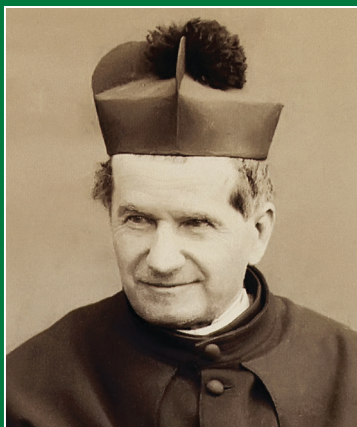


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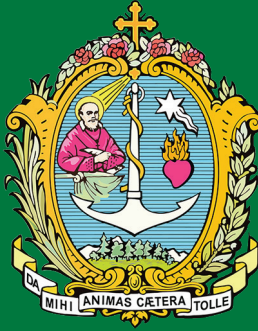
# SALESIAN SOURCES

## 1. DON BOSCO AND HIS WORK



LAS - ROME

KRISTU JYOTI PUBLICATIONS



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## Salesian Sources



SALESIAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE

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## 1. DON BOSCO AND HIS WORK

*Collected works*

LAS - ROME

KRISTU JYOTI PUBLICATIONS

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ST JOHN BOSCO  
(1815-1888)





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*By*  
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BY

Aldo GIRAUDO

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## PRESENTATION BY THE RECTOR MAJOR

As we approach the Bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth and the conclusion of my service as Rector Major, I am particularly happy to see the publication of this work which is so necessary and so much desired. It is the first volume of Salesian Sources, with the title "Don Bosco and his work. Collected works".

In the task requested of the entire Congregation to "start afresh from Don Bosco", the 26<sup>th</sup> General Chapter asked the Rector Major to see to "translation and publication of a collection of principal Salesian sources." Now, with this publication, we have a further tool allowing us to explore our Salesian charismatic identity at greater depth. Indeed we cannot reinterpret Don Bosco for today, update his insights and pastoral and educational choices, or live his spiritual experience unless we are familiar with the sources where he speaks directly.

Two years ago I entrusted the task of carrying out this request of the General Chapter to the *Istituto Storico Salesiano* (the Salesian Historical Institute), whose statutes list the publishing of our sources in critical editions as being amongst its tasks. I am very grateful to the members of the Historical Institute, who have worked carefully and constantly under the coordination of its director, Fr José Manuel Prellezo, to bring this work to conclusion within the established time period.

This volume of historical sources is divided into a number of parts: writings and documents on the history of Don Bosco and his work; writings and testimonies of Don Bosco concerning education and schooling; writings and testimonies of Don Bosco on spiritual life. As we have learned over the three years of preparation for the Bicentenary, this is the threefold way of approaching Don Bosco and his work, his pedagogy and his spirituality both directly and in historical terms. The fourth part of this volume instead brings together writings of a biographical and autobiographical nature, where the aforesaid historical, pedagogical and spiritual dimensions often overlay and enrich one another to the point where it is difficult to make distinctions between them.

In the planning process of the Historical Institute this is the first volume of “Salesian Sources”, precisely in reference to Don Bosco and his Work. So we will have to wait for further publication of other volumes of sources which could possibly follow on chronologically through the lives of Don Bosco’s Successors. We will be especially faithful to this ongoing work.

This first volume, in Italian and the languages it will be translated into, is entrusted to every Salesian. Each of us, beginning from our initial formation, should have a personal copy of it. It should be like a “*vademecum*” or handbook essential for knowledge of Don Bosco and thus for loving, imitating, and calling upon our dear Father. Without love there is no desire to get to know him, but without this knowledge we will not grow in love. It is my special wish that there be a serious and systematic study of these Salesian sources during our initial formation.

I should note and with no little satisfaction, that our *historical sense* has grown in the Congregation over recent years; a culture of history and the desire to improve our historical understanding. Contributing to this have been the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Congregation, the centenary of Fr Rua’s death, and the three year preparation for the Bicentenary. Also providing impetus to this process have been the dissemination of historical studies translated into various languages, the renewal of Salesian studies in initial formation, various initiatives at regional level, the work of the Salesian Historical Institute itself and qualifications in Salesian studies pursued by the Spirituality Institute at the Faculty of Theology, UPS. It is my fond hope that the Provinces become more involved in preparing researchers in Salesianity.

This volume of Salesian sources based on Don Bosco and his work is also entrusted to the *Salesian Family*, friends of Don Bosco, those who admire Salesian work, young people, lay people involved in Don Bosco’s spirit and mission, families; everyone can draw from these fresh springs of the Salesian charism, a gift of the Spirit for us and for the entire Church. Everyone can be inspired by Don Bosco’s pedagogy and spirituality. With a collection like this it will certainly be much easier, too, for scholars to cite and refer to a single source text.

May God reward all those who have put their hand to this enterprise; the best results of such work will be growth in gratitude and admiration for Don Bosco, inspiration drawn from his evangelising commitment to young people, a desire for holiness, apostolic vocations to the Salesian Family. It is my wish, therefore, that this volume and its translations into various languages can have widespread dissemination around the world.

May Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco bless this work. Let us entrust to their intercession all those abundant fruits we so much desire and hope for.

Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva  
Rector Major

Rome, August 16, 2013  
Don Bosco's Birthday



## INTRODUCTION

by

Francesco MOTTO - José Manuel PRELLEZO - Aldo GIRAUDO

Saint John Bosco (1815-1888) continues to interest so many people around the world 125 years after his death. His stature as a Christian educator, holy priest, founder and shrewd organiser is considered to be significant at an international level, both within and beyond the Salesian Family, thanks to the presence and apostolic activity of his disciples and those who have continued his work.

This publication responds to an explicit request of the 26<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Salesian Society (2008) to the then Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva, to place the *principal sources* for getting to know the Saint at the disposal of all members of the Salesian Family.

The editors of this volume felt constrained to make a broad selection in three relevant areas - history, pedagogy and spirituality - of works which Don Bosco printed (collected in 37 volumes<sup>1</sup>) and critical editions, given the huge amount of material preserved in the archives.

It should be recalled that Don Bosco's writings are not the only tool for understanding him and his work. Because of the way they were written and the intentions their author had in mind on each occasion, the historical circumstances and mental frameworks they reflect, they are insufficient on their own for offering a profound understanding of who he was and what he did. These limitations can be overcome by accompanying the documents with a study of Don Bosco as an individual, along with his educational and pastoral experience at the Oratory in Valdocco. Fortunately we can also benefit from a rich legacy of testimonies from outside for all this. His writings reveal the Saint's thinking and throw light on his life as it was, but will this alone allow us to correctly interpret the beginnings?

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Opere edite*. Reprinted in its original form. Rome, LAS 1976-1977, 37 vols.

Not only this. A life like Don Bosco's, made up of so many different factors, common events, charismatic and even exceptional features, a life of faith lived under the banner of conservatism and modernity, tradition and renewal, historically based but also prophetic, can only be adequately grasped if considered in all its complexity and its many historical facets. If we extrapolate just one or even a handful of aspects and think this is enough to give us a complete profile, we falsify or at least limit the understanding of such a rich and profound figure, and a teaching and praxis that has seen so many historical results. Hence, scholars have leaned towards providing the broadest possible collection of sources and have insisted on studying their reliability and contextual significance.

To understand Don Bosco's *being, his thinking and activity*, the very first effort must be to locate him within classic coordinates of space and time; the historical, pedagogical and religious context (but also geographical, political, cultural, economic, ecclesial ...) within which he lived. In this broad spectrum his person acquires its correct distinctiveness, reveals its characteristic features, allows us to glimpse the many implications, lights and shades which it manifests or which distinguish him from other individuals of his time.

It is from his time that he inherited ideas, habits, historical legacies and aspirations of various kinds, but in turn he left his own mark on it, his own achievements and dreams. Turin, Piedmont, Italy of the late 19th and early 20th centuries would have been different without the active presence of the Salesian work which arose in Valdocco; but this too would have certainly presented a different face to the world had it arisen in another geographical and historical context.

Let us briefly present the three main contexts in which we can best locate and understand Don Bosco's writings that follow.

### **1. Don Bosco in the historical context of his time<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup> There are countless studies of 19<sup>th</sup> century Italy. We limit ourselves to pointing to one work which studies the 'Risorgimento' in all its dimensions, from the political to the symbolic, from the private to the European: Alberto Maria BANTI and Paul GINSBORG (ed.), *Storia d'Italia. Annali*, vol. XXII. *Il Risorgimento*. Torino, Einaudi 2007. On religious and ecclesial problems of the era, see: Gabriele DE



Firstly we consider it useful to offer a brief profile of the Piedmontese educator in the historical scenario of the 19th century. Born the year of the Congress of Vienna (1815), an event that signalled the beginning of the Restoration and an attempt to re-establish the social and political system that prevailed prior to the French Revolution, Don Bosco died towards the end of the century (1888) in an Italy that had been unified for some thirty years at that point, even though many of its problems had yet to find resolution.

*a. His formative years (1815-1844)*

John Bosco's formation begins with his early upbringing at home, in the municipality of Castelnuovo d'Asti (1815-1830), covered the decade of his secondary studies (1831-1835) and his time at the seminary (1835-1841) spent in Chieri, and concluded in Turin with his three years of further studies in theology and ministry at the Pastoral Institute (Convitto Ecclesiastico 1841-1844). These were the years of the Restoration. Following a first rigid attempt in Piedmont to regain the old order, which failed with the revolutionary movements in 1821, there was a focus on gradual reform in structural, administrative, commercial, military and legal areas under the government of King Charles Felix (1821-1831). Thus a cultural climate matured and under King Charles Albert in 1848 it would lead to a turning point with the introduction of a constitutionally-based parliament. The key players in this transformation were young aristocrats formed in a European spirit, like brothers Massimo and Roberto d'Azeglio, Camillo Cavour, along with a middle class élite of entrepreneurs with liberal ideas fundamentally hostile to the regime of privilege enjoyed by religious institutions and favourable to the movement for national unification.

The economic recovery, thanks to the reforms of Charles Felix and hopes aroused by patriotic and liberal groups since Charles Albert came to the throne,

ROSA, *Il movimento cattolico in Italia dalla Restaurazione all'età giolittiana*. Bari, Laterza 1988; ID. (ed.), *Storia dell'Italia religiosa*, vol. III. *L'età contemporanea*. Roma-Bari, Laterza 1995; Maurilio GUASCO, *Storia del clero in Italia dall'Ottocento ad oggi*. Roma-Bari, Laterza 1997; Mario ROSA (ed.), *Clero e società nell'Italia contemporanea*. Bari-Roma, Laterza 1992; Francesco TRANIELLO, *Cultura cattolica e vita religiosa tra Ottocento e Novecento*. Brescia, Morcelliana 1991.

saved Piedmont from a second wave of uprisings which involved other Italian states between 1830 and 1831 (The Kingdom of Sicily, the Duchy of Modena, the Papal States). They were strongly repressed. Secret Societies flourished in this climate. In 1831 *Giovane Italia* founded by Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1873) came into being. He was a political activist with Republican leanings, and from exile had proposed the abolition of the monarchy and national unity with Rome as the capital. Nurtured by such principles any number of patriots organised other revolutionary movements (Savona and Genoa, 1834), all of which failed. Many were forced into exile, such as Giuseppe Garibaldi. There were new attempts at uprisings in the following years in Calabria, Sardinia and the Roman areas but they were immediately and forcibly squashed<sup>3</sup>.

The young Don Bosco, it seems, had not picked up the scent of these events, occupied as he was with his studies. In autumn 1835 he entered the fervent and demanding environment of the seminary in Chieri. This institution, founded seven years previously by Archbishop Colombano Chiaveroti (1754-1831), was governed by a model inspired by the post-tridentine formation tradition<sup>4</sup>.

Don Bosco discovered these ideals when he entered the Pastoral Institute in Turin after his ordination (1841) for his three year specialisation course. Here, in addition to his studies, he was introduced to pastoral ministry in parishes and schools in poor suburbs, and to the prisons and charitable institutions. Thanks to this ministry he became aware of the problems of a city in rapid demographic growth. He was especially touched by how young people were abandoning school and decided to dedicate himself to them. Sunday catechetical instruction, which he started up in the first months with a group of young workers, gained momentum.

<sup>3</sup> Don Bosco would seize upon what came out of these revolutionary movements, viz., “the revolutionary and irreligious spirit” resulting from corruption of morals, criticism of the deposit of faith and the papacy (cf. Giovanni BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia raccontata alla gioventù da' suoi primi abitatori sino ai nostri giorni*. Torino, Tipografia Paravia e Compagnia 1855, 480).

<sup>4</sup> On humanist and seminary studies in Turin in this era cf. Aldo GIRAUDDO, *Clero, seminario e società. Aspetti della Restaurazione religiosa a Torino*. Roma, LAS 1993.

In 1844, when Don Bosco accepted the role of chaplain at the Barolo works in the outlying suburb of Valdocco, his activities increased and so did the number of young people. With the help of college chaplains, other clergy and lay people he added a range of educational and pastoral initiatives to the catechetics that gave more solid shape to his work. The Oratory of St Francis de Sales came into being and took a firmer shape once it had a stable location at the Pinardi house (1846), and Don Bosco decided to abandon any other commitment so he could dedicate himself to it exclusively. The work established itself for its preventive and re-educational effectiveness and its original approach in a setting marked by social and juvenile problems which the authorities were struggling to control. Don Bosco gathered and helped “poor and abandoned” children, formed them and equipped them to fit into society in a dignified and orderly way. To do this he wrote appropriate instructional, educational and devotional texts, organised a home to take in those who were bereft of most things they needed and opened a second Oratory named after St Aloysius Gonzaga in Porta Nuova (1847). He found the support of public opinion which, little by little, was taking notice of his work, and gained the trust of administrators, government and the Royal family.

*b. Two years of upheaval (1848-1849)*

Just prior to 1848, while the industrial revolution in England was going ahead at great human cost, the economy in France and the Austro-Hungarian Empire was more prosperous, while in Italy the patriotic and national ideal and a longing for the political unification of the various states was growing amongst the populace. Priest and philosopher Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-1852) proposed a formula for confederation, under the honorary presidency of the (*neoguelphian*) Pope. While Catholics and moderates looked favourably on the idea, others inspired by republican ideals or a more compact national view rejected it. The reformist and liberal openings of Pius IX, elected in 1846, attracted a lot of sympathy. Under pressure from revolutionary movements which had broken out all over Europe, King Charles Albert, who had suppressed censorship in 1847, promulgated the Statutes (March 4, 1848), the basic law of a state inspired by French and Belgian models. Pius

IX too, granted a Constitution (March 14, 1848) and set up two legislative chambers, opening up a political and administrative career for lay people. The Pope's choices fed liberal expectations<sup>5</sup>. Other Italian sovereigns put reforms in place, while in France, where the monarchy had collapsed, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was elected President of the Republic (December 1848). The Austrian Empire, in 1848, was also shaken by revolts put down forcibly by the army. Chancellor Metternich resigned and Emperor Ferdinand I abdicated in favour of the younger Franz Josef (1830-1916).

Given the wave of movements which broke out on March 17 and 18 in Venice and Milan, his councillors convinced Charles Albert to declare war on Austria (March 23, 1848). After initial successes the Piedmontese army was obliged to sign an armistice (August 5) abandoning Milan to the imperial army. Pius IX, who did not consider it appropriate to join in the fighting (his address on April 29), was accused by patriots of being a traitor to the national cause. The idea of a confederation collapsed and public opinion of the Pontiff split into two opposing views: a radical liberal hostile one and a conservative Catholic one. The war against Austria resumed at Novara (March 23, 1849) but Piedmont suffered a heavy defeat. Charles Albert abdicated in favour of his son Victor Emmanuel II who signed a humiliating peace agreement with the Austrians. Meanwhile, due to serious uprisings Pius IX was forced to flee to Gaeta (Kingdom of the Two Sicilies) while a Republic was proclaimed in Rome (February 9, 1849), but it was short-lived; it came to an end on July 3 following French military intervention and the Papal States were restored.

In these difficult two years Don Bosco in Turin was involved in consolidating the oratories at Valdocco and Porta Nuova, adding the Guardian Angel oratory on the outskirts of Vanchiglia whose founder, Giovanni Cocchi was forced to abandon it. He also started a *Mutual Aid Society* amongst the oratory boys, underwrote "work contracts" for young workers and founded a newspaper called *L' Amico della gioventù* (The Friend of Youth), which only lasted a few months (1848-1849). Despite financial difficulties due to the war, he found

<sup>5</sup> The most extensive monograph on the Restoration Pope is by Giacomo MARTINA, *Pio IX*. 3 vols. Roma, Università Gregoriana Editrice 1974-1990.

funds to buy the Pinardi house and surrounding land, and decided to set up oratory activities which would tackle the growing moral and economic poverty.

The social situation in Turin over these years demanded urgent intervention at every level. In 1838-1848 the population saw a 16.89% increase: from 117,072 to 136,849. In the following decade the increase would rise to 31.28% thanks to a constant migratory influx<sup>6</sup>. Citizens on the outskirts saw extensive and disorderly settlements spring up of entire families or individuals, mostly young, due to development in the manufacturing and building industries. Very poor work security, malnutrition, lack of hygiene along with ignorance, low salaries and absence of social security had an impact on the general living conditions of the people. The number of poor people in the city grew, along with outbursts of moral depravity and increasing social risk<sup>7</sup>.

Political events in these two years made an important impact on Don Bosco's choices and on the future of his work. The patriotic euphoria of some of his collaborators, including some priests, and the anticlerical turn induced by these events convinced him to distance himself from any political group (he did not want to make enemies of any factors outside his mission) and especially to commit himself to forming more trustworthy helpers chosen from amongst the boys at the Oratory, shaping them according to his spirit and ideals. From here on his work and stature gained prestige, through positive appreciation of his social efforts, and charitable help increased.

*c. The decision to set up the Salesian Work in the decade of preparation for Italian unity (1850-1860)*

After the fall of the Roman republic, Pius IX returned to Rome and abolished the republican constitution. He emphasised the religious side of his pontificate, leaving the Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli, to

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Giuseppe MELANO, *La popolazione di Torino e del Piemonte nel secolo XIX*. Torino, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano-Comitato di Torino 1961, 73 and 124.

<sup>7</sup> A good presentation of the social situation is offered by Umberto LEVRA, *L'altro volto di Torino risorgimentale 1814-1848*. Torino, Comitato di Torino dell'Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano 1988.

manage political affairs, entrusting him to the military protection of Napoleon III who initiated the second French Empire in 1852.

While the failure of the first war of independence provoked a hardening of anti-liberal tendencies in the rest of Italy, Piedmont did not go back on its constitutional choices. A moderate parliament at the end of 1849 collaborated with the government. From 1850 Camillo Cavour (1810-1861) was involved in government, becoming Prime Minister in November 1852. He remained in that post uninterruptedly until 1861, thanks to an understanding with Urbano Rattazzi's Centre Left. This was an important decade for the Piedmontese State which also involved a neat distinction between Church and State. Secular politics had a strong anticlerical flavour, made evident in 1850 with the Siccardi legislation abolishing ecclesiastical privileges and forcing Archbishop Luigi Fransoni into exile. It was also the process of state centralisation that culminated in 1855 by abolishing the juridical person status of religious orders and expropriating their goods (Cavour-Rattazzi legislation) and introducing the Casati legislation reforming schools in 1859. Strong controversy exasperated things for people and resulted in a serious crisis of conscience for Catholics who were caught between patriotism and fidelity to the Church.

Cavour successfully established Piedmontese foreign policy. Through diplomatic activity and military involvement in the Crimean War (1855) he succeeded in transforming the problem of Italian unification into a European problem (Congress of Paris 1856) and created an alliance with Napoleon III (Plombières, July 1858) against the Austrians. The decisive support of the French army determined the success of the second war of independence, which culminated on June 24, 1859 at the battle of Solferino and San Martino with a French-Piedmontese victory. This was followed by the armistice at Villafranca (July 1) and the Zurich Peace accord (November 10). In exchange for French military support, France gained Nice and Savoy. Piedmont annexed Lombardy and following a popular plebiscite (March 11-12, 1860), Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna as well. The Papal States, following the battle of Castelfidardo (September 18, 1860), lost Marche, Umbria and Sabina and were only left with Lazio. Cavour, ably supporting the success of

Giuseppe Garibaldi's campaign against the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, also included the territories of southern Italy and made the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy possible (March 17, 1861)<sup>8</sup>.

The political events had painful consequences for Catholics who were faithful to the Holy See. Bishops and priests in disagreement with liberal politics, which were damaging to the Church's rights, faced legal consequences and were removed. Some were also imprisoned.

Don Bosco was shocked at the turn of events but not discouraged. While remaining faithful to the Pope he confirmed his decision to avoid taking any political position and asked himself about the choices he needed to make in this new scenario. Attentive to the needs of the young and ordinary people, he seized the right opportunity for developing the work at Valdocco. He built the church of St Francis de Sales between 1851 and 1852, supported by government and public charity. Appointed by Archbishop Fransoni as head of the three oratories (March 31, 1852), he gained the autonomy he needed to carry out his plans. He chose his collaborators from amongst his boys, getting them to start their ecclesiastical studies and forming them according to his own spirit. He extended the home attached to the Oratory, transforming it into an educational institution for students and trade boys. In 1853 he put up the first part of a new building which he completed in 1856 and would open workshops and secondary classrooms in it. The number of pupils grew enormously, especially after acquiring the nearby Filippi house (1860) which enabled him to do further building extensions. Meanwhile the plan to have a Congregation to serve his work, suggested by Minister Rattazzi and supported by Pius IX, was focused on founding the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales (December 18, 1859). This would determine future development of Salesian work.

Meanwhile his reputation was consolidated, thanks to his many educational and social initiatives, his contribution at the time of the cholera

<sup>8</sup> For the "fabric of Italian unity" see the monumental work by Rosario ROMEO, *Cavour e il suo tempo*, 3 vol. [1818-1842, 1842-1854, 1854-1861]. Bari, Laterza 1984 and the more recent life of Luigi CAFAGNA, *Cavour*. Bologna, Il Mulino 1999.

epidemic (1854), his popular publications, the success of the *Catholic Readings* (begun in 1853) and his tireless mobilisation of charity through lotteries or raffles, and circular letters. It was precisely this shrewd sensitisation of public opinion, which he tried out in the decade 1850-1860 and later perfected, that allowed the Salesian work to find the necessary resources to take off at local and worldwide level.

His unmistakable model of formation, his spiritual pedagogy found an ideal narrative formulation in the life of his pupil, Dominic Savio (1859), and was widely disseminated. It contributed enormously to propagating knowledge and respect for Don Bosco's work.

1850-1860 was a decisive decade for the life of the Saint. He consolidated his charismatic personality and his views and put down solid foundations for future developments in terms of organisation, pedagogy and spirituality.

*d. The growth of Salesian work beyond Turin in the decade which saw Italian unity reach its completion (1861-1870)*

The new Kingdom of Italy, following the premature death of Camillo Cavour (June 6, 1861), faced enormous problems of a political, diplomatic, socio-economic, cultural, administrative kind. But there was a religious problem too, given the dispute with the Church and, from 1870, the 'Roman question' which would continue until the Lateran Treaty (1929).

Cavour's successor, Bettino Ricasoli, tried without luck to induce the Pope to renounce the Papal States. After Garibaldi's military expedition to conquer Rome was blocked (October 1862), the diplomatic avenue was chosen. By a convention drawn up in September (1864), Prime Minister Marco Minghetti assured Emperor Napoleon III of the integrity of the Papal States in exchange for his withdrawing French armed forces from Rome and transferring the capital to Florence, which took place in 1865.

The following year Italy sided with Prussia in the Austro-Prussian war (June 1866). This was the third war of independence. Despite Italian defeats, thanks to the Prussian successes and French diplomacy, the Kingdom of Italy was



able to annex Venice, but without Trent and Trieste. Four years later, taking advantage of the victory of the Prussians over the French at Sedan (September 1, 1870), and the fall of the second Empire, the Italian army marched on Rome and conquered it on September 20 (the Porta Pia breach), putting an end to the Papal States. Pius IX withdrew to the Vatican. On February 3, 1871 Rome was proclaimed as the capital of the Kingdom of Italy: a centralised, socially conservative, bourgeois and anticlerical State.

The decade 1861-1870 was marked by strong tensions, heavy fiscal measures that weighed upon the poorer people, the struggle against brigands in the south, worsening relations with the Holy See which was more and more intransigent in its defence of its principles, condemning liberalism and secularism, and in proclaiming the need for temporal power to guarantee its freedom. The publication of the *Syllabus* “containing the principal errors of our time” (December 8, 1864), confirmed the definitive break of the Church with liberalism and the end of any attempt at reconciliation between Catholics and contemporary society. The state pursued its secular progress with drastic measures, extending the law of suppression of Congregations and liquidating ecclesiastical assets (1866-1867), abolishing exemption from military service for clerics (1869). Vatican I sanctioned papal primacy and infallibility in the realm of faith and customs.

Despite all of this, Don Bosco pursued the same direction he had undertaken in earlier years and succeeded not only in consolidating the Oratory at Valdocco but in opening new horizons, intelligently seizing opportunities that were opening up and showing that he was able to intuit future tendencies. The development of his work after 1860 is in some ways the product of the situation created in Italy halfway through the 19th century in its patriotic and liberal climate. Between 1860 and 1870 the city of Turin had profoundly altered. Immigration was no longer seasonal but ongoing. Young workers who once thronged the streets and inns on Sundays had changed their patterns of behaviour: workers groups, gymnastic, musical and cultural societies and recreational centres had sprung up everywhere. Those attending the weekend oratories were decreasing in number. The saint, who was in touch with the needs of his times, grasped other opportunities such

as the growing demand for education. The development of his printing press (opened in 1862) for example, was helped by the general interest of the people in improving themselves culturally (coming from the typically liberal sense of human dignity). Out of this came the flourishing of text books for ordinary young people and for their Christian education. The same reasons facilitated the growth of boarding schools [*collegi*] in Italy and in Europe. While the State was struggling to resolve the problems of organising public education, liberal legislation, despite centralised control and the non-denominational and anticlerical tendencies of the sector, allowed free or private schools to exist and supported municipal administrations who wanted to organise boarding schools or hostels. This is one of the areas on which the Catholic world focused and around which it organised itself, since it was excluded from the political arena. It also focused on and organised religious groups, peoples banks, insurance, social welfare. Don Bosco jumped at these opportunities to broaden his mission.

The Valdocco work was boosted with the “highest occupation of available space after 1868 with eight hundred or more occupants. There was also an increase in the number joining the Salesian Society. This called for new establishments outside Valdocco to take up the surplus population, de-congest things at Valdocco, relieve the financial burden, and usefully occupy those who had bound themselves to Don Bosco through religious vows.”<sup>9</sup> Beginning from 1862, the year the junior seminary at Mirabello was founded, the saint increased the number of colleges, hostels, trade schools (Lanzo 1864, Cherasco 1869, Borgo San Martino 1870, Alassio, Varazze, Marassi and Sampierdarena 1870-1871). It was often municipal administrations that were asking for them. This was a choice that allowed the Salesian institution to consolidate: boarding sections guaranteed a more stable and organisable youth population (at a time in history when this kind of work was required), helped the Salesian charism to expand geographically, contributed to the development of Catholic organisations by forming young talent, and ensured a regular flow of vocations for the Congregation to develop. The increase in boarding schools at this time

<sup>9</sup> Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)*. Roma, LAS 1980, p. 124.

is a factor we need to take into account to understand how Don Bosco was thinking along with certain elements characterising preventive pedagogy and Salesian spirituality. From this point onwards the Saint was always thinking of Salesians more as educators in this boarding setting.

While Vatican I was in progress (1869-1870) Don Bosco was in touch with some bishops from America, Asia and Africa who visited his work and proposed foundations in their dioceses. Thus began his more direct interest in the missions, which would become more focused in the years to follow.

There were also political and religious circumstances that were leading Don Bosco towards the Help of Christians. At a time when the papal territories were being annexed, the bishops of Umbria invited the faithful to call on Mary as *Auxilium Christianorum* or Help of Christians. In 1862 news spread of Mary's appearances and of healings near Spoleto. The bishop of the city sent a report to the Turin newspaper *L'Armonia* (May 17 and 27). Don Bosco spoke of this in a Goodnight on May 24, 1862 and on the 30th told of a dream in which the Barque of Peter, under attack, found refuge between the columns of the Eucharist and Our Lady Help of Christians. The following December he was planning to build a larger church which would be dedicated to the Help of Christians: "Our times are so sad that we really need the Blessed Virgin to help us preserve and defend the Christian faith."<sup>10</sup> In 1864 the foundations were dug and on April 27, 1865, the foundation stone of the new church was solemnly laid in the presence of Prince Amedeo of Savoy, the King's son. The general serious financial crisis encouraged Don Bosco to broaden his circle of acquaintances to gather the required funds. Trips to Florence, Rome and other Italian cities. He wrote letters, organised lotteries or raffles. The flow of offerings, large and small, began again and works reached their conclusion. On June 9, 1868, the archbishop of Turin consecrated the shrine. In order to request charitable offerings, Don Bosco emphasised the needs of the times, took advantage of popular enthusiasm, expectation of miracles, heavenly favours for individuals, families and the church through Mary's intercession. He wrote a booklet on *The Marvels of the Mother of God invoked under the title*

<sup>10</sup> MB 7, 334. [Note that all references to the *MB* are to the original Italian edition]

of *Mary Help of Christians* (1868) and other pamphlets with wide distribution. He also founded the *Pious Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians* (1869). Thus, while Spoleto remained a local shrine, the church in Turin and its painting by Lorenzone acquired national and international fame, riding on the wave of development of Salesian works. Valdocco began to be a centre of popular and Marian devotion marked by a strong Salesian spirituality.

In 1869 Don Bosco gained papal approval for the Salesian Congregation. From here on he put all his efforts into infusing a clearer Salesian identity into his disciples. Vocations increase, works multiply, especially the schools. His production for bookshops increases and he begins new publishing initiatives like the *Biblioteca della gioventù italiana* (Library of Italian Youth 1869).

As a Catholic obedient to the Holy See, Don Bosco followed the invitation: “Neither voted for nor voters”, but he continued to communicate with the Pope and the Secretary of State Antonelli regarding what he knew about the whispered intentions of various national governments with regard to policies affecting the Church. He got involved particularly in resolving the problem of vacant Episcopal sees; as someone acceptable to the Holy See and appreciated by various Ministers, in the years 1865-1867 he offered or was invited to mediate between the parties, absolutely in a private role, regarding new Episcopal appointments. He succeeded especially in the case of Piedmont where not a few prelates owed their appointment to him.

*e. Italian, European and South American development of Salesian Work in the 1870s and 80s*

Because of the taking of Rome (1870), relations between Church and State worsen. The Holy See did not recognise the law of Guarantees (13 May 1871) by which the Italian Government sought to legitimise its occupation of the capital, control relations with the Holy See, guarantee the Pope’s freedom to govern the Church and the clergy’s independence in carrying out its mission. The Pope rejected the law as a unilateral act and in 1874 asked Italian Catholics to play no part in politics (*“non expedit”*, it is not appropriate) in a State that was considered to be a usurper. The rupture between State and Church was

beyond healing, especially after 1873 in Rome when the State went ahead to extend the laws of suppression of religious incorporations and the confiscation of their goods (churches, convents, educational and charitable institutions, hospitals...)¹¹.

In 1876 a parliamentary revolution took place in Italy that took the government further Left, where it became more secular, anticlerical and Masonic than the Right which had governed up until then¹². It had an ambitious programme, but found it difficult to bring it to completion especially given the various short-lived governments that followed (11 in 12 years, of which 8 were presided over by Agostino Depretis). Amongst the various reforms we note the Coppino legislation on obligatory schooling for the first three years of primary school (1877) and the law on protection of child labour (1886).

On January 9, 1878 Victor Emmanuel II died and was succeeded by his son Umberto I. A month later Pius IX also died (February 7). The new Pope, Leo XIII (1810-1903), had already indicated his intentions by his choice of name to change the way things were set up, while keeping the “*non expedit*” regarding political involvement by Italian Catholics. He was the first modern Pope to reflect on the relationship between science and religion (*Aeterni Patris*, 1879), on the role of Catholics in society (*Immortale Dei*, 1885), on the Church’s social teaching (*Rerum Novarum*, 1891) and promoted the renewal of theological and philosophical studies as well as the foundation of Catholic universities.

Like all Catholics, Don Bosco had hoped for the preservation of the Papal States but he prudently noted the existing circumstances without particular comment. He continued dealing with Rome to get definitive approval of the

¹¹ Cf. Carlo Maria FIORENTINO, *Chiesa e Stato a Roma negli anni della Destra storica 1870-1876. Il trasferimento della capitale e la soppressione delle Corporazioni religiose*. Roma, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento italiano 1996.

¹² Cf. Guido VERUCCI, *L’Italia laica prima e dopo l’Unità 1848-1876. Anticlericalismo, libero pensiero e ateismo nella società italiana*. Bari, Laterza 1981; ID., *Cattolicesimo e laicismo nell’Italia contemporanea*. Milano, F. Angeli 2001.

Rule; he accepted involvement in mediation between the Italian Government and the Holy See for the government's *exequatur* for bishops in Piedmont and Lombardy. His very prudent relationships with individual Ministers on the Left were always in view of the needs of his mission and his works: legal titles for teaching or support for Salesian works in South America, a place for Italian emigration. For example, on April 16, 1876, during preparations for the second missionary expedition, he presented the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Luigi Melegari, with a special plan for Italian colonial settlement in Patagonia, a somewhat unreal plan and rather poetic, as he himself wrote, but it was an opportunity for him to express his "good will to help poor humankind."<sup>13</sup>

But over these years Don Bosco went ahead decisively with his work as an enterprising founder, a wise formator of educators, forger of religious communities dedicated to the education of youth, and as a teacher in spiritual life for young people and the people in general. He shared government of the Congregation with members of the Superior Chapter and the rectors of individual works, whom he knew how to value and involve through regular Council meetings, annual Conferences of St Francis de Sales and General Chapters. Don Bosco founded the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in 1872, beginning with the group of Daughters of the Immaculate at Mornese, led by Fr Pestarino. He formed them according to his spirit and successfully introduced them into the Salesian work which was rapidly expanding. In 1874 he gained definitive approval of the Constitutions, an important step for consolidation of the Salesian Society, though restricted by certain legal conditions which he overcame in 1884 with the granting of the "privileges". Fully in tune with the Catholic missionary movement, he organised the first Salesian missionary expedition to Latin America in 1875, followed by other expeditions annually. In 1876, he set up the Cooperators Association, a clever project of Catholic solidarity to support the Salesian mission. In 1877 he founded the *Salesian Bulletin*, a monthly journal of strategic information for broadening consensus and for support for Salesian work. In the same year he presided at the first of the General Chapters of the Congregation.

<sup>13</sup> E(m) V, pp. 119-120.

It was a time of frenetic and intelligent activity where Don Bosco's extraordinary gifts and expansive vision emerged, despite a gradual physical decline. He kept up contacts with religious and civil authorities, benefactors and friends through correspondence and personal meetings. He undertook frequent trips throughout Italy (especially to Rome) and to France (from 1875). Along with the fame his work had, veneration for his charismatic personality was spreading. He was given a triumphal reception in Paris (1883) and Barcelona (1886). Don Bosco had become a symbol for sensitising the European Catholic world. Under fierce anticlerical attacks, it paid attention to supernatural events, strengthened its faith, came together around the figure of the Roman Pontiff and got involved in social, educational and pastoral activity.

Over these years the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Italy widened their presence opening works in Liguria, Lazio, Sicily, Tuscany, Trent and Venice<sup>14</sup>. Works also developed beyond Italy: in France (Marseilles, Navarra, Saint-Cyr, Paris, Lille), in Spain (Utrera, Barcelona), in Great Britain (London); especially in South America (Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador) there was prodigious expansion, thanks to good missionaries like John Cagliero, Joseph Fagnano, Louis Lasagna, James Costamagna.

There was no lack of problems. Don Bosco's relationships with Roman authorities went through critical moments, aggravated by his struggles with the new Archbishop of Turin, Lorenzo Gastaldi, which went on till 1872 and 1883, the year the archbishop died, despite an agreement established by the Holy See (1882). Financial needs encouraged Don Bosco to multiply his visits, organise a network of cooperation, set up a meticulous awareness campaign to feed the influx of funds he needed to support so many foundations and the expensive construction of sacred buildings: the church of St John the Evangelist in Turin, consecrated in October 1881, and the Sacred Heart

<sup>14</sup> For foundations in Italy see the three volumes of the 150th anniversary of Italian unification: Francesco MOTTO (ed.), *Salesiani di don Bosco in Italia. 150 anni di educazione*. Roma, LAS 2011; Grazia LOPARCO - Maria Teresa SPIGA (edd.), *Le Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice in Italia. Donne nell'educazione*. Roma, LAS 2011; Francesco MOTTO - Grazia LOPARCO (edd.), *Salesiani e Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice in Italia. Un comune percorso educativo (1859-2010)*. Roma, LAS 2013.

Basilica in Rome, opened in 1887 by Don Bosco himself, already at the end of his life. The saint's physical decline had already begun some years before. He gradually offloaded the practical government of the Congregation to the Superior Chapter presided over by the Prefect General, Fr Michael Rua, who was appointed Vicar General with plenipotentiary powers by a papal decree in 1884.

## *2. Don Bosco in the pedagogical context of his time*

“Don Bosco's serious contact with official, academic pedagogy never seems to have been ever seriously verified, even though he had very real relationships, even cordial and friendly ones, with certain contemporary theorists of pedagogy”, states Pietro Braido citing, amongst other well known theorists, Antonio Rosmini, Giovanni A. Rayneri, Giuseppe Allievo<sup>15</sup>. Albert Caviglia instead, referring to the Piedmontese pedagogical movement of the second half of the 19th century, assures us that “Don Bosco followed the movement with interest, I would say almost eagerly, wanting to learn how to impart knowledge to his boys.”<sup>16</sup>

In this framework we need to highlight certain data and testimonies regarding the contacts which the founder of the Salesian Congregation had with the above-mentioned pedagogues and, in general, with the pedagogical context of his time, with a view to identifying the aspects which best illustrate and most easily grasp—in the writings and documents made available to the reader in the second part of this collection—the important core elements of Don Bosco's thinking on education and schooling. At the same time, reveal the most salient characteristics of his approach to educating “poor and abandoned youth”.

<sup>15</sup> Pietro BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere. Il sistema educativo di don Bosco*. Roma, LAS 1999, p. 152. For general context: Rachele LANFRANCHI - José Manuel PRELLEZO, *Educazione scuola e pedagogia nei solchi della storia*, vol. 2. *Dall'Illuminismo all'era della globalizzazione*. Roma, LAS 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Alberto CAVIGLIA, *Don Bosco nella scuola*, in BS 53 (1929) 6, 179.



*a. Pedagogical formation in family and school settings*

Many different experiences were part of Don Bosco's upbringing; he was influenced by different factors, people and institutions. The cornerstone of the Salesian founder's vocation to education was constructed and developed over the time he grew to maturity as a human being, Christian and pastor. Indeed, attentive as he was to the flow of events of his time and to the key areas in his own particular experience, Don Bosco has given us hints to important episodes and names of priests, teachers, individuals and institutions which contributed, in fact, to outlining the main stages of his pedagogical preparation.

In his infancy and his experience of being left without a father, his mother, Margaret Occhiena, emerges as the "first educator and teacher" of the young John Bosco. Almost seventy years later he writes of her: "Her greatest care was given to instructing her sons in their religion, making them value obedience, and keeping them busy with tasks suited to their age."<sup>17</sup> It was in the family setting especially that he picked up the habit of prayer, doing his duty, and sacrifice.

Along with the upbringing he had from his mother, a privileged place is occupied for a brief but significant period of time by a venerable old priest Fr John Calosso. After a fortuitous encounter (November 1829), a keen and genuine relationship of respect and trust was established between the poor but intelligent lad who wanted to go to school, and the kindly chaplain of Morialdo. Under his guidance John enthusiastically took up his primary studies once more. The kind of relationship established here between pupil and master is spoken of then proposed to Salesians as an example: "I put myself completely into Fr Calosso's hands ... Every word, every thought, every act I revealed to him promptly. This pleased him because it made it possible for him to have an influence on both my spiritual and temporal

<sup>17</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*. Introductory essay and historical notes by Aldo Girauda. Roma, LAS 2011, p. 61. Henceforth: MO, 61. On the significance and historical and pedagogical value of this posthumous work of Don Bosco, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 5-49. [Please note that the page references to MO are to the Italian edition indicated here]

welfare” (MO, 71). The sudden death of his benefactor was something John as a teenager perceived to be an “irreparable disaster”. But before writing this Don Bosco speaks enthusiastically of his meeting with the seminarian Joseph Cafasso, who later as his spiritual director and professor, would have particular influence on the young priest John Bosco’s cultural formation and his educative and pastoral choices.

*b. Kindness: the core of his educational approach*

The account he gave of the following events allowed Don Bosco to highlight certain personal characteristics of his teachers and details about the schools he attended. For example in recalling his grammar classes, he sums up the school environment in Chieri in the following way: “kindness of teachers” (MO, 77). Each of these is then given a brief description for his attitude to preventive education: Prof. Valimberti “gave me a lot of good advice” on “how to keep out of trouble”, while Prof. Pugnetti “was very kind to me” (MO, 78-79). Prof. Peter Banaudi “was a model teacher. Without having recourse to corporal punishment, he succeeded in making all his pupils respect and love him. He loved them all as if they were his own sons, and they loved him like an affectionate father” (MO, 88). Don Bosco, on the other hand, did not neglect to highlight the limitations and faults he observed in his teachers. For example he tells us that a “beloved teacher” was replaced by another one, who, “unable to keep discipline, almost scattered to the wind all that Fr Virano had taught in the preceding months” (MO, 77).

Also with regard to the formators at the seminary, he hints at their qualities and limitations, including some rather severe criticisms: “I was greatly attached to them, and they always treated me with the greatest kindness; but my heart was not satisfied. The rector and the other superiors usually saw us only when we returned after the holidays and when we were leaving for them. The students never went to talk to them, except to receive corrections .... In fact if a superior came on the scene, the seminarians, with no particular reason, would flee left and right as if he were a monster.” (MO, 105).

*c. Religion: “fundamental part of education”*

The “kindness” which fascinated the young Bosco and which he so readily emphasised when alluding to his teachers was not limited to a superficial “niceness” or to simple “good manners”. The genuine kindness he is suggesting depends on right moral conduct and a solid religious basis. Recalling the period he spent at the “College” in Chieri (1831-1835), Don Bosco traces out a very detailed picture in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* of the disciplinary regime then in vogue in the public schools, under the *Regulations for schools outside of university* (1822). After indicating the meetings of the “Society for a good time” which were held during the week at one of the member’s home “to speak about religion”, he says: “Here it is good to recall that in those days religion was a basic part of the educational system. A teacher faced instant dismissal should he make any statement unbecoming or irreligious. If this was the way teachers were treated; you can imagine how severely pupils were dealt with for any unruly conduct or scandal!” (MO, 83). The emphasis on “severity” in these situations suggests, understandably, that the measures taken by the “rigid” and “conservative” school arrangements in 1822—inspired by the practice in Jesuit boarding schools—were not something the narrator liked. “Nevertheless in the mature Don Bosco’s mind, these prescriptions were perfectly in line with the fundamental dimensions of his “preventive” educational system because of the strong principles of religiosity, morality, order which inspired all scholastic life.”<sup>18</sup>

Nor does he fail to recall his positive contacts with institutions and educational and teaching methods of the Company of Jesus. With some “exemplary” friends, he recalls that every “Sunday, after the ‘congregation’ at the college we went to the Church of St Anthony where the Jesuits had this marvellous catechism class, where they told us of some examples which I still recall.” (MO, 82).

<sup>18</sup> P. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere ...*, p. 138.

The experiences he had and the people he met as a child and in his youth which we have briefly indicated—certainly contributed and to quite some degree, to forming the future educator and founder of congregations dedicated to the education of youth. From a pedagogical point of view on the other hand, the stage Don Bosco spent at the Pastoral Institute in Turin (1841-1843) must have been an especially fruitful one for him. The pastoral practice and theological studies there did not fail to give him “the basic guidelines for religious and moral, essential and practical pedagogy.”<sup>19</sup> Over those years Don Bosco also had occasion to integrate his formation with the religious experience and spirituality of two Saints who had a real impact on his ‘preventive’ educational style: Philip Neri and Francis de Sales, appreciated as they were in the Piedmontese cultural setting and especially at the Pastoral Institute in Turin.

It should be sufficient to point to just one fact. Wanting to demonstrate the reason why the first work dedicated to his boys “began calling itself by the name of St Francis de Sales,” Don Bosco writes “because we had put our own ministry, which called for great calm and meekness, under the protection of this saint in the hope that he might obtain for us from God the grace of being able to imitate him in his extraordinary meekness and in winning souls.” (MO, 137).

The seminary at Chieri and the Pastoral Institute in Turin could not provide the young priest with a specific culture in pedagogical and teaching matters. Nevertheless they contributed by giving him the “basic mental structures” which then allowed him, thanks to his uncommon intelligence and innate practical sense, to integrate without difficulty within the educational and social welfare activities for youngsters in the capital of the the Kingdom of Savoy.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

*d. His encounter with young people in prison and with orphaned and abandoned youngsters on Turin's streets*

When Don Bosco arrived at the Pastoral Institute in 1841 he had his first experiences of teaching catechism to young migrants under the guidance of Fr Joseph Cafasso, and went to Turin's prisons. His contact with boys in prison and his active involvement in concrete educational experiences were certainly determining factors in forming Don Bosco the "educator" and "author of pedagogical works". He himself tells us: "The idea of the oratories came from visiting the prisons in this city. In these places of spiritual and temporal misery there were many young men in the flower of their youth, alert, good-hearted, well able to be the consolation of their families and an honour to their town; and here they were locked up, discouraged, the opprobrium of society. Carefully considering the reasons for this misfortune one could see that for most of them they were unfortunate more for want of education than out of malice."<sup>20</sup>

Elements and guidelines came from the experiences he had, which would then guide and characterise his work: "I was beginning to learn from experience that if young lads just released from their place of punishment could find someone to befriend them, to look after them, to assist them on feast days, to help them get work with good employers, to visit them occasionally during the week, these young men soon forgot the past and began to mend their ways. They became good Christians and honest citizens." (MO, 129). At other times Don Bosco speaks of meeting boys in the squares and lane-ways, often fatherless or motherless or both, having come into the city from the countryside looking for work; he recalls the name such as in the case of Bartholomew Garelli, with whom he "begins" his work of religious formation in the sacristy of the Church of St Francis of Assisi (MO, 127-129).

Already from the early 1840s then there was a firm position in John Bosco's life: the choice of education of the young. "My inclination is to work for young people", he confessed to Fr Cafasso; he told the same to the Marchioness Barolo, and with equal frankness told this to the civil authorities who had invited him and his boys to take part in the national celebrations.

<sup>20</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Cenni storici intorno all'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, in Pietro BRAIDO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella Chiesa a servizio dell'umanità. Studi e testimonianze*. Roma, LAS 1987, p. 60.

Attentive to the “voice of his time”, he did not try to avoid the complex problems that came from the Italian Restoration, especially the conflict between the national and the religious conscience. But like “many liberal Catholics and moderate clerics, he understood the possibilities of a common working base: popular education. Like all Catholics he suffered at the humiliation of the Church and felt for its transcendent mission .... Finally, he felt that his life was substantially committed almost entirely to the problem of education, seen as what could give an overall solution to the religious and civil problem.”<sup>21</sup>

*e. Don Bosco was not the only one active at the time in the history of education*

In his special and final choice of the young as his life’s commitment, and in the works he began for the education of the most abandoned of them, Don Bosco was not alone in his pursuit. He found himself in harmony especially with a broad group of educators of Christian and Catholic orientation. Similar pedagogical efforts were pursued and proposed by others. “*The preventive system* which he practised, spoke about and finally, wrote about, arose in a context in which similar directions were pursued, codified and proposed by others. We are talking about educators, men and women, often neighbours geographically, who in some cases influenced or could have influenced him, or maybe because he was able to read some of the things they had written or had heard about. These especially were men and institutions who shared his concerns about youth in new and difficult times and set up not dissimilar initiatives on their behalf with a style of education that one could legitimately call *preventive*.”<sup>22</sup>

Amongst the educators he met in Turin an important place must go to the Brothers of the Christian Schools (De la Salle Brothers). Don Bosco dedicated one of his most relevant books to *fratello* Hervé de la Croix: his *Church history for use in the schools* (1845). Albert Caviglia, though, seems to go too far when he

<sup>21</sup> Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Volume primo: *Vita e opere*. Second edition reviewed by the author. Roma, LAS 1979, pp. 253-254.

<sup>22</sup> P. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere...*, p. 93.

writes that the Salesian founder was “a great scholar” of “Lasallian methods”; we cannot even document whether he had read the spiritual and pedagogical works of John Baptist de la Salle. Instead it is entirely likely that he did not remain unmoved by evening classes for workers opened by the de la Salle Brothers in 1846, and that he had a small work in hand – *The twelve virtues of the good teacher* (Marietti 1835) – by *fratel* Agathon, a de la Salle Brother. This latter, speaking of the virtues of the good teacher and his behaviour, insists on: “goodness”, “warmth”, “loving kindness”, “meekness or gentleness”... these are terms that often turn up in Don Bosco’s written corpus.

His two years spent as chaplain in the Marchioness Barolo’s work must have also been filled with educational experience. It would be reasonable to suppose that Don Bosco, as a young priest, had been particularly influenced by the principles which led to the various charitable and religious initiatives of this famous noble woman: distributing the bread of faith, but first giving people their daily bread; seeking the salvation of souls by looking after both body and mind; re-educating in a loving way rather than repressing; offering the basic instruction needed for new times. Those two years “had to be an organised school for Don Bosco, despite it not being an academic one, for the preventive system.”<sup>23</sup>

Along with the educational experiences we have pointed to it is essential to take other founders of institutes for the education of needy young people into account. We limit ourselves here to citing the most significant of these.

Especially brothers Marco and Antonio Cavanis, who began the Congregation of secular clerics of the schools of charity, founded in Venice in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They expressed the core of their educational approach with the terms “prevention”, “loving discipline” and “fatherly love”. These expressions were certainly not unknown to Don Bosco when he was putting the finishing touches to his *Regulations for Salesian Houses* (1877) and preparing the most important of his writings: *The Preventive System in the*

<sup>23</sup> Pietro BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, I. Roma, LAS 2009 pp. 179-180; cf. also *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

*education of youth* (1877). In fact some years earlier, as he himself said while drawing up the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales, he had the Rule of the “Cavanis Institute in Venice”<sup>24</sup> in hand. He would certainly have read the article, amongst others, that said: “Let teachers propose to carry out their task amongst the children not so much as teachers but as fathers; therefore let them take care of the children with the greatest charity ...; let them try always to fill them with Christian habits, and preserve them with fatherly vigilance from the contagion of the world” (art. 94).

Similar conjecture can be made about the writings of the priest-educator from Brescia, Ludovico Pavoni, whose institution (1847) proposed educating “poor and abandoned boys ... in religion and the arts”, with a view to giving them back “to the Church as excellent Christians, and to the State as good artists [tradesmen], and virtuous and faithful subjects.” In this case too, the parallels between the texts found in this collection of *Salesian sources* are easily discovered. However they are texts and testimonies that are quite frequently found in the cultural environment of the time. So it is not so easy to suggest which depended on what. So we need to go a step further. More than once Don Bosco indicates the author of a work he has used in drawing up one or other text or whom he recommends to his helpers, who were involved not only in teaching catechism in the festive oratories or the Sunday and evening schools, but in his more complex and articulated educational works.

*f. Openness to the Piedmontese pedagogical context of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century*

Don Bosco’s first educational and welfare institution – the Oratory of St Francis de Sales in Valdocco (1846) – and his first pedagogical and spiritual publications (1845) were written in a particularly lively cultural atmosphere. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the question of education was being tackled in Piedmont with resolute awareness, not only as a “pedagogical problem”, but also as a “political problem”. There are some particular issues at the roots

<sup>24</sup> E(m) I, p. 562.



of such a movement. In 1844 pedagogue and educator Ferrante Aporti was called to the University of Turin to give a course on method, which met with much interest. In 1845 the first edition of *L'Educatore Primario* saw the light of day, and it gave particular attention to the study and spread of “popular pedagogy”. At the conclusion of one of its articles, pedagogue Vincenzo Troya wrote that education, “to be complete, should primarily propose being good Christians, but also hard-working, intelligent, busy citizens who are useful to society and their families.”<sup>25</sup>

We do not know if V. Troya’s article had influenced the formulation of the notable pedagogical principle often put forward in several variations by Don Bosco in his writings: “good Christians and upright citizens”. At any rate it is possible to document that the Saint had some copies of this journal on his table while he was finishing some of his writings. In his *Bible history for use in the schools* (1847), for example, he draws passages from the *L'Educatore Primario* and accepts the view of the journal’s editor, Antonio Fecia, who spoke of the need to “popularise” the Bible to make it more available to readers. Don Bosco also recognised that he had used various illustrations, following the advice of “wise teachers”, according to which the Bible should be taught with the aid of maps, drawings, pictures representing the more important facts.

We are talking of the so-called “intuitive” approach, widespread in Italy under the name of the “demonstrative method” — by Ferrante Aporti, whose lessons in Turin were published in the *L'Educatore Primario*.

His openness to the Piedmontese pedagogical movement was not limited to this publication. In 1863, in a personal letter to the Superintendent of studies in Turin, replying to some criticisms of another of his books the *History of Italy*—in particular, that he had said nothing about the “deplorable actions” of certain “characters”—Don Bosco justified his choice: “I did this following the principle established by the well-known educators Girard and Aporti who

<sup>25</sup> Vincenzo TROYA, *Quale sia il genere d'istruzione utile e necessario specialmente nei villaggi*, in “L'Educatore Primario” 1 (1845) 12, 192.

suggested leaving out of books for children anything that might give a bad impression to the tender and fickle minds of young people.”<sup>26</sup>

After approval of the *Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales*, Don Bosco’s attention to education and schooling became increasingly more aware. That same year (1874), in agreement with his closest helpers, the founder saw that young people joining the Salesian Society would have a regular “school of pedagogy”. He appointed Fr Giulio Barberis as the teacher for this subject. After thirty years of teaching this latter explained that in drawing up his text—Notes on sacred pedagogy—he used what he had heard viva voce from Don Bosco, and what he had picked up from pedagogical writers the saint had recommended—G. A. Rayneri, G. Allievo, A. Franchi, A. Monfat, mons. F. Dupanloup—and publications of “various other well-proven authors”.

The works of one of those, Antoine Monfat, were familiar ones at Valdocco. On 16 November 1882 in the “great conference” for staff at the house—“with around 35 there, including clerics who were assistants, teachers and priests”—he had a paragraph read from “*Discipline for educators. The practice of Christian education* by Fr A. Monfat (A Marist priest) who also gave rise—this was emphasised in the minutes of the meeting—to other observations, especially being united, being in agreement, and that this agreement amongst us seeps into the young people we educate.” Don Bosco was also at the meeting.

Amongst the “proven authors” whom Barberis alludes to, Barnabite Alessandro Maria Teppa deserves special attention. One of his most widespread publications—*Advice for clerical educators of the young* (1868)—was warmly recommended by Don Bosco and used by him for conferences he gave to young Salesians studying philosophy. This work by the Barnabite priest was still enjoying particular favour at the Mother House in the 1880s. On March 8, 1883, during a conference to staff at Valdocco dealing with problems of discipline, after reading a paragraph on “punishments” in the small treatise on

<sup>26</sup> Letter to the Superintendent of studies in Turin, Francesco Anselmi, in E[m] I, p. 589. Years earlier, in 1848, in the “L’Educazione Primario”, there was a positive review and recommendation of the *Bible history for use in schools* written by Don Bosco.

the Preventive System, they also commented on “the chapter on punishments” in Teppa’s work. In the following conference it was decided to “give each one” of those present a copy of it, so that it could function “as a guide” for not getting away from “the spirit of Don Bosco.”<sup>27</sup> In the simple but substantial pages of this book we find statements like these: “So the one who wants to make himself loved by his pupils must first love them with fatherly affection and as a friend. Let him see to everything that they need or that could be of advantage to them in spirit and body.”

*g. A characteristic style of educating*

However it was not the first time that those responsible for the by now complex educational work at Valdocco had listened to these words or similar. Nor was it the only occasion where the initiator of that work invited his young helpers to practise these guidelines or others very close to them.

Though he did not arrive at drawing up a complete pedagogical system in theoretical terms, as has so often been said, Don Bosco nevertheless *reflectively* adopted consistent and valid elements in his writings and *consciously* tried them out in his educational work amongst young people. They allowed him to shape up a well-developed and unified educational proposal which was undeniably his own.

In this proposal we can identify a “doctrinal core” of notable “practical effectiveness”. We can list the most relevant and characteristic of them: 1) preventive attention: “prevent and not repress”; 2) pedagogical optimism: placing trust in youth on which “the hope for a happy future” is based; 3) formation as “good Christians and upright citizens”: the scope and aim of complete education; 4) “reason, religion loving-kindness”: the three pillars of the Preventive System; 5) assistance: positive, stimulating presence amongst the youngsters; 6) the importance of educators who are: “fathers, teachers and friends” of the young they are educating; 7) educational climate: welcoming, family style, joyful.

<sup>27</sup> José Manuel PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento tra reale e ideale. Documenti e testimonianze*. Roma, LAS 1992, pp. 254-255, 258.

This is not a list of general and abstract formulas. On the contrary these are principles and guidelines which Don Bosco knew how to practise with his personal style: first of all in his encounters with needy youngsters on the streets in Turin or in open institutions like the weekend oratories; then in every more complete and complex works—secondary classes offered internally, hotels, boarding schools, arts and trades workshops ...—appreciated by his contemporaries, and which have seen extraordinary development through to our own times.

These rapid indications of the contribution of the founder of the Salesian Society to the history of pedagogy and education can ultimately be completed—in terms of reading the *Salesian Sources*—by recalling the testimony of the first teacher of pedagogy to the young Salesians, Giulio (Julius) Barberis. Referring to the Preventive System, he stated that “Don Bosco only wrote it up in general terms”, but “applied it then completely” under the gaze of his followers and helpers<sup>28</sup>.

To achieve an adequate understanding of Don Bosco’s thinking on education and schooling, therefore, study of his writings, as careful and profound as it may be, is not sufficient. It is essential to dedicate careful attention to his life, the details of his educational experience: those he spoke of and those spoken of by his helpers and his contemporaries. All taken, obviously, with due critical understanding.

To sum up. The development of Don Bosco’s pedagogical thinking and his educational works was obviously not simply the result of his organisational skills and circumstances that he wisely exploited. It was also the result of his pedagogical experience, “consistent in its essential principles” and “flexible in its progress and application in the context of changing historical circumstances. Nor was it a purely abstract pondering of things but the powerful incentive for an educational relationship and a complex system of works.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Giulio BARBERIS, *Appunti di pedagogia sacra...* [Torino], Litografia Salesiana 1897, p. 277.

<sup>29</sup> Pietro STELLA, *Juan Bosco en la historia de la educación*. Madrid, Editorial CCS 1996, p. 33.

Seen this way we discover Don Bosco's preventive system—in its broadest sense—as a project essentially open to additions and theoretical, historical and methodological developments which enrich it and make it ever more relevant, without destroying its original essential features<sup>30</sup>.

### 3. Don Bosco in the spiritual context of his time<sup>31</sup>

Two principal historical factors are especially relevant to 19<sup>th</sup> century spirituality<sup>32</sup>. On the one hand the romantic sensitivity pervading the general cultural climate and with its implications for piety; on the other hand socio-political events which prepared for and studded the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century: the French Revolution, the Napoleonic period, liberal movements, restoration wars, anticlerical governments, laws harmful to the Church's rights, suppression of religious congregations and confiscation of their goods, the collapse of the Popes' temporal powers, systematic campaigns by the press denigrating the Church and the gradual exclusion of Catholics from the spheres of politics and culture.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere...*, pp. 391-404.

<sup>31</sup> Fundamental for an understanding of what is specific to Don Bosco in the broader picture of 19<sup>th</sup> century spirituality, are these: Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Vol. II: *Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità*. Roma, LAS 1981; Francis DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco et la vie spirituelle*. Paris, Beauchesne 1967; ID., *Jean Bosco (saint)*, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité ascétique et mystique*. Vol. VIII, Paris, Beauchesne 1974, coll. 291-303; Joseph AUBRY, *La scuola salesiana di don Bosco*, in Ermanno ANCILLI (ed.), *Le grandi scuole della spiritualità cristiana*. Roma/Milano, Pontificio Istituto di Spiritualità del Teresianum/O.R. 1984, pp. 669-698.

<sup>32</sup> There are many studies of 19<sup>th</sup> century spirituality, and amongst them we note: Pietro STELLA, *Italie: de la restauration à l'indépendance, 1814-1860*, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité ascétique et mystique*. Vol. VII, Paris, Beauchesne, 1971, coll. 2273-2284; Tullio GOFFI, *La spiritualità dell'Ottocento*. (Storia della Spiritualità 7). Bologna, EDB 1989; Massimo PETROCCHI, *Storia della spiritualità italiana*. Vol. III. *Il Settecento, l'Ottocento e il Novecento*. Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura 1979; Pietro CRESPI - Gian Franco POLI, *Lineamenti di storia della spiritualità e della vita cristiana*. Vol. II, Roma, Edizioni Dehoniane 2000; Pietro ZOVATTO (ed.), *Storia della spiritualità italiana*. Roma, Città Nuova 2002.

These circumstances of a general nature undoubtedly had implications for 19th century spirituality. As a consequence they had an impact on Don Bosco's inner life and in part motivated his choices and emphases. But these alone are not enough to fully explain the important features of his personality and charism that make him one of the most significant figures in the panorama of holiness and spirituality in the 19th century. For this other aspects need to be taken into consideration, maybe of less historical resonance, but equally important: the environments he was formed in, the cultural substratum and popular religious thinking that he came out of, the mindset and yearnings of the young people amongst whom he ministered, but above all certain unmistakeable features of him as a human being and certain things that happened to him.

*a. The spiritual climate of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century*

Trusting in the light of reason and scientific progress, the tendency to exult the rights and duties of the citizen, mistrust of the traditional and mystical spirituality of the preceding century, the 18th century emphasised phenomenological subjectivism, reduced religion to symbolic rituals and Christian spirituality to moral and virtuous effort, and rational conduct. At the beginning of the 19th century, reflecting on the dramatic results of the revolution and its reverberations at a European level, there was a reaction. Revolutionary ferment was interpreted as general corruption of the heart, the obscuring of reason and weakening of the will; Jacobean excesses were the perverse result of human pride when detached from faith. The need was felt, then, to reaffirm whatever had been obscured or denied. Religion as the basis for civil society and the 'cement' in society was declared to be an irreplaceable value, including from a civil and political perspective. Since its elimination, Louis de Bonald (1754-1840) said, had led to the destruction of society, the moral and spiritual reconstruction of Europe must begin by recovering the transcendent and ethical values of Catholicism, from a strong and ardent love for religion and virtue. Through a careful reinterpretation of preceding centuries, François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) arrived at identifying

the history of civilisation with the history of religion and presented the best conquests of the intellect, arts and progress as the result of the “genius of Christianity” (1802).

The religious conscience perceived the revolution as the incarnation of divisive infernal powers attacking the Church to the detriment of souls; recurring famines, epidemics, economic crises and wars were God’s punishment, calling people to conversion, asking them to return to sincere religious practice based on inwardness and reverent submission to the divine.

This sensitivity, already in the Napoleonic period, gave rise to a first Catholic recovery through initiatives of spiritual formation limited to small groups, such as the *Amicizie*, who from Piedmont spread to Savoy, Lombardy, Tuscany, Rome and Austria, and like the youth associations in Brescia promoted by ex-Jesuit Luigi Mozzi dei Capitani (1746-1813). These had an effect on the educational vocation of Ludovico Pavoni (1784-1849) and the noble Venetian brothers Antonio Angelo (1774-1853) and Marco Antonio Cavanis (1772-1858). The *Amicizie* produced zealous priests like Pio Brunone Lanteri (1759-1830), founder of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, and Fr Luigi Guala (1775-1848) who started the Pastoral Institute, a breeding ground for holy and zealous priests, and a decisive environment for the young Don Bosco’s spiritual leanings and choices. The works and writings of Ludovico Pavoni and Cavanis brothers would also influence him. This spiritual recovery amongst the best of the clergy generated, in Piedmont as elsewhere, a relaunching of pastoral care to uplift the people morally and spiritually.

At the dawning of the 19th century spiritual works of a deeper religious inspiration saw the light of day. One example was *The way to holiness shown us by Jesus through devotion to his Most Sacred Heart* (1795) by Agostino Albergotti (1755-1825)—inspired by the Imitation of Christ and the spirituality of St Francis de Sales—written in the form of an affectionate colloquy between Jesus and reader, where it was said that holiness is a way open to all the faithful and consisting essentially in “becoming like Jesus”, his virtues, his obedience to the movement of the Holy Spirit, the “gentle sparks of his divine fire” that

moved one “with gentle force to love and want to love the highest Good even more.”<sup>33</sup> This style of intimate colloquy could also be found in other spiritual works of the time, such as *Jesus at the heart of the priest* by Bartolomeo del Monte (1726-1778)—often reprinted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—*Jesus at the heart of the young person* by Giuseppe Zama-Mellini (1788-1838)—recommended by Don Bosco himself in the *Companion of Youth*—and *Mary at the heart of the young person* (1843) by Vincentian Pietro Biancheri. Also a result of this reawakening were works by the Jesuit from Ferrara, Alfonso Muzzarelli (1749-1813), a keen polemicist who rejected Rousseau’s pedagogical thinking, and was the author of works aimed at arousing spiritual fervour, amongst which the *May, or Month of Mary* (Ferrara 1795). It would be very popular throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, along with *Practical instruction on devotion to the heart of Jesus*. Very often reprinted through the century were *Documents for the instruction and tranquillity of souls* (Turin 1785) by the Barnabite Carlo Giuseppe Quadrupani (1758-1807). These, like many other small works by spiritual writers reacting against the “evils” and aridity of the century of the Enlightenment, brought to the level of the common faithful essential elements of asceticism, devotion to the Heart of Jesus, the Blessed Sacrament and Our Lady, through simple meditations which encouraged fervour. A specific literary genre thus came into being, an amalgam of religious instruction, meditation, devote emotions and resolutions that would see further development right up to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the context of a thirst for culture and inwardness establishing itself amongst the people. Don Bosco, nurtured by such “spiritual readings”, would make them an effective tool in his educational activity, reformulating them and adapting them to the needs and tastes of his boys.

During the Renaissance, the triumphant return of Pius VII to Rome after the fall of Napoleon’s Empire became a symbol of the Church’s triumph over the powers of evil, thanks to God’s extraordinary intervention. It was

<sup>33</sup> Agostino ALBERGOTTI, *La via della santità mostrata da Gesù nella devozione al suo SS. Cuore*. Milano, Vita e Pensiero 1931, pp. 83-84.



a time for religious revival, and an effort to re-Christianise society through pastoral activity amongst the people. The invitation to conversion and reform of behaviour took place especially through preaching missions, culminating in a general confession and the whole community going to Communion. The mission preachers insisted on compunction of heart, daily prayer, regularly receiving the sacraments, keeping Sundays and Feast Days holy; they emphasised the value of daily virtues, fulfilling one's duty, temperance and moral behaviour. A religious sentiment of repentance and expiation was an urge to prayer and devout practices. The mysteries of Christ's life, devotion to his passion, the practice of the *Via crucis* (Stations of the Cross) and saying the Rosary together were all attractive. Greater importance was given in parishes to preparing and celebrating first Communion; the Easter Duty was made more solemn by having extraordinary confessors and giving out Easter tickets; the *Forty Hours* took on grander importance.

Parish ministry gained strength, thanks to better formed and motivated clergy. Catechetics for children was relaunched, along with Sunday religious instruction for adults. Confraternities and pious unions of men and women gained new life with help from parish priests. Traditional rites gained new impetus: rogation days, processions, devotion to the dead; new devout practices were introduced, novenas and triduums, Marian months, garlands. Even in the more remote villages, through preaching and the ministry of the confessional, the clergy promoted the spiritual life of the humble folk; they formed them to a more substantial piety, animated by love, inspired by confidence in God; they spurred them on to practical exercise of virtues and active faith; parents were sensitised to the Christian upbringing of their children.

This was the kind of atmosphere in which the young John Bosco's Christian initiation as a child took place, wisely looked after by his mother who got him used to saying his morning and evening prayers, got him ready for his first confession, gave importance to his first communion, and created the conditions which helped the boy understand the spiritual importance of the event (MO, 68-69). His early literacy was the result of the work of a priest teacher at Capriglio, who "was very good to him" and "most willingly" helped

him with instruction and his Christian upbringing (MO, 61). The topics he heard in the preaching at the missions also had an impact on John Bosco as a boy: reminders of the Last Things, intended to arouse a sense of guilt, the resolve to be converted so as not to be caught out in sin by death, and the decision to give oneself irrevocably to God. It was a spirituality sensitive to the “great affair” of the salvation of one’s soul, emphasising God’s love for mankind, the Divine Saviour’s redeeming passion, but also the inexorable nature of his judgement, awareness of human weakness and the power of temptation. This spirituality encouraged prayer of supplication, insisted on frequenting the sacraments, inspired examination of conscience and good resolutions, urged people to penance and mortification. And it was precisely in the context of a popular mission proclaiming the “need to give oneself to God in time and not put off conversion”, that brought about the encounter with Fr John Calosso, his first and very effective spiritual director, whom the teenager trusted: “It was then that I came to realise what it was to have a regular spiritual director, a faithful friend of one’s soul. I had not had one up till then. Amongst other things he forbade a penance I used to practise: he deemed it unsuited to my age and circumstances. He encouraged frequent confession and communion. He taught me how to make a short daily meditation, or more accurately, a spiritual reading ... From then on I began to savour the spiritual life.” (MO, 71).

*b. Romantic modulations in John Bosco’s formation*

18th century apologetics had reacted against representation of religious practice as sad, boring, contrary to the spirit of freedom. At the beginning of the 19th century, re-evaluation of “the beauty of Christianity” led to a joyful view of the life of grace. At the same time, riding on the wave of the beatification (1816) and canonisation (1836) of Alphonsus Liguori, a more benign ethics came into force compared with rigourist positions, and some of the lesser spiritual works of the Saint were rediscovered—full of emotion, and responding to the emotional nature of the romantic era. Other than beauty, they also proclaimed the “good things” of faith, helping people to love and desire “Christian perfection”, divine intimacy, and to work for the eternal

joys of heaven. It was a time when religious sentiment felt itself in profound harmony with Saints who represented the gentle Christ: Francis of Assisi, Philip Neri, Francis de Sales, Vincent de Paul. Their life and writings were interpreted from a romantic perspective. This attention to sentiment and the heart encouraged a devout psychologism, focus on inwardness, constant monitoring of one's awareness. To avoid the danger of sentimentalism St Alphonsus' advice on the need to "move to practice" was repeated, the need to translate fervour into detachment of the heart from sin, into mortification of the senses, life commitment, virtuous acts, works of charity. Some of the saint's smaller works, his *Eternal maxims*, his *Practice loving Jesus Christ*, his *Preparation for death*, were amongst the most widely disseminated and best loved devout publications of the 19th century at every level of society.

Alphonsus' writings and the piety they presented had a basis in austerity which the romantic soul succeeded in tempering by recovering the devout humanism of St Francis de Sales. He exercised a powerful fascination in the 19<sup>th</sup> century amongst clergy and laity. Throughout the century, other than the frequent reprinting of his complete works, pocketbook versions of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* were enormously successful, even amongst simple folk, along with collections of his maxims. Also reprinted was the *Spirit of St Francis de Sales*, by bishop Pierre Camus, in a digest version by Pierre Collot, offering a loving and kind picture of the Saint from Savoy, along with his irrepressible pastoral zeal which had him exclaim "*Da mihi animas, caetera tolle*". The spirit of St Francis de Sales pervaded the life and spiritual literature of the 19th century and greatly influenced the direction of romantic piety, equal to his figure which became the symbol of apostolic zeal and pastoral approach for the clergy in these new times.

When he entered the seminary at Chieri, the cleric Bosco found an exacting environment focused completely on ethical behaviour, scrupulous fidelity to the rule and exact fulfilment of duty, daily practices of piety, humble submission. When he asked his philosophy professor for "some rules for life", he got the response: "Just one thing, exact fulfilment of your duties." (MO, 104). Seminary life was austere, characterised by strong spiritual effort, guided by chosen formators with whom John always had a good relationship, despite

their reserve and distance from the clerics. The priestly ideal was nurtured by abundant reading, in community and personally, from meditation books on the good priest, little manuals of piety which nurtured affections during visits to the chapel. The cleric Bosco preferred the lives of the saints, biblical and historical material<sup>34</sup>. His formators insisted in respect for the rules, the need to be “obedient to discipline” not out of fear or formality, but out of an “inner spirit”, “with the right intention of pleasing God alone”<sup>35</sup>. In his talks to the seminarians Archbishop Chiaveroti, read publicly in the refectory, John could also note the strong insistence on the pastoral aim of his studies: God calls a young man to the ecclesiastical state principally for a service of “sanctification of one’s neighbour ...; whence one does not sufficiently satisfy one’s duty by attending to one’s own sanctification to the point where he does not see to the sanctification of others.”<sup>36</sup> Apostolic zeal must characterise the spiritual journey of the seminarians from the outset, motivate their every activity inward and outward, since they are called to become pastors dedicated exclusively to their ministry to the people, suitable for exercising the care of souls, which is the “art of arts and the most difficult of all.”<sup>37</sup> A good pastor must be inflamed by the desire to save his brothers and sisters: “What else is the pastor of souls if not a victim of the love he must show to God and his neighbour?”<sup>38</sup> The ideal priest as presented by Archbishop Chiaveroti is characterised by pastoral holocaust: he has no peaceful dreams or days, no time for himself, everything goes into his ministry. “I beg you, brothers: you have not yet resisted to the point of your blood, nor given your life for your sheep, as a good pastor must do.”<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> On the cleric Bosco’s reading also see: no. 305, p. 991; no. 309, p. 1226.

<sup>35</sup> Colombano CHIAVEROTI, *Raccolta delle lettere, omelie ed altre scritture*. Torino, Ghiringhello e Comp. 1835, vol. III, pp. 221-222.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 179-180; cf. also pp. 377-378.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 414.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 416.

Romantic modulations are clearly seen in the *Life of Louis Comollo* (1844), republished with significant additions in 1854<sup>40</sup>. It is a valuable document for understanding the evolution of spiritual sensitivity between the first and second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: in an intensely emotional, intimate and fervent atmosphere in which the young Bosco was immersed in his years at the seminary and in the practical, apostolic, charitable and social direction that romantic spirituality took after 1848, under the pressure of events.

*c. Spiritual life at the Pastoral Institute*

After his priestly ordination, Don Bosco found at the Pastoral Institute a setting which was just as demanding, but more open and sensitive to the spiritual and pastoral circumstances of the moment. Here, as well as study, recollection and prayer, he came across the moral and spiritual example of his formators, their extraordinary pastoral zeal. The Rector, Louis Guala, tutor Felix Golzio, but especially the spiritual director, Joseph Cafasso, like other zealous apostles of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, aimed at intimately harmonising the “moment of contemplation with affection for the Lord, translating the sweetness of these affections into religious activity” and pastoral activity; “their elevation to God in faith and charity turned into apostolic activity of compassion and redemption.”<sup>41</sup> Don Bosco writes of his formators: “The prisons, hospitals, pulpits, charitable institutes, the sick in their homes, the cities, the villages, and we might add, the mansions of the rich and the hovels of the poor felt the salutary effects of the zeal of these three luminaries of the Turinese clergy. These were the three models placed in my path by Divine Providence. It was just up to me to follow their example, their teaching, their virtues.” (MO, 126). This was a determining experience for his future mission, which set him on the path of apostolic ascesis which would be the basis of the spirituality of his Congregations.

“The spirituality of the Pastoral Institute was based on the teaching of St Francis de Sales and St Alphonsus Liguori. It did not form to holiness or for

<sup>40</sup> See further, no. 305.

<sup>41</sup> T. GOFFI, *La spiritualità dell'Ottocento...*, p. 29.

holiness like a monastic community; it did not educate to mystical experience; it did not invite one to abandon everyone and everything to see that one was only of God and in God. It limited itself to making young priests aware that they were living in a spiritually perturbed world; it had them see that from the Christian angle everything had to be done; it prepared its priest members for tireless activity on behalf of souls to be saved, offering them the comfort of charitable apostolic acceptance. The Pastoral Institute sought to convince priests that whatever they offered to or required of the faithful (orthodox doctrine, spirit of prayer and mortification, ethical and canonical observance) necessarily required testimony in their own lives. The Pastoral Institute did not inculcate in priests or laity a new spiritual doctrine, but an ascetic and virtuous voluntarism within faithful practice of piety.”<sup>42</sup>

The teaching at the Pastoral Institute, inspired by St Alphonsus Liguori, gave Don Bosco a unified vision of things: moral theology, Scripture, liturgy, ascetic and mystical theology were above all meant to nurture an interior life and so were fundamental elements in his ministry, in the historical context of a society undergoing complete transformation.

The model of the priest offered in the teaching and practice of the Pastoral Institute harmonised the Salesian view with the apostolic spiritual activity of the Jesuits. According to Francis de Sales devotion essentially consists in loving God and generating a gradual ascetic commitment to purifying the heart, an ever more intense practice of prayer and sacraments, daily exercise of virtue. And since Christian perfection is the common vocation of all Christians, in caring for souls the pastor must adapt devotion to the circumstances, strengths, occupations and duties of each one in particular. Jesuit inspiration adds to devotion the apostolic commitment to spreading the kingdom of God through tireless dedication and work, and in battle style, however always maintaining in this active life, a contemplative attitude within.

“It was onto this Salesian and Jesuit doctrinal trunk that the spirituality of the 19th century developed its own ascetic experience. It maintained

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

that given the presence of the grace of the Spirit of the Lord (Jn. 15:5), one could engage in perfection oneself. It was his belief that spiritual perfection “consists in the habitual effort of good will, a vigilant and persevering moral tension of conscience over the domain of one’s actions, a normal attitude of self-government, self-mastery, with the intention of unifying the complex psychological mechanism of one’s instincts, passions, interests, sentiments, inward and outward reactions, thoughts, under a single directive command, love of God and neighbour, the supreme and vital norm of the Christian personality.”<sup>43</sup>

These are precisely the features which connote the spiritual stature of Fr Cafasso effectively outlined by Don Bosco at his funeral, along with an exasperated asceticism (“rigid penitence”) with a pastoral intent<sup>44</sup>. In his eyes the teacher is the successful synthesis of apostolic holiness: “I can tell you that I have found many [Saints] who have stood out heroically some for this, some for some other virtue, but I believe it would be truly rare to find someone who united in himself such wisdom, so much practical humanity, so much prudence, fortitude, temperance, zeal for things to do with the glory of God and the salvation of souls that we see in Cafasso the priest.”<sup>45</sup>

Other preferred issues in the spiritual and cultural climate of the century were Providence and Divine mercy, confidence in and abandonment to God, inner peace. In Turin, St Joseph Benedict Cottolengo (1786-1842) called his work *The Little Home of Divine Providence*; Marchionness Giulia di Barolo (1785-1864) founded the Sisters of St Anne and Providence; Don Bosco himself wrote and published an *Exercise of devotion to God’s mercy* (1847). Abandonment to God seems to be one of the characteristic features of 19th century piety. It is an invitation we find in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, in various works of Don Bosco and in his collection of letters, both in the broad

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64 (quoting an address by Paul VI found in “L’Osservatore Romano” March 4, 1976).

<sup>44</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Cafasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri*. Torino, Tip. G. B. Paravia e Comp. 1860, pp. 9-45 (OE XII, 359-395).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97 (OE XII, 446-447).

sense of confident trust, spiritual dependence and offering of self, and in his trust in the material help he needed for life's practical necessities. But for Don Bosco confidence and abandonment to God are not passive attitudes, but are accompanied by a readiness for action, the intelligent search for solutions and opportunities, unconditional dedication to the given mission, to his boys and the confreres.

*d. Don Bosco's ascetic emphasis*

“Don Bosco educated at the Pastoral Institute to tireless apostolic asceticism, considered it appropriate to offer the clerics who were helping him a spiritual formation that differed from the formation practised in seminaries and novitiates. These formed clerics and novices by separating them totally from the world, with a view to creating in them a mindset and behaviours that were opposite to those of lay people. On the contrary Don Bosco immersed his clerics amongst young people so they could share their piety and duties with them. He maintained that apostolic dedication was not only an impregnable bulwark of morality, but certainly a highly formative asceticism of charitable spirit.”<sup>46</sup>

Don Bosco also offered asceticism as a way to holiness for his boys: “How many things do we need then to become Saints? One thing only: *We need to want it*. Yes; so long as you want it, you can be saints: nothing else is lacking other than *wanting*.” The example is clear from “Saints who were very poor, and caught up in all the problems of a very active life”, but they became saints simply by “doing everything they had to do well. They fulfilled all their duties to God, putting up with everything out of love for him, offering him all their pains, all their difficulties: This is the great science of eternal salvation and holiness.”<sup>47</sup>

In Don Bosco's spirituality, nevertheless, the lesson of classic asceticism is reformulated into an anthropological perspective more suited to teenagers

<sup>46</sup> T. GOFFI, *La spiritualità dell'Ottocento...*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>47</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Vita di santa Zita serva e di sant'Isidoro contadino*. Torino, P. De-Agostini 1853, pp. 6-7 (OE V, 176-177).



and young adults. His spiritual pedagogy was aimed at proposing a formative model adapted to them correcting any likely deviations of a misunderstood spirituality, and leading them constantly to real everyday life, which not only must be accepted, but joyfully embraced, according to their state in life. He takes up and applies to the youth situation the humanist perspective and teaching of St Francis de Sales. Thus he offers a kind of ‘positive’ mortification, which forbade intemperate and useless rigidity while remaining demanding so that everything would be focused on one’s circumstances of life, one’s duties of state.

Here we have one of the cornerstones of the Saint’s proposal. He considers a wide range of duties, all stemming from one’s real circumstances: “duties of piety, respect for and obedience to parents and charity to everyone.”<sup>48</sup> As a result he suggests to his young pupils not fasts and penances they would themselves choose, but “diligence in study, paying attention at school, obeying superiors, putting up with the inconveniences of life like heat, cold, wind, hunger, thirst”, overcoming their seeing it as “necessary” greater forces from outside and accepting them calmly out of “love for God.”<sup>49</sup> He places the duties coming from the Gospel precept of charity at the same level: exercising “much kindness and charity” for one’s neighbour, putting up with their faults, “giving good advice and counsel”; “doing things for your friends, bringing them water, cleaning their shoes, also serving at table ..., sweeping the refectory, the dormitory, carrying out the rubbish, bringing in the wood, trunks.” All these things according to Don Bosco, need to be done “joyfully” and with “satisfaction”. In fact, “real penance consists not in doing what pleases us but in doing what pleases the Lord, and serves to promote his glory.”<sup>50</sup> The spiritual value of these existential situations is guaranteed by the intention with which they are done and the purpose we give them: “What you

<sup>48</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besuccho Francesco d’Argentera*. Edizione seconda. Torino, Tip. Dell’Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1878, pp. 102-103.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102-103.

need to put up with out of necessity,” he reminds Dominic Savio “offer it to God, and it becomes a virtue and merit for your soul.”<sup>51</sup>

Don Bosco agrees with Saint Teresa of Lisieux in seeing perfection as living charity, but shown in concrete loving acts helping our neighbour, far from selfish interests, lovingly calm and faithful to our tasks even in the face of opposition and suffering. The mortification which Don Bosco proposed to his boys was above all an *ascetic and pedagogical tool* aimed at control over instinctive impulses, their senses, correcting their faults and building up virtue: “It is difficult for a young man to preserve his innocence without penance”<sup>52</sup>; “You often tell me I have many faults,” says the young shepherd Francis Besucco, “and this is why I also want to fast.”<sup>53</sup> But the desire for penance has, in Don Bosco’s view, a *mystical* connotation as well, indeed it grows in proportion to the extent of interior charity: “When love of God takes possession of a heart, nothing in the world, no suffering can inflict it, indeed everyone of life’s sufferings brings it consolation. From tender hearts already comes the noble thought that one is suffering for a grand purpose, and that suffering in life gains a glorious recompense in blessed eternity.”<sup>54</sup>

But there is something else, the loving perspective in which Don Bosco proposes this ascesis of duty. It is rooted in that “giving oneself to God in time”, he spoke of in 1847 in the *Companion of Youth*, and which he then developed over the following years as “giving oneself completely to God”, as an essential (baptismal) form of Christian life, with such determination and enthusiasm as to mark a point of no return. This seems to us to be the perspective that underpins every one of his formative interventions as its final purpose, with a view to helping young people to shape their daily lives in the direction of sacrificial charity. In fact rather than making it a choice of

<sup>51</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell'oratorio di san Francesco di Sales*. Torino, Tip. G.B. Paravia e Comp. 1859, p. 75 (OE XI, 225).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72 (OE XI, 222).

<sup>53</sup> G. BOSCO, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, p. 58.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

being religiously aware and morally consistent, he wanted to educate them to the unconditional gift of self to God, who is loved above all else, the goal of the spiritual journey. From such an inward movement comes necessarily a life of joyful and ardent charity, an intense and serene practical fervour. This absolute determination of gift, which leads the Christian to a state of complete obedience to the Father that was Christ's, in the condition of a servant who freely takes things up out of love, throws new light on the meaning and value of daily actions. From it comes an unheard of way of executing things that reveal the quality of Christian daily life which the young person has achieved.

Exemplary in this sense is the experience of Michael Magone, as told by Don Bosco: his "frank and resolute" conversion generated a new perception of himself and his daily life. If earlier on he had unwillingly withdrawn from his beloved recreation to do his duties, which he saw as a weight<sup>55</sup>, he would then be seen "running to be first where duty called him", wanting to regulate himself "constantly well ... with application and diligence". We see him mature inwardly in an important way, accompanied by a "total change both physical and moral", interpreted by his teachers as an evident sign of his "wanting to give everything to piety ... stripped of the old Adam."<sup>56</sup> In the Life of Francis Besucco, Don Bosco expresses more explicitly the "mystical" orientation of asceticism. He outlines the commitment of the young shepherd and his diligence in his duties as expressing his choice of perfect conformation to the divine will: "He came to the Oratory with a prior purpose in mind; so in his behaviour he always looked at the point he was tending towards, that is, to dedicate himself to God in the ecclesiastical state. To this end he sought to progress in knowledge and virtue."<sup>57</sup> His adherence to daily life, his practical intention, the intensity of his commitment and his efforts to be perfect (to

<sup>55</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*. Torino, Tip. G.B. Paravia e Comp. 1861, p. 15 (OE XIII, 169).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33-39 (OE XIII, 187-193).

<sup>57</sup> G. BOSCO, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, p. 83: it is the conclusion to Chapter 18, dedicated to his commitment to study, taken up lovingly "with all the avidity of someone who is doing something he really likes." (p. 80).

“do more and better things”), which came from such a movement of love, marked the boy’s whole life, shaping an attitude of detachment and loving completeness, of kenosis and ecstasy, similar to what is described by Francis de Sales as “ecstasy of life and works”, which is the summit of the journey of perfection<sup>58</sup>.

Dominic Savio, strongly excited by the overwhelming mystical experience he had as a result of the sermon on holiness “which inflamed his heart with love for God”, and inwardly pressured by the “need” “to be completely the Lord’s”, is led to “doing rigid penances, spending long hours in prayer.” Don Bosco instead encourages him “not to be worried,” and keep “constant and moderate cheerfulness”, “be persevering in his duties of piety and study,” “always take part in recreation with his companions.”<sup>59</sup> At the same time he guides him in the direction of the apostolic holiness he had learned at the Pastoral Institute: “The first thing he advised him for becoming a saint was to get busy winning over souls to God; thus there is nothing more holy in the world than cooperating for the good of souls, for whose salvation Jesus Christ shed the last drop of his precious blood.”<sup>60</sup>

Like others formed spiritually in the first half of the 19th century, Don Bosco was convinced that the action of grace urges us to a personal ascetic way of life, rich in moral virtues, industrious holiness and works of charity. He had absorbed religious sentiment, affective devotion and lacked trust in mystical experience, because it seemed to him to be extraneous to daily duty and service of one’s brothers, a misunderstood *fuga mundi*. He preferred willing commitment to doing good, being immersed in life, virtuous industry and cheerfulness, friendly and helpful relationships and above all apostolic charity: “solicitude for the good of souls” and zeal for “instructing children in the truths of the faith”, and “winning over to God” all of humankind. But

<sup>58</sup> FRANCESCO DI SALES, *Trattato dell’amor di Dio*. A cura di Ruggero Balboni. Milano, Paoline 1989, pp. 526-533: Chapters 7 and 8 of the seventh book, where the Saint develops the topic of the life of ecstasy more explicitly.

<sup>59</sup> G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, pp. 50-52 (OE XI, 200-202).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53 (OE XI, 203).

it ought be noted that this ascetic and practical direction, this tendency to material and spiritual charity, to charitable activity according to the “need of the times”, this general insistence on involvement for the benefit of those who suffer and are excluded, this preference for pastoral and missionary fervour—all characteristic of 19th century spirituality—is not opposed to inner union with God for Don Bosco. He never neglected the prayer of simple union, and indeed was ever responsive to the urgings of the Holy Spirit. “We could say that in the 19th century every Saint was in fact necessarily a mystic, since his or her virtuous lives were rooted in and flourished in the determining grace and light of the Spirit. But if we pay attention to the explicit awareness he had of his spiritual status and how it was developing, he was an ascetic and not a mystic. In the 19th century the spiritual was reduced to and identified with what was moral, asectic.”<sup>61</sup>

*e. Prayer, sacraments and devotion to Mary*

The core of the spirituality dominant in Don Bosco’s century is summed up in the title of a small work by St Alphonsus: *The great means of prayer for achieving eternal salvation*. This was in fact the “basic individual and collective attitude we discover in 19th century spirituality faced with the profound transformations marking the century.”<sup>62</sup> In the Catholic world the perception of an incipient disaffection in the ordinary ranks of people with religious practice, and still more the increasingly virulent attacks on the Church, the Barque of Peter tossed by storms, against its institutions and its hierarchy, aroused recourse to supplicant prayer and together they nurtured an active and warrior-like spirit. Resolutions of faithfulness were renewed, sacramental practice and devotions increased, pastoral zeal multiplied, missionary activity was relaunched, and a huge variety of charitable activities were put in place, and they worked at a profound spiritual and moral renewal of the clergy and laity.

<sup>61</sup> T. GOFFI, *La spiritualità dell'Ottocento...*, p. 68.

<sup>62</sup> Pietro STELLA, *Prassi religiosa, spiritualità e mistica nell'Ottocento, in Storia dell'Italia religiosa*. Vol. III, *L'età contemporanea*, a cura di Gabriele DE ROSA. Roma-Bari, Laterza 1995, p. 115.

Don Bosco moved precisely in this direction, with attention to youngsters and their formation. There were many devotions freely offered to the boys at the Oratory, but the saint “did not indulge in the exuberant devotion typical of 19th century Catholicism for fear of annoying or tiring them.”<sup>63</sup> The prayer he fostered has as its primary aim lifting up their spirit, guiding the heart to God, invoking the grace to resist temptations, detaching their heart from sin, and growing in virtue. It was along these lines that he developed a brief pedagogy of prayer. Practices of piety were a way to achieve a spirit of prayer and also be a manifestation of it. In the *Companion of Youth* he offers simple tools for sanctifying every action, right up till the end of the day, when, “thinking of the presence of God with our hands joined upon our breast”, we take our rest. Everything is to be done for God, attending “diligently” to one’s duties and “directing every action to the Lord”. Aloysius Gonzaga is presented as a model of union with God nurtured since childhood, filled with affection and “delight”: “One had to really force him to stop praying .... Gain for me, O glorious St Aloysius, a spark of your fervour, and may the spirit of prayer and devotion always grow in me.”<sup>64</sup>

He was aware of youthful sensitivity, so insisted on love, divine intimacy, friendship with Christ, Mary’s motherly tenderness. It is the task of the Christian educator to act so as to “get young people to have a taste for prayer”, so that through practising it they would achieve a “spirit of prayer” and spiritual “fervour.”<sup>65</sup> For this to happen there was a need to practise it by thinking of “the presence of God”, our very loving Father, and getting used to gradually lifting up our heart and mind to the Creator, encouraging them to “converse familiarly with God” in any place, like Dominic Savio, who “even in the midst of the noisiest games, collected his thoughts and with pious affection

<sup>63</sup> Massimo MARCOCCI, *Alle radici della spiritualità di don Bosco, in Don Bosco nella storia*. Acts of the 1st International Congress of Studies on Don Bosco (Università Pontificia Salesiana. Roma, 16-20 gennaio 1989) by Mario Midali. Roma, LAS 1990, p. 165.

<sup>64</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de’ suoi doveri...* Torino, Tipografia Paravia e Comp. 1847, pp. 68-70 e 82 (OE II, 248-250 e 262).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, pp. 113-119 (OE XV, 355-361).

lifted up his heart to God.”<sup>66</sup> Don Bosco saw to the external attitudes (sign of the cross, genuflection, body position<sup>67</sup>) and proposed modest and pleasing practices of piety, not heavy ones: “Easy things that do not frighten off or tire the Christian faithful, and even more so young people. Fasts, long prayers and similar rigid austerities are to be left out for the most part or done in a more relaxed way. Let us keep to simple things, but do them perseveringly.”<sup>68</sup> He also recommended to his boys: “Let prayer be frequent and fervent but never with bad will or disturbing our companions; it is better not to pray than to pray badly. First thing in the morning as soon as you wake make the sign of the cross and raise your mind to God with a brief prayer.”<sup>69</sup>

In perfect harmony with the spirituality of his time Don Bosco aimed at achieving an inner state of constant love, for himself and others by these means. They imbued thoughts, unified affections, guided actions. “To pray means lifting up our heart to God and speaking with him through holy thoughts and devout sentiments”, he wrote in the *Catholic Companion* 1868<sup>70</sup>. The state of prayer, in his way of seeing it, is not only a “degree” of prayer, because it is always accompanied by a tendency to moral perfection: detachment, the effort to overcome and control oneself, self-mastery, patience, vigilance, faithfulness and constancy. This is the state of the recollected soul, in a style of modest life, focused on essentials, hard-working and charitable, polarised by the inward action of Grace which preserves us from distracted thoughts and banal things, taking nothing away from joyful liveliness of daily life. An inner dimension with a heightened atmosphere, the only one truly capable of transforming the playground, school, workshop or office into privileged Salesian places for encountering the Lord.

<sup>66</sup> G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, p. 62 (OE XI, 212).

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Giovanni BOSCO, *Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*. Torino, Tipografia Salesiana 1877, pp. 64-68 (OE XXIX, 160-164).

<sup>68</sup> G. BOSCO, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, pp. 46-47 (OE XIII, 200-201).

<sup>69</sup> G. BOSCO, *Regolamento per le case...*, p. 63 (OE XXIX, 159).

<sup>70</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Il cattolico provveduto per le pratiche di pietà con analoghe istruzioni secondo il bisogno dei tempi*. Torino, Tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1868, p. 87 (OE XIX, 95).

In such a way the saintly educator radically re-purposes the ancient precept of the *fuga mundi* in the context of modernity. Thanks to the spirit of prayer, distancing ourselves from the world and immersion in the world are brought together and harmonised in a projection of offering, responsibly taking on our experience in ways that are typically Christian. Prayer, apostolic fervour and mortification are but facets of a single attitude of the consecration of the heart. This is a lofty proposal made by Don Bosco to his disciples in consecrated life, but also to simple boys whom he encouraged with: “Courage then, let us begin in time working for the Lord, it is up to us to suffer something in this world, but then we will have an eternal reward in the other.”<sup>71</sup>

His spiritual proposal also gives the highest importance to sacramental practice: “Be certain my boys that the two strongest supports for you as you are on the road to heaven are the sacraments of confession and communion.”<sup>72</sup> Don Bosco valued the sacraments from a pedagogical and spiritual perspective. His insistence on frequenting the sacraments comes from his awareness of human frailty, the need to support the will to stabilise it in good and in virtue; but also his belief in the powerful transforming action of the Holy Spirit who, acting through the Sacrament, brings about radical purification and sets up the ideal inner conditions so the Lord can “take possession of the heart” ever more solidly. Here we grasp the reason for his insistence on the choice of a stable confessor, a soul friend to whom we can entrust ourselves in complete confidence and be led along the ways of the Spirit. In this confidential relationship the confessor personalises this spiritual proposal: he teaches the art of examination of conscience, forms to perfect contrition, encourages effective resolutions, guides along the path of purification and virtue, introduces to the taste for prayer and practice of the presence of God, teaches ways for a fruitful communion with Christ in the Eucharist. Frequent confession and communion are intimately bound up with Don Bosco’s spiritual pedagogy. Through careful and regular confession

<sup>71</sup> G. BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto...*, p. 73 (OE II, 253).

<sup>72</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Regolamento dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per gli esterni*. Torino, Tipografia Salesiana 1877, p. 36 (OE XXIX, 66).



life “in God’s grace” is fostered and the tendency to virtue is nurtured that allows one to approach frequent communion ever more worthily; at the same time, through Eucharistic communion, the young person focuses on Christ and grace finds room to go to work at depth, transforming and sanctifying.

This formative concern gives substance and meaning to the emotional and effective aura with which Don Bosco imbues Eucharistic devotion. During the Offering at Mass for example, he invites his youngsters to take on Christ’s thoughts: “I offer you my heart, my tongue, so that in the future I will desire nothing other than to speak only about what is to do with holy service.”<sup>73</sup> Thus during thanksgiving after communion he urges them towards consecration of themselves: “Ah if I could only have the heart of the Seraphim in heaven, so that my soul would burn ever more with love for my God! ... I declare that in the future you will be always my hope, my comfort, you alone my wealth. ... I offer you my whole self; I offer you my will so that I may want nothing else than what pleases you; I offer you my hands, my feet, my eyes, my tongue, my mouth, my mind, and my heart and everything of me; protect these sentiments of mine, so that every thought, every action may have no other purpose than your greater glory and the spiritual advantage of my soul.”<sup>74</sup>

These are texts taken from the devout literature of the day, but if we read them in the context of the formative efforts Don Bosco put into place, especially the specific model of the Christian and citizen he pushed for, they acquire particular value and throw light on the mechanisms the saintly educator triggered for the inner involvement of his boys in their relationship with God and for Christian perfection.

Don Bosco’s Marian spirituality too had a marked pedagogical function, while keeping the typical features of romantic and 19th century spirituality. As we can see, for example, in the biographical profile of Michael Magone, devotion to Mary culminates—as Fr Caviglia says—in a “pedagogy of

<sup>73</sup> G. BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto...*, p. 88 (OE II, 268).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 101-102 (OE II, 281-282).

adolescence, which is then and especially a pedagogy of chastity”, offered by Don Bosco to the simplest children of the people, “taken off the streets, from the perversion of slums and disorderly family life; or poor children from the country, bad or in danger of becoming so for want of social correctives.”<sup>75</sup>

Don Bosco adds something more. He tells us that Michael, while meditating on a verse from Scripture written on a holy picture of Our lady—*Venite, filii, audite me, timorem Domini docebo vos*—felt urged to write a letter to his Rector “in which he said how the Blessed Virgin had got him to hear her voice, called him to be good and that she herself wanted to teach him how to fear God, love him and serve him.”<sup>76</sup> So then: a correct Marian pedagogy is also able to make a boy sense the inner appeal of the Spirit, lead him to more intense spiritual activity and kindle in him the desire to be more perfect. In the life of Dominic Savio, this spiritual energy achieves its peak with the formal and solemn act celebrated on the evening of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8, 1854), when the boy renewed his promises before his first communion and said: “Mary, I give you my heart; may I always be yours! Jesus and Mary, always be my friends! But please, let me die rather than have the misfortune of committing even one sin!” from that moment on his behaviour and his spirit seemed to be transfigured: “With devotion to Mary taken as his support” Don Bosco comments “his conduct became so edifying and joined with so many acts of virtue that I began then to write them down in order not to forget them.”<sup>77</sup> These expressions reveal the dynamic importance of the devotion to Mary instilled by Don Bosco in his boys: a devotion not detached from daily life, but mingled with it, able to give moral and spiritual energy to the practice of doing good, in a perspective of human and spiritual fulfilment which imbues his inner life and his action.

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<sup>75</sup> Alberto CAVIGLIA, Il “*Magone Michele*” *una classica esperienza educativa*, in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di don Bosco*. Torino, SEI 1965, vol. V, p. 162.

<sup>76</sup> G. BOSCO, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele* ..., pp. 39-40.

<sup>77</sup> G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico* ..., p. 40 (OE XI, 190).

#### 4. Suggestions for reading this volume

This is not the place for dwelling on Don Bosco the writer and the many reasons that led him to write, many of them tied to profound changes in the country, of which we have spoken. This has already been taken up competently by others, amongst whom Pietro Stella, who has divided Don Bosco's unpublished writings and some 150 printed works (more than 400 reprinted) into certain categories: *Scholastic works; pleasant readings, drama; hagiographical works; biographical writings and stories with an historical basis; religious instruction and prayer; writings relating to the Oratory and Salesian work.*

We can classify most of the items collected in this volume under these last three categories: letters and circulars, various rules and regulations (for the Oratory, the houses, the Sodalities, the Salesian Society, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians); stories of the Oratory penned at different times; pamphlets and circulars to Cooperators and benefactors, to political and religious authorities; articles in the *Salesian Bulletin*; programmes for feasts and the boarding schools; memorials in defence of the Salesian schools or to obtain benefits or to give explanations on the progress of the Congregation or missions in Patagonia; accurate summaries of his preventive system; notes of all kinds, in particular on pedagogical and spiritual matters; general notices and guidelines of an educational and formative kind for the boys or the Salesians; written versions of sermons, goodnights, conferences and "dreams"; edifying biographies of people close to Don Bosco, etc.

In the face of such a large number and variety of writings, it is clear, for a correct reading and for a valid interpretation, that we should take into account firstly the literary genre of the individual documents: chronicle, narrative, biographical, autobiographical, legal, apologetic, hagiographic, dramatic, edifying, homiletic, confidential, moralistic, didactic, academic, compilations, allegory...

Secondly, we should carefully consider the author's intention: for private use or for printing, intended for a single person or many recipients, addressed to an authority or a simple person (man, woman, youth, cleric, brother, priest,

sister, Salesian), for educational purposes or in defence of their actions, to inform or to form, brought about by a particular situation or impromptu, etc.

Nor should other factors be overlooked: the existence or otherwise of earlier editing efforts (a text written as an instant response has a different value from one which has been reworked many times; a completely personal text differing from one incorporating citations from others ...); the way Don Bosco presents it; the occasion and conditions under which he writes a given document (in real time or later, as a young priest full of dreams, or as an elderly founder at a time he is weighing things up, at times of foundational success or of institutional crisis, at the height of his strength or at times of illness and tiredness).

A fundamental characteristic of the writings of Don Bosco should also be borne in mind—his care to express himself with the utmost simplicity, unpretentiously, neither speculative nor literary, but in a way that even the uneducated person can understand without help from others. His then is a simple, clear, orderly, familiar, often fatherly style of writing, aimed at making sure he is understood, adapted to everyone's intelligence, and especially able to speak to everyone's heart. When he took up the pen Don Bosco did not do it to write treatises, but to “speak” to the young, to ordinary people.

Finally, as is well known, in the writings and speeches aimed at the formation of the Salesians we do not go looking for complex pages of spiritual or educational doctrine, nor profound analysis of a sociological nature or of psychological introspection. Don Bosco preferred offering reflections that came from his personal experience, codifying a practical educational system he had experienced. Especially because certain of his beliefs or prior understandings play a precise role, like his adherence to the principles of faith and an unquestionable tradition of Christian life and practice, the intangibility of religion and the papacy, the incompatibility of Christian righteousness with any kind of rebellion against legitimate authority, the ‘morality’ which any kind of writing should be imbued with, the continuity of an educational praxis that had been so effective. If the religious motive is very pronounced, perhaps because of the particular trends of the time and the formation of Don

Bosco, also a pedagogical one seems to be affected by the particular historical, geographical and socio-psychological environment at the Valdocco Oratory, and in this, especially the climate and the needs of the student section.

As a final summary, it is the historical sense which must guide the reader of Don Bosco's writings.

This current volume can be read page by page without leaving out the general introduction that offers essential frameworks and keys to the reading. It could also be read thematically, following up specific topics. But it is important to ask oneself, before thumbing through the volume, what we expect of it. At this point it would be useful to look through the thematic index at the end for what interests one. The reason is simple: often a topic is found not only in the part which seems to relate most to it—and where, for practical reasons, it has been included—but also in other parts of the volume. It is well-known that for Don Bosco, pedagogy and spirituality have significant contact points, so often “pedagogical sources” may also without exaggeration be considered as “spiritual sources” and vice versa. Not only that, also for an understanding of pedagogy and spirituality, knowledge of his experience of life and action—“narrated” in different ways in writings with different purposes—is an essential condition for avoiding one-sided interpretations and abstract evaluations. In this regard the general and thematic indexes are of particular interest.

Of course, the reader will not be the first to read the writings of Don Bosco published here: others have read them, contextualised, analysed, interpreted them before him. So wisdom suggests that the bibliography at the end of each chapter and the bibliography at the end of the volume, as well as critical editions of individual texts, be part of a “small library” available to everyone in case of need.

## **5. Publishing criteria and norms**

Each of the parts into which this volume has been divided has its own identity as indicated by its title. In the individual presentations the sections which make up that part are indicated as also the criteria used in selecting

the texts. Obviously, this criteriology, subjective as it may be, tried to keep in mind the major areas of life and action of Don Bosco, the types of his writings, who they were addressed to, the results achieved.

In the collection and selection of the materials offered, critical editions of existing documents and writings of Don Bosco, unpublished signed manuscripts and original printed texts reproduced in facsimile edition have been preferred (Giovanni BOSCO, *Opere edite. Prima serie: Libri e opuscoli*. Rome, LAS 1976-1977, 37 vols. 1976-1977). For texts drawn from conferences, letters or circulars, accounts of “goodnights” or “dreams”, we have used manuscripts signed by Don Bosco or notes and testimonies of his listeners preserved in the ASC. In this case the location in the archives and references to the *Biographical Memoirs* (BM) have been given.

For the transcription of documents, keeping in mind that the purpose of the publication is to widen the range of readers, we have sought to offer an edition that is as faithful as possible to the original, while being rigorous and legible, but without the complex apparatus common to critical editions. The limited intervention on the part of the editors of the different parts of the volume satisfy the following criteria:

*[Note that these may or may not apply in this English translation—they may apply where certain parts or words are left in Italian for obvious reasons, otherwise, as befits translation, English conventions will apply rather than Italian ones.]*

- a) abbreviations of words or phrases (e.g.: Aus.: Ausiliatrice; G.C.: Gesù Cristo; Elem.: elementare), with exception of commonly used abbreviations which can be easily understood (e.g.: art.).
- b) removal of archaic forms that might make the reading and understanding of the text difficult (e.g.: a': ai; co': coi; da': dai; de': dei; ne': nei; pe': pei; pel: per il, etc.).
- c) Original punctuation has been kept. To facilitate reading however some minor changes have been introduced but they do not alter the meaning of a sentence or term. At the end of numbered paragraphs, the semicolon (;) sometimes used in the original, though not always

consistently, becomes a period (.). In limited cases it was thought necessary to introduce punctuation to avoid difficult or ambiguous reading.

- d) Accents have been normalised according to current usage (perchè is always: perché; poichè: poiché; quì: qui; nè: né).
- e) Words with final double letters are written as they would be today.
- f) Final syllable of abbreviations, often written as superscript, is written at the same level.
- g) Overuse of capital letters is normalised for today:
  - 1) Initial capital: proper nouns, certain collective nouns (Chiesa cattolica, Società salesiana, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione), Oratorio (when it refers to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales in Turin), Papa and Re (Sua Santità, Sacra Real Maestà...).
  - 2) Initial lowercase: common nouns (casa, scuola, madre); months of year and days of week (if in Italian); abbreviation for professions: sac. (sacerdote), avv. (avvocato), on. (onorevole), can. (canonico); noble or ecclesiastical titles (conte, marchesa, cardinale, vescovo, prevosto, provveditore, direttore, sindaco, ispettore).

## ABBREVIATIONS

AGFMA	= General Archives of the FMA
allogr.	= <i>allografo</i> , written by another hand
ASC	= Archivio Salesiano Centrale or Central Salesian Archives
aut	= <i>autografo</i> – original handwritten document
BS	= “Bollettino Salesiano” (Turin 1877-)
CG	= Capitolo Generale or GC, General Chapter

CII *Introduction*

- DBS = *Dizionario biografico dei salesiani*. Redazione: E. Valentini, A. Rodinò, by Salesian Press Office Turin 1969
- DBE, *Scritti* = P. BRAIDO (ed.), *Don Bosco educatore. Scritti e testimonianze*. Roma, LAS 1997<sup>2</sup>
- E = *Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco*. Per cura di E. Ceria. Torino, SEI 1858-1959
- Ed. = Edizione, edito
- E(m) = G. BOSCO, *Epistolario*. Introduzione, testi critiche e note a cura di F. Motto. 5 vol. Roma, LAS 1991-2012
- Lettere = *Lettere circolari di D. Bosco e di D. Rua ed altri loro scritti ai salesiani. circolari di DB* Torino, Tipografia Salesiana 1896
- MB (also BM if English versions are [rarely] cited.) G. B. LEMOYNE, *Memorie biografiche di don Giovanni Bosco... del venerabile servo di Dio don Giovanni Bosco...*, vol. 1-9. S. Benigno Canavese. Torino, Scuola Tipografica Salesiana-Libreria Editrice 1898-1917; G. LEMOYNE - A. AMADEI, *Memorie biografiche di san Giovanni Bosco*, vol. 10. Torino, SEI 1939; E. CERIA, *Memorie biografiche del beato Giovanni Bosco...*, vol. 11-15. Torino, SEI 1930-1934; E. CERIA, *Memorie biografiche di san Giovanni Bosco*, vol. 16-19. Torino, SEI 1935-1939.
- Ms = *manoscritto* or manuscript
- OE = G. BOSCO, *Opere edite*. Prima serie: *Libri e opuscoli*. Roma, LAS 1976-1977
- RSS = “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” (Roma, 1982-2013)



PART ONE

**WRITINGS AND DOCUMENTS  
ON THE HISTORY OF DON BOSCO  
AND SALESIAN WORK**

*by*  
Francesco MOTTO



## INTRODUCTION

*No one exists outside of history, not even the saints who also have a peculiar relationship with the supernatural, the meta-historical. Don Bosco, then, is a man, indeed a saint, but radically a child of his times who received much and gave not a little back to those times. As a consequence, and as already noted in the general introduction, without a precise historical contextualisation and without a careful look at the results of what he achieved, his multifaceted, complex and in some way problematic personality cannot be fully understood. So much so that some of his greatest scholars have already included this temporal notion in the titles of their works<sup>1</sup> and many others, on the basis of extensive archival research, broad biographical investigations, rich historical frameworks, interesting comparative analyses, have placed Don Bosco not only within the framework of the history of 19th century Italy, understood in the broadest sense of the term as the history of the Risorgimento, the history of Italian society, the history of the Church in Italy and Church-State relationships, but also as part of the history of education, instruction, culture, the press, charitable works, piety, male and female religious life, associations, missions and so forth. The discourse has then been broadened to the multifaceted Salesian activity in other countries, European and South American considering that Don Bosco, a devout son of Piedmont, with his “sons and daughters” became a “citizen of the world”, interesting himself in the eternal and earthly happiness of young people in every country. In recent decades also, critical editions of the principal sources have been prepared<sup>2</sup>.*

<sup>1</sup> Pietro BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*. (= ISS - Studi, 20-21). Roma, LAS 2009<sup>3</sup>; Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Vol. I. *Vita e opere*; II. *Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità*; III. *La canonizzazione (1888-1934)*. Roma, LAS 1979, 1981, 1988; ID., *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)*. Roma, LAS 1980; Francis DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888)*. Torino, SEI 1996; Arthur J. LENTI, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*. 7 vols. Roma, LAS 2007-2010 (Spanish edition by Juan José BARTOLOMÉ - Jesús Graciliano GONZÁLEZ, *Don Bosco: historia e carisma*. 3 VOLS. Madrid, CCS 2007).

<sup>2</sup> To the dozens of books published by the *Istituto Storico Salesiano* (ISS - First series), we need to add various smaller works from the “Piccola Biblioteca” by the same Institute and numerous articles from the “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” (RSS) Journal.

*Such a notable scientific literature, then, can be placed beside the much more extensive literature of a popular, publicity-oriented, hagiographic kind*<sup>3</sup>.

*Now, of the considerable amount of resources available on the history of Don Bosco and his works, this first volume brings together around 150 writings and documents which together offer a kind of general history of Salesian work from the point of view of the Founder, beginning from the time in 1846 when he started out in the Pinardi house at Valdocco, Turin. From this “cradle” the work then spread throughout the world.*

*The documentation is structured following a five-fold typology of texts, meaning to say: 1. Sources relating to the charismatic and institutional growth and geographical expansion of Salesian Work, 2. Sources relating to an institutional history of this Work within the Catholic Church, 3. Sources regarding Don Bosco’s ‘politics’, with special attention to his official mediation between Church and State over thorny matters at a time of growing conflict with the archbishop of Turin, 4. Sources relating to the history of the missionary initiative and the first Salesian presences in Latin America, 5. Sources relating to an economic history of Salesian work while the founder was still alive.*

*As you may have already guessed, we are not taking into account here writings and documents from the first 30 years of Don Bosco’s life, those of his formation tied to his native area, Castelnuovo and Chieri (1815-1841) and his further theological studies in the three years he spent as a student priest at the Pastoral Institute (Convitto) in Turin (1841-1844). For this period you can go to the Memoirs of the Oratory*<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Saverio GIANOTTI, *Bibliografia generale di don Bosco*. Vol. 1. *Bibliografia italiana 1844-1992*. (= ISS - Bibliografie, 1). Roma, LAS 1995; Herbert DIEKMANN, *Bibliografia generale di don Bosco*. Vol. 2. *Deutschsprachige don Bosco-literatur 1883-1994*. (= ISS - Bibliografie, 2). Roma, LAS 1997; Jacques SCHEPENS, *Bibliografia generale di don Bosco*. Vol. 3. *Bibliographie française. 1853-2006. Nederlandstalige bibliografie 1883-2006*. (= ISS - Bibliografie, 4). Roma, LAS 2007; RSS 26 (2007) 113-333. For a general orientation see Francesco MOTTO, *Storia della storiografia di don Bosco*, in Stanisław ZIMNIAK (Ed.), *Storia e identità salesiana in Africa e Madagascar*. (= ACSSA - Studi, 5). Roma, LAS 2012, pp. 215-231 (in English pp. 233-249), for Spanish in “Cuadernos de Formación Permanente” 12 (2008) 57-81.

<sup>4</sup> See pp. 1170-1308.

SECTION ONE  
FROM THE PINARDI HOUSE TO PATAGONIA  
**Presentation**

*This section is made up of a chronological collection of 29 of Don Bosco's writings or documents concerning Salesian work relating to the forty or so years from 1846-1888. These are texts chosen, amongst the many possible choices, for their intrinsic worth, the ample and important information they contain, the particular significance they have in the historical and biographical events in Don Bosco's life and in development of Salesian work.*

*They are offered in chronological sequence and as such divided within the perspective of the charismatic and institutional development at the place of foundation, viz., Turin (1846-1863), and the geographical expansion of the work in Italy, Europe, Latin America (1864-1888). Both perspectives correspond to Don Bosco's temperament, apostolic passion, trust in God, which never allowed him to stop at the goals he had already achieved.*

*Without doubt, the charismatic and institutional expansion of the Mother House at Valdocco which went, over a twenty year period, from a weekend oratory for working boys to a very broad youth complex in Italy—with boarding and day sections, oratories and schools of various kinds, trade workshops, printing press, a seminary for clerical and Salesian formation, a centre of Marian devotion—documents Don Bosco's relentless desire to serve "in his own way" the greatest number of "poor and abandoned" youth.*

*Every initiative at Valdocco obviously had to deal with the attitude of revolutionary politics in Piedmont first and later in Italy, with its evolving school legislation, the unstable situation of the Church in Turin and Piedmont and the recurring economic crises that reduced the almost only financial resources potentially available to him, namely local charity, public and private.*

*In turn, the geographical expansion of the work in quick succession from Turin to elsewhere in Piedmont (Mirabello, Lanzo, Borgo San Martino, Cherasco) then from Piedmont to Liguria (Alassio, Varazze, Genoa) in the early 1870s, corresponded to the phenomenon of so-called “collegializzazione” (the growth of boarding schools), sponsored and promoted by Don Bosco to broaden his field of activity. This spread enormously from 1875 with the opening of other houses in Italy, France and Latin America, as far as southern Patagonia.*

*But many other reasons underlie this expansion: the need to offer new horizons to the members of a Congregation in numerical growth, the desire to escape the overly legal constraints of the Archdiocese of Turin, a strong desire to bring the Gospel to peoples who had not yet known it, giving credit to the recurring missionary dreams of the founder, etc.*

*The writings presented here are of various lengths—ranging from a letter of a few lines to a narrative of a dozen pages—but mainly written for varying purposes depending on the different target groups: private letters, circulars, reports and narratives for internal use, circulars to the general public, reminders, notes written in confidence, or in self-defence, document about activities in or beyond Valdocco, agreements regarding foundations, relations with the civil and ecclesiastical authorities at various levels of responsibility ...*

*It can therefore be assumed that these differences of genre, goals, targets in the sources published here involve considerable differences too in the information and data provided, in the circumstances they mention, in the highlights they offer, in tone, in the emphases and interpretations given to particular events. This is true especially for events in the first decade of Salesian work (1846-1855), which correspond chronologically to the third decade in the already mentioned Memoirs of the Oratory, also written for particular purposes in the 1870s. This is not the place to dwell on the study of these differences in wording, so please refer to introductions, critical editions of individual documents, scientific biographies of Don Bosco and especially to further study of Salesian work while Don Bosco was still alive.*

## I. BEGINNING, EXTENSION AND CHARISMATIC AND INSTITUTIONAL CONSOLIDATION OF THE WORK AT VALDOCCO

*Don Bosco, at the advice of his spiritual director, St Joseph Cafasso<sup>5</sup> from autumn 1844 to summer 1846 lived at the Barolo Refuge<sup>6</sup> as chaplain of the Little Hospital of St Philomena, opened in August 1845. In the same place and in other temporary places not far from Valdocco, he carried out his early priestly ministry on behalf of boys, mostly immigrant lads who had no parish of reference. On the vigil of his move to the Pinardi house, he drew up for the civil authorities of the city of Turin, who were responsible for and concerned about public order, a very brief account of his three years of catechetical activity, indicating the aims and results he had achieved that were positive both for civil society and the Church (no. 1).*

*Three years later (1849), the oratory work at Valdocco had already extended to another two parts of the city (Porta Nuova, Vanchiglia), was frequented by around a thousand boys, but had been extended especially through school activities and a small boarding house (no. 3).*

*Three years later again (1852), always in view of tackling new needs of the youngsters, the structures at the Oratory at Valdocco were considerably extended with new buildings, including a new church, thanks also to the results of a raffle (lottery) which enabled Don Bosco to succeed in considerably broadening his circle of benefactors (no. 6). Amongst these were well-known city authorities and personalities invited to attend an academic performance put on by his evening classes for young working lads (no. 7).*

<sup>5</sup> Fr Joseph Cafasso (1811-1860), teacher at and Rector of the Pastoral Institute, Turin. Proclaimed Saint in 1947 by Pius XII.

<sup>6</sup> Pious Work founded by Marchioness Giulia Falletti di Barolo, nee Colbert (1785-1864), to take in women (for free) who had been in prison or had been involved in prostitution.

*The attention of this sub-alpine educator however was potentially addressed to a very wide circle of young people: young Piedmontese who needed moral education at a time of freedom of the press, by means of a newspaper for them (no. 2), to young apprentices at the Oratory whom he helped internally by means of a Mutual aid Society (no. 4) and whom he helped outside with regard to their rights from their employers in town (no. 5), to Italian youth in general and the ordinary people in the country needing protection at a time of strong secularisation, through a range of publishing initiatives (no. 9).*

*During the years of the “home attached” at the Oratory, by now economically guaranteed (no. 8), this was now enriched with new activities: internal secondary classes (no. 11), arts and trades workshops (no. 12), a large church (no. 16). All this was realised at a time that was religiously and politically difficult, feeding suspicions amongst the governing authorities who also appreciated the work at Valdocco. Don Bosco sought to defend himself through personal contacts and detailed self-defence in correspondence (no. 15).*

*For the internal use especially of his growing Salesian Congregation he drew up occasional accounts of the history of the Oratory, where he was the main character, actor, witness, and the only formator of its personnel (nos. 10, 13, 17).*

*Meanwhile in Turin the Oratory of St Aloysius at Porta Nuova was also growing, with the construction of a new church (no. 19).*

*In turn the Oratory (and the home attached) at Valdocco, to which Don Bosco dedicated all his concern, and in which and from his direct experience he developed his educational system and formed his teachers, began to become, because of its chronological precedence, its coverage and prestige, the mother house for youth works and the Salesian Congregation itself. In the early seventies the tiny ‘kingdom’ of Valdocco was ready to extend its boundaries under the banner of a mission perceived as desired and blessed from on high. The charismatic figure of Don Bosco and the original experiences of his ‘sons’ by his side at the mythical Oratory at Valdocco became sources of inspiration for whoever left home to be transplanted under other skies.*



*The 16 documents published here in chronological order (along with the other 22) mark in a certain way the main stages of internal development of the Oratory at Valdocco. Obviously for a better understanding of its history, you should go to the bibliography at the end of the volume.*

## **1. To the Vicar of the city, Marquis Michele Benso di Cavour**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 66-68.

Turin, 13 March 1846

Your Excellency<sup>7</sup>,

The role which Your Excellency plays in everything to do with the public good, both civil and moral, leads me to hope that you will not find it disagreeable [*discaro*]<sup>8</sup> to have some information concerning our catechetical programme, that has the good of youth at heart. Its purpose is the good of young people, and you yourself have shown favour and support for it on a number of occasions.

This catechetical programme began three years ago in the Church of St Francis of Assisi and, since the Lord blesses his own work, young people attended in greater number than the place could accommodate. Then in 1844, for reasons of employment I established myself at the Pious Work of the Refuge and these good young people continued coming there for religious instruction. It was precisely at that time that Rev. (Dr) Borel<sup>9</sup> and Rev. Fr Pacchiotti and myself presented a petition to the Archbishop, who then authorised us to convert our room into an Oratory where we could

<sup>7</sup> Marquis Michele Benso di Cavour (1781-1850), father of statesman Count Camillo, was Vicar General of policy and the police from 1835 to 1847 with the task of seeing to public order in the city and its suburbs.

<sup>8</sup> *Discaro*, translated here as 'disagreeable'. *Discaro* is not common today in Italian.

<sup>9</sup> Fr John Borel: Turinese priest (1801-1873), doctor in theology, royal chaplain (1831-1841), spiritual director of the college of St Francis da Paola (1829-1843) then spiritual director of the Works of the Marchioness Barolo. He was, with Fr Cafasso, a valuable supporter and collaborator of Don Bosco especially at the beginnings of the Oratory, when he took on the responsibility of dealing with civic and church authorities.

teach catechism, hear confessions, celebrate Mass for the above-mentioned youngsters.

But since their number grew and they could no longer fit in there, we put the issue to our illustrious City authorities and they authorised us to relocate our catechism classes to St Martin's Chapel at the city mills. Lots of youngsters turned up there; at times more than two hundred and fifty of them.

But the City authorities asked us to relocate our catechetical programme elsewhere, come January, without offering us a reason. This was a serious dilemma for us, since to have to abandon the good work we had begun seemed such a pity. Only His Excellency, Count Collegno<sup>10</sup>, gave us the courage to continue after speaking with you.

During the winter we carried on using our own room and some other rooms we rented. Finally, this week we negotiated a site with Mr Pinardi<sup>11</sup>. We agreed on the sum of two hundred and eighty francs for a large room which we can use for the Oratory plus another two rooms with some adjacent land. This place seems convenient to us, because it is very close to The Refuge and also because it is far from any Church but close to some homes. It remains for you to indicate that this is acceptable for the neighbourhood and the wider community.

The purpose of this catechetical programme is to gather young people on weekends and holy days who, left to their own devices, would not attend any Church for instruction. We do this by encouraging them to be good through our words, promises, gifts and the like. Our teaching is limited simply to this: 1. Love for work. 2. Frequenting the holy Sacraments. 3. Respect for all their superiors. 4. Flight from bad companions.

These principles which we make every effort to inculcate in the hearts of the young have produced marvellous results. In the space of three years

<sup>10</sup> Giuseppe Luigi Giacinto Provana di Collegno (1785-1854), special councillor for the King. From 1840 he was President, chief and general comptroller of Finances.

<sup>11</sup> Francesco Pinardi, who migrated from Arcisate (Varese), with a contract dated 1st April 1846 rented out the "shed" to Don Bosco, as the stable place for the Oratory.

more than twenty have embraced the religious state, six are studying Latin so they can undertake an ecclesiastical career, many others who now have better sentiments go to their respective parishes. This is noteworthy given the quality of these boys, most of them between ten and sixteen years of age, without any religious or educational background and most of them prey to vice and at risk of being cause for public complaint or being sent to a place of correction.

You are good-hearted and love whatever can redound to the public civil and moral good. Hence we ask you to protect our efforts which, as can be well seen, have no shadow of material gain in mind but only gaining souls for the Lord.

The costs involved in finding and setting up the place indicated have been considerable. Count Collegno, gratefully mentioned above, has offered to help us and gave us permission to put our case to Your Excellency. He indicated he would then explain the matter to you in detail. Whenever you should wish to speak with me and my colleagues, we are ready at the slightest indication. It is our most eager wish.

And in asking you to look kindly on the liberty I have taken, I wish you everything that is good from the Lord and regard it as the greatest honour that I can express my esteem and profound respect.

Your Excellency's most humble and indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco  
Spiritual Director at the Refuge.

## 2. Circular for support of the magazine the *Friend of Youth*

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 83-84.

[Turin, January 1849]

Distinguished Sir,

Freedom of the press, the confusion that some magazines are creating in religious matters to dishonour and vilify religion, persuade us of the great

need there is for religious magazines to oppose those who deal so cunningly with the truth<sup>12</sup>.

It is for this purpose that we are, to our great satisfaction, in the third month since *The Friend of Youth* came into being. But because of the need for an antidote against the lack of religion not only amongst youth, but amongst other classes of people, we have resolved to produce it in such a way that it can be the friend of every Catholic family.

Huge expenses are required for this enterprise and since the number of associates is not sufficient we are inviting Your Excellency to buy shares in it.

They are of various amounts: 20, 50 and 100 francs, given the good will and possibilities of contributors. At the end of the current month a quarter of the shares will be paid back. The rest will be paid by quarterly advance. As soon as the magazine reaches the stage where subscriptions cover expenses Your Excellency will receive reimbursement for what was advanced with a *free* subscription and a premium corresponding to what the magazine earns.

The well-known zeal of Your Excellency in looking after the people, your obvious fondness for everything regarding religion, makes us hopeful of your powerful cooperation in this determination of ours that everything be done to maintain morality and preserve religion.

You can help us not only with shares, but also by promoting the magazine, which is why we are sending you some numbers of the magazine to offer to people who can only be pleased at the efforts of someone whose only reward for his labours is the preservation and sound progress of the Catholic Religion.

Meanwhile, imploring Heaven's every blessing on you we are greatly honoured to be,

<sup>12</sup> After freedom of the press was granted (1848), Don Bosco and others founded *The Friend of Youth* to control the influence of anticlerical magazines. It was a religious, moral and political magazine aimed at "confirming the people in their Catholic Faith ... and instructing them, educating them in virtue", "so in this magazine nothing will be spared of what can serve to enlighten the human intellect and improve the heart" (editorial of no. 1, October 21, 1848, p. 1). The magazine only survived a few months due to financial difficulties.

Your Excellency's humble servants,

For the administration  
Fr John Bosco, manager

P.S. Shareholders in the city are asked to send the undersigned bill to the management at the printers where this magazine is published. By provincial post.

### **3. To King Victor Emmanuel II**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 89-90.

[Turin, prior to 14 November 1849]

Your Royal Majesty<sup>13</sup>,

Fr John Bosco, who lives in this Capital, humbly describes for Your Majesty how he wanted to provide for the needs of the most abandoned youngsters, and so began to gather them on Sundays and Holy Days in one or other place around the city, always with the consent of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities. The Lord blessed this work and now it has been established at Valdocco between Porta Palazzo and Porta Susa as an Oratory under the title of St Francis de Sales. More than five hundred boys flock there, a large number of them having been released from prison or who are in danger of ending up there.

The place indicated above then became too small for the great number who wanted to come, so in 1847 another Oratory, under the title of St Aloysius, was opened at Porta Nuova between the viale de' Platani and R. Valentino.

Given that in present times abandoned youth find themselves in greater need of both education and religion, the Vanchiglia Oratory run by Fr Cocchi, assistant priest at the church of the Annunciation<sup>14</sup> which was closed for a

<sup>13</sup> Victor Emmanuel II of Savoy (1820-1878), last King of Sardinia (1849-1861) and first King of Italy (1861-1878).

<sup>14</sup> Fr John Cocchi (1840-1895), enterprising initiator of educational and social works for young workers. The Guardian Angel Oratory which Fr Cocchi had been forced to close in the critical period following on

year, has now been reopened under the title of the Guardian Angel. In all three places using sermons, catechism lessons and school, we constantly nurture love for work, respect for authority and law according to the principles of our Holy Catholic Religion. There are also Sunday classes for teaching the metric system, for those who can come. We also have a home with twenty five beds to provide for the most urgently in need of these boys. The usual number who attend these Oratories together amounts to around a thousand, for Sundays and Holy Days.

Up until now everything has gone ahead with the help of some charitable individuals and with the help of a good number of zealous priests and also lay people.

Now the supplicant, finding himself in charge of the three Oratories, is in difficulty given that between the three places the rent costs two thousand four hundred francs, including expenses for maintaining the three chapels respectively, where we have all the sacred functions every Sunday and Holy Day, and then there is the difficulty of the other daily expenses, the result of the extreme poverty of some of the children, and despite all the efforts the supplicant has made he now finds himself in the tough position of not being able to continue.

He therefore begs Your Royal Majesty to give kind consideration to a work that has already provided and we hope will continue to provide for the well being of so many abandoned individuals. It is a work that already received charity from Your august father<sup>15</sup>. The supplicant beseeches You to grant the charitable aid that Your father would look kindly upon.

I have the honour... etc.

Petitioner  
Fr John Bosco

from the first war of independence, was reopened under the responsibility of Don Bosco and Fr Borel, and entrusted to the management of Fr Robert Murialdo.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Albert of Savoy (1798-1849), King from 1831 to 23 March 1849, then abdicated in favour of his son Victor Emmanuel II, after the military defeat at Novara by the Austro-Hungarian army.

#### 4. Mutual Aid Society

Critical ed. in *Società di Mutuo Soccorso di alcuni individui della Compagnia di San Luigi eretta nell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales* (Mutual Aid Society for some individuals in the St Aloysius Sodality, erected at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales). Torino, Tipografia Speirani e Ferrero 1850 (OE IV, 83-90).

[June 1850]

##### *Notice*

Dear boys, here is a set of regulations for your Society. It can serve as a rule so that the Society goes ahead in an orderly and advantageous fashion. I can do no less than praise this effort of yours and your diligence in promoting it. It is very prudent of you to put aside one coin a week, money that you would easily otherwise spend but which will be of great help to you when you find yourselves in need. So you have my full approval.

I only recommend that while you show yourselves to be zealous for the good of the Society, you do not forget about the rules of the St Aloysius Sodality on which your fundamental advantage depends, that of your soul.

May the Lord infuse your hearts with true love and joy, and may the fear of God accompany all your actions.

Fr John Bosco

##### *Regulations of the Mutual Aid Society*

1. The purpose of this Society is to lend a hand to companions of ours who fall ill or find themselves in need and therefore involuntarily without work.

2. No one may be admitted to the Society unless enrolled in the St Aloysius Sodality, and whoever ceases for some reason to be a member of said Sodality will no longer be considered to be a member of the Society.

3. Each member will pay 5 cents [*a soldo*, actually equivalent to about 5 cents at the time] every Sunday, and cannot benefit from the Society until six months after he has been accepted. But he can have immediate right to

assistance from the Society if upon entering he pays fr. 1.50, so long as at that time he is neither ill nor unemployed.

4. The assistance given to anyone who is ill will be 50 cents a day until he returns to full health. In the case where the sick person has to go to a pious work [understand 'hospital' in modern terms] this assistance will cease and will not be paid except when he has come out of there for a period of convalescence.

5. Those who through no fault of their own are put out of work will begin to receive the above-mentioned assistance eight days after they have become unemployed. When the aid goes beyond twenty days the Council will make appropriate decisions to either increase or decrease it.

6. All offerings for the benefit of the Society will be gratefully accepted, and every year a special collection will be taken up.

7. Whoever fails to pay his quota for a notable period of time can no longer benefit from the Society until he has satisfied the unpaid amount, and then may not take anything for a month.

8. The Society is administered by a director, vice-director, secretary, vice-secretary, four councillors, a visitor and substitute, a treasurer.

9. All the Society's administrators, beyond exact payment of 5 cents [*soldo*] each Sunday, will take utmost care to observe the rules of the St Aloysius Sodality, thus attending to their own sanctification and encouraging others in virtue.

10. The natural director of the Society is the superior of the Oratory. He will see that the administrators do their duty, and that members' needs are satisfied according to the current regulations.

11. The vice-director will help the director, and will give appropriate orders to the secretary regarding meetings, and will present to the Council whatever could be of benefit to the Society.

12. The secretary will take care of collecting quotas each Sunday, noting carefully those who fulfil their obligation, and will exercise much charity



and kindness. It is also the secretary's task to send notes to the treasurer with the name, surname and address of anyone who is ill: all decisions of any importance taken in council will be written up by the secretary. In all these many things he will be helped by the vice-secretary who will also take his place whenever needed.

13. The four councillors will offer their opinion on whatever can be of benefit to the Society, and will vote on whatever pertains to the administration of matters, such as appointment of members.

14. The natural visitor of the Society is the spiritual director of the St Aloysius Sodality. This individual will go in person to the home of anyone who is sick, in order to check what his needs are and make the required report to the secretary. Once the note indicating aid has been obtained he will take it to the treasurer's home, after which he will bring the funds to the sick person. When the visitor hands over the funds he will take every care to see that he reminds the sick person of some maxim of our holy religion and will encourage him to receive the sacraments should the illness become serious. He will be assisted in this by his substitute, who will show the utmost concern in helping the visitor, especially bringing the aid and consoling those who are sick.

15. The treasurer will look after the funds of the Society and will give an account of them every three months. But he cannot give money to anyone without a note declaring what the need is, brought by the visitor, and which is also signed by the director.

16. Each member of the executive will hold his post for one year; he can be re-elected.

17. Every three months the Council will give an account of its administration.

18. These current regulations come into force on the first of July 1850.

## **5. Work contract for a young man at the Oratory**

ASC A2200101, original handwritten ms. by Don Bosco (cf. MB IV, 295-297).

[November 1851]

“By virtue of this document which can be called on at the simple request of one of the parties, drawn up at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales between Mr Carlo Aimino and the youth Giuseppe Bordone, pupil at the said Oratory, assisted by his guarantor, Mr Ritner Vittorio, it has been agreed as follows:

1. Mr Carlo Aimino receives the youth Giuseppe Bordone, son of Giuseppe (dec.) native of Biella, as an apprentice in his glazing trade and promises and obliges himself to teach him that trade over a three year period which will come to an end on the 1st December of the year one thousand eight hundred and fifty four. During the course of his apprenticeship he will give him the necessary instruction and the best rules regarding his trade as well as appropriate advice relating to good behaviour, correcting him where he should fail with words and nothing else. He also obliges himself to see that he is gainfully employed in work related to the trade and not extraneous to it, being careful to see that it does not go beyond his strength.

2. The same master craftsman will leave his apprentice completely free every Sunday or Holy Day in the year so that he can attend to the sacred functions, Sunday school and other duties that he has as a pupil of the aforementioned Oratory. When the apprentice, for reasons of illness, is absent from his duties, the master has a right to remuneration for any period of time exceeding fifteen days in the course of one year. This indemnity will be paid by the apprentice for that number of days when he has finished his apprenticeship.

3. The same master craftsman obliges himself to pay the apprentice his day's pay for the years indicated above, that is: for the first year one lire, the second year one lire fifty cents, and the third year two lire, paid weekly.

4. This employer obliges himself, finally, to write up a frank monthly report on his apprentice's behaviour, on a sheet that will be provided for this purpose.

5. The youth Giuseppe Bordone promises and obliges himself [to offer] during his time as an apprentice of the master craftsman who is his employer, his prompt, diligent and attentive service, to be respectful and obedient to his employer and act as a good apprentice should in his regard. By way of guarantee of his obligation, he offers as security Mr Ritner Vittorio, jeweller, who is here present and accepts, and obliges himself to make restitution for any damage which occurs for the master craftsman and employer should it be the fault of the apprentice.

6. Should it be the case that the apprentice does not correct some fault and is sent away from the Oratory because of it, any influence from and relationship between the director of the said Oratory and master craftsman and employer will cease, but if the apprentice's fault does not particularly impact on the master craftsman he should, despite everything, carry through this contract drawn up with the apprentice, and the latter should carry out all his duties towards the master craftsman until the end of the agreed time under the guaranty indicated above.

7. The director of the Oratory promises to offer his assistance regarding the good behaviour of the apprentice and to deal immediately with any complaint that the employer may have as a result of the apprentice he has taken in.

Thus, both the master craftsman-employer, and the apprentice-pupil, assisted as indicated above, promise to attend to and observe what pertains to them to do, under pain of damages.

Carlo Aimino

Giuseppe Bordone

Fr John Bapt. Vola

Ritner Vittorio guarantor

Fr John Bosco director of the Oratory<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Protecting young apprentices and their formation in their profession was an objective that Don Bosco followed up tenaciously at a time in history when industrial development was just getting underway.

## 6. Circular promoting a lottery on behalf of the new church at the Oratory

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 139-140.

Turin, 20 December 1851

Your Excellency,

A modest charitable work was undertaken some ten years ago in a district of this City, under the title of *the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, directed solely to the intellectual and moral good of that portion of youth who through parental negligence, bad companions or lack of means, finds itself exposed to the constant risk of corruption. Some individuals keen on the proper education of the people regretfully noticed that there was a growing number of young people who were idle and ill-advised, living on what they can borrow or by fraud on street corners or in the squares. They weigh on society and are often instruments of all kinds of misdeeds. They also saw with great sadness that many who had spent some time at work, were going out on Sundays and Holy Days spending their time in gambling or drinking away the little they had earned during the week. Wanting to remedy an evil that can only have very sad consequences, they decided to open a house for Sunday gatherings, where everyone could be at ease in fulfilling his religious duties and also receive some instruction, some advice or guidance for living his life in an upright and Christian way.

Therefore the Oratory of St Francis de Sales was set up with the charitable help of generous people who usually spend money on things to do with the public good. Items useful for celebrating religious functions and for giving the youngsters moral and civil education were made ready. Similarly for games equipment that would help develop their physical strength and provide honest recreation, in this way trying to make their stay in the place useful and pleasant.

It is difficult to explain how the youngsters took to the invitation extended without any real publicity; it was simply of the kind that usually gets passed on amongst family members, to come to the Oratory every Sunday or Holy Day. But it gave encouragement to enlarge the enclosure and over time introduce

the improvements that ingenious and prudent charity suggested. Then classes began on Sundays and later on winter evenings: reading, writing, elements of arithmetic and Italian, and a special opportunity for getting the youngsters familiar with the use of the measurements they felt they had most need of, given that many were working with trades.

The aim was to instil in them affection for their families, fraternal charity, respect for authority, gratitude to benefactors, love for work, and more than anything else instruct them in Catholic and moral teaching to lead them away from the road to wrongdoing, infuse in them the holy fear of God and give them timely instruction on the observance of religious precepts. These are the things that zealous priests and lay people have worked hard at the last ten years and given most of their concern to.

So while there are people who have worked laudably at spreading scientific knowledge or helping the arts progress, assisted industry and the education of better-off young people in boarding schools and senior high schools, in the modest Oratory of St Francis de Sales it has been mainly a case of religious and civil education for young people who also have the strength and will to be useful for themselves, their families and the country, although they are less favoured by fortune.

However, recognising that the chapel was too small to accommodate the great number of boys, and not wanting to leave off halfway in such an effort that had begun so well, the promoters, full of confidence in the generosity of their fellow citizens, decided to put their hand to a bigger building better suited to the purpose and so ensure the lasting nature of such a useful educational institution. Putting aside any delay and overcoming any doubts, they courageously laid the foundations for the new Oratory.

Donations, gifts, encouragement have not failed thus far and so much progress was made in the work that in a few short months the building has reached as far as the roof.

But ordinary means are no longer enough to bring this building to completion, and it is necessary for the inexhaustible charity of the public to come to the aid of private charity. It is to this end that the undersigned

promoters of this pious work turn to Your Lordship, asking your agreement to and proposing a way that has already been successfully employed by other well-deserving institutions and will certainly not fail for the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. The proposal is a lottery or raffle of items which the undersigned are thinking of undertaking to supplement the cost of completing the new chapel and which Your Lordship, we have no doubt, will agree to considering the excellence of the work it is to be directed to.

If Your Lordship could offer us any item of silk, wool, metal, wood or some craft item or something made by some charitable noblewoman, it will all be gratefully accepted because when it comes to charity, any small help is a big one, and because even small offerings by many may be enough to complete the desired work when put together.

The undersigned trust in your Lordship's kindness, certain that the idea of agreeing to the proper education of abandoned youth could do no less than encourage you to give something. For the rest it is enough to remind you of the singular kindness that people of every kind and status have shown and promised to achieve the extension. Especially valuable has been the vote of the first legislative body of the State which, after having taken things into kind consideration, appointed a commission to receive precise details, and once they knew them they warmly recommended this idea to the King's Government. Also valuable has been the generous two year subsidy decreed by the unanimous vote of the Turin City Council. His and Her Majesties have shown extraordinary largesse, deigning to offer help, and venerable bishops and distinguished people pleased to recommend it to public charity have shown a special kindness.

The undersigned extend their anticipated thanks to Your Lordship for the courteous cooperation you will offer for the successful outcome of the proposed lottery, and we implore Heavens blessings upon you.

Your most indebted servants,

The Promoters <sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> The names of 16 members of the Commission follow, made up of priests and laity belonging to the aristocracy and middle class.

## **7. Invitation to an academic performance**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 157.

Turin, 14 May 1852

Your Excellency,

Given the eagerness with which your Lordship has deigned to be part of matters regarding the good of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, I hope you will not be displeased with this invitation by which I invite you to come along next Sunday, May 16, from 2 to 5 in the afternoon, to honour with your presence the display that the young men from our evening classes will give of their simple studies this school year<sup>18</sup>.

You will not see great things but without doubt you will see the good heart and good will of these young men of ours.

The subjects of this performance are:

1. Reading and writing – Elements of arithmetic – the metric system and Italian grammar. – Singing and music.
2. A little bit of sacred geography, Scripture - New Testament – Singing and music.
3. Dialogues: Journeys to Palestine—A young man unrewarded—A number of passages and poems will be recited and interspersed amongst the various branches of instruction.

Convinced that you will want to respond to this humble invitation of mine I want to thank you for what you have done and I hope you will want to continue on behalf of these youngsters of mine. Once again my sincere thanks and I am respectfully,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco <sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> This invitation is to demonstrate the positive results of the educational work on behalf of young workers.

<sup>19</sup> Invitations to artistic and musical performances were happening continuously in Valdocco, especially for the annual distribution of school prizes. On September 5, 1869 Don Bosco did not hesitate to ask the mayor to extend an invitation to those taking part in the National Pedagogical Conference taking place in the city: cf. E(m) III, pp. 131-132.

## 8. To Canon Lorenzo Gastaldi

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 175-176.

Turin, 24 November 1852

Dear Canon<sup>20</sup>,

Here is the reply you are waiting for regarding my position before the government. Given that the property is mine, I believe that in whatever event, a new building would belong to the owner of the land; nevertheless to also remove this doubt I have done things so that offerings coming to me from private charity, the lottery included, are all used for building the church, putting aside a sum taken from a small amount earned from the sale of a nearby house some years ago, as well as revenue from the land there, all used in fact for building the house. I have been thus assured by the best lawyers that the Government cannot touch this property in any way.

But ... was Don Bosco dead? Here was the problem. Considering the circumstances of the times and not being able to otherwise ensure holding onto the property, I invited Dr Borel, Fr Murialdo, Fr Cafasso to play a part in purchasing the above, so we drew up a document of mutual accord so that in the event of the death of one, the property would be passed on to the three survivors, who would certainly be free to involve another partner: given this situation it would be advisable to pay the death duties [right of succession] of the deceased.

I consulted a number of legal people whom I trust and had no other possible expedient in that regard. So with regard to the new acquisition under

<sup>20</sup> To a friend who had entered the Rosminians and was worried about the position of the Work at Valdocco with regard to civil legislation which was hostile to ecclesiastical institutions, Don Bosco replies in a reassuring way. On February 19, 1851, he bought the Pinardi house and adjacent land, forming a private legal society with Frs Joseph Cafasso, John Borel and Robert Murialdo (on January 26, 1853 the property would come into Don Bosco and Fr Cafasso's hands alone by deed, and the latter, in his will, left the property entirely to Don Bosco as its sole owner: cf. Fedele GIRAUDI, *L'Oratorio di don Bosco*. Torino, SEI 1935, pp. 95-99). Thanks to Don Bosco's prudence the laws of suppression of congregations and confiscation of their goods, emanating from Turin in 1855 and extended to the rest of Italy in 1866-1867, had no effect on Salesian work.



discussion I will accept entirely what Fr Rosmini in his prudence will consider convenient, making available to him whatever poor efforts I can to cooperate in everything that could be for the glory of God and to the advantage of souls<sup>21</sup>.

Meanwhile I offer my humble respects to the praiseworthy Fr Rosmini, and recommending myself to your prayers, I wish you every blessing from the Lord. I remain,

Your most affectionate servant and friend,

Fr John Bosco

P.S. As I write your mother is working<sup>22</sup> in the laundry cleaning and mending; your visit gave her great joy.

### **9. Circular on disseminating the *Catholic Readings***

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 233-234.

Turin, [30] October 1854

Your Excellency,

Although I am fully convinced of the interest you have in all things regarding the good of souls, nevertheless seeing the artful skills the enemies of our holy religion are employing to spread error and ruin the morality of the people, I have decided to write you a special letter with a view to asking you if you could lend me a hand in disseminating and promoting the *Catholic Readings*, aimed at shoring up the Christian people against the snares set for them in matters of religion.

<sup>21</sup> Don Bosco was in contact with Fr Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855) and various members of his religious family for years. The acquisition of the land at Valdocco was done with a view to collaborating with the Rosmini Institute of Charity.

<sup>22</sup> Gastaldi's mother, Margaret, was one of Don Bosco's mother's most active helpers in looking after the boys' laundry.

Associative membership, as I believe you already know, is very well-priced (fr. 1.80 in the city and in Episcopal sees, and where 50 members can be gained, the booklets are sent free of freight charges). But it is utterly important for the 'Readings' to be better known, and Your Excellency can offer me great assistance in this work of charity, both by doing all you can in particular, and by recommending them to or getting some good person involved whom you certainly know, who can *arguat, obsecret, increpet in anni patientia et doctrina*.

This way it seems to me we can stem the growing evil, and if we cannot stop it entirely, at least before God we will have the consolation of having done as much within our power as we could.

Perhaps Your Excellency is amazed that I so keenly recommend you for this affair, but we are convinced that we are in times that are calamitous for the followers of the Catholic religion. The risks we face demand the cooperation and concern of all good people and especially the clergy.

Meanwhile I beg your kind forbearance if I do not send this letter free of charge, as I would like, as I also beg you to kindly accept this act of confidence. Thank you and I ask Heaven to bless you, while respectfully and with gratitude I offer you whatever I can do.

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

P.S. In the *Catholic Readings* office at via Bogino no. 3/2 there is a considerable number of booklets already printed and available at a reasonable price for anyone who wants some of them for himself or to peddle to others.

Attachment

The plan for the *Letture Cattoliche* Association

Critical ed. in ASC A2230503 (MB IV, 532-533).

1. The books we are proposing to give out will have a simple approach, in popular language, and contain material exclusively regarding the Catholic religion.

2. Each month we will publish a booklet of around 100 to 108 pages or more, depending on the material being dealt with. The paper, font and format is similar to what you see here.

3. The cost of the association is 90 cents half-yearly to be paid in advance, arriving at the modest sum of L. 1.80 a year. For those wanting to receive the booklets by post the cost is L. 1 cent. 40 for six months, or L. 2 cent. 80 a year.

4. To make things as easy as possible for all well-deserving clergy and laity who wish to lend a hand to this work of charity, the books will be sent free of freight costs, to all parts of the kingdom and beyond, as far as the borders, so long as associates form a centre to which we can address no fewer than fifty booklets.

5. In provincial cities and places, associations will be accepted by people designated by their respective diocesan Ordinaries, to whom the Work is particular recommended and of whom we provide names and addresses etc.

## **10. Draft regulations for the boys Oratory of St Francis De Sales in Turin in the Valdocco district – Historical Outline**

Critical ed. in Pietro BRAIDO, *Don Bosco per i giovani: L'“Oratorio”, una “Congregazione degli Oratori”*. *Documenti* (Piccola Biblioteca dell'ISS, 9).

Roma, LAS 1988, pp. 9-56<sup>23</sup>.

### Introduction

*Ut filios Dei, qui erant dispersi, congregaret in unum.* Joan. c. 11 v. 52.

It seems to me that the words of the Holy Gospel, which tell us that our divine Saviour come down from heaven to earth to gather together all the children of God scattered all over the world, could be applied literally to the young people of our times. These young people, the most vulnerable yet most valuable portion of human society, on whom we base our hopes for a happy

<sup>23</sup> Written around 1854 for his own close helpers, this is the first document offering the broad details of the beginnings of the work at Valdocco. It contains some variations by comparison with similar documents (cf. nos. 13 and 17) and the *Memoirs of the Oratory* (cf. no. 309).

future, are not of their nature depraved. Were it not for carelessness on the part of parents, idleness, mixing in bad company, which happens especially on Sundays and other Holy Days, it would be so easy to inculcate in their young hearts the principles of order, good behaviour, respect and religion. For if it so happens that they are ruined at that young age, it is due more to their thoughtlessness than to ingrained malice.

These young people have a real need of some kind person who will take care of them, work with them, guide them in virtue and keep them away from vice.

The problem lies in finding ways of gathering them, being able to speak to them, and of instructing them in the moral life.

The Son of God was sent for this purpose, and his holy religion alone can achieve it. This religion is of itself eternal and unchangeable, and has been, and will always be, the teacher of people. But the law it contains is so perfect that it can adapt to changing times and suit people's different characters. The oratories are regarded as being amongst the most fitting means for instilling the spirit of religion in hearts that are uncultivated and abandoned. These oratories are gatherings in which young people, after they have attended church services, are entertained with pleasant and wholesome recreation.

The support which the civic and Church authorities have given me, the zeal shown by many worthy people who have given me material aid, or have helped directly with the work, are a clear sign of the Lord's blessing and of the public's appreciation.

It is now time to set out a regulatory framework that might serve as a plan for a proper organisation of this part of the sacred ministry, and as a guideline for the numerous priests and lay people who work in it with such dedication and charitable concern.

I have often begun [to draft such a framework], but have always given up on account of the innumerable difficulties I had to overcome. Now, to ensure the preservation of unity of spirit and uniformity of discipline, as well as to

comply with the wish of persons in authority who have counselled me to do so, I have decided to complete this work, no matter what the outcome may be.

But I wish it understood from the start that it is not my purpose to lay down law or precept for anyone. My one aim is to set out what we do in the Boys' Oratory of St Francis de Sales at Valdocco, and the way it is being done.

Some expressions found herein may lead some people into thinking that I am seeking my own honour and glory. Let them not think so; let them rather put it all down to my commitment to write [about the oratory] as things actually developed and as they are even at the present day.

When I dedicated myself to this part of the sacred ministry, I fully intended to consecrate every effort of mine to the greater glory of God and to the good of souls. My resolve was to work to make these young people good citizens for this earth, so that they might be one day worthy inhabitants of heaven. May God help me and enable me to continue in this endeavour to my last breath. So be it.

### *Historical Outline of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*

This Oratory, a gathering of young people on Sundays and holy days, began in the Church of St. Francis of Assisi. For many years during the summertime, the Rev. Fr Cafasso used to teach catechism every Sunday to bricklayers' boys in a little room attached to the sacristy of the aforementioned church. The heavy workload this priest had taken on caused him to interrupt this work which he loved so much. I took it up towards the end of 1841, and I began by gathering two young adults in that same place who were in serious need of religious instruction. These were joined by others, and during 1842 the number went up to twenty, and sometimes twenty-five. From these beginnings I learned two very important truths: first, that in general young people are not bad in themselves but more often than not they become such through contact with evil companions; second, that even these bad youngsters, if separated one from the other, are susceptible to great moral change.

In 1843 the catechism classes continued on the same footing and the number increased to fifty, the most that the place assigned to me could accommodate. All the while, while visiting the prisons of Turin, I was able to verify that the poor unfortunates committed to that place of punishment are generally poor young men who come into the city from far away either because they need to find work, or encouraged by some rascally companion. These young people are left to themselves particularly on Sundays and Holy days and spend the little money they earn during the week on games [of chance] or on sweetmeats. This is the beginning of many vices; in no time at all, these young people, who were good, are found to be at risk themselves and putting others at risk. Nor can the prisons better them in any way, because while detained there they learn more refined ways of doing evil so that when they are released they become worse.

I turned therefore to this class of youngster as the most abandoned and at risk; and during the week, either with promises or with little gifts, I tried to win over more pupils. I succeeded, and their number increased greatly, so that, when larger premises were placed at my disposal in the summer of 1844, I found myself at times with some eighty youths around me. I experienced great happiness at seeing myself surrounded by pupils who behaved as I wanted, all of them started on a job, and whose conduct both on weekdays and Sundays I could some how vouch for. As I looked over them, I could visualise one of them returned to parents from whom he had run away, another placed with an employer, and all of them well on the way to learning their religion.

But the community life characteristic of a place like the Pastoral Institute of St Francis of Assisi (Convitto), the silence and good order required by the services conducted in that public and very well attended church, got in the way of my plans. And even though the well-deserving, late-lamented Dr Guala<sup>24</sup> encouraged me to persevere, nevertheless I clearly perceived the need for new premises. Because religious instruction occupies the young people for only a certain period of time, after which they need some outlet: hikes, games.

<sup>24</sup> *Luigi Fortunato Guala* (1775-1848), teacher and theologian, rector of the church of St Francis of Assisi, and founder of the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto ecclesiastico*).

Providence arranged that in late October 1844 I should be appointed to The Refuge (Rifugio) as spiritual director. I invited my boys to come and visit me at my new residence and the following Sunday they gathered there in much larger numbers than usual. My room served both as oratory and playground. What a sight! No chair, table or anything else in the room could escape the attack of that friendly invasion.

Meanwhile, I and the Rev. Dr Borel, who from then on became the Oratory's staunchest supporter, had chosen a room that was intended as dining room and common room for the priests working at the Refuge, and that seemed big enough for our purposes. We adapted it as a chapel. The Archbishop gave his kind approval, and on the day of Mary's Immaculate Conception (December 8, 1844), the chapel we had long hoped for was blessed, with the faculty of celebrating the holy sacrifice of the Mass, and of giving Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament.

The news of a chapel destined exclusively for the young, the liturgical services prepared especially for them, a bit of open space to romp around in, proved to be powerful attractions, so that our church, which began to be called 'Oratory' at that time, became quickly overcrowded. We made do as well as we could. Catechism classes were held in every corner: in rooms, kitchen and corridors.

Things were moving along when an occurrence (or better, Divine Providence acting with hidden purposes) turned our oratory upside down. On August 10, 1845 the Little Hospital of St. Philomena<sup>25</sup> was opened and the premises we had been using for nine months had to be given over to other uses. Another meeting place had to be found. Following a formal request, the Mayor of the city allowed us to go to St Martin's chapel near the *Molazzi* or city Mills. So on Sunday we announced the change of place. The boys were partly sad at having to leave a place they had come to like as their very own and partly anxious about something new but they readied themselves to go.

<sup>25</sup> Don Bosco was taken on by Marchioness Barolo as chaplain at the Little Hospital ten months before the opening, which took place in August 1845.

You would have seen one carrying a chair, another a bench, some carrying a picture or statue, others the vestments or altar cloths or cruets. Some of the more playful ones would have stilts or bocce balls or throwing discs, but they were all keen to see the new oratory.

Two months went by peacefully there, although we could not do things perfectly since we couldn't celebrate Mass or have Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, nor was it all that easy to have recreation. But that period of calm was a prelude to a storm that would put the Oratory to a more severe trial. Word got around that these gatherings of youngsters were dangerous and that at any moment they could move from having recreation to creating a riot. What kind of riot could ignorant, penniless boys without weapons cause! They were only gathering to learn catechism; they would have trembled even at hearing a crow flutter! But despite this the rumours kept growing and a report was sent to the mayor in which I was described as the head of the gang, and that they were making an intolerable racket at the mills, a disturbance that nobody could put up with; damage was being done to the walls, benches and even the paving in the courtyard. I had quite something to say about the fact that these claims had no substance but it was all in vain. An order was issued that we had to immediately evacuate the locale we had been previously given.

I then asked if we could go to the Holy Cross cenotaph church, known as St Peter in Chains. Permission was given. We happily went off there but it was just a single festive occasion, because new reports were written and sent to the mayor in which our gatherings were described as acts of insubordination and we were soon prohibited from setting foot there ever again.

I make no mention of the names of individuals who sent these acrimonious reports off to the City [authorities]; I merely observe (God forbid that I take any delight in it) that one person lived just one more day and the other just three days after having made their report. This was something that made a deep impression on the youngsters who were aware of the fact.

What could be done? I found myself with a heap of materials for the church and for games, a crowd of youngsters that followed me everywhere and not an inch of ground where we could go to.



Afraid that my children would stop coming, I hid all my worries and on Sundays took them off one day to Sassi, another to the Madonna di Campagna (Our Lady of the Fields), and another to the Mount of the Capuchins. The number of boys grew rather than diminishing. In the meantime, as the winter was drawing near, and the weather no longer favoured excursions into the countryside, I and Dr [John] Borel rented three rooms in the Moretta<sup>26</sup> house, a building not far distant from the present site of the Oratory in Valdocco. During that winter our activities were limited to simple catechism lessons on the evening of each Sunday and holy day.

At this time the gossip that had already been making the rounds for some time, that the oratories were a deliberate way of getting young people away from their own parishes in order to instruct them in suspect principles, grew more insistent. This allegation was based on the fact that I allowed my young people every kind of recreation as long as they did not sin or do anything that could be regarded as reprehensible conduct. In response to the allegation, I pointed out that my purpose was to gather together only those young people who did not belong to any parish. As a matter of fact most of the youngsters were from out of town and did not even know which parish they belonged to. But the more I tried to explain the truth of the matter, the more sinister was the cast thrown upon it.

Furthermore, certain events took place that forced us to leave the Moretta house, so that in March 1846 I had to lease a small grass field from the Filippi brothers, at the location where the pig-iron foundry is at present. And there I was under the wide and starry sky, in the middle of a field bordered by a sorry-looking hedgerow that kept out only those who did not want to come in. There I was with some three hundred young men who found their heaven on earth in that oratory—an oratory the roof and the walls of which were nothing but sky.

To make matters worse, the Vicar of the City, Marquis Cavour<sup>27</sup>, informed but prejudiced against these weekend gatherings, sent for me. He briefly

<sup>26</sup> A two-storey building belonging to Fr John Baptist Moretta (1777-1847).

<sup>27</sup> See doc. no. 1.

reported what was being rumoured about the oratory and then said to me: “My good Father, let me give you a sound piece of advice. Get rid of those villains, because these gatherings are dangerous.” I replied: “All I am trying to do is to better the lot of these poor boys. If the City would care to provide any kind of premises for me I have every hope of being able to very much lessen the number of troublemakers, and at the same time, the numbers of those who go to prison.”

“You are fooling yourself my good priest; these efforts are all in vain. Where will you get the money? I cannot allow such gatherings.”

The results we have had convince me that these efforts are not in vain: the money is in the Lord’s hands, and sometimes he uses the most paltry of instruments to carry out his work ...”

“I cannot allow such gatherings.”

“Don’t grant them for me, Sir, but grant it for the good of these boys who will end up badly left to their own devices.”

“I am not here to argue; this is a disorder and I want to put a stop to it. You do know that without permission no assembly is allowed.”

“My assemblies have no political aim; they are merely to teach catechism to poor boys and I do this with the Archbishop’s permission.”

“The Archbishop has been informed of these matters?”

“He is informed and I have never put a foot out of place without asking him for his advice and consent.”

“But I cannot allow these assemblies.”

“I do believe, Sir, that you would not want to prohibit me from teaching catechism, which has the Archbishop’s permission.”

The Archbishop had knowledge of everything and urged me to be patient and have courage. In the meantime I was forced to resign from the Refuge in order to be able to attend more directly to the care of my boys, and as a result I was without employment and without means of support. Every project of

mine was given a sinister interpretation. I was physically exhausted with my health undermined, to the point that the word was put around that I had become insane.

Failing to make others understand my plans I sought to mark time, because I was deeply convinced that events would prove me right in what I was doing. Furthermore, I wanted so much to have a suitable site that in my mind I imagined this to be already a fact. This was the reason why even my dearest friends thought that I was out of my mind. And my co-workers abandoned me entirely, since I would not give in to them and desist from my undertaking.

Dr Borel went along with my ideas. However, since no other course seemed open to us, he thought we should pick a dozen of the younger children and teach them their catechism privately, and wait for a better opportunity to go forward with our plans.

“No,” I replied “This is not the way. This is the Lord’s work; he began it, and he has to bring it to completion.”

“But meanwhile,” he insisted, “Where will we gather our boys?”

“In the Oratory.”

“But where is this Oratory?”

“I see it there already: I see a church, a house, and an enclosed playground. It is there, and I see it.”

“But where are these things?”

“I do not know where they are, but I see them.”

I insisted because of my lively wish to have these things. I was thoroughly convinced that God would provide them.

Dr Borel felt sorry for me in that condition, and he too reluctantly expressed doubts about my sanity. Father Cafasso kept telling me not to take any decision for the duration. The Archbishop however was inclined to agree that I should stay with the work.

All the while Marquis Cavour firmly held to the position that these gatherings, which he claimed were dangerous, should stop. But not wanting to take a decision that might displease the Archbishop, he with his office staff (the equivalent of our city council) arranged for a meeting at the Archbishop's palace. The Archbishop later confided to me that it looked like the last judgement. The discussion was brief, but the verdict was that such gatherings must absolutely stop.

Fortunately Count Provana di Collegno at the time was serving in the Vicar's Council as Head of the Accounting Department. He had always encouraged me and supported my work financially both from his own private purse and on behalf of His Majesty King Charles Albert. This Sovereign of grateful memory, appreciated the work of the oratory and would send financial help in times of special need. Through Count Collegno he often expressed to me his satisfaction with our special priestly ministry. He placed our ministry on a par with the work of the foreign missions and would have liked to see such gatherings of young people at risk held in every city of the realm.

When he learned of my predicament he sent me 300 francs through the same Count, with words of encouragement. He also let the Vicar's office know that he wished such Sunday gatherings of young people to continue. The Vicar was to take care to prevent any disorder that might arise. The Vicar obeyed and took steps to that effect. He ordered a number of archers, a kind of security guard, to attend our meetings and report.

They were there for catechism classes, sermons, singing practice and recreation, and reported everything in detail to the Vicar. By and by his attitude changed for the better, and so did the situation at the Oratory.

*The beginning of the current Oratory at Valdocco and its growth until the present day*

It was a Sunday evening on the fifteenth of March, a memorable day for our Oratory, when seeing such a huge number of boys playing and seeing myself alone in their midst, my health and strength at an end, without knowing where I could go now that the field we had rented was to be put to other use, I

became so emotional that I burst into tears. “My God,” I began saying, raising my eyes to heaven, “Why don’t you let me know where you want me to gather these dear boys of mine? Oh please let me know, tell me what I must do!”

These were the kinds of words that were churning in my heart when at that moment a certain Pancrazio Soave came to me saying that there was a Mr Pinardi who had a place I could rent which would be very suitable for my purpose. I went immediately. It was a shed. We spoke about it, agreed on a rental price and on how we could turn the place into a chapel. It all took just a few minutes. I ran back quickly to my boys, called them together and overwhelmed with happiness began to shout: “Courage boys, we have an Oratory. We will have a church, a sacristy, a place for school and for recreation.”

This news was greeted with enthusiasm. And on Easter Sunday in April we carried all the equipment for church and recreation there and the new chapel was inaugurated. A little later other rooms in the same Pinardi house were rented where we started the Sunday and evening classes. Chev. Gonella<sup>28</sup>, an outstanding benefactor of this Oratory, was so pleased with these classes that he set out to introduce them at St Pelagia’s. The city itself took the evening schools into consideration and opened them in various suburbs around the city where today it is easy for any worker who so desires to get basic education. Since the things that followed this period are well known to everyone, I limit myself to noting them briefly.

1846. One Sunday in April the current church was blessed and given faculties for celebrating Mass, teaching catechism, preaching and having Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

The Sunday and evening classes made good progress teaching reading, writing, singing, bible history, arithmetic and Italian. Oratory pupils put on public demonstrations of what they were learning.

<sup>28</sup> Andrea Gonella (1770-1851), banker and textile industrialist. Also his son Marco (1822-1886) would be a great friend and benefactor of Don Bosco.

In November, I took up residence in the Home attached to the Oratory. Many priests, including Frs Vola, Carpano, Trivero<sup>29</sup> took part in things at the Oratory.

1847. The St Aloysius sodality was set up<sup>30</sup> with the approval of the ecclesiastical authorities. A statue of the Saint was arranged for and the six Sundays leading up to the feast of St Aloysius were grandly celebrated. On the feast day itself the Archbishop came to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to a large group of boys and we enacted a comedy with singing and music.

Additional rooms were rented thanks to which a number of evening classes were added. We took in two poor young orphaned boys, without a trade and ignorant of religion. This is how the Home began and it continued to grow.

Given the large number of boys that were coming to the Oratory and because the church and the enclosure at Valdocco had become too small, *a new Oratory was opened at Porta Nuova* in the Vaglietti, now the Turvano house, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception under the title of St Aloysius Gonzaga, and Fr Giacinto Carpano was put in charge. This new Oratory began using the same rules and had the same aim as the one at Valdocco; soon it too was filled with boys.

1848. The number of boys taken in as boarders had increased to fifteen. Following a number of problems that had arisen because we were preparing the boys for admission to Holy Communion, the Archbishop formally gave faculties for preparations for Confirmation and Communion and for fulfilling the Easter duties in the chapel at the Oratory.

The first Retreats were held for a selected group of boys at the Home attached to the Oratory and we saw excellent results. The City council sent a commission to visit the Oratories and after sending a letter expressing

<sup>29</sup> Fr Giacinto Carpano (1821-1894) and Fr Giuseppe Trivero (1816-1894) were already helping out with spiritual and material assistance of young migrants.

<sup>30</sup> See doc. nos. 4 and 206.

their satisfaction they offered a subsidy of 600 francs. The Institute for the Education of the Poor (*Mendacità*) also came to the aid of the Oratories with a temporary subsidy. We made a solemn procession to Our Lady of Consolation (The *Consolata*) for Communion in May in honour of Our Blessed Lady. We had already done that for two years, but without the procession. The pictures of the *Stations of the Cross* were blessed and together we made a visit to the Altar of Repose on Holy Thursday; then in the evening that day for the first time we held the ceremony of the *lavabo* (Washing of the feet).

This same year piano and organ lessons began, and the boys began to go out to sing Mass and Vespers with church choirs in Turin, Carignano, Chieri, Rivoli etc.

1849. The entire Pinaridi house, the area in front and behind the house was rented; The church had been extended by at least half. The number of boys in the Home was now thirty. The Pope fled Rome and went to Gaeta in the Kingdom of Naples and the boys at the Oratory took up a collection which deeply moved the Holy Father and he had Cardinal Antonelli write a letter of thanks and sent his blessing on the boys at the Oratory. Then from Gaeta he sent a packet of 60 dozen rosaries for the boys at the Oratory and these were distributed with much celebration on July 20. *See the booklet printed on that occasion.*

Because of the war, Fr Cocchi closed the Guardian Angel Oratory and it remained closed for a year and was then entrusted to us. Fr Vola was asked to run it.

The Senate and the Ministry sent a commission to visit the Oratories and their report and discussion was favourable. See the *Piedmontese Gazzetta* of March 29, 1849.

Savio Ascanio was the first young man in the Oratory to receive the clerical habit<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Ascanio Savio (1832-1902), received the cassock on November 1, 1848; he then left Don Bosco and joined the Oblates of the Virgin Mary.

1850. We bought the Pinaridi house and the house attached to it. The number of boys living in was now fifty. The number of boys coming to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales was extraordinary so we planned a new church and on 20 July Chev. Cotta<sup>32</sup> laid the foundation stone and Canon Moreno<sup>33</sup> blessed it amidst a huge crowd of people. *The acts of this function are in writing.*

The Bishop of Biella in a circular of his recommended the building of the new church and collected a thousand francs. Since we lacked money to continue the church we organised a lottery which was held the following year and was very favourably received. We collected three thousand three hundred items which, deducting expenses, produced a net result of 26 thousand francs<sup>34</sup>.

On the first of June the Mutual Aid Society began. The statutes can be seen in the printed booklet<sup>35</sup>.

1851. On June 20, the Feast of Our Lady of Consolation, the new church was blessed with much pomp, many distinguished people were in attendance and there was much joy, and the first sacred ceremonies were held there. The attached poem gives a hint of how much was done on that day: *'Come augel di ramo in ramo'* etc.

Various purchases were made for the church; the St Aloysius altar was bought. The choir loft was built.

1852. The explosion at the powder mill on April 26 the year before rocked the Home at the Oratory and damaged it considerably, so this year we built a new construction workshop. It was close to being finished (December 2)

<sup>32</sup> Giuseppe Cotta (1785-1868), banker and member of important city institutions. Senator from 1848, in the three years from 1849-1852 he was a city councillor.

<sup>33</sup> Ottavio Moreno (1777-1852), canon at the cathedral, senator and head of the Royal Apostolic Treasury. He had great respect for Don Bosco's work for which he obtained substantial financial aid.

<sup>34</sup> See no. 6.

<sup>35</sup> See no. 4.



when it almost completely collapsed causing much fear and damage. Nobody, fortunately, was injured.

Mr Michael Scanagatti<sup>36</sup> offered a set of elegant candelabra for the main altar. The bell tower was built. Since there was no further space for evening classes, some were held in the new church. The old church was turned into a dormitory and study and classrooms.

Fr Cafasso had the current pulpit built.

1853. Building started on the part of the house which had collapsed: it was completed, furnished and by October was being lived in. The new area meant that the dormitories and refectory for the boys who were living in could be better organised. By now there were 65 of them.

Chev. Duprè<sup>37</sup> bought a communion rail of marble and embellished the St Aloysius altar. Marquis Fassati<sup>38</sup> provided a marble railing and a set of brass candelabra for Our Lady's altar.

Count Cays, the prior of the St Aloysius sodality bought a bell which was blessed by the parish priest of Borgo Dora. He provided the current Baldacchino.

For the first time we held the Forty Hours and the Octave for the Easter festivities.

We rented out the entire Belleza house in order to get rid of the disturbances from this tavern and all the people of suspect behaviour who went there.

1854. Because of the financial crisis this year no new works were undertaken. We simply finished off some of the most essential things. Count

<sup>36</sup> Michele Scanagatti (1803-1879).

<sup>37</sup> Giuseppe Luigi Duprè (died 1884) banker, and at the time held many public roles. With other well-known personages on 9 December 1851 he had supported Don Bosco's request to the head of the Finance Department for authorisation to launch a lottery, cf. E(m) I, pp. 136-137.

<sup>38</sup> Domenico Fassati Roero, Marquis a great benefactor of Don Bosco along with his wife Maria de Maistre (1824-1905).

Cays<sup>39</sup> was re-elected as prior of the St Aloysius sodality and provided a long new frieze<sup>40</sup> which ran the length of the church cornice.

The lack of food, work which exposed many young people to danger in body and soul meant that we took in many more boys and their number increased to eighty six.

### 11. To the Minister for the Interior, Luigi Carlo Farini

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 407-408.

Turin, 12 June 1860

Your Excellency<sup>41</sup>,

I humbly beg your Excellency to kindly read what I am outlining regarding the house known as the Oratory of St Francis de Sales.

In the space of a fortnight I had to undergo two detailed searches without knowing the reason for them<sup>42</sup>. Things like this upset the spirit and order of the boys. If Your Excellency would be kind enough to explain the reasons for these searches I assure you I would give you every satisfaction according to the truth.

Meanwhile I want you to be fully convinced that:

1. I have been carrying out my priestly ministry for twenty years in prisons, hospitals, the streets and squares of this city, picking up abandoned boys to

<sup>39</sup> Carlo Cays Count of Giletta and Caselette (1813-1882), president of the St Vincent de Paul Conference, member of the subalpine parliament (1857-1860), was widowed, became a Salesian and also a priest (1877).

<sup>40</sup> The word he uses is a Piedmontese term for drapery.

<sup>41</sup> Luigi Carlo Farini (1812-1863), Former Minister for Public Education (1851-1852), was Minister for the Interior for three months. On the same date Don Bosco wrote a reminder to the Minister for Public education, Terenzio Mamiani: cf. E(m) I, pp. 408-410.

<sup>42</sup> He refers to a detailed search carried out by the police for political motives (26 May) and a school inspection (9 June) of secondary classes at the Oratory, cf. Pietro BRAIDO - Francesco MOTTO, *Don Bosco tra storia e leggenda nella memoria su "Le perquisizioni"*. *Testo critico e introduzione*, in RSS 8 (1989) 111-200.

set them on the path to good conduct, work, according to their intelligence ability and inclination, without ever having received or asked for payment of any kind. Indeed I have used and will willingly continue to do so today, whatever funds of my own I have to build the house and support these poor boys.

2. Over all this time I have always been in agreement with the Government and have always had support and benefactors from amongst its Ministers. Boys who are at risk and abandoned have been sent to me both from your Ministry<sup>43</sup> and the War Ministry<sup>44</sup> and I have always taken them in; then when I found myself in exceptional need I had recourse to these Ministries and received help. This kindness of the Ministry was also supported by two orders of the day, one in the Senate, the other the House of Representatives, recommending this work of charity to the King's Government. I am attaching a copy of several of the many letters the Minister of the Interior has written to me encouraging me to promote this work of charity.

3. I have never meddled in politics. In everything I have said, done, written or had printed over these twenty years no one could honestly find a single word running contrary to government legislation. It is forbidden to talk politics of any kind in this house; no one has ever been associated with any newspaper. I have always been convinced that the priest must exercise his ministry of charity in any time and place; given any kind of legislation or government, respecting and indeed assisting the authorities while keeping rigorously out of politics.

4. Should Your Excellency have any advice, counsel, or anything else to offer me for this work of the oratories I respectfully beg you to do this as a father who wants what is good for his children, not in a threatening way that could cause irreparable damage to the work that has cost twenty years of appealing for government and private help.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. E(m) I, pp. 433 e 436.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. E(m) I, p. 362.

I ask you to give kind consideration to these humble but sincere reflections, and in recommending these poor young lads to your clemency, I take the opportunity to wish you blessings from Heaven. It is an honour for me to express my esteem and gratitude, and I remain,

Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

## **12. To the Prefect of the Turin province, Giuseppe Pasolini**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 465.

Turin, 26 October 1861

Your Excellency,

Fr John Bosco, director of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, respectfully informs Your Excellency that the increasing numbers of boys taken into this house means having some other professions in place other than carpentry, tailoring, boot making and bookbinding. It seems that it would be highly useful to begin a small printing press.

With this in mind we need to ask Your Excellency for authorisation:

1. To open a printing press in this house under the title of *Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press*.

2. To allow the director of the same Oratory to be the manager, given that the purpose of this small press is exclusively a charitable one, and given the meagre means and work we will have to restrict ourselves to.

3. Prior to commencement of printing work the applicant is obliged to provide a master printer who can guarantee the work to be undertaken.

Since this small Press aims to give work to and benefit the most abandoned and poorest boys in society, the undersigned, trusting in your well-known

kindness hopes that his request will be taken into kind and favourable consideration<sup>45</sup>. I have the greatest honour in declaring myself to be,

Your Excellency's most humble petitioner,

Fr John Bosco<sup>46</sup>

### 13. Historical Outlines concerning the Oratory of St Francis De Sales

Critical ed. in P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani...*, pp. 9-29, 56-77.

[1862]

The idea of the Oratories came from frequenting the prisons in this city. In these places of spiritual and temporal misery there were many young men in the flower of their youth, alert, good-hearted, well able to be the consolation of their families and an honour to their town; and here they were locked up, discouraged, the opprobrium of society. Carefully considering the reasons for this misfortune one could see that for most of them they were unfortunate more for want of education than out of malice. One could note also that little by little they could be led to appreciate their dignity as human beings, that they could reason, and that they must earn their bread in life through honest effort and not by stealing. In other words as soon as their minds were enlightened by a moral and religious principle they began to feel something good in their hearts which they could not explain but which made them want to be better people. In fact many changed their behaviour while still in the prison, while others when released lived in such a way that they would not end up there again.

<sup>45</sup> Giuseppe Pasolini (1815-1877) was State Minister for Commerce, Fine Arts and Agriculture in the Papal States (1848-1849). Senator of the Kingdom from 1868, he was Prefect in both Milan and Turin. In 1876 he took up the role as President of the Senate.

<sup>46</sup> The request was granted on condition that it be a professional Press and thus in the first months of 1862 a new trade workshop was added to boot-making, book-binding, carpentry and tailoring, opened in previous years. The printing workshop did not fail to alarm city presses for its presumed competition factor.

So we had confirmation that these young men were unfortunate for want of religious and moral instruction and that these two educational means were ones that together could keep good boys good and lead the unruly ones to make wise judgement when they were released from these places of punishment.

As a trial, some appropriate catechetical programmes were begun in the prisons around the capital and a little later in the sacristy of the church of St Francis of Assisi. And thus the Sunday gatherings began. Boys released from prison were invited as well as others who we found and collected here and there in the streets and squares and workshops during the week. Moral and religious stories, hymns, small gifts, some games were the lure we used to deal with them on Sundays and other holy days.

Throughout 1841 on average around seventy boys attended. With great satisfaction the oratory continued at St Francis of Assisi for three years, until the extraordinary number of boys forced us to choose a larger place. Then in 1844 Don Bosco, for reasons of Church employment, had joined the administration of the pious work of the Refuge in Valdocco. There a suitable place was selected and on December 8, 1844 the first chapel destined exclusively for the young people was blessed. This chapel consisted of two rooms next to the building used by the two priests who were running the aforesaid work of the Refuge. The Oratory lasted a year here.

In autumn 1845, because of the growing number of boys, a number that often exceeded two hundred, the building which up until then had served as a chapel was now to be used for something else, so it was necessary to seek a more appropriate place. For about four months we went to St Martin's near the city Mills but finished there to give way to another catechism program for young people. St Peter's in Chains cenotaph, the Moretta House, an enclosure belonging to the Filippi house served as an Oratory up until spring 1846.

That year we rented and then bought the Pinardi house in the Valdocco district, and this is where the Oratory of St Francis de Sales arose. The number of boys grew such that in 1850 it often went beyond two and also three thousand.

With a view to providing for this need, in 1851 the current church was put up and that was done with help from the Lotteries, raffles of items and other private donations.

*The Oratory of St Aloysius at Porta Nuova.* In 1847, seeing that such a huge number of boys could no longer be contained in the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, another was opened at Porta Nuova between dei Plantini and Valentino streets. Administration of this was entrusted to Fr Giacinto Carpano, and then was passed on to others. Currently Fr Leonardo Murialdo<sup>47</sup> is its zealous director. The average number of boys is around 500.

*The Guardian Angel Oratory.* The extraordinary number of boys coming to the Oratory at Porta Nuova soon made us realise that another site was needed where the greatest need was felt. Vanchiglia is a heavily populated part of Turin and full of youngsters who just wander about on Sundays and Holy Days. The worthy Fr Cocchi had already opened an oratory there but had to abandon it due to other things he had to do. So in the same place with an almost identical purpose, in 1849 we reopened the Guardian Angel Oratory there, near the Po. Administration was entrusted to Fr Robert Murialdo, but since his health is currently up and down it has been entrusted to Fr Michael Rua<sup>48</sup>. The average number presently attending this Oratory is around four hundred.

*General observations.* We could call these Oratories places aimed at dealing with youngsters at risk on Sundays and other Holy Days by offering them pleasant and honest recreation after they have attended the church services. So as well as the churches there are enclosures that are large enough for recreation and other suitable places for lessons and to bring the pupils under cover

<sup>47</sup> Leonardo Murialdo (1828-1900), Saint, former collaborator at the Guardian Angel Oratory in Vanchiglia (1851), took on the running of the St Aloysius Oratory at Porta Nuova, at Don Bosco's request in 1857, and remained there until 1865. Following that he became the director of the Collegio degli Artigianelli (a boarding school for trade students), set up by Fr Cocchi in 1849, and then founder of the Congregation of St Joseph; he carried out intense activity in the social sector, especially on behalf of workers.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Rua (1837-1910), Blessed, Don Bosco's principal collaborator from the earliest days of the Oratory, would succeed him in leading the Salesian Congregation (1888-1910).

during bad weather in the cold season and when it rains. Ways of attracting them to come are: small prizes, games and a kind welcome; medals, holy pictures, fruit, something to eat or a snack; sometimes a pair of socks, shoes or other clothing item for the poorest ones; finding them work, going to see their families or their employers. The games are: bocce (bowls), quoits, stilts, see-saws of various kinds, leap-frog, gymnastics, military exercises, singing, concerts with instruments and vocals. But what attracts the youngsters most is the kind welcome they receive. Long experience has led us to understand that the good result of education of the young consists especially in knowing how to make oneself loved so that one can then be feared.

The religious services on Sundays and other holy days are as follows: Mass followed by a story from the bible or Church history, or an explanation of the Gospel of the day; then recreation. After midday catechism in classes, vespers, a brief instruction from the pulpit, Benediction and then followed by the usual recreation. Once religious services are over everyone is free to stay and play or to go home. Once night falls we send everyone home and the Oratory is closed.

There is a set of rules guiding everything in church, recreation and school. Those taking part are priests, clerics and some good citizens who help out with everything. During Lent, in all three places there is catechism each day at midday for those who are not free at other times during the day. We even celebrate Mary's month with a sermon or spiritual reading, rosary and Benediction at sunrise or at the time in the evening when we say the Hail Mary according to circumstances.

People taking the most active part at the beginning of the Oratory have been, as well as those already mentioned: Fr Ponte<sup>49</sup>, Fr Trivero, Fr Pacchiotti<sup>50</sup>, Dr John Vola. Of particular help has been the worthy Fr John Borel. He has been the soul and support of things exercising his priestly ministry and in

<sup>49</sup> Fr Pietro Ponte (1821-1892) chaplain of the Opere Barolo. He stayed with Don Bosco in the Pinardi house for more than a year (1847-1848).

<sup>50</sup> Fr Sebastiano Pacchiotti (1806-1885), chaplain at the Opere Barolo.



material and moral assistance. Chevalier Dr (Fr) Baricco<sup>51</sup> has also taken part several times.

*Sunday school.* Many youngsters, either for lack of means or facilities are already moving on in years but have not had the necessary instruction for learning a trade. During the week they were not able to attend school of any kind, so this need suggested Sunday classes. We started these in 1845. It seemed difficult at the beginning given that there were no books or people to give advice or direction. We had school, we taught things but during the week, what had been taught and learned on Sundays was mostly forgotten. Just the same we mostly overcame this serious obstacle by taking just one area of study at a time and having just one lesson to be learned through the week. This way we succeeded in getting them to learn how to read and write and then the four arithmetical operations, and then the elements of the metric system, Italian grammar and Bible history, but without ever passing on to something new if what we already had in hand was not yet well understood. The public performances that were offered satisfied important personages who honoured us with their presence, amongst whom Fr Aporti<sup>52</sup>, the city Mayor, Chevalier Bellono<sup>53</sup>, and Chevalier Fr Baricco.

*Evening classes.* Amongst the multitude of boys who came another need appeared, since although the Sunday classes produced good results, nevertheless they were not sufficient for many. So we began to invite them to come during the week on days and at times that were most convenient for the pupils. One boy encouraged another and in a short while it was considered appropriate to set a fixed time and this was in the evening, just when the working boys had finished their day's work.

<sup>51</sup> Dr (Fr) Pietro Baricco (1819-1887), professor, member of the Turin city council, responsible for public education in the city.

<sup>52</sup> Ferrante Aporti (1791-1858), priest and pedagogue from Mantova, the first in Italy, in 1828, to open infant schools. Classes given in Turin in 1844 at the Higher School of Method brought him to the attention of public opinion, so much so that after the 1848 war he took refuge in the city, was made a senator and took on various important roles in citizens' cultural institutions.

<sup>53</sup> Giorgio Bellono (1806-1852), Mayor of the city from 1850 to 1852.

In 1846 the evening classes began for the first time. Attendance was extraordinary to the point where we had to limit ourselves to the number of pupils we could physically take in the squeezed circumstances. Since evening schools were then opened by the city administration in many parts of the city it was not necessary to offer them in the other oratories. They continue until the present only in the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. The subjects taught are: reading, writing, the metric system, Italian, plainchant, vocal music, instrumental music and some drawing, pianoforte, organ and also French.

*Day school during the week.* Another type of boy can be found on the loose wandering the city and these are the ones who are either very poorly dressed or since they cannot settle down to discipline are not accepted in the public schools or are expelled from them. For the most part they are either orphaned or neglected by their parents even at a tender age and so they wander the streets and squares brawling, cursing and stealing. We opened a school for them in the Oratory of St Francis de Sales and another in St Aloysius. A considerable number attend in both oratories and through the careful and kindly concern of the teachers satisfactory results have been obtained in terms of proper behaviour and discipline. A few of them were then admitted to classes in town, others in evening schools and some others yet found employment.

*The Home at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales.* Amongst the young people who come to these Oratories we find some who are so poor and abandoned that almost anything we did for them would be almost useless without providing somewhere where they could live, eat and be clothed. We tried to do this with the attached Home at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. At the beginning we rented out a small house there in 1847 and began to gather up a few of the poorest boys. At the time they went out to work in the city coming home to the Oratory to eat and sleep. But the serious need that we became aware of, from various towns around the province, made us determine to extend our acceptance also to boys who were not attending the Turin oratories.

One thing happened after another. Abandoned young people swarmed in from everywhere. So we established a platform whereby we accepted only boys between the ages of twelve and eighteen, without father and mother, completely abandoned and poor. But since going into the city into public workplaces had bad consequences, we extended our place, rebuilt existing parts and built new (we have seven hundred boys) workshops so that everything is now here at home. The trades taught are tailoring, boot-making, book-binding, carpentry, printing and study for those whose behaviour and attitude to academic subjects make them suitable for it.

The earnest desire many showed for taking regular academic courses meant we had to make exceptions in our acceptance conditions. So for studies were also accepted boys who were not abandoned nor completely poor so long as their behaviour and attitude to study was such that it left no doubt that they could hope for an upright and Christian success in an academic career.

*Administration.* In the house we even have a set of regulations to guide everything. There is a Rector on whom everyone depends. He has a prefect as his vice and who is responsible for accounts and correspondence. A Director looks after the school, keeps in touch with the teachers and study assistants, catechists or spiritual directors. A bursar looks after service staff, repairs and all the domestic arrangements in general. The shop heads or master craftsmen in each workshop also depend on him. There are no fixed fees, so the house is supported only by charity coming mostly from private donations. The city council usually gives an annual grant of 300 francs for lighting and wood for the evening classes during winter. It is not possible to calculate the precise expenses for the whole house or for each individual but we could establish somewhere around 60 cents per day per person all up. The church, the buildings, the site for the house and oratory at Valdocco are the property of Don Bosco. Those at Porta Nuova and Vanchiglia are leased.

*Results.* To understand the results obtained in these schools, the Oratories and the Home at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales we need to divide the pupils into three groups: the undisciplined, the restless and the good. The

good ones stay that way and make marvellous progress in goodness. The restless type, those already accustomed to wandering around not doing much work achieve some success through a trade with assistance, instruction and by being kept busy. The undisciplined ones mean we have a lot to do. If we can get them to gain some taste for work we can mostly win them over. By the means already indicated we can obtain some results which could be explained thus: 1. That they do not get worse. 2. Many improve in common sense so can earn their bread in an upright manner. 3. Those who seemed to be insensitive under vigilance over time become more pliant—if not completely, at least to some extent. We leave it to time to profit from the good principles and know how to put them into practice.

This means that every year we have been able to place more than a hundred boys with good employers where they can learn a trade. Many have returned to the families they fled from and are now more docile and obedient. Not a few were placed with upright families as domestics.

The coming and going of boys from the Home at this Oratory comes to around three hundred a year. A few of them have found a place with the National Guard or Military Band, others continue with the trade they learned here while some serve in upright families and yet a sizeable number of others take up teaching. These ones sit for the regular exams or remain here at home or go as teachers to towns that are asking for them. Some also take up other civic careers.

Amongst the students many set out on an ecclesiastical career. These, once they have finished their secondary studies, are mostly sent off to the various bishops who look after them lovingly to help them and allow them to continue in the career they have aspired to. Amongst these we have chosen a number who carry out a teaching role in this house, teach catechism in the Oratories, assist in the various workshops and dormitories. When they become priests they continue to exercise their sacred ministry on behalf of the boys here or those who attend other oratories in the city. Others follow their inclination and are assigned to other aspects of ministry which the ecclesiastical superior judges them suitable for.

One very deserving person in the oratories and this house is Fr Victor Alasonatti<sup>54</sup> who has tirelessly dedicated all his efforts for many years in these charitable works.

As for all the personnel of this house and the oratories, including domestic staff, nobody receives a stipend, but each offers his work for free.

#### **14. To the Superintendent of Studies in Turin, Francesco Selmi**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 541-543.

Turin, 4 December 1862

Distinguished Sir<sup>55</sup>,

I am respectfully presenting to your Excellency that in the desire to promote secondary education amongst the less well-off classes in the population, I have begun secondary classes for poor lads who we have been taken into our house with a view to those who would like to earn an honest living through arts or trades, or academic studies. In the past our curriculum was never completely along the lines of government programmes and subjects. But now, wanting to gain regular recognition for these classes, I am requesting you, Honourable Sir, for approval of these classes as a private institute following the norms of article 246 of the legislation on Public Education<sup>56</sup>.

The curriculum will follow the programmes and subjects laid out by the government in the above-mentioned article, as has already been the case.

*With regard to teachers*

<sup>54</sup> Fr Vittorio Alasonatti (1812-1865), first Prefect of the Oratory at Valdocco (from 1854) and of the Salesian Society (from 1859 until his death).

<sup>55</sup> Francesco Selmi (1817-1881), former superintendent of studies in Brescia, took up the same role in Turin in 1862. He was also Director General for the Ministry of Public Education. He then left his administrative roles to take up the Chair of Chemistry and Pharmacy at the University of Bologna.

<sup>56</sup> The article envisaged the possibility of opening private schools under certain conditions involving teachers, teaching programmes, and possible ministerial inspections.

For the first year secondary I am proposing Fr Victor Alasonatti who is registered for fourth year Latin according to the former legislation.

For arithmetic Fr Angelo Savio who is a registered teacher for 4th grade primary.

For 2<sup>nd</sup> year secondary, cleric John Anfossi.

For 3<sup>rd</sup> year secondary cleric Celestine Durando.

For 4<sup>th</sup> year secondary cleric Francis Cerrutti.

For 5<sup>th</sup> year secondary, Fr John Francesia<sup>57</sup>.

The four last-mentioned have no titles other than a declaration by their professors, but as well as their experience of six years of teaching at their respective levels, they also attended lectures in Greek and Latin at our Royal University. Their young pupils have benefited from this in an outstanding way. None of them receives a wage and all these teachers offer their services voluntarily. I am requesting temporary approval for these last four, giving me a fixed time in order to re-present them or others, but this time with all the titles required by law<sup>58</sup>.

Studies are under the direction of the worthy professor of rhetoric, Fr Matthew Picco<sup>59</sup>, as they have always been up until now.

<sup>57</sup> Only the second of these, John Anfossi (1840-1913), would leave the Salesian Congregation in 1864 to join the diocese, but remained very affectionate towards Don Bosco. Angelo Savio (1835-1893) was Economist General of the Salesian Congregation for years, before leaving as a missionary for Latin America, where he died. Clerics Celestine Durando (1840-1907), Francis Cerrutti (1844-1917) and John Baptist Francesia (1838-1930) became priests, writers and authoritative members of the Salesian Society, taking on roles of responsibility.

<sup>58</sup> Don Bosco always wanted his secondary classes to be within the private system according to the legislation in force at the time (cf. no. 11), but later sought exemption from certain obligations of this legislation (such as legal titles for his teachers). The ambiguity of his position, which went undetected for some fifteen years due to support from compliant Ministers and benevolent Superintendents, was discovered and condemned at the end of the 1870s with a consequent decree closing down his classes (cf. no. 21).

<sup>59</sup> Matthew Picco (1812-1880), priest, teacher at his own privately run school.

I note here in passing that the purpose of this house has been that these secondary classes are a kind of junior seminary, for young men to be able to study who have both the intelligence and virtue but lack the means or at least have limited means.

With complete faith that my humble request will be given kind consideration I have the honour of being,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **15. To the Minister of the Interior, Ubaldino Peruzzi**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 583-584.

[Turin, May-June 1863]

Your Excellency<sup>60</sup>,

Although I remain calm concerning what your Excellency has written to me, that is [that] given the need to make some observations, you would of course have made these directly to me, nevertheless since you have passed on to me certain reports, and given that there has also been publicity in the papers I believe I should note here that there are some unfounded rumours that have been of concern to the Superintendent of Studies, the Minister for Public Education and Your Excellency yourself. Here are the rumours and here are my responses.

#### *1. The studies and spirit of our clerics are not in harmony with Government institutions today.*

R. Our clerics have the same treatises, studies and subjects as the diocese, and our clerics regularly attend classes at the seminary in Turin with the exception of certain secular subjects for which they go to our Royal University

<sup>60</sup> Ubaldino Peruzzi (1822-1891), former Minister for Public Works, took up the Interior Ministry Portfolio on 9 December 1862. Don Bosco defends his own book *History of Italy* (which went to a fourth edition in 1863) in a letter to the Ministry for Public Education (cf. E[m] II, pp. 584-585).

since they are not available at the seminary. I believe there is nothing else that needs to be proven in this regard.

*2. There is no picture of the King put up.*

R. I might say that nor is there one of the Pope or the Bishop; I could also add that there is no law which commands or advises such. But I could say other things; I can say that this second item of hearsay is totally baseless. The picture of the King is in any number of rooms, and all three of our offices have a picture of our Sovereign. His image is also in the thousands of young men who leave this house and are now honourably serving their country in the ranks of the army; it is in the hearts of the young men in this house, who offer special prayers for their sovereign morning and evening and for whoever is concerned about the good of the State with him.

*3. But the History of Italy is not according to the desired spirit.*

R. This *History of Italy* is not a school textbook. On the other hand I did write it at the invitation of the Minister for Public Education, it was printed under his very eyes and he gave me a gift of fr. 300 when I brought him the first copy. It is already in its fourth reprint, but always under the eyes of the Minister, who, and this is no small thing, recognised it with a special decree or better had it listed amongst the best books. It is true that in the earlier editions there were expressions that needed to be altered following the events of 1860-1-2. These were modified as everyone can see in the fourth edition published this year. If there should be something which still merits lack of approval it is enough to tell me and it will be corrected in the next edition.

On the other hand I have spent 23 years putting my life and all I have into public ministry. The squares, streets, prisons, hospitals have been the places I have dealt with. What I have said, done, written, were always public and no one, private individual or public official who has been in power in the past has noted anything that would censure my work.

I do not currently ask the government for employment, honours, money; I ask only moral support, help so that with common agreement I can



promote and provide the necessary development for a work that aims solely at preventing abandoned youngsters from filling up our jails, and that those who come out of these place will not have cause to return there. These things seem to me to be completely in the interests of the government.

[Fr John Bosco]

## 16. First circular for collecting funds to build the Church of Mary Help of Christians

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 41-44.

[Turin, halfway through March 1864]

*Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis. (Laurentine Litany)*

*Tu nos ab hoste protege et mortis hora suscipe. (The Church).*

*Mary Help of Christians, pray for us*

*In the final hour – of our life. Mother, protect us.*

Worthy Sir<sup>61</sup>,

While the city of Turin sees a growing number of factories every day, and its population is continually increasing, there is also a need for new buildings consecrated to the practice of our religion. Amongst other parts of the city this need is keenly felt in the district known as Valdocco (1), where amongst some 20,000 or more inhabitants there is no other church with a certain capacity except for the parish church at Borgo Dora (2), and that cannot hold more than 1,500 individuals.

However in the district around this parish there are the smaller churches of the Little House of Divine Providence and the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, where there is public access on Sundays and Holy Days. However both of these are not even big enough to serve the large community for which they were built, and there is little room left for anyone from outside.

<sup>61</sup> Other appeals to charity would follow in the three years during which the church was being built (1865-1868).

So desiring to provide for the urgent need of the inhabitants of Valdocco and for many young people who come to the Oratory on weekends from various parts of the city, and who cannot fit into the existing small church, I have decided to set about building a sufficiently large church to respond to this double purpose, and which could also in time become a parish when the ecclesiastical authorities see fit. A worthy engineer has drawn up plans in the shape of a Latin cross, already approved by the competent authority; the space inside will be around 1,000 square metres, and costs around L. 200,000.

The church will be put up in via Cottolengo on land acquired through the generosity of certain good people. This land is adjacent to the current building belonging to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. The excavations have already been dug, and we are already working on the foundations.

To bring this pious work to completion, and not having the necessary funds, I can do none other than put all my trust into the hands of Divine Providence and recommend myself to the charity of those who are devotees of Mary, amongst whom I believe I can with good reason list your worthy self.

I say devotees of Mary, because it is precisely in honour of the Immaculate Mother of Jesus Christ, under the title of *Auxilium Christianorum*, or Help of Christians, that this sacred building will be erected. While we hope that it will be an instrument of salvation for many people, it will also be a tribute of our gratitude to Mary Most Holy for the benefits received and an invitation to our most merciful Mother to always protect us in the future, and help us maintain the faith and practise all the Christian virtues in this city.

It is to you, therefore, that I have humble recourse. Whatever sum of money, whatever object, even construction materials, will be accepted with a keen sense of gratitude. It will take three years to complete this work, so if your Lordship cannot currently help out, it will be possible to do so later.

I attach some sheets for you and for other charitable people whom you may judge to propose this work of public charity to.

Where the sheet has been filled in according to the attached form, I humbly beg you to send it to my address in accordance with the work to be done.

When there is no other way of sending to its destination what your charity has inspired you to offer it could be securely done through a postal order.

I have every trust that whatever you shall offer in this exceptional case will certainly deserve copious blessings from the Blessed Virgin Mary in spiritual and temporal matters.

Finally I beg you to give kind forbearance if this has caused you any bother and I wish you every blessing from heaven. With heartfelt gratitude, I am honoured to be,

Your worthy Sir's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

*Qui elucidant me, vitam aeternam habebunt. (Eccl. 24, 31). Domus Dei aedificetur in loco suo. (Esd. 5).*

*Mary says: Those who are devoted to me will have eternal life. May the Lord's house be built in an appropriate place.*

1. This suburb is called Valdocco from the abbreviation *Val Oc. Vallis occisorum*, or *Valley of the murdered*. It was called this in ancient times because of the martyrdom here of Saints Avventore and Ottavio. This is why this part of the city seems so blessed by God as shown by its many pious and charitable institutions. It has been watered by the blood of the martyrs.

2. From the parish church at Borgo Dora drawing a line to the church of the Consolata and that of St Donato, then across to the Royal powder factory as far as the River Dora, there is an area covered by houses where 35,000 inhabitants live without a public church.

## II. NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPANSION OF SALESIAN WORK

*From 1863 onwards the Salesian work which arose at Valdocco and through other oratories in Turin began to expand rapidly, as already indicated, through numerous foundations first in Italy—Piedmont, Liguria (no. 18) and then in other regions—and finally in France and Latin America (nos. 21, 24, 25, 27).*

*Such broad development was helped by the new school reform in Italy, (1864), the difficulties diocesan seminaries were having, the continual requests for Salesian schools in Italy, France (1875), Spain (1881), England (1887), especially following the diffusion of a positive image of “a new Congregation for new times” as the Society of St Francis de Sales was thought to be in many places. Then the definitive approval of the Salesian Constitutions (1874) ended up by encouraging the opening of new charismatic horizons in South American mission lands (1875).*

*Obviously the rapid expansion was made possible above all by the growth in both male and female vocations, including adult vocations (no. 20). For the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians the Founder worked at acquiring the future Mother House at Nizza Monferrato (no. 22).*

*Don Bosco sought to encourage everyone with a new version of the history of the Oratory (no. 17) and through circular letters.*

*The enthusiastic, broad and very detailed presentation by Don Bosco to the Holy See on the moral and material state of the Salesian Society in March 1879 (no. 24), which indicated all Salesian works at the time and those about to be founded, aroused more than concern and a consequent request for clarifications from pontifical authorities, which the founder tried to respond to accurately (nos. 25, 26).*

*At the same time Pope Leo XIII entrusted him with the building of the church and work of the Sacred Heart in the new capital of the Kingdom of Italy (no. 28). All this while in the old capital, Turin, he was defending himself against the closure of his secondary classes at Valdocco, by having recourse to all legal venues around the country (no. 23) and even the eviction of his boys who were living there.*

*These boys always kept their school in grateful memory, so much so that when they became past pupils, many of them would go back each year to celebrate Don Bosco's name day and also hear a word from him (no. 29).*

*In its expansion outside of Piedmont and beyond Italian borders Salesian work had to confront difficulties, hostility and suffering. In Italy from the late 1870s onwards in fact it had to deal with openly secular politicians and not rarely anticlerical ones. That notwithstanding he did not hesitate to get into contact with them and also ask them for financial assistance and protection, given the broad activity of the Salesians in looking after Italian immigrants (no. 27); he founded houses in France at the time of the Third Republic which had politics that were adverse to religious Congregations (different from Spain in the Bourbon restoration); in the new liberal States in South America he had to deal with governments and local authorities who did not hesitate in traumatically breaking relations with the Holy See and promulgating anticlerical and Masonic legislation. For all of this one can logically only go to studies on Salesian work in the individual countries<sup>62</sup> and Salesian houses, as well as some works which sum up the situation<sup>63</sup>. For mission development in particular, see further on for the documents in the relevant section<sup>64</sup>.*

## **17. Conference to Salesians on the history of the Oratory**

ASC A0040605 *Cronaca dell'anno 1864*, ms by Giovanni Bonetti, pp. 9-22  
(cf. MB, II 406-407).

On the evening of May 8, 1864, when people had gathered for his conference [Don Bosco] began thus: Already for some time I have wanted to

<sup>62</sup> For Italy the statistics published for the 150th anniversary of Salesian work might be useful: Francesco MOTTO (Ed.), *Salesiani di don Bosco in Italia. 150 anni di educazione*. Torino, LAS 2011; Grazia LOPARCO - Maria Teresa SPIGA, *Le Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice in Italia. Donne nell'educazione*. Roma, LAS 2011.

<sup>63</sup> E. g. Arthur J. LENTI, *Don Bosco. History and spirit*. Vol. 5. *Institutional expansion* and Vol. 6 *Expansion of the Salesian work in the New World and Ecclesiological confrontation at home*. Edited by Aldo Giraud. Roma, LAS 2009.

<sup>64</sup> See pp. 251-307.

reveal in its entirety the reason behind our Society; in other conferences we were speaking of the purpose, how to achieve it, but I have never explained everything to you. But first of all I preface this by saying that I intend to oblige each confrere not to speak about what I say just now with any person who does not belong, even if later he should leave the Society. I could not bring myself to tell this story, I prayed about it, and the idea has not left my mind now for some time, so believing that it will be for the greater glory of God, this evening I have decided to tell you everything<sup>65</sup>. Here it is then.

Already as a child I felt inclined to do things for my friends, and other youngsters, telling them edifying stories, teaching them. So I attracted them with games at home and after having amused them somewhat, I would stand up on a bench and then give them some words of encouragement, tell them parts of a sermon I had heard before, and got them to say the Rosary, sing the litanies; not only small boys but young men of 18, 20 years of age would come to these functions in front of the house in our little yard on Sundays, and it stirred me seeing how many were ignorant of matters to do with the faith, how unwillingly they went to church and then all the other problems that belong to this age.

I continued to do this while I was living in the college. And I saw how I needed to get involved in the upbringing of youth when I was a priest in Turin, where I was able to speak with various young men whom I found there, and although they were grown up they were very ignorant of the faith. I began to ask many of them to come and see me, at first for some hours on a Sunday they came and found me at the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*) and there I instructed them, heard their confessions, advised them, and they loved me and I loved them.

Then I went to The Refuge, and there I continued to help them with instruction, and the number of them grew enormously. I heard confessions on Saturday evenings or the following morning, or on Feast Days; we said Mass,

<sup>65</sup> Other versions of the same history of the Oratory were rather more reserved: see nos. 10, 13 and Part 4, pp. 1170-1308.

gave them instruction; in the evening we taught catechism, many priests helping me, and things went very well.

But the time came when I had to leave The Refuge, since the Marchioness wanted this place for girls only; we were without any place to go for our meetings, and for catechism classes, and without a church. We looked for a place and we found one; but just as we were able to go there two or three times, NN forced us out saying he could not put up with the boys who were yelling too much. There were lots of lies and insults and we were forced to find another place; but the day after the good gentleman had an accident and soon went to the next life.

We then went to the holy ground [cemetery]; but the chaplain could only put up with us a couple of times, then went off and complained about us and sent us away. He also met with an accident two days later and died.

We were without a place and no one wanted us. However, given these two deaths, and such sudden deaths of people who had persecuted us, we were convinced the Lord was with us. Not that I wished evil on anyone, but I was convinced that it was God who wanted things this way and that no one would harass us. Meanwhile I was distressed.

It was then that someone paid me a visit and I saw a house not far from the Refuge which someone pointed out to me was destined for me and my boys. The following morning I immediately told Dr Borel: "Now we have a place ... And we have it for tomorrow", I told him. I immediately went to see the place. Looking around, I saw there was a house of ill-repute where vile things were happening. I was very dejected and I said: "These are diabolical illusions", then I was embarrassed at having thought this so quickly and said nothing more. We continued on merrily going to one place or another for our meetings, hearing confessions, preaching and going to Mass at the Consolata.

But then came another visit and I was shown the same house. So I thought then of tomorrow, withdrew not far from the place and wept, and I could not convince myself that I had to go to the place of ill-repute. So I said: it is time to pray and ask God to enlighten me and pull me out of all this mess. Then

came a third visit and again I was shown the same house, and this time I heard a voice telling me: “Have no fear of going to that house. Do you not know that God can enrich his people from the spoils and riches of the Egyptians?”

Then I was happy and I looked for ways to get hold of that house when lo and behold the owner of the field where we usually went came and found me. He told me that he longer wanted me to come to this field with the boys since he said they were trampling all the land and no grass could grow there any longer. I reminded him of the contract but he told me he would let me off the rent and everything, but he would no longer allow these gatherings.

So there I was again without a place. But then the next day the owner of the house I had seen came to me and told me: “I hear you are looking for a house for a laboratory; well, if you would like to rent mine, I will let it out to you.” “Certainly—I’m looking for a house for an oratory.” “Yes, a laboratory” the good man added. “No, not a laboratory, an oratory.” “Yes, yes, oratory, laboratory, it’s all the same.”

So I was ever more convinced this was God’s will, and I set off to take a look at the inside of the house and found it in a bad state, the ceiling was so low it could not really serve as a chapel. I said: “This is a little low to make it into a church”. “You want to make a church?” the other one asked me. “Yes”, and he was very happy about this and we began digging down more than a metre since we couldn’t lift the roof, and this way we got things right and had our church. Some serious disputes (*contrasti grandi*).

Then came a fourth visit in which I was made to see the house as it is at the present with the church, the main altar in the same place where it is found now; and above it was written in large letters: *Haec est domus mea; inde exhibit gloria mea*. This left such an impression on my mind and I was so convinced that I told everyone frankly: “Some time soon I will have a beautiful and spacious house here, with our own church big enough to hold many boys.” One day I found myself on a large plot of land with the boys around and I told them: “The high altar for our church will be in this same place where I am standing now” and that’s how it was. When the architect began drawing the plans up, without me pointing to the spot he said: “This is where the main



altar will be”, and he had chosen the exact spot I had told the boys some years before: “Here is where the main altar will be.”

And then came a fifth visit. In this one a person led me to a place where there was a nice road all covered with roses, not only below but also above in the form of a roof, and all around there were roses; I had never seen anything as beautiful before; and he asked me to start walking. Well, I did not want to crush such beautiful roses, so I took off my shoes. But I took a step or two and then, ouch, I had to go back since I had trodden on a thorn which really hurt, and I saw that under these beautiful roses there were lots of very sharp thorns, and not only below but everywhere. Then I said: “But you need shoes here” and others watching me added: “Certainly you need shoes.” So that’s what I did. I had a large number of priests and other people who came along with me. I began walking again and despite all my precautions just the same from time to time I trod on one or other of those large thorns. However, I got to the end of the road.

Then I turned to look back and of all those companions I saw there was nobody left. I was so upset and quickly went back to see what they were doing or where they were, but I saw nobody. I began weeping bitterly and said: “Is it possible that everyone has abandoned me and I am left alone on this road?” But then just as I was going on weeping and feeling bad about things I saw a great crowd of priests, clerics and other people coming toward me. When they reached me they said: “Here we are ready to follow you; tell us what to do and we will obey.” Then I calmed down and told them: “Well then, if you are ready to set out along this road, let’s get going”, and they all set out and I followed on behind.

Then they lost courage and began to turn back. A very large number of them were happy and courageous and got to the end of the road. I did too. Then we saw a very large and magnificent hall in front of us where there were other beautiful roses, and I looked—they were all without thorns and gave off the sweetest of fragrance. The person who was accompanying me spoke to me saying: “Have you understood all this?” “No,” I answered, “I beg you to explain everything to me” and then he said: “You know, then, that this road

stands for the care you have to take of young people. You need to use shoes to walk on this road, meaning mortification. The beautiful roses are a symbol of the ardent charity which must distinguish all your helpers in the education of youth. The thorns stand for all the obstacles, sufferings, inconveniences you will have to put up with while doing this. But never lose courage: with charity and mortification you will win out. And at the end you will have roses without thorns as you have seen in that rich hall you came to.” Of course I found myself in my bedroom, just having woken up from this dream.

The time of trial came, 1848; my helpers began setting down laws that I did not approve of. They wanted to lead the boys out into the squares and also get us to cry out “Long live Italy” and some even began preaching this way to the boys. I was soon forced to get into the pulpit and gainsay everything they had said and I was forced to tell them not to come any more, I had no further need of their work. The few that still remained were further alienated from me by the others who were angry, and I was left on my own. We can add here that I continued to say with much emphasis that I could already see a large, beautiful house with a large church; I was not only laughed at but it came to a point where some of those who seemed to me to be the most calm, and also my friends, took me aside and advised me to go to the mental asylum telling me that if I tackled this illness at its beginnings I could be returned to health, these crazy ideas would pass if I got away from it all for a while. But I told them and everyone who was laughing at me that I knew what I was talking about, was fully in my senses, and I told them again that it would not be many years before they would see what I was saying happen. So I had to hear confessions, say Mass, preach, have recreation with the boys, teach catechism, sing vespers, do instructions, give Benediction all by myself; no one came any more to give me a hand.

With God’s help I always kept going. Then I began to have boys at home and I taught them Latin, and in the evening while I was eating I demonstrated plainchant to some, others music, a sight never seen before; but I was happy because I saw that it would not be long before I had boys who could even know how to teach these things to me. Some clerics I was teaching began to help me in some things.

Meanwhile the house which initially was only let to me, I purchased, with the help of some charitable people; we soon began putting up a part of the workshop. In 1851 we laid the foundation stone for the new church, and things were going well. Some of the same ones who thought I was crazy, came back to me when they saw how things were going and one of the ones who had been the most excited about things at the time, often came to preach in this same church, and used to say with great passion: "It was me who was crazy, not Don Bosco." Archbishop Fransoni<sup>66</sup> was very happy with our work and on one occasion when he called me he said: "Don Bosco you are but mortal; it would be good for you to also think about how the work of the oratories can continue after your death." From then on I began thinking of putting down the foundations for a Congregation of people who would be all consecrated to the good of youth.

But then came stormy days and Archbishop Fransoni had to go into exile. From there he always continued protecting us and helping us in all kinds of ways. I needed to take advice from people with their finger on the pulse and this is why I went to Rome. There I went to find Pius IX, who after I had spoken a few words said to me: "Don Bosco, you are mortal; have you thought of perpetuating the work of the oratories?" I assure you I was moved to tears when the Supreme Pontiff spoke these words to me that Archbishop Fransoni had already said and I replied: "Holy Father, this is why I came to Rome", and we began to speak at length. On one occasion we spent almost an hour and a half talking about these things and it was he himself who told me how to lay down this foundation. So I told the Pope all these things that I have told you. No one else knew these things, only the Pope. Someone might now well say that these things are all for the glory of Don Bosco. Nothing of the sort: all I have to do is render a fearful account to God as to whether I have worked in such a way as to fulfil God's divine will. I am convinced that this has only been God's project and one he has deigned to show us. I have

<sup>66</sup> Luigi Fransoni (1789-1862), Archbishop of Turin from 1831 until his death, was expelled by the Government and exiled to Lyon in 1850, but he continued to govern the diocese through his vicar general. He placed great trust in Don Bosco, supporting him especially at the beginning and at crucial moments of the Oratory.

always been of the opinion that I could achieve these things. Sometimes I will certainly have been imprudent, and I don't want to tell you about these occasions, but I am always at work, and everything I do I have done for this end. In afflictions and tribulations, in persecutions I have always been given strength, and have never lost courage. The Lord has always been with us and will be if with courage, mortification and spiritual charity we work to raise up and draw souls and the young to him.

### **18. Agreement between the city council and Don Bosco to open a school and boarding section at Alassio (1870)**

Archivio Comunale della città di Alassio, *Registro deliberazioni*<sup>67</sup>; ed. in MB IX, 875-877.

The year of the Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy, on the first day of the month of June, in Alassio, in the city council. Present were the following gentlemen: 1. B. Lazzaro Brea, Mayor and President; 2. Count G. Batta Morteo 3. Francesco Biancardi. Rev. Fr John Bosco was also in attendance.

With the above-mentioned gathered at city hall, the president explained the purpose of the present meeting as being to draw up an agreement relating to the opening of a school with a boarding section in this city, Alassio, a project of the Rev. Fr John Bosco already decided on by this council in its decree on the second of December one thousand eight hundred and sixty nine, and approved by the school council of the province of Genoa by decree on March 30, 1870. The above-mentioned council team was then called upon to draw up such an act.

The city council: following on from this invitation, and noting the above-mentioned order and decree; after having agreed with the aforementioned Don Bosco on certain additions or alterations to the said project which would

<sup>67</sup> After the brief experience of managing the seminary at Giaveno (1859-1862), and opening colleges (school plus boarding section) at Mirabello (1863), Lanzo Torinese (1864) and Cherasco (1869), Don Bosco drew up this agreement for opening the first house in Liguria. We publish it as a model of many other agreements drawn up for Italy and overseas, after lengthy negotiations with local, civil and church institutions.

be favourable to the council, as well as certain clarifications they considered opportune; bearing in mind what is laid down by art. 93, no. 4, of the municipal legislation, has come to the following agreement with Don Bosco:

Art. 1. Father John Bosco commits himself and those who follow him to opening a school with a boarding section in this city, Alassio, and to offering primary and secondary education to local boys, and to those from outside the municipality who wish to take part.

Art. 2. The same Father Bosco will offer five teachers for the primary classes with appropriate registration, and will also provide suitable and sufficient number of teachers for the five secondary classes. Furthermore he will provide a technical course of French and Italian language, geography and arithmetic, spread throughout the secondary classes and corresponding to the subjects as given in normal technical and classical courses, without Father Bosco being obliged to add further teachers other than those established for the secondary classes.

Art. 3. Instruction in the primary and secondary classes will be offered according to the legislation and discipline established in programmes by the Ministry for Public Education.

Art. 4. All expenses for the furnishings of the boarding section will be borne by Father Bosco. The city council for its part as proprietor, and in conformity with what is prescribed in art. 1604 of the Italian *Civil Code* commits itself to:

1. All repairs needed for the use and maintenance of the building and attached areas.

2. Providing and maintaining the furnishings and other things necessary for the primary and secondary classrooms, and will retain the ownership of such.

Art. 5. The city council commits to paying Father John Bosco nine thousand lire a year for the teaching staff of the primary and secondary classes up to the two classes of Rhetoric, which will be at his expense, other than allowing him an income from fees as indicated further on.

Art. 6. The city council also commits to paying the same Father Bosco two thousand lire for five years for expenses for initially setting up, and then maintaining the boarding section.

Art. 7. This present contract will last for five years with the intention of it being renewable, unless one of the parties gives prior notice of five years that it will not be renewed.

In the event that for circumstances beyond our control the contract is to be dissolved within the first five years, the city council will no longer be bound to pay the annual amount, nor other costs in the following years.

Art. 8. Should a provincial school be opened in Alassio, Father Bosco is obliged to bring the number of classes in the municipal school, at both secondary and upper secondary levels up to the number prescribed by law, subject to proper understanding with the competent provincial council.

Art. 9. The city council temporarily offers the priest Don Bosco the use of the existing school for the aforementioned classes, and the Palazzo Durante with its attached courtyard and small garden for the boarding section. When this building is definitively established as a school and boarding section, the council will also provide the garden run by Giovanni Schivo, and which is adjacent to the said building.

Art. 10. For the secondary classes, as agreed by both parties, a fee will be established according to the laws dealing with teaching students, and can be fixed by Father Bosco; that is, for the two Rhetoric years the *maximum* will not exceed thirty lire, and for Grammar level, twenty four lire. Pupils from Alassio can be given a reduction, that is, the *maximum* for the Rhetoric years to be set at twenty lire, and for the Grammar years, sixteen lire. Poor students, those recognised as such by the council, are exempt. The council will see to fee collection through the appropriate role of fee collector. Those who board at the college, and for that matter all pupils in the primary classes, will be exempt from this fee.

Art. 11. We state that it is permissible for any day student to attend classes for individual subjects given to the boarding students and they will fit in with the discipline and timetable of each class.

Art. 12. In terms of arrangements for behaviour and religious instruction, the Council defers to the prudence of Father Bosco and the parish priest of the district in which the college is located.

Art. 13. The management and administration of the school, boarding section and classes is entrusted totally to Father Bosco, but dependent on the district delegate, according to laws currently in force for Public Education.

However he will be extremely grateful for any advice or counsel the mayor, members of the council deem necessary for the academic, moral, and hygienic benefit of the school grounds and buildings, and pupils who attend there. He will deal directly with Father Bosco concerning these matters, or with whoever represents him at the school and boarding section at Alassio.

Art. 14. Classes will be opened at the commencement of the 1870-1871 school year.

These minutes have been drawn up, read and confirmed by the undersigned.

Fr John Bosco  
B. L. Brea president  
G. B. Morteo councillor for the aged  
G. B. Armato secretary.  
V. - Approved.

Genoa 20 June 1870,

Prefect and President of the Council for Public Safety

E. Mayr

Registered in Alassio, first July 1870, in Reg. 7 sheet 67 N. 458, paid dues of a hundred and fifty lire, eighty cents, received by the undersigned.

Morando, receiving clerk  
copy conform for official use  
Alassio, 6 July 1870  
Council secretary  
B. G. Armato

## **19. Circular for the Church of St John the Evangelist with hospice and classes for poor children in Viale del Re in Turin**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 261-262.

Turin, 12 October 1870

A densely populated area has sprung up in Turin city from Piazza d'Armi as far as the Po for about three kilometres, without there being schools for the children nor churches for religious worship.

And amongst this population, as everyone knows, the Protestants have put up their so-called church with a hospice, classrooms and an infant school.

So due to the deplorable lack of nearby churches and Catholic schools, and due to the nearby heterodox establishment it is a serious ordeal for fathers of families to send their sons and daughters where they have to mix with Protestant children and to the infant school under the specious pretext that necessity has no laws.

For many years the *Oratory of St Aloysius* has existed there with classrooms and a playground, but along the extension of via San Pio V this area has been divided in two and this makes it unable to serve its purpose.

With the help of charitable people land was purchased between via San Pio V and Via Madama Cristina, fronting on viale del Re, with a view to providing in some way for the seriousness of this need.

The intention is to build a church which can also serve for the adults, but with buildings large enough for a school, hospice, playground for the children to play on Sundays and where they can be protected from the dangers of immorality and prepared for some art or trade.

With the support of Divine Providence work has begun; the boundary wall is already finished, and while a worthy engineer is completing the drawings for the church and connected building we are also going about finding construction materials.

But the difficult times we are going through, the poverty felt everywhere are a great obstacle to completing a work such as this, for which we have not



a single penny in the budget. The charity of Catholics has never diminished in other similar situations and we are certain it will not be lacking now; the situation is too serious to doubt it.

As everyone can easily be convinced, we are dealing here with preserving a great number of children, and perhaps also adults and entire families, from the serious and deadly danger of being led into error against the holy Faith, and almost unconsciously being alienated from the holy Catholic Church and her supreme Head and Pastor, ending up, indeed finding themselves caught up in heresy almost without knowing it.

We are seriously inviting and warmly asking those who love the glory of God, the good of the holy Catholic Church and the salvation of their neighbour, to reflect on these issues.

We hope that works will be completed in two years and in this period of time we make a humble but warm appeal to all good people, asking them to give some offerings that God will inspire them to, for exceptional needs.

Such offerings can be money or any other material that could help with the building or decorating of the church or its adjacent building.

This is about saving souls, and whoever offers a kindly hand will have sure hope of hearing these words from our Saviour one day: "You saved a soul, your own was predestined."

The Supreme Pontiff Pius IX has praised this enterprise and blesses all who take part in it. His Grace, our beloved Archbishop, not only encourages us, but is playing his part with whatever means his circumstances allow. We appeal to Christians in general, but especially those living in the vicinity or who have some land there.

The church is dedicated to *Saint John the Evangelist*, and the altarpiece will represent the Saviour entrusting St John to Our Blessed Lady at the foot of the cross, as is described in the holy Gospel.

Offerings can be given to the undersigned or to Fr Traversa, the priest at San Massimo, to whose parish the land chosen for the building belongs.

May God fill with graces and Heavenly favours all worthy donors, and grant them happy days of rich reward here on earth and much more in blessed eternity. So be it<sup>68</sup>.

Fr John Bosco

## **20. The work of Mary Help of Christians for vocations to the Ecclesiastical State**

Critical Ed. in *Opera di Maria Ausiliatrice per le vocazioni allo stato ecclesiastico benedetta e raccomandata dal Santo Padre Pio Papa IX*. Torino, Tipografia dell'Orat. di S. Francesco di Sales 1875 (OE XXVII, 1-8).

Turin, 30 August 1875

Your Excellency,

I ask your Lordship to be kind enough to read what I set out here concerning the Work of Mary Help of Christians the plan and programme of which I am attaching. Without me explaining at length you can easily understand what its purpose is; to prepare older young men over time to be good priests. I believe you could lend me effective support in two ways:

1. By taking an interest in this Work, supporting it, making it known, promoting it with whatever moral and material means, which with zeal and charity your Lordship can, in good time.
2. And if you know some student who fulfils the conditions for the programme, you could kindly send him in my direction.

Full of faith in your cooperation, I ask God to duly recompense you, while with profound gratitude I have the honour of being,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Two years later he took the initiative of building the church of San Secondo sending a similar circular out to citizens living in the area between Porta Nuova and Piazza d'Armi: cf. E(m) III, pp. 448-449. But the building would be completed by the Archbishop.

<sup>69</sup> In tune with the ecclesial significance of devotion to Mary under the title of Help of Christians, and which was growing rapidly after building the church dedicated to her at Valdocco, Don Bosco, with the Pope's

## Work of Mary Help of Christians

*Messis quidem multa, operarii autem pauci;  
Rogate ergo Dominum messia ut mittat operarios  
in messem suam. (St Luke. 10: 2.)  
The harvest is great, but the workers  
are few: ask then the Lord  
of the harvest to send workers into his harvest.*

For years we have been lamenting the need for workers for the Gospel, and the lessening of vocations to the ecclesiastical state. This lack of vocations is felt in every diocese in Italy and throughout Europe; it is felt in religious congregations who lack postulants, in the foreign missions who are constantly saying with St Francis Xavier: *Send us workers for the Gospel to help us*. Indeed we know of not a few foreign missions close to going out of existence for the sole reasons that they lack workers for the Gospel. So it is necessary to pray to the Lord of the harvest, that he may send workers into his mystical vineyard: but we have to add our cooperation to our prayers. Already in Germany, France, England and many parts of Italy charitable works have been founded for this purpose and they show good results, but they are insufficient for the many and urgent needs. While we highly praise this works that have been begun, and pray to God with all our heart, that he allow them to prosper even more to his greater glory, it seems appropriate to propose yet another that perhaps could more quickly be of help. This is a course of studies *for young adults who intend to consecrate themselves to God in the ecclesiastical state*.

From experience we know that of ten youngsters who begin their studies with an idea of enrolling in the army of Jesus Christ, on average only two

assent and the recommendation of many bishops, launched a vocations programme with a great future. The Work of Mary Help of Christians for adult vocations, begun in September 1875, found immediate success, both at Valdocco under the guidance of Fr Luigi Guanella, and at Genoa-Sampierdarena, where Don Bosco in 1877 reprinted, with additions, that first set of statutes reproduced here.

get as far as the priesthood, while from older young adults who have already thought about and studied their call, the number is eight out of ten.

We have also seen that over a very short period, therefore at less expense, they complete their literary studies, because they separated from the younger ones who have to gradually work through all their classes, and thanks to shortened courses can very soon reach their goal.

For these and other reasons we are proposing a course of secondary studies for young adults including those who are less well off, but who have the exclusive intention of an ecclesiastical career.

### *Fees*

No fees are set, the work is entrusted totally to the piety of the faithful. Each one can help as a donor, *correspondent or benefactor*.

1. *Donors* commit themselves to giving 10 cents [2 *soldi*] a month or one franc a year. For priests it is enough that they celebrate one Mass providing the stipend for the benefit of the Work.

2. The *Correspondents* are those who, in honour of the twelve apostles, become the leaders of one or more groups of a dozen donors, collect their offerings and send them to the director of the Work. Correspondents can accept with gratitude whatever small offering their may be, even if it is just 5 cents [1 *soldo*] a year.

3. *Benefactors* is the name given to those who are happy to give some offering of money or in kind for example foodstuffs, linen, books and the like.

Those who offer fr. 300 a year can send any student of their choice to the institute. If the offering is fr. 800 the student will be kept on for the full time of his literary studies. Offerings will be sent to Father John Bosco in Turin, or to Father Paul Albera<sup>70</sup> the director of the St Vincent's hospice where the

<sup>70</sup> Fr Paul Albera (1845-1921), a pupil of Don Bosco and his second successor as Rector Major of the Salesian Society (1910-1921).

new pupils will be gathered for now. At the end of the year correspondents will be given a particular account of the number of pupils, offerings received and results obtained.

### *Observations*

This work is placed under the aegis of the Blessed Virgin the Help of Christians, since Mary was proclaimed by the Church as *Magnum et singulare in Ecclesia praesidium*; she will certainly deign to protect a work aimed at finding good ministers for the Church. In fact God in these times has granted countless graces to whoever calls on his august Mother under the title of Help of Christians.

Does this work cause problems for any other already existing work?

It does not cause them problems but supports them. Without priests, preaching, sacraments, what would become of the *Work of the Propagation of the Faith*, of the *Holy Childhood* and all the other pious works?

### *Spiritual advantages*

1. Those who send along even the smallest offering will receive a special blessing from the Holy Father, who blesses and recommends the *Work of Mary Help of Christians*.

2. The merit of having contributed to a great work of charity. *One cannot do something better*, says St Vincent de Paul, *than contributing to producing a priest*.

3. A Mass will be said every day in the church of Mary Help of Christians: our pupils will attend Mass and offer their communions with special prayers for their benefactors.

4. The donors will benefit from the merits of all masses, preaching, other good works, and the wonderful merits from souls whom the priests, formed by their charity, will win over for God as they exercise their ministry. Certainly the words of St Augustine apply to them: *Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti*.

## 5. Indulgences etc.

Indulgences will be described separately, and a separate note will be sent out to anyone who puts his or her name to this work of charity directed to the general good of the Church.

### *Programme*

#### *Purpose of the Work*

The purpose of this work is to bring together young adults who have a clear desire to do their literary studies thanks to suitable courses so they can embrace the ecclesiastical state.

#### *Acceptance*

1. Each student must belong to an upright family, be healthy, strong and of good character, and between 16 and 30 years of age. Acceptance will be given preferably to those who have completed military service or who have some probability of being exempted from it (1).

2. They should have a certificate declaring that their behaviour has been edifying, that they attend parish functions and frequent the sacraments, and that they have a clear desire to embrace the ecclesiastical career and have at least completed a primary level course in Italian.

3. Birth certificate, smallpox certificate, and a note indicating if they can pay at least some of the programme's expenses.

4. They will not go for holidays during the autumn holiday season. They will find the required relaxation at the college or some other place chosen for this purpose.

5. When the literature course is finished each student is free to become a religious, go to the foreign missions or return to his diocese and ask his bishop for the faculty of taking the clerical habit. In this latter case the director of the work will make it his task to humbly recommend the candidates to their

respective ordinary so that according to merit he may deign to take them into his kind consideration.

### *Study*

1. Studies cover the classical course up to but not including philosophy; teaching extends only to Italian, Latin, history, geography, arithmetic, the metric system and elements of Greek.

2. Excluded from these classes will be those who have not attained the age described above, or who do not intend to consecrate themselves to the ecclesiastical state.

3. The fixed fee is fr. 24 a month, paid in advance each term. fr. 300 per year. For the complete time of literary studies, fr. 800.

4. This fee covers all expenses for literary classes, plainchant, music, recitals, food and lodging, medical, haircuts. Expenses for clothing, hosiery, repairs, medicines and books must be paid by the students.

5. Meal arrangements are as follows: breakfast and morning tea - sufficient bread; soup, second course, wine and bread if desired for lunch; supper will be soup, bread and butter and more bread if desired.

### *Clothing*

Students will have secular attire, and no uniform is required. On entering they will bring two sets of clothing for summer and two for winter, one for weekday wear in the house, the other for Sundays or if going out.

The wardrobe should include at least 6 shirts - 4 sheets - a blanket and winter cover - pillow with three pillowslips - 6 pairs of socks - 3 pairs of underwear - sweater - 8 handkerchiefs - 4 towels - 2 pairs of shoes - 2 hats or birettas - a trunk - a mattress 175 m. wide, 0.70 m. long.

The establishment will provide only a litter and straw, for which there will be a once-off payment of fr. 12.

N.B. Requests for acceptance should be made to Father John Bosco in Turin, or Father Paul Albera, the director of St Vincent's hospice in Sampierdarena.

With ecclesiastical approval<sup>71</sup>.

(1) Those over thirty can be accepted, so long as they have already completed a course in literature.

## **21. To Fr Joseph-Marie Timon-David**

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 178-179.

[Varazze, after 20 July 1876]

Dear Father<sup>72</sup>,

Lawyer Ernest Michel from Nice, a good friend of mine, has often hinted at a large number of Italian youths who with their family or in search of work come to Marseilles.

They are barely educated either school-wise or in religion, and do not speak French, so they are exposed to serious moral risk. In saying that he indicated that one of our houses could do some good. This was the main reason for his proposal.

As far as you are concerned Father, I am telling you with good heart, that if I can in any way help, or throw my bit in amongst all the works of charity that exist in Marseilles, I would willingly do so so long as:

1. I have prior agreement of the archbishop, on whom I intend to depend not only in matters of religion but in anything he might simply be able to offer advice on.

2. That your honourable self judges it convenient and that your work for young workers gives me moral support.

<sup>71</sup> The setting up of the work for adult vocations and its dissemination in print was hindered by Archbishop Gastaldi the archbishop of Turin.

<sup>72</sup> A French priest (1823-1891), founder in 1847 of the *Work of the Sacred Heart for young workers* and in 1852 of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart serving the same group. The foundation of the Salesian house in Marseilles in 1878 began with this contract.



3. Our houses live off Providence and we need very little, and we never seek an annual recompense. It is enough for me to have a place where we can gather the poorest of them on Sundays, and provide shelter for those who are completely abandoned. We have seen that any already existing works have never clashed with what the Salesians do.

With that as a premise I would kindly ask you to speak on my behalf to His Grace the Archbishop of Marseilles and get his general opinion, and if you have something to suggest to me in this regard, you will do me a great favour by letting me know.

In the course of next autumn when I go to our house in Nice it would be easy for me to take a trip to Marseilles and more positive explanations can be given on the spot.

If you or others ever come down to our parts, I will willingly offer you this house for whatever service it might be able to render.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always remain with us. Please pray for me. I remain your,

Most humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

## **22. Circular for the house of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Nizza Monferrato**

ASC A1760326 Circulars, invitations to others, written up by a third person with author's corrections.; ed. in E III, pp. 306-307.

Turin, March 1878

Worthy Sir,

Nearby the city of Nizza Monferrato a convent with attached church has existed for some centuries under the title of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Graces. All the citizens still recall the time this blessed place was a residence for holy monks whose austerity of life and constant fervent prayer, brought blessings from Heaven on the Christian people.

The church which was open to public worship, and where the monks from the monastery regularly officiated, was a true sanctuary, a peaceful refuge of piety where many sought consolation from the travails of life, and not a few rediscovered the way to salvation that they had lost. But when the monks were forced out by political events, the church and monastery were sold and converted to profane use as a wine storage area.

This profanation of a holy place caused bitter regrets in the hearts of the faithful, and everyone requested that it be returned to pious use, and many devout citizens asked for this by making vows and through prayer. It was then that, encouraged by good and respectable clergy and lay people I set about things and with agreement of the bishop of the diocese and with religious, previously having sought permission of the Holy See, I bought the monastery and church and am now repairing them so they can be returned to use for public worship.

The church will be provided with priests so that the faithful can comfortably do their devotions and the monastery will change into a house of education<sup>73</sup>, and while this will be a nice addition to Nizza as a city it will also be an easy means for raising their children in knowledge and piety.

But to complete such a task considerable funds are needed, since it costs 32 thousand francs and only half has been paid. To do the restoration, provide furnishings we completely lack the essential means. Everyone knows that this poor person writing would not have begun the work unless he trusted in the Lord's Providence and in the piety of those who have such a work at heart which will be useful to religion and civil society.

Therefore I address myself to your honourable self asking you to help in whatever way your situation allows and piety suggests.

Other than money we will accept construction materials, furniture, clothing, wood for building or for burning and anything else that could contribute to the above-mentioned purpose.

<sup>73</sup> Don Bosco does not explain that the institute would be used for education of girls under the direction of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

While we would be grateful for large offerings, we will be grateful for even the smallest, since the Lord takes no less account of the widow's mite than the larger almsgiving of the rich.

In order to receive these offerings in Nizza we have appointed a commission in the kind persons of Fr Bisio, the vicar of san *Giovanni*, the surveyor, Mr Luigi Terzani, and Mr Berta.

In Turin, with the undersigned.

In towns belonging to the diocese of Acqui the work is humbly recommended to the zeal and charity of reverend parish priests, reequoting them to promote and receive any donations and to send them to the writer or to the aforementioned Fr Bisio in any way they judge to be suitable.

I am happy though to assure all worthy donors of the apostolic blessing of the new reigning Pontiff, Leo XIII, who willingly deigned to impart it on February 23 last.

For my part, as well as my sincere and unalterable gratitude, I assure them of the warm offering of prayers, masses, all the works of religion which take place every day in the above-mentioned church, and thus imploring the copious blessings of Heaven on these benefactors.

With great gratitude I have the honour of being,

Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **23. The Oratory of St Francis De Sales**

Critical ed. in *L'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales – Ospizio di beneficenza. Esposizione del sacerdote Giovanni Bosco*. Torino, Tipografia salesiana, 1879 (OE XXXI, 257-267)<sup>74</sup>.

[Turin 1879]

*The Oratory of St Francis de Sales is not a private secondary school*<sup>75</sup>

The designation 'private secondary school', incorrectly assigned to the hospice of St Francis de Sales in recent days, has caused harm and no minor disturbance to the youngsters who live here.

With a view to giving the school authorities and other authorities of State a correct idea of the nature and purpose of this institute some historical information will certainly be of help, from which it will be apparent what its relationships with the public authorities have been, and how these latter have consistently recognised it as a work of charity from its beginnings until the present.

*The beginnings and the purpose of this Oratory*

It is to be noted how, frequenting the prisons in this city, the writer could ascertain that a great number of youngsters were paying the penalty for crimes that neglect and lack of consideration rather than malice had dragged them into. He was also convinced that such young men, had they a kind soul to support them at the time of their release, would not commit these crimes again; and many who were at risk, mostly foreigners, thanks to fatherly help, could easily stay away from doing wrong.

<sup>74</sup> The appendices quoted here are not published.

<sup>75</sup> On May 16, 1879 a ministerial decree forced the closure of the secondary classes at Valdocco because the teachers did not have legal titles or registration. Don Bosco appealed to the Minister for Public Education (26 June), and made a petition to King Umberto I (6 July). He asked the King for the annulment of this decree (13 November) and the King passed on this request to the Council of State (24 December). At the same time the Printing Press at Valdocco printed both the Petition reproduced here, and his recourse to the Council of State (OE XXX, 449-480), in which he claimed that the ministerial decree was illegitimate. The matter was closed when this recourse was rejected (29 November 1881), but in the meantime Don Bosco had seen to registered teachers.

It was with this purpose that I began the work of the oratories or recreation centres in 1841, where poor and abandoned boys would gather especially at weekends. Here they got involved in gymnastics, public speaking, music, small theatricals, and other games of pleasant recreation. Elementary instruction, the study of religion and the rules of good manners were also part of this.

Evening classes began in 1846, and these were visited by a deputation of city councillors. They showed their great satisfaction, and having provided a report for the council plenary meeting, a gift of a thousand francs with an annual subsidy of 300 francs was decreed for the evening classes, a subsidy that continued until 1877.

A commission also visited from the Work for the Education of the Poor, and as a sign of its approval it also gave us a gift of fr. 1,000.

Amongst the young people who attended the oratories were some who were so poor and abandoned that any concern for them would have been useless if they were not brought into a hospice where they could be housed, clothed, fed and set on the path to some art or trade. Thus in 1847 the so-called hospice or Oratory of St Francis de Sales opened. Every evening there the pupils had elementary classes, vocal or instrumental music, drawing, the metric system, arithmetic and other studies adapted to their trades.

During the day they were occupied in trades such as carpentry, boot-making, tailoring, metalwork, book-binding, printing, compositing, font-making, stereotype printing, copper-engraving, painting, photography etc.

Some who were brighter or because they belonged to families who had fallen on hard times then took up technical courses, French and some took up academic (classical) studies. This way we have provided compositors for the printing press at the institute, assistants in the hospice, while not a few have taken up a military career, or gone on to literary studies, and in a short period of time have been able to earn themselves an honest living. In this way we were able to support the inclinations of our young men and set up a system of education appropriate for an institute which in a short time was looking after 900 young men many of whom currently are pupils of our hospice.

Up until now the Oratory of St Francis de Sales was considered to be a hospice of charity for the benefit of poor and abandoned children. School authorities helped us morally and materially.

*The Senate of the Realm and the Minister for the Interior*

This new model for bringing together and educating the children of the most needy portion, and we could say, of the portion at most risk, attracts people from various parts.

The Mayor of Turin, Chevalier Bellono, the Prefect, a number of parliamentarians and senators pay us a visit with great pleasure, spending hours in the school workshops and even joining in recreation with the children.

Count Sclopis came one day with Marquis Ignazio Pallavicini and Count Luigi Collegno, all Senators of the Realm. They visited the hospice, the classrooms, the recreation centre and the weekend gatherings. They especially admired the care with which we tried to place boys with a good employer, and who might be without work but who had reached the age of applying themselves to a trade.

When they left they said they would like to refer everything to the Senate so it could make a warm recommendation to the Government and commit it to helping an institution with the purpose, they said, of decreasing the number of urchins and those who end up populating the prisons.

In fact at their meeting on March 1, 1850, the Senate gave a splendid testimony to the work of the oratories. The Senate commission that visited us, keenly recommended the work of the oratories to the Government to encourage and support it with moral and material means, as a truly useful and eminently humanitarian and Christian institution for our times.

You can see a report on this visit in the acts of the Senate, as in Appendix no. 1.

The Government, and especially the Minister for the Interior, took the senators' recommendation into special consideration and cooperated with the development of the hospice also with material means.

Ministers Rattazzi, Cavour, Farini, Lanza, Peruzzi, Ricasoli, Nicotera judged this institute to be almost their own work, sending us all kinds of abandoned boys. Then when there was some gymnastic display, distribution of prizes, some small theatrical performance, or musical concert, these worthy gentlemen said they were happy to be there like fathers in the midst of their own children. It happened more than once that the Prefect of the Province and the Mayor of Turin accompanied the Minister for the Interior and also Princes from the Royal House to take part in our family feast. Some letters in Appendix no. 2 testify to this and make clear the judgement these people made concerning the institute.

#### *Turin city council*

Turin city council has always considered the work of the oratories to be a charitable institution. It encouraged it with prizes, helped it with material means and directed a large number of boys at risk there.

When the *colera morbus* struck our region in 1854, the Mayor of Turin brought the children who had been orphaned by this deadly disease together in a suitable place, and entrusted its care and running to the writer. Around fifty of the most abandoned were sent by the same Mayor to this hospice, where they were brought up, instructed and prepared for an art or trade. See Appendix no. 3.

A further 20 children, struck by the same misfortune, were sent here by the Prefect of Ancona; a few from Sassari, Naples; nine from Tortorigi in Sicily and other towns in Italy.

#### *Classes at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales and school authorities*

For more than 35 years, our primary, technical and secondary classes both for internal students and external ones, were always the object of kindness on the part of the school authorities.

The Boncompagni law of 1848 considered this hospice as a refuge for poor boys, an institute of arts and trades, and left us totally under the Ministry for the Interior. (See Boncompagni law, art. 3).

The Lanza Law in 1857 said similarly. The Minister not only left our classes free in terms of choice of teachers, but often helped them, and by a letter on April 29, 1857 gave us L. 1,000, assuring us of his support and all the means dependent on it so this institute could have greater development.

The Casati law in 1859 also left our classes autonomous; the school authority continued personally and with financial help to support this institute, which continued to enjoy freedom in its choice of teachers.

In 1865 the Royal Superintendent of Studies, unaware of the completely special character and nature of the institute, wanted to consider it as a private secondary school, and therefore obliged to have registered teachers; but a letter from the Minister for the Interior and another from the Mayor of Turin, addressed to the Minister for Public Education, declared this to be a work of charity in the strict sense of the word and they noted that the obligation of having registered and therefore salaried teachers in its classes would bring it to ruin since there was not a cent in the budget. Once this statement was made the Minister and the Royal Superintendent said nothing further about the legality of our teachers. See the letter in Appendix no. 4.

Over all this time (1841-1877) the Ministers of Public Education have constantly sent poor boys to us and the Royal Superintendents felt that they themselves could come into the classrooms and offer teaching ideas to the teachers and give lessons to the pupils. All these school superiors always promoted our teaching and never considered submitting it to the common law for the reasons that:

1. It is a charitable hospice; it lives off charity each day; it does not compromise anyone's public or private interests. Indeed it is to the advantage of the Government itself which often does not know how to provide for certain children who are not urchins but abandoned and in evident risk of becoming so.

2. These youngsters for the most part are taken in for free, except for the alms from benefactors who recommend them. This is what our benefactors and Ministers of State have been accustomed to doing. (See Appendix no. 5).



3. Pupils receive their education totally for free; and for the most part we even have to give them books, paper and similar stationery items for free.

4. The teachers then carry out their particular duties zealously, and with self-sacrifice worthy of the highest praise and find time to give lessons to their pupils for free.

5. The excellent results of the pupils in public exams, the bright career that some of them have in letters, philosophy, various university faculties, the military and in commerce are a clear argument that the education given by these teachers satisfied common expectations.

#### *An error of fact*

What has been explained thus far would clearly seem to demonstrate that the Oratory of St Francis de Sales is a shelter, a charitable hospice where amongst the education offered they can also freely take up secondary, technical and professional studies. This is how all the Ministers of Public Education have judged things and have done things, as well as the Royal Superintendents for 35 years or more. Only in 1878 did the Superintendent of Studies in Turin, not well informed of the purpose and nature of the institute, want to designate it as a private secondary school attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, and therefore subject it to the law controlling private secondary schools. This is where the request for registered teachers comes from, and the obligation to be in the classroom for a determined period of time, and ultimately the closure of the institute and the sending away of its pupils.

This is an error of fact, because the secondary school attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales has never been such and no one can point to where it exists. Everyone knows and can describe this Oratory as a work of charity to which other charitable oratories are attached, where amongst the internal and external students, amongst those who come on weekdays and weekends, amongst those who attend day classes and those who come for evenings ones, are thousands of poor children who come to be educated in learning, morality, work.

### *Petition*

The above explanation is not intended as an accusation of any kind or complaint against anyone: I only want to protect the future of my pupils; therefore I humbly petition the Minister for Public Education to still consider this institute as a charitable hospice where its director truly takes the place of the father in conformity with the Casati law art. 251-252, and grant the writer of this letter, under his responsibility and vigilance, to freely continue to educate or give instruction in elementary and technical courses according to art. 356;

That those parts of the secondary course may continue to be taught which are considered suitable for the printing press, commerce, the military or other career, and that may continue to be of advantage to poor young people in this institute;

That we may be able once again to freely gather them, remove them from risk, and complete an education that will give them the means by which they can quickly and honestly earn their bread of life.

## **24. Report to the Holy See (1879)**

Printed Ed. in *Esposizione alla Santa Sede dello stato morale e materiale della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel marzo del 1879*. Sampierdarena, Tipografia salesiana 1879  
(OE XXXI, 237-254).

### *[Introduction]*

The Constitutions of this Society in Chapter VI prescribed that every three years a report needs to be made to the Holy See on the moral and material state of the Society and its progress. This has been kept to approximately in the past, because with the opening of new houses, and the modifications which the young Congregation has had to make because of the special circumstances of time and place, we were hindered from making the complete and exact report which was due. The Rector Major of this Congregation, desirous of being duly respectful to the Holy See in everything, and with complete trust in receiving the observations and counsels that can contribute to the greater

glory of God, is now fulfilling this duty, humbly laying out the state in which the Pious Society finds itself in the various countries in which it exercises some sacred ministry, or is active in the academic or artistic education of the young.

*Brief information on the Congregation of St Francis de Sales from 1841 to 1879*

In 1841 this Congregation was nothing other than a catechism class, a weekend recreation centre, to which a Hospice was added for poor working boys in 1846, thus becoming a private institute in the guise of a large family. Various priests and gentlemen lent a hand as outside helpers to this pious enterprise. In 1852 the Archbishop of Turin approved the Institute, with a *motu proprio* granting all the necessary and appropriate faculties to Father John Bosco, making him the superior and head of the work of the oratories. From this year until 1858 a common life began; school, education of clerics, of whom a number became priests and remained with the Institute. In 1858 Pius IX, of happy memory, advised Father Bosco to set up a Pious Society with a view to preserving the spirit of the work of the oratories. He also kindly drew up the Constitutions, reduced in practice for common life for the use of an ecclesiastical Congregation of simple vows.

After six years the Holy See, with the appropriate decree, praised and commended the Institute and its Constitutions, and appointed the Superior. In 1870 [1869] the Institute and its Constitutions were definitively approved with the faculty of providing dimissorials for Salesian clerics who had entered the houses of the Congregation before they were 14 years of age.

In 1874 the Constitutions were definitively approved in its individual articles, with the faculty of providing all dimissorials *ad decennium*. Then the Holy See at various times enriched this Pious Society with the more necessary privileges for an ecclesiastical Congregation of simple vows. Meanwhile various houses have been founded bit by bit as Divine Providence has given us the opportunity and means: and since they have grown considerably in number, they have been divided into inspectorates or provinces.

The confreres spread across the various Houses of the Congregation, are dependent on the Rector of their respective communities; the Rectors are subject to a Provincial who presides over a determined number of houses making up the Inspectorate or Province. The Provincials depend on the Rector Major. With his Superior Chapter he administers the entire Congregation, with direct and absolute dependence on the Holy See.

Although the Congregation has as its purpose to occupy itself in a particular way with youth at risk, nevertheless its members willingly lend a hand in parishes and charitable institutes preaching occasional triduums, novenas, retreats, missions, helping by celebrating Mass and hearing the confessions of the faithful. They also write, publish, disseminate good books, sending out more than a million a year.

#### *Piedmontese Province*

*Mother House of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. This name includes:*

1. The church of Mary Help of Christians which more than a thousand people attend, coming for catechism, to hear Mass, sermons, frequent the sacraments and other similar practices of piety.
2. A school with all five secondary classes.
3. A studentate for clerics.
4. A House of Novitiate.
5. A home and workshop for working boys where we have the principal trades in civil society.
6. A church dedicated to St Francis de Sales, with a weekend recreation centre for boys coming from outside Turin city.
7. Day and evening classes for the poorest and most abandoned boys in Turin.
8. On the other side of the city there is a church and recreation centre under the title of St Aloysius, where boys come for all the sacred functions

and religious instruction; we are building a church there in honour of Pius IX, with an attached hospice.

9. Attached to this Oratory are day classes for the poorest and most abandoned boys. This oratory and these classes have the purpose of keeping these boys away from the Protestants who have a nearby church, hospice, classrooms and a hospital.

10. The oratory, church, recreation centre are under the title of St Joseph and in the parish of Sts Peter and Paul.

11. Also entrusted to the sacred ministry of the Salesians is the St Joseph's workshop for elderly women who need work and special help.

12 They also look after the Institute of the family of St Peter, whose purpose is to take in women who have gone astray and come out of prison but want to work and be involved in Christian life.

13. The same religious service is offered to the so-called Institute of the Good Shepherd, aimed at keeping girls at risk from ruin, and taking in repentant ones who are seeking a safe shelter from immoral behaviour.

14. Near Turin we have the college at Valsalice for better-off boys. This has the complete primary, lower secondary and upper secondary courses.

15. There is a chaplaincy at the same college for de la Salle Brothers who are invalids.

16. Outside Turin and not far from Caselle there is an oratory and chaplaincy for the benefit of the public, with classes for the children. The novices of the Congregation also spend their summer here.

17. Near Lanzo in the town of Mathi there is a paper factory where young people are always working and making paper for our printing presses at the Institute in Turin, S. Pierdarena, Nice, Montevideo and Buenos-Ayres.

18. In Lanzo there is St Philip Neri College with 250 boarders and the same number of day students, and with a public church. This offers primary and secondary classes.

19. Near this town a chaplaincy is entrusted to the Salesians under the title of the Holy Cross.

20. In the diocese of Ivrea, at San Benigno there is a huge building with a studentate for clerics and priests of the Congregation. There is a public church attached to the Institute and school instruction is given to boys from the town.

21. In the diocese of Casale, in the town known as Borgo San Martino, there is a junior seminary or the college of St Charles with primary and secondary education for more than 200 boys.

22. Primary and secondary education is also offered to all children from the local population.

23. In Mornese, diocese of Acqui, there are public classes for boys of the district.

24. In the diocese of Mondovì, at Trinità, there is an Institute under the title of Mary Immaculate with a public church, oratory and weekend recreation centre, evening and day classes.

### *Liguria Province*

The provincial house in this province is in Alassio, diocese of Albenga.

Here there are:

25. A public church by the name of Our Lady of the Angels, functioning for the benefit of youth and adults in the city.

26. A college with more than 200 boarders and more than 400 day students. They offer all primary, secondary and technical classes.

27. Attached to the college at Alassio is the administration of public schools in the town of Laigueglia.

We can note that Dr Francesco Cerruti, the Rector of this college, has been appointed by the Ordinary of the diocese as general spiritual director for all women's religious institutes in the diocese.

28. In the diocese of Ventimiglia, in the town of Valle Crosia, is the house of Mary Help of Christians. Here there is a public church and primary schools founded to keep boys away from the Protestants who have opened schools, a church and a hospice nearby.

29. In the diocese of Savona, in the city of Varazze is the St John the Baptist college with primary, technical and secondary classes for around 150 boarding students.

30. The same is offered to around 500 day students.

31. In the public church in this city we gather as many boys as we can for religious instruction and to frequent the sacraments.

32. In the diocese of Genoa, at Sampierdarena, there is the St Vincent de Paul hospice and public church, where thousands of faithful attend mass, go to confession, take part in sermons and catechism.

33. Here too is the college of Mary Help of Christians for adults who aspire to the ecclesiastical state. There are about 200 of them.

34. There are also trade students here with respective workshops.

35. There are evening and day classes also for boarders and day students.

36. The Archbishop of the diocese entrusted the Salesians with the additional parish church of Our Lady of Graces.

37. In the diocese of Sarzana in the city of Spezia is St Paul's Oratory. Here there is a public church for all the faithful, day and evening classes and a semi-boarding institute. The principal purpose of these classes is to draw young people away from the Protestant schools that have opened a short distance from the hospice.

This institute was founded at the request and with the charity of the Supreme Pontiff Pius IX of happy memory, and is maintained with help from His Holiness Leo XIII, happily reigning.

38. In the diocese and city of Lucca there is a hospice, public church, oratory and weekend recreation centre for children of the city.

*Roman province*

39. In Magliano, capital of Sabina, the Salesians administer and direct the minor and major seminary, teaching primacy and secondary education including philosophy and theology. Students from the city attend these classes. Here there is also a hostel for ordinary young citizens.

40. In the diocese and city of Albano there are secondary public schools, as well as municipal ones, and a junior seminary.

41. Here too there is a public church for the benefit of the faithful.

42. In the city of Ariccia there are primary classes, a public church for young people and adults.

43. A professor of fine arts teaches at the seminary of Montefiascone.

*Appendix to the Piedmontese province*

44. In the diocese of Padua, and in the city of Este, there is a college and hostel called Manfredini college offering primary and secondary education.

*Appendix to the Liguria province for houses in France*

45. The Congregation began expanding into France in 1875. The first house was established in the diocese and city of Nice, known as the *Patronage de Saint Pierre* where there are 120 children living, and who study arts and trades and some who have applied to study for the ecclesiastical state.

46. In another part of the same city is an oratory and weekend recreation centre where about a hundred poor boys come for religious practices and for Sunday games.

47. In the diocese of Frejus, in the La Navarre district, there is a farm where a few boys learn about cultivation, others study as aspirants to the ecclesiastical state.



48. In Saint-Cyr, not far from Toulon, there is another agricultural establishment where a notable number of boys are assisted and introduced to farming.

49. In the diocese and city of Marseilles is the *Oratoire de Saint-Léon*; this takes in a few abandoned boys who do different trades.

50. The so-called *Maîtrise* in the parish of St Joseph can also be found there, with classes in literature, music and ceremonies. The main purpose here is to cultivate vocations to an ecclesiastical career.

### *The American province*

With the advice and also charitable help of Pius IX, we undertook sending Salesians to America. The Supreme Pontiff proposed three aims: 1. To go and look after Italian adults but especially Italian youth who are spread in large numbers across the southern part of the Americas; 2. Open houses near the natives [‘selvaggi’ or savages, is the word he uses] to serve as a junior seminary and provide shelter for the poorest and most abandoned; 3. This way make progress in propagating the Gospel amongst the natives in the Pampas and Patagonia. The first departure was in 1875. Wanting to cooperate with the pious intentions of the Holy Father, 10 went to Rome to receive the blessing and their mission from the Vicar of Jesus Christ, and on November 14 that year left Genoa and arrived on the 14th of the following month in Buenos-Ayres, capital of the Argentine Republic. Currently there are more than 100 Salesians in America working as follows:

51. In the diocese and city of Buenos-Ayres, the provincial house, and in the recently erected parish of St Charles in Almagro, around six thousand souls.

52. The Pius IX hospice where some 150 boys are learning arts and trades.

53. Public schools, an oratory and weekend amusements for day students.

54. A novitiate and studentate for the Congregation.

55. The Boca parish dedicated to St John the Evangelist with around 27 thousand inhabitants, almost all of whom are Italian.

56. Public schools for poor children.

57. They are in charge of the church of *Mater Misericordiae or de los Italianos*. This church is especially for Italian adults and children who come there in great numbers for religious instruction from all across the city and nearby towns.

58. In the city of San Nicolás de los Arroyos not far from the natives [savages] there is a college or junior seminary for the missions where a number of vocations are coming from.

59. A public church for adults in the city.

60. We also run the Ramallo parish which is a village of some 4000 souls. Inhabitants from the homesteads around usually come to this parish for religious practices at least on Sundays, and especially for baptisms and marriages.

#### *Republic of Uruguay*

61. The Pio College at Villa Colón and a seminary for the missions. This college is also considered to be a minor seminary for the diocese and connected with the State university.

62. There is also a public church there for the nearby population.

63. In Montevideo, the capital of the Republic, there is an oratory with classes for poor and at risk children.

64. In the city of Las Piedras we run a parish of six thousand souls, with public classes and a weekend oratory.

#### *Houses which the Salesians will soon be running*

A college in the diocese and city of Milan, in the parish of the Crowning of Our Lady.

A hospice, oratory and weekend recreation centre in the diocese and city of Cremona.

A hospice and oratory in the city of Lugo which comes under the diocese of Faenza.

Likewise in the cities of Brindisi, Catania and Randazzo in Sicily.

In Challonges near Annecy, in Auteuil in Paris, in Santo Domingo, Brazil and Paraguay etc.

### *Observations*

General observations:

1. The houses of the Congregation are the property of its members; we have some debts but we have property for sale of sufficient value to be able to pay them.

2. There are some 40,000 young people receiving a Christian education, or education in arts, literature in Salesian houses. Of these, around 300 enter the clergy each year. When pupils have decided on their vocation most return to their dioceses, others embrace the religious state, some dedicate themselves to the foreign missions. After our definitive approval by the Holy See vocations grew in a most consoling way. When the Congregation was approved by the Holy See (April 3, 1874), there were 250 Salesians; currently they total more than 700, and the 17 works then entrusted to them have grown to be 64.

### *The Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*

When I presented the catalogue of our Pious Society, also noted was the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, founded in Mornese, diocese of Acqui, in 1873. Its purpose is to exercise works of charity for poor girls just as the Salesians do for poor boys. This humble institute which then had only one house, also, thanks to divine kindness, has had a notable increase as follows:

1. In Mornese a house for the professed, a house for the novitiate and postulants.

2. There is education for poor girls in the same city, public schools with a weekend religious gathering for adults.

3. In Nizza Monferrato in the house named after Our Lady of Graces, there is a boarding school, classes and workshops for day students, a studentate for the Sisters.

4. In the diocese and city of Turin there is the Institute of St Charles where they have day classes for poor girls, an oratory, weekend classes, also for adults.

5. Attached to the same house is the studentate for the Sisters preparing for the public exams for teaching.

6. In Chieri there is a school, classes for day students under the protection of St Teresa.

7. In the same city they have opened an oratory and weekend classes for adults attended by more than 400.

8. In Lanzo Torinese they look after the kitchen and laundry for the Salesians' St Philip Neri college.

9. In the diocese and city of Biella they look after the kitchen and laundry for the bishop's seminary.

10. In the diocese of Casale in Borgo San Martino they lend their services to the kitchen, laundry, wardrobe, and bring the older girls of the town together on Sundays.

11. In Lu they have an infant school, a school and workshop for poor girls, a school and religious gathering on Sundays for older girls.

12. In Quargnento, diocese of Alessandria, they look after the infant school and have a Sunday school and religious gathering for the older ones.

13. S. Pier d' Arena, diocese of Genoa, they look after the laundry, clothing, kitchen for the St Vincent's hospice and gather the older girls on Sundays.

14. They provide the same service for the college at Alassio, diocese of Albenga.

15. In the diocese of Ventimiglia, in Valle Crosia they have a school with a workshop, a Sunday religious gathering for adults to draw them away from the Protestants who have opened schools and a hospice there attracting them to go there with gifts and promises.

16. In the diocese and city of Nice they offer the service of clothing and laundry for the Patronage de St Pierre.

17. In the diocese of Frejus in the Navarre district they look after laundry, clothing, and the kitchen for the agricultural school established there.

18. At Saint-Cyr the same service as for Navarre.

### *Houses in America*

19. In the diocese of Montevideo the sisters have recently opened public classes for poor girls in the parish of Las Piedras.

20. At Villa Colón they have a school, workshops on weekdays and a Sunday religious gathering for poor girls.

21. In the city and diocese of Buenos-Ayres they recently opened a school and workshop with a summer school for poor and abandoned girls.

### *Observations*

All the houses the Sisters live in belong to the Congregation, but a Salesian is in charge. On the moral side the spirit of piety and regular observance are very satisfying; therefore we have reason for thanking the Lord for his mercy. On the material side they have some debts but there are assured means for paying the instalments. As seen from what has been reported above, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, who in 1874 had only one House, now have 21, and the Sisters who were between 10 and 15 in number then have grown to more than three hundred, while there are many requests for admission, and there are keen requests coming in from many places to open new Houses or take over the running of already existing ones, but which are in need of support.

*The moral state of the Salesian Congregation*

Having reported on the state and material growth which divine goodness has granted to the humble Salesian Congregation here is a brief indication of its moral state.

1. The observance of the Constitutions, thanks be to God, has been maintained in all houses, and up till now there has been no Salesian forgetful of himself who has caused scandal. The work is greater than the strength and number of the individuals; but no one is dismayed and it seems that effort is a second nourishment after material nourishment. It is true that some are victim of their zeal both in Europe and in the foreign missions; but all this does is to increase the desire of other Salesians to work. However we have seen that no one works beyond his strength to the detriment of his health.

2. Requests from Salesian aspirants are many, but our experience has been that many have a vocation to other religious orders or to the secular priesthood, not to join the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales. There are around three hundred requests annually, of who, about a hundred and fifty are admitted to the novitiate; those who profess are on average around a hundred and twenty.

3. We have very good relationships with the diocesan Ordinaries and parish priests; we could say they are our fathers and benefactors. We have encountered difficulties with just one Ordinary and we really do not know the real reason why<sup>76</sup>. With patience, the Lord's help and by working under his diocese we hope to gain the same benevolence we experience in all other dioceses.

4. Another great difficulty we met was regarding privileges. We believe the Salesians should have the privileges which religious orders and other ecclesiastical congregations normally enjoy, but which up until now the Holy See has not judged fit to grant<sup>77</sup>. Our material and moral progress would be

<sup>76</sup> The allusion is to the Archbishop of Turin, Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi; see the section in this volume given to the conflict (nos. 80-90).

<sup>77</sup> This happened only ten years later (see no. 38).

much more easily assured thanks to the granting of these privileges, which we humbly and keenly ask for.

5. The first General Chapter was held in 1877. Very important matters were dealt with concerning the practice of our Constitutions, but before sending the decisions we made to the Holy See we thought it opportune to put them into practice for a time, introducing modifications to understand the corrections we needed to make and then present them to another General Chapter, which God-willing will be held in September 1880.

6. The members of the Congregation join with their Rector Major in paying homage to the Holy See and in professing their inviolable attachment to it, and beg the Supreme Authority of the Church to continue his fatherly assistance towards them, while they with all possible effort will not cease to support the faith, and obedience to the Vicar of Jesus Christ in all countries where they have houses, both in Europe and America.

*Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam.*

Fr John Bosco  
Rector Major

**25. “Clarifications for the Prefect of  
the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars,  
Card. Innocenzo Ferrieri, regarding the earlier report”**

Archivio Congregazione dei Religiosi e degli Istituti Secolari, T 9.1 R, ms written by another person with author’s corrections.; ed. in E III, pp. 505-508.

Turin, 3 August 1879

Your Eminence,

I have received a copy of the observations which the authoritative Congregation of Bishops and Regulars has deigned to offer regarding the report on the moral and material state of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales.

First of all I humbly thank Your Eminence, assuring you that I will value the comments made and use them to the advantage of our Salesian confreres and they will serve as a norm for the future reports which should be made every three years to the Holy See.

Meanwhile I shall fulfil the task here of offering the clarifications requested, following the numerical order of the observations made:

*1. Nothing was said in the aforementioned Report about the financial state of the Institute, nor on the novitiate. This should be done according to the norms established by the sacred canons and apostolic Constitutions.*

Explanation.

[R] The Pious Society does not exist legally, therefore it cannot own anything or contract debts or credits. The Houses of the Congregation (as on p. 13 of the mentioned Report) are the property of each member; there are debts, but one member has a property for sale of sufficient value to pay them. But the Congregation both as a moral and legal entity does not own, nor can it own, anything.

One Novitiate house is here in Turin, approved and regulated by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars itself, and all the established and approved norms as in Chap. XIV of our Constitutions are followed; with the same norms and decree of approval of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide another Novitiate house was opened in Buenos Aires, capital of the Argentine Republic.

*With the authorisation of the aforesaid Congregation of Bishops and Regulars one has also been set up in Marseilles, where we are completing a building adapted to and appropriate for all the prescribed observances to this end.*

We should soon be opening a new Novitiate in *Spain* and in the diocese of *Seville*, for which in time we will make a formal request to the Holy See for due authorisation.



A request had been made to open a Novitiate in *Paris* too; but certain difficulties have arisen that make this improbable, so all that discussion has been suspended for now.

A priest of known piety and learning is the director of novices. Two other priests are helping him. Each day meditation, spiritual reading, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament are regularly made, and the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin is said. Each evening they gather in the church to receive the blessing of the director. Each week they go to confession, and go to communion almost daily. Two conferences are given each week and one instruction on the Constitutions. Thus far religious observance has been maintained.

2. *The Pious Society cannot be divided into Inspectorates, which is not usual, but into Provinces for the erection of which permission from the Holy See must be obtained in each case.*

R. The Pious Society is divided into Inspectorates according to article 17 Chap. IX of our Constitutions, expressed thus: *Si opus fuerit, Rector Maior, Capitulo Superiore adprobante, constituet visitatores, eisdemque curam quamdam demandabit certum domorum numerum inspiciendi, ubi earum distantia et numerus id postulaverit. Hujusmodi visitatores, sive cognitores, Rectoris Maioris vices gerent in domibus et in negotiis eisdem demandatis.*

His Holiness Pius IX, of ever venerated memory, recommended that we eliminate any terms that might clash with the secular spirit in the first body of rules for the humble Salesian Society. Therefore instead of saying *monastery*, he proposed we should say *house, college, hospice, orphanage*; in place of general to say *rector major*; and for the name *prior*, or *guardian* substitute *director*; and for provincial or province some equivalent term.

It would be appropriate to say that division into inspectorates has not yet been put into place but is only proposed *ad experimentum*, and when we know it is possible to do so then due recourse will be had to the Holy See. But our sad times and the constant and serious difficulties we have to face daily do not let us see any other tolerable division in the midst of secular society, therefore we ask that we can temporarily use it.

*3. With regard to the article "Piedmontese Province" it is said that certain refuges for women have been entrusted to the sacred ministry of the Salesians. This cannot be done other than with the authority of the respective bishop, and it should have indicated if he was involved and what this sacred ministry consists of.*

R. In opening female institutes and in taking on spiritual direction all the norms described in Chap. X of our Constitutions were followed. These are Institutes in fact lacking in material means, and the Salesians charitably offer their religious service to them at the request of the Ordinaries. This sacred ministry is always agreed upon and circumscribed by the diocesan Ordinary in everything referring to the sacraments of confession, communion, celebration of Holy Mass, the Word of God, catechism classes and the like.

*4. From the Report it would seem the Salesians have colleges, schools etc., but nothing is said about whether this is with the permission of the respective Ordinaries, and whether the teaching depends on the sacred canons, and especially the Holy Council of Trent.*

R. The rules approved by the Holy See for opening new houses were followed as described in Chap. X of our Constitutions, so there were due arrangements with the diocesan Ordinaries beforehand as prescribed by the sacred canons and the Holy Council of Trent.

*5. A report is added in the same Report on an Institute of women under the title of Mary Help of Christians, and nothing is said about whether this Institute has a superior general (male) on whom the Sisters depend, and whether it is completely independent, as it should be, from the Salesian Institute.*

R. When the Salesian Constitutions were approved we talked about and dealt with what regarded the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

The Institute of Mary Help of Christians depends on the Superior General of the Pious Salesian Society in temporal matters, but in what concerns the exercise of religious worship and the administration of the sacraments they are totally subject to the jurisdiction of the Ordinary. The superior of the Salesians gives the Sisters material means and with the consent of the bishop

establishes a priest with the title of spiritual director for every house of the Sisters. A few bishops have already approved this female Institute, and we are now going through the due experimentation to understand in practical terms the modifications to be introduced before submitting them to the Holy See for approval. Since the limits of the Sisters' dependence on the Superior of the Salesians have been noted at various points of their Rule, a copy of their Rule is attached for whoever wants to gain greater clarification on this. We note also that the Mother House of the Sisters is in Mornese in the diocese of Acqui, whose Ordinary has always overseen the origins, progress and spread of the Institute.

*6. We add that the Sisters look after the kitchen, take care of the laundry, the wardrobe in seminaries, hospices run by males, and this has always been approved by the Holy See.*

R. At any rate we have always had previous understanding with the diocesan Ordinaries, and indeed it was they who made the requests. We have followed all the rules that the sacred canons prescribe and that prudence suggests.

*7. This Sacred Congregation cannot but recognise at least how singular and inappropriate it is that this Report was printed, while the three-yearly report to be given by superior generals of Institutes has no other purpose than to make known to the Holy See the disciplinary, personnel, material, financial state of each pious institute, and how things are going with the novitiate.*

R. I had the Report printed for one sole purpose—to facilitate its reading. This being the first time I was sending a report of this kind to the Holy See I followed the example of a superior of another institute who told me: “The Holy See prefers a printed Report.” Next time I will see it as my strict duty to send it as a manuscript.

Having given the required clarifications, I beg Your Eminence to keep this poor Society in your kind consideration. Our times, civil laws and authorities, the efforts they make to wipe out ecclesiastical Institutes, urge me to beg of Your Eminence all the support and indulgence compatible with the prescriptions of the Holy Church.

These clarifications should have been sent to Your Eminence last May, but for serious problems this house has been subjected to I have had to put it off until today.

With the highest veneration it is my greatest honour to declare myself to be,  
Your Eminence's most humble and indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

## **26. Further clarifications on new “observations” received**

ASC A 1710419 *Lett. orig. Ferrieri*, ms. written by another with author's corrections.; ed. in E III, pp. 540-544. Additional passages from Card. Ferrieri's letter are included in square brackets, but which were missing in the original.

[Turin, 12 January 1880]

Your Eminence,

I am saddened that, despite my good will, I have not succeeded in providing the desired clarifications about the three-yearly Report made to the Holy See about our humble Congregation. So that this and any other matter can be explained in a way that is compatible with this Congregation and at the same time in the way required by the sacred canons, I am sending Fr (Dr) Francesco Dalmazzo as our procurator with the task of placing himself at Your Eminence's command, or at the command of whoever you indicate to him.

Meanwhile I am explaining here some of my thoughts in respectful response to the letter Your Eminence deigned to address to me on October 3, 1879. The above-mentioned Father Dalmazzo can explain these where necessary.

[Regarding the explanation provided for observation no. 1 you say that the Pious Society does not legally exist, therefore it cannot own things or contract debts. You go on then to say that the houses of the Congregation are the property of some of its members; that there are debts, but one member is selling property that can pay them. You conclude then that the Congregation as both a moral and legal entity, does not own nor can it own things. It is the opinion of this Sacred Congregation that all these expressions about non-legal existence are to be understood in reference to civil law which is hostile to pious institutes. With regard to the

laws of the Church, before which civil laws have no standing, all pious institutes, therefore also those of the Salesians, have legal existence according to the sacred canons. Therefore they are subject to the Holy See for goods they have under any title, and they may be acquired and they may possess them.

All the pious institutes in their three-yearly Report pay no attention to civil laws of any government, and they make their report on their financial state, reporting succinctly what goods they possess under what title, what income they know of, wherever it may come from, and how it is provided; and if they need to sell goods even if owned by third persons, or create debts, this Sacred Congregation has always encouraged the need for apostolic permission, and they have shown themselves to be obedient. Only you have attached the civil law to exempt yourself from such obligations.

You reflect that the Constitutions were approved by the Holy See with the obligations that are seen in art. 2 in Chap. VI and art. 3 in Chap. VII even though the said civil laws had been enacted at the time of the aforementioned approval].

### *1. Regarding ownership*

This Pious Society of ours is a moral entity that cannot own anything neither before civil society, nor before the Church. In Chapter IV no. 1 of our Constitutions we read: *“Ideoque qui sunt professi in hac Societate dominium radicale, ut aiunt, suorum bonorum retinere poterunt”*. In the same Chapter no. 2 it says as follows: *“Poterunt vero sodales de dominio sive per testamentum, sive (permissu tamen Rectoris Maioris), per acta inter vivos libere disponere”*.

Since because of our sad times this point was fundamental for us I asked, in having our Constitutions approved, how the words of Chapter VII article 3 should be understood—expressed thus: *“In bonorum alienationibus Societatis, et aere alieno conflando, serventur quae sunt de iure servanda iuxta Sacros Canones, et Constitutiones Apostolicas?”*

Through Monsignor then Cardinal Vitelleschi, the former secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, their Eminences replied: “The response is in the same article, viz., *in alienationibus bonorum Societatis*” and that should mean that when time or place allow us to own something in common, or in the name of the Pious Society this article should be observed

as it is observed by all religious and ecclesiastical congregations. That seems to be in conformity with no. 2 of the above-mentioned Chapter VII where it says of the Rector Major: “*Nulla, quod ad res immobiles attinet, emendi vel vendendi ei erit facultas, absque Superioris Capituli consensu*”.

This is the meaning I have always given to our Constitutions from the beginning of this Pious Society’s existence. And this was always the understanding of the Supreme Pontiff Pius IX, always of glorious memory, as also of the eminent cardinals chosen to examine and approve our Constitutions.

So considering stable goods owned personally by members to be subject to the prescriptions of the sacred canons and as ecclesiastical goods would throw things into confusion for us; because all the Salesians made their religious profession on the basis of the first article of Chapter IV De voto paupertatis, which begins thus: “*Votum paupertatis, de quo hic loquitur, respicit tantummodo cuiuscumque rei administrationem, non vero possessionem*”.

[In the same clarification on observation no. 1. you assert that the novitiate in Marseilles was set up with the authorisation of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Since I do not know that the aforesaid Sacred Congregation had given such authorisation, I see the need for you to send it, pass on the rescript showing permission to open the novitiate in Marseilles].

## *2. Novitiate in Marseilles*

Regarding authorisation for the Novitiate in Marseilles that you want to see, I think there is a misunderstanding; because the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on 5 February 1879 asked the bishop of the city, on February 23, 1879, and he replied to the Sacred Congregation in favour and considered the matter closed, while it still seems to be ongoing. The documents relating to this are attached and I renew my request to grant this favour.

[In the response you made to observation no. 2 you say that the Pious Society is divided into Inspectorates, following art. 17 Chap. IX of the Constitutions. Now in the aforesaid art. 17 it speaks of ‘visitors’ being set up by the Rector Major *si opus fuerit, Capitulo Superiore approbante* and not yet of provincials. All other institutes in whatever other part of the world

are divided into Provinces, after approval by the Holy See, which has never allowed this division to be done under another name. You should hold to the general rule].

3. By dividing into inspectorates instead of provinces I judged this to be the practical application of article 17, Chapter IX of our Constitutions: *“Si opus fuerit, Rector Maior, Capitulo Superiore adprobante, constituet visitatores, eisdemque curam quamdam demandabit certum domorum numerum inspiciendi”*.

The terms ‘province’ and ‘provincial’ in these calamitous times would throw us amongst wolves who would devour us or scatter us. This nomenclature was suggested by Pius IX himself, of ever dear and grateful memory. If you absolutely want the old terms, I request that this obligation at least be limited to dealings with the Holy See, with the freedom to use the terms that are possible in these times in secular society.

[In the clarification that you offer on observation no. 3 you say: “In opening female institutes and taking on spiritual direction for them all the norms described in Chap. X of the Constitutions were followed.” In this Chapter it speaks of opening Houses for clerics, young men and boys to be educated by the Salesians; it certainly does not speak of opening Houses for women that would be directed by them. Nor can it be said that it was in the mind of the Holy See to allow opening and direction of such houses by the Salesians in approving the Constitutions, because that runs contrary to the maxims founded on very reasonable grounds. The Salesians can have spiritual direction of Houses of women when this is entrusted to them by the respective Ordinaries, and this spiritual direction must consist in administration of the sacraments and in preaching the word of God, if and when this is required by the said Ordinaries].

4. In matters relating to the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians the Salesians do not have any other involvement in their houses other than spiritual, within the limits and in the way the Ordinaries in whose diocese a Sisters, House is, allow and prescribe.

[On observation no. 4. you respond thus: “When the Salesian Constitutions were approved we spoke of and dealt with what regards the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. The Institute of Mary Help of Christians depends on the Superior General of the Pious Salesian Society.”

Given the voluminous material on the Salesian position, especially the part dealing with the approval of the Constitutions, we observe that it never dealt with, and even less so discussed what regards the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Had that been true this Sacred Congregation would certainly have ordered the separation of these two Institutes. It was never its custom to approve, especially in more recent times, that women's Institutes depend on male Institutes: and if a dependence of the kind had ever occurred, it would have immediately ordered that it cease. You wish to introduce a contrary idea, that this Congregation can do no less than reject].

5. In what refers to the Institute of Mary Help of Christians as to whether or not it was proposed in approving the Constitutions I can respond that in the printed summary by the Sacred Congregation in examining definitive approval of our Constitutions, where there is a list of the houses opened at the time, on p. 10, no. 16 we read as follows: As an appendix and depending on the Salesian Congregation is the *House of Mary Help of Christians* founded with the approval of the ecclesiastical authority in Mornese in the diocese of Acqui. Its aim is to do for poor girls what the Salesians are doing for boys. There are already forty Sisters taking care of 200 girls.

The aforementioned eminent cardinals had some questions on the nature and purpose of this institution and showing that they were satisfied with my verbal declarations concluded that the matter would then be dealt with more carefully when their Constitutions were presented for the appropriate approval by the Holy See.

When this Sacred Congregation, in observation no. 5 on your three-yearly report, wrote asking how the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was managed, there was a question as to whether this had a Superior General (female), and not a Superior General (male), as you mistakenly wrote when reporting on the above-mentioned observation].

6. In the clarifications required of April 5, 1879 it was asked: *“If this Institute, of the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians had a superior general on which the Sisters depended, and if it were totally independent, as it must be, from the Institute of the Salesians.”*

The response was affirmative adding what was its authority in conformity with the Constitutions of the Sisters. Now your eminence asks if the above-



mentioned Sisters have a superior general (female). I respond affirmatively that they have a *superior general (female)* and their own Superior Chapter conforming to title III of their Constitutions.

Having explained everything above I beg Your Eminence to consider with paternal kindness that the Pious Salesian Society without material means, in calamitous times began and continues to support itself up till now amidst growing difficulties, and with endless opposition. Therefore it needs all the benevolence and indulgence compatible with holy mother Church.

We have opened almost a hundred houses offering Christian education to around fifty thousand children, of whom more than six hundred every year become clerics. On the other hand I believe I can assure Your Eminence that the Salesians have no other aim than to work for the greater glory of God, and to the advantage of the holy Church by spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ amongst the natives of the Pampas and in Patagonia, therefore we all ask for benevolence, advice, material and moral help.

Kneeling before Your Eminence I ask forgiveness if I have involuntarily written some inconvenient word, while I have the great honour to declare myself,

Your Eminence's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

**27. Report to the President of the Council and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Benedetto Cairoli, concerning Salesian activity on behalf of Italian migrants in Argentina and Uruguay**

ASC A072 *Documenti per scrivere la storia di don Giovanni Bosco...*, vol. XXIII, pp. 81-82; ed. in E IV, pp. 4-6.

Turin, 16 January 1881

Your Excellency,

This is now the sixth year that I have presented myself to the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Rome, explaining the need for an Italian mission in South

America. Having examined and come to know the importance of the project the Minister approved it and encouraged it with flattering words, helping me with a subsidy for the voyages. Therefore on November 14, 1875 I sent 10 members of our Institute who arrived in the Argentine Republic on the 14th of the following month. A further four expeditions were sent.

I would like now to offer a brief outline of what has been achieved in this period of time.

### *Uruguay*

In the city of Montevideo, the capital of the Republic, we founded a school attended by more than 300 poor boys, most of whom are children of Italians.

In Villa Colón not far from the capital, we have begun a college where Italian is taught and spoken. The same education is offered to Europeans living in the eastern cities of La Plata.

### *Argentine Republic*

In Bocca, a thickly populated suburb of Buenos Aires, there are more than 20,000 Italians living. A parish was set up here, and schools for boys and girls with a hospice for around 200 poor boys.

Then in the centre of the city is the Church of the *Misericordia* [Our Lady of Mercy]. In the same city we have the San Carlos de Almagro hospice which takes in more than 200 poor boys. The Salesians look after this and offer religious worship to a large number of adults and children who come to what we might call their national church where preaching is in Italian and Italian is spoken.

In the city of San Nicolás de los Arroyos there is also a college with boarders and day students where Italian is spoken and taught.

We also look after many Italian settlements amongst which the most important of them is *Villa Libertad* in Entrerios with 200 Italian families who have established themselves out in the countryside in places that are far from

the city and commerce. They are involved exclusively in the cultivation of the very fertile countryside.

### *Patagonia*

We were soon able to set up six native settlements in Patagonia, on the banks of the Rio Negro, which many Europeans, mostly Italians, also came to. The Salesians have founded schools, education centres and hospices there for children, adults and anyone who needs to learn some art or trade and ways of cultivating the land.

The idea is to continue these Italian missions as far as the Magellan Straits and from there on to Cape Horn. But I need to speak about this personally with Your Excellency as I hope to do, if you grant me the opportunity, next March.

### *The current state of things*

The latest statistics indicate there are some 30,000 Italians in the Argentine Republic of whom 50,000 are in the capital, without counting the suburbs. We have already sent five expeditions of Salesians, who are presently spread over thirty four locations where they give instruction and education in general to the most poor and abandoned, but always with special concern for Italians.

### *Projected events*

We are currently putting together a new expedition to help those already working in the Republics with the same need for someone who will look after youth and the adults. This expedition is of 22 individuals some of whom will leave towards the end of the current month on the steamship Umberto I, which belongs to Rocco and Piaggio Co.

The others will depart on February 3 next on the mail boat belonging to Lavarello Co.

Finding myself pressed for preparing the necessary items and paying the voyages I am turning to Your Excellency to help me in this endeavour,

which will certainly bring great honour to the Italian nation and all those who promote it. I also believe that you will be pleased to know how the Salesians have so often been ready to render service to Italian officials resident in Montevideo and Buenos Aires, as you will see from the report these officials have made to the Italian Government.

Here then is the work I would like to put under Your Excellency's protection: a work that has the aim of spreading knowledge, morality, civilisation, business and agriculture in those distant countries where Italian families continue to flow.

Full of trust in your well-known kindness I have the great honour of declaring myself to be,

Your Excellency's humble representative,

Fr John Bosco

## **28. Circular for the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome**

ASC A1760419, printed copy of the circular <sup>78</sup>

Turin, 29 January 1881

All works which redound to the glory of our holy religion must certainly interest Christians throughout the world and in a special way when they are destined to the advantage and adornment of the city of Rome, soul and centre of Christianity, and when promoted by the supreme leader of the Church itself. It is works of this kind which are described below and which are to be completed in the capital of the Catholic world. They are judged to be of the greatest value to religion and civil society and therefore are proposed by the enlightened mind of our zealous Pontiff Leo XIII gloriously reigning. The works are as follows:

<sup>78</sup> The ASC has preserved two printed copies dated 16 July 1881 and 10 February 1882, with minor variants concerning progress in the work on the church: cf. E IV, pp. 18-20.

1. A church at the Castro Pretorio on the Esquiline hill and consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It will also serve as a parish for twelve thousand souls, and a monument to the immortal Pius IX. The parish is already established as a legal entity and recognised by civil and ecclesiastical authority;

2. A recreation area where we can gather boys especially on weekends, amuse them with pleasant games after they have fulfilled their religious duties;

3. Evening classes for older youth. This category of young people, occupied in hard work throughout the day, often lacks the means for having the right education which they have great need of;

4. Day classes for children who, due to their poverty or because neglected, are not able to attend public schools;

5. A hospice where children who wander the streets and squares of whatever town, city or nation they belong to will be instructed in knowledge, and arts and trades. Because of this many of them come to Rome trusting to find work and money, but when their hopes are dashed they fall into poverty, are exposed to the risk of wrongdoing, and as a consequence end up populating the State prisons. This hospice should be able to hold around five hundred poor orphans following the already existing model of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales in Turin.

### *The state of things*

Since 1878 an appropriate commission of respectable individuals was set up by initiative of the reigning Pontiff, under the presidency of his Cardinal Vicar, with a view to building the above-mentioned sacred edifice.

Once the land was bought, work immediately began based on a design by Architect Count Vespignani<sup>79</sup>, and work went ahead quickly. But since funds were lacking to continue the work, while on the other hand wanting

<sup>79</sup> Francesco Vespignani (1842-1899) was responsible for a number of buildings, mainly in Rome, amongst which the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for which, at Don Bosco's indication, he modified the original plan, increasing its size.

to provide more effectively for the needs of youth at risk, the Holy Father decided to entrust the building, and the care and administration of the work, to the writer (1). At the same time, given this lack of funds, His Holiness authorised him to have recourse to the charity of all the Christian faithful.

### *Ways of helping*

1. Help can be given as finance or as building materials;
2. Everyone can help through prayer, and by advising people who are well-off to become benefactors;
3. All Cooperators are asked to send their donations to Rome to His Eminence Cardinal Raffaele Monaco La Valletta, Vicar General of His Holiness, or to Fr (Dr) Francesco Dalmazzo<sup>80</sup> – Torre dei Specchi N. 36, Rome; or to Father John Bosco in Turin;
4. Some who will have the title ‘collector’, will be authorised to collect donations. But these are not to go asking for donations unless furnished with a written document noting the purpose of the request, name, surname and that they are collectors, the signature of Father John Bosco, and a seal with the words: *Pia Societas Sancti Francisci Salesii*;
5. Without need for this formality we respectfully ask the Most Reverend Archbishops of various dioceses, the reverend parish priests, curates and rectors of churches to be collectors amongst the Christian faithful living within their respective jurisdictions, and to send to any of the three above-named individuals any money they have been able to collect, and to help any of the collectors who have the required documentation.

### *Advantages for donors and collectors*

1. A special blessing from the Holy Father, who approves and recommends this pious endeavour, for all who love to see an increase in our holy religion, upright behaviour, the good of youth and all of civil society;

<sup>80</sup> Francesco Dalmazzo (1845-1895), put in charge of following up the works for the church of the Sacred Heart, was living with the Oblates at Tor dei Specchi.

2. When this sacred building is finished and consecrated to divine worship, every Friday a Mass will be celebrated at the main altar and the praises of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and other particular prayers for benefactors will be said;

3. The same will also happen on the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Feasts of Our Lady, Christmas, the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament and on all the Feasts of the holy Apostles;

4. With a view to offering special respect to the august Mother of God and invoking her powerful protection on all our benefactors, each evening a third part of the Rosary will be said, the Loretto Litanies or the *Ave Maris Stella* will be sung, followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The function will conclude with the *De Profundis* and *Oremus* or with a *Pater, Ave* and *Requiem*, in suffrage for deceased benefactors;

5. These celebrations of masses, prayers and exercises of Christian piety will be in *perpetuum*.

Fr John Bosco

(1) Following the kind disposition of the Holy Father, it was possible to acquire more land to extend the church and to put up the planned hospice, classrooms and workshops.

## 29. Address to the Past Pupils

Critical edition in BS 7 (1883) 8, pp. 127-129.

*[Address to lay Past Pupils, 15 July 1883<sup>81</sup>]*

... At the end, Don Bosco, visibly moved, took his turn to speak. He spoke of his real joy at seeing so many of his beloved sons; He assured them that he always loved them and loved those too who were not there in body but were certainly there in affection; He thanked them for their filial demonstration, and that their numbers were constantly growing; He praised their pious thought in offering him a gift that would look very nice in the Church of

<sup>81</sup> They came to Valdocco for the occasion to celebrate with Don Bosco.

Mary Help of Christians, and he spoke with special affection of the Provost of Faule.

“It is true”, Don Bosco said, “that the orator and poet, speaking of Don Bosco, broke into pious exaggeration and used the rhetorical manner of speech that we call hyperbole, but this was forgivable licence for his dear boys whose expression of feelings was a response more to the dictates of their heart than their mind. However, always remember that Don Bosco was not and is none other than a poor tool in the hands of a very competent artist, indeed a most wise and omnipotent artist, who is God. Let there be praise, honour and glory given to God”. “Then,” Don Bosco added “our Fr Colletti spoke well when he said that the Oratory had done great things up till now, and I add that with God’s help and with the protection of Mary Help of Christians it will accomplish other things still. Other than Heaven’s help, what helps us and what will help us to do good is the very nature of our work. What we aim to do is looked upon well by everyone including those who do not share our idea of religion. If there is someone who creates obstacles for us we need to say that they either don’t know us or they do not know what is being done. Civil instruction, moral education of youth who are either abandoned, or at risk, removing them from idleness, wrongdoing, disgrace, and maybe even prison – this is what our work aims at. So what wise man, what civil authority could possibly stop us?

Recently, as you know, I went to Paris, and I spoke in various churches to plead the cause of our works and, let us put it in frank terms, to find money to give bread and soup to our boys who never lose their appetite. Now amongst the audience there were some who came only to get to know Don Bosco’s political thinking. Some even thought I had gone to Paris to stir up a revolution, others thought I was there to find people for a political party, and so on. There were some benevolent people who feared that someone would play some silly prank on me, but from the moment I began speaking all these weird ideas ceased along with their fears and Don Bosco was left free to go from one end of France to the other. No, truly, we do not engage in politics with our work. We respect constituted authority, we observe the laws that



have to be observed, we pay our taxes and we keep on going, asking only that they let us do good for poor youth and save souls. If you want, we also play politics but in an entirely innocent way, indeed to the advantage of any Government. Politics can be defined as the art and science of governing the State well. Now the work of the Oratory in Italy, France, Spain, America, in every country where it has been established, working especially to offer relief of those most needy young people, tends to lessen the number of vagabonds and unruly types. It tends to decrease the number of young wrongdoers and thieves. It tends to empty out the prisons. In a word it tends to form upright citizens who, far from causing grief to public authorities, help them to keep order, calm and peace in society. This is our politics. This is the only thing we have been concerned about up till now and which will be our concern in the future. It is precisely this approach that has allowed Don Bosco to do good firstly to you and then to so many other young people of every age and place. So why enter politics? With all our efforts what could we obtain? Nothing else, maybe than to make it impossible to carry out our work of charity. Political matters today are like a steam train charging along the rails dragging a wagon behind it, probably heading for a cliff and ruin.

Would you like to stand on the rails to stop it? You would be run over. Would you like to shout at it and scare it? It doesn't hear anything and you would go hoarse for nothing. So what do you do? Stand off to the side and let it go either until it stops of its own accord, or God stops it with his omnipotent hand. Certainly there must be those in the world who interest themselves in political matters, to give advice, to point out perils and the like, but this is not a task for us poor people. For us, religion and prudence tell us instead: Live as upright Christians, concern yourself with the moral education of your children, teach your children their catechism properly in [boarding] schools and parishes, and that's it.

This, I repeat, is Don Bosco's way of behaving. He is so non-political that he doesn't even read a newspaper. So let this be your way of behaving, my dear sons and you will have that great good that I want you to have, I mean harmony, peace in your families, prosperity in your temporal business affairs, a long life free of serious preoccupations and suffering, and especially the

best of all good things which is to persevere in God's grace and happiness in Paradise, where I hope that through the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ and through the intercession of Mary Most Holy we will one day find ourselves together again singing his eternal glory." ...

*[Address to Past Pupil priests, 19 July 1883]*

... Afterwards, everyone came to speak with Don Bosco, and barely overcoming his emotion, which almost forced him to choke his words, he expressed his great consolation at seeing so many of his beloved sons and zealous priests, and thanking them for the affection they continued to show him, he promised that for his part he would show his gratitude until death, praying for them and helping them in any way that was possible for him to do so.

Then he said how the Lord and the Blessed Virgin blesses the Oratory and its works, and then made some observations that we would particularly like to indicate.

He said that for some time people had been saying and the newspapers were publishing that Don Bosco had worked miracles. This was an error. Don Bosco had never claimed and had never said that he was working miracles; none of his sons should attempt to propagate this false notion. Let's be clear how things stand: Don Bosco prays and gets his boys to pray for people who are recommended to his prayers, to obtain this or some other grace, and God in his infinite kindness often grants the graces asked for, some of them being extraordinary and miraculous. But to tell the truth, Don Bosco has so little to do with it that often the graces are granted without him knowing anything about it.

Here he repeated what he had said on other occasions and added: "Our Lady Help of Christians: here is the miracle-worker, here is the worker of graces and miracles through the great power she has received from her Son Jesus. She knows that Don Bosco needs money to allow so many thousands of poor boys to eat, that these weigh on his shoulders; she knows that he is poor and that without material aid cannot carry on the work undertaken to the

advantage of religion and society, so what does Mary do? Like a good mother she goes looking, looking for those who are ill and says to them: do you want to be healed? Well then, be charitable to these poor boys, give a hand to these works and I will give you the grace of healing. She sees the desperation in a home where the child has gone off the rails and she says to the father or mother: do you want this unfortunate lad to leave his mistaken ways? Well then for your part do something to remove so many other poor abandoned children from danger to body and soul and I will see that your son receives help from healthy advice. So in order not to go on too long, Mary Help of Christians, in a thousand ways, consoles those who help the Oratory, and we can do no other than to make sure we are not unworthy of her protection.

And if Mary helps the Oratory children she will help you too, since you were once those children and can still claim to be so. Always live as good priests, as this old friend of yours taught you and encouraged you to be; be zealous for the salvation of souls who unfortunately may be lost; take special care of the young in your villages, for society's hope rests in them; remain united to the head of the Church, the Vicar of Jesus Christ; let us always love one another, pray for one another, and pray especially for your poor Don Bosco, who is getting ever closer to death, so that through the mercy of God we may all be saved, and save countless others as well."

## SECTION TWO

# DON BOSCO AS FOUNDER

### Presentation

*The original experience of Valdocco and the first oratories in Turin could have grown in extension and depth as well as extending beyond city limits on two conditions: that there was an operational plan and that there were the human and financial resources for this to happen.*

*Don Bosco understood well beforehand that the continuity of his work would be as a result of the stable organisation of available resources adequately formed spiritually and educationally. The suggestions of Minister Rattazzi but especially the moral support of Pope Pius IX allowed him to overcome natural doubts in going ahead with a plan for founding something that seemed openly opposed to the “signs of the times”, meaning the Cavour-Rattazzi laws against religious institutions not involved in preaching, education, health, and which suppressed hundreds of religious houses with thousands of members.*

*Having overcome every hesitation, Don Bosco threw himself courageously into the task of giving life to a religious Congregation such as the Salesians which in all probability he had dreamed of as being different from the one that actually came into existence and whose foundation he would certainly not have thought would be so demanding and would cause him so much suffering. Quicker and decidedly less problematic instead was the founding of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and his two lay associations: the “Salesian Cooperators” and the “Devotees of Mary Help of Christians”.*

*Now, of the various possible historical profiles under which Don Bosco the Founder can be studied<sup>1</sup> (historical and factual, historical and psychological, historical and pedagogical, historical and sociological, historical and theological...) here we are only interested in the historical and legal one.*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mario MIDALI, *Tipi di approccio a don Bosco fondatore. Rilievi valutati alla luce della riflessione contemporanea*, in ID. (Ed.), *Don Bosco fondatore della Famiglia salesiana*. Roma, SDB 1989, pp. 27-80.

*Already in the 1850s Don Bosco had tried to attract young helpers to his sphere of activity who were formed 'on the ground' working beside him and who once they had studied theology, could then continue the Work of the Oratories which he had begun in Turin.*

*In the historical turning point between the 1850s and 60s such work took on the shape of a true and proper religious society with Constitutions, destined for a future in both civil and church society in Italy and in many European countries and beyond.*

*At the end of the 1860s, having finished building the church of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco launched a lay association of devotees who took their name from that, aimed at giving stability to the spontaneous cult of the Virgin of Valdocco. The church had increasingly become a centre of popular and ecclesial religious sentiment.*

*At the beginning of the 1870s, to the emerging Society of St Francis de Sales, already formally recognised by the Holy See, he added the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, aimed at carrying out the same Salesian educational mission but for girls and young women.*

*Finally, once the Salesian Constitutions were approved (1874) and the first overseas expedition had sailed (1875), Don Bosco proceeded with the canonical foundation of the Salesian Cooperators Association which led to fulfilling plans he had merely glimpsed and sketched out in earlier years.*

*With this fourth foundation the "Salesian Family" of Don Bosco's era was complete, and would be successively enriched with other groups admitted by future Rectors Major.*

*Published here are both requests for approval or recognition that Don Bosco put to various religious authorities regarding the four institutes he founded, and, following each of these, the eventual subsequent decrees which Don Bosco often published in the dossiers he sent to the Holy See.*

## I. SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES

*On April 3, 1874, Pope Pius IX definitively approved the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales and on the following April 13 the competent Congregation of Bishops and Regulars promulgated the relevant decree.*

*The torturous history of this complex process in drafting the Salesian Constitutions is already known thanks to the critical edition of all the preparatory texts for the text approved in 1874 and for the first text to be translated into Italian (1875)<sup>2</sup>. Likewise known are the serious difficulties Don Bosco encountered in gaining the desired approval, due to opposition from the archbishops of Turin, Alessandro Riccardi di Netro first, but especially Lorenzo Gastaldi later, and also the many animadversiones from consultants and heads of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars who were deputed to give this approval.*

*The constant requests to the Pope with which Don Bosco solicited approval of the Constitutions, the moral support of bishops and cardinals who were in favour, and whom he had approached personally or by letter, failed to have the better of the legislation in force and the canonical practice of the era. These demanded reasonable time for experimentation and acceptance of the animadversiones, which Don Bosco instead felt ran contrary to the complete freedom of action which the Salesian Society, in his opinion, needed.*

*Here we publish 11 documents relating to Don Bosco the Founder over the period 1852-1884. We divide them into three distinct phases.*

*Above all the five occasions or acts preceding the first recognition of the Salesian Society in 1864: the appointment in 1852 of Don Bosco as director and head of the three oratories in Turin, by Archbishop Frasoni (no. 30), the choice in 1854 of the name 'Salesians' for some young men who were ready to undergo a "trial of the exercise of practical charity towards their neighbour" (no. 31), the foundation of the Salesian Society in 1859 (no. 32), the first request, which was left hanging, for diocesan approval in 1860, made to the archbishop in exile (no. 33) and the first religious professions in 1862 (no. 34).*

<sup>2</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesci di Sales [1858] - 1875*. Critical texts by Francesco Motto (= ISS - Fonti, Serie prima, 1). Roma, LAS 1982.

*Then follows the whole procedure for canonical approval of the Society and its Constitutions (1864-1874), spread over four requests and subsequent decrees, following the Methodus in force for approval of Constitutions of new Institutes: the 'decretum laudis' of 1864 (no. 35), the decree of diocesan approval for the Salesian Society in 1868 (no. 36), the decree of pontifical approval of the same Society in 1869 (no. 37), the decree of definitive approval of the Salesian Constitutions in 1874 (no. 38). The decrees, all in Latin, are offered in translation.*

*The third phase was the ten year wait for the granting of "privileges" by the Holy See in 1884 (no. 39) shortly prior to the official announcement of the appointment of Fr Rua as plenipotentiary Vicar of Don Bosco (and of Fr John Cagliero as Provicar for Latin America) published, however, a year later (no. 40).*

*In the arduous process of founding a true and proper religious institute like the Salesians, which of course Don Bosco had no personal experience of or specific theological and legal preparation for, very different factors played a part: events, situations, experiences, legal arrangements, reflections, intuitions, prejudices, personalities, friendships, civil and religious authorities; all elements, these, which are not so easy to identify, analyse, evaluate and deal with. For a broader presentation of these see contributions collected in an appropriate section of one of these volumes<sup>3</sup>. For an overall synthesis of the entire scene see the already indicated works by P. Stella, F. Desramaut, P. Braido, A. J. Lenti ..., which in turn have plenty of bibliographical references.*

### **30. Appointment of Don Bosco as the Director and head of the three oratories in Turin**

ASC A0201203 Copy conforms with the original<sup>4</sup>.

Marquis Louis Fransoni  
Knight of the Supreme Order of the Annunciation,  
by the Grace of God and of the Apostolic See  
Archbishop of Turin

<sup>3</sup> M. MIDALI, *Don Bosco fondatore della Famiglia salesiana...*, pp. 148-278.

<sup>4</sup> This document can be considered as the first official recognition of Don Bosco's work by the diocesan authority.

To the reverend John Bosco of Castelnuovo.

Diocesan priest.

Greetings,

We congratulate you, worthy priest of God, for your zeal and charity in gathering poor boys in the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales in Valdocco, an enterprise that can never be sufficiently commended. We consider it only proper to register our complete satisfaction for this undertaking by officially appointing you, with this letter, Head Spiritual Director of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and also of the Oratories of Saint Aloysius and the Guardian Angel in order that the work undertaken under such felicitous auspices may prosper and develop in a spirit of charity, for God's true glory and for the great edification of the people. Therefore, we hereby confer upon you every faculty necessary and suitable to this holy purpose.

The original of this certificate is being forwarded to our chancery for filing, and the chancellor will be authorised to issue a copy to you.

Turin, March 31, 1852.

Signed: Filippo Ravina, Vicar General

Undersigned: Balladore, Chancellor

### **31. Choice of the name "Salesians"**

ASC A4630102 ms. by Fr Michael Rua (no date, probably after the fact).

"On the evening of 26 January 1854 we gathered in Don Bosco's room: Don Bosco, Rocchiatti, Artiglia, Cagliero and Rua<sup>5</sup>; we were invited to engage, with the help of God and of St Francis de Sales, in an experiment in the practical exercise of charity toward neighbour, in order eventually to make a promise and later, if possible and appropriate, a vow of it to the Lord. From that evening the name Salesians was given to those who chose and would in the future choose to engage in such an exercise."

<sup>5</sup> Only the last two became Salesians; Rocchiatti was one for a while.



### 32. Minutes of the foundation of the Society of St Francis De Sales

Critical ed. in RSS 27 (2008) 335.

*In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ*  
*Amen*

1859. In the Year of Our Lord eighteen hundred and fifty nine, on the eighteenth of December in this Oratory of St. Francis of Sales at 9 in the evening, the following gathered in Father John Bosco's room: [Fr John Bosco] himself, Father Victor Alasonatti, the Seminarists Deacon Angelo Savio, Subdeacon Michael Rua, John Cagliero, John Baptist Francesia, Francis Provera, Charles Ghivarello, Joseph Lazzero, John Bonetti, John Anfossi, Louis Marcellino, Francis Cerruti, Celestine Durando, Secondo Pettiva, Anthony Rovetto, Caesar Joseph Bongiovanni, and the young man Louis Chiapale. All [present were] united in one and the same spirit with the sole purpose of preserving and promoting the spirit of true charity needed for the work of the Oratories on behalf of neglected young people at risk. For in these disastrous times of ours such young people are liable to be corrupted and plunged into godlessness and irreligion to the detriment of the whole of society.

The Gathered group then decided to form a society or congregation with the aim of promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls, especially of those most in need of instruction and education, while providing the members with mutual help toward their own sanctification. The project met with unanimous approval. Hence, after a short prayer and the invocation of the light of the Holy Spirit, the group proceeded to elect the members that would make up the central body of the Society and would lead this and future communities, if it should please God to grant increase.

The group then unanimously requested Him [Don Bosco] who has been the initiator and promoter [of the work] to accept the office of Major Superior, as is becoming in every respect. He accepted the office on condition that he should have the power to choose for the office of prefect the present writer [Alasonatti], who has held that office in the house up to the present.

The group then considered the method to be followed in electing the other members of the central governing body, and it was decided to hold the election by secret ballot. This was deemed the speediest way of setting up the council, which was to consist of a spiritual director, of a financial administrator, and of three councillors, in addition to the two already mentioned officers.

The writer [of these Minutes] was appointed secretary and [now] solemnly declares that he has faithfully discharged the task entrusted to him by general agreement. As the balloting progressed, he recorded the votes by the name of the individual concerned; and this was the result of the elections: the Seminarian, the Subdeacon Michael Rua was unanimously elected spiritual director, and he accepted [the appointment]. The same procedure was followed for the financial administrator, with the result that Deacon Angelo Savio was elected. He also accepted, pledging to discharge the duties of that office.

Three councillors remained to be elected. The balloting for the first of these resulted in the election of the Seminarian John Cagliero. The second councillor to be elected was cleric John Bonetti. The balloting for the third and last councillor resulted in a tie between seminarians Charles Ghivarello and Francis Provera. A second balloting produced a majority favouring Seminarian Ghivarello. Thus the central administrative body of our Society was definitively established.

The report of these proceedings, as summarily described herein, was read before the assembly of all the members and elected officers and was approved as true to fact. It was then unanimously resolved that this original document should be kept on file, and to guarantee its authenticity the Major Superior and the Secretary affixed their signatures.

Fr John Bosco  
Victor Alasonatti, priest, Prefect

### **33. Request to the Archbishop of Turin, Luigi Fransoni, for Diocesan approval of the Salesian Society**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 406-407.

[Turin, 11 June 1860]

Your Grace,

We, the undersigned, motivated solely by the desire to ensure our eternal salvation, have come together in common life to more conveniently attend to those things which concern the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

To preserve unity of spirit and discipline and to practise means known to be useful for the purpose we have proposed, we wrote down some rules in the guise of a religious society which, excluding any reference to politics, aims solely at sanctifying its members especially by the exercise of charity towards our neighbour. We have already tried putting these rules into practice and have found them to be compatible with our abilities and advantageous to our souls.

But we know that the minds of individuals are too easily subject to illusion and often to error if not guided by the authority God established upon the earth, which is Holy Mother Church. It is for this reason that we humbly come before Your Grace, humbly requesting that you read the attached draft regulations, changing, subtracting, adding, correcting whatever the Lord inspires you to for his greater glory and for what is compatible with our abilities.

We recognise in you, Your Grace, the pastor who unites us to the supreme leader of the Church of Jesus Christ. Once Your Grace has spoken, we recognise the will of the Lord in your words.

While asking you to kindly accept this request of ours, kneeling before you we ask for your holy blessing, and we beg you to read the attached draft regulations signed by us,

Fr John Bosco  
*a further 25 signatures follow*<sup>6</sup>

### **34. First triennial Religious Professions of sixteen Salesians**

Critical ed. in RSS 29 (2010) 34.

1862. On 14 May, the confreres of the Society of St Francis de Sales were called together by the rector and most of them confirmed their belonging to the new Society by formally professing the vows. This was done in the following way: Don Bosco the rector, vested in a surplice, invited everyone to kneel and then they began reciting the *Veni Creator* which continued, verses alternating, until the end. Once the *Oremus* of the Holy Spirit was said they recited the Litany of the Blessed Virgin with its *Oremus*. Afterwards they said a *Pater, Ave* and *Gloria* to St Francis de Sales adding the invocation to him and the *Oremus*.

When this was finished, the confreres, Fr Victor Alasonatti, Fr Michael Rua, Fr Angelo Savio, Fr Joseph Rocchiatti, Fr John Cagliero, Fr John Francesia, Fr Dominic Ruffino, clerics Celestine Durando, John Anfossi, John Boggero, John Bonetti, Charles Ghivarello, Francis Cerruti, Joseph Lazzero, Francis Provera, Louis Chiapale all said the formula of the vows together and each one signed the appropriate book<sup>7</sup>.

### **35. Request to Pius IX for Pontifical approval of the Salesian Constitutions**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 37-38.

Turin, 12 February 1864

<sup>6</sup> Following the founding meeting of the Salesian Society (18 December 1859), new members were admitted to the Society, amongst whom the fifteen year-old Paul Albera and the first “tertiary” Salesian, Fr John Ciattino, parish priest of Mareto (Asti). Faced with the 78 constitutional articles sent him, the archbishop had only a slight reservation on the formulation of the vow of chastity.

<sup>7</sup> Four of them (Anfossi, Boggero, Chiapale and Rocchiatti) would leave the Society.

Most Holy Father,

With the glory of God and the good of souls in view as my sole purpose and desire, I humbly come before Your Holiness and kneel to petition for the approbation of the Society of St Francis de Sales<sup>8</sup>. Much thought has gone into this undertaking and I have long desired to bring it to completion. In 1858 I had the good fortune of being granted an audience with Your Holiness. On that occasion, I spoke to Your Holiness of the efforts exerted by heretics and unbelievers to win over the people, poor and defenceless young people in particular. Your Holiness welcomed with joy the idea of a Society that would be devoted to the care of this portion at risk of the flock of Jesus Christ. Your Holiness personally wished to lay down its basic premises, and I have done my best to follow these in drafting the present regulations.

To the best of my poor power and ability, I have tried to implement Your Holiness' counsels. But I fear that in carrying out this work I may have departed, perhaps even in essential points, from the object intended. Consequently I am asking for the correction, rather than for the approbation, of these projected constitutions.

With this end in view, Your Holiness, or whoever Your Holiness may wish to delegate for the purpose, should feel free to correct, add, and strike out to the extent that may be judged to redound to the greater glory of God. I shall not object in any way. Rather, I shall be available for any explanation that may be required or deemed useful. Even as of now, I wish to express my indebtedness to anyone who will be of assistance to me in bringing the statutes of this Society to [the desired] perfection, and in rendering them as stable and as conformable as possible to the standards of Our Holy Catholic Religion.

<sup>8</sup> The "Draft Regulations" of the Salesian Society, now grown to 107 articles divided into 16 chapters and accompanied by letters of recommendation by various bishops, were sent by Don Bosco to the Pontiff along with a dossier in which he indicated the need for the superior of the Society to have full freedom in the matter of admissions to holy orders (the faculty to provide "dimissorials"). This would end up being the *punctum dolens* in the entire process of canonical approval.

These statutes, of which a copy is submitted herewith, are grouped in 16 chapters, divided into brief articles. An explanation of a number of important points is provided on a separate sheet.

The Bishops of Cuneo, Acqui, Mondovì, Susa, Casale, as well as the Capitular Vicar of this our Archdiocese, have been kind enough to write letters of commendation in support of this Society. Its members now number over seventy-five, and their only desire is to devote their life and means for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

United in prayer, we await any decision that Your Holiness, as the Supreme Head of the Church, may [see fit to] render; and we kneel to beg Your Holiness' apostolic blessing, as a token of this hoped-for and signal favour.

As for me, I deem it the highest honour to kneel before Your Holiness and to profess myself,

The Church's and your Holiness' most humble,  
most indebted, most devoted Son,

Fr John Bosco

*Decretum*<sup>9</sup>

*Pauperum adolescentulorum miserans conditionem sacerdos Ioannes Bosco e Dioecesi Taurinensi, iam ab anno 1841 aliorum Presbyterorum etiam auxilio fretus, illos in unum colligere, Catholicae fidei rudimenta edocere, et temporalibus subsidiis levare instituit. Hinc ortum habuit Pia Societas, quae a Sancto Francisco Salesio nomen habens, ex Presbyteris, Clericis et Laicis constat. Socii tria consueta simplicia vota obedientiae, paupertatis et castitatis profitentur, Superioris Generalis, qui Rector Maior nuncupatur, directioni subsunt, et praeter propriam sanctificationem, praecipuum hunc habent finem, ut quum temporalibus, tum spiritualibus adolescentium praesertim miserabilium commodis inserviant.*

<sup>9</sup> The decree "praised and commended" the new Congregation but it also asked for some corrections to the text of the constitutions (indicated in 13 attached *animadversiones*) in view of its future approval.

*Iam inde a Piae Congregationis principio, quae ad huiusmodi consilii rationem pertinere arbitrati sunt, adeo studiose diligenterque curarunt, ut maximum ex eorum laboribus Christianae Reipublicae fructum accessisse, exploratum omnibus sit; et quamplures Antistites in proprias eos Dioeceses advocaverint, quos tamquam solertes strenuosque operarios in vinea Domini excolenda sibi adiutores adsciscerent. Verum, praenominato sacerdote [Ioanni] Bosco, qui Fundator simulque Superior Generalis Piae Societatis est, multum sibi suisque sociis deesse visum est, nisi eidem Societati Apostolica accederet confirmatio.*

*Commendatus idcirco a plurimis Antistitibus praefatam confirmationem a SS. Domino Nostro Pio Papa IX humillimis precibus nuperrime postulavit, et Constitutiones approbandas exhibuit. Sanctitas sua in audientia habita ab infra[scripto] Domino pro Secretario Sacrae Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium sub die prima Iulii 1864, memoratam Societatem, attentis Litteris Commendatitiis praedictorum Antistitum, uti Congregationem votorum simplicium, sub regimine Moderatoris Generalis, salva Ordinariorum jurisdictione, ad praescriptum Sacrorum Canonum et Apostolicarum Constitutionum, amplissimis verbis laudavit atque commendavit, prout praesentis Decreti tenore laudat atque commendat; dilata ad opportunius tempus Constitutionum approbatione.*

*Insuper Sanctitas Sua, attentis peculiaribus circumstantiis, indulget, veluti huius Decreti tenore indulget, ut hodiernus Moderator Generalis, seu Rector Major, in suo munere, quoad vixerit, permaneat; quamvis constitutum sit, ut eiusdem Piae Societatis Superior Generalis duodecim tantum annis suum officium exercent.*

*Datum Romae ex Secretaria Sacrae Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium hac die 23 Iulii 1864.*

A. card. Quaglia, Praefectus  
Stanislaus Svegliati, Pro-Secretarius

*(Translation)*

Moved by the pitiable condition of poor young people, Father John Bosco, a priest of the diocese of Turin, as far back as the year 1841, with the help

of other priests began to gather those [young people] together, instruct them in the rudiments of the Catholic faith, and assist them with material help. From this [ministry] was born the pious Society named after St Francis de Sales and consisting of priests, seminarians and laymen. The members profess the traditional simple vows of obedience, poverty and chastity, and are under the authority of a superior general known as Rector Major. Besides attending to their own sanctification, their main purpose is to work on behalf of poor young people especially by helping them both materially and spiritually.

From the start the members of the pious congregation have sought to cultivate with great zeal and diligence whatever they thought would contribute to the advancement of such a purpose. Because of this [commitment] their labours, as is known to all, have brought the greatest benefits to Christian society, and many bishops have asked them into their own dioceses and have taken them, like the faithful and tireless workers that they are, as associates in the care of the Lord's vineyard. However, the aforementioned Father Bosco, who is both founder and Superior General of the pious Society, as well as his associates [rightly] feel that the founding would be incomplete if the society did not receive the confirmation of the Apostolic See.

Therefore, with the commendation of many bishops, he has very recently most humbly petitioned our Holy Father, Pope Pius IX, to grant such confirmation, and [to that effect] he has presented Constitutions for approval. After giving careful attention to the above-mentioned letters of commendation from bishops, in an audience granted on July 1, 1864 to the bishop and under-secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, His Holiness bestowed the highest praise and commendation on said Society as a Congregation with simple vows [working] under the authority of a Superior General, but respecting the jurisdiction of diocesan Ordinaries in keeping with the Sacred Canons and the Apostolic Constitutions. It is therefore the intention of the present decree to praise and commend the pious Society—even while putting off the approval of the Constitutions to a more suitable time. Moreover, His Holiness, taking special circumstances into consideration, has graciously granted, as it is also the intention of this decree so to do, that the present Superior General, or Rector Major, remain in office



for life, although the constitutions provide that the Superior General of this pious Society should hold that office only for twelve years.

Given in Rome by the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on this day July 23, 1864.

A. Cardinal Quaglia, Prefect  
Stanislao Svegliati, Pro-secretary

### **36. Petition to the Bishop of Casale Monferrato, Pietro Maria Ferrè, for Diocesan approval of the Salesian Society**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 461-462.

Turin, 19 December 1867

My Lord<sup>10</sup>,

Herewith the humble request that the members of the Society of St Francis de Sales make to Your Lordship with a view to gaining diocesan approval of their Society should you consider this to be for the greater glory of God.

I note here only that the decree, a copy of which is attached<sup>11</sup>, is made on the basis of the rules printed later and following the copy I believe I sent you. According to this you may establish the guidelines for having this 'guest' in your home, where we are already temporarily living.

If need be I can visit Casale whenever.

With all my heart I wish you every blessing from Heaven, and in recommending us all to your holy prayers I profess my deep gratitude.

Your Lordship's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

<sup>10</sup> Pietro Maria Ferrè (1815-1886) was transferred from Pavia to Casale the preceding March, thanks to an accord between the Holy See and the Italian State in which Don Bosco also played a part (cf. no. 64).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. no. 35.

*Decretum*<sup>12</sup>

Critical ed. in OE XVIII, 579-582.

*Nos Petrus Maria Ferrè  
Dei et Apostolicae Sedis gratia  
Ecclesiae Casalensis episcopus, et comes*

*Sicuti praecipuum est Episcoporum munus a Vinea Domini totis viribus malas herbas eradicare, ita maxima est eis cura adhibenda ut bonae arbores, quae bonos fructus facere portendant, in eadem Vinea serantur, colantur, atque custodiantur.*

*Cum autem Divina providentia factum sit ut Societas a Sancto Francisco Salesio dicta tamquam nova plantatio in Nostra hac Dioecesi constitueretur, eam omni prorsus animi favore prosequi Nobis est in Consilium.*

*Acceptis itaque epistolis supplicatoriis una cum constitutionibus, quas Ioannes Bosco Sacerdos, eiusdem Societatis Superior Generalis, Nobis obtulit, optimum in Domino factum Nobis est visum hanc eandem Societatem rite adprobare.*

*Istius enim Societatis constitutiones quindecim capitulis constat; capitula autem in articulis dividuntur. Finis est Sociorum sanctificatio praecipue per exercitium christianae charitatis erga adolescentulos diebus festis derelictos; pauperiores vero quibusdam domibus receptos alere; et si bonum Ecclesiae postulaverit, Iuniorum Seminariorum curam suscipere, quemadmodum in hac Nostra Dioecesi, in pago, cui est nomen Mirabello, iam pridem est factum, ubi centum circiter et quinquaginta parvuli ad scientiam ac pietatem informantur, quemadmodum eos decet qui in sortem Domini sunt vocati. Deinde sacris praedicationibus, catechesi, bonorum librorum diffusionem, ut animarum lucrum Socii optineant, operam dabunt.*

*Attente igitur hisce constitutionibus perlectis, fine, ac forma memoratae Societatis consideratis, peculiari quoque benevolentia permoti erga Domum iam antea in hac Dioecesi constitutam, ut ipsa magis atque magis firmetur, eiusdemque fructus uberiores evadant;*

<sup>12</sup> This is a request for canonical recognition and not just a simple commendation.

*Habita ratione commendationem Antecessoris Nostri, qui eam erigendam curavit, et etiam atque etiam commendavit;*

*Adhaerentes Sacrae Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium Decreto, quo hanc Societatem, attentis litteris Commendationis plurimorum Episcoporum, Maximus Ecclesiae Pontifex amplissimis verbis laudare et commendare dignatus est uti Congregationem votorum simplicium sub regimine Superioris Generalis;*

*Hisce demum omnibus attente consideratis ac perpensis, Societatem a Sancto Francisco Salesio dictam commendandam atque adprobendam esse duximus, uti praesenti Decreto commendamus, et tamquam Dioecesanam Congregationem adprobamus secundum constitutiones Nobis relatas.*

*Insuper cum ex memorato Decreto constet Superiorem Generalem eiusdem Societatis esse rite constitutum, Nos benevolenti animo parati sumus omnes facultates et privilegia eidem concedere, quae necessaria aut opportuna videbuntur, ad maiorem Dei gloriam et ad bonum Societatis promovendum.*

*Veruntamen cum supralaudata Sacra Episcoporum et Regularium Congregatio absolutam Constitutionum adprobationem ad opportunius tempus distulerit, volumus omnes correctiones ac reformationes, additamenta, quae Sancta Sedes in his constitutionibus inserere iudicaverint, eadem admittantur, in constitutionibus accommodentur et observentur, sicuti et Nos admittimus et observare intendimus.*

*Dum autem hanc Societatem apud omnes Catholicos Episcopos commendamus, ut opere ac consilio eam firmiorem reddant eique pro viribus faveant, Supremum Ecclesiae Antistitem demissis precibus enixe obsecramus, ut absolutam Apostolicam Constitutionum adprobationem huic Societati concedere tandem dignetur.*

*Hanc denique probationem esse tantum Dioecesanam declaramus salva aliorum Episcoporum iurisdictione.*

*Datum Casali, in Aedibus Nostris Episcopalibus, die 13 ianuarii anni 1868.*

† Petrus Maria, Episcopus  
Can. Briatta, Cancell. Episc.

*(Translation)*

We, Pietro Maria Ferrè  
By the grace of God and the Apostolic See  
Count and Bishop of Casale

Since the main task of the bishops is to use all their strength to remove the weeds from the Lord's vineyard, they need to employ every effort to see that in it plants offering good fruit are sown, cultivated and looked after.

And since, by the intervention of Divine providence it has happened that the said Society of St Francis de Sales has been newly planted in this diocese of ours, it is precisely our will to protect it and offer it all our support.

Therefore, having received the letters of request and the Constitutions sent to us by Father John Bosco, superior general of the same Society, we consider it an excellent thing in the Lord to grant due approval to this Society.

The Constitutions of this Society consists of fifteen chapters, each with its articles. The proposed aim is the sanctification of its members to be pursued especially through the exercise of Christian charity on behalf of abandoned teenagers at weekends; to gather the poorest of them and provide them with a home; and if the good of the Church requires it, to look after young seminarians, as has already been done for some time in this diocese, in the town of *Mirabello*, where about a hundred and fifty youngsters are being educated in knowledge and piety, as is required for those called to the service of the Lord. Moreover the members dedicate themselves to preaching, teaching catechetics and spreading good books to help with the salvation of souls.

Having read these Constitutions carefully, examined the aim and form of the Society, and urged on also by a special benevolence towards the Society which has already been set up in this diocese for some time, so that it may consolidate yet further and bring about more fruitful advantage;

Bearing in mind the recommendation of our predecessor who sought to have it set up and often praised it;

In complete fidelity to the decree of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars by which the Supreme Pontiff of the Church, after considering the letters of recommendation of many bishops, deigned to praise this Society and recommend it as a Congregation of simple vows led by a superior general;

Having examined and duly pondered all these things, we consider it our duty to recommend and approve the said Society of St Francis de Sales, as we declare in this decree, and confirm that it is a diocesan Congregation which conforms to the Constitutions given us.

Moreover, as pointed out by the decree it appears that the superior general of the Society has been duly constituted, so we are kindly disposed to grant him all the faculties and privileges retained necessary or opportune, with a view to promoting the greater glory of God and the good of the Society.

Nevertheless, since the said Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars has delayed its definitive approval until an opportune time, we would like all the corrections, variations and additions that the Holy See judges to be appropriate to insert be so adopted and observed, as we intend to accept and observe them.

So while we recommend this Society to all Catholic bishops to consolidate it through their works and advice and favour it according to their possibilities, with humble prayers we beseech the supreme pastor of the Church that he may finally deign to grant definitive apostolic approval of the Constitutions of this Society.

We declare finally that this approval is only a diocesan one and respects the jurisdiction of other bishops.

Given at Casale (Monferrato), from our bishop's palace, on January 13, 1868.

† Pietro Maria, bishop  
*Can. Briatta, Cancell. Episc.*

### 37. Petition to Pope Pius IX for Pontifical approval of the Salesian Society

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 545-546.

*A domo sodalitia pagi Mirabelli,  
quarto idus junii MDCCCLXVIII [10 June 1868]<sup>13</sup>*

*Beatissime Pater,*

*Humillime ad pedes Sanctitatis Tuae provolutus supplex deprecor ut Sancti Francisci Salesii Societatem paterna ac consueta bonitate tua adspicias, eidemque, sienti optimum in Domino visum fuerit, provideas.*

*Abhinc quatuor annis amplissimis verbis hanc nascentem Congregationem commendare dignatus fuisti ad instar Congregationum votorum simplicium, dilata tamen ad opportunius tempus Constitutionum approbatione. Attentis peculiaribus circumstantiis generalem superiorem, ejusdemque successorem constituebas.*

*Temporis vero opportunitatem ad hoc opus perficiendum praesens tempus, Beatissime Pater, ex tui cordis erga nos voluntate, habere dignare. Nam per octo et viginti circiter annos existentia hujus Societatis inter tot malorum temporum perversitates; commendatio, quam saepe saepius de eadem fecisti; adprobatio Dioecesis Episcopi Casalensis; litterae supplicatoriae Antistitum Provinciae Ecclesiasticae Taurinensis, aliorumque Antistitum et praecipue Eminentissimorum Cardinalium De Angelis, Sanctitatis Tuae Camerlingi; Antonucci Archiepiscopi Anconitani; Corsi Archiepiscopi Pisani; dies denique mei, qui jamjam vertunt ad occasum; atque alia quae separatim adnotantur, Salesianae Societatis approbationem esse summopere necessariam suadere videntur.*

*Quod si Sanctitas Tua, Beatissime Pater, hanc supremam approbationem bonum in Domino non diducaverit saltem concede ut socii, qui clericalem militiam prosequantur, sacros ordines admitti possint et valeant ab Episcopo Casalensi, licet ad aliam Dioecesim pertineant. In illa enim Dioecesi juniorum*

<sup>13</sup> This is the fourth request Don Bosco addresses to the Pope after the *decretum laudis* of 1864. The main problem is the question of dimissorial letters for ordinations.

*seminarium et sodalitia domus jam pridem fuit instituta.*

*Congregatio ista, quae creatura tua dici potest, Beatissime Pater, benedictionem, soliditatem, certum quodam existendi modum, summa videlicet atque Apostolica approbatio, a Te expectat. Faxit Deus, ut nostrorum votorum compotes fiamus.*

*Dum autem ad hunc finem quotidie preces ad Deum enixe perfundimus, omnes ad Pedes Sanctitatis Tuae provoluti humiliter tuam sanctam et Apostolicam benedictionem expostulamus.*

*Mihi autem prae omnibus felicissima sors contingit ut nominatim possim me profiteri.*

*Beatitudinis Tuae*

*Humillimus, addictissimus filius et famulus*

*Sacerdos Joannes Bosco*

*(Translation)*

Most Holy Father,

Kneeling humbly before Your Holiness, I beg you to turn your customary kind gaze on the Society of St Francis de Sales and meet its needs, if this seems appropriate to you.

Five years ago you deigned to comfort us with great praise of the Congregation which then came into being as a Congregation of simple vows, putting aside approval of the Constitutions till an opportune time. Bearing in mind the particular circumstances, you established the superior general and his successor.

Deign, most Holy Father, to consider in the kindness of your heart for us, this present opportunity as the most appropriate one for completing this work. In fact it has lasted for 28 years amidst the many setbacks of these sad times; you have often made recommendations in its regard; it has received diocesan approval from the bishop of Casale; petitionary letters of bishops

from the ecclesiastical province of Turin and other bishops witness in its favour, and especially from his Eminence Cardinal De Angelis, Camerlengo of Your Holiness, and from their Excellencies Antonucci, Archbishop of Ancona, and Corsi, Archbishop of Pisa. Moreover, deign to consider my advancing years now reaching their end. These and other situations indicated separately seem to indicate that approval of the Salesian Society is highly necessary.

If then, most Holy Father, you do not judge in the Lord that your definitive approval is opportune, at least grant that its members who are preparing for the priesthood can and will obtain the required admission to holy orders from the bishop of Casale even though they belong to another diocese: in that diocese in fact for some time a junior seminary and a religious house has been set up.

The Congregation, which can be considered to be your creation, most Holy Father, awaits from you, evidently [through definitive apostolic approval], blessing, stability and sure pledge of its continued existence. May it be God's will that our aspirations be heard.

While every day we raise our prayers to God for this end, kneeling humbly before Your Holiness, we implore your holy and apostolic blessing.

I have the singular grace of declaring myself Your Holiness',  
most humble and affectionate son and servant,

Fr John Bosco

*Decretum*<sup>14</sup>

Printed ed: OE XXXII, 153-157.

*Salus animarum, quarum curam a Principe Pastorum accepit SS. Dominus Noster Pius Papa IX, continuo Eum vigilem reddit, ut nihil inexpertum relinquat,*

<sup>14</sup>The response of the Holy See to both requests had been negative. Don Bosco succeeded in getting the Salesian Society approved and obtaining a faculty for ten years for issuing dimissorials for clerics who had entered Salesian Houses before 14 years of age, only through a series of personal interventions with competent authorities over a long period in Rome at the beginning of 1869.



*quo sacrosancta Catholica Fides, sine qua impossibile est placere Deo, ubique terrarum vigeat semper, atque augeatur. Quocirca singulari sua Apostolica benevolentia eos potissimum ecclesiasticos viros prosequitur, qui in Societatem adunati, iuventutis curam suscipiunt, eam spiritu intelligentiae ac pietatis imbuunt, omnique studio et contentione, uberes in vinea Domini fructus virtutis, et honestatis afferre conantur. Quum Sanctitas Sua inter huiusmodi Societates accenseri noverit Piam Ecclesiasticorum Virorum Congregationem, quae a S. Francisco Salesio nuncupata, anno 1841, a sacerdote Ioanne Bosco, Augustae Taurinorum erecta fuit, illam sub die prima Iulii 1864 Apostolicae Laudis decreto condecoravit.*

*Ast memoratus Fundator nuperrime Urbem petiit, atque penes Sanctam Sedem enixe postulavit, ut praefatam Congregationem, eiusque Constitutiones approbare dignaretur. Summus vero Pontifex in audientia habita ab infrascripto D. Secretario huius Sacrae Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium, sub die 19 Februarii 1869, attentis Litteris Commendatitiis plurimorum Antistitum, enunciatae Piam Congregationem, uti Societatem votorum simplicium, sub regimine Moderatoris Generalis, salva Ordinariorum iurisdictione ad formam sacrorum Canonum et Apostolicarum Constitutionum, approbavit, et confirmavit, uti praesentis Decreti tenore approbat, atque confirmat, dilata ad opportunius tempus approbatione Constitutionum, quae emendandae erunt iuxta animadversiones ex mandato Sanctitatis Suae iam alias communicatas, excepta quarta, quae modiflcanda erit prout sequitur; nempe Sanctitas Sua supplicationibus sacerdotis Ioannis Bosco benigne annuens, eidem tamquam enunciatae Piae Congregationis Moderatori Generali facultatem tribuit, ad decennium proximum tantum duraturam, alumnis, qui in eiusdem Congregationis aliquo collegio, vel convictu ante aetatem annorum quatuordecim excepti fuerunt, vel in posterum exipientur, ac nomen praefatae Piae Congregationi suo tempore dederunt vel in posterum dabunt, relaxandi Litteras Dimissoriales ad Tonsuram, et Ordines tam Minores, quam Maiores recipiendos; ita tamen ut, si a Pia Congregatione quavis de causa dimittantur, suspensi maneant ab exercitio susceptorum Ordinum, donec de sufficienti Sacro Patrimonio provisi, si in Sacris Ordinibus sint constituti, benevolum Episcopum receptorem inveniant.*

*Contrariis quibuscumque non obstantibus.*

*Datum Romae ex Secretaria Sacrae Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium  
sub die 1 Martii 1869.*

A. Card. Quaglia, Praefectus  
S. Svegliati, Secretarius

*(Translation)*

The salvation of souls entrusted to the care of His Holiness Pope Pius IX prince of pastors, means he is constantly vigilant in order not to overlook anything to ensure that the holy Catholic faith, without which it is impossible to please God, may always flourish and spread throughout the world. Wherefore he bestows his special apostolic kindness on these men of the Church who have come together in a Society to look after youth and teach them the spirit of knowledge and piety, and who make every effort to result in abundant fruits of virtue and honesty in the Lord's vineyard. So as soon as His Holiness learned that amongst societies of this kind was the Pious Congregation of religious which took its name from St Francis de Sales, begun in Turin in 1841 by Fr John Bosco, he honoured it with the *decretum laudis* on July 1, 1864.

The above-mentioned founder soon came to Rome and insisted with the Holy See that it would approve this Congregation and its Constitutions. The supreme pontiff, then, in an audience given the undersigned bishop and secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on February 19, 1869, and noting the letters of commendation from many bishops, approved and confirmed this Congregation under the government of its superior general, respecting the jurisdiction of Ordinaries according to the form of the sacred canons and apostolic constitutions, as is the tenor of the current decree confirming and approving it. But he put off to a more opportune time the approval of the constitutions which are to be corrected following observations by order of His Holiness which have already been communicated on other occasions. The exception is for the fourth, which must be modified as follows: that is, that the Holy See in kind response to the requests of Father John Bosco, grants him, as superior general of the Pious Congregation, the faculty, valid only for the coming ten years, of issuing dimissorial letters for receipt

of the tonsure and both minor and major orders, to his own pupils who had entered a college or hostel prior to their fourteenth year, or who will enter thus in the future, and who will in time join said Pious Congregation or will do so hereafter; but in such a way that if for any motive they should leave the Pious Congregation, they will remain suspended from the orders they received, until they find some bishop who will kindly accept them.

Notwithstanding anything to the contrary.

Given in Rome by the secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on 1 March 1869.

A. Cardinal Quaglia, Prefect  
S. Svegliati, Secretary

### **38. Petition to Pope Pius IX for Pontifical approval of the Salesian Constitutions**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 59-60.

*Taurini, 1° martii 1873*

*Beatissime Pater,*

*Societas Salesiana quam tu, Beatissime Pater, opere et consilio fundasti, direxisti, consolidasti, nova beneficia a Magna Clementia Tua postulat. Etenim hujus Congregationis constitutionum existentia et praxis ferme triginta annorum; difficultates et gravia pericula superata, admirabile ejus incrementum, sunt totidem argumenta quae Dei digitum ostendunt, quemadmodum ipsi Episcopi in eorum litteris commendatitiis asserunt.*

*Nunc vero ad hujus operis complementum duo summopere adhuc desiderantur: Absoluta Constitutionum approbatio, et facultas dimissoriales litteras relaxandi abs-que exceptione. Haec sunt duo beneficia quae humillimis et enixis precibus exopto.*

*Ut autem uno oculorum ictu Congregationis status dignoscatur hic adnectuntur:*

*1° Brevis notitia sive collectio documentorum ad hanc congregationem spectantium.*

*2° Nonnulla exemplaria constitutionum de ultima editione.*

*3° Declarationes supra aliquas parvi momenti mutationes, quas experientia ad processum et soliditatem Congregationis peritiles ostendit.*

*Caetera, quae desunt, addere dignetur bonitas et clementia Tua.*

*Dum autem hoc magnum negotium nostrum in manus Domini commendamus, omnes salesianae Congregationis socii, qui omnes filios tuos esse gloriantur, corde et animo Deum deprecamur, ut, quidquid in oculis Domini melius sit, ipse perficiat, tibi que suggerat.*

*Interim ad Tuae Sanctitatis pedes provolutus, caeteris felicior suppliciter [me] subscribo*

*Humillimus filius*

*Joannes Bosco sacerdos  
Sup. Gen.*

*(Translation)*

Turin, 1 March 1873

Most Holy Father,

The Salesian Society that you, most Holy Father, through your efforts and counsel have founded, directed and consolidated, implores new favours of your Holiness; the existence and practice of the Constitutions of this Society for almost thirty years, the difficulties and grave risks that have been overcome, and its marvellous growth are likewise proof that we can see the hand of God at work, as the bishops also state in their commendations.

Now, then, to complete the work, we desire two things above all: the definitive approval of the Constitutions and the full faculty to issue dimissorials<sup>15</sup>.

These are the two favours I humbly and insistently implore.

<sup>15</sup> The faculty was valid only for those clerics accepted into a Salesian house prior to their 14th year.

So you can quickly see the state of the Congregation the following attachments are included:

- 1) Brief information or collection of documents relating to this Congregation.
- 2) Various copies of the most recent edition of the Constitutions.
- 3) Some statements concerning a number of small variations that experience has shown to be very useful in developing and consolidating the Congregation.

Out of your goodness and kindness you may add anything that is lacking.

And while we trustfully place this grand affair into the Lord's hands, all the members of the Congregation glory in being your sons, and cordially and intimately pray to God that he himself will complete and suggest to you what is best in his eyes.

Meanwhile, kneeling before Your Holiness, I am more happy than anyone else to call myself,

Your most humble son,

Fr John Bosco  
Superior General

*Decretum*<sup>16</sup>

*Sanctissimus Dominus Noster Pius Papa Nonus, in Audientia habita ab infrascripto D. Secretario S. Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium, sub die 3 Aprilis 1874, Feria VI in Parasceve, attentis Literis Commendatitiis Antistitum Locorum, in quibus Piae Societatis Presbyterorum a S. Francisco*

<sup>16</sup> The long interval of time that intervened between the request on 1 March 1873 and the pontifical approval of the Constitutions (13 April 1874) was due to objections by Archbishop Gastaldi, received by heads at the Vatican, to certain articles (dimissorials, novitiate, studies ...). The definitive approval of the Constitutions was given only after corrections (not only formal ones) required by the "Particular Congregation" of cardinals tasked with examining the constitutional text.

*Salesio nuncupatae Domus extant, uberibusque fructibus quos ipsa in Vinea Domini protulit, suprascriptas Constitutiones, prout in hoc exemplari continentur, cuius Autographum in Archivio huius S. Congregationis asservatur, approbavit et confirmavit, prout praesentis Decreti tenore, approbat atque confirmat, salva Ordinariorum iurisdictione, ad praescriptum Sacrorum Canonum, et Apostolicarum Constitutionum.*

*Datum Romae ex Secretaria memoratae S. Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium die 13 Aprilis 1874.*

*A. card. Bizzarri Praefectus*

*S. Archiep. Seleucien. Secret.*

*(Translation)*

His Holiness Pope Pius IX, in an audience granted the undersigned bishop and secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on April 3, 1874, Good Friday, having carefully noted the letters of commendation by the bishops of places where there are houses of the Pious Society of priests of St Francis de Sales and the abundant fruits produced in the Lord's vineyard; approved and confirmed the Constitutions as contained in this sample and whose original is kept in the archives of the Sacred Congregation. This is the tenor of this decree of approval and confirmation, while respecting the jurisdiction of the Ordinaries, according to the prescriptions of the sacred canons and apostolic constitution.

Given in Rome by the secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on April 13, 1874.

A. Card. Bizzarri prefect

S. Archbishop of Seleucia secretary

### 39. Last request, to Pope Leo XIII to grant certain “Privileges” to the Salesian Society

Archivio Congregazione Religiosi e Istituti Secolari 18130/12, original by another but with an authentic signature. (cf. MB XVII, 714, 720).

*Taurini, die 1° aprilis 1884*

*[Romae, die 24 maii 1884]*<sup>17</sup>

*Beatissime Pater*<sup>18</sup>,

*Jam undecimus annus agitur ex quo, Beatissime Pater, humilis Societas ex S. Francisco Salesio dicta absolutam et specificam constitutionum adprobationem consecuta est. Aliqua privilegia omnimode necessaria a Supremo Ecclesiae Antistite tunc elargita fuerunt. Hoc temporis decursu socii Salesiani toti in eo fuerunt ut eorum constitutiones ad praxim traducerent, novitatum, studia perficerent, pietatis exercitia inter socios eorumque alumnos promoverent et ita societatis finem consequerentur, qui gloria Dei lucrumque animarum semper fuit. Post absolutam adprobationem, adiuvante Deo, factum est ut haec humilis societas, vere pusillus grex, mirum in modum citissime augetur et in diversas Italiae partes, in Galliam, in Hispaniam, in Americam Meridionalem usque ad Indos et ad Patagones se se extendit.*

*Cum haec Congregatio suam adprobationem est consecuta, sexdecim domos dumtaxat habebat in quibus septem millia circiter adolescentuli Christianam educationem habebant; socii tercentum adnumerabantur.*

*Nunc vero Domus sive familiae alumnorum sunt centum quinquaginta: alumni ultra centum milia: religiosi quatuor centum supra mille.*

*Inter tot alumnos et socios, inter tot domus unam ab aliis tam dissitam magna difficultas exorta est ob deficientiam privilegiorum, quibus coetera Ecclesiastica instituta gaudere solent.*

*Sed cum non amplius privilegiorum communicatio concedi assoleat, aliqua*

<sup>17</sup> Numerous constantly updated manuscripts of the request are preserved.

<sup>18</sup> To obtain the desired “privileges” from the Holy See, similar to those given to other religious families, Don Bosco had to struggle for ten years. The positive outcome came after the appointment of a new Archbishop of Turin.

*praecipua et pernecessaria privilegia aliis Congregationibus concessa in pagella hic adnexa descripta, et pro humili Societate nostra nunc fidenter postulo.*

*Per huiusmodi concessionem, Beatissime Pater, pia Salesiana Societas tutam et cognitam viam habet quam sequatur; facillime Ordinariis locorum innotescunt privilegia quibus fruatur praecipue in Missionibus suscipiendis et domibus in externis regionibus adaperiendis.*

*Ob tantum beneficium Salesiani omnes grato animo Deo et tibi quotidie laudem dicent; unusquisque pro virili parte ad vineam Domini excolendam operam dabit.*

*Ego vero videns solidatum opus, quod Sancta Dei Ecclesia mihi concredidit, cum gaudio cantabo: Nunc dimittis servum tuum Domine.*

*Humillimus filius*

*Joannes Bosco sacerdos*

*(Translation)*

Most Holy Father,

Eleven years ago the humble Society under the title of St Francis de Sales obtained definitive and specific approval of its Constitutions: certain privileges that were absolutely necessary were then bestowed by the supreme pastor of the Church. Over this period of time the Salesian members have dedicated themselves entirely to putting their Constitutions into practice, to making their novitiate and to completing their studies; promoting the practices of piety amongst their members and the pupils and thus pursue the purpose of the Society which was always the glory of God and to win over souls. After its definitive approval, and with God's help, this humble Society, a truly small flock, very rapidly and prodigiously spread to various parts of Italy, into France, Spain, Southern America to the natives and to Patagonia.

When the Congregation gained approval it had only sixteen institutes where around seven thousand teenagers received Christian education: it had three hundred members. Now instead there are one hundred and sixty six



religious houses with pupils; day students and boarders combined are around a hundred and fifty thousand; there are one thousand four hundred religious.

With so many members and pupils, with so many houses so far from one another, great difficulties arise for want of the privileges which are usually given to other ecclesiastical institutes.

But now, although it may not be usual to grant the privileges, some of them important and very necessary, that are granted to other congregations as indicated on the attached sheet, I am also asking them for our humble Congregation.

Thanks to this concession, most Holy Father, the Salesian Society will have a known and secure path to follow; it will be much easier for local Ordinaries to know the privileges which can be of special advantage in benefiting mission centres and opening institutes in foreign regions.

All the Salesians will thank God for this great gift and will give praise to you every day; Each will try to put all his effort into working in the Lord's vineyard. And I, seeing the work that the holy Church of God has consolidated, will joyfully sing: *Now, Lord, let your servant go in peace.*

Your most humble son,

Father John Bosco

#### *Decretum*

*SS. D. No. Leo PP. XIII in audientia habita ab infrascripto D. Secretorio S. Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium die 13 Junii 1884 Sacerdotem Joannem Bosco fundatorem et Superiorem Generalem Piae Societatis Presbyterorum a S. Francisco Salesio nuncupatae illiusque Socios specialibus favoribus et gratiis prosequens, omnia et singula Indulta, Privilegia, Exemptiones et Facultates Congregationi SS. Redemptoris concessa, iisdem Socios eorumque Ecclesiis, Capellis et Domibus benigne communicare, extendere atque in perpetuum elargiri dignatus est, cum omnibus Clausulis et Decretis necessarii et opportuni. Ceterum eadem Sanctitas Sua mandavit declarari, prout praesentis Decreti tenore*

*declaratur, Privilegia, Facultates, Gratias Spirituales sive ad tempus sive oretenus concessa, omnino revocata, abolita et suppressa esse. Contrariis quibuscumque non obstantibus. –*

*Datum Romae ex Secretaria S. Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium hac die 28 junii 1884.*

I. Card. Ferrieri, *Praef.*

I. Masotti, *Secretarius*

*(Translation)*

His Holiness, Pope Leo XIII, in an audience granted the undersigned bishop and secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on 16 June 1884, desiring to accompany with special favours and graces, Father John Bosco, founder and superior general of the Pious Society of priests known as St Francis de Sales and its members, has kindly deigned to communicate and bestow *in perpetuum* all and each of the indults, privileges, exemptions and faculties granted to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, to their churches, chapels and houses [religious], with all the clauses and decrees that are necessary and opportune. Moreover His Holiness has ordered us to declare, conforming to the tenor of this decree, that all privileges, faculties and spiritual faculties granted orally or temporarily are completely revoked, abolished and suppressed.

No norm or obstacle may run contrary what has been established.

Given in Rome, by the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and of Religious, today June 28, 1884.

I. *Cardinal* Ferrieri, *Prefect*

I. Masotti, *Secretary*

**40. Official communication to Salesians concerning the appointment of Fr Michael Rua as Plenipotentiary Vicar and of Fr John Cagliero as Pro-Vicar for Latin America**

ASC A1750502, printed copy with original signature of Don Bosco; ed. in E IV, pp. 347-349.

Turin, 8 December 1885

My dearest sons in Jesus Christ,

Troubled by various problems, and feeling that my strength is diminishing by the day, I have already for some time considered the need to have relief and support in fulfilling the mission the Divine Providence has entrusted to me.

I saw the need for someone who could help me effectively in carrying out my tasks and who could also be placed in charge of everything that is essential for the smooth running of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales.

For this purpose, therefore, I have thought of choosing a vicar to represent me and be another me, a vicar who would have this special task so that the traditions we have thus far observed are kept intact and will be preserved after me by those who follow us. I am speaking of traditions that are the practical norms for understanding, explaining and faithfully practising the rules that were definitively approved by the holy Church and that make up the spirit and life of our Pious Society. So, it is my keen desire that when it comes time for me to pass into eternal life, nothing will disturb or change what is ours.

Some time ago, while I was meditating on this need, the supreme pontiff wrote to me of his own accord through his Grace Archbishop Domenico Jacobini asking me who it seemed to me would be able to take my place in the supreme direction of the Pious Salesian Society.

Thanking the Holy Father for his benevolence, I replied, proposing Fr Michael Rua as my vicar, because even chronologically he is one of the first members of the Society, and because for many years he has already to a great extent carried out this role and because, in the end, this appointment would find great acceptance from amongst all the confreres. A few weeks ago, the

Holy Father, through our beloved Archbishop, deigned to indicate to me that this proposal was most acceptable to him.

Therefore, my dearest sons, after having prayed over a long period to the giver of all good things, after having called on the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit and the special protection of Our Lady Help of Christians and your patron St Francis de Sales, and applying the faculty granted me by the supreme pastor of the Church, I appoint Fr Michael Rua as my Vicar General, currently the Prefect of our Pious Society, and everything that I can do he can do too with full powers in all public and private matters which refer to this Society and all the personnel who make it up.

The new Vicar, I am certain, in dealing with important matters will always gratefully accept the kind advice and counsel that will be given him.

To you then my dearest sons, I recommend that you give him the complete obedience that you have always professed for the one you call father and who loves you with fatherly love - the obedience that has up until now and will always be, I hope, my consolation.

As a consequence then of this choice I also note that, using the faculties given me by the Rule, I appoint Fr Celestine Durando as Prefect of the Pious Salesian Society, exonerating him from the office of School Councillor which he has occupied up until now, while in his place and in the office of School Councillor for our Pious Society I choose and appoint Fr Francis Cerruti, currently the Provincial of Liguria Province and Rector of the college at Alassio. He of course will remain Provincial until such time as I make new arrangements.

With regard to our missions in South America I appoint Bishop John Cagliero as my Pro-vicar with full authority over all personnel and all the houses and Provinces in those parts<sup>19</sup>.

On this same occasion I believe you will be happy if I share with you that my health has improved somewhat, and I attribute this to the charitable

<sup>19</sup> John Cagliero (1838-1926), native of Castelnuovo, head of the first missionary expedition (1875), was consecrated bishop just a year before (December 7, 1884). He would be made a cardinal in 1915.

prayers that I know you have raised up to God for me. I truly thank you from my heart, and I assure you that with the little strength and few days that the merciful God will still deign to grant me, I intend to dedicate myself totally to the advantage of our humble Congregation and to the benefit of our souls.

May the Lord bless the new vicar, the other superiors and all our confreres, and may he see that all are one heart and one soul in promoting the glory of our Heavenly Father and the sanctification of our souls.

Most affectionately in Jesus,

Fr John Bosco

Note 1. The Rectors of individual houses will read this letter at the first conference they hold for our beloved confreres.

Note 2. I recall that on other occasions I have already recommended, that in addressing letters and in all public and private writings not dealing with our relationships with ecclesiastical authorities, we never use the titles of Congregation, but only civil titles such as *director*, *doctor*, *professor*, *master*, *prefect* etc. So missionaries writing from America to Europe to a confrere should not use the title father, but *priest* or *Mr*.

## II. ASSOCIATION OF DEVOTEES OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

*When he had built the church of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco in Turin in 1868, Don Bosco had it consecrated with an entire cycle of celebrations made available for the public domain through an appropriate booklet<sup>20</sup>. Then he set out to make it an attractive centre for prayers, thanks and donations through a second larger book<sup>21</sup>. Still not satisfied he sought to give stability to general devotion to Mary under the title of Mary Help of Christians through a lay association which bore that name.*

*He himself sketched out the beginnings of it in a third booklet where he drew on the history of the title of Help of Christians through the ages, presenting devotion under that title in Munich and Turin and adding a long series of prayers and practices with their indulgences<sup>22</sup>. He did not fail to include documents relating to the approval of the Association, the ones you find here: the papal brief granting indulgences over a ten year period to the new association (no. 41), the request for and canonical approval from the Archdiocese of the Statutes (no. 42), the Regulations (no. 43).*

*Afterwards (1870) he gained permission from Pius IX to erect the association as an Archconfraternity with the faculty of aggregating similar associations that already existed or would be set up in the archdiocese of Turin; this faculty was then extended by the same Pope in 1877 to all dioceses in Piedmont (and in 1896, in Fr Rua's time as Rector Major, to all dioceses in the world, by Pope Leo XIII).*

<sup>20</sup> *Memorial of a solemnity in honour of Mary Help of Christians.* Torino, Tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1868 (OE XXI, 1-174).

<sup>21</sup> *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice. Raccolte dal Sacerdote Giovanni Bosco.* Torino, Tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1868 (OE XX, 192-376).

<sup>22</sup> *Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians canonically erected in the Church dedicated to her in Turin, with an historical outline of the title.* Torino, Tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1869 (OE XXI, 339-434).

*For a rapid overview of the association, its history and how it is today, including interventions by some Rectors Major, see no. 3 of the Quaderni di Maria Ausiliatrice<sup>23</sup> and the already cited extensive bibliographies of Don Bosco.*

#### **41. Petition to Pius IX for indulgences favouring the setting up of the Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 62-63.

[Rome, 2 March 1869]

Most Holy Father,

Father John Bosco, keenly desirous of promoting devotion to the Mother of God and veneration of the august sacrament of the Eucharist, sought to satisfy the constant requests of many of the faithful and begin a pious union under the title:

*Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians  
in the church dedicated to her in Turin*

The aim of its members was to do whatever they could to enhance decorum, devotion and observance of feasts, solemnities, triduum, novenas, processions and all practices of piety referring to the honour and glory of the great Queen of Heaven and Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

But since the treasury of holy indulgences would offer members special encouragement and fervour, the speaker humbly appeals to the well-known kindness of Your Holiness that he may deign to grant the following spiritual favours to each member:

1. A plenary indulgence on all feasts and solemnities, celebrated throughout the year in honour of the Blessed Virgin and the Blessed Sacrament on condition that they approach the sacraments of confession and communion.

<sup>23</sup> Pier Luigi CAMERONI, *ADMA. Associazione di Maria Ausiliatrice. Un itinerario di santificazione e di apostolato secondo il carisma di don Bosco*. Leumann (Torino), Elledici 2009.

2. A plenary indulgence once a week on the day they approach these same sacraments of confession and communion and pray for the needs of holy mother Church.

3. An indulgence of five hundred days every time they attend holy Mass.

4. An indulgence of three hundred days every time they devoutly say: *Maria Auxilium Christianorum ora pro nobis*, including its translation into other languages. That such an indulgence may also benefit those who are not aggregated to this pious union.

5. In the previously mentioned church of Mary Help of Christians where every morning the rosary is said along with other prayers, Mass is celebrated at the main altar where the Blessed Sacrament is kept and general communion is available for many faithful especially young people, we humbly ask that the same plenary indulgence be granted to everyone who takes part in this act of devotion and goes to holy communion.

6. That these indulgences may also be applied in suffrage for the holy souls in Purgatory.

Yours ...

Fr John Bosco

[Papal Brief]

Critical ed. *In Associazione dei devoti di Maria Ausiliatrice canonicamente eretta nella chiesa a lei dedicata in Torino, con ragguaglio storico su questo titolo.*

Torino, Tip. dell'Oratorio

di S. Francesco di Sales 1869 (OE XXI, 378-385).

*Pius PP. IX*

*Ad futuram rei memoriam*

*Exponendum curavit Nobis dilectus filius Ioannes Bosco, Presbyter Taurinensis, sibi, ad fovendam augendamque fidelium erga sanctam Dei Matrem, augustumque Eucharistiae Sacramentum religionem, in animo esse, piam sodalitatem in Ecclesia sub invocatione Immaculatae Virginis Auxiliatricis Civitatis Taurinensis de Ordinarii licentia instituire, cui vulgo - Associazione dei devoti di Maria*



*Ausiliatrice - nomen sit, et cujus sodales praecipue in promovendum Deiparae Immaculae augustique Sacramenti cultum intendant animum.*

*Quo vero, propositis uberioribus ad coelestem beatitatem potiundam praesidiis, maiori studio fideles sodalitati isti nomen dent, atque in praescripta pietatis opera incumbant, enixas Nobis preces adhibuit humiliter, ut Ecclesiae thesauros, quorum dispensationem Nobis commisti Altissimus, idcirco reserare de benignitate Nostra dignaremur.*

*Nos igitur salubres has frugiferasque memorati dilecti filii curas plurimum commendantes, quo sodalitas ista maiora in dies, Deo iuvante, suscipiat incrementa, de Omnipotentis Dei misericordia, ac BB. Petri et Pauli App. ejus auctoritate confisi, omnibus et singulis utriusque sexus Christifidelibus e pia sodalitate vulgo - Associazione dei divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice - in cognomine Ecclesiae Civitatis Taurinensis canonice instituta nunc et pro tempore existentibus, vere poenitentibus et confessis, ac sacra Communionem refectis, qui eandem Ecclesiam, et sodalitates Oratorium vel Altare, Nativitatis, Circumcisionis, Epiphaniae et Ascensionis D. No. I. C. festivitatum, Dominica Pentecostes, sollemnitate SS. Corporis Christi, itemque septem potioribus Immaculae Virginis Deiparae festis, a primis vespere usque ad occasum solis dierum hujusmodi, singulis annis devote visitaverint, ibique pro Christianorum Principum concordia, haeresum extirpatione ac s. Matris Ecclesiae exaltatione pias ad Deum preces effuderint, quo die ex recensitis id egerint, Plenariam omnium peccatorum suorum Indulgentiam et remissionem misericorditer in Domino concedimus.*

*Praeterea eisdem sodalibus, qui quolibet die sollemnium supplicationum, quae in honorem sanctae Dei Matris dicta in Ecclesia per tres aut novem dies continuos fieri solent, ea, quae descripsimus, pietatis opera corde saltem contriti peregerint, septem annos totidemque quadragenas: quotiescumque vero rite devoto interfuerint Exercitio cujusvis diei mane de Ordinarii licentia praefata in Ecclesia habendo, et corde pariter contriti consuetas preces ut supra pro Christianorum Principum concordia, haeresum extirpatione, ac s. Matris Ecclesiae exaltatione recitaverint, centum dies de injunctis eis, seu alias quomodolibet debitis poenitentiis in forma Ecclesiae consueta relaxamus.*

*Quae omnes et singulae Indulgentiae, peccatorum remissiones, ac poenitentiarum relaxationes ut etiam Animabus Christifidelium, quae Deo in*

*charitate conjunctae ab hac luce migraverint, per modum suffragii applicari possint, misericorditer in Domino elargimur.*

*Praesentibus ad Decennium tantum valituris.*

*Datum Romae apud S. Petrum sub annulo Piscatoris die XVI Martii MDCCCLXIX pontificatus Nostri anno vigesimotertio.*

*N. card. Paracciani Clarelli*

*(Translation)*

Pius PP. IX

For perpetual remembrance

Our beloved son John Bosco, a priest of the Turin diocese, has explained what he has in mind to encourage and increase the devotion of the faithful to the Holy Mother of God and the august sacrament of the Eucharist, and to set up a pious society by the name of *The Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians*, with the approval of the Ordinary, in the church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians in Turin, whose members will have the fostering of devotion to the Immaculate Mother of God and the august sacrament as their principal aim.

So, by offering them greater assistance to achieve heavenly bliss, and so that the faithful may be more committed to this Association and fulfil the prescribed works of piety, he has presented us with this humble petition asking us that out of our kindness we should unlock the treasures of the Church for this end, the dispensation of which is our commission from the Most High God.

Commending the salutary and fruitful concerns of our beloved son, and so that this Association may grow day by day through divine help, and relying on the merciful God and the authority of his blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, We do hereby mercifully grant in the Lord a plenary indulgence and the remission of all their sins to all Christian individuals of either gender who are now and will in the future be enrolled in the pious society which has the name *The Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians*, canonically erected in the church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians in Turin and who, truly penitent, have been to confession and communion and who have devoutly

visited this church, oratory or altar of this Society from first Vespers until sunset, on whichever of the following days they will have done so: Christmas Day, the Feast of the Circumcision, the Epiphany and the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ, on Pentecost Sunday, on the Solemnity of the Body of the Lord, and similarly on the seven principal Feasts of the Immaculate Virgin, Mother of God; and have prayed for harmony amongst Christian princes, for the eradication of heresies, and for the exultation of holy mother Church.

Moreover, to the same members who at least with penitent heart fulfil the above-mentioned works of piety on each day of a novena or triduum usually carried out in this church in honour of the Mother of God, we grant seven years of indulgence and as many quarantines: every time they come to the devotions which, with the permission of the Ordinary are celebrated each morning in the church, and who are likewise of penitent heart and say the usual prayers for harmony amongst Christian princes, the eradication of heresies and the exultation of holy mother Church, we grant a hundred days of indulgence.

We mercifully grant in the Lord that these indulgences, forgiveness of sins and remission of the pains of sin, may also be applied by way of suffrage to the souls of faithful Christians who passed from this life in God's love.

These are valid for ten years only.

Given in Rome at St Peter's under the seal of the Fisherman on 16 March 1869, in the 23rd year of our pontificate.

*Card. Paracciani Clarelli*<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> In the booklet quoted at note 22 (Turin, 1869, Chap. VI, pp. 28-31) we read: "Favours granted to this church by the supreme pontiff. The supreme pontiff often helped with this church through material offerings and even more through spiritual favours. On January 12, 1867 he granted the following indulgences to all who came to the aid of the building of this church: 1. His apostolic blessing with a plenary indulgence at the moment of death; 2. A plenary indulgence every time they worthily approach holy communion; 3. These indulgences are applicable by way of suffrage to the souls in purgatory. To encourage the faithful to take part in the consecration of this church, with a Brief issued on 22 May 1868, he granted a plenary indulgence to all who had been to confession and communion and who visited this church of Mary Help of Christians on the day of its consecration or on another day during the octave ..." (papal letter of September 23, 1868 follows).

**42. Petition to the Archbishop of Turin, Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi for the Canonical Erection of the Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians**

Printed Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 73-74 (OE XXI, 370-377).

[Turin, 18 April 1869]

Your Grace,

The undersigned humbly lays before Your Grace that solely out of a desire to promote the glory of God and the good of souls he has had in mind that in the church of Mary Help of Christians, consecrated by Your Grace to divine worship just a year ago, he could start a pious union of the faithful under the name of the *Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians*. The principal purpose would be to promote veneration of the Blessed Sacrament and devotion to *Maria Auxilium Christianorum*: a title that seems to be most pleasing to the august Queen of Heaven.

With this in mind some rules have been drawn up modelled on, almost copied from the statutes of the well-known confraternity of Mary erected in Munich in Bavaria.

So that these exercises of piety may have a stable form and be fully in accord with the spirit of the holy Church this humble individual petitions Your Grace to take this pious project into kind consideration and humbly begs you to examine these statutes, add, take away, modify as you see fit, and then as I humbly petition you, approve them with any clause Your Grace considers opportune for promoting the glory of the august Queen of Heaven and the good of souls.

The Association's altar would be the main altar in the church, the privileged one, and at which most of the exercises of piety take place which are the purpose of this Association.

Full of hope that you will grant this favour, and with deep gratitude I implore your holy blessings and profess myself,

your humble petitioner,

Fr John Bosco

[*Decretum*]

*Alexander Octavianus Riccardi  
Ex Comitibus A Netro  
Supremi Ordinis SS. Annuntiationis  
Eques Torquatus Etc. Etc.  
Dei et Sanctae Sedis Apostolicae Gratia  
Archiepiscopus Taurinensi  
SS. D. No. D. Pii Papae IX Praelatus Domesticus  
Ac Pontificio Solio Adsistens*

*Viso memoriali nobis exhibito ab ad. Rev. Dom. Ioanne Bosco ecclesiae sub invocatione Immaculatae Virginis Auxiliatricis nuper erectae in hac civitate rectore, eiusque tenore considerato, piis oratoris votis libenter annuentes ad fovendam augendamque fidelium erga s. Dei Matrem augustumque Eucharistiae Sacramentum religionem, piam sodalitatem cui nomen erit: Associazione dei divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice ad altare maius praedictae ecclesiae praesentium tenore erigimus ac canonice erectam declaramus pro utriusque sexus fidelibus, ut omnes eidem adscribendi de Ecclesiae thesauris, praescripta opera adimplendo, participare valeant; quoniam vero statuta nobis pariter exhibita, ac per nos firmata, piae societatis regimini et incremento accommodata novimus, eadem approbamus, reservata nobis facultate ea addendi vel variandi, quae magis pro dictae piae sodalitatis utilitate expedire iudicabimus. Hoc nostrum decretum una cum memoratis precibus ac statutis in registris Curiae nostrae referri iubemus ac per authenticum exemplar D. Oratori exhiberi.*

*Datum Taurini die decima octava aprilis anno millesimo octingentesimo sexagesimo nono.*

*† Alexander Archiepiscopus  
et manualiter subscriptus Th. Gaudi pro Cancell.*

*Ita in originali cum quo coll. concordat.*

*Datum Taurini die, mense et anno praemissis.*

*Th. Gaude pro Cancell.*

*(Translation)*

Alessandro Ottaviano Riccardi  
dei conti Di Netro  
Knight of the Supreme Order of the Annunciation, etc. etc.  
by the Grace of God and of the Holy Apostolic See  
Archbishop of Turin  
Domestic Prelate of His Holiness Pope Pius IX  
and Assistant at the Papal Throne

Having seen the note presented by Rev. Father John Bosco, rector of the Church recently erected in this city under the title of the Immaculate Virgin the Help of Christians, and having considered its tenor, I willingly consent to the pious wishes of the writer to nurture and increase the devotion of the faithful to the holy Mother of God and the august sacrament of the Eucharist, and by this present decree we erect and declare canonically erected for the faithful of both genders at the main altar of said church, the pious society that will take the name *Association of the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians*, in such a way that all who enrol in it, fulfilling its prescribed works, can participate in the treasures of the Church. And since the statutes likewise presented to us and which we have signed are known to be appropriate for the governing and increase of the Pious Society we approve these too, reserving the faculty of adding or varying those things we judge to be of greater use to said Pious Association. This decree of ours and its petition along with the statues will be kept in the archives of our curia and a genuine copy sent to the petitioner.

Given in Turin in April 18, 1869,

† Alessandro *archbishop*  
Teologo Gaude *pro-chancellor*

### **43. Association of the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians [Regulations]**

Printed ed. in *Associazione dei devoti di Maria Ausiliatrice canonicamente eretta nella chiesa a lei dedicata in Torino, con ragguaglio storico su questo titolo*. Torino, Tip. dell'Oratorio di S.

Francesco di Sales 1869, 96 p. (OE XXI, 386-397).

1. An Association of Mary's devotees is erected in the church in Turin dedicated to Mary Help of Christians and with the authorisation of His Grace the Archbishop of Turin. It proposes to promote the glories of the divine Mother of the Saviour to merit her protection in life and especially at the moment of death.

2. Two special means are proposed: spreading devotion to the Blessed Virgin and veneration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

3. To this purpose members will act with words, advice, works and with the authority of promoting decorum and devotion in novenas, feasts and solemnities which occur in the course of the year in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Blessed Sacrament. Spreading good books, holy pictures, medals, reports, taking part in and recommending taking part in processions in honour of Our Blessed Lady and the Blessed Sacrament, frequent communion, assisting at holy Mass, accompanying Viaticum are all things that members propose to promote with every means compatible with their state.

4. Members will make every effort themselves and with people they employ to prevent blasphemy and any kind of talk against religion and in as much as they can prevent any obstacle hindering keeping Sundays holy.

5. Each member according to advice in catechism classes and from spiritual teachers is warmly encouraged to go to confession and communion every fortnight or once a month and attend Mass daily as long as the obligations of their state allows this.

Members will say each day, following their usual morning and evening prayers, and in honour of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament: *May the most holy*

*and Blessed Sacrament be praised at every moment.* And in honour of the Blessed Virgin: *Maria, Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis.* It is sufficient for priests that they have the intention to pray for all members of this pious Association in their holy Mass. These prayers will serve as a bond uniting all members in one heart and soul to give due honour to Jesus hidden in the most holy Eucharist and his august Mother, and take part in all the works of piety carried out by each member.

### *Spiritual advantages for members*

All members, in order to mutually assist one another to walk the way of salvation aim to be in communion through the good works each one does in private or in the church of Mary Help of Christians, or elsewhere.

1. They will take part in the practices of piety held at the Association's altar which is the main altar in this church: it is the special daily altar according to the decree of the Sacred Congregation on May 22, 1868. Mass will be celebrated at this altar, amongst other things, each morning around six on weekdays, and around seven on Sundays along with the third part of the Rosary, with special prayers. All those who can be there will go to communion. The reigning Pius IX kindly grants 100 days indulgence to everyone each time he or she takes part in this exercise of piety. Every evening psalms will be sung, there will be spiritual reading, prayers, Benediction, and the rosary as in the morning. Each member can gain the plenary indulgence on the solemnities of Christmas, the Circumcision, Epiphany, the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ; on Pentecost, and *Corpus Domini*.

2. A plenary indulgence can be gained on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Our Lady's birthday, the Presentation in the temple, the Annunciation, Purification, Visitation, her assumption into Heaven.

3. The same plenary indulgence can be gained on any day of the novena or feast of Our Lady, *Help of Christians*; on the Feast of St Francis de Sales, St Aloysius Gonzaga, and on a day chosen each month for the exercise for a



Happy Death. The indulgences noted here can also be gained by those not enrolled in the Association. Every member who takes part in the practices of piety celebrated in this church over the year on the occasion of triduums or novenas can gain, once each day, an indulgence of seven years and also quarantines. It is good to note here that to gain the above plenary indulgences sacramental confession and communion are prescribed unless the member has the praiseworthy practice of going to confession each week. In this case only the state of grace is required.

4. Each year on the first free day after the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, a *Requiem Mass* will be sung, and other suffrages offered for the souls of the deceased members in general and particular for those whom God called to eternal life in the course of the year. When a member falls ill or God is pleased to call them to a better life they will especially be recommended to the prayers that are said each day at the altar of Mary Help of Christians so long as the Rector of the church is advised.

#### *Acceptance*

1. Whoever wishes to be part of this Association will have his/her name and surname, place of residence written in the appropriate register kept in the sacristy of the church of Mary Help of Christians. On that occasion, if they so desire, they will be given a medal or holy picture with a booklet about the Association.

2. Parish priests and any others who have the care of souls, directors of colleges or education centres or charitable institutes can enrol any of their dependants so long as they send members' names to the director of the church who is also the director of the pious Association.

There is no annual subscription fee; each person if he or she wishes will give a yearly donation to cover expenses for the novena and Feast of Mary Help of Christians, and for all the other sacred functions carried out during the year in the church of the Association.

*Visa supra scripta statuta seu capitula a nobis firmata tamquam praedictae  
piae societati ac fidelium pietati consona approbamus, reservata nobis facilitate  
eadem variandi, iuxta rerum ac temporum circumstantias.*

*Datum Taurini die 18 aprilis 1869.*

† Alexander Archiepisc.  
*manual. Th. Gaude pro Cancellarius*

*Ita in originali cum quo etc.*

*Th. Gaudi pro Cancellarius*

### III. THE INSTITUTE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

*In the early 1870s, when the Salesian Society was going through a happy time of expansion beyond the borders of Piedmont, thanks also to the many vocations flowing in, Don Bosco, with a group of Daughters of Mary Immaculate at Mornese who were gathered around Mary Domenica Mazzarello (1837-1881), gave life to the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. In a very short time it was approved by the Diocesan Ordinary and aggregated to the Salesian society, then spread throughout Italy and overseas. We publish here five documents on this women's foundation.*

*First of all the request to the Superior of the Sisters of St Anne, Mother Enrichetta Dominici, on adapting the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales to the new Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (no. 44).*

*Secondly the minutes of the first eleven triennial religious professions and the first five clothing ceremonies (four, according to other copies of the minutes), which in some ways was the founding act for the Institute itself (no. 45). Signed by the diocesan authorities, it lacks Don Bosco's signature (he was at the professions, but not when the minutes of the ceremony were compiled), but he would make two corrections on another copy of the document.*

*Then follows a circular to parish priests in which Don Bosco presents the purpose of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and sends the programme of the school at Mornese (no. 46).*

*The document most important for its consequences is perhaps the petition to the Bishop of Acqui, Bishop Joseph Mary Sciandra, for diocesan approval of the FMA Institute after possible corrections of the Constitutions (no. 47).*

*Then having obtained the decree of approval, and given that the Salesian Sisters had now spread throughout Italy, France and America, Don Bosco send them the printed text of their Constitutions with some particular recommendations of his (no. 48).*

*Perhaps his painful experience in gaining pontifical approval for the Salesian Society and its Constitutions had dissuaded Don Bosco from running the same risk*

for the women's Institute. He simply aggregated it to the Salesians, a rather rare thing, and this did not escape the attention of pontifical authorities in his 1879 Report (see no. 24) and would later be re-examined<sup>25</sup>.

On relationships between Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello and their cooperation in founding the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, see the bibliography in the note<sup>26</sup>. For pedagogical and spiritual aspects go to the second and third parts respectively of this volume.

#### **44. To the Superior of the Sisters of St Anne, Mother Enrichetta Dominici (Blessed)**

Printed Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 325-326.

[Turin], 24 April 1871

Very Reverend Mother<sup>27</sup>,

I am putting the rules<sup>28</sup> of our Congregation in your hands asking you to kindly read them and see how they would suit an institute of religious women in the sense that I was able to personally describe it for you.

<sup>25</sup> In conformity with the constitution *Conditae a Christo* of Leo XIII (1900) and the *Normae* (1901) the Holy See requested juridical separation of the FMA from the Salesians and a review of the Constitutions (1906). The decree of pontifical approval for the Institute is dated September 7, 1911.

<sup>26</sup> María Esther POSADA, *Don Bosco fondatore dell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, in M. MIDALI (Ed.), *Don Bosco fondatore della Famiglia salesiana...*, pp. 281-303; María Esther POSADA, *L'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice in rapporto a don Bosco*, in Mario MIDALI (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia. Atti del I Congresso Internazionale di studi su don Bosco*. Roma, LAS 1990, pp. 217-229; María Esther POSADA, *Significato della "validissima cooperatio" di S. Maria Domenica Mazzarello alla fondazione dell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, in ID. (Ed.), *Attuale perché vera. Contributi su S. Maria Domenica Mazzarello*. Roma, LAS 1987, pp. 53-68. Many texts are published in Piera CAVAGLIÀ - Anna COSTA (Ed.), *Orme di vita. Tracce di futuro. Fonti e testimonianze sulla prima comunità delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (1870-1881)*. Roma, LAS 1996.

<sup>27</sup> Maria Enrichetta (Caterina outside religious life) Dominici (1829-1894). From 1861 she was the superior of the Congregation of the Sisters of St Anne, founded in Turin by Marchioness Giulia e Tancredi Falletti di Barolo. Paul VI beatified her in 1978.

<sup>28</sup> The text of the Salesian Constitutions is at the stage of pontifical approval.

It should begin from No. 3 – *The purpose of this Institution the Daughters of the Immaculate*<sup>29</sup>– to then take away or add as you would judge in your wisdom for founding an institute whose daughters would be true religious before the Church, but before civil society free citizens as well.

For chapters or articles of the Rule of St Anne which could be adapted, I would be very happy if you would do so.

When you think it would be good for us to speak, you can let one of our clerics or workers know who often go there.

I know this is a new bother for you but I believe it will redound to the greater glory of God. If we succeed in winning over some souls you will have played a major part.

May God bless you and all your religious family, and recommending myself and my pupils to the charity of your holy prayers, I profess myself gratefully, to be your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

#### **45. Minutes of the founding of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians**

Printed in Piera CAVAGLIÀ - Anna COSTA (Edd.), *Orme di vita - Tracce di futuro. Fonti e Testimonianze sulla prima comunità delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (1870-1881)*.

Roma, LAS 1996, pp. 38-41.

The following document was compiled in the year of the Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy-two, in the House of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Mornese in the presence of the undersigned and by order of the Very Reverend Bishop Joseph Mary Sciandra.

The Very Reverend Father John Bosco, Founder and Director General of many schools for the Christian and social education of boys, had for a long

<sup>29</sup> Daughters of the Immaculate: the reference is to the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate at Mornese, which most of the first Salesian Sisters belonged to.

time desired to open a house to begin an institute where the same benefits should accrue to young girls, especially those coming from working class families. Finally his wishes were fulfilled. On the fifth day of the current month, in the chapel of this House the following were clothed with the habit of the new congregation. Mary Mazzarello, daughter of Joseph, Petronilla Mazzarello of Joseph, Felicina Mazzarello of Joseph, Joan Ferretino of Joseph, Teresa Pampuro of Lorenzo, Felicina Arecco of John Anthony, Rose Mazzarello of Stephen, Catherine Mazzarello of Joseph, all from Mornese. Angela Jandet of Louis from Turin; Maria Poggio of Gaspari from Acqui; Assunta Gaino of Anthony, from Cartosio; Rose Mazzarello of Joseph from Mornese; Maria Grosso of Francis from St. Stefano Parodi; Corinna Arrigotti of Peter from Tonco; Clara Spagliardi of Lawrence from Mirabello. The first eleven mentioned made their profession, taking vows for three years in the hands of His Excellency the Very Reverend Monsignor Joseph Mary Sciandra, Bishop of the diocese. A short time before he had blessed the religious habits they were then wearing and invested the novices with the medal of Our Lady Help of Christians and the professed with the crucifix.

The ceremony was very touching and through a special grace from God the above-mentioned Don Bosco was present. It was feared that ill health would prevent this. The new religious had the consolation of receiving from him advice on how they should correspond to the grace of vocation in the religious institute they had embraced.

A series of circumstances manifested the special Providence of God for this new institute. The greater number of these young women from Mornese had already received the medal of Mary Immaculate from the hands of Monsignor Modesto Contratto of venerated memory. Monsignor Sciandra, his immediate successor, unaware of this, accepted hospitality in this House for the only reason that the healthy air would help him recover from a serious illness, and completed the good work by presiding himself at the celebration. This should have taken place at the end of the retreat given by Raymond Olivieri, Canon and Archpriest of the Diocese of Acqui and the Very Reverend Prior, Father Mark Mallinari, Rural Vicar of Canelli. This retreat began on the evening of July 31 but, given the much desired presence of Don Bosco who had to leave

the following day for Turin, the ceremony was brought forward to the fifth, a day sacred to Our Lady of the Snow.

The Retreat finished today. The Bishop, who celebrated the community mass and distributed Holy Communion, assisted with all solemnity at the closure. He addressed a few words of encouragement and gave some helpful thoughts as souvenirs to his new Daughters in Jesus Christ and with all his heart he imparted to them his pastoral blessing.

The present document was compiled for the verification of what is stated above. A copy is to be placed in the parish archives in Mornese by order of His Excellency the Bishop and another copy in the Bishop's Curia of Acqui.

† Giuseppe Maria, bishop<sup>30</sup>

Father Domenico Pestarino director of the Institute

Olivieri Raimondo canon archpriest of the cathedral at Acqui

Marco Mallarini prior rural vicar of Canelli

Carlo Valle provost and parish priest of Mornese

Pestarino Father Giuseppe witness

Ferraris Father Tommaso witness

Fr Francesco Berta bishop's secretary

#### **46. Circular to Parish Priests on the School at Mornese**

Printed ed. in E(m) IV, p. 155.

[Turin, end of August 1873]

Very Reverend Father,

I take the liberty of presenting you with the programme of the girl's school set up a year ago in Mornese.

<sup>30</sup> Giuseppe Maria Sciandra (1808-1888), consecrated bishop of Acqui in November 1871, entered the diocese on January 6, 1872.

You will understand that the purpose of this Institute is to raise Christian girls in religion and good behaviour; therefore I am trusting much in your kindness and ask you respectfully to make this programme known and thus find some new students for this house.

Full of trust in your support I offer you my warmest thanks. May the Lord bless you, and I with full respect have the honour of professing myself,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco<sup>31</sup>

**47. Petition to the Bishop of Acqui, Bishop Joseph Mary Sciandra, for Diocesan approval of the Institute of Mary Help of Christians**

Printed Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 49-50.

Mornese, 14 January 1876

Your Grace,

Your Lordship would know that an Institute with the title of house or college of Mary Help of Christians in Mornese was begun by the zealous Fr Dominic Pestarino of ever dear memory<sup>32</sup>. Its purpose was to provide Christian education for girls who are not well-off, or who are poor and abandoned, in order to set them on the path to good behaviour, learning and religion under the direction of the Sisters known as the *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*.

With great kindness Your Lordship deigned to be the protector of the new Institute and on August 5, 1872 was content to read the Rule, adding

<sup>31</sup> Attached to the letter was the programme for the house at Mornese. We should not be surprised that Don Bosco made no reference to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. In those early days it was the founder who accepted postulants and established the conditions for admission of the girls to the Institute.

<sup>32</sup> Domenico Pestarino (1817-1874) studied theology in Genoa and was ordained priest in 1839; in 1847 he returned to his place of origin, Mornese, where he carried out a busy apostolate; he became part of the Salesian Society as an 'extern' member.



appropriate observations, presiding at the first clothing ceremony, and the first professions.

Shortly afterwards you enriched the new Institute with various favours and precious privileges, and thanks to you it has become a moral entity before the Church.

These things were like the mustard seed which your Lordship sowed and which grew marvellously. The current number of Sisters is a hundred or more; the Sisters have been entrusted with the public girls' schools in the town; to the Institute's building, a convent school for girls of average circumstances has been added, as you can note from the attached programme.

A second house has already been opened at Borgo San Martino, another at Alassio; the fourth will be opened this year in Lanzo near Turin; many requests are arriving for new houses to be opened in other towns.

But this Institute will certainly lack its true basis until it has sought the ecclesiastical approval that puts religious Institutes on a secure path, one leading to the greater glory of God.

It is to obtain this favour that I respectfully present Your Lordship with the Rules of the Institute of Mary Help of Christians as they have been practised for some years, petitioning you to examine them and indicate any modifications which in your enlightened wisdom you judge necessary, then, if God so inspires you, to give the Institute and its Constitutions diocesan approval. Father James Costamagna director<sup>33</sup>, and all the Sisters join me in asking for this special favour.

This will be one more reason for our indelible gratitude, and we assure you that we will pray in common and privately every day to the merciful God and his august Mother the Virgin Help of Christians, to preserve Your Lordship for many more happy years, and thus you will see the copious results of the

<sup>33</sup> Fr James Costamagna (1846-1921), priest since 1868, spiritual director of the first FMA community in Mornese, left in 1877 as a missionary for Argentina and in 1894 was consecrated titular bishop of Cologne and vicar apostolic of Méndez y Gualaquiza in Ecuador.

work you were pleased to bless, enrich with spiritual graces, and protect, and we could say found and support until now.

With the greatest gratitude I have the honour of professing myself to be  
Your Lordship's most indebted servant

Fr John Bosco  
Fr James Costamagna  
Sister Mary Mazzarello superior

*Decree of diocesan approval for the Constitutions  
of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*

Printed in P. CAVAGLIÀ - A. COSTA (Ed.), in *Orme di vita - Tracce di futuro*. Roma, LAS  
1996, pp. 163-166.

*Josephus Maria Sciandra*  
*Dei et Sanctae Apostolicae Sedis gratia*  
*Episcopus Aquensis et Comes*  
*Sacri Romani Imperii Princeps*

*Miserrimis hisce temporibus, quibus consiliorum evangelicorum professio tam impiis ac innumeris modis praepeditur, ipsaque iuvenum ac puellarum christiana educatio aut prorsus negligitur, aut sceleste corrumpitur, nulla plane res optatior atque iucundior nobis offerri poterat, quam sacra in hac Dioecesi erigenda Domus, quae puellis Deo mancipandis ianuas aperiret cuiusque ope educationi christianae filiarum populi opportune consuleretur.*

*Quapropter vix conscii effecti de proposito ab Adm. Rev.do D. Sacerdote Joanne Bosco Taurinensi piae Societatis Salesianae Superiore, concepto, instituendi nempe in hac Dioecesi, loco Moronisii, Congregationem Filiarum Mariae Auxiliatricis ad eum finem, ut in ipsam omnes illae puellae convenirent, quae tum propriae spirituali perfectioni vacare, tum proximorum saluti, filias populi praesertim christianae edocendo, promovere intenderent, Nos libenti animo enascentis Instituti Constitutiones, quibus regeretur, ad experimentum probavimus, illudque gratiis et favoribus auximus.*

*Quum vero Institutum huiusmodi Filiarum Mariae Auxiliatricis iam, Deo favente, sub praedictarum Constitutionum regimine, adeo feliciter creverit, ut centum quinquaginta puellis ditetur, vel eidem adscriptis, vel proxime adscribendis, ac praeterea ipsa Filiarum Mariae Auxiliatricis Domus gynaeceum agat filiabus populi instituendis, ac in Christi doctrina instituendis, tum ipsae foemineae scholae Pagi Moronisiensis sub filiarum Mariae Auxiliatricis disciplina in dies augeantur et floeant; hinc ut novum hoc ac perutile, iudicio quidem Nostro, Institutum, meliori modo promoveatur, eiusdem Constitutiones iampridem datas ac iterum nobis subiectas praesentibus litteris, tamquam ad Dei gloriam et animarum salutem procurandam et adaugendam idoneas, firmiter ac stabilius probamus ac confirmamus, ea innixi potestate, quam vigens dat praxis hoc inducta fine, ut Congregationes ad experimentum aliquod de iis sumendum prius inchoentur, quam Sanctae Sedis absoluto iudicio, ab eaque plenissima potestate cum ipsarum regulis definiantur.*

*Hoc vero dum facimus, potestatem tamen Nobis ac Successoribus Nostris explicite reservatam volumus, variandi nempe, ubi et quoties id expedire videbitur, Constitutiones ipsas, quas in praesens probamus et confirmamus.*

*Jam reliquum est, ut Congregationem Filiarum Mariae Auxiliatricis, eiusdemque singula membra paternae benevolentiae ac charitati omnium Episcoporum, in quorum Dioecesi vel iam operantur, vel in posterum sunt operaturae, commendemus.*

*Praesens decretum una cum Constitutionibus praelaudatis, ac praesentibus litteris confirmatis, in Curia nostra Episcopali asservabitur.*

*Datum Aquis die 23 januarii 1876*

† Joseph Maria *Ep.us*  
Fr Franciscus Berta *Secr.ius*

*(Translation)*

Joseph Mary Sciandra  
by the Grace of God and of the Holy Apostolic See  
Bishop and Count of Acqui  
Prince of the Holy Roman Empire

In such sad times as the present, in which in various and godless ways the profession of the evangelical counsels is hindered, and even the Christian education of young boys and girls is either completely overlooked or wickedly corrupted, nothing could be more suitable or more pleasing to us than to be offered to erect a holy house in this diocese, that can open its doors to girls who aspire to consecrate themselves to the Lord and for work which can opportunely provide for the Christian education of the girls of the people.

As soon as we became aware of the intentions of the Reverend Father John Bosco of Turin, superior of the Salesian Society, to want to begin the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in this diocese, in the Mornese locality, so that all young girls who aspire to their personal perfection and to promoting their neighbour's salvation especially through the Christian education of the girls of the people, would come to it, we very willingly approved the Constitutions of the new Institute ad *experimentum* and have assisted and promoted its development.

Given that the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians has already happily developed, with the help of God, by following the already-mentioned Constitutions, so much so that it now has 150 who have already joined or who are about to, and given that the House of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians is running a girls' school for the education and catechetical instruction of the girls of the people, and that these classes at Mornese are increasing and flourishing under the guidance of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and since our judgement is that this new and very useful institution may develop still further, we approve and confirm the Constitutions, already earlier given by us and newly presented to us in the present documentation. We do this in a more stable and secure way, since they are suitable for procuring and increasing the glory of God and the salvation of souls. We do this by the power we currently have, so that the Congregation may begin to practise them ad *experimentum*, before the Holy See expresses its judgement and with all its power definitively approves the Rule.

In doing this we wish nevertheless that the power to alter these Constitutions we are now approving and confirming, where and when we believe it to be convenient, be explicitly reserved to us and our successors.

It now only remains for us to recommend the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and its individual members to the fatherly benevolence and charity of all the bishops in whose diocese they are working or will work in the future.

This decree, along with the Constitutions mentioned and confirmed by this document, will be preserved in our Episcopal Curia.

Given in Acqui, January 23, 1876,

† Joseph Mary *bishop*  
Fr Francis Berta *secretary*

#### **48. Letter accompanying the FMA Constitutions**

Printed ed.: *Regole o costituzioni per aggregate alla Società salesiana*. Torino, Tip. e Libreria salesiana 1878, pp. 3-6; also published in P. CAVAGLIÀ - A. COSTA (Edd.), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 262-263.

Turin, Feast of the Immaculate Conception [8 December] 1878

To the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Thanks to the goodness of our Heavenly Father the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians which you are fortunate to belong to, has seen huge development in a short time. In the space of a few years we have been able to open a good number of houses in Piedmont, Liguria, France; even in the distant regions of America.

While the Institute was focused on the Mother House at Mornese, some hand-written copies of the Rule were sufficient for every Sister to get to know it; but now that by Divine Providence houses have multiplied and the Sisters have gone to live in them, these are no longer sufficient.

This is why I judged it to be for the greater glory of God and to the advantage of your souls to have them printed; and now I present them to you.

They already have the approval of a number of bishops<sup>34</sup>, who have found them fully appropriate for sanctifying a Daughter who aspires to be all for Jesus and who at the same time also wants to put her life at the service of her neighbour, especially in the education of poor girls. Furthermore: the Institute was praised and approved by special decree of the bishop of Acqui<sup>35</sup>, in whose diocese it was born in 1872 and still prospers.

Take care then, of the rules which govern it. Read them and meditate on them; but above all never forget that it would be of no value at all even knowing them by memory, if you did not put them into practice.

Therefore let everyone take every care to observe them in detail; the vigilance and zeal of the superior should aim at this, as also the diligence and intelligence of their subjects. By doing this you will discover peace of heart in your Congregation, and you will be on the road to Heaven and become saints.

Meanwhile I gladly take this propitious occasion to recommend that in your prayers you keep in mind the soul of the Very reverend Father Domenico Pestarino, first director of the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, whom the Lord used to put down the foundations of this Institute. For his charity and zeal he truly deserves your warmest gratitude.

Also pray for one another, that the Lord may keep you constant and faithful in your vocation and make you worthy of doing great things for his greater glory.

Pray especially for the Sisters who are already on the way and for those who still will be, to distant parts of the earth to spread the name of Jesus Christ,

<sup>34</sup> That is, the bishops of Casale, Biella, Turin and Bordighera.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. no. 46.

and make him known and loved. Pray above all for the Catholic Church, for its visible head, for the bishops and local pastors; pray also for the Salesian Society to which you are aggregated<sup>36</sup>; and do not forget me who wants every happiness for you.

May the Virgin Help of Christians protect and defend us in life and in death; and by her powerful intercession may she obtain from her divine Son the wonderful grace of finding ourselves one day all together under her mantle in eternal bliss.

Fr John Bosco

<sup>36</sup> This aggregation, taken for granted by Don Bosco, would be questioned by the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in 1879, when he received the three year Report on the moral and juridical state of the Salesian Society: see pp. 88-89, 98-99.

#### IV. SALESIAN COOPERATORS ASSOCIATION

*The Salesian Cooperators association, which came into being in 1876, just two years after the approval of the Constitutions of the Salesian Society, is the last group that Don Bosco founded. As with ADMA he did not ask the Holy See for formal, canonical approval of the association; he considered it sufficient for the aims of the Salesian Cooperators Association to gain moral recognition through the granting of indulgences by the Pope and favourable recommendation by some bishops.*

*First of all we publish the text of the Christian Union, which Don Bosco had printed at the beginning of 1874, before the Salesian Society was approved on 3 April (no. 49). Then comes a second text under the new title of Association for Good Works, printed in 1875, further developed than the earlier one and especially in that it had a new paragraph presenting the Salesian Society (no. 50). It seems we can attribute variations to Don Bosco's hand. In 1876 at Albenga first, then Sampierdarena-Turin came the printed version of Salesian Cooperators, or a practical way of helping good morals and civil society (no. 51). In the same year at Genoa-Sampierdarena (OE XXVIII, 365-374), in Nice, Buenos Aires extended editions appeared with some modifications<sup>37</sup> as well as a range of complementary texts: an introduction by Don Bosco on July 12, 1876, a petition to Pius IX on March 4, 1876, Pius IX's Brief on May 9, 1876 and a list of indulgences. "The pious association of Cooperators" effectively gained official approval from the Archbishop of Genoa, Salvatore Magnasco only on December 15, 1877, and for that archdiocese, following a further edition that year to which the archbishop of Turin reacted vehemently.*

*To these three texts of regulations we add here two circulars to the Salesian Cooperators which appeared in the Salesian Bulletin: one in January 1879 (no. 52) and another in January 1888 (no. 53). Don Bosco used these to inform them in a very familiar way of works that had been put in place the previous year and of what he was thinking of opening in the current year, thanks to their spiritual*

<sup>37</sup> The most important perhaps is the title of the first paragraph: "It is necessary for Christians to unite in doing good" which is the title of the Turin edition: "*Unione cristiana nel compiere il bene*". To paragraph VIII (Religious practices) point 5 was added related to applying indulgences.



and financial help. He did not hide any problems or failures from them and encouraged them to continue with their generosity.

The brief set of regulations published here and the two simple circulars offered as a “side dish” don’t give us a complete picture of the identity, activity and value of the Salesian Cooperator. Conferences, speeches and events, especially in the final decade of Don Bosco’s life, have enriched the figure of the Cooperator, and this can be found in the third section of this volume. But a complete and exhaustive history of the Salesian Cooperators Association, which of course has a fairly complex pre-history, still waits to be written. For now one can go to partial studies and research<sup>38</sup>, other than the appropriate pages, obviously, of the already quoted studies of Don Bosco<sup>39</sup>.

#### 49. “Christian Union” (1874)

Printed ed. in *Unione cristiana*. Torino, Tip. dell’Orat. di San Francesco di Sales, 1874  
(OE XXV, 403-410).

##### 1. [Preface]

If feeble forces are united they become stronger; *Vis unita fortior*, God says. A single strand can easily break, but if we bring a number of them together we get a strong rope that is very difficult to break; *Funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur*. This is what people in the world do to succeed in their temporal affairs and to ensure the success of their plans. We Christians should also do this: united as the first Christians were in one heart and mind to succeed in the most important of all affairs, the great project of the eternal salvation of our soul. This is the purpose of the Salesian Association.

<sup>38</sup> E. g. Guido FAVINI, *Don Bosco e l’apostolato dei laici*. Torino, SEI 1952; Francis DESRAMAUT, *Da Associati alla Congregazione salesiana del 1873 a Cooperatori salesiani del 1876*, in ID. - Mario MIDALI (Ed.), *Il cooperatore salesiano nella società contemporanea*. (= Colloqui sulla vita salesiana, 6). Leumann (To), Elledici 1975, pp. 335-359; ID., *Don Bosco fondatore dei cooperatori Salesiani*, in Mario MIDALI (Ed.), *Don Bosco fondatore della Famiglia salesiana*. Roma, SDB 1989, pp. 323-357.

<sup>39</sup> In particular there is the extensive and up-to-date summary by Pietro BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*. (= ISS - Studi, 21). Roma, LAS 2009, vol. II, pp. 173-205.

## 2. *Salesian Association*

Therefore the purpose of this Association is to offer people who live in the world a tenor of life which in a certain way approaches that which is practised in a religious Congregation and this is, at least partly, to find the peace that we seek in vain in the world. Many would willingly lock themselves up in a cloister but there are some who because of age, health or circumstances, and many for lack of opportunity or vocation, are absolutely prevented from doing this. And again those in the midst of ordinary occupations, in their families, can live in a way that is useful to their neighbour and themselves almost as if they were in a religious community. Wherefore the Salesian Association could be called a type of third order of a traditional kind with this difference, in that they [the latter] propose Christian perfection through the exercise of piety: here the main purpose is an active life especially on behalf of youth at risk.

## 3. *Purpose of this Association*

The same field of activity (harvest) of the Salesian congregation is open to all accociation members.

1. The first task for members is charity towards young people at risk. Bringing them together, instructing them in the faith, advising them when they are at risk or bringing them to where they can be instructed, are matters where every member is invited to exercise his or her zeal. Whoever cannot do these things *per se*, can do them through others, such as advising a parent, a friend to do these things; or pray or offer material assistance where there is need. It is also a task of the Association to promote novenas, triduums, retreats and catechetics especially where material means or morals are wanting.

2. Because in these times we feel the lack of vocations to the ecclesiastical state, so each one can take special care of those young men who because of their behaviour and attitude to studies show some indication of being called, help them with good advice, and direct them to schools, colleges where they will be encouraged and directed to this purpose.

3. Encouraging good press over irreligious press by promoting good books, pamphlets, leaflets, printed material of any kind in places and amongst people where it seems prudent to make this proposal.

#### *4. Constitutions and government*

1. Whoever is at least sixteen years old can become a Cooperator, so long as this person has the firm intention of abiding by the rules proposed here.

2. The Superior of the Salesian Congregation is also the Superior of this Association.

3. The Directors of each House of the Congregation are authorised to enrol members. They will pass on on the name, surname and place of residence to the Superior who will note everything down in the common register.

4. In towns and cities where none of these Houses yet exist and where there are at least ten members, a group leader [called a 'decurion'] will be appointed. Ten decurions can have a head who will be called a prefect of the Association.

The prefect and decurion will preferably be chosen from amongst parish priests or some exemplary member of the clergy. They will correspond directly with the superior. Where there are fewer than ten members they will correspond with the director of the nearest house or directly with the superior.

5. Each decurion will communicate with his ten; each prefect with his hundred members; but each member if necessary, can direct himself to the Superior and explain whatever he judges should be taken into consideration for the benefit of his neighbour and especially youth.

6. At the end of each year the superior will communicate with the members explaining the works that should be promoted by preference in the following year, and at the same time giving news of those who in the past year were called to eternal life and recommending them to everyone's prayers.

### *Particular obligations*

1. Members are not bound to any annual fee; they are only invited to make an offering to support works promoted by the Association. These offerings can be handed to the decurions, prefects, directors, or directly to the Superior.

### *6. Advantages*

1. Members can gain many indulgences, a list of which will be sent to each one.

2. They will benefit from all the Masses, indulgences, prayers, novenas, tridiums, retreats, sermons, catechism classes and all the works of charity which the Salesians carry out in the course of their ministry, and especially from the Mass and prayers which take place mornings and evenings in the church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin to call down Heaven's blessings on all members and their families.

3. The day after the Feast of St Francis de Sales all priests of the Congregation and the Association will celebrate holy Mass for deceased confreres/members. Those who are not priests will try to go to holy communion and say a third part of the rosary with other prayers.

4. When a member falls ill, the Superior will be immediately advised, so particular prayers can be said for him or her. The same is to be done in the case of the death of a member.

### *7. Religious practices*

1. No outward penance is prescribed for Salesian associates but it is recommended that they be modest in dress, frugal at table, simple in their domestic arrangements, blameless in speech and exact in the way they carry out the duties of their state.

2. They are advised to make at least some days of retreat each year. On the last day of each month, or some other day more convenient, they will make the exercise for a happy death, go to confession and communion as if it were the last time in their life.

3. Each day lay members will say an *Our Father, Hail Mary* to St Francis de Sales for the needs of the holy Church. Priests and anyone who says the Office of Our Lady, or the canonical Hours are dispensed from this prayer, so long as in saying the Office they add this special intention.

4. They will try to be more frequent in approaching the sacraments of confession and communion.

5. To remove any doubt of conscience we declare that the rules of this Association do not oblige under pain of either mortal or venial sin except for cases where they might be commanded or forbidden by the precepts of God or holy mother Church. But their observance is recommended for the many spiritual advantages that each one can gain and which are the object of this Association.

... [the enrolment formula follows]

## 50. "Association of Good Works" (1875)

Printed ed. in Associazione di Opere Buone. Torino, Tip. dell'Orat. di San Francesco di Sales  
1875 (OE XXV, 483-494).

### *I. Christian Union for doing good*

This association is called *Christian Union* or, [Union] of good works, because its purpose is to associate good people so they can join forces helping each other to do good.

This is the example that the faithful in the primitive Church left us. Seeing the serious dangers that hung over them every day, without being dismayed they united one in heart and soul to encourage each other to remain firm in the faith and overcome the endless assaults they were being threatened by. This is also the advice the Lord gave when he said: feeble forces, when united, become stronger, and if one strand taken on its own easily breaks, it is very difficult to break them when put together: *vis unita fortior, funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur*. Men of the world also follow a similar example in their temporal affairs. Should the children of the light, then, be less prudent than

the children of darkness? Certainly not. We Christians should likewise come together in these difficult times, and come together in the spirit of prayer, charity and zeal, using all means that religion offers to remove the evils which today may jeopardise the important affair of our eternal salvation. We propose the association be stably bound to the Congregation of St Francis de Sales.

## *II. Salesian Congregation*

This Congregation was definitively approved by the holy Church on April 3, 1874. The principal aim of its members is to work for the benefit of one's neighbour in general and especially for youth. Although their number has already notably grown, nevertheless they can only respond to the need in a minimal way, or to other daily requests that come their way. In various parts of Italy and other parts of Europe, in China, Australia, America and especially the Argentine Republic requests have come for Gospel workers to open religious houses or colleges for the education of young people, to open or at least support missions - they are tirelessly calling for Gospel workers to come.

The poor Salesians cannot fulfil all these needs and therefore while they do what they can for their part, they turn to whoever loves our holy Catholic religion and the salvation of souls and invite them, indeed beg them out of love of Our Lord Jesus Christ to give them a hand and cooperate with them: in the special works of charity that make up the purpose of this Congregation. With so many hands at work it is hoped to extend our work to vaster and more copious harvests, thus bearing more fruit for the glory of God and the benefit of souls.

## *III. Salesian Association*

1. This pious institute therefore, having been definitively approved by the Church, would seem to be able to offer itself as the stable bond of union.

2. Its general purpose is to establish a way of living as a good Christian sincerely desiring to save his own soul and at the same time gaining the peace of heart that one seeks in vain for in the world.

Many would certainly go to a cloister, but there are some who because of age, health or circumstances, and many for lack of opportunity, are absolutely prevented from doing this. And again there are those who are in the midst of ordinary occupations, in their own families, who can join with those who in fact are living in a Congregation thanks to this Association. Whence they can be considered as a kind of traditional Third Order, with the difference that these proposed Christian perfection through the exercise of piety; here the principal purpose is the active life in the exercise of charity to one's neighbour and especially youth at risk. That is the particular purpose of the Association.

#### *IV. The way to cooperate*

Salesian associates are not to limit themselves to words but to end up doing works. Therefore their zeal consists especially in cultivating the harvest of the Congregation they intend to associate with.

1. The members shall promote novenas, triduum, spiritual retreats and catechetical instruction, especially in places where material and moral means are lacking.

2. The scarcity of priestly vocations in these times of ours is felt in all its severity. Hence, those members who are in a position to help shall take special care of youngsters who have the necessary moral qualities and an aptitude for study, and show signs of a vocation. They can help them with timely advice, and by directing them toward those schools and colleges where they will be cultivated and directed to this purpose.

3. [There is an urgent need to] counter the irreligious press by good press. Hence members can help by spreading good books, leaflets and all kinds of printed matter in those places and among those families in which acceptance may prudently be expected.

4. Finally there is the exercise of charity to youth at risk by taking them in, instructing them in the faith, getting them to take part in religious functions, advising them of dangers, taking them to where they can be instructed in religion. These are all part of the harvest where each associate is invited to

exercise zeal. Whoever cannot do these things per se can do them through others, such as advising a parent, a friend to do these things. One can pray or offer material assistance where there is need. The early faithful laid all their goods at the feet of the apostles so they could be used to help widows, orphans or other serious needs.

#### *V. Constitutions and government of the Association*

1. Whoever is at least sixteen years old can enrol in this Association, so long as this person has the firm intention of abiding by the rules proposed here.

2. The Association is humbly recommended to the benevolence and protection of the supreme pontiff, bishops, parish priests on whom it will have *absolute* and *unlimited* dependence in all things referring to religion.

3. The Superior of the Salesian Congregation is also the Superior of this Association.

4. The Director of each House of the Congregation is authorised to enrol members. He will pass on the name, surname and place of residence to the Superior who will note everything down in the common register.

5. In towns and cities where none of these houses yet exist and where there are at least ten members, one will be appointed as group leader [called a 'decurion'].

Ten decurions can have a head who will be called a prefect of the Association. The prefect and decurion will preferably be chosen from amongst parish priests or some exemplary member of the clergy. They will correspond directly with the superior. Where there are fewer than ten associates they will correspond with the director of the nearest house or directly with the superior.

6. Each decurion will communicate with his ten; each prefect with his hundred members; but each member if necessary can direct himself to the superior and explain whatever he judges should be taken into consideration.



7. Each month a printed bulletin will be given to members with an outline of things suggested, already done or proposed to be done. At the end of each year the superior will communicate with the members explaining the works that should be promoted by preference in the following year, and at the same time giving news of those who in the past year were called to eternal life and recommending them to everyone's prayers.

8. Every first Sunday of the month or some other more convenient day, decurions or prefects will bring together the members of their respective teams to see to the smooth running of works that have been undertaken especially catechetical instruction in the parishes, but always with permission of the parish priests.

9. Every centurion or decurion should try to call members of his respective team together on the day of St Francis de Sales or on the following Sunday so they can mutually encourage one another in devotion to their holy patron, and to perseverance in the works begun in accordance with the purpose of the association.

#### *VI. Particular obligations*

1. Every member will do what he can with his own means or funds collected from charitable individuals to promote and sustain the works of the association.

2. Every year members will make an offering of L. 1 for works that are promoted by and to promote the association. These offerings will be addressed to the superior, or the decurions, prefects or directors who will see that they are sent on.

3. A collection will be regularly taken up at conferences and especially at the conference for St Francis de Sales. Whoever cannot come to this conference can get his offering to the superior in some other way.

### *VII. Advantages*

1. Members can gain many indulgences, a list of which will be sent to each one.

2. They will benefit from all the Masses, indulgences, prayers, novenas, triduums, retreats, sermons, catechism classes and all the works of charity which the Salesians carry out in the course of their ministry. They will also benefit from the mass and prayers said each day in the church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin to call down Heaven's blessings on members and their families, and especially on those who have fallen ill and whose life is in danger.

3. The day after the Feast of St Francis de Sales all priests of the Congregation and the Association will celebrate holy Mass for deceased confreres/members. Those who are not priests will try to go to holy communion and say a third part of the rosary.

4. When a member falls ill, the Superior will be immediately advised so particular prayers can be said for him or her. The same is to be done in the case of the death of a member.

### *VIII. Religious practices*

1. No outward penance is prescribed for Salesian associates but it is recommended that they be modest in dress, frugal at table, simple in their domestic arrangements, blameless in speech and exact in the way they carry out the duties of their state, seeing that their dependants observe and keep holy Sundays.

2. They are advised to make at least some days of retreat each year. On the last day of each month, or some other day more convenient, they will make the exercise for a happy death, go to confession and communion as if it were really the last time in their life.

3. Each day members will say an *Our Father and Hail Mary* to St Francis de Sales for the intentions of the supreme pontiff. Priests and anyone who says the Office of Our Lady, or the canonical Hours are dispensed from this

prayer. It is enough for them to add this special intention as they say the divine Office.

4. They will try to be more frequent in approaching the sacraments of confession and communion.

5. Although members are keenly recommended to observe these rules for the many advantages each one can gain, to remove any doubt of conscience we declare that the rules of this Association do not oblige under pain of either mortal or venial sin except for cases where they might be commanded or forbidden by the precepts of God or holy mother Church.

... [the enrolment formula follows]

### **51. “Salesian Cooperators, or a way of helping good morals and civil society” (1876)**

Printed ed: *Cooperatori Salesiani ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume e alla civile società*. Torino, Tipografia salesiana 1875 (OE XXVIII, 256-271).

#### *I. Christian Union for doing good*

In every age good people need to come together to help one another in doing good and keeping evil at bay. This is what the Christians in the primitive Church used do. Seeing the serious dangers that hung over them every day, without being dismayed they united one in heart and soul to encourage each other to remain firm in the faith and overcome the endless assaults they were being threatened by. This is also the advice the Lord gave when he said: feeble forces, when united, become stronger, and if one strand on its own breaks easily, it is very difficult to break them when put together: *Vis unita fortior, funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur*. This is even what men of the world are accustomed to doing in their temporal affairs. Should the children of the light, then, be less prudent than the children of darkness? Certainly not. We Christians should likewise come together in these difficult times, and come together in the spirit of prayer, charity, using all means that religion offers to remove the evils which today may jeopardise good morals without which civil society is heading for destruction.

## *II. The Salesian Congregation as the bond of union*

Given that this Congregation has been definitively approved by the Church it can serve as a sure and stable bond for the Salesian Cooperators. In fact its purpose is primarily to work for the benefit of youth, on whom either the good or sorry future of society depends. Nor do we only mean by this proposal that this is the only way to provide for such a need, given that there a thousand others; indeed we keenly recommend that each one use whatever means are appropriate to pursue this great objective. For our part we are offering one and it is the Salesian Cooperators, asking good Catholics who live in the world to come to the aid of the members of this Congregation. It is true that its members have notably grown in number, but their number is still far from being able to meet daily requests coming from various parts of Italy and Europe, China, Australia, America and especially the Argentine Republic. In all these places there are daily requests for sacred ministers to come and take care of youth at risk, to go and open houses or colleges, to open or at least support missions awaiting the arrival of workers for the Gospel. It is to respond to such needs that we are looking for Cooperators.

## *III. The purpose of the Salesian Cooperators*

The fundamental purpose of the Salesian Cooperators is to do good to themselves by a tenor of life which is as close as it can be to that of the common life. Because many would willingly enter the cloister, but there are some who because of age, health or circumstances, and many for lack of opportunity, are absolutely prevented from doing this. There are also those who are in the midst of daily occupations, in their own families, who can become Cooperators and live as if they were in the Congregation. Wherefore the supreme pontiff considers this Association to be like a Third Order of a traditional kind with this difference, in that these [latter] propose Christian perfection through the exercise of piety: here the main purpose is an active life especially on behalf of youth at risk.

#### IV. *The way to cooperate*

Cooperators are offered the same harvest as the Congregation of St Francis de Sales which they intend to associate themselves with.

1. To promote novenas, triduums, retreats and catechetical instruction especially where material means or morals are wanting.

2. Since in these time the scarcity of priestly vocations is felt in all its severity, those members who are in a position to help shall take special care of youngsters who have the necessary moral qualities and an aptitude for study, and show signs of a vocation, They can help them with timely advice, and by directing them toward those schools and colleges where they may be cultivated and directed to this purpose. The Work of Mary Help of Christians aims precisely at this.

3. Countering irreligious press by good press thanks to spreading good books, leaflets and all kinds of printed matter in those places and among those families in which acceptance may prudently be expected.

4. Finally, charity towards young people at risk, taking them in, instructing them in the faith, getting them to take part in religious functions, advising them of dangers, taking them to where they can be instructed in religion, are another harvest for Salesian Cooperators. Whoever cannot do these things *per se*, can do them through others, such as advising a parent, a friend to do these things. One can pray or offer material assistance where there is need, following the example of the early Christians who laid their goods at the apostles' feet so they could be used to help widows, orphans or for other serious needs.

#### V. *Constitutions and government of the Association*

1. Whoever is at least sixteen years old can become a Cooperator, so long as this person has the firm intention of abiding by the rules proposed here.

2. The Association is humbly recommended to the benevolence and protection of the supreme pontiff, bishops, parish priests on whom it will have absolute dependence in all things referring to religion.

3. The Superior of the Salesian Congregation is also the Superior of this Association.

4. The director of each house of the Congregation is authorised to enrol members. He will pass on the name, surname and place of residence to the Superior who will note everything down in the common register.

5. In towns and cities where none of these houses yet exist and where there are at least ten members, one will be appointed as group leader called a 'decurion', who will preferably be a priest or an exemplary lay person. He will correspond with the superior, or with the director of the nearest house.

6. When there is a need every Cooperator can explain to the superior whatever he believes should be taken into consideration.

7. Every three months and even more often through a bulletin or printed leaflet members will be given an outline of things proposed, done or proposed for doing. At the end of each year members will be told of works that should be promoted by preference, and at the same time given news of those who in the past year were called to eternal life and recommending them to everyone's prayers.

8. On the day of St Francis de Sales and on the Feast of Mary Help of Christians every decurion will gather members of his group so they can mutually encourage one another in devotion to these heavenly protectors, calling on their patronage to help them persevere in the works begun in accordance with the purpose of the Association.

#### *VI. Particular obligations*

1. Members of the Salesian Congregation consider all Cooperators to also be their brothers in Jesus Christ and will always direct work to them in cases where it can be for the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls. When needed, Cooperators will turn to members of the Salesian Congregation with the same freedom.

2. Thus, every member with his own means or funds collected from charitable individuals will do what he can to promote and sustain the works of the association.

3. Cooperators do not have any financial obligation but will make a monthly or yearly donation as dictated by the charity of their heart. These offerings will be addressed to the superior in support of works promoted by the Association.

4. A collection will be regularly taken up at conferences on the Feasts of Mary Help of Christians and St Francis de Sales. In places where there are not enough members for a decurion, and where someone cannot come to the conference he will see that his offering arrives by whatever means is easiest and safest.

### *VII. Advantages*

1. His Holiness, the reigning Pius IX, grants by a decree dated July 30, 1875 to promoters of this work all the favours, spiritual graces and indulgences enjoyed by Salesian religious, except for those referring to community life. A separate list of all this will be sent.

2. They will benefit from all the Masses, indulgences, prayers, novenas, triduum, retreats, sermons, catechism classes and all the works of charity which the Salesians carry out in the course of their ministry anywhere in the world.

3. They will also benefit from the mass and prayers said each day in the church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin to call down Heaven's blessings on members and their families, and especially on those who do something morally or materially for the benefit of our Congregation.

4. The day after the Feast of St Francis de Sales all priests of the Congregation and the Association will celebrate holy Mass for deceased confreres/members. Those who are not priests will try to go to holy communion and say a third part of the rosary.

5. When a member falls ill, the superior will be immediately advised so particular prayers can be said for him or her. The same is to be done in the case of the death of a cooperator.

### *VIII. Religious practices*

1. No outward work is prescribed for Salesian Cooperators but it is recommended that their life be in some way similar to the life of someone living in a religious community. They are recommended to be modest in dress, frugal at table, simple in their domestic arrangements, blameless in speech and exact in the way they carry out the duties of their state, seeing that their dependants observe and keep holy Sundays.

2. They are advised to make at least some days of retreat each year. On the last day of each month, or some other day more convenient, they will make the exercise for a happy death, go to confession and communion as if it were really the last time in their life.

3. Each one will say daily an *Our Father, Hail Mary* to St Francis de Sales for the intentions of the supreme pontiff. Priests or those who say the canonical Hours or Office of the Blessed Virgin are dispensed from this prayer. It is enough for them to add this special intention as they say the divine Office.

4. They will try to be more frequent in approaching the sacraments of confession and communion.

### *Notice*

Although members are keenly recommended to observe these rules for the many advantages each one can gain, to remove any anxiety of conscience we declare that their observance does not oblige under pain of either mortal or venial sin except for cases where they might be commanded or forbidden by the precepts of God or holy mother Church.

... [the enrolment formula follows]



## 52. Circular to Male and Female Cooperators at the beginning of 1879

Printed ed in BS 3 (1879) 1, 1-3 (E III, pp. 429-432).

[Turin, January 1879]

My venerable benefactors,

I find the greatest consolation in presenting myself to you, worthy Cooperators, and speaking to you of things which in the course of the year were the object of your concerns and charity.

First of all I have to fulfil a great duty, that of thanking you for the kindness and zeal with which you have responded to invitations made to give financial offerings or contributions of any other kind.

I believe you will be satisfied when you have heard the report on the results of your charity.

I am doing two things here: first of all a brief report on things achieved and secondly proposing works for the coming year. I need to do this to fulfil what our regulations prescribe in article 7 chapter V.

### *Things achieved in 1878*

Thanks to your effective support we have been able to do many things which we trust are for the glory of God and for our neighbour's benefit.

Twenty two new Houses were opened this year for the benefit of young people at risk in Italy, France, South America, meaning the Republics of Uruguay and Argentina.

The missions, then, in these foreign parts have extended over a vast evangelical field which promises a most abundant harvest.

This has forced us to send a new expedition of Salesians and Sisters of Mary Help of Christians to open further hospices, education centres, and to support those already opened.

This way we have increased the number of people taken from the path to evil, returned them to being an honour to themselves, to where they come from, and a benefit for their families.

We have also had the great consolation of having pulled not hundreds but many thousands of youngsters from danger and we could say from prisons, setting them on the right path, on the way of virtue, and helping them eventually to earn an honest living.

Another work that excited common interest was the church and institute of St John the Evangelist. Work has gone as far as the roof and we hope to resume work on this next spring.

Serious personal and financial sacrifices have been needed to support all these works. But the assistance of Divine Providence through your help has not been lacking. You must be content given the holy purpose that your charity was directed to, and also content for the moral and material results gained for souls and civil society.

It was this great thought that moved the inexhaustible charity of the supreme pontiff Leo XIII, may God keep him healthy and safe, to come to our aid. When he was informed that we were in dire straits, he was happy to send us the generous gift of two thousand francs with the paternal and consoling letter you will find below (1).

Nevertheless we were still lacking ten thousand lire for the new expedition of missionaries, and this sum came to us through the charity of a Salesian Cooperator. This generous Christian wanted to remain anonymous, but along with his offering he enclosed the following words: I have read how the Holy Father, with all his constraints, has sent two thousand lire for the various works of charity he supports. Moved by such example I am offering you, especially for the needs of your missionaries, the sum of 10,000 francs. These are savings I put aside through work and effort when I was young, and I willingly offer them so they can go before me to light up the way to eternity, which I feel is very near.

May Heaven bless the heroism of this pious donor and grant him adequate recompense in this life and the reward of the just in the life to come.

With this help we were able to go through with the expedition of new missionaries, provide them with what they needed, and have the necessary provisions for those who are already exercising their sacred ministry in these remote regions.

### *Things proposed for 1879*

There are more things to propose for the new year. The first, using every moral and material means in our power, is to promote parish catechetical instruction and all other works for the benefit of young people who are abandoned and at risk.

We want to free them from imminent danger, doing wrong, from prison; we want to make them upright citizens and good Christians.

Another thing to recommend is the *Work of Mary Help of Christians* which has the purpose of cultivating vocations to the ecclesiastical state amongst adults.

The main house is the St Vincent's Hospice in Sampierdarena. There have already been consoling results. Already a notable number have made decisions about their vocation and returned to their respective dioceses, while others chose the religious state and others the foreign missions.

The church of St John's then, with its attached hospice, being a tribute that the Salesian Cooperators pay to the glorious memory of Pius IX, should encourage everyone to support it fully, trusting that in the current year at least the church will be brought to completion.

### *Projected events*

Worthy Cooperators, you ask where we can find the means to support similar works of public charity.

I am placing all my trust in your charity.

God has helped us in the past in very difficult times; he will certainly continue to inspire your generous resolutions, and will ensure that you can carry them out.

Since we currently find the need to prepare bread and clothing for many of the boys we have taken into our hospices, with the approval of the civil authorities the idea has been floated of a small lottery involving some paintings and ancient *objet d'arts* offered for this charitable purpose.

A number of tickets will be sent to each Cooperator, and I hope you can take some or at least spread them around some charitable relatives or friends. At any rate there will be a description eventually in the *Bulletin*.

Meanwhile, venerable and outstanding benefactors, please accept the warmest of thanks that I with the Salesians and the young people who have benefited offer you from the bottom of our hearts.

Our gratitude is indelible, while God is preparing an imperishable reward for you.

We pray morning and evening in the church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, in all Salesian churches and houses, that God may grant you stable health and a happy life, give harmony and peace to your families, prosperity and fruitfulness to your business. In short, our prayers are addressed to calling down God's blessings upon you, so that after having spent quiet and happy days on this earth, you will enjoy the fruits of your charity in the highest heaven.

In a particular way we recommend the Supreme Pontiff Leo XIII, our chief Cooperator, to your prayers; and all those who work for the good of holy Church; and those Cooperators who were called to another life during the year. Finally, I also recommend my soul to the charity of your prayers, assuring you that I will always be, in Jesus Christ,

your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

(1) The letter was also published in the magazine *Unità Cattolica* No. 279, year 1878.

### 53. Final circular to Cooperators at the beginning of 1888

Printed ed. in BS 12 (1888) 1, 1-6.

Worthy Cooperators,

I feel that my poor health will not allow me to write at length, nevertheless I cannot omit sending you this letter this year, in accordance with the Regulations, to spend some time with you who are the benefactors of my boys, and who take loving care of the works entrusted by God to the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales.

What shall I tell you? I tell you especially that you should join with me in saying at least an *Our Father and a Hail Mary* and a *Requiem aeternam* for more than 1,000 Cooperators, men and women, who were called to another life in the year that has just concluded. I tell you that we thank God, who in the midst of so many victims of death, was kind enough to spare us, and allows us to find ourselves once more at the beginning of a new year. I will tell you that we have many reasons to rejoice in the Lord, because with his divine assistance we have been able to complete many works for the salvation of souls and for the benefit of civil society. Finally, I will tell you that the good we must do is growing more and more every day, and therefore, reason and religion require that we do not lose our good will, that indeed we have the courage to make greater sacrifices, and grow in our efforts.

#### *Rapid review of the main works carried out in 1887*

Although the main works carried out in the year just past have already been sufficiently noted in the *Salesian Bulletin*, just the same so you can see it all at a glance, I recall them here briefly.

The work that needs to be highlighted above all others is the consecration of the church of the Sacred Heart in Rome, which took place amidst the splendour of the sacred rites and saw the presence of some of the most important prelates and members of the Sacred College, the accompaniment of classical music and all that this means, to the complete satisfaction of the Holy Father Leo XIII, who had entrusted us with its construction since he began his pontificate.

At Vallecrosia near Bordighera, in the house of Mary Help of Christians, we repaired the considerable damage caused by the earthquake on February 23, rebuilt it almost from scratch because it was uninhabitable, rebuilt most of the bedrooms, classrooms, and even the bell tower of the new church, which was in danger of collapse, and finally we completed the church itself, which will be opened for divine worship on December 18 this year.

At Mathi they have begun and will complete the paper works to the point where from a thousand five hundred kilograms a day it will now be producing four thousand, thus doubling production and therefore bringing down costs to the great advantage of the Catholic press.

At Catania a property known as Villa Piccioni was acquired, with its surrounding property of about eight thousand square metres, a modest house which will be enlarged and become, with the help of divine providence and citizen's charity and generosity, a large hospice and house of arts and trades for poor boys of the people, who because of their education will be able to earn an honest living, and will one day be the support of their family and a secure guarantee of the moral good of the whole city.

We acquired a good piece of land in Marseilles, to enlarge the House already there which has become too small for the needs; this acquisition will make it possible to accept many other boys and pull them out of abandonment and poverty.

We are likewise extending the Houses in Paris and Lille in France, Utrera and Sarrià in Spain, and also Faenza and Florence in Italy.

Thanks to his Highness, Prince and Bishop, the help of the authorities and various charitable clergy and laity, we have opened a Salesian House in Trent, which will be an orphanage; this House is the first to be opened in the Austrian Empire, and I hope it will undergo great development with divine assistance and the support of good people. I hope it will prepare the way for setting up other similar Houses in the same Empire.

In London, capital of England, through the zeal of a Catholic noblewoman we have accepted the running of schools which already have around 200 boys

and girls, and we have also taken on the administration of a parish of some 30,000 individuals, almost all Protestants, from amongst whom it is hoped that over time we will have many conversions to the Catholic Church.

Nor should I remain silent about the spiritual and corporal care the Salesians are offering to the victims of cholera in Catania in Sicily, and in San Nicolás de los Arroyos in the Argentine Republic, as well as those who were injured or were victims of the earthquake in Diano Marina in Liguria, and the orphans in either case; this care has won broad praise from the authorities.

As for America I would go on too long if I were to sum up everything, thanks be to God and Catholic charity, that we were able to do in the year just concluding.

I will touch on the missions further on, so it is enough here to indicate the setting up of a house of arts and trades, under the name of St Joseph, in Concepcion, and a stable residence for the missionaries in Punta Arenas in the Republic of Chile and another similar residence in Chol-Malal and Guardia Pringles in Patagonia Argentina. In these and other places, at the same time we have built various chapels for celebration of the divine mysteries and to instruct the faithful and others.

Many of the American Houses already founded, especially colleges and hospices, have been enlarged to the benefit of many hundreds of young people, with new buildings; amongst others those of Patagones and Viedma on the banks of the Rio Negro, the one at Payssandù and San Paolo in the Empire of Brazil.

Nor could I omit mentioning the various missions, this same year, begun by Bishop John Cagliero, Vicar Apostolic of southern and central Patagonia, and by Bishop Joseph Fagnano, Prefect Apostolic of southern Patagonia; missions pushing up to the Cordilleras and down to Tierra de Fuego, with huge efforts and clear danger to life but with great and consoling results inasmuch as the first seeds of the divine word have been sown in hitherto unknown tribes, and we have discovered places and customs which will be very useful for us in setting up mission stations in such abandoned spots, where we can strengthen religious and moral good for the salvation of so many unfortunate souls.

Since I am speaking of the missions, I should not let the charity of the Cooperators pass without a word. It has grown over recent months following the sending out of the circular I felt I needed to send you asking for help for the missions; charity that, while it lifts my heart and makes me rejoice in the Lord, also gives me the means to continue quickly spreading the Gospel and Christian civilisation in far away parts of the world. And I especially must not remain silent about the recent expedition of eight Salesians to Quito in the Republic of Ecuador, where they will open schools and workshops for boys, and from where they will then spread the light of faith to thousands of poor natives who are living in the Andes without the benefits of Christian civilisation. Finally, in the exultation and commotion of the Catholic world for the priestly jubilee of our wise Leo XIII, we have even been able to collect rare and precious items from our houses in Europe and America, and even from the missions at the furthest end of Patagonia, to place at the feet of his august throne. These will be a tribute of our profound veneration and unwavering attachment to him, and sign of our sincere joy at the glorious event.

*New Houses and Works of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*

The Sisters too, known as the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, have been able to increase the number of their works on behalf of girls. In fact they have taken on the running of infant schools and opened schools, workshops and festive oratories in eight other places such as in Italy, at Gattinara, Torre di Bairo, Farigliano, Pecetto Torinese, and Mathi. At Moncrivello and Novara, because of the charity of two zealous Salesian women Cooperators, two large areas have been bought to begin a work which will be of great advantage to girls. In America, with the help of a well-known family in Montevideo, they have opened a new college in Payssandú, with a festive oratory and day school attended by many hundreds of girls. They have also extended their existing Houses in Buenos Ayres and Patagones, and there they have girls coming from as far away as Tierra del Fuego, have instructed them and had them baptised, presenting them to God as the first Christian fruits of those extreme confines of the world. It is also worth mentioning the assistance given to



people affected by the cholera in Bronte in Sicily, where some of them out of love for Jesus Christ did not hesitate to join them in hospital where they have been locked away.

I should also mention other works of the Salesians and Sisters; but given the fact that you have already been informed of them during the year, I will leave these in order not to go on too long, and so I can talk about another work which we have particularly in mind for the coming year.

Meanwhile, from what I have said thus far you can easily see how your charity has borne abundant fruit; fruit in the relief, education and instruction given to many boys and girls whom we have been able to take in, in greater numbers, in our hospices and colleges, workshops, festive oratories, weekday and Sunday schools, churches and chapels erected and consecrated to divine worship; fruits in the conversion of many people without faith, by evangelising and civilising them in their hitherto unknown lands; fruits in the preservation of the faith in many Christian countries of Europe and especially America where they are emigrating every year in their thousands in search of a poor earthly fortune, but are in danger of losing their happy and eternal inheritance in Heaven; fruits again in the publication of good books, hundreds and thousands of copies of them in defence of religion and to encourage Christian piety. For all this good the Salesians and the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians give thanks to God especially, who has extended his heavenly favours so much, then to all of you, worthy Cooperators, who came to our help in your kindness and who have been able instruments of divine providence for the benefit of countless souls.

#### *Work proposed for 1888*

There are many works that I could recommend to your charity for the coming year, but there is only one I want to indicate to you here, the one I have most at heart. Faithful men and women can now benefit at their leisure from the church of the Sacred Heart in Rome; many can hear God's word there, frequent the sacraments, be present for their edification at the sacred ceremonies, be instructed by more frequent preaching, and in short be

inspired to piety and devotion and be more fervent in the practice of Christian virtues. But this is still not everything. The Holy Father, Leo XIII, would like another work to rise up beside the church; he would like the hospice that has just opened there to be extended with buildings already planned, and be able to take in five hundred or more boys who are the daily living representatives of the children of Palestine around the adorable person of Jesus Christ, to be blessed, instructed, set on the way to virtue, on the way to heaven, by Him.

This work is highly called for by the current needs in Rome. Hundreds of youngsters, Roman or not, coming from everywhere, out of poverty, or neglect, or by the snares of the enemy, find themselves exposed to huge dangers to body and soul. Many for want of some place to live become lazy, grow in vice, are caught up in wrongdoing, and end up falling into the hands of the police and from there end up in prison. Not a few have come from elsewhere and go there looking for work, then not finding any, become listless, find bad companions and even lose the religion that has its centre and headquarters there, spreading its vivid rays to all parts of the world. What a misfortune it is that a poor young Christian lad should be in peril of his faith and good behaviour in Rome itself which, by means of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, has enlightened and enlightens, sanctified and sanctifies the people!

These things sadden the Pope when they happen to a Catholic anywhere on earth, but they afflict him profoundly when they happen so often and under his very gaze, without him being able to prevent or remedy them, and they happen especially to so many unwary and inexperienced youngsters who are also the hope of the Church and civil society.

Well, now we can greatly lessen such disasters in Rome, we can save many young people, comfort the soul of the Roman Pontiff, and at the same time console the heart of Jesus; and we can achieve this holy purpose by constructing the planned hospice. Our most zealous supreme head of the Church was kind enough to indicate this when I had the happy fortune to be received by him in a special audience last May. After hearing with pleasure that the church of the Sacred Heart was finished and opened in the service of God, after thanking the Salesians, their Cooperators and whoever had helped in completing this

arduous task, he went on and said: “Now get to work putting up the already planned hostel, so we can take in and save so many poor boys, teaching them to become good Christians and wise citizens. To this end I bless you and all those who will give you a hand.”

These words of the Vicar of Jesus Christ are profoundly engraved on my heart, and I want you too to treasure them.

It would be truly worthy of your zeal that in 1887 and 1888 you would honour the great Jubilee festivities of Leo XIII by finishing the two main works that he entrusted to you as soon as he ascended the throne of St Peter. The first is finished, and we have already presented it to him on May 14 last when it was solemnly consecrated, almost as an opening for his priestly jubilee, and today the church of the Sacred Heart is the admiration of many pilgrims, amongst others, who come to Rome from all over the world. What a great consolation it would be for your charity if at the end of next year, at the closing of the above-named festivities, we could say to the Holy Father: “Here you are, we have finished the hospice you so much wanted for the good of young people: hundreds of them can now find safe shelter near you, and in the shadows of your cathedral can grow up as worthy sons of the Church, and an unflinching pledge of good order and behaviour for civil society.”

#### *Four reminders by way of conclusion*

I conclude by putting four ideas to you by way of reminder. I observe especially that a person and a house which provides alms is like the ocean; no matter how much water the sun causes to evaporate from its surface, it never diminishes in its extent because the evaporation becomes rain, snow and ice, and after having irrigated and made the earth fruitful, it becomes rivers which flow back into it from everywhere. So it is with a person, a family, who with what they have, maybe even only with what they have left over, cooperate for the glory of God and the benefit of their neighbour. Their alms combine with those from many others, and this, like when many drops of water come together, becomes a rain shower of benefits for thousands of people, profiting faithful and faithless alike, helping young people, families, whole populations

in human society. These children then, these families, these people who have benefited, other than praying and asking God to shower a hundredfold of graces on their benefactors, through the religious and moral education they have gained from the coming together of so many alms, are formed and grow up in virtue, promote harmony and peace in private and public, help work, industry to grow. It sees a decrease in theft, crime, revolution, and in this way every citizen benefits, including in temporal terms and sees a hundredfold return for whatever has been dispensed by works of religion and charity.

So the first reminder is this: if we want our spiritual and material interests to prosper, let us especially try to help God's interests to prosper, and promote the spiritual and moral good of our neighbour by means of almsgiving.

Coming to the second reminder I begin by reflecting that the ordinary rule, when someone dearly wants to obtain some grace from God by intercession of the Virgin or some Saint, is usually more or less along these lines: if you give me this grace I will give so many alms, make such and such an offering. Although this way of doing things is not to be disapproved of, just the same I do not believe it is the best way to quickly and securely gain God's favours, the graces we especially have most at heart. This way of doing things suggests a degree of mistrust of God, Our Lady or the Saints we call on. Much better and more effective would be to first give what we would want to give after the grace we implored has been granted. By first giving something, we do something good, and this joined with faith, trust in God, has much greater power before his throne. By giving first, it in some way commits God, the Virgin and the Saints to be generous to us, since we have abandoned ourselves to their sovereign kindness and powerful intercession. By giving first, the words of Jesus Christ are fulfilled, for where he recommends almsgiving he says: "Give and it will be given you: *date et dabitur vobis.*" Here, as we see, Jesus Christ does not say: "Promise to give and it will be given you"; he says: "You give first, and then it will be given you." Experience shows that this is a very powerful way of obtaining more important graces; I myself am witness to this thousands of times over. So here is the second reminder: if you want to more easily obtain some grace, be gracious yourself, meaning give alms to others before God or the Virgin do so for you. *Date et dabitur vobis.*

Thirdly, remember that giving alms for the spiritual or corporal good of our neighbour is not mere advice which we can ignore without detriment to our soul, but it is a strict command, included in the commandments of the divine law, one group obliging us to honour and love God, the other obliging us to love our neighbour. It is only a suggestion that you give everything you have, profess voluntary poverty, like religious do; but it is a precept to give some of what you have as alms, or what you have over, as the Gospel says: "*Quod superest date eleemosynam.*" And it is precisely because this precept is overlooked that Jesus Christ, on the day of Universal Judgement will say to the damned: "Go away from me, you cursed, into eternal fire." Why? Because you were not charitable to those in need. It was because he had not given of his surplus to poor Lazarus that Jesus Christ told the rich man buried in hell: "*Mortuus est dives et sepultus est in inferno.*" And again to those who do not give of their goods to the poor, the apostle St James says that their faith is dead, and it will not help them in eternal life. The same apostle also adds that pure and undefiled religion is this: to provide for the needs of orphans and widows, meaning doing works of spiritual or corporal mercy. All these and other similar judgements of the Holy Spirit are trying to point out that someone who could but does not do works of mercy is a Christian but not a Christian, he is a man who on the last day will hear a sentence of condemnation; a man who, although not lacking in anything like the rich man without mercy, will not receive mercy from God. So my third reminder is this: by our works of charity we close the gates of hell and open the gates of Paradise for ourselves.

Finally, I confide in you that my sight is failing, I feel weaker, and the day is not far off when I must pay my tribute to death and go to my grave. If that should happen and this be the last letter I send you, here then is my fourth and final reminder: I recommend to your charity all the works that God has deigned to entrust me with over almost fifty years; I recommend to you the Christian education of youth, vocations to the ecclesiastical state, and the foreign missions; but in a very special way I recommend to you the care of poor and abandoned young people who have always been the dearest portion in my heart, and who through the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ I hope will be my crown and glory in heaven.

And now it only remains to me to call on God that he may shower you, your families and your interests with his choicest blessings; I ask him especially to grant you a prosperous and happy life, crowned in time by the death of the just. For this purpose the Salesians and young people in our houses join with me in praying to the Lord every day, and through the powerful intercession of the Virgin Help of Christians and St Francis de Sales we hope to be heard and to have the good fortune to find ourselves reunited in eternal bliss.

May you also be kind enough to pray for me. With the greatest of gratitude I profess myself, worthy Cooperators,

Turin, 8 December 1887,  
your most indebted servant,  
Fr John Bosco

### SECTION THREE

## DON BOSCO BETWEEN THE HOLY SEE, THE KINGDOM OF ITALY AND THE ARCHBISHOP OF TURIN

### Presentation

*In the context of the Italian 'Risorgimento' Don Bosco, we know, chose to publicly stay apart from the various political currents of his time. From 1848-1849 he managed to hold a not-so-easily balanced position regarding Church and State, by not lining up decisively in favour of political innovations, but nor did he directly and publicly oppose them in word or deed or through hostile attitudes.*

*While contrary to the Kingdom of Sardinia's policies towards the Church in 1850-1860 – he fought them within the limits of his being a Piedmontese priest— he avoided argument and hurting sensitivities, also because he wanted to safeguard his activity as an educator and founder.*

*Over the period the historical Right was in government—1860-70—thanks to his charitable and philanthropic work much appreciated by key players in Italian politics at the time (Victor Emmanuel II, Camillo Cavour, Urbano Rattazzi, Alfonso Lamarmora, Giovanni Lanza, Marco Minghetti, Paolo Onorato Vigliani ...), he was not only able to avoid too much interference from them in his manifold socio-religious initiatives, but also managed, on more than one occasion to play a linking role between them and the pontifical authorities. The newly born Kingdom of Italy was in fact heading for a collision with the Holy See since it came into being (1861) especially after the military occupation of Rome and the proclamation of the Papal city as the capital of the new Kingdom (1870).*

*Setting aside any possible hesitation, Don Bosco entered the buildings housing the respective power-wielders looking for meeting points, temporary though they might be, between the two parties. And he did succeed in narrowing the distance between certain points of dissension, not by hiding behind global political solutions, but opting to save what could be saved, beyond the irreconcilable differences of*

*principle in the “Roman question”. If Pius IX and Cardinal Antonelli could consider him a champion of fidelity on any account, political liberals of the time, even though ideologically very different in their positions, saw his presence in sectors of social life as very useful since he was trying to preserve moral values, solidarity and responsibility. Don Bosco did not hide the fact that he was a priest who was faithful to the Pope and the Church of Rome. But his opposition to liberalism, more than having a political stamp, was of a religious and moral nature. All his interventions of “ecclesiastical politics, whether the ones where he spontaneously offered himself as a “mediator” between the parties, or those where he was involved by others, were inspired precisely to encourage and create conditions for safeguarding the faith and religious practice amongst the Italian population<sup>1</sup>.*

*Even when the historical Left came to power at the end of the seventies and for all of the eighties (Benedetto Cairoli, Michele Coppino, Francesco Crispi, Agostino Depretis, Giovanni Nicotera, Giuseppe Zanardelli ...) Don Bosco kept up good relationships, while obviously not sharing their ideological positions which were mostly Masonic and anticlerical, or their policies where the Holy See was concerned. Despite the escalation of the conflict between clericalism and anticlericalism, Don Bosco cultivated a deep-rooted sense of the State, seeing its essential function and cooperating within the limits possible. There was no lack of tense moments at the House in Valdocco, Turin towards the end of the seventies, where of course there had already been difficult times given the many running battles with Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi.*

<sup>1</sup> On Don Bosco's thinking and 'political' activity cf. Francesco MOTTO, *L'impegno civile e morale di don Bosco nell'Italia unita in dialogo con le istituzioni civili e di governo*, in RSS 29 (2010) 177-200.



## I. CONFIDENTIAL LETTERS TO THE POPE CONCERNING THE POLITICAL SITUATION (1858-1867, 1873)

*In the years immediately preceding and following Italian Unity (1858-1866), Don Bosco kept constantly in touch with Pius IX by letter. He did this not only for interests directly relating to his work, but also in reference to the worrying situation the Church was going through in Piedmont, to encourage him in his defence of the faith against the enemies of religion, and to pass on to him any likely reserved information in his possession. As already indicated, Don Bosco was with Pius IX and his Secretary of State, Card. Antonelli, on the Roman question. Slowly however, he became convinced that a too vigorous resistance to the “revolution” was becoming ever more pointless, even risked worsening the situation, so after the capture of Rome he chose, also politically, the principle of doing whatever good could be done<sup>2</sup>.*

*Here then, we reproduce ten reserved letters he sent the pontiff over the years of Italian Unity, using people he could trust, not the normal post which Don Bosco knew was controlled by the public authorities.*

*In 1858 he was concerned with the unresolved question of the bishop of Turin, archbishop Fransoni. On his journey to Rome he was involved in this by the brother of the president of the Council, Marquis Gustavo Cavour (no. 54)<sup>3</sup>.*

*The following year he informed the pontiff of the possible infiltration of “revolutionaries” into the Papal States and the imminent proposal, by Government, of candidates for vacant Episcopal sees (no. 55). Still in 1859 he communicated his disapproval of the expansionist policy of the Kingdom of Savoy to the detriment of the Papal States and of his constant efforts to defend the faith of the people and the education of his boys (no. 56).*

*He had similar concerns the following year even if he had some hope that after this difficult moment the Church would have the final triumph (no. 57). On the*

<sup>2</sup> For Don Bosco’s position on the Roman question cf. Francesco MOTTO, *Orientamenti politici di don Bosco*, in RSS 12 (1993) 9-37. Cf. various letters of the Saint to the Pope with relevant comment in Arthur J. LENTI, *Don Bosco, his Pope and his Bishop*. Roma, LAS 2006, pp. 11-64.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Francesco MOTTO, *Don Bosco mediatore fra Cavour e Antonelli*, in RSS 5 (1986) 3-20.

*vigil of the proclamation of the new Kingdom of Italy, including territories taken from the Papal States (1860), he repeated the same concerns and hopes, despite not excluding a possible new expulsion of the Pope from his See in Rome (no. 58).*

*In his letters in 1863-1864 he noted the essential stability of the situation (nos. 59, 60), while in a letter in 1865 he indicated that the suffering caused by marriage legislation about to be approved by parliament was compensated by the joy of beginning the building of the church of Mary Help of Christians and his hopes for the approval of the Salesian Society and its Constitutions (no. 61).*

*The following year (1866) he returned both to the matter of Papal approval for this, and to the difficult question of Church-State relationships (no. 62).*

*Some years later, in 1873, he announced the Pope's awaited exile in prophetic and symbolic language (no. 63), before returning to Rome. The value of this message was owed to the fact that it came from someone whose earlier predictions had come true<sup>4</sup>.*

#### **54. To Pope Pius IX**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 352-354.

Turin, 14 June 1858

Most Holy Father,

Back among my boys, I cannot say enough of the things heard and seen in the eternal city, those things that especially have to do with Your Holiness, for my heart overflows with gratitude toward Your Holiness' sacred person.

The spiritual favours that you so kindly granted me are already bearing their intended good fruit: in thirty or more different towns, people immediately set about planning the celebration of the month of May in honour of Mary, Mother of God. This effort found encouragement in the indulgences you granted for the singing of sacred hymns.

<sup>4</sup> Peter STELLA dedicates some pages to his predictions on events in 1870-1874, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Vol. II. *Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità*. Roma, LAS 1981, pp. 532-547 (Appendix, *Note per uno studio sui sogni di don Bosco*).

Also I find satisfaction now in being able to provide more accurate information about things [religious] in Rome, and this offsets insinuations coming from people who whether through malice or ignorance distort the meaning of even the holiest things.

One thing however has been a source of heartfelt regret to me after leaving Rome—not to have had more time at my disposal so that I could come to see Your Holiness again, since in your kindness you had offered to receive me. I believe it had to do with our archbishop. Be that as it may I would again recommend our diocese in its pitiable state to Your Holiness' good and fatherly heart. I entreat Your Holiness with the words that the faithful of Lyons of old spoke to St Eleutherios, your worthy predecessor: "Holy Father, act to bring peace to our Church and help us in our need." True, we are not suffering outright persecution and there is no bloodshed, but evil is rampant and the damage immense. We still have a lot of good people but they are oppressed and helpless. The evil get bolder by the day; the weak are daily led astray in great numbers. If by height of misfortune the heretics were to come to power legally, I have reasons to believe that defections would reach frightening proportions even from the ranks of those who occupy posts of responsibility in this diocese. I say this in the Lord: may Your Holiness forgive me.

I do not know if the idea expressed by Mr de Cavour<sup>5</sup> has anything in it to commend it to Your Holiness. If it is a question of establishing a principle, I would not trust the proposal, while if it is a particular case one could hope for some success, especially if he still shows the same good intentions. In any case, Your Holiness needs to act in some way for the good of the Turin diocese, because the evils that would result from inaction would be irreparable. I speak in the Lord.

<sup>5</sup> It concerns Marquis Gustavo de Cavour (brother of Count Camillo, president of the Council) who had written to him while he was in Rome, about the Holy See taking steps to promote the archbishop of Turin, Archbishop Fransoni, exiled in Lyon, as Cardinal, and appointing a coadjutor bishop with right of succession.

Rumour has it, and it has also been reported in the press, that Father Genta, parish priest of St Francis de Paula in this capital should be named Bishop of Asti<sup>6</sup>. I would like to bring to Your Holiness's attention, that he is very much the liege of the government. Not long ago he was decorated with the Cross of Sts Maurice and Lazarus for his *enlightened zeal*: these were the words of the citation. He is a follower of Gioberti, and shows signs of supporting the Bill on civil marriage.

I beg Your Holiness' kind indulgence for the words that a son kneeling at Your Holiness' feet addresses to you, for he loves you more than he loves himself. I humbly ask your apostolic blessing on myself and on my poor boys. I assure you of our constant prayers, that the Lord may grant Your Holiness many more years for the good of the Church. As for me it is my hope and firm resolve, with God's help, to work with all my strength for the good of the Church to my dying breath.

Your Holiness' and holy Church's most indebted, humble son

Fr John Bosco

### 55. To Pope Pius IX

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 368.

[Turin, February 1859]

Most Holy Father,

A trusted person leaving for Rome, Canon Sossi from the cathedral in Asti<sup>7</sup>, affords me the opportunity of kneeling before Your Holiness and of conveying to you a piece of information that I believe to be urgent. From some written messages that happened to pass through my hands I learned that some evil-intentioned persons are planning to set up revolutionary cells at Civitavecchia, Ancona, and Rome. Obviously their aim is to foster revolutionary sentiment

<sup>6</sup> Giovanni Antonio Genta (1810-1888), who was not appointed bishop.

<sup>7</sup> Antonio Vitaliano Sossi (died 1891) probably went to Rome also to support the appointment of a bishop to Asti, vacant since the resignation of Bishop Filippo Artico.

so as to be ready to move into action by the end of March. I have not been able to learn the names of these people: the letters were simply signed F. Δ · • ·

The situation in our diocese is becoming steadily more murky: evil is on the rise. Cavour<sup>8</sup> shows good will, if he is sincere, but is surrounded by vicious rogues who are dragging him God only knows to what extreme. Only this morning he told me he wanted to present other candidates for vacant dioceses.

Forgive the liberty I take in writing: I, my boys, clerics and priests pray to God daily to give Your Holiness health and grace and to keep you many more years for the good of the Church.

Kneeling at your feet we humbly implore, with the greatest respect, your holy and apostolic blessing. In their name I profess that I am,

Your Holiness' most devoted son in Christ,

Fr John Bosco

### **56. To Pope Pius IX**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 386-388.

Turin, 9 November 1859

Most Holy Father,

It was with anxious anticipation that I waited for a safe means to reach Your Holiness by letter. My purpose was respectfully to ask for your blessing to strengthen us in the midst of our present trials. I also wanted to assure Your Holiness of our filial Catholic devotion to your sacred person. You are the successor of St Peter, the Vicar of Christ and supreme shepherd of the Church, and whoever is not united to it has no hope of salvation. I am now able to fulfil this desire of mine through the kindness of Marquis Scarampi. This zealous confrere in the Society of St Vincent de Paul, and our steadfast collaborator in the work of the oratories is leaving for Rome where he will spend the winter.

<sup>8</sup> This would be Count Camillo (see note 5), whom Don Bosco had met after his return from Rome in 1858.

First of all, Holy Father, we strongly disapprove of what our Government has done or had instigated in Romagna; although we could not stop this evil we have always disapproved of what they were doing there in word and in writing<sup>9</sup>. Most of the clergy and almost all parish priests, and I could say most of the lay people share these same sentiments although they do not dare show it publicly. But a vicious, hostile press, threats, promises of those in government have unfortunately won over many who were hesitant or afraid to the point where the number of courageous Catholics is greatly diminished.

Faced with such a disastrous religious situation good Catholics have closed ranks around their bishops, offering their services. But we in Turin were and are exposed to much greater danger by far. Our archbishop is in exile; the vicar general is threatened as soon as he opens his mouth; the Protestants who are protected by the authorities spare neither money nor effort to propagate their errors; the press is given freedom and teaching is unchecked; these things have poisoned the moral and religious life of the people with their deadly contagion.

Despite all this we have done and do what we can to lessen the consequences of these evils. We have formed a kind of society especially of clergy: we do what we can to spread good books and good newspapers; we preach; we give retreats, triduums and novenas and catechetical instruction always with a view to teaching the fundamentals of our Catholic religion and respect for the supreme head of Christianity. In this way up until now we have succeeded in preserving healthy religious principles in many young people. My estimate is that over three thousand youngsters attend our festive oratories or evening or day classes. All of them show good disposition, receive the sacraments of confession and communion, and are eager to hear God's Word.

There are around five hundred boys attending our schools. Those we have taken in are around three hundred, and of those, eighteen this year have donned the clerical habit; two entered the Dominicans. Two have even become priests; another three we hope, with God's help, will do so this year.

<sup>9</sup> It was about annexing territories from the Papal States to the Kingdom of Sardinia and Piedmont.

Divine Providence has seen in a truly marvellous way that our schools are calm and we can teach all our classes without interference of any kind.

But, Holy Father, I should not hide the fact from you that this raging storm is far from spent. I fear a Government based on revolution; I fear the daily diminishing number of good Catholics; I fear the great number of enemies of the social order taking refuge amongst us or swelling the ranks of rebels in Romagna; I fear, and may God hold this scourge at bay, I fear that Your Holiness may yet be harassed and perhaps persecuted in who knows what way.

I say this as a most affectionate son who always fears that some evil may happen to his beloved father; I pray to the holy and Immaculate Virgin to obtain better times from God for the people and the peace of the Church. For Your Holiness' consolation I tell you that as soon as events broke out in the State belonging to the Holy See my boys began saying special prayers every day for you and a dozen or so began alternating in going to holy communion asking God to give you health, and grace and to preserve Your Holiness.

I have told you these few things, perhaps failing to show due respect in my sentiments and words: please be forbearing.

Meanwhile I kneel at Your Holiness' feet, along with many of the clergy working alongside me in the sacred ministry, and fifty or so clerics who aspire to the ecclesiastical state, and about two hundred boys who want to join the Church's ranks [clergy]; for all my boys living here, and all who come to the oratories, for all who kneel at your feet we beg your apostolic blessing as though it were coming from Jesus Christ himself. May it be a blessing that keeps us firm in the holy Catholic religion, and makes us strong and ready to give our lives rather than to say or do the least thing that goes against its precepts. Amen.

Your Holiness' most affectionate, indebted son ...,

Fr John Bosco

## 57. To Pope Pius IX

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 400-401.

Turin, 13 April 1860

Most Holy Father,

For some time, Holy Father, my boys have wanted to show a sign of gratitude and veneration for Your Holiness in whom we see a kind father and the Vicar of Jesus. But times were so difficult, that in order not to compromise ourselves uselessly, we had to limit ourselves to praying to God in corners in our homes and churches.

Now, although revolution continues, nevertheless my boys, of their own spontaneous will, have taken up a collection to offer their mite or better their pittance for Peter's Pence. And those who on account of their poverty could offer nothing, have offered their holy communions for the intentions of Your Holiness and for the peace of the Church.

Seconding their outburst of religious fervour I take the liberty of placing humbly at Your Holiness' feet a message from them signed by all contributors. I do so with the same heartfelt sentiment with which they themselves express their hearts' affection towards you, the best of fathers.

The small sum of money collected has been entrusted to the editors of *L'Armonia* for safe delivery.

Holy Father, we are at the moment living through most dangerous and trying times. Up until now the Piedmontese clergy has stood firm. Now however, threats, promises, gifts of money and the bad example of clergy from regions that have been *annexed* give us cause to fear for the future. In some diocese a number of clergy have publicly signified their support of current government policy. Some religious corporations have even put on light displays to celebrate the *much-touted annexation*.

The revolutionary plan now calls for the invasion not only of Romagna, but also all the other provinces of the Holy See, Naples, Sicily etc.<sup>10</sup>. Our holy

<sup>10</sup> Twelve days later the expedition of 'The Thousand' set sail from Genoa to Sicily, led by Giuseppe Garibaldi.



religion is legally opposed and reviled. We have no means to defend it except our little popular pamphlets, and our classroom teaching and catechism classes.

Holy Father, in view of the present situation, were we to rely on human help, we would have to be prepared for the worst: destruction of the faith and bloodshed for those who would rise in its defence.

However, Holy Father, take heart in the Lord. The holy and Immaculate Virgin from heaven is preparing a great triumph for her Church. this triumph will take place in the near future. True, it will be preceded by horrible catastrophes, but God will shorten the evil times. Meanwhile we pray that the reign of sin may come to an end and that God's holy will be done. As soon as peace comes again to the Church, I hope to be able to visit the Eternal City and gaze once more, before the end of my days, on Your Holiness' venerable countenance.

Meanwhile my priests, seminarians, students and working boys kneel with me at Your Holiness' feet and humbly beg you to accept our small offering and the expressions that accompany it. We ask for your holy apostolic blessing to confirm us in the holy religion of Jesus Christ until death. *Amen.*

Your Holiness' and holy Church's most humble and devoted son,

Fr John Bosco

### **58. To Pope Pius IX**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 440-442.

Turin, 10 March 1861<sup>11</sup>

Most Holy Father,

A devoted reporter from the newspaper *L'Armonia* is travelling to Rome, and this affords me with the opportunity of addressing a few words to Your

<sup>11</sup> Ten days later, March 17, the Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed, following the annexation of territories taken from the Papal States and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

Holiness. How many things would this humble priest like to say to the Head of Christendom! But my report shall be brief.

After being made the object of repeated harassment, peace has returned. I am allowed to work for my youngsters and to publish the *Catholic Readings* undisturbed. During this year our school has grown fourfold. Our boarders now number about five hundred. They are youngsters with good promise and are studying with the priesthood in mind.

For the moment our clergy is showing courage and standing firm. But very severe trials are in store, and if the Lord does not sustain us with his grace, I fear the worst. We have been subjected to attacks with promises, threats and repression. Now the time of persecution is at hand.

Many of the laity are still practising, but a great number daily fall from apathy into complete indifference, the bane of Catholicism in our area. However, many that have been in hiding have thrown off fear and are showing the courage of their Christian convictions.

Holy Father, you may take some comfort in the fact that here in Piedmont you have a great number of devoted children. United in the Spirit we are, God willing, ready to lay down our life and forfeit our possessions for that most holy religion of which you are the visible Head on earth. May God help us from heaven.

What causes most pain are the catastrophes that hang over the Universal Church. But take courage, Holy father, we have been praying and are now intensifying our prayer for the preservation of your sacred person. One of our youngsters who for some years has given evidence of being favoured with special lights from God<sup>12</sup> has this to say: "The present trials will greatly sadden Pius IX's fatherly heart. The Immaculate Virgin is offering to the Holy Father a glorious bouquet of roses, but he must grasp them by their thorny stem."

Another person believes that unless God's designs are changed Your Holiness will again have to leave Rome under duress. A great good, however, will come from this evil, for whole nations will flock to you to pay you

<sup>12</sup> The boy's name is not known.

homage. Millions of people will then embrace Catholicism moved only by the fortitude evinced by the Vicar of Jesus Christ in his trials. By this means many souls redeemed by our Saviour will receive the light of grace.

Briefly put, the most terrible calamities are to befall us shortly, more terrible than any in history. But Your Holiness will win the most glorious triumph when after bloodiest engagements you will again enjoy peaceful possession of your States, be received with love by your people and blessed by kings and nations.

And what about those rulers and their followers who are the cause of all these evils? Those who caused these evils or who could but did not prevent them, are the cudgel that God wields to punish people's misdeeds. The cudgel is then broken and thrown into the fire.

In any case we have been and are praying without ceasing that the merciful God may preserve and protect God's Vicar and give peace to the Church. Hope in human beings is of no avail; now God alone can help.

Holy Father, you have been generous with me in the past; be generous to me once more and out of the great goodness of your heart overlook the too familiar tone of this letter. Put everything down to the great love I cherish for your revered person.

In your kindness be pleased to bestow on my youngsters and myself your holy and apostolic blessing, while I kneel at your feet as,

Your Holiness' most devoted son,

Fr John Bosco

### **59. To Pope Pius IX**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 552-554.

Turin, 13 February 1863

Most Holy Father,

I hope that Your Holiness will show his usual kindness to me and allow this poor but devoted son of holy mother Church, by means of the good

Catholic Marchioness Landi, to have the consolation of kneeling before you and expressing some filial thoughts coming straight from the heart.

First of all may I express warm gratitude on my own behalf, that of my colleagues and boys for the many spiritual favours you have bestowed on us on many occasions. For us these favours have been a powerful encouragement to keep striving, praying and working to promote the glory of God and good of souls with what little we have.

For two years now religion and priests have been exposed to severe trials in our towns, due to the amount of money the Protestants have, threats, and even oppression by the authorities, and by the misguided actions of not a few of those whom God had placed in charge of looking after the Lord's house. To this we need to add the lack of Catholic education for youth in our primary and secondary schools which has brought about two very sad effects; it has led to a craze for reading irreligious and seductive materials, and rejecting the fundamentals of religion. Then there has been a notable lessening of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and those who feel they are called are often laughed at.

Newspapers and impious books continue to be printed, there are many more of them, and they are more widespread, but with much less benefit to the enemies of religion. This is because of the increase in good books and newspapers and the greater care Catholics are taking in promoting the press and propagating it.

But amongst the many reasons for feeling sorry for ourselves there are also some consoling ones. Respect and veneration for Your Holiness has very much grown amongst good Catholics; it has likewise increased amongst the enemies of the Faith. This is due to Your Holiness' irrefutable behaviour, good works and steadiness. *Omnia ad majorem Dei gloriam.*

The death or exile of more than a few bishops<sup>13</sup> has confounded the less fervent and has meant that the clergy have come together more, leading them

<sup>13</sup> Around fifty bishops were exiled during the brief Rattazzi term in office in 1862 (March-December).

more exclusively and directly to truth's core, to the Vicar of Jesus Christ. The bishops continue to be incredibly united; the Piedmontese clergy are of one mind with the bishops and with Rome; the clergy of other Provinces (*flens dico*) have in no small manner disgraced themselves. The only consolation in this disastrous scene is the steadiness and prudence of the bishops which has prevented many from defecting and not a few to repent. Let me say something strange but true. It seems that at the moment the bishops are achieving greater good from exile or prison than they would if in their dioceses. They are publishing, defending the principle of divine authority in its visible head which is at the basis of our holy Catholic religion.

Although we are often witness to the frequent plundering of sacred places and people, thus far divine worship has not been neglected. Many churches have been built or restored. In Turin alone four parish churches are being built, one of which will be dedicated to *Maria Auxilium Christianorum*.

Since Your Holiness has already been willing to hear me speak about the oratories I will also say something about these. We have five of them and there is a more than satisfactory flow of young people to them who come to hear God's Word and receive the sacraments. There are regularly more than three thousand who turn up at weekends. The oratory of St Francis de Sales has a shelter, classrooms and boys coming from all over the city on weekends. There are seven hundred who live with us; of these five hundred and fifty want to be priests; each year a few of them become priests and go to various towns to exercise their priestly ministry.

Meanwhile, Holy Father, the youngsters in our oratories continue to pray for Your Holiness that he may be preserved for many years, and for the triumph of holy mother Church. There are a considerable number of communions every day; morning and evening we pray to the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin; during the day there are many visits to the Blessed Sacrament and all of this is to call on the divine and merciful God to lessen the serious and terrible scourge that has been felt across our cities and towns now for some years. May wonderful days of peace for the Church and the people be restored.

Unfortunately, Holy Father, we still have to make the great journey *per ignem et aquam*, and what once seemed so far away is now very close. May it please Your Holiness to follow up the thought that God inspires in you by proclaiming that wherever possible there will be veneration of the Blessed Sacrament and devotion to the Blessed Virgin. These are the two anchors for the salvation of our poor human race. Many of the faithful are praying for you, Holy Father that the Holy Virgin may sustain you in this time of trial. You can be sure of this. They are praying that Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament will deliver you from danger.

Having had this great consolation of being able to speak this way to Your Holiness I ask you to bear with my boldness which is driven by the great affection that we here have for your sacred person.

And finally, we ask you to be especially kind and impart your holy blessing on this large group of priests, seminarians, lay people and youngsters who all join with me in humbly requesting this. In their name I have the great consolation of kneeling at Your Holiness' feet.

Your poor but devoted son,

Fr John Bosco

### **60. To Pope Pius IX**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 69-70.

Turin, 25 August 1864

Most Holy Father,

Fr Emiliano Manacorda, doctor of theology and law, and zealous supporter of our oratories<sup>14</sup> is returning to Rome to pursue the exercise of his sacred ministry. By God's providence he is a person of means but he has no other aim than to devote life and possessions to those things that Your Holiness may judge to be for the greater glory of God.

<sup>14</sup> Emiliano Manacorda (1833-1909), a priest from Asti working in the Roman Curia, a great friend of Don Bosco, who supported him as a candidate for bishop of Fossano: cf. E(m) III, pp. 382-383.

Through this benefactor of our young people I have the opportunity to express my gratitude to you, Holy Father. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for so kindly taking into consideration the proposal submitted for the Society of St Francis de Sales. I have already obtained a decree of general approval of the Society with a number of critical observations on the constitutions. I will carefully try to implement them and then submit the constitutions again to Your Holiness so that you may graciously expedite to its completion the work begun under your holy auspices. It appears that God has wanted to be lavish with his blessings in our regard. The Society is already over a hundred members strong. It has four houses and five oratories attended by young people of every age and condition. Their number often surpasses three thousand.

The religious situation in our area seems to have come to a head. But the visible signs of God's powerful presence among us are in evidence every day. *Est Deus in Israel*. In the provinces of the former Sardinian kingdom perfect union continues to be maintained amongst the bishops and clergy of every category. True, the religious press is often threatened, fined and penalised. Nevertheless no one is deterred by fear, and no one has any other point of reference than Rome and the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

Take heart, then, Holy Father, because the time is at hand and relief from distress is in store for you. God is with you. Meanwhile morning and evening we offer special prayers to God and the Holy Virgin for the preservation of your sacred person *ad multos annos*. May you live to see with your own eyes the triumph of our holy religion and the glory of the holy Church.

Most Holy Father, please overlook the liberty I am taking, I the poorest and least of your children. But you are our father and will kindly bear with me. Priests, seminarians and thousands of young people join with me in placing their possessions, hearts and their lives at your service. For your part please give us your holy apostolic blessing, and that will be reward enough for us.

With the highest esteem, deepest gratitude and most tender devotion, I kneel at Your Holiness' feet, unworthy as I am to be,

Your Holiness' most humble and devoted son,

Fr John Bosco

## 61. To Pope Pius IX

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 128-130.

Turin, 30 April 1865

Most Holy Father,

It is ever a source of joy and comfort for me, Most Holy Father, to have the opportunity of addressing, also on behalf of my friends and associates, the dearest and most beloved of fathers. The bearer of this letter is the Marquis Fassati who is travelling to Rome for devotional purposes. He is a great benefactor of our house, so much so that if the church of Mary Help of Christians is now rising above ground, I owe it in great measure to the generosity of the Fassati family.

The church is rising steadily, Most Holy father, but I find myself in very straitened circumstances financially. I have therefore decided to use the very means that you yourself were so kind to suggest through one of our benefactors: I am planning a raffle. I therefore take the liberty of asking Your Holiness for your blessing on those who are involved in the building and to send us some gifts to head the list of objects in the catalogue.

These days we have been following with consternation the Bill on civil marriage, and our apprehension was all the keener for the fact that its introduction is attributed to Bishop Di Giacomo<sup>15</sup>. We hope that the bishops' negotiations in progress will bring about modifications in the Bill—who knows??

On Thursday (April 27) the bishop of Susa blessed the cornerstone of the church of *Mary Help of Christians* as this was taking place by a happy coincidence something wonderful happened. The sacred service was held from 2 to 3 P.M. with several thousand people from the first families in this city in attendance. Now as everyone was kneeling and praying that the great Mother of God would bring to naught our enemies' attacks on the religious

<sup>15</sup> Gennaro Di Giacomo (1796-1878), bishop of Alife (Caserta); friend of King Victor Emmanuel II, who appointed him as senator of the Realm in 1863; in the preceding days in the Senate they had discussed the Marriage Bill.



corporations and on Church properties, at that very moment the Bill in the House of Representatives ran into trouble. The debate was suspended and the Bill, which in the morning had appeared to be headed for passage without opposition, was withdrawn<sup>16</sup>.

Also, most Holy Father, we offer prayer in common morning and evening that God would help you find a way to repair the ruinous damage that threatens each day to become more serious, if that were possible. I am referring to the problem of returning bishops to their sees and appointments for vacant sees<sup>17</sup>. The whole world is anxiously awaiting with bated breath the Holy Father's decision in the matter, although all are convinced that whatever the Pope does is well done and valued by the faithful.

Last March I submitted to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales revised in accordance with the observations I received. I leave everything in Your Holiness' hands, whose fatherly goodness I have so often experienced. Our membership has risen above a hundred. We have seven houses in operation. The observance of the rules and of religious discipline is as good as can be humanly expected.

Take courage, Holy Father; we are intensifying our prayer for the day when Your Holiness will personally intone the great *Te Deum* in thanksgiving for peace restored to the Church and for the glory of Pius IX's pontificate. I think the day is about to dawn, but not before we fight new dreadful battles.

May God bless Your Holiness and may the Blessed Virgin keep you *ad multos annos* for the good of the Church. In your kindness please bless my poor youngsters and myself, as I humbly kneel with them at your feet, happy and honoured to be,

Your Holiness' most humble and devoted son,

Fr John Bosco

<sup>16</sup> On Thursday April 27 Giuseppe Vacca had requested suspending discussions on his legal plan to administer ecclesiastical goods ; on 28 April a royal decree ordered that the plan be withdrawn.

<sup>17</sup> Negotiations were going on between Cardinal Antonelli and the government envoy, Saverio Vegezzi, to overcome difficulties in appointing bishops to many vacant sees in Italy. Don Bosco perhaps played a part in resumption of these negotiations: cf. note 20.

## 62. To Pope Pius IX

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 201-202.

Turin, 25 January 1866

Most Holy Father,

The Marchioness Amat di Villarios, a fervent Catholic and our generous benefactress is travelling to Rome, and I take this opportunity to voice some concerns of mine, also on behalf of my numerous associates in the sacred ministry, and of my youngsters.

The work of the oratories is going forward without hindrance. Last year we opened a new oratory and another one, God willing, will be opened next summer.

The young people given shelter in three separate hospices are 1200 in number. About a 100 of them take the clerical habit every year. Most of them return to their diocese of origin and enter the seminary there. Those of them who have the proper spirit remain with us and join the Society of St Francis de Sales, which at present is 110 members strong.

Morning and evening we continue to offer special prayers for the present needs of the Church, and in particular for the preservation of Your Holiness' precious days.

Our fear is that a great trial is in store for us before this year is over. Will it be pestilence? War? Famine? May God's will be done. Only may God not take from us the vineyard of our evangelical labours because God has found better workers for it.

A great calamity for us has been the passing of the Bill on civil marriage that went into effect on New Year's Day<sup>18</sup>. It is bound to dishearten the faithful and sow seeds of strife between civil and Church authorities, not to speak of its immoral consequences. What gives us hope in this crisis is the close union

<sup>18</sup> The reference is to new laws that came into force in the Kingdom of Italy at the beginning of the year, also involving new marriage legislation—see the previous letter.

existing among the faithful, with priests and bishops, and with the Supreme Head of the Church.

In any case we are actively engaged in writing, preaching and in catechetical instruction with excellent results. We are very busy in the confessional and the sacrament of communion is well attended. Our focus and our devotion are focused, one might say, on Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and on devotion to Mary Immaculate. With regard to our devotion to the Mother of God, you may be pleased to learn that the Church of Mary Help of Christians has made great progress. The walls and the roof are completed, and hopefully we will be able to see God's work through to the end with the help of Divine Providence. It isn't the richest church in the city but people are saying that it is the most imposing and the most apt to inspire devotion in the faithful.

The *Catholic Readings* continue to be published and the Association is 12,00 members strong. It seems they are keenly read. This is the 14th year of their publication. We ask your blessing that they may continue.

The Society of St Francis de Sales is making good progress. The religious discipline and zeal of its members leave nothing to be desired.

We now look to the Holy See in the hope that our Constitutions will be definitively approved, at the time and in the manner that Your Holiness will judge to be for the greater glory of God and the good of souls.

My associates, pastors and simple priests, the members of the Society of St Francis de Sales, the young people of our hospices and of our oratories, join me in kneeling at Your Holiness' feet for your holy Apostolic blessing. All of us are ready to sacrifice our health and possessions, and our very lives for that holy religion of which you are the Head.

More fortunate than they, but also on their behalf, I have the honour to be with gratitude and reverence,

Your Holiness' most devoted and humble son,

Father John Bosco

### 63. Dreamlike message reserved for Pope Pius IX

Critical ed. in Cecilia ROMERO, *I sogni di don Bosco*. Leumann (Torino), ElleDiCi 1978, pp. 29-32.

24 May - 24 June 1873

It was a dark night, and people could no longer find their way back to their own countries. Suddenly a most brilliant light shone in the sky, illuminating their way as at high noon. At that moment from the Vatican came forth, as in procession, a multitude of men and women, young children, monks, nuns, and priests, and at their head was the Pope.

But a furious storm then broke out, somewhat dimming that light, as if light and darkness were locked in battle. Meanwhile the long procession reached a small square littered with dead and wounded, many of whom cried for help. The ranks of the procession thinned considerably. After a two-hundred-day march, all realised that they were no longer in Rome. In dismay they swarmed about the Pontiff to protect him and minister to him in his needs.

At that moment two angels appeared, bearing a banner that they presented to the Supreme Pontiff, saying: *Take the banner of Her who battles and routs the most powerful armies on earth. Your enemies have vanished; with tears and sighs your children plead for your return.*

One side of the banner bore the inscription: *Regina sine labe concepta*; and the other: *Auxilium Christianorum*.

The Pontiff accepted the banner gladly, but he became very distressed to see how few were his followers.

But the two angels went on: *“Go now, comfort your children. Write to your brothers scattered throughout the world that people must reform their lives. This cannot be achieved unless the bread of the Divine Word is broken among the peoples. Teach children their catechism and preach detachment from earthly things. The time has come”, the two angels concluded, “when the poor will evangelise the world. Priests shall be sought among those who wield the hoe, the spade and the*

*hammer, as David prophesied: God lifted the poor man from the fields to place him on the throne of the princes of His people.”*

On hearing this, the Pontiff moved on, and the ranks began to swell. On reaching the Holy City, the Pontiff wept at the sight of its desolate citizens, for many of them were no longer. He then entered St Peter’s and intoned the *Te Deum*, to which a chorus of angels responded, singing: *Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.*

When the song was over, all darkness vanished and a blazing sun shone. The population had declined greatly in the cities and in the countryside; the land was mangled as if by a hurricane and hailstorm, and people sought each other, deeply moved, and saying: “*Est Deus in Israel.*”

From the start of the exile until the intoning of the *Te Deum*, the sun rose two hundred times. All the events described covered a period of four hundred days.

The person reporting these things is the same who unerringly predicted what happened to France a year before it took place.

These predictions were widely known and were fulfilled day by day, as if a script were being followed.

According to this same person, France, Spain, Austria and a German power would be the instruments of Divine Providence in preventing the collapse of civil society and restoring peace to the Church, which for so long and in so many ways has been fought against. These events would start in the spring of 1874 and would be completed within a year and a few months, unless new iniquities should be perpetrated against God’s will.

## II. INDICATORS TO THE HOLY SEE FOR THE CHOICE OF NEW BISHOPS FOR VACANT SEES (1867-1877)

*One of the most difficult conflicts to resolve in relationships between the Holy See and the new Kingdom of Italy was that of the dozens of Episcopal sees left vacant for political reasons. Both parties were aware of the seriousness of the situation, but attempts to exit from the situation were shipwrecked by the persistent serious friction brought about by proclaiming a Kingdom which comprised territories taken from the Papal States (1861). Only in 1865-1867 did a process of détente coming into place, where, having overcome mutual resistance, the Holy See succeeded in appointing many bishops with the agreement of authorities of the Kingdom.*

*Don Bosco, involved in these complex diplomatic negotiations as unofficial representative of the Holy See in order to make contacts, lobby, refer people, seek mediation, had done his part, especially for the dozens of vacant Episcopal sees in Piedmont<sup>19</sup>. In 1865 he intervened to set up what would be called the Vegezzi mission which ended without result; in 1866-1867 he was contacted by mediator Tonello at the invitation of the President of the Council, Ricasoli and during these contacts he proposed candidates acceptable to both parties.*

*In the years that followed he continued to communicate with the Cardinal Secretary of State telling him that the people and civil authorities were happy with the appointments, and to express his own views, hopes and concerns regarding some of them, suggesting candidates for appointment which he knew of, and who stood out for piety, doctrine, prudence and being in tune with the Holy See.*

*As is clear, Don Bosco's voice was well accepted by both parties, but many other voices were raised for and against the policy of understanding, and so many positive and negative elements came into play wanting to advance or slow down negotiations taking place. So many others expressed different opinions on the new pontifical appointments and transfers of certain prelates. It was logical then that some candidates Don Bosco suggested were then appointed bishops while others were not.*

<sup>19</sup> The whole scene is presented in Francesco MOTTO, *L'azione mediatrice di don Bosco nella questione delle sedi vescovili vacanti in Italia.* (= Piccola Biblioteca dell'ISS, 8). Roma, LAS 1988.

*We are publishing six letters here on these events: five sent to the Cardinal Secretary of State Giacomo Antonelli and one, much later (1877), to his successor, Cardinal Giovanni Simeoni. Don Bosco then got involved also in appointment of bishops in Argentina, including Salesian missionary Fr John Cagliero.*

#### **64. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 349-350.

Turin, 5 April 1867

Your Eminence,

I am taking advantage of private individuals so I can write with the liberty I would not have if using the postal service. With regard to the Fossano deputation you will find out everything from Canons Viara and Rossi, excellent priests who have been sent to plead for appointment of their bishop.

Of those who were appointed amongst us, Gastaldi in Saluzzo, Galletti in Alba, Savio in Asti there is universal acceptance, and even those who were hostile to ecclesiastical authority have good hopes for them. We could hope for the same for Colli in Alessandria, Calabiana in Milan, Ferrè in Casale.

One thing that would be very good to take into consideration is the position of Mons. Balma. This worthy prelate is deservedly thought of as a saint. This is due to his public and private behaviour; for twenty years he worked for vacant dioceses sparing no efforts—trips or the work entailed by his ministry.

But the fact that he was not considered for any appointment has had a very bad effect on everyone, and there are a thousand conjectures as to why. So much so that he is in very straitened circumstances, and lives off the charity of kind people who help him with funds.

Take this into consideration and see what can be done for someone who is so publicly regarded for his piety, learning, prudence and zeal.

Amongst those with a reputation for virtue and who would be well acceptable to all authorities are: Salvay, Vicar General at Alba, Garga, Vicar

General at Novara, Bottino, canon and priest of the Metropolitan in Turin; Nasi, also a canon there, but especially deserving of consideration is Father Marengo who is professor of theology in the seminary in Turin, and who has dedicated so much of his sacred ministry to speaking and writing. These people are very devoted to the Holy See.

Perhaps you will judge this letter as sounding over-confident; but you are kind enough to welcome me as a father and I feel I can speak with the words and heart of a son; so please forbear with me.

I renew my request to pray for our poor Congregation of St Francis de Sales; we continue to pray that you may be preserved and for the perseverance of His Holiness. May God hear our prayer.

Filled with respect and with the most heartfelt gratitude it is my honour to consider myself,

Your Eminence's most humble and indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **65. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 369-371.

[Rome, 12 September 1871]

[Your Eminence],

Having pondered all aspects of the matter before the Lord and offered special prayers:

1. Giovanni Battista Bottino. He is a doctor in theology, a canon of the cathedral [in Turin] and a preacher of renown.

2. Celestino Fissore. He is a canon of the *same* [cathedral]. He is a doctor in theology and canon law, and a jurist of renown. He has been for many years vicar general of the diocese of Turin.

3. Giorgio Oreglia. He is a canon, provost and Vicar General and capitular of the diocese of Fossano.



All three men are well to do.

Canon Luigi Nasi is worthy in every respect. But he is in very poor health.

Both Canon [Stanislao] Gazzelli [di Rossana] and Canon [Carlo] Morozzo [della Rocca] can be recommended and are moreover readily acceptable to the king. But in the present circumstances they are not as desirable as the first three above.

Recommendable but less appropriate would be the nomination of Provost Gaeti, vicar forane of Castel Ceriolo. He is completely acceptable to the king to whom he is very close, but his theological education is inadequate.

Mons. Andrea Scotton, a canon of Bassano Veneto. He preached in the cathedral [of Turin] and gave evidence of saintliness and great learning. He comes recommended by numerous works and supporting reports. He is well to do, in great health and courageous to a fault.

Canon [Anacleto Pietro] Siboni, Vicar General and capitular of Albenga, comes highly recommended from many quarters.

Bishop [Lorenzo] Gastaldi of Saluzzo has support among the best of the clergy on account of his learning and piety. They would like him transferred to Turin. As a doctor in theology on the faculty of the University of Turin he would be ideally placed to keep theological studies at the University on the right track.

[Fr John Bosco]

## **66. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 418-419.

[Turin, 4 April 1872]

[Your Eminence],

Amongst the clergy with a reputation for zeal, piety, learning, prudence, devotion to the Holy See and who work hard in their priestly ministry, and

who could be listed as candidates for vacant diocese, for example Aosta and Bobbio it seems we could list:

– Canon Duc currently Vicar General and capitular at the cathedral in Aosta.

– Provost Silvestro Tea, Rector at the main parish in Ivrea, the parish of san Salvatore: a learned man.

– Canon Salvaj who has been Vicar General at Alba for many years

[Fr John Bosco]

### **67. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 53-54.

[Turin], 17 February 1873

Your Eminence,

God has called the Bishop of Biella to himself and some tell me also the Bishop of Tortona.

I do not intend to make proposals, just some indications. From what one hears said publicly, suitable bishops for today's needs could be:

1. Canon Giorgio Origlia Canon, Provost and Vicar General at Fossano.

2. Baron Luigi Nasi Canon at the cathedral in Turin. He is of a noble but solidly Catholic family.

3. Theologian Tea Silvestro, rector and parish priest in Ivrea.

They are all pious, learned, prudent and working well in their sacred ministry.

I hope I can greet you in person in a few day's time, meanwhile I have the honour of being

Your Eminence's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **68. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 118-119.

[Turin], 10 June 1873

Your Eminence,

God has called to himself a zealous pastor, a pillar of the sub-alpine Church in the death of the Bishop of Mondovì, Bishop Ghilardi.

It seems that a good successor could be Canon Stanislao Eula, parish priest of the cathedral in that city. He is generally known as a pious, learned, prudent person, especially erudite in Canon Law and theology. He preaches often and is very devoted to the Holy See.

This is only an indication. You do as God inspires you to do.

I am always happy to give indication of my deep veneration and assure you that we pray for you. I am,

Your Eminence's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **69. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giovanni Simeoni**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 396-397.

Turin, 27 June 1877

Your Eminence,

The Bishop of Albenga, Bishop Siboni has died. May I be bold enough to remind Your Eminence of those whom I indicated to His Eminence Cardinal Antonelli as candidates, with advice from the Archbishop of Genoa.

Perhaps the Vicar Della Valle who knows the diocese very well, could be best; but I leave it all in Your Eminence's hands, asking God to enlighten you in the choice of a Pastor who can meet the need.

Please accept the poor tribute of our prayers while I have the honour of being

Your Eminence's most humble servant

Fr John Bosco

Fr Antonio Campanella, doctor, professor of elocution, prior, parish priest of Carmine, Genoa. Mitred Abbot, Agostino Sanguinet, parish priest of the Maria del Rimedio College, Genoa. Fr Andrea Scotton, renowned preacher, prelate of His Holiness, well-known writer, much loved and known in the diocese of Albenga although he ordinarily resides in Bassano, Veneto.

### III. INTERVENTIONS TO SOLVE THE MATTER OF BISHOPS' 'TEMPORALITIES' (1872-1874)

*The Law of Guarantees on 13 May 1871 and decrees applying to this required that for newly appointed bishops to enter into possession – the so-called temporalities – they had to present the Minister with the original decree of appointment and formally ask for the exequatur to be granted. This act, in the Holy See's judgement, implied recognising the Kingdom of Italy which came into being in 1861, and included part of the Papal States 'illegally' taken from the Pontiff.*

*Since the Holy See was not ready to give such recognition, even indirectly, to the new Kingdom, and since the Government did not intend to step back from its position, the bishops were between a rock and a hard place, between the intransigence of both Minister and Vatican. So they had to be content with a papal subsidy, and those who took steps not authorised by the Holy See (Montecassino, Saluzzo) were reprimanded and punished. A number of compromises were attempted, some cases were solved, but the situation remained blocked.*

*Don Bosco in 1872, on the basis of certain oral understandings with ministers in previous years, intervened once more by his personal initiative on both sides, but without getting much of a hearing at the Vatican. In the two years that followed the Vatican seemed to step back from its absolute intransigence, hypothetically accepting another compromise, that of the government being presented, by whatever authority, even a public notary, with a copy of the bull of appointment from the original posted up in the sacristy. Don Bosco kept in close contact with both sides despite being attacked by some zealous Vatican personnel.*

*Halfway through January 1874 when it seemed that the matter might find a solution with both sides accepting the above approach, it all collapsed from Government opposition also the result of international pressure. The linking role which Don Bosco played and where he did not spare himself the journeys, discussions and letters with various political and Vatican figures had not succeeded in "reconciling the irreconcilable."<sup>20</sup>*

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Francesco MOTTO, *La mediazione di don Bosco fra Santa Sede e governo per la concessione degli "exequatur" ai vescovi d'Italia (1872-1874)*. (= Piccola Biblioteca dell'ISS, 7). Roma, LAS 1987.

*In the decisive stage of the dispute, the slow and careful acceptance by the Vatican in the two years that followed (1875-1876), Don Bosco seemed not to play any further part.*

*In relation to this question of the “temporalities”, we publish here Don Bosco’s correspondence with Ministers Giovanni Lanza (no. 70, 72), Marco Minghetti (no. 73), Paolo Onorato Vigliani (no. 76), Pope Pius IX (no. 71) and Cardinal Antonelli (nos. 74-77).*

**70. To the President of the Council of Ministers [Prime Minister]  
and the Minister for the Interior, Giovanni Lanza**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 397-398.

Varazze, 11 February 1872

Your Excellency,

I meant to write sooner and ask for clarification on the matter of the Bishops’ temporalities but illness has prevented me thus far from doing so. I am now asking you to spare a moment to read what I write here.

When I had the honour of speaking with Your Excellency on September 9 last, it seemed to me that the Government had agreed to allow the Pope full freedom in the choice of Bishops, and that the Government would not put any difficulties in the way of obtaining the *temporalities*.

I communicated this much to the Holy Father and when for his part two days later His Holiness expressed his gratitude and some further thoughts on the matter, Your Excellency was happy to confirm all this.

I am receiving inquiries about this matter, and I myself would like to know if I misunderstood or if the government has had cause to change its position.

If Your Excellency could kindly give me something I can say about this, it would remove a serious embarrassment, and the Government’s intentions would be properly understood.

I believe it would be good to point out here how the most recent appointments of bishops have found universal acceptance, and the people’s satisfaction borders on enthusiasm.

Both parties have praised the Government in most flattering terms for the freedom left to the Pontiff and the Bishops in exercising their ministry. But when they saw the bishops once again obliged to take up residence in one of the diocesan seminaries, or their own home, or an inn or rented apartment, well I can't tell you just how much public opinion began to change.

I believe if Your Excellency had the opportunity to listen to what is being increasingly noised abroad on these matters every day, you would take effective measures to see that these matters are settled; and it seems things could be settled without it being at the expense of either party.

I write with confidence, and I assure you that while I make it clear I am a Catholic priest devoted to the Head of the Catholic religion, I have also shown myself to be devoted to the Government. I have always dedicated my life and means to its subjects.

If you believe I can help in something which would be to the advantage of the Government and religion you only have to show me how.

May God be good to Your Excellency and please accept my profound gratitude.

Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

J. Bosco

P. S. After the 13th of this month I will be in Turin.

### **71. To Pope Pius IX**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 349-350.

[Turin], 8 April 1872

Most Holy Father,

Thanks to Archbishop Fissore of Vercelli I am able to deliver this letter safely into the hands of Your Holiness.

With great consolation I can tell you, Holy Father, that the new bishops were welcomed with the highest respect by every category of citizen; but what

will certainly be of great comfort to Your Holiness is the zeal of these pastors and the care and obedience constantly shown them.

Even just considering Turin we can say that the principles of social order and religion have made extraordinary progress.

However the matter of the *temporalities* is what is still causing not a little grief. When the government began to raise objections, I immediately wrote to Prime Minister Lanza. I reminded him of the formal pledge made by the government and by the king himself that nothing would be allowed to stand in the way of the bishops' *temporalities*.

I reminded him that he, Lanza, had repeatedly told me to tell the Holy Father everything; and that this way things would not come to such a formal lack of communication. He replied that there was no cause to worry because the difficulties that had arisen were temporary and would be resolved, and that the government's position in the matter had not changed at all.

As time went by, noting that nothing was being done I made further inquiries but got no reply. I know for a fact that the government would like to move out of this embarrassing situation, but it cannot find a way.

Meanwhile, Holy Father, I am in debt to you for my health. The doctors had told me there was no hope of recovery. But when I received Your holy blessing I began to improve and after a few days I had recovered and was able to go about my ordinary affairs.

Archbishop Fissore will speak to you of our Congregation, which God blesses and marvellously makes prosper.

With my priests, seminarians and boys, about 6,000 in all, we kneel before Your Holiness' feet and like children kneeling before their father we implore your holy blessing.

I sign on behalf of all.

Your most indebted and devoted son,

Fr John Bosco



**72. To the President of the Council of Ministers  
and Minister for the Interior Giovanni Lanza**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 434-435.

[Turin], 21 May 1872

Your Excellency,

The matter of the Bishops' *temporalities* recently made public must be settled somehow. There are too many rumours around which are harmful to the Church, the Government, and of benefit to no one.

Some time ago I wrote to Your Excellency how I thought it would not be difficult to come to a rapprochement and leave intact principles that the Government on one side and the Holy see on the other want to preserve.

Although I stand apart from politics and public matters, nor do I have any responsibility of this kind, I believe nevertheless that the Government can be satisfied by a genuine note from the Holy see, declaring to the Government that in the Consistory held on n.n. bishops were publicly appointed to the vacant sees ...

So when Your Excellency thinks this plan or some other one that you believe to be easier would be possible to implement, and if you would like to use me to communicate it to the appropriate individuals, I would consider myself fortunate to have offered some service to my Government and brought some benefit to the Church. As a private individual unknown to the political world, I would give the press no opportunity to speak either for or against, as you would already know from similar situations.

At any rate I beg you to forgive me disturbing you once more and I ask you to accept my profound respect and deep gratitude.

Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

**73. To the President of the Council of Ministers  
[Prime Minister] Marco Minghetti**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 128-129.

[Turin], 14 July 1873

Your Excellency,

Although I stand quite apart from political matters, nevertheless I have never refused to play a part in things that can be of some advantage to my country.

It was for this that last March, having gone to Rome I made the effort to visit Prime Minister Lanza to study a way that bishops could come into possession of their temporalities<sup>21</sup>. His Excellency was pleased with this idea, and when he knew that I had no official role for this from the Holy See, we met a number of times to look at a *modus vivendi*. He then showed me four proposals by the Council of State, one of which, with some modifications, is the one described on the separate sheet.

I reported the proposals to Cardinal Antonelli and to the Holy Father himself. All parties understood that once the debate on the Bill against religious corporations was concluded, and parliament adjourned for the summer recess, the proposal would be put into effect as modified.

I hope the new government still intends to work toward the settlement of a dispute that is harmful to many and advantageous to no one. I shall be happy again to be of service in any capacity that may be for the good of my country and of the Church. The Minister for the Interior was to receive a large package containing everything we had dealt with on this matter.

It would do me a great favour if you could simply let me know if this package arrived and was delivered to you.

<sup>21</sup> In a letter on March 15 1873 Don Bosco communicated to Card. Giacomo Antonelli that in the evening he would be having the "final meeting with that individual" and would tell him of the results the following day: cf. E(m) IV, pp. 66-67.

With deep respect, I am,  
Your Excellency's humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

[Attachment]

*Bishops' temporalities*

The *modus vivendi* most in accordance with the principles of the Holy See would be the following article with attached modifications:

1. *The Chapter, or Chancery or other competent authority will present a summary of the Bull, declaring that nothing was added to the formulas customarily employed in such texts.*

2. *The Chapter, the Chancery, or other competent authority will send a declaration to the King's Procurator or other government authority, that in the Consistory held on such and such a day ... the priest ... was officially appointed bishop of ... and that the customary Bull expressed in customary terms, or simply, the customary Bull, has been sent.*

**74. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 137-138.

Turin, 3 August 1873

Your Eminence,

At the beginning of July the Prefect of Turin questioned me on behalf of the Minister if I was aware that the Holy See was still of the same mind regarding the business at hand.

I could not respond *viva voce*, but instead wrote a letter to Minghetti in which I said that if this matter referred to the Bishops' temporalities he would need to tell me which *modus vivendi* he was alluding to, if it was the one modified this winter with the Minister, and which I had a copy of; but I added that I had no formal role in this business but that when it would be a case of

bringing into effect what had been officially concluded, I would be happy and willing to speak with those in charge.

Minghetti answered in his own hand on July 16: *I have received your letter of the 14th and I will write to you regarding this matter within a few days* etc.

I immediately wrote to Your Eminence seeking guidelines to follow. Perhaps the letter did not arrive, or you did not understand what I meant; I wanted to send a coded message by means of Mons. Tortone<sup>22</sup> who told me that such messages could no longer be sent.

He said he would send a brief message, and now I explain things more fully.

I would ask you now to tell me, even in broad terms:

1. if someone else is dealing with this matter;
2. if I should hold off or continue on the basis of what was already established.

It would be good for you to note, since we heard this here, that the Minister for Grace and Justice has gone to the baths and will return on the 4th of this month. I believe this may be the reason for Minghetti's delay in answering as he promised.

Forgive me for bothering you again, but I would be very happy if I could bring even just an atom of balance to this matter which is becoming more thorny and urgent every day.

May the Lord keep you in good health. I express my deep gratitude and am honoured to be,

Your Eminence's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

<sup>22</sup> Gaetano Tortone (1844-1891), Piedmontese priest who was "charge d'affaires" for the Holy See with the government in Turin after the breakdown of diplomatic relations in 1850.

## 75. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 150-151.

Turin, 25 August 1873

Your Eminence,

I have received Your Eminence's letter authorising me to deal with the matter of the Bishops' temporalities on the basis established last March.

I should inform you that the formulation enclosed with your letter would be more easily accepted, but the *modus vivendi* as it is called, and as discussed and definitively approved would be the one described in the attached sheet. If you tell me to stay with this there is no need for further discussion; but if I need to take up the one described in your letter then it becomes a new proposal.

At any rate thus far Minister Minghetti has only told me that he would be answering me regarding this matter as soon as possible.

If I need to come to Rome for this I would first come and see Your Eminence to have a basis and guidelines that you would judge most appropriate.

The bearer of this letter is Father Antonio Sala, the bursar of this house, who also brings the greetings of the entire Congregation. You could give him your reply.

We continue to pray for Your Eminence's precious health and we trust the the merciful God will hear our individual and common prayers. With deep gratitude, I have the honour of being,

Your Eminence's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

## 76. To the Minister of Grace and Justice and Religion, Paolo Onorato Vigliani

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 166-167.

Turin, 12 October 1873

Your Excellency,

The great trust that Your Excellency enjoys publicly is what moves me to speak with you concerning a matter touching on the good of religion and the State. Let me explain things briefly.

In March of this year I had the honour of speaking with Prime Minister Lanza, to officially deal with the dispute over the Bishops' temporalities. He presented me with three *modus vivendi* proposed by the Council of State. He chose one which seemed closest to the positions of both parties. We made some adjustments more of form than of substance, and these are the ones indicated as letter A on the separate page.

The discussions, which took place in the House of Representatives at that time, advised postponing the execution of the proposal until the end of that parliamentary session.

Except that the change of Minister brought things to a standstill.

About halfway through July, I gave a report on these matters to His Excellency Minghetti, who on the 16th of that month kindly told me he had received my letter adding that he would reply as soon as possible. The many serious public matters he has had to deal with will certainly have delayed him or perhaps he has even forgotten about the matter under discussion.

This is why I make bold to address Your Excellency, since you hold the Ministry that such matters refer to. On that occasion, however, we only spoke of the *modus vivendi* to be applied to bishops who were being appointed, but for those already appointed another was proposed which is marked on the page with the letter B.

We did not speak about that at the time nor reflected on it, reserving that for a more appropriate opportunity.

As a priest I love my religion, as a citizen I want to do whatever I can for the government, and taking the governments side here, it seems to me that the *modus vivendi* B is entirely consonant with the government's view of the matter; hence the Government:

1. Would be contacting the Holy See directly.
2. The Holy See would respond officially to the Government.
3. Upon receiving the official list of appointed bishops, the government could make its exceptions before granting the temporalities.
4. By admitting this principle it seems to me that the Government would be wielding a true exequatur, since it could grant or not grant the temporalities, and also set appropriate conditions.

I thought it best to make these reflections practical so things can be understood easily as they really are.

In the practical implementation of this plan certain details of the procedure could be modified, and I believe that the Holy See would raise no objections. For example where it is said *Inquiring of Monsignor* etc.; one may take it to be an oral inquiry through a delegate: it could equally be addressed to the Holy Father, or his Secretary.

I am totally uninvolved in politics or in public affairs. Hence, should Your Excellency see fit to make use of my humble services in this matter, there would be no unwanted publicity.

Having explained these matters I must carry out a serious duty asking your kind forbearance of perhaps my overly confident way of writing. I wish you every heavenly blessing, and with the greatest respect I am,

Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

[Fr John Bosco]

**77. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 171-172.

Turin, 20 October 1873

Your Eminence,

A Senator of the Realm came to speak to me of the matter addressed in the attached letter. This discussion in no way altered the understanding we have, but it did give me an opportunity to write another letter in which I substituted the basis established in Your Eminence's for the other *modo* that had been discussed last winter and of which I had already sent a copy to you earlier. If after reading Mr Vigliani's letter you judge it convenient for me to make a trip to Rome, you only have to say so.

I am writing to keep you up to date with matters, and to assure you that for me it is always a real pleasure when I can be even of minimal service to the Holy See and Your Eminence. With profound gratitude I have the honour to declare myself

Your humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

**78. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 191-192.

Rome, 2 January 1874

Via Sistina 104

Your Eminence,

This evening I was able to speak with Mr Vigliani about this well-known matter. He expressed a desire to alter some words in order to forestall certain difficulties which he said he might encounter in the Council of State. Having looked at the formulation as a whole, he said he was happy and that he would present it to the Council of Ministers from whom, he said, there would be



no opposition, since he already had an understanding with them along these lines. He said the same for the Council of State.

He noted only that the Council of State was nearing the end of its session, and since it met only once a week, would deal with the question in about a fortnight. After which he would give me a communication which I could pass on to Your Eminence.

At the time Vigliani wanted to establish a formula for future choice of Bishops.

I limited myself to saying that I thought there would be no difficulty on the part of the Holy See, that the formula used for those chosen, taking away whatever concerned the current situation, could also apply to future bishops; but I quickly added that it would be better to complete one issue before beginning with the other.

Vigliani expressed some ideas of his own that I will put together and send you so you can be informed of what has been done about the second matter. The details then I would hope to explain in person.

May God grant you stable health and a happy year. I have the great honour of declaring myself,

Your Eminence's most humble servant,

Fr John Bosco<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> In a letter from Rome to Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi (January 16, 1874) he communicated that the "well-known affair" had been finalised, that "the formula" to hand on to the Minister for Grace and Justice had been accepted by both parties, and that the Archbishop of Turin would be the first to use it, unless some interruption came from "the devil sticking his finger in the pie": cf. E(m) IV, pp. 203-204.

#### IV. DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE ARCHBISHOP OF TURIN

*Relationships between Don Bosco and Archbishop Gastaldi went through two different stages, one of great understanding and cooperation, and another of notable difficulties and conflicts. The watershed could be considered to be Gastaldi's transferral from the Episcopal See of Saluzzo to being Archbishop of Turin in 1871.*

*Theologian and Canon, Lorenzo Gastaldi at the end of the 1840s appreciated and supported Don Bosco's work of the oratories, he praised him in the press, allowed his mother and sister to help the boys at the Oratory in Valdocco and when he left as a Rosminian for England in 1853 he spoke on behalf of Don Bosco. On his return to Italy, his respect for Don Bosco continued and his friendship intensified through his collaboration in publishing the Catholic Readings, his preaching to the boys at Valdocco and to the Salesians, his lessons in theology to the latter group, and his generous offerings for the church of Mary Help of Christians.*

*Given these precedents, once can understand how Don Bosco indicated him to Cardinal Antonelli as a possible bishop and in 1867 the Pope appointed him to Saluzzo then in 1871, again on indications from Don Bosco, as Archbishop of Turin.*

*At this point the "coexistence" between the two strong personalities became difficult, their mutual esteem for one another and their work diminished, their relationship grew ever more tense and ended up in open conflict, made worse by a hostile secular press, but also by writings from their religious defenders, all with the best of motives.*

*The reasons for dissent or bitter conflict were varied: different ways of thinking about the Church, different ways of understanding formation to the priestly and religious life, disagreement about the Salesian Society being a religious institution and its legal form, different points of view about the privileges obtained by the leader of the Society, real or pretended rights by both sides, justified complaints or sheer obstinacy, voluntary involvement or not in conflict situations for which they had no direct responsibility, the impact that other controversies had on them,*

*or events that were insignificant in themselves but that could lead to painful misunderstandings and mutual distrust.*

*Other than the roles they had and what they represented, we also need to consider that they were individuals of a very different kind and with different sensitivities, different desires, passions and dreams; but they were both fierce fighters, equally inclined to command rather than obey. They gave more consideration to the results of their actions than to seeking simple agreement, were not always available to meet together, clarify, conciliate, perhaps because of mutual disappointments, hopes, frustrations, real preconceptions.*

*When the one was accused of insubordination to legitimate authority he replied he was being persecuted by the other with the consequence that all attempts at mediation, at local level or by the Holy See, were doomed. It was a contest of wills that presented as a classic conflict between authority and charisma, even more so at a time dominated by Ultramontanism, and only an “accord” at the command of the Holy See in 1882 was able to resolve it.*

*We publish eleven texts that belong to this painful affair, almost all of them letters Don Bosco wrote to the Archbishop. He communicates the satisfaction of the civil authorities at the archbishop’s appointment to Turin (no. 79); he explains the meaning of pontifical approval of the Salesian Constitutions and how formation is given to Salesians (no. 80); he disagrees with the archbishop’s decision regarding ordination of Salesian priests, especially considering how many diocesan vocations came from Valdocco and his own involvement on behalf of Gastaldi’s appointment at both Saluzzo and Turin (no. 81); he is sorry about events causing the archbishop problems but for which he does not feel responsible (no. 82); he defends his work regarding retreats, hoping to lay aside concerns about doing things in the best way possible, in order to combat evil and promote good (no. 84); he offers some reflections and explains some details, asking that he be given reasons for a possible refusal (no. 85).*

*Amazed that in a personal discussion he was not given an opportunity to explain himself or correct what he was accused of—after all he had done on behalf of the two episcopal appointments—he says he has nothing else to add and merely asks forgiveness for any trouble he has caused (no. 86); he asks for renewal of*

*his faculties for confessions, which had expired, to avoid giving scandal (no. 87). Then follows a letter responding to a controversy on indulgences which had been referred to Rome (no. 88), before an extensive printed report at the end of 1881 (no. 89) which is a simple example of Don Bosco's circumstantial complaints concerning Archbishop Gastaldi's attitude towards him, and about which for the first two years of the Episcopal appointment to Turin (1872-1874) he had drawn up a detailed account for the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, Salvatore Nobili Vitelleschi (no. 83).*

*This collection of documents concludes with the letter of formal acceptance of the "Accord" (no. 90)<sup>24</sup> which was really more an armistice between belligerents than a peace: real peace between the two individuals did not exist. There was mistrust or profound wounds that could not simply be put aside by a document. The true "accord" would only come about with the sudden death of the archbishop on March 25, 1883 and the granting of privileges to the Salesians on June 28, 1884, after a long ten year wait.*

*A good part of Don Bosco's correspondence and the documentation relating to the Gastaldi affair published here—as also the even more abundant material in the archives and partially published—has a rather polemical tone to it, making their trustworthiness suspect and interpretation difficult. So once again one needs to look at the critical biographies of the two individuals<sup>25</sup> and appropriate studies<sup>26</sup>.*

<sup>24</sup> In his letter to Cardinal Lorenzo Nina on 17 June 1884, Don Bosco said that "the project by lawyer (Fr) Colomiatti presented to the Holy Father" had some difficulties if it was to go ahead. He asked for "some days to make some clarifications", cf. E IV, pp. 145-146.

<sup>25</sup> For Archbishop Gastaldi see Giuseppe TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi (1815-1883)*. Vol. II. Torino, Ed. Piemme 1988, pp. 259-290.

<sup>26</sup> A. J. LENTI, *Don Bosco, his Pope ...*, pp. 65-240.

### 79. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 383-384.

[Passerano (Asti), beginning of November 1871]

Your Grace,

I have spent two days here in Passerano in the Radicati home<sup>27</sup> where I have spoken at length with the Vice Prefect of Turin who was also here, the lawyer Bonino. He spoke very well of the letter you wrote and the response from the Prefect, then he expressed the keen desire that when you enter your new diocese you should make a solemn *entrance*.

We need to see how the civil authorities feel about that, I replied.

“Have no doubt,” he added, “they will leave nothing to be desired. If we are able to talk about this I will then give you some of the details.”

If you are still thinking about a pro-vicar I believe you could appoint Fr Bertagna. Pious, learned, practical, well-off. Perhaps he might accept. This is only my thought and you are free to take note of it or not.

I ask for your blessing, and with deep gratitude I am,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

P. S. Please, look after your health. *Messis multa*, but it needs workers.

### 80. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 493-495.

Turin, 23 November 1872

Your Grace,

I thank Your Grace with all my heart for the letter you kindly deigned to write me, and although it does not lessen my pains it reveals, however, no

<sup>27</sup> A noble family of benefactors in cordial relationships with Don Bosco. Costantino Radicati Talice di Passerano was Prefect of Turin from 1868 to 1871.

reason for the attitude you have had for some time concerning myself and the members of the Society of St Francis de Sales.

You reduce matters to two issues: the lack of a good Novitiate and of an ecclesiastical and religious spirit amongst the members. These two matters demand clarification both on my part and for Your Grace. So please be good enough to read this.

Before approaching the Holy See for approval of this Congregation I had a long talk first with Mons. Svegliati and with Cardinal Quaglia, and then with the Holy Father himself. The latter one evening had me explain at length the reasons why, according to me, I judged this new institution to be God's will, to which I gave all the answers he had asked for. Then he asked me whether a Congregation was possible in times, places and amongst people who wanted to suppress them.

"How could you have a house of studies and a novitiate?" he asked. I replied, saying what some months earlier I had said in reply to Your Grace, that is that I did not intend founding a religious order which would take in penitents or converts who needed to be formed to piety and good behaviour, but my intention was to bring together young people and also adults of assured morality, morality proven over the years, who could be accepted into our Congregation.

"How do you achieve that?" the Holy Father interrupted.

"I have already achieved that," I added "and I hope to continue doing so for that category of members who are accepted into the Society. We limit ourselves to young men who have been brought up and instructed in our houses; young men who have ordinarily already been selected by their parish priests. They have seen their virtue stand out amidst hammers and hoes, so they recommend them for our houses. Two thirds of those who come return home."

Those we keep study and pray with us for four, five even seven years and of these only a few are admitted to a time of trial, even after this long practical

training period. For example this year 120 completed their rhetoric year in our houses; of these 110 entered the seminary, but only 20 remained for the Congregation, while the others were directed to their respective diocesan Ordinaries.

When they enter their trial period they do two years here in Turin where every day they have spiritual reading, meditation, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, examen of conscience, and each evening a brief little homily which I give—rarely do others do that—and this is to everyone in common, with the aspirants.

Twice a week there is a conference expressly for the aspirants, once a week for the whole Society.

When the Holy Father heard these things, he showed he was very satisfied and replied: “May God bless you, my son practise the things you have pointed out to me and your Congregation will achieve its purpose. If you find any difficulties let me know and we will look at ways of overcoming them.”

After that the decree of approval came, which you have seen. And we have done everything that we said.

From what I have explained here you can easily understand that it seems to me we have a novitiate even if not by that name.

You add that *with rare exceptions* no member of the Salesian Congregation shows the required virtues and you find them particularly lacking in humility. I would humbly and respectfully beg Your Grace not to speak in general but to point out these individuals by name, and I assure you they will be severely corrected and it will only need doing once.

Such a thing would be something hidden that needs to be revealed; hidden from me until today; hidden from Your Grace until April this year. Up until then you saw, heard, read, and I could even say, administered some of the most important things in this house. Up until then, in anything you wrote or said privately or publicly, you always said this house was an ark of salvation for the young where they learned piety and the like.

There are more things I would like to say about this that I do not wish to entrust to a letter, and I hope, when you have time to hear me out, that I can explain them in person.

Thank you for the kind words in your letter. This is the only comfort I could take from it. With gratitude, I have the honour of being,

Your Grace's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **81. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 96-98.

Borgo San Martino, 14 May 1873

Your Grace,

The letters that you had your secretary Chiuso write to me, especially the most recent of these<sup>28</sup>, have given me much to think about and in order not to make too hasty a reply to this last one, I went to our house at Borgo San Martino to make a three day retreat, after which, as if I were presenting myself before the Lord's judgement, I am explaining my thoughts concerning this.

You are telling me that you will not admit any of our clerics to ordination unless cleric Borelli is sent away from us (he has not been with us for two weeks), and cleric Rocca. Plus you wanted a formal promise that we will no longer receive anyone who belonged to the clergy in Turin into any house of the Congregation.

Since you have given no reasons for this I believe I can offer you some thoughts on the matter.

If these clerics have been expelled from the seminary, what does it matter if they find refuge in a house where they can reflect on their lot, or get ready

<sup>28</sup> Letters of April 10 and 29 and a letter of May 10. Tommaso Chiuso (1840-1904) was the archbishop's secretary and chancellor.



for some exams, learn a trade so they can earn some bread for themselves? Just because these clerics have lost their vocation, should they become refugees and victims of a sad future?

It would seem to me better to help them find somewhere to go where they can do something and provide for their situation. Bishops we are on good terms with have done this and still do so. Perhaps it could be said that they must ask permission, and this would resolve any problem.

One could answer that the obligation to ask permission is a serious imposition on them and for the Congregation or house they are asking to go to. Since such a condition was not part of the arrangement, the superior is not authorised to add it. Especially since this permission was requested a number of times, and up until now was not given.

In these cases you should consider that if it is said that clerics expelled from the seminary must not be taken into any house by order of the archbishop, or if they are then they have to be sent away, you also make enemies of their friends or their parents, or so it seems to me.

Especially since some of them have already begun a course of studies, and others have already begun to learn a trade.

This declaration, which I believe you have no authority to make, puts a wall between the Salesian Congregation and the diocese to whose good it is dedicated and for which it has worked for more than thirty years.

Of course if there is some prescription of the Church which I am unaware of in this regard, then I will obey, and totally.

As for all my clerics who have been presented for ordination, I observe that you will refuse them if you find any problems with any of them, but if they are worthy of being ordained, could you refuse them out of reprisal and for reasons that have nothing to do with them, thus depriving the Congregation, Church and your own diocese of priests, given that there is such a shortage of priests?

It seems to me that this Congregation deserves some consideration. It has worked for this diocese without any self-interest of any kind and since 1848 until now has supplied no less than two thirds of the diocesan clergy. Especially since when a cleric or other member of the clergy comes to the oratory, all he is doing is changing residence. He would still be working in the diocese and for the diocese of Turin.

In fact on the three occasions Your Grace decided not to admit our clerics to ordination, all you did was to diminish the number of priests working in the diocese.

Having said that, I would like Your Grace to be keenly convinced that you and I have people around us who would subtly have us understand that they would like to go public and say: the archbishop has also broken relations with poor Don Bosco.

You know what I have done in this regard, and even just a few days ago I made no small sacrifice to stop publicity of certain defamatory articles.

And again I would like you to be informed that certain documents pilfered from Government files, are circulating in Turin. From these papers one may learn that Canon Gastaldi owes his appointment as bishop of Saluzzo to Don Bosco's mediation. And likewise it was through Don Bosco's mediation that he was made archbishop of Turin. These papers also recall the difficulties that had to be overcome in the matter and give the reasons why I championed your cause, amongst others the great good you had done for our house, our Congregation.

Everyone knows the great good we can do for one another if we are of common accord, and that evildoers will greatly benefit from any ruptures between us.

Now, Your Grace will be saying: "but what does Don Bosco want?"

Full obedience, full accord with my ecclesiastical superior. I ask for nothing else than what the Holy Father has said many times, and that Your Grace said many times when you were bishop of Saluzzo: that is that in the difficult times in which we find ourselves, a new Congregation needs all the indulgence

compatible with the authority of the Ordinary, and when difficulties do arise it needs to be helped with whatever advice and effort is possible.

I have written this letter with the sole desire of telling you what could help both of us and would be useful for the glory of God; however if some inappropriate word has slipped out, I humbly beg forgiveness. With deep veneration I profess that I am

Your Grace's most humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

## **82. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 143-144.

Sant'Ignazio [Lanzo], 12 August 1873

Your Grace,

The bishop of Vigevano has told me of a letter concerning me, with a reply from Your Grace. If it had not been written to a bishop I would say it was written in jest. Instead it is serious. I am sorry about this and I am sorry too that you have to put up with thorns, but that these thorns were planted by Don Bosco is something I cannot accept. I have always tried to lessen your problems, and I know how much sacrifice that has meant for me. I have always had good will. I have never asked anything except that you tell me what you are unhappy about in my regard, and I was never given a positive response.

You refer to mediation by the Canon at the cathedral. It seems to me I have done everything you asked me. You wanted me to make a declaration that I would not accept any clerics without permission. I did that. You spoke to me about Borelli, who was only in our house for a brief time to make a retreat, after which he put off the clerical habit. You spoke of Rocca, and we agreed that sending him away immediately would only increase the number of people speaking ill of him; we would do this as soon as the holidays came. Fr Marengo agreed and this is how things were decided. On September 4 the school year finished in Lanzo, after which the cleric went back home.

Had I been in Your Grace's place I would have given him permission to stay where he was, both to leave a cleric with Don Bosco, who sends some every year to the diocesan seminary, and to make it clear that when a cleric loses his vocation he is not abandoned by his superior, who will help him in whatever way he can. But however that may be, if he did not get the permission which he tells me he had asked for several times, then he would go home when the school year finished.

As for other things said there, I can say that there are things in my life for which I must give account to the Lord, but I know of none regarding Your Grace.

I believe that whatever I have said in private or in public proves what I am saying.

For sixteen months I have been asking what your problem with poor Don Bosco is, and up till now all I have is a few vague things. If there is something I do not know about, tell me and I will humbly ask forgiveness from that moment. Let us not add thorns to thorns.

I know that your concern is for the greater glory of God, and I do what I can for the same; so why are we not in agreement? Try telling me what you want from me.

I do not cease to pray and get others to pray that your health may be preserved. I have the honour of being,

Your Grace's humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

**83. To The Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars,  
Arch. Salvatore Nobili Vitelleschi**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 287-290.

[Turin, 21 May 1874]

Your Grace,

The fear that difficulties with our archbishop would continue, especially regarding the ordination of clerics, has unfortunately come to pass. I say this referring to the archbishop of Turin, since with the forty four other bishops we have relations with there is only kindness and support.

So that Your Grace can have a correct idea of things I believe it opportune to note how Archbishop Gastaldi while he was a Canon, both before and after he left the Rosminians, was a zealous collaborator of our boys' oratories.

When he became bishop of Saluzzo he was zealous in our regard. When he became archbishop of Turin he continued for some time to show benevolence and like all the other Ordinaries, often admitted our clerics to ordination. But ten months ago his attitude changed.

I will skip over a number of facts referring to other matters: here I am speaking only of ordinations.

I begin by saying that he did not intend to admit any of our clerics to ordination unless they had first undergone theology exams set by a commission he had appointed. This was a novelty in our towns; the bishops had usually admitted religious ordinands who had taken their exams with their respective superiors.

Despite this I quickly obeyed and sent my clerics for the exams as requested; then the archbishop added that he himself wanted, forty days prior, to examine these candidates: when they entered the Congregation, what vows they had taken, where they had done their preliminary studies, who had been their superiors, what reasons they had for leaving the diocese and joining a Congregation etc. etc.

This unusual request interfered not a little with our pupils' vocations.

Nevertheless I obeyed and calling in ordinands from quite some distance away I presented them for the requested scrutiny.

He indicated that he was happy with them all but did not want to admit them to ordination.

These things, he said, were sufficient enough for the pupils, but not for the superior. "I want the superior to formally declare that in the future none of his houses will accept any cleric or priest who belongs to the Turin clergy."

Although it was beyond his right to demand it, I wanted to comply, but I believed it was my duty to insert the fact that the declaration was to be understood in such a way that it in no way went against the prescriptions of the sacred canons safeguarding the freedom of religious vocations. He was unhappy with this clause and did not want to admit any candidates for ordination.

When I made further humble requests he answered that he disapproved of the triennial vows; he did not recognise the authority of the superior of the Congregation. I observed that the requests were in conformity with the decree of approval on March 1, 1869, a genuine copy of which was kept in the archbishop's archives and another copy along with the Constitutions had been given him personally.

He said he had no memory of that and that therefore other copies should be sent. This was done but he did not reply. Meanwhile two years went by without him wanting to admit anyone for ordination and this caused serious disturbance and difficulty for the Congregation.

After the definitive approval of the Constitutions, all of which was shared with him, I again renewed my request for ordinations.

He answered that he did not want to decide until he had seen the decree granting the issuing of dimissorials. I presented it to him; he read it then said that he did not want to say yes or no until there was a genuine copy of the decree lodged in the archbishop's archives.

The observation was made that this ran contrary to what was usually the case for Religious orders and ecclesiastical Congregations, where it was enough for the proper person to see the decree, especially given that two copies of the rescript had already been presented, in accordance with the requests for them, to the Curia and that they had been lost, causing us a problem but without ever being told about it.

Given that he was always negative I judged that it would be good to tell him that I was authorised to allow the decree to be seen by whoever had the right to see it, but not to give copies of it to anyone. He remained negative.

I asked him, I begged him not to cause further problems, given that we both had people around us who were opposed to us. He did not alter his views.

Your Grace can easily understand how much damage and discouragement an attitude of this kind does to a poor Congregation just starting out. At least one should know the reasons for it. But no one knows.

This is a simple outline of the facts that I have written down briefly here after placing myself in God's presence and looking at the Crucifix.

I now ask Your Grace to communicate my stance to the Holy Father or to whoever else you believe can give me advice or a guide to follow.

Would it be too bold if I asked for dimissorials *ad quemcumque episcopum*?

Forgive this disturbance on my part and please accept my profound gratitude etc.

[Fr John Bosco]

#### **84. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 316-318.

Turin, 10 September 1874

Your Grace,

The close scrutiny which Your Grace gives to the progress of our poor Congregation, shows that you want it to have exact observance of its Rule and ecclesiastical prescriptions and this can only be a good thing; it keeps us vigilant in our duties, something I thank you for with all my heart.

However there are certain things that I do not understand well, or whether they are according to the spirit of the Church or to anyone's advantage.

I am not speaking about the frequent private letters we have exchanged; not about your insistence that I had some of Your Grace's letters published, something that has never even crossed my mind. I speak only of the letter which

you had addressed to me on August 23 last, concerning the scheduled retreat to be held at our college in Lanzo, for the sole reason that this information was published without my knowledge or involvement. And at the time it was decided that this retreat would no longer take place, so it seems to me that this was enough to remove any idea of there being opposition to ecclesiastical authority. But the printed invitation sent to parish priests was not without your knowledge, even though a copy was not sent to the archbishop.

Amongst other things the letter says: *Retreats of this kind cannot be offered without the consent of the ecclesiastical authority.* I do not know where you find a rule of this kind.

I know what the Council of Trent says (sess. V, c. 2), and what the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars says, that religious preachers not approved for preaching must in certain cases ask permission, in other cases ask for the Ordinary's blessing.

I am not ignorant of what the Synod's Constitutions published by Your Grace have to say but all these items concern public churches, and I would certainly follow them in such cases; indeed before communicating information about the preaching I would not have failed to follow the usual procedures.

But in our case we are only talking about some teachers who wanted to come together in one of our colleges and rather than doing something else, wanted to spend a week on retreat.

It is also worth noting that our priests are all approved by Your Grace for preaching and that from the early days of the Oratory the ecclesiastical authority has granted the faculty for us to have triduum, novenas, retreats when we want in the oratory's churches and chapels.

In March 1852 the appropriate decree *granted this Institution all the necessary and appropriate faculties.*

You have the originals of these in the Curia; I even brought a copy personally to Your Grace. Archbishop Riccardi<sup>29</sup> confirmed all these faculties

<sup>29</sup> Arch. Alessandro Riccardi di Netro (1808-1870), archbishop of Turin from 1867 to 1870.



and when Your Grace granted certain parochial rights to the church of Mary Help of Christians you assured us that these were not intended to detract in any way from whatever had been granted by your predecessors.

This is why several times a year we have offered retreats in Turin, Moncalieri, Giaveno and Lanzo without ever having recourse to ecclesiastical authority.

And when Your Grace was a Canon, you often preached here at Valdocco and Trofarello with much zeal, but neither you nor I ever asked permission. In all these cases for all these retreats we are only talking about members of the Congregation and young people educated in our houses, never of people from outside who have been publicly invited. So by doing what we had customarily done for many years, I was clearly convinced that I was not undertaking anything that might be contrary to canonical prescriptions, or Your Grace's orders, which are always respected.

Before I received your letter I had already heard from one or other individual of your resentment, but always with a bad interpretation put on it almost as if you wanted to hinder the good of the faithful.

Many of the things that refer to me or Your Grace are exaggerated and distorted by public opinion or those who want to denigrate others.

And now I beg you to allow me to speak for a moment with the language of the heart.

It seems to me that before the judgement seat of the Lord, a day that is not so far off, we will be much happier if we can leave aside this concern for doing things in the best way possible and get on with fighting evil and promoting good. It would be good if those days could return when you judged any idea of poor Don Bosco's to be something to be put into action.

Letters should not be written here or there which do nothing else but increase our woes, and provide the enemies of religion with cause for blame or ridicule.

Would it not be better if you wrote not vaguely but concretely and specifically about what you want from our poor Congregation, whose members are working with so much effort for the good of the diocese which Divine Providence has entrusted to you? And also could we just bury forever the idea that some people crazily suppose is Don Bosco's, that he wants to rule over someone else's house?

I have written with no intention to offend or to cause further problems for Your Grace, but if some involuntary expression is unacceptable, I humbly beg your forgiveness.

In this house we have always prayed and will continue to pray that your health may be preserved. I have every confidence that you know that the poor writer has always been and remains,

Your Grace's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **85. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 350-351.

Turin, 10 November 1874

Your Grace,

Your Grace's reply has been communicated to me regarding the fact that our clerics have not been admitted for the next set of ordinations at Christmas time. You know that it is the strict duty of a superior to provide for the good of his religious, and that it is also the Church's duty, and you certainly know the cases where an Ordinary can refuse such ordinations.

However, before asking Rome how I should go about things, I consider it good that I explain certain thoughts of mine, and this only to not increase the problems and regrets that I have always tried to lessen, whatever you may want to say.

I did ask if I should or could make a declaration not to accept clerics from the seminary according to the tenor that I had the honour to present to Your

Grace and I was offered no little criticism for that. In the end you said: “Go and read the Constitution of Benedict XIV which begins: *Ex quo dilectus*; consult the declarations of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars *Super ingressu clericorum saecularium in Regulares*. Dec. 20, 1859. Also consult the responses given to the bishop of Pinerolo on May 3, 1839 and you will have norms to guide you.”

Despite all that I am asking you to believe that of the clerics expelled from the seminary in Turin it has not been the case that any of them belong to our Congregation neither as professed members or as novices.

At the very most a few came for a while because they had been abandoned, but as soon as they found somewhere else to go they went there; others came to make a retreat to help them prepare for laying aside the clerical habit, as cleric Borrelli did.

All of these, however, were sent to ask Your Grace’s permission, and when this was refused, we also refused to accept them.

Also be kind enough to believe me when I say that if I did decide to take these clerics in temporarily, it was to mitigate the acrimony of their parents and friends who were spitting out *plagas* endlessly against you, as if these young men had been completely abandoned.

Having said that, I ask Your Grace to admit our clerics for ordination, as was humbly requested. If you should decide to be adamant in your refusal, I ask you at least to write to me with the reasons, so I can be guided.

However things may be and whatever anyone wants to say about me, I can assure you that I have always, in accordance with my strength, acted for the good of my ecclesiastical superior and for the diocese that Divine Providence has entrusted to you, and in the hope that I can continue to do so for the rest of my life I have the honour of declaring myself,

Your Grace’s humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **86. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, p. 536.

Turin, 28 October 1875

Your Grace,

Yesterday Your Grace decided to tell me everything you thought appropriate without even allowing me to offer a word to clear myself or correct what you were accusing me of.

I feel sorrier for Your Grace than I do for myself. I had in mind to tell you things that would have helped diminish, perhaps free you of serious regrets.

With all the respect due to the dignity of an archbishop, which is your due, I believe I can say that if you were the bishop of Saluzzo and then became the archbishop of Turin, if serious difficulties that could have come between us were ironed out, all that, and Your Grace knows this, has been due to the proposals and concerns of poor Don Bosco, who now is not allowed to even say a word and is sent away as you well know. I believed I could say something, and indeed I felt it my duty to; now I believe I am fully exonerated.

Excuse me for the regrets caused. I believe that with the greatest reverence I have always been and will never cease to be,

Your Grace's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **87. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 586-587.

Turin, 26 December 1875

Your Grace,

Only on Christmas Eve did Fr Rua show me that my faculty for confessions had expired last September. Finding myself with a sacristy full of boarders and day students waiting for confession, I decided that for this occasion I

could use a faculty obtained from the Holy Father for special cases that might happen to me in any place.

Today however I stopped, and tomorrow I will leave Turin so I don't have to answer questions beginning to circulate about this fact.

Now I humbly ask you to renew this faculty to avoid gossip and scandal; and since this supposes serious reasons, thus as a poor priest and as Superior of a Congregation definitively approved by the Holy See, and properly appointed as such, I respectfully ask you to point out what I must do or make amends for if there has been any failure on my part. If you decide not to explain this to me but rather to Rome, I renew my humble request to remove a situation from me that is painful for everyone and even more so for the superior of a Congregation involving many houses.

Whatever your response may be I ask you to address it to the Oratory where it will be immediately passed on to the place where I am staying.

I have the honour of declaring my due esteem and respect and that I am

Your Grace's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **88. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin**

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 508-510.

Turin, 22 November 1877

Your Grace,

Out of respect for your letter of the 9th inst., it is my duty to assure you that regarding the Mass celebrated by a Salesian priest on September 16 this year in a private oratory at Rivara I do not intend to invoke any privilege.

The priest who did this, not being able to celebrate because refused by his parish priest, believed in good faith supported by reasons which he thought sufficient, that in this circumstance he could celebrate in a place that had become the property of the Salesian Congregation.

If there had been time to ask me, I would not have agreed and I will not agree in any case, given the situation I am in. I hope that since before God there is no fault, Your Grace will accept this frank declaration, and I reverently request this.

As for the matter of indulgences for Cooperators I regret very much that Your Grace's decision was made public, even if only to the parish priests, before being examined by the Congregation for indulgences. Because I believe this publication would be a scandal and a stumbling block for the faithful and those without faith who would not fail to come to know about it.

It would certainly damage the Congregation, because such a serious accusation could not be mistaken; but perhaps the worst damage would not be caused for the Congregation nor myself. Mere knowledge of the existence of this dispute would already be a reason for much criticism and for contrary judgements not all unfavourable to myself.

It would then be necessary for me to have recourse to the Roman Congregations, and if as I believe the decision would be in my favour, how inconvenient it would become when this decision was made known! I do not want to hinder anything that Your Grace does that your zeal for religion dictates, but allow your unworthy servant to request that before taking this step you should ask learned and prudent individuals about it, if only to see that you are protected from any criticism and the malevolence of your adversaries, as Your Grace had already done for certain letters published in the Calendar.

And then, why not have recourse to the mature and authoritative judgement of the Roman Congregations who would not fail to give the matter due consideration and decide according to what would be right?

And to tell you sincerely what I think, I would be very sorry if the question of forbidding Masses were not treated in the same way, and that printed matter of a reserved nature should prejudice the decision.

Since the controversy had been referred to Rome by Your Grace, would it not have been more appropriate for matters to have been dealt with there? The Sacred Congregation would see if this publication really had something to say on the matter .

Now despite myself I will have to respond, and certainly a defence against sufficiently serious accusations, and where I believe I am in the right, could never be without proportionate disapproval of the points and reproaches of Your Grace against my way of acting.

I ask your forgiveness in advance, and if it seems to you that I have gone too far in something, attribute it to my need to defend myself and to the very real regrets that I have. But why not deal with this problem in a fatherly way, and with the indulgence that a Congregation just starting out deserves, one that sincerely wants what is good, and that could err through ignorance but certainly not through malice?

God will judge Your Grace and his poor servant on our right intentions, on the Christian charity and humility with which we have acted, on the efforts we have made to find proportionate means to defend and promote the interests of his holy religion: in Him I trust.

I must not leave matters without responding to the observation made to me that I accepted a cleric without testimonials in the Congregation (now Fr Rocca) who had been expelled from the seminary in Turin. Your Grace will allow me to remind you that cleric Rocca had requested these testimonials five times. On another occasion Fr Rua requested them, and the writer on yet another occasion, without ever being given them. As a consequence of that we went ahead in accordance with the instructions of the Sacred Congregation of Discipline for Regulars dated January 25, 1848 (*Collectanea* pag. 891).

I respectfully kiss your hands and declare that I am,

Your Grace's most devoted, respectful servant,

Fr John Bosco

### 89. Report for the Holy See (15 December 1881)

Critical ed. in *Esposizione del sacerdote Giovanni Bosco agli eminentissimi cardinali della Sacra Congregazione del Concilio*. S. Pier d’Arena, Tip. di San Vincenzo dei Paoli 1881, pp. 51-53, 75-76 (OE XXXII, 99-101, 123-124)<sup>30</sup>.

1879

On 12 January this year the archbishop of Turin went to Chieri and brought together the Canons of the College in a Chapter. In an effort to lead them to pass a motion of no confidence in the oratory Don Bosco had opened there for young girls, he likened the Salesians to a steam train that had gone off the rails, producing more bad than good.

Since he could not get enough votes against the oratory, on the 12th and then 14th of February he suspended the Salesian director from<sup>31</sup> hearing confessions anywhere in the archdiocese, as we indicated above.

On February 20, Don Bosco and the main superiors were outside of our main house in Turin when the archbishop arrived suddenly, without invitation, to take part in a performance in our theatre, while a few days earlier he had sent Fr Bonetti notice of his suspension from hearing confessions not only in Chieri but in the whole diocese, as he said. Following that, he wrote that “*he attended our performances during Carnival, to prove without doubt his benevolence towards the Salesian Congregation*”.

We ask: why did the archbishop refuse so often to come to functions in our church, and also to administer Confirmation when he was invited, and then turn up at the theatre without any invitation?

On the 26th he wrote to Don Bosco asking him to call in and see him about a very serious matter. The very serious matter was the question concerning Fr

<sup>30</sup> Of this long report (76 pages) we have extracted some passages from 1879-1880 and the conclusion.

<sup>31</sup> John Bonetti (1838-1891), was one of the first and most brilliant Salesians. He was the editor of the *Salesian Bulletin* and as director of the girls’ oratory at Chieri he had a long-running dispute with Archbishop Gastaldi regarding differences of opinion with the parish priest at the cathedral in Chieri. Don Bosco and the pontifical authorities were also caught up in this dispute.



Bonetti, for which for certain letters that had come to him from Rome he had first said that he would absolutely give him back his faculty for hearing confessions, but then told him he was still suspended for Chieri, making him feel that he was culpable in the very field of his labours. Don Bosco went and saw him that evening, and the archbishop said he would restore Fr Bonetti's faculties for hearing confessions anywhere, leaving it up to Don Bosco's prudence whether to send him to Chieri or not. When Don Bosco brought this news home everyone was happy, but it was of short duration, because in the morning the archbishop sent him a new letter, going back on what he had said the evening before. Here is this letter:

“Turin, 27 May 1879.

Very Reverend Father,

The need I have to suppress without delay the discord that has arisen in Chieri obliges me to ensure that Fr Bonetti is kept away until I have re-examined matters 'in loco' and made a decision with full knowledge of the case. Thus I consider it necessary that for all this period of time this priest not exercise his ministry of hearing confessions in Chieri and that consequently I am withdrawing from Fr Bonetti (*if he is withdrawing it, then it is a sign that he had given it the evening before*) the faculty of sacramentally absolving until the time indicated above. Given my current physical state, I cannot yet determine when that will be. This is what I had told Fr Rua at the beginning of this month and what, reflecting on our conversation yesterday evening, I believe I must declare to your Reverence. I am,

Your devoted servant,

Lorenzo, Archbishop”.

Whose fault is it then, if we could not reach a peaceful agreement from the beginning?

1880

On March 22 the archbishop of Turin sent Father John Cagliero a letter in which he offered a house, land and L. 6,000 if the Salesian Congregation

would open a festive Oratory and two primary day schools offered for free to children of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Turin.

Having looked carefully at everything and seen that the same offer had been made to other religious corporations who had not accepted, and that the Salesian Congregation, already lacking in personnel and means, was not able to open a new house with all that was required for only L. 300 a year, which would be the result of an offer of L. 6.000, he answered that it would not be possible for now to shoulder the burdens that would result from such a decision. The archbishop himself, finding Fr Cagliero's observations correct, also agreed that the Congregation would not have been able to open a house for just L. 300 a year and said he would suspend negotiations until the opening of the new church and house of St John the Evangelist, which was close to the site being offered and where it would be much easier to send the two teachers for classes in the morning and evening. Not long went by before, having forgotten these understandings, he complained to Cardinal Lorenzo Nina, our benevolent protector, and to turn him against his protégées told him that the Salesians had been decidedly cold towards his offer, and *that he was still waiting for a definite response.*

Upon receipt of such a grievance, His Eminence wrote to Don Bosco on June 23 asking for further information. Don Bosco informed His Eminence with the following letter adding another one from Fr Cagliero who had personally dealt with the archbishop about the matter.

...

### *A plea*

I do not intend accusing anyone or defending myself with this Report. I only wish to make it possible for the Holy See to understand the situation of this Pious Salesian Society so it can offer me valid support, prevent any renewal of these problems which cost time, effort and money, all things that I strongly want to dedicate entirely to the glory of God and for the good of souls.

Therefore I humbly beseech the eminent Cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, and through them the Holy Father, to come to the aid of our young Congregation, whose interests I am obliged in conscience to promote and safeguard.

When the Holy See approved the humble Salesian Society, it also took it under its protection, and therefore I have complete faith in it wanting to support it so that amidst our calamitous times it can pursue the purpose for which it was funded and approved.

And this even more so now that the merciful God has helped the Salesians found 140 houses in which Christian education is given to more than 80 thousand children. Of these houses a good 35 are in South America and also amongst the poor wild natives. All these institutes need time and tranquillity for me to govern and administer them, and see that they pursue their purpose which is to propagate the Gospel, and the salvation of souls.

#### *Declaration*

Having explained these thoughts, the Superior of the Salesian Congregation kneels before His Holiness Leo XIII, humbly asking forgiveness for any disturbance of an involuntary kind. He assures him that he will obey whatever disposition, counsel and advice His Holiness sees fit to give him. He promises in advance to accept them and make them an unalterable rule for himself and for the Congregation which Divine Providence has entrusted to him. It came into being, was sustained and strengthened through the moral and material help of the supreme pontiff, and therefore all Salesians will glory in living and dying, working and serving and pleasing Him who gave them life and preserved them in it before the Church and the world.

## 90. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin

Archivio Segreto Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato*, anno 79, rubrica 257,  
original by another but signed by the author.; ed. in E IV, p. 151.

Turin, 8 July 1882

Your Grace,

His Holiness, considering that the various disputes which have arisen for some time between Your Grace and the humble Congregation of the Salesians are the source of misunderstanding and friction to the detriment of authority and the admiration of the faithful, has deigned to let me know that it is his will that there cease to be any disagreement between us, and that we re-establish a true and lasting peace.

Hence, to accommodate the fatherly and wise intentions of the august Pontiff, which have always been my intentions, I express my regret to Your Grace that in recent times some incidents have altered the peaceful relationships which once passed between us, and caused bitterness of soul for Your Grace. Indeed if Your Grace has ever believed that I or any individual of the Salesian Institute, has influenced things in this way, I beg pardon of Your Grace and ask you to forget the past.

In the hope that Your Grace will look kindly on these sentiments, I take this auspicious occasion to hope that God gives you his choicest blessings, while I have the distinct honour of declaring myself with great esteem and profound reverence

Your Grace's most respectful servant,

Fr John Bosco

## SECTION FOUR

# MISSIONARY INITIATIVE

### Presentation

*The missionary dimension is a fundamental part of Don Bosco's story, lived at a time when the Church was paying great attention to the missions under the leadership of Pope Gregory XVI (1831-1846) and especially Pius IX (1846-1877), thanks also to the arrival in Rome of missionary bishops for Vatican Council I (1869-1870) and to the foundation of many missionary congregations.*

*Don Bosco was not lacking in missionary aspirations even when he was doing his theological studies and was a careful reader of missionary journals. In Turin he directly witnessed missionary exhibitions and expeditions in partibus infidelium. He also wrote about the history of the missions and kept up friendly relationships with promoters of the missions and some great missionaries: Canon Giuseppe Ortalda (Torino), Bishop Daniele Comboni (Verona-Africa), Card. Charles Lavigerie (Africa), Father Timoleone Raimondi (Hong Kong) etc.*

*Once the Salesian Congregation was founded and approved by the Holy See, Don Bosco nurtured plans to send Salesian missionaries to India, Australia, China, Africa, the United States. But the lack of prepared personnel and especially the difficulties in learning languages and feeling at ease in countries which were totally outside the neo-Latin roots of the Salesians at the time, had him put it off. Instead at the end of autumn 1874 he very quickly accepted proposals coming to him from Argentina, at the invitation of the Consul of the Republic in Savona, Giovanni Battista Gazzolo, an admirer of Salesian works in Liguria, and with the consent of Pope Pius IX, who knew the South American region.*

*It concerned running a boy's college in San Nicolás de los Arroyos, not far from areas populated by natives, in whom Don Bosco could identify the characters in one of his dreams some years earlier. And then he wanted to offer spiritual assistance to Italian migrants in Buenos Aires<sup>1</sup>.*

<sup>1</sup> The most recent treatment of things leading up to Don Bosco's missionary expeditions has been offered by Carlo SOCOL, *Don Bosco missionary call and China*, in RSS 25 (2006) 215-294.

*This transoceanic initiative, which coincided with the first Salesian expansion into Europe (France, to be precise, 1875), seemed to be a courageous one, but Don Bosco personally took on the responsibility for accepting it, dealing with local religious authorities and promotional associations so he could broaden possibilities and clarify the details. Then he also personally chose and prepared his personnel, organised the expeditions, found the funds he needed, and kept the missionary quality of the whole effort alive, both for his Salesians and with civil and religious authorities on both sides of the Atlantic.*

*The evangelising zeal which was part of his whole life led him quickly to a shift from a project of spiritual assistance to his migrant compatriots and young people who were reasonably well off, to a true and proper missionary activity on behalf of the natives in that geographical area. After seven expeditions of more than a hundred men and women missionaries, in August 1883, with the long-awaited canonical erection of the Apostolic Vicariate of northern and central Patagonia entrusted to the enterprising Fr John Cagliero, and the Apostolic Prefecture of southern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego entrusted to the tireless Fr Joseph Fagnano, the great Salesian missionary adventure could be said to have firm and stable foundations. Now it was a case of consolidating and developing a work that had begun well. This took place in subsequent years with the Patagonian epic while Don Bosco was still alive but especially under the leadership of his successor, Fr Michael Rua (1888-1910).*

*Of the considerable documentation available on this missionary theme, we are extracting 17 between those written by Don Bosco and other documents, dividing them into two sections: those preparatory to and preceding the first missionary expedition and the ones that followed illustrating the development of the Salesian missions. For texts after 1877, we publish the original texts, often only signed by Don Bosco but with notes and corrections added. It should be said here that historical and geographical information contained in the various memos of Don Bosco on Patagonia should not be taken too literally, given the inadequate sources he had available to him.*

## I. SOURCES PRIOR TO THE FIRST MISSIONARY EXPEDITION

*The first seven documents offered here belong in some way to the first missionary expedition which sailed from Genoa on November 14, 1875.*

*In particular there are three letters sent to correspondents in Argentina. In the first of these, in December 1874, after having got the necessary information and essential contacts with the Archbishop of Buenos Aires and his Vicar General, Don Bosco put forward a proposal to the latter to send Salesians for two foundations one in the capital and one at San Nicolás de los Arroyos<sup>2</sup>. He assured him that his personnel would be able to offer services superior to those requested by the Argentinian promoters (no. 91).*

*In the second letter, in summer 1875, once he had accepted requests coming from the founding committee for the college at San Nicolás de los Arroyos, and through the local Italian parish priest, Fr Pietro Ceccarelli, Don Bosco told them of variation to the personnel that was to be sent halfway through November, the name of the superior responsible for the early times, Fr John Cagliero and his immediate successor, Fr John Bonetti<sup>3</sup>. He had no scruples in asking payment for the majority of the tickets for the journey (no. 93).*

*Some things were still uncertain so he sent the parish priest a list of precise information he needed in advance, so there would be no problems on arrival and beginning the work in places so far away (no. 94).*

*Two important addresses of Don Bosco to the Salesians are added to this correspondence. The first is a circular telling them he had accepted the missionary project on behalf of the civilised population and the “uncivilised population” (his word was ‘savages’) of Argentina. He then appealed for anyone who wanted to be part of the expedition he was planning for October and indicated the formalities which had to be done and times and ways of preparing for departure (no. 92).*

<sup>2</sup> A place 55 km south-west of Buenos Aires.

<sup>3</sup> Fr Bonetti never left for Latin America. The successor to Fr Cagliero as Provincial was Fr Francis Bodrato (1823-1880).

*The second is the moving farewell discourse of Don Bosco's on November 11 1874 (n. 97). The departure of the first missionaries was organised as a memorable event. The ceremony would have impressed itself on the minds of those present and readers of the Catholic paper that made reference to it. In the morning the community had their monthly exercise for a happy death and then with the boys present, took part in the administration of Baptism to a young Waldensian lad. The celebrant was the head of the missionary expedition, Fr Cagliari. Later in the evening, after solemn vespers, the moving farewell ceremony for those leaving took place, during which Don Bosco gave his address. Having reminded them of Jesus' mandate to go out to the whole world and preach the Gospel, he indicated that while requests for other missionary countries could not be accepted for lack of personnel, it did not happen this way for the request from Argentina where there was a worrying pastoral situation, both civil, meaning Italian emigrants who were losing their faith, and "savage", meaning the natives who had to be civilised and evangelised. Obviously he did not forget to thank benefactors, supporters and the group who were departing, a little seed that would become a big plant and was destined to grow. The future would prove him right.*

*To close this collection of documents is a request for favours, spiritual graces and material aid sent to Cardinal Alessandro Franchi, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide (no. 95) and a request for a papal audience for the departing missionaries, adding a possible recognition of two outstanding benefactors of the first expedition, Consul Gazzolo and Fr Ceccarelli (no. 96)<sup>4</sup>.*

<sup>4</sup> For the way Don Bosco went about his missionary activity, see Jesús BORREGO, *Estrategia misionera de don Bosco*, in Pietro BRAIDO, *Don Bosco nella Chiesa a servizio dell'umanità. Studi e testimonianze.* (= ISS - Studi, 5). Roma, LAS 1987, pp. 153-202. On the five missionary expeditions, see Luigi FRANGI, *Le prime cinque spedizioni missionarie nell'Argentina e nell'Uruguay dal 1875 al 1881*, in "Salesianum" 41 (1979) 819-856.



**91. To the Vicar General of Buenos Aires,  
Monsignor Antonio Espinosa**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 366-360.

[Turin, 22 December 1874]

Very Reverend Monsignor Espinosa Vicar General of Buenos Aires<sup>5</sup>,

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always remain with us.

Mr [*Commendatore*] Giovanni Battista Gazzolo, Consul for the Argentine Republic in Italy<sup>6</sup>, has often spoken of your Lordship's zeal and the tireless efforts that His Grace the Archbishop<sup>7</sup> are making in that vast diocese. At the same time he pointed out the lack of Gospel workers especially those involved in the education and Christian instruction of the young. This worthy gentleman, with a view to supporting the spirit of the Salesian Congregation, and doing as much good as he could for the Republic which he represents here, decided to write to His Grace that the Salesians would not be adverse to offering him their feeble efforts where there was need and if it would please him. Your Lordship was kind enough to answer that the archbishop was pleased with the idea, and would willingly accept new missionaries and look after them.

Of course I keenly thank you both, and I am telling you that we are ready to accept the project and with this in mind I intend to take the matter up with you formally as the representative of the diocesan Ordinary.

To carry out this project we will be helped very much by what Fr Ceccarelli, parish priest of San Nicolás has written, that he is ready to offer a house, parish and his support to the Salesians, then they could go on, once set up in a stable way, to fulfil the many things that remained without fruit for want of workers.

<sup>5</sup> Mariano Antonio Espinosa (1844-1923). In reality he was the archbishop's secretary and would become Vicar General only in 1879; appointed first bishop of La Plata (1898), he would then be transferred to the metropolitan see of Buenos Aires in 1900.

<sup>6</sup> Giovanni Battista Gazzolo (Genoa 1827-1895), sea captain, migrated to Argentina in 1858, returned to Italy with the title of Argentine Consul in Savona and "immigration agent".

<sup>7</sup> This is Mons. Léon Federico Aneiros (1826-1894).

That done we can come to this proposal that I intend to put to His Grace's enlightened wisdom:

1. I will send some priests to Buenos Aires to set up a hospice as a base. For this it would help very much to have a church, anywhere, for the sacred functions and to teach catechism to the most neglected youngsters in the city. Consul Gazzolo has suggested that the Church of Our Lady of Mercy, which is not in use, would be very good for this purpose. If there is no public church we could also make do with some local hall so we can gather and deal with these poor children.

2. I would then send to San Nicolás the number of priests, clerics and lay members needed for religious services, the choir, and also for a school if there is need.

3. From these two sites the Salesians could then be sent elsewhere to wherever the ordinary thinks best.

If it seems that these ideas could be the basis for making our project a concrete one, you could write to me and then I will begin to take care of matters.

As a guide for you I can tell you that our Congregation is definitively approved by the Holy See, and although its primary purpose is to look after poor youth, nevertheless it extends to every branch of the sacred ministry. Moreover the Holy Father, who has himself become our Protector, would like to see these details before we conclude them definitively. I know, moreover, that he is very happy with this proposal, because he has a special affection for those distant lands which were the object of his apostolic zeal when he was sent there as Nuncio for the Holy See.

I will also write to the vicar at San Nicolás regarding his letter.

I did not write in Latin or Spanish because I see that you write excellent Italian<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> He did his theological studies in Rome from 1865-1869.

I recommend myself and my families to the charity of your Lordship's holy prayers and those of His Grace the Archbishop, and with humble reverence for both of you, I have the greatest honour to declare myself,

Your Lordship's most indebted and humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

## 92. Circular to the Salesians

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 407-409.

Turin, 5 February 1875

To the Salesians,

Among the many proposals received to establish missions in foreign countries, the one from Argentina seems to be the best. Beyond civilized areas there are immense territories in that country that are inhabited by savage tribes. Among them, by the grace of God, the Salesians can exercise their zeal.

We shall begin by opening a hospice in Buenos Aires, the capital of that vast Republic, and a school with a public church at San Nicolás de los Arroyos, not very far from the capital.

Personnel for this new venture must be assembled, but it is my wish that this be done on a volunteer basis and not through obedience.

Therefore, those who wish to volunteer for the foreign missions should proceed as follows:

(1) Send in a written application expressing their desire to go to these countries as members of our Congregation.

(2) The Superior Chapter shall then meet, and after invoking the Holy Spirit, will proceed to examine the health, intellectual background, physical endurance and moral strength of all applicants. We shall select only those who, we have good reason to believe, will go to the missions with advantage to their own soul and for the greater glory of God.

(3) Those who have been chosen will then gather together for whatever time they need to study the language and customs of the people to whom they intend to bring words of everlasting life.

(4) The departure is scheduled for next October unless some serious unforeseen reason will force us to modify our plans.

Let us thank God with our whole heart for His goodness in bestowing new favours every day upon our humble Congregation, and let us endeavour to become worthy of them by the exact observance of our constitutions, especially those dealing with the vows, by which we have consecrated ourselves to God.

Let us not cease offering prayers to God so that we may exercise the virtues of patience and meekness. Amen.

Believe me always in Jesus Christ your affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

P.S. I ask the Directors kindly to read and explain the contents of this letter to the confreres.

**93. To the Parish Priest of San Nicolás De Los Arroyos,  
Fr Pietro Ceccarelli**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 490-493.

Turin, 28 July 1875

Very Reverend Father and beloved in the Lord<sup>9</sup>,

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always remain with us.

Taking account of the letters written by your Reverence and the two precious documents that the most excellent founding Committee for the

<sup>9</sup> Pietro Ceccarelli (1842-1893), priest from Emilia, migrated to Argentina in 1871 and for twenty years was (1873-1893) parish priest of San Nicolás de los Arroyos, where he promoted various social works. He was a member of the Committee encouraging the project for a college to be entrusted to the Salesians.

College at San Nicolás was pleased to direct me, I decided that my sons should begin preparations to leave for the Argentine Republic as soon as things are ready.

I would now ask you to pass on to the gentlemen in this good Committee the following:

(1) I thank them with all my heart for the kind words they wrote me, and that the Salesians, with all their good will, hope to be able to correspond to their expectations concerning the running of the San Nicolás college and for the evening classes which have shown excellent results for us here.

(2) In keeping with the Constitutions of our Congregation I must to some extent make some changes in the personnel that had been requested. Five will be priests, all qualified teachers holding diplomas of this country. In addition, for the necessary church services and school activities there will also be a music teacher to play and also teach singing, piano, organ and other church instruments. I shall send also two lay Salesian Brothers, one to handle church maintenance, the other to look after the residential quarters at the school. For greater dependability I wish the whole domestic staff to be made up of members of the Salesian Congregation, so we can be very sure of their activity. But when things have begun you can write to me and I will see to what needs to be done.

(3) Father John Cagliero, Doctor of Theology, Provincial and Assistant Superior of our Congregation, will lead the Salesians and shall have full authority to negotiate and conclude any business with either civil or ecclesiastical authorities. Then, once the Salesians have assumed their respective duties, Father John Bonetti will take over. For many years he has been head of a college with more than three hundred pupils, and is already known for many of his published works. Father Cagliero will then return to Europe to make his report and provide whatever may still be necessary for the smooth running of the new college and other things that Divine Providence may see fit to entrust to us.

(4) Since this is the first long sea voyage ever undertaken by my Salesians, I am most anxious that the Argentine Consul at Savona, the Honourable John Gazzolo, should accompany them. He is someone who enjoys our full trust, he knows all about the sea and he knows the countries and many of the people amongst who, our men will be living. Our travellers then will be ten in number and I am having recourse to the municipal authorities to pay for these berths. Only three second-class berths are needed. Should there be any problems, I will take up the matter of the fares for anyone they feel they cannot pay for. I am ready for this and other sacrifices, because I keenly want everything to go well, especially regarding morality and that nothing will be lacking that can contribute to a solid start for the work at San Nicolás.

(5) The Salesians should leave here about the middle of November. I shall let you know the exact date as soon as it is definitely settled.

(6) As for the names to be assigned for tickets you could do a single [group] ticket with Fr John Cagliero's name as the leader, or you could put Consul Giovanni Gazzolo as leader to include the number he judges fit. This way we can avoid the difficulty that could eventuate if someone got sick and couldn't leave at the established time.

(7) Let the archbishop know whatever he needs to know of the matters dealt with here.

And to you, dear priest in the Lord, my humblest and warmest thanks for all your good work in this pious undertaking. If as I hope we can do some little thing for God's glory and for the boys at San Nicolás, you will certainly have the greater merit.

I am convinced that you will find the Salesians are good brothers to have and following your advice they will meet the expectations of the civil and religious authorities as we have done thus far amidst the difficult situation of public affairs here in our own country.

If there is anything, please write to me in all freedom and as soon as you need to. I will write back as soon as possible with a detailed account of the things we are preparing for the departure.

Finally, I recommend myself, my Salesians and all our pupils to the charity of your holy prayers. I have the honour of declaring myself, gratefully and respectfully,

Your Lordship's humble servant and friend,

Fr John Bosco

**94. To the Parish Priest of San Nicolás De Los Arroyos,  
Fr Pietro Ceccarelli**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 503-504.

Turin, 12 August 1875

Dear Fr Ceccarelli,

I have received your letter of agreement with Consul Gazzolo and we have immediately replied to you and the city council at San Nicolás. Our departure will be no later than November 15 next, but we hope it will be earlier. Meanwhile to get our crew ready I need to ask you many details:

1. Regarding vestments, sacred vessels, furniture for the church will we find it there or must we provide it ourselves and bring it with us?
2. The same question goes for house items, kitchen, bedrooms, sheets, handkerchiefs, shirts, towels etc.
3. As for books e.g. missals, antiphonaries, benediction folders, masses for the dead, breviaries, catechisms, school books such as grammars, dictionaries and the like.
4. Do our men go to the college or the presbytery when they get to San Nicolás? Do we need to think of service personnel or will something be set up in this regard?
5. By classes in the college does that also include others in the city, or are these separate or entrusted to others?
6. Will it be necessary to provide a piano or is there one in the college? What about sheet music, methods for teaching organ, piano, Gregorian chant?

7. I am sending you the Regulations or rather the timetable we use for evening classes at Varazze and Turin. But the best regulation lies in the quality of the teacher.

8. Will our priests be involved in preaching, catechism, confessions of the faithful, as we do in our churches?

9. Do I need to write beforehand to the archbishop of Buenos Ayres and what do I need to say?

10. Since I am printing a prayer book for the youth in Spanish, and have already written it, and since I would like it to be as close as possible to what you usually do in the archdiocese, I need you to send me as soon as possible a small catechism for children where I can find daily prayers, e.g.: *I adore you, Hail Mary, Creed, Hail Holy Queen, Angel of God, Ten Commandments, acts of faith* and so on. This way our confreres can quickly follow the usual procedures in the diocese.

Right now I need you to be very patient, instruct me and help me.

I want you to cut a good figure so nobody says “It’s a shoddy operation.” Since the honour of a budding Congregation is at stake, I intend to spare neither personnel nor expense if this will contribute to the success of the undertaking.

I ask you to give me any advice you think is needed, and pass on my humble and respectful regards to the gentlemen in the founding Committee who kindly wrote to me.

May God fill you with his blessings. Pray for me. With true gratitude I have the honour of declaring myself,

Your humble servant,

Fr John Bosco



**95. To the Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide,  
Cardinal Alessandro Franchi**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 514-516.

[Ovada, 31 August 1875]

Your Eminence,

I turn humbly to Your Eminence and ask you to be a father and protector in the affair that I respectfully have the honour to put to you. With the blessing of the Holy Father, and having completed all necessary arrangements with the Archbishop of Buenos Aires and the City Council at San Nicolás de los Arroyos the Salesian Congregation has finalised its arrangements for opening a hospice in the capital, a college at San Nicolás, especially on behalf of the missions, and for taking up the administration of public schools with a church on behalf of the citizens.

The first departure of Salesians has been fixed for the last days of October, ten of them, and a similar number will leave not long after. This being the first time we are opening houses in the foreign missions, I turn to Your Eminence, asking you to:

1. Grant the Salesian Congregation (definitively approved on April 3, 1874) all the favours, spiritual graces and privileges that the Holy See usually gives to religious who go to the foreign missions both as Salesian individuals and religious houses.

2. This Congregation, although it is reasonably well provided for in personnel, is nevertheless at its beginnings and has few means, so is in serious need, so I ask Your Eminence if you could give us some financial aid, books especially in Spanish for the use of the church or school; sacred vessels, vestments and the like, as your well-known charity sees fit.

The City Council at San Nicolás is giving a place for the college and church and paying the journey for five missionaries. Other preparatory expenses for studying languages, personal effects, everything to do with the voyage, furniture, first setting up are borne by the Salesians.

Your kindness and charity on other occasions give me hope that now too you will be our father and protector. The Salesians for their part will try to correspond with the utmost zeal to the benefits received, recalling with indelible gratitude the one who gave them the means to exercise their evangelical ministry in the Argentine Republic. With divine help we hope to be able to extend from there to other parts of America.

It is our heartfelt prayer that God will fill you with heavenly favours and grant you a long and happy life for the good of the Church and civil society. In the name of all I kiss your sacred hand and declare with the greatest reverence that I am,

Your Eminence's most indebted and humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **96. To Pope Pius IX**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 534-536.

Turin, 27 October 1875

Most Holy Father,

The plan to open a hospice and college for the missions in the Argentine Republic which Your Holiness has deigned to bless, is about to come into effect. The departure of the missionaries is set for November 13 next. Amongst the many people who have worked so zealously for the good success of this enterprise it seems to me I could nominate:

1. Mr Giovanni Battista Gazzolo, Consul of that Republic in Savona. It was he who dealt with everything, smoothed out any difficulties that arose, took on teaching Spanish to our religious and the twenty Sisters whom he will accompany to Buenos Ayres and San Nicolás de Los Arroyos.

2. Fr Pietro Ceccarelli the only parish priest in the huge population of this latter city, who with no little trouble, expense and zeal has dealt with the Church authorities, then began and brought to a good conclusion dealings

with the city council, who are offering a college, public church to the new missionaries for the benefit of young people and adults.

For these two exemplary Catholics, Holy Father, for the charity they have shown, much more than the Salesians could have expected, I dare to ask Your Holiness to honour Mr Giovanni Battista Gazzolo with some pontifical title as Your Holiness should think fit, and for Fr Pietro Ceccarelli I ask the title of chaplain or some other honorary title at Your Holiness' pleasure.

Neither of them has made any request, and indeed they are completely ignorant of my petition; but I know that such a sign of benevolence from Your Holiness would be very pleasing to their respective families, would encourage them both to continue their care for the good of our holy Catholic religion and also to found other pious institutes in those distant countries.

Before leaving our Salesians would like to come to Rome to receive your holy Apostolic blessing and thus assure you they will work, live and die for this divine religion of which Your Holiness is the supreme head on earth. They hope that Your Holiness, in his unlimited mercy will kindly welcome them.

Kneeling humbly before you, I offer your filial homage of all the Salesians, begging you to bestow your holy blessing. In their name and with the greatest of gratitude I have the incomparable honour of declaring myself,

Your Holiness' most humble and indebted son,

Fr John Bosco, Rector Major

### **97. Don Bosco's Farewell to Departing Missionaries**

Critical ed. in *Da Torino alla Repubblica Argentina. Lettere dei missionari salesiani per il sac. Cesare Chiala*. Torino, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1876, pp. 43-57.

When vespers were over, Don Bosco went up into the pulpit to offer a brief farewell talk.

At his appearance a profound silence fell upon the church packed with people. A thrill of emotion swept through the congregation, this being the final time a beloved father would speak with his beloved sons, and the last time these would hear the echo of his dear accents!

One of our boys gifted with an excellent memory was able to partly recall this speech, which we could say was improvised and where the mind was struggling with the heart, because at every point when the speaker touched on the vitally important part of the argument, that is, the missionaries there present, his voice softened then died on his lips ... and with a visible effort he went on to a different topic, holding back his tears, but inevitably his listeners too were crying.

“Our Divine Saviour,” thus he began “when he was on this earth, before going to his heavenly Father gathered his apostles and told them: *Ite in mundum universum... docete omnes gentes... praedicate evangelium meum omni creaturae*. Go out to all the world ... teach all peoples ... preach my Gospel to all creatures.”

“With these words the Saviour gave not advice but a command to his apostles, for them to bring the light of the Gospel to all parts of the earth. This command or mission gave the name ‘missionaries’ to everyone who in our country or foreign countries go out to spread or preach the truths of the faith. *Ite, andate*.”

“When the Divine saviour ascended into Heaven the apostles carried out their Master’s command. Sts Peter and Paul went to many towns, cities and kingdoms in the world. Saint Andrew went to Persia, Saint Bartholomew to India, Saint James to Spain and everyone preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ, some here, some there, to the extent that St Paul already in his time wrote: *‘Fides vestra annuntiatur in universo mundo*. The faith of Jesus Christ has been preached throughout the world.”

“But would it not have been better for the apostles to stay put and win over the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all of Palestine, especially because it was easier to bring them together and discuss the fundamental points of the Catholic religion and ways to propagate it so there would be no one left in those regions who did not believe in Jesus Christ? No, they did not do this; the Divine Saviour had told them: *‘Ite in mundum universum: - Go out to all the world’* and so the Apostles, not being able to go out to all the regions of the globe by themselves, successively recruited more and more Gospel

workers whom they sent here and there to spread God's Word. St Peter sent St Apollinarus to Ravenna, St Barnabas to Milan, St Linus and others to France, and so did other apostles in governing the Church."

"The Popes who were St Peter's successors did the same and all those who went out into the missions left from Rome or went out with the permission of the Holy Father."

"All this is according to the dispositions of God our Saviour who established, as was necessary, a secure, infallible centre which everyone could refer to, on which everyone depended, and with which everyone had to be in accord if they were to preach his holy word."

"Now, studying what we could do as a small group, in accordance with our strengths, to carry out Jesus Christ's precept, various missions were presented in China, India, Australia, America itself, but for various motives especially since ours is just a budding Congregation, we preferred a mission in South America in the Argentine Republic. To follow this up and indeed to follow up the precept of Jesus Christ, as soon as we began to speak of this mission we immediately found out what was the thinking of the head of the Church and everything was done with His Holiness' full knowledge; our missionaries, before leaving for their mission, have gone to pay their respects to the Vicar of Jesus Christ to receive his apostolic blessing and then depart as if sent by the Divine Saviour himself."

"In this way we are beginning a great work, not because we have pretences or believe we can convert the whole universe in a few days, no, but who knows. Could it be that this departure and this little group is like a seed from which a huge tree grows? Who knows if it is not a grain of millet or a mustard seed which grows little by little and may do great good?"

"To give you a good idea of the great need for priests in the Argentine Republic, let me quote just a few bits from a letter recently received from a friend in that country. 'If ever in these parts,' he writes 'we could have something like you have, I don't say the church of Mary Help of Christians, but even in the most forgotten parts of Italy or France, oh how fortunate these

peoples would consider themselves, and how grateful and bending they would be to the voice of the ones who were labouring on their behalf! But here often, not even at the moment of death, can they have any of the comforts of our religion. Not a few areas are absolutely deprived of Holy Mass.' He told me of a relative of his, who wanting to go to Mass on Sunday left on Thursday and to arrive on time he had to travel fast using a horse, a carriage and whatever other means possible, and he just arrived in time in that town on the Sunday morning for Mass."

"The few priests there are, are not enough to administer the sacraments to the dying either because of the size of the population they have to look after, or because of the distance to the various towns they live in."

"I recommend to you then with special insistence the sad situation of many Italian families, many of whom live in those cities and towns and out in the countryside. Parents and their children have little instruction in the language and customs of where they live, far from schools and churches, and they don't go to religious practices or if they do, understand nothing. Therefore they write to me that you will find a huge number of children and also adults who live in deplorable ignorance unable to read, write or without any religious principles. Go then, seek out these brothers of ours who through poverty or misfortune have gone to a strange land, and help them know how great is God's mercy, that he has sent you to them for the good of their souls, to help them know and follow the path, the secure path that will lead them to eternal salvation."

"And then in the regions surrounding the civilised part there are hordes of natives [savages] where the religion of Jesus Christ, civilisation, business has not yet penetrated, and where there is not yet a single trace of a European foot."

"These areas are the Pampas, Patagonia and some islands around them, making up a continent perhaps larger than all of Europe."

"Now all those vast regions are ignorant of Christianity, and ignorant in fact of any principle of civilisation, business, religion. Oh so let us pray then,

let us pray to the owner of the vineyard that he may send workers into his harvest, that he may send many, but that he may send them after his own heart so they may spread the kingdom of Jesus Christ on this earth.”

“At this point I should address words of thanks to all the benefactors who in so many ways have worked for the success of this mission. What can I say? We turn to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, exposed now for Benediction and pray that he may recompense all that has been done on behalf of this house, the Salesian Congregation and this mission.”

“I should speak of a well-known person who began, followed up and brought this pious undertaking to conclusion, but I must remain silent because he is here present; I will speak about him on another occasion.”

“And now I address a few words to you, my believed sons who are about to depart.”

“Before anything else I recommend that in your private and common prayer you never forget our benefactors in Europe, and the first souls that you succeed in winning over for Jesus Christ offer them to the heavenly Father in homage and as a pledge of gratitude to the worthy donors of this mission. I have already spoken to each of you individually as my heart inspired me to or what I thought useful; for all of you then I am leaving some special written reminders as my testament for those going to foreign countries and whom perhaps I will not have the consolation of seeing again on this earth.”

“But my voice is failing, my tears are drowning my words. I only want to tell you that if my soul at this moment is moved to emotion by your departure, my heart finds great consolation in seeing how our Congregation has grown; in seeing how in our small way we too in this moment can place our little rock in the great building of the Church. You leave with courage, but remember there is only one Church that extends across Europe and America and throughout the world, and holds within it the inhabitants of all nations who wish to take refuge in its motherly bosom.”

“Christ is the Saviour of souls here and also there. The Gospel is such that what is preached in one place is also preached in another, and although

we might be separated in body there is unity in spirit everywhere, everyone working for the greater glory of the same God and Saviour Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“But wherever you go and live, oh beloved sons, you must always maintain that you are Catholic priests and you are Salesians. As Catholics you went to Rome to receive the blessing, indeed your mission from the supreme pontiff.”

“And by this fact you pronounce a formula, a profession of faith and make it publicly known that you are sent by the Vicar of Jesus Christ to carry out the same mission as the Apostles, sent by Jesus Christ himself.”

“Therefore these same sacraments, this same Gospel preached by the Saviour, by his apostles, by the successors of St Peter up until our time, that same religion, those same sacraments must be jealously loved, professed and exclusively preached, whether you go amongst savages, or amongst uncivilised peoples. May God free you from saying any word or doing the least action that may be or could also be interpreted to be contrary to the infallible teachings of Peter’s supreme See, the See of Jesus Christ, to which everything must refer, and upon which everything must depend.”

“As Salesians in whatever remote part of the globe you find yourselves, do not forget that here in Italy you have a father who loves you in the Lord, a Congregation that thinks of you in any event, provides for you as will always welcome you as brothers. Go then, you will have to face up to all kinds of difficulties, hardships, dangers, but do not be afraid, God is with you, he will give you such grace that you will say with St Paul: ‘Alone I can do nothing, but with divine help I am all powerful. *Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat.*’ Go, but do not go alone; everyone is accompanying you. Not a few of your companions will follow your example and will go and reach you there in your field of glory and tribulations. Those who do not leave with you to accompany you in the evangelical field that Divine Providence has established for you, will accompany you in thought and with prayer, and they will share your consolations, afflictions, the flowers and thorns, so that with divine help you can be fruitful in all that you must put up with for the salvation of souls by Jesus the redeemer. Go then, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, and our venerable



Archbishop have blessed you, I also with all the affection of my heart invoke copious divine blessings on you, on your voyage, on your every undertaking, your every effort.”

“Goodbye! Perhaps we will never see each other again on this earth, but I have the firm hope that through the infinite mercy of the Lord we will see each other together in that homeland where earth’s labours, the brief sufferings of our life will be fittingly rewarded with the eternal joys of Heaven.”

## II. A MISSIONARY PROJECT IN RAPID DEVELOPMENT

*What were Don Bosco's missionary plans for Argentina once he had set foot in that land? With the information in his possession thanks to research by Fr Giulio Barberis, and to correspondence with local authorities and Salesian missionaries, six months after the first expedition Don Bosco was able to send the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, Cardinal Alessandro Franchi, a first report on the immediate results of the work of Salesian missionaries in Argentina (no. 98). He asked for financial aid and the setting up of an Apostolic Prefecture for the territories of Pampa and Patagonia to refer those who belonged to no institution either ecclesiastical or civil.*

*He also asked for financial support from the Italian Minister for External Affairs for Salesian assistance to Italian immigrants in Argentina (no. 99), and from benefactors in general for houses already opened in Argentina, those requested in Chile, for the costs of voyages and the necessary personal effects for new missionaries (no. 100).*

*At the end of 1877 he once again sent the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide a new broad-ranging memo on the importance of the Salesian missions, on the results achieved over two years, on the personnel involved and his limited financial resources. He finished with a request to erect an Apostolic Vicariate in central north Patagonia and an Apostolic Prefecture further south (no. 101).*

*As soon as the new Prefect of Propaganda Fide, Cardinal Giovanni Simeoni was appointed, Don Bosco briefly repeated the same request, which amongst other things he had also forwarded to the new Pope Leo XIII, who shared Don Bosco's plans for America and India, but left all decision in that regard to the appropriate Congregation (no. 102).*

*He sent a memo on the state of the Salesian Society in the Patagonian missions to the same pontiff in April 1879, and again asked for formal recognition by the Holy see for those parts, so he could obtain financial assistance from the Pious Work of the Propagation of the Faith in Lyon and the Holy Childhood (no. 103).*

*Broad-ranging information with attached documentation on the progress of the Salesian missions are contained in two other memos: above all in a broad*

*report to the Pope on the missions in Patagonia in 1880 again with a view to obtaining an Apostolic Vicariate in Patagonia, and then in an even briefer but detailed history of the individual Salesian foundations in Patagonia sent to the Work of Propagation of the Faith in Lyon in March 1882, so he could have some financial support to improve apostolic results (no. 105).*

*The repeated requests for new juridical circumscriptions were accepted the following year. On November 16, 1883 the Vicariate and Apostolic prefecture, so long desired, were erected (no. 106)<sup>10</sup>.*

*Our brief collection concludes with a circular to missionary Cooperators in 1886 (no. 107), translated into 4 languages and sent all round the world, in which Don Bosco referred to the imminent development of Salesian works in Chile, down in the Magellan territories in the south, in Brazil, while he renewed his request for prayers and for financial help.*

*Nine expeditions had already left with more than 100 Salesian missionaries and 40 Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. While Don Bosco was still alive, a further three expeditions followed (April and December 1886, December 1887) with around thirty other missionaries, men and women who by now had arrived in the extreme south of Chile (Punta Arenas, 1887).*

## **98. To the Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, Cardinal Alessandro Franchi**

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 143-149.

Rome, 10 May 1876

Your Eminence,

As an affectionate and obedient son of the Holy See, I am explaining to Your Eminence a project that over these times seems to me can be of great benefit to a vast region, perhaps the only one in which up until now the Gospel has not reached to offer the merciful effects of faith in Jesus Christ.

<sup>10</sup> Maria Andrea NICOLETTI, *Le complicate missioni della Patagonia da don Bosco a don Rua: situazione iniziale, sviluppi, bilancio*, in Francesco MOTTO (Ed.), *Don Michele Rua nella storia*. Roma, LAS 2010, pp. 339-362.

This region is known as the Pampas and Patagonia or the Magellanic area of South America. It is between the Sea of the Indies and the Pacific and extends from the 42nd parallel to the 60th. Joined to this are nearby islands, and the area forms a continent larger than Europe. Thirty years after Christopher Columbus, the famous explorers Caboto and Magellan made their existence known, but were unable to penetrate the region. After them various courageous Gospel workers made an attempt at various times and some are still working there, but their efforts and progress has been temporary.

The name of Jesus resounded as far as the 45th parallel, but again they had to pull back and limit themselves to the current borders of the Argentine Republic and Chile.

So in Patagonia, with its vast area and scarce population, and because of the fierce nature and gigantic stature of its people, and again because of the terrible climate, (from 6 to 8 degrees centigrade) saw few gains and its geography is listed amongst those huge regions where neither Christianity nor civilisation has been able to penetrate until now, nor has any civil or ecclesiastical authority been able to extend influence or empire.

In recent times there has been some dawning of hope and divine mercy since various cities, a few towns in the Argentine Republic founded close to the savages have established some vague contacts with them to the point where it has been possible to approach them, speak with them and even do a little mixed trading.

Those behind these social events thought it might be possible to try something that would have possible spiritual fruit.

Some years ago we dealt with Cardinal Barnabò<sup>11</sup>, of glorious memory, regarding some projects that were also explained to the Holy Father. One or other of these was given preference, and His Holiness blessed and encouraged the attempt.

The project most preferred was to establish shelters, colleges, hostels, and educational centres on the borders where the natives [*selvaggi*] lived.

<sup>11</sup> Alessandro Barnabò (1801-1874), Prefect of the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* from 1856 until his death.

By relating with the children it was easier to communicate with the parents so little by little to make progress amongst the savage tribes. With the blessing of the Holy Father I got in contact with Mr Giovanni Battista Gazzolo, the Argentine Consul in Savona, and with his help dealt with the archbishop of Buenos Ayres, the President of the Argentine Republic<sup>12</sup> and with the city council at San Nicolás de Los Arroyos; two years of negotiations concluded with ten Salesians going there to dedicate themselves to a new kind of mission, opening a hospice in Buenos Ayres as a base, and a college at San Nicolás.

Since this city is no more than 60 leagues from the natives it could be a place for the Salesians to study the language, history, customs of the people, and maybe even prepare some indigenous missionaries from amongst the pupils who could be a guide amongst the natives.

#### *Hospice in Buenos Aires*

Once the departure of the Salesians was set they quickly began studying the language, history and customs of the countries.

When they had prepared the necessary materials for religious worship, and furniture for rooms and classrooms, they went to Rome to receive the blessing, their Mission and appropriate advice from the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Furnished then by Your Eminence with faculties as apostolic missionaries, on November 14, 1875 they left for America and on December 14 they arrived in the capital of the Argentine Republic.

They had with them a *Brief* from the Holy Father and a recommendation from the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs and were welcomed with much kindness by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities.

Of these Salesians three remained in the aforementioned hospice and church of Mater *Misericordiae* and then set to work directly with the many

<sup>12</sup> The President was Nicolás Avellaneda (1837-1885). The former Minister for Justice and Minister for Education, went about an economic policy aimed at agricultural and industrial development of the Country, thanks also to colonisation of the Pampa begun by his predecessors and the strong European immigration which provided cheap labour.

Italians living there. They occupied themselves in the city hearing confessions, preaching and were already able to open three festive oratories in three main parts of the city.

### *College at San Nicolás*

The other seven religious went to San Nicolás, where the city council offered them a small hall, but sufficient to be able to begin the college.

Works were completed with the help of some charitable citizens, the hall was extended, furnished and now has around a hundred boys living in and fifty who are there during the day only, because the lack of space means they need to spend the night with their families or in private arrangements.

The college is called San Nicolás in order not to offend certain national sensitivities, but it is a true seminary or college for the missions amongst the natives.

There have already been some consoling results from the college. The classes are set up properly and fully religious discipline is observed. Amongst the indigenous pupils, seven of the older ones have asked if they can embrace the ecclesiastical state to go, as they say, and convert their relatives who are still savages. Some pupils are sons of parents who a short time ago used to live in the Pampas, others come from there to see their children and talk a little with the teachers or the directors, or so I can glean from letters I received a few days ago from San Nicolás.

Now we want to open other education centres in areas closer to the native tribes but for these works to be supported, progress and obtain the desired results we need men, and we need material means. And since evangelisation amongst the natives belongs to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide I am turning humbly to Your Eminence, its worthy Prefect, asking you to help me with the work and advice.

### *Things most needed*

The harvest is abundant everywhere, and pupils abound, but of course building and personnel are absolutely essential. So to prevent our current

missionaries not being weighed down by work we need to send them as soon as possible no fewer than ten religious to support the works begun and to take new steps towards Patagonia.

Up until now the expenses entailed (ca. 100000 fr.) have been—with effort—borne by the Salesian Congregation helped locally by some pious Argnetinians, but private aid cannot manage such an undertaking so I am asking Your Eminence:

1. To take this mission into kind consideration, give us all the rules and advice that in your enlightened wisdom that you feel can help and be of moral benefit for the natives .

2. Give us material aid for the classes we have set up in Turin for missionaries destined for Patagonia and for the missionaries to whom Your Eminence wanted to entrust a mission in the Indies [understand this as South American Indians!] as you were kind enough to indicate to me; to support the expenses of voyages and what we need for the college opened in San Nicolás, and for the houses and hospices that are to be opened according to the project indicated earlier.

3. To establish an Apostolic Prefecture with a view to exercising ecclesiastical authority over the people of the Pampas and Patagonia who currently belong to no diocesan Ordinary, nor to any civil government authority.

Having thus explained this humble project I submit everything to Your Eminence's prudence and am ready to accept and follow whatever modification or variation you consider fit.

I desire only to spend the last days of my life for this mission that seems to me to be for the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls. May Your Eminence help me in whatever you can, especially by the charity of your holy prayers. I have the distinct honour of bowing before you and declaring myself to be,

Your Eminence's most humble and indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### 99. To the Minister for External Affairs, Amedeo Melegari

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 192-193.

[Turin, 12 August 1876]

Your Excellency<sup>13</sup>,

Last April I had the honour of explaining to Your Excellency the miserable situation of Italians who have gone to the Argentine Republic and other countries and cities in South America, for want of scholastic and moral education.

I also noted some ways by which it seemed to me we could provide for their needs and how as an experiment I had already sent ten Salesians or in other words members of the charitable association under the name of San Francis de Sales, whose purpose is to work for poorest and most abandoned children in society.

Your Excellency showed he was sensitive to this explanation, praised the project and, promising government support directed me to Marquis Spinola<sup>14</sup> who was about to depart as the Italian Minister in Buenos Ayres.

This intelligent gentleman understood the serious situation and promised to get involved as soon as he took office, while meanwhile he advised me to continue working in Italy with Your Excellency.

Now I have the honour of letting you know that we have successfully set up schools and religious services in the Church de los *Italianos* in Buenos Aires.

A college was opened at San Nicolás de los Arroyos with boarders, and poor pupils who cannot be taken in as boarders but come to school as day students.

<sup>13</sup> Luigi Amedeo Melegari (1805-1881), senator from 1862. In 1876-1877 he was Foreign Minister.

<sup>14</sup> Federico Costanzo Spinola (1830-1909), extraordinary envoy and plenipotentiary Minister for the Italian Government in Argentina.



Also as soon as possible we will open a hospice for poor boys living in the capital, and a college in Montevideo with the same purpose as the one in San Nicolás.

For provision we need to support these schools, the hospice and colleges, if Your Excellency is happy I could talk about this when we have received a report from Marquis Spinola.

As things stand at the moment I would simply like Your Excellency to grant a subsidy<sup>15</sup> for items and expenses for the voyage for twenty Salesians who need to leave as soon as possible to help the other members who find it difficult because they are too few for the growing and considerable needs.

I have every hope that Your Excellency will lend his effective support that besides its national interest is especially aimed at improving the lot of the most needy group in society, the children of Italian families at risk.

I am honoured to declare that with all respect I am,  
Your Excellency's [humble servant],

[Fr John Bosco]

### 100. Circular to Benefactors

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 204-208.

Turin, 25 August 1876

Worthy Sir,

God who is so rich in mercy deigned to bless the idea of a mission *in the Argentine Republic* and over a few months Salesian missionaries were able to found a college in Montevideo, set up a shelter for neglected children, repair the *Mother of Mercy* Church, open schools and festive oratories in Buenos-Ayres for the many Italians living there.

<sup>15</sup> We were given a thousand lire.

We have completed and opened a college in *San Nicolás de los Arroyos*, where there are more than a hundred and twenty boys, a few of whom belong to families from native tribal areas.

Connected with the college they have also opened a public church where adults can listen to God's Word, hear Mass, approach the sacraments of confession and communion.

By opening these houses the way has been set up for making progress with the natives. The Holy Father has blessed and commended this pious undertaking. Now we are attempting to open a new institute in *Dolores*, another in *Carmen* which is the last city in the Argentine republic between the Atlantic and Patagonia.

From letters received at the moment from missionaries we have the great consolation that in three areas the natives are asking for missionaries to come amongst them and proclaim the kingdom of God. Other houses, other shelters of the same kind are planned for the Republic of *Chile*.

There we have been offered the chance to open in *Santiago*, the capital, a shelter for many neglected and abandoned children who have no education, no way of knowing about God their Creator; a college in *Valparaiso*, the second city in the Republic; a junior seminary in *Concepcion* the last diocese in the south of the republic and one in *Valdivia*, a city bordering on the native area of Patagonia.

When these houses have been opened, shelters set up, we can ensure morality and religion amongst the natives, and we can provide academic and Christian education for children of every class. Meanwhile we are looking after vocations to the Church which are fortunately manifesting themselves amongst our pupils.

This way we hope to prepare missionaries for the people in the Pampa and Patagonia, so the natives can become evangelisers amongst the natives with out the danger of new massacres as in past ages. The plan to form indigenous missionaries seems to be blessed by the Lord since there are already ten older native boys who have made the request and been admitted amongst the missionaries.

They are very keen to join the clergy and go and preach the Gospel amongst the natives.

But the Salesians who have been sent and are already working in the evangelical field assigned to them are not enough for the serious work they have in hand and the extended work still ahead of them.

So they do not succumb to the weight of their labours it is essential that they are immediately sent no fewer than *twenty new helpers* to help them. That is the number they are asking for there and that we are preparing, all content to face whatever risks so they can join their confreres and work with them to win over souls for God. But just like last year when I had to rely on the charity of the faithful for the first expedition, now I have to do the same.

We need to provide books, personal effects, sacred vessels, items for school, the house, and fares for those about to depart. We also need to provide many things those already in the missions have asked for.

In those remote places everything is lacking. The cost of a new mission is no less than *sixty six thousand francs*. I have no other way to collect this amount than to rely on the charity of good Catholics and especially your worthy self.

While the Salesians willingly offer their lives to save souls, in their mission place they are relying on Your Lordships' charity, begging you to come to their aid through your kindness.

Do what you can, and we also need you to recommend other charitable individuals we can have special contact with. Every offering no matter how small can be sent to me in whatever way is easiest for the good donor.

May our loving and divine Saviour, who died on the Cross to save us all, bless and abundantly reward all our benefactors.

Our missionaries for their part, those already in America, those preparing to leave, assure you of their daily prayers for their benefactors, and in the name of them all I express my deep gratitude. I have the distinct honour being,

Your worthy Sir's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

**101. To the Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide,  
Cardinal Alessandro Franchi**

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 533-541.

Turin, 31 December 1877

To His Eminence Cardinal Franchi Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide.

In the calamitous times in which we are living, good Catholics and especially religious congregations have to close ranks even more around the great teacher of truth, the Holy See. It is from there that we have guidance and advice to act with certain success both in civilised countries and in the foreign missions. For this purpose some years ago I had the distinct honour of explaining to Your Eminence the desire many Salesians had to dedicate their efforts to the foreign missions where we feel the lack of Gospel workers more and more every day.

With paternal and wise advice Your Eminence told me: let us prepare missionaries. Comforted by the Holy Father's blessings I set about this task and supported only by Divine Providence I opened a college and seminary in Turin for the foreign missions, almost immediately afterwards, another in Genoa and then elsewhere.

God blessed these feeble efforts and in a short time I was able to prepare a notable number of trade teachers and religious keen to dedicate themselves to the missions.

So I am presenting myself once more to Your Eminence to advise me where best to make the first attempt, that is, in the Indies or in Australia or in South America towards the Pampas and Patagonia.

The last mentioned seems the most appropriate because more proportionate to a new congregation. The successes we have obtained encourage me to ask Your Eminence to intervene with your authority to consolidate the work begun two years ago under your auspices.

I am asking you therefore to first let me explain three things: the need for this mission; its situation regarding personnel and how we have sustained them thus far; and then Your Eminence can judge what needs to be done for the greater glory of God.

*The need for this mission*

We first need to say that between the natives in the Pampas and Patagonia right down to Tierra del Fuego or Cape Horn there is an area about the size of Europe where the Gospel has not been able to penetrate until now.

Over various times some courageous clergy have penetrated into some parts of the native population but it has always cost their lives without any real success for their sacrifice.

It is true that down there near the natives [savages] there were always some missionaries, especially the French, some Vincentians, but their few numbers and the extraordinary distances along with other serious problems meant the results of their zeal were few and far between.

In this general need that we have learned from history and also from what others have said or done, and considering the present situation in those countries, we believed it was time for a new experiment. That of no longer sending missionaries amongst the savages, but going to nearby civilised areas and founding churches, schools and hospices there with two aims in mind:

1. Cooperating with and preserving the faith of those who have already received it;
2. Instructing and giving shelter to those natives for whom religion or need has moved them to seek refuge amongst Christians. The aim was to establish relationships with the parents through the children, so that the natives [savages] could be evangelised by the natives themselves.

To carry out this plan, the help of the Argentine Consul resident in Savona was very helpful. He asked the archbishop of the Argentine Republic and a missionary from Modena, Fr Ceccarelli, to make a formal request to this

humble writer to come to the religious assistance of towns that were already set up, and the natives.

As he put it these miserable people were advancing in huge numbers against regular troops but just becoming prey because they were being decimated by Government machine guns and muskets.

We completed our arrangements by November 14, 1875 and the first ten Salesians left; the second expedition, 24 in number, left the year after; we finally sent the last group of 27 just last November. A further fifteen will reach their companions next spring.

### *Results*

1. Blessed by the Vicar of Jesus Christ and therefore really blessed by God, the Salesian missionaries found an abundant harvest.

Archbishop Aneyros of Buenos Aires has a huge diocese surrounded on several sides by the natives of Patagonia and the Pampas. Many towns and cities hadn't seen a Catholic priest in years. So the archbishop accepted the newly sent missionaries with great kindness and soon gave them the administration of the Church of Our Lady or Mercy or *de los Italianos*, in the centre of the city. It had fallen into disuse.

2. They then opened festive oratories, evening classes, then a hospice for poor and abandoned children especially those coming from native families. The hospice holds eighty orphans with a public church next to it.

3. This became too small for the needs, so with government help another school for arts and trades was opened in the city, where there are three hundred orphans with a public church.

4. Next to the orphanage in Buenos Ayres there is a suburb called La Bocca with 25 thousand inhabitants of various languages and nationality. There was no church, school or priest there. So in agreement with the archbishop they established a parish, opened day and evening classes and festive oratories. Now they are already building (and have almost finished) a wooden church with a residence for the parish priest and his helpers.

5. A college boarding house and day school at San Nicolás de los Arroyos, the last city in the Argentine Republic towards the natives in the Pampas. They have around 200 pupils.

6. They have opened a publicly functioning church in the city.

7. Pio College in Villa Colón not far from Montevideo the capital of Uruguay.

8. There is no bishop in this large Republic, just a Vicar Apostolic, Monsignor Vera, who had no seminary or Catholic college. Now in Pio college they have about 150 pupils, the only 'nursery' from which we can hope to have vocations for the Church for this Republic and for the missions.

9. Next to the college they have opened the public church of Saint Rose frequented by people living in the district and nearby towns.

10. Not far from Villa Colón a girls' boarding and day school has been opened for poor and abandoned girls, run by the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians who also belong to the Salesian Congregation.

11. At the end of November last, Monsignor Vera<sup>16</sup> offered a parish to the Salesians - and it was accepted - in Las Piedras, a city of around 6,000 without priests and without school teachers. It is 20 kilometres from Villa Colón and puts us in contact with the western side of the Republic which is still inhabited by natives [savages].

These are the houses and churches already opened in the Argentine Republic and Uruguay on behalf of youth and adults.

However while the Salesians were working to promote and preserve the spirit of faith in them, they never lost sight of studying what could ease the way to working amongst the natives, which is the constant goal they have dreamed of.

<sup>16</sup> Giacinto Vera, the Vicar Apostolic in Montevideo and first bishop of the new diocese from 1878 until his death (1881).

*Personnel*

Many people have been needed to sustain festive oratories, day and evening schools, hostels for working boys, colleges and churches. 60 Salesians have already left from Europe for this purpose, and are now busy running the above-mentioned works.

It is true that this year one of our most zealous missionaries died, a victim, they wrote, of his tireless work<sup>17</sup>. But far from discouraging them it encouraged real enthusiasm in every Salesian to leave for the foreign missions.

Already thirty young men have come from the colleges and schools we have opened who wanted to join the clergy and become missionaries. They want to live amongst and bring the Gospel to their parents and friends still all immersed in idolatry. More than a hundred pupils have already shown a clear desire to embrace the ecclesiastical state and are giving clear signs of a vocation.

A regular Novitiate and Studentate were also opened in the Argentine capital having obtained authorisation from Your Eminence.

In Europe then we have many houses where we take in young men in all kinds of situations, educate them in learning and piety, and most of them want to be missionaries. More than two hundred of these alone are in our house in Sampierdarena and it is known as the *Work of Mary Help of Christians*.

All these things lead us to the well-founded hope that with God's help we can send fifty missionaries abroad each year, including trade teachers, catechists and priests.

*Material means*

If we want to draw up a budget then we have no secure income—not a penny, but always and very especially supported by Divine Providence we have been able to found, set up, provide materials for so many houses and

<sup>17</sup> Fr John Baccino (1843-1877), member of the first missionary expedition (1875); the first Salesian to die in America.



churches, prepare hundreds of trade teachers and priests and send them off with everything they need. All this has been done while giving bread and Christian education to twenty thousand children.

For the glory of God and the American peoples we can state that the Salesians who came to these foreign lands were welcomed with unheard of charity to the point where they lacked nothing they needed to exercise their sacred ministry, set up hospices, churches and schools.

Strictly speaking the Salesians owned nothing in Europe or in America, but they have never lacked anything for the works they have undertaken.

The only steady and stable benefactor is the Holy Father, who has so often come to our aid so generously with inexhaustible charity. Now we can add the hopeful response of Your Eminence and the Pious Work of Propagation of the Faith, which from letters written by its president indicates that they will help us with these missions once Your Eminence makes the recommendation<sup>18</sup>.

### *Projected events*

While the Salesians have been at work running the Institutes entrusted to them by Divine Providence, other people have often gone to set up missions in the countryside amongst the more advanced colonies of natives.

While they were catechising, people of every nation rushed there but for material interests. However for many years now there has been no priest there and a priest's voice has not been heard.

Thanks to these excursions on behalf of the Gospel, writes Father Cagliero, the head of the Salesian missionaries, we have been able to learn much about the character, nature, languages and customs of the natives and at least commence some contacts which are very useful for getting to know the best places for the missions and which are less dangerous for the missionaries.

Amongst the many places where it seems they can set up a stable mission are Carruhué and Santa Cruz.

<sup>18</sup> See no. 102.

Carruhué is a place with a garrison of soldiers and a fort built in 1875 on the newly erected frontier with the Republic of Buenos Aires. The government had extended its frontier more than eight thousand kilometres towards the Pampas where they keep the natives [savages] at bay at gunpoint. Under the pretence of trade the natives have often raided and killed the Argentinians.

On the western side of the Argentine Republic, Carruhué is the most advanced location amongst the natives, located as it is at the 37th parallel of latitude, and 5th of longitude west of the meridian of Buenos Aires.

It is true, as the newspapers indicate, that this year (1877) there were serious hostilities and massacres amongst the Pampas and the Argentinians but the missionaries were not part of those events and they were kindly welcomed, indeed both sides were happy to have them there: meaning the natives and the Argentinians. At Carruhué they built or better improvised a large square and market where savages and civilised could meet.

The Salesians are being awaited there, and the archbishop of Buenos Aires can't wait for them to come and look after the native adults and children. The adults have a barbarous custom of often abandoning their children in the fields when they have too many of them or they cause some problem. Here they are building a church and next to it a hospice to entrust to the Salesians.

Santa Cruz is a small colony in the extreme east of Patagonia near the Magellan Straits on the 50th parallel (latitude). It is a trade site for Patagonians that usually came there to exchange products with the foreigners, who brought them the food and drink the natives preferred. This colony has now become one of major importance because as the Argentine newspapers have announced, two hundred Russian families are settling there for trade and agriculture. And at the moment there is no provision for religious worship.

If the Catholics go there they are going to find the others already well-established and in a certain way their superiors. But if the Russians become dominant, it will be very difficult for Catholic missionaries to organise themselves and establish themselves.

A hospice, a mission house at Santa Cruz and Carruhué seem appropriate both to preserve the faith amongst those who have already received it, and to

begin contact with the natives, give shelter and education to their children always with the religious purpose of making further advances into the lands they inhabit.

*Petition*

So having given you some pointers on the Salesian missions I now feel bold enough to ask Your Eminence to help with your authority and wise advice.

It seems to me that it would be timely and effective to consolidate and stabilise things there for bringing and spreading the Gospel:

1. By erecting the mission at Carruhué as an Apostolic Prefecture;
2. By erecting Santa Cruz as an Apostolic Vicariate as it is so far away and one could say almost impossible to have a bishop for the sacraments they are asking for.

Now it only remains for me to fulfil my duty on behalf of the Salesian Congregation, thanking Your Eminence for all the charity you have shown to the Salesians and asking you to continue with this precious kindness and advice. Meanwhile, I have the distinct honour of being,

Your Eminence's most indebted son of the Holy See,

Fr John Bosco

**102. To the new Prefect of the Sacred Congregation  
of Propaganda Fide, Cardinal Giovanni Simeoni**

ASC A1740613; ed. in E III, pp. 320-321.

[Rome, after 15 March 1878]

Your Eminence<sup>19</sup>,

After the discussions that I had the distinct honour of having with Your Eminence concerning the missions in South America and amongst the

<sup>19</sup> Giovanni Simeoni (1816-1892), former auditor at the Nunciature in Spain then secretary of the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*; in 1875 he was sent as Nuncio to Spain and made a cardinal. Secretary of State from 1876 until March 5, 1878, he was then Prefect of the Apostolic Palace and the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*.

natives, I immediately went to the Holy Father to explain what it seems to me we could undertake for the smooth running of the missions we have begun<sup>20</sup>.

*I noted in brief:*

1. The success we have had in the houses, or better at the seminary in San Nicolás de Los Arroyos, the last city in the Argentine Republic bordering on the natives [savages]. It seems that the time of mercy has arrived for those people and therefore it could be fruitful to try an experiment in Patagonia itself where the missionaries would be invited by two well-known chiefs to stay in their locality where they would assist and protect them.

2. So it seems timely to set up a Vicariate or Apostolic Prefecture in Carmen, also called Concepcion or Patagónes, a small colony on the north banks of the Rio Negro where the natives [savages] are trading with the foreigners. Once we have a college for students and a hospice for working boys it will be easy to establish contact with the natives and through their children begin to talk religion with their parents. The college at San Nicolás offers us an example supporting this argument.

3. I also explained in a few words how within a year I could prepare ten priests for the Apostolic Vicariate of Mangalor in India, or for some other mission that His Holiness judges to be preferable.

His Holiness, with his usual kindness, listened to this brief explanation, praised and blessed both projects then directed me to Your Eminence so that in your enlightened wisdom you could inform His Holiness concerning the convenience, the material and moral means that can be depended on in this eventuality. The same request was put some months ago to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and now I humbly renew this request for this grace without which we cannot provide for the urgent needs of the

<sup>20</sup> Don Bosco stayed in Rome from 23 December 1877 until March 26, 1878. He was received in audience by the new Pope Leo XIII on March 16.

foreign missions and the Salesian houses in Europe which are collecting essential provisions for the greater glory of God and the good of souls.

Fr John Bosco

### 103. To Pope Leo XIII

Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Segreteria di Stato a. 1879 r. 248, ms aut. by Gioachino Berto with authentic signature of Don Bosco; ed. in E III, pp. 468-470.

Turin, 20 April 1879

#### *Memo*

#### *Approval of Salesian missions by the Holy See*

[Most Holy Father,]

The first negotiations for the Salesian missions abroad took place with His Eminence Card. Barnabò in 1872, who gave us encouragement.

Then His Holiness Pius IX gave us the location for the missions in 1874, and encouraged us to go to the Argentine Republic to take care of the Italians there and to try out some new forays amongst the Pampas and Patagonian natives. The same charitable Pius IX provided material means for the first expedition which took place on November 14, 1875.

The first 10 Salesian missionaries presented themselves to the Holy Father on November 1 that year to receive his blessing and their apostolic mission.

The Holy Father encouraged them with warm words, provided them with a letter from the Cardinal Secretary of State to the Archbishop of Buenos Ayres dated the same day (see attachment A<sup>21</sup>).

They were also granted the necessary faculties by the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide with a decree on November 14, 1875 (see attachment B).

<sup>21</sup> The attachments are not published here.

The supreme pontiff expressed his consolation, praising and approving the new mission in a *Brief* dated the 17th of the same month and year (see attachment C).

There were four Salesian missionary departures in the years that followed. Now there are more than 100 of them in South America, that is, in Uruguay, the Argentine Republic and in Paraguay, where they are preparing to accommodate the pious desires of Your Holiness Leo XIII.

To give still greater stability to the Salesian missions the Congregation of Propaganda, informed of the increase in the evangelical harvest and the vocations God has raised up in those countries, authorised the opening of a novitiate by decree on July 6, 1876 (see attachment D).

The reigning supreme pontiff Leo XIII, may God keep him healthy and whole for many years, on September 18, 1878 deigned to address another *Brief* full of fatherly affection, with which he approved and encouraged the Salesian missions in America (see attachment E).

The same charitable supreme pontiff Leo XIII although in serious financial straits, nevertheless, informed of the difficulties we were meeting with the fourth expedition, for lack of finance, helped us with a generous offering<sup>22</sup> and encouraged us to continue the work begun with a letter dated November 23, 1878.

One of the great difficulties was uncertainty as to whether the missions in South America belonged to the Congregation of Propaganda Fide or the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs.

Everything therefore was recommended to the charity and zeal of His Eminence Cardinal Nina, Secretary of State, that as Protector of the Salesian Congregation he would:

1. Establish which of the two Sacred Congregations mentioned we should turn to when Salesian missionaries have recourse to the authority of the Holy See. These missionaries are now in Uruguay and the Argentine Republic.

<sup>22</sup> The sum of 2,000 lire.

2. Approve these missions in accordance with the request made by the General Council of the Pious Work the Propagation of the Faith, resident in Lyon<sup>23</sup>, so we can obtain the promised subsidies which are essential in our current situation (see attachment F).

3. In reply to the letter of the General Council of the Propagation of the Faith we note that for each matter of a subsidy or matters to do with it reference be made to Fr John Bosco, Rector Major of the Congregation in Turin. Here he has set up the main seminary from which the missionaries leave, and where the countries entrusted to them for exercising the sacred ministry also maintain correspondence and are dependent on.

4. It would be of great advantage also to have a recommendation for the Work of the Holy Childhood.

We could also note how many young people saved from certain death were brought from Arabia (Cabil) to our house in Turin. Here they were instructed in the Faith, baptised, educated, given a trade and others were prepared for an ecclesiastical career and are now missionaries in their own country. Another 10 coming from Damascus are now doing their studies before being sent back to their country. And once again there is a considerable number of native boys who have been baptised by the Salesians amongst the natives; others have been taken into hospices in Buenos Aires.

On this same day, April 20, 1879 three Salesian missionaries have departed with the Minister for War in Buenos Aires, to go down to the natives in the Pampas and save the huge number of children from the extermination they appear to have been condemned to by the Argentine Government. Unfortunately these boys wander in their thousands looking for someone to save them in body and soul, but we don't have the material or moral means to save them all. Nevertheless the number of native [savage] children given to the Gospel and civil society will be great.

Fr John Bosco

<sup>23</sup> See no. 105.

#### 104. To Pope Leo XIII

ASC A1720724 Orig letter., Leone XIII; ed. in E III, pp. 568-575.

Rome, 13 April 1880

##### *Salesian missions and relationships with the Holy See*

The foreign missions have always been the Salesian Congregation's dream.

The need to sustain the faith for those who have been baptised, to propagate it in native lands and thus help and free those still living in the darkness of error has always been a topic of study, reading and admiration amongst us.

For a long time our pupils used to go to the missions by associating themselves with other Institutes or requests from bishops, in America, Australia, India, China and Japan.

The first negotiations for an expedition of missionaries were carried out in 1872 with His Eminence Cardinal Barnabò Prefect of Propaganda Fide; then the Supreme Pontiff Pius IX advised us to bring together the Salesian religious aspiring to go to the missions and send them to found houses and hospices in places of greatest need.

Amongst other regions the supreme pontiff was pleased to indicate South America and nominated the Argentine Republic. Since he had been in those parts he knew the great need for missionaries to go and look after Italians who had gone there and also to make some efforts amongst the natives in the Pampa and Patagonia.

The charitable Pius IX effectively helped us with material means to complete the first expedition, and on November 1, 1875 ten Salesians went to present themselves to the supreme head of the Church, the Holy Father, to ask for his holy blessing and thus receive their apostolic mission from the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Father welcomed them with great kindness, encouraged them with warm words, and provided them with a letter from the Cardinal Secretary of State to the Archbishop of Buenos Aires dated the same day. See *Attachment A*<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> The attachments are not published here.



They were also granted the necessary faculties by the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide with a decree on November 14, 1875. See *Attachment B*.

A little after the Supreme Pontiff expressed his consolation, praising and approving the new expedition with a Brief dated the 17th of the same month and year. See *Attachment C*.

To give still greater stability to the Salesian missions the Congregation of Propaganda, informed of the increase in the evangelical harvest and the vocations God has raised up in those countries, authorised the foundation of a novitiate by decree on July 6, 1876. See *Attachment D*.

The reigning Supreme Pontiff Leo XIII, may God keep him healthy and whole for many years, on September 18, 1878 deigned to address another Brief full of fatherly affection, with which he approved and encouraged the Salesian missions in America. See *Attachment E*.

The same reigning Leo XIII although in serious financial straits, nevertheless, informed of the difficulties we were meeting with the fourth expedition, for lack of finance, helped us with a generous offering and encouraged us to continue the work begun with a letter dated November 23, 1878.

#### *Purpose of the Salesian missions in America*

The Supreme Pontiff Pius IX proposed three aims to the Salesian missionaries:

1. To go and look after Italian adults and especially the young who had gone in great numbers to South America.
2. Open houses near the natives [savages] to serve as a junior seminary and provide shelter for the poorest and most abandoned.
3. This way make progress in propagating the Gospel amongst the natives in the Pampas and Patagonia. The first departure of Salesians, as we said, was on November 14, 1875, and they arrived on the 14th of the following month in Buenos Aires, capital of the Argentine Republic.

*Present situation of the Salesian missions in America*

Currently there are around 120 Salesian in America working as follows:

In the diocese and city of Buenos Aires, the provincial house, the administration centre. The provincial lives in the parish soon erected, and known as San Carlos in Almagro, with around six thousand souls.

The Pius IX hospice where some 150 boys are learning arts and trades.

Public schools, oratory and a recreation centre with amusements for day students on weekends.

Novitiate and studentate for members of the Congregation.

The parish at La Boca dedicated to St John the Evangelist with around 27 thousand inhabitants almost all of whom, are Italian.

Public schools for poor children.

The *Mater Misericordiae* church, or *de los Italianos*, whose main purpose is to help Italian adults and children in religion. They come from all over the city and nearby countryside.

In the city of San Nicolás de los Arroyos not far from the natives [savages] there is a college or junior seminary for the missions where a number of vocations are coming from.

Here too there is a public church for the benefit of the adults.

We also run the Ramallo parish which is a village of some 4000 souls. This parish is made up of various homesteads that are some distance from one another, but the inhabitants come together on Sundays to take part in religious practices, approach the sacraments and have their children baptised.

In the Republic of Uruguay with the Lord's help we have also been able to found other houses.

The Pio College at Villa Colón is considered to be a diocesan seminary for the missions, and it is also linked to the State university.

A public church has been opened for the people around Villa Colón.

In Montevideo, the capital of the Republic, an oratory has been founded and schools for poor and at risk children.

In Las Piedras we have a parish of six thousand souls with public schools and a festive oratory.

### *Sisters of Mary Help of Christians*

Three years ago the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians have come to the aid of Salesian religious in America, looking after the very many poor girls who are in serious danger regarding morality and religion.

In the diocese of Montevideo in the earlier mentioned parish at Las Piedras the Sisters help the missionaries with school, catechism, assisting and instructing the native girls, preparing them for confession, communion, and the sacrament of confirmation.

At Villa Colón they have a school, workshops on weekdays, and they bring the older girls together at weekends.

In Montevideo they have founded schools and a hospice for girls at risk of falling into the hands of the Protestants.

In Buenos Aires they founded many schools, workshops and weekend congregations of abandoned girls.

### *The colonies on the Rio Negro*

Having given a rapid explanation of the Salesian missions in America, it would be good now to explain what we think needs to be done to improve the lot of the natives from the Pampa and Patagonia along the Rio Negro.

The Rio Negro is a river that arises in the heights of the Cordilleras de Los Andes and after a long and torturous journey of 1000 km it empties into the Atlantic at the 40th latitude South. The north bank of this river marks the boundary with the vast Pampas deserts. The vast regions of eastern Patagonia begin with the south bank.

For four centuries Catholic missionaries have found it very difficult to penetrate these native lands; they made unheard of sacrifices, but without results as far as we know since none of those who got as far as inner Patagonia ever returned.

In 1878 [the Salesians] also sought to try out something there and left on a Government boat for the Rio Negro, but a terrible storm put their lives in danger, pushed them back several times and finally they were forced to take refuge in Buenos Aires.

In 1879 they were more successful going another way. They crossed the Pampas, spoke with some chiefs or native heads and found good acceptance. They were able to baptise more than 400 native children. Arriving at the Rio Negro they saw the colonies which the archbishop of Buenos Aires in a letter of August 15, 1879, offered to the Salesian missionaries, with the description as follows: See Attachment I.

The moment has finally come where we can offer the mission of Patagonia that has been so much at heart, as also the parish of Patagones that can serve as a centre for the mission. As you will have already seen from the letters of Fr Costamagna, the parish of Patagones consists of:

1. Carmen de Patagones with around 3,500 souls, and the parish priest looking after them lives here;
2. La Guardia-Mitre around 17 leagues from Patagones with a population of around 1000;
3. The Conesa Colony 34 leagues from Patagones, where there are around 800 natives from the Catriel tribe;
4. A new settlement at Choele-Choel 70 leagues from Patagones with around 2000 souls between Christians and natives. All these villages are situated on the north bank of the Rio Negro, which is easily navigable; at its widest it is no wider than two 'quadras' (270 metres). Opposite Carmen de Patagones, on the south bank of the Rio Negro, and already in Patagonia, is Mercedes de la Patagonia, where the governor of the territories lives. Here there is now a church for a population of some 1,500 souls.

Around eight leagues from Mercedes is the colony of St Francis Xavier, also on the south bank of the Rio Negro, therefore part of Patagonia. This colony is made up of around 400 Linares natives.

For all these natives there is but one priest. On Sundays he celebrates Mass at his residence, then crosses the river and celebrates a second one at Mercedes de la Patagonia. As you can see it is almost impossible for one priest alone to provide a regular service for all these parishes, even if he had a helper. I regret very much that up until now I have not been able to remedy this need for an absolute lack of priests.

Some years ago the Vincentian Fathers took over this mission, but it all came down to preparations for a house for the missionaries and after that for want of men, they had to abandon it.

To all these problems we can add the sad effects of Protestant propaganda at work in these areas. To help put a stop to these growing evils and give some stability to the Patagonian missions, and to stop the people from falling victim to the insidious activities of enemies of the Faith, we accepted the proposal of the zealous Archbishop Aneyros, who also made some good offers in the name of the Argentine Government to send the Salesians to Patagonia. So an expedition was formed of twelve Salesians, and on 15 December last, with a much more peaceful voyage this time, they arrived in Carmen on January 2 this year. Others then left to help their confreres and if Divine Providence continues its support, we hope to send another expedition soon.

To help set up the civil and religious arrangements in the colonies in this area, the Argentine Government is helping the missions and is currently offering to help the Salesians in evangelising both banks of the Rio Negro, meaning promoting the Gospel amongst the Pampas and Patagonian natives.

They have promised material and moral support to this end. Recently the President of the Republic formally asked us to present a document explaining what would be the appropriate conditions for relationships between the missionaries, the government and the natives.

The Salesians who went to Patagonia, in accordance with the view of the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, chose Carmen as their centre for correspondence

and administration. Their first concerns were to build a church, a place to live in, schools for the boys and the girls. Some then set about teaching arts, trades and agriculture to the colonies, others continued to make progress amongst the natives to catechise them and if possible found colonies in areas further into the desert.

The Sisters of Mary Help of Christians have already begun to work on behalf of these colonies, organising schools and hospices for the most neglected of the girls.

*Things that need to be done*

So that religion can be stabilised in Patagonia and cooperate effectively in the development and growth of the missions, it seems that three things are most important:

1. An Apostolic Prefecture or Vicariate as a centre for the already established colonies and those which, with the Lord's help, we still hope to set up.
2. Founding a seminary for pupils to study the nature, language, customs and history and geography of the area.
3. Formulating a proposal which, if the Argentine Government is well-disposed enough to accept, would ensure the religious and civil status of natives who come to the Faith.

Since negotiations with the Argentine Government take time and need clarification, this can be put off till later.

However we can take up the other two points, that is to found an Apostolic Vicariate and a seminary for the missions in Patagonia.

*Apostolic Vicariate in Patagonia*

Given that the Argentine has recently set up the above-described colonies as the Province of Patagonia, the Apostolic Vicariate or Prefecture could carry the same title. It would embrace the colonies on both the north and south banks of the Rio Negro, including all territories to the eastern side of Patagonia until a new Vicariate is set up in Santa Cruz, a small colony already

founded towards the Magellan Straits, where the River by that name empties into the Atlantic. The new Vicariate then would extend from the 36th until the 50th parallel of latitude South.

It would be good to note that the Cordillera de los Andes divide Patagonia from the 40th to the 50th parallel of latitude South as far as the Magellan Straits, thus forming the eastern side towards the Atlantic and the western side towards the Pacific.

Since this latter aside belongs to Chile it would have to be excluded from the proposed Vicariate.

After the Magellan Straits, the Tierra del Fuego area begins and adjacent islands as far as Cape Horn, that is, from the 50th to 63rd parallel. These areas are the subject of dispute between the Argentine and Chilean Governments, so it would also be good not to involve them in our plan.

Once the Holy See has set up an Apostolic Vicariate at Carmen, as well as having a stable centre for the missions, we will also have the necessary titles for obtaining aid from the Work of Propagation of the Faith and the Holy Childhood.

We could likewise have help from some charitable organisation in Buenos Aires, which could help in spreading the Gospel in the Pampas and Patagonia.

We also have a well-founded hope that the Argentine Government will agree to an annual donation for a Vicariate which we would say is essential for the political and religious situation in the two territories.

### *Seminary for the missions in Patagonia*

Three colleges or junior seminaries, as we can say, were founded in South America in order to cultivate vocations to the ecclesiastical state. One in Villa Colón, another in Buenos Aires, the third in San Nicolás de los Arroyos the last city in the Argentine Republic bordering on the Pampas.

We already have some vocations, but these vocations for now are somewhat rare and are not enough for the serious needs of the dioceses which have a great lack of clergy. So it is essential to have a seminary in Europe with a view to preparing Gospel workers for Patagonia.

As reflection has matured on the convenience of opening this seminary in Italy, or France or Spain, it seems that for the hope of the best material and moral support Marseilles is the best city for this seminary, and in time open a studentate in Spain to facilitate study and practice in Spanish, which is the language of Government and popular schools, and the first one to be learned by the natives.

Once we have an Apostolic Vicariate, this seminary and studentate once founded can also hope for some help from the Propagation of the Faith and the Holy Childhood and we would also have an easy way to organise fundraising for this purpose, if that would please the Holy Father.

We note that in order not to touch on the sensitivities of dioceses which in general are all lacking vocations, it seems better that our students should all be taught as far as philosophy and then be free to return to their dioceses, or enter a religious order, or dedicate themselves to the missions in Patagonia. Only this latter group should be accepted and prepared for studies proper to those who wish to dedicate themselves to the missions amongst the natives of the Pampas, Patagonia, and God willing also in the lands of Tierra del Fuego.

All the matters above were dealt with and discussed with the Very Reverend Monsignor Domenico Jacobini, secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs<sup>25</sup>, and with His Eminence Cardinal Gaetano Alimonda<sup>26</sup>, member of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, both given this role by His Holiness the Supreme Pontiff Leo XIII, to whom everything has been communicated, and that he may bless and approve whatever he judges to be for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Fr John Bosco

<sup>25</sup> Domenico Jacobini (1837-1900), was secretary of the Congregation of *Briefs*, and from 1879 to 1880 was secretary of Extraordinary Affairs. Nuncio in Lisbon from 1891 to 1896, he was made cardinal in 1896.

<sup>26</sup> Gaetano Alimonda (1818-1891), bishop of Albenga in 1877, cardinal from 1879, in 1883 became archbishop of Turin; he was friendly with and admired Don Bosco.



### 105. To the Work of the Propagation of the Faith in Lyon

ASC A2210117 Originals (not letters), written by Gioachino Berto with corrections by the author. di don Bosco; ed. in E IV, pp. 123-127<sup>27</sup>.

[Turin, March 1882]

#### *The evangelisation of Patagonia*

The vast extent of the Pampas deserts and Patagonia, of Tierra del Fuego and the Malvinas Islands are regions that up until now have obstinately resisted civilisation and the voice of Catholic missionaries. These lands cover a surface area more or less the size of Europe. Since Columbus discovered America courageous Gospel workers have tried to penetrate them many times, but with little result and indeed one could say they were all massacred without anyone bringing back positive news of the territories and their inhabitants.

Father John Bosco, meditating on the unhappy state of the multitude of savages still buried in the shadows of death, felt bitter disappointment.

Moved by the desire to try again, he went to Rome and spoke with the Prefect of *Propaganda Fide*, and then with the Supreme Pontiff, Pius IX. This wonderful pontiff, while knowing the difficulty of the task, nevertheless encouraged it, blessed it and effectively cooperated in preparing the first efforts.

Once the first dealings with civil and ecclesiastical authorities were complete, a chosen group of Salesians went to Rome and presented themselves to the Vicar of Jesus Christ on November 1, 1875.

The loving pontiff welcomed them with fatherly kindness, spoke with them in public and private and then told them: Go now to South America. Earlier efforts convinced them not to go immediately amongst the natives, but to set themselves up near them in order to preserve in faith those who had already received it, and meanwhile through the children of the natives find a way to approach their parents.

<sup>27</sup> The text was translated and published in France (*Les Missions catholiques*, 24 July) then re-translated in Italy (*Bollettino delle Missioni Cattoliche*, Milano, 3 novembre 1882).

Having received their mission from the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the 10 sons of St Francis de Sales, led by Fr John Cagliero, left on the 14th of the same month for the Argentine Republic and on the 14th of the following December, landed in Buenos Aires, the capital of that Republic.

The first efforts of the new missionaries were directed to founding institutes in Uruguay and the Argentine Republic bordering on and on behalf of the natives. They founded hospices to take in poor and abandoned children; some seminaries were set up to take in young men and educate them, possibly preparing them for an ecclesiastical vocation.

The number of houses increased and they needed other and many more personnel. There was one and sometimes more expeditions to South America each year. They began with various places for the missions not far from the natives, and these missions were of advantage. Hundreds of children were instructed and received into the Faith.

#### *First attempts to enter Patagonia*

With a view to finally entering Patagonia it was decided to take advantage of a Government ship that was supposed to go to the Rio Negro in the northern part of Patagonia. The boat departed in May 1879. The journey seemed as it would go well but it was not to be.

On the high seas a terrible storm swept the Atlantic and after 13 days of useless and very dangerous navigation they had to abandon themselves to the winds which pushed the boat and its crew back to where they had departed from. That the missionaries and others were saved is attributed to special protection from Heaven.

But far from losing courage the missionaries decided to enter by land. Therefore the following year Fr James Costamagna with Dr Anthony Espinosa and a catechist set out through the Pampas where many consolations awaited them. They were able to speak with a number of tribal chiefs, make known the name of Jesus to the inhabitants of those immense deserts, who up till then had never heard of him, and baptise around 500 of the natives [savages] including adults and children.

Finally after 45 days of journeying through this land without name, no roads and no habitation, not without difficulty they crossed the Rio Colorado, the Rio Negro and arrived in Patagonia properly so called and which had always been the missionaries' dream.

The Argentine Government protected this perilous expedition, a journey of more than two thousand kilometres.

*The borders of Patagonia and the situation of the Salesian missions there*

The name Patagonia is given to that part of South America beginning at the 37th parallel South and extending to the Magellan Straits. A high chain of mountains called the Cordilleras divides Patagonia into two. The western side runs out to the Pacific and belongs to the Republic of Chile; the other is the great eastern slopes that belong to the Argentine Government when they are able to civilise them.

The eastern side has the following borders: to the north the Rio Colorado which rises in the Cordilleras and empties its waters into the Atlantic. To the east it borders on the Atlantic; to the south with the Magellan Straits, to the west with the Cordilleras separating it from the western side.

The new missionaries stopped on the banks of the Rio Negro on the 40th parallel south. Here they came across various venues where foreigners usually go to sell or better exchange wines, liquor, bread or some *objets d'art* with products from those territories, work done by the natives and which because of their novelty are then brought to other parts of America and even to Europe.

The missionaries therefore stayed in Carmen which is a large square where the natives and other foreigners usually gather.

The Patagonians and also the Europeans living there welcomed the missionaries with inexpressible joy. So they were able to deal with their chiefs, examine the condition of the inhabitants and find out the possibilities for setting up colonies there.

They took the necessary precautions, found good understanding with the natives, and promising to return as soon as possible they boarded a waiting

ship on the Rio Negro and returned to Buenos Ayres to prepare essential items for life, especially the victuals they would need for eating.

When they got to Buenos Ayres they explained the results of their journey to the Government and their Salesian confreres who all thanked the good Lord who had finally opened the treasures of his graces for people who up until then had lain amidst the shadows of death.

They then prepared the most necessary items, and with the help of other missionaries and the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians who had arrived from Europe, Father Joseph Fagnano, at the end of December 1879 went directly to Patagonia to give the mission a regular form.

They founded houses, churches, hospices and established schools for the boys and girls. At the moment the regularly established colonies in Patagonia along the northern bank of the Rio Negro towards the Rio Colorado are:

1. *Carmen de Patagones* with around 1,500 souls between Europeans and natives who have come to the Faith;
2. *La Guardia Mitre* 85 km from Patagones, and with 1,500 souls;
3. The *Conesa Colony* 155 km from Patagones, where there are more than a thousand natives belonging to the Catriel tribe;
4. A new settlement called *Choele-Choel* 350 kilometres from Patagones. Between baptised Christians and natives preparing for the Faith there are 2,500 souls.

Opposite Carmen on the southern banks of the Rio Negro and in Patagonia proper is Mercedes which is currently the residence for the governor sent by the Argentine Government. The population is around 2,000 souls.

50 kilometres from Mercedes is the *San Xavier* colony also on the southern banks of the Rio Negro, but further into Patagonia. There are 600 Linares natives there some of whom are baptised and some being instructed in the Faith. At the moment new settlements are being founded inside Patagonia and they are already preparing what is needed for a regular settlement on the banks of Lake Nahuel-Huapi, where there are many natives living around.

Fr Joseph Fagnano<sup>28</sup> with a catechist made an excursion down to this place which is about a thousand kilometres from Carmen and is not far from the Cordilleras of America. Details of this and other excursions are described separately.

Near this lake we have already been able to receive hundreds of natives into the Faith and thus has begun a Christianity which is the first fruits of central Patagonia offered by the garden of the Catholic Church.

### *Difficulties to be overcome*

The first difficulty is the scarce number of missionaries in those endless regions. In agreement with the Holy father in Europe colleges and seminaries were founded with the purpose of preparing workers for the Gospel.

In Uruguay and the Argentine Republic there are two colleges or seminaries with the same purpose of preparing missionaries for the Evangelisation of the Pampas and Patagonia.

This way we hope to surmount this first problem.

The second difficulty is the scarcity of funds. We have to build houses, churches, schools, a building for the Sisters and classrooms for girls and boys.

We have also built shelters for the native boys and girls, but needs demands that we build many more. We need sacred vessels, supplies for classrooms, our houses and also clothing for the poorest amongst the natives.

Another serious obstacle is presented by the Protestants. As soon as they saw that the danger of being massacred had gone, and encouraged by huge salaries, they went to set up their tents in the settlements. Here they became teachers and under the appearance of practising medicine, surgery, or setting up pharmacies, they lavished much money, risking serious embarrassment for the Catholic missionaries.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Fagnano (1844-1916), left with the first missionary expedition (1875), and in 1883 was appointed Prefect Apostolic of southern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego (no. 106).

But all these and other difficulties the missionaries themselves hope to overcome little by little as they advance into the lands still to be evangelised.

Heaven's protection of the Christians is obvious. There was one settlement where there was so much need and because of their promises the Protestants were blindly given all the power, but as soon as the missionaries came there and were able to found Catholic schools the so-called evangelical schools were left empty and without students. What is absolutely essential at the moment is the support of the worthy and pious Work of the Propagation of the Faith.

Fr John Bosco

### **106. Decree erecting the Apostolic Vicariate and Prefecture in South America (16 November 1883)**

ASC A8430106 *Patagonia Nord: aperturalerezione canonica*, copia ms; ed. in MB XVI, 582.

#### **Vicariate Apostolic**

*LEO XIII*

*Ad futuram rei memoriam. Ad fovendam vel magis et provehendam sacram missionem Patagoniae, cuius curam laboresque iam pridem Sodales Congregationis Salesianae susceperunt, postulatum est a dilecto filio Joanne Bosco memoratae Congregationis Auctore et Antistite Summo, ut in Septentrionali Patagoniae regione Vicariatus Apostolicus erigatur. De sacrarum missionum bono et incremento ex officio Supremi Apostolatus, quo in Ecclesia Dei fungimur, Nos vehementer solliciti Venerabilibus Fratribus Nostris S. R. E. Cardinalibus Catholicae propagandae Fidei praepositis huiusce rei examen commisimus. Itaque pensatis hac de re omnibus accurateque consi-deratis de eorundem Venerabilium Fratrum Nostrorum consilio huiusmodi postulato annuendum existimavimus.*

*Nos igitur Apostolica auctoritate Nostra harum litterarum vi in Septentrionali supradictae regionis parte Vicariatium Apostolicum erigimus atque erectum declaramus, ea lege ut in ipso comprehendatur etiam pars centralis Patagoniae, quae nondum explorata est. Huiusce autem Vicariatus Apostolici Patagoniae Septentrionalis limites esse volumus ad Orientem mare Atlanticum, ad Occidentem Montes, qui vulgari nomine "Les Cordiglieres" appellantur, ad Austrum [?] populos,*

*qui dicuntur Pampas, ad meridiem Patagoniam centralem. Haec volumus atque decernimus in contrarium facientibus quamvis speciali atque individua mentione ac derogatione dignis non obstantibus quibuscumque.*

*Datum Romae apud S. Petrum suo Annulo Piscatoris die XVI Novembris MDCCCLXXXIII. Pontificatus Nostri Anno sexto<sup>29</sup>.*

Pro D.mo Card. Mertel  
A. Trinchieri Subst.

*(Translation)*

For perpetual remembrance. To better foster and promote the sacred mission in Patagonia, already for some time entrusted to the care and activities of the members of the Salesian Congregation, our beloved son John Bosco, founder and supreme moderator of the aforesaid Congregation, has requested that an apostolic vicariate be erected in the northern region of Patagonia. Greatly encouraged by the good done and the growth of the sacred missions, by virtue of the role of supreme apostolate entrusted to us in the Church of God, we have passed the examination of this request on to our venerable brothers the cardinals of the holy Roman Church responsible for the activities of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. Therefore, having carefully pondered everything regarding this matter, and as it is the opinion of our venerable brothers, we have judged it appropriate to accept the request.

We then, by virtue of our apostolic authority and by means of this document, create and declare erected the apostolic vicariate in the northern part of the aforesaid region, adding that also the central and as yet unexplored part of Patagonia be included in it. The borders of this apostolic vicariate of northern Patagonia will be: to the east the Atlantic ocean, to the west the mountains known in the vulgar tongue as “Les Cordiglieres”, in the north the Pampas peoples, to the south, central Patagonia. We wish and decree this, notwithstanding anything to the contrary... (the rest as is standard for such decrees!)

<sup>29</sup> The *brief* appointing Fr Cagliari as Vicar Apostolic was given on November 20 (MB XVI, 583).

From Rome, St Peter's, under the seal of the Fisherman, November 16, 1883, the sixth of our Pontificate.

For His Eminence Cardinal Mertel  
Trinchieri, *Substitute*

### **Apostolic Prefecture**

ASC A8420101 *Patagonia Merid.: aperturalerezione canonica*, copia ms, ed. in MB XVI 584.

#### *Decretum*

*Cum ad catholicae fidei propagationem in Patagoniae regionibus expedire visum fuerit Sacro Consilio Christiano nomini propagando ut Apostolica Praefectura ibidem erigeretur, E.mi ac R.mi Patres eiusdem Sacri consilii in Generali Conventu habito die 27 Augusti 1883 censuerunt statuer que, ut praedicta Praefectura in parte Meridionali Patagoniae erigeretur, quae insulas Malvinianas ac insulas circa sinus Magellanum existentes comprehendat. Huius tamen Praefecturae limites determinari in praesens non possunt cum regio illa adhuc explorata non sit in omnibus partibus.*

*Quam quidem in rem E.mi ac R.mi Patres praesens edi Decretum mandarunt.*

*Datum Romae ex Aed. S. Congregationis de Propaganda Fide die 16 Novembris 1883<sup>30</sup>.*

† Ioannes Card. Simeoni *Praefectus*  
Trinchieri, *Substitutus*

*(Translation)*

Since for the Propagation of the Catholic Faith in the regions of Patagonia, it has seemed appropriate to the sacred council responsible for the spreading of the name of Christ, that there be established there an Apostolic Prefecture, the eminent and reverend fathers of the same sacred council at their general

<sup>30</sup> Fr Fagnano was appointed Prefect Apostolic on December 2, 1883.



meeting held on August 27, 1883, considered it opportune and established that the aforesaid prefecture be erected in the southern part of Patagonia and would include the Malvinas Islands and the islands around the Magellan Straits. Nevertheless, the boundaries of this prefecture at the current moment cannot be defined since not all parts of the region have yet been explored.

For this decision, the eminent and reverend fathers have ordered publication of his decree.

Given in Rome, from the palace of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, on November 16, 1883.

† Giovanni Card. Simeoni, *prefect*  
D. Archbishop of Tiro, *secretary*

### 107. Circular to Cooperators

ASC A1770201 *Circolari, Inviti ad altri*, ms by another hand in 4 languages,  
with DB's signature.; ed. in E IV, pp. 360-363.

Turin, 15 October 1886

My worthy Cooperators,

My heart rejoices in being able to tell you, my dear Cooperators of the interesting news that comes from Patagonia and the many other missions already opened in South America, and at the same time tell you of plans for new enterprises, which because of the urgent needs of those far off populations, we need to begin as soon as possible.

After having travelled back and forth through Patagonia, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Cordilleras de los Andes, and crossed those famous mountains a good two times to arrive in Chile, and after having catechised and baptised various native tribes at the price of incredible dangers and efforts on the part of our missionaries, the time has arrived to think seriously of consolidating and perpetuating the good done up till now.

Since these tribes have been pacified and converted to the Faith, and having begun to enjoy the first fruits of a Christian and civilised life, they

cannot resign themselves to seeing the missionary only from time to time, calling them to a social life and the light of the Gospel.

Rightly they want them always in their midst to be directed, instructed and consoled by them and more especially to be assisted by them when they are sick and in danger of death.

We should not marvel then that Bishop Cagliero, vicar apostolic of Patagonia, does not have the courage to refuse these poor natives who are also his dear children in Jesus Christ, these missionaries and these just comforts. But he has neither personnel nor sufficient means to satisfy their ardent desires. Having to set up fixed residences for the missionaries in the Patagonian desert, where the natives have come together in colonies or villages, he needs, as you can well understand, a greater number of priests, catechists and Sisters, and many material means which are essential for social existence and divine worship.

These poor neophytes, despite their good will, cannot offer our missionaries anything else other than their lamentable poverty. They too need everything, right down to being clothed and maintained, especially at the beginning of their conversion. So the fate of the missionaries depends on the Pious Salesian Society and the charity of our Cooperators. Should we be disheartened? Oh no! Indeed let's redouble our efforts, so as not to allow those works to diminish which have already meant so much sweat and sacrifice.

Other than this it is good for you to know that, to ensure the result of the total conversion of Patagonia, we have already decided to open a way through from the western part of Chile, and already a small group of Salesians has gone there to found a house on the other side of the Cordilleras, in the city of Concepción, belonging to the Chilean Republic.

It is from there that groups of missionaries must leave to evangelise Araucania and western Patagonia, spreading then little by little into the Chiloe archipelago and Magellan, and into the territory of Tierra del Fuego, all populated by countless native tribes completely without any idea of religion and civilisation.

Fr Fagnano at the moment would have already gone to the Malvinas, and from there he will go to explore all the islands as far as Cape Horn, and there he will look at the most strategic points best suited for setting up the tents of the new soldiers of the Cross who will soon go down there to reach him.

You could never imagine, dear Cooperators, how many requests come to me from down there from our tireless missionaries and the people themselves, to send new and considerable reinforcements of men and money.

And to make better known the needs and satisfying condition, thanks be to God, in our missions in America our missionary Fr Louis Lasagna has come expressly from those parts, and he will leave no stone unturned to convince me to prepare another large expedition of Salesian missionaries and Sisters of Mary Help of Christians. He also needs a good number for the missions entrusted to him in the vast empire of Brazil, bigger in itself than the whole of Europe, with boundless regions populated solely by natives roaming through vast forests and hoping for centuries for a helping hand to take them out of their shameful barbarous ways in which they have lain buried and will remain so, for who knows how many more generations, unless the zeal of the missionaries, supported by the charity of the faithful, soon brings them help.

Urged on by these powerful motives we have decided to prepare for next November an expedition with a new group of missionaries, at least thirty of them, and even more if abundant help arrives from benefactors in time.

That said, it will not be difficult to understand, dear Cooperators, that to prepare the new band of conquerors of souls and propagators of God's kingdom on earth we need considerable expense for sacred items, clothing and linen, items for the church, school and dwelling and urgent expense for journeys by sea and land. So I just have to put all my hope in God and in your generosity, dear Cooperators, so that just as you have helped me with previous expeditions so you will not delay in helping me with this current one, despite the financial straits afflicting us.

So I am appealing once more to your charity. Listen to me and also to the voice of our dear missionaries and the cry coming from so many poor destitute people in those distant parts.

Therefore I beg our Cooperators to make this new expedition possible helping us with your fervent prayers and offerings of cloth or linen, rags or clothing, church items, sacred vessels, and even more so with money for tackling the expenses of journeys by sea and land, and finally with any alms your piety suggests and your situation permits.

At the Oratory in Turin where the new missionaries will leave from, we can gratefully receive by hand, or by rail, or by post, whatever your industrious charity will sent for this noble cause.

On the day chosen for the departure of the missionaries, before the farewell function, there will be a conference for Cooperators in the sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians. You will be notified in good time so those who want to can come. And while you are invited from this moment, I would not want to omit asking you to kindly seek out people you know and friends who also might want to come with their offering for this work of humanity and faith.

We will write their and your names in the register in our pious institute so we will remember them every day in our prayers, and to implore copious blessings on you and all those who help us, on their families and their work, certain that God will write them into the book of life, the book of the predestined, since it is the opinion of the great St Augustine that whoever effectively procures the salvation of souls ensures that of his own soul: *Animam salvasti, animam tuam praecelestinasti.*

May Mary Help of Christians, who is the mother and protectress of our missionaries and those poor natives, obtain from God every choicest spiritual and temporal blessing,

Yours most affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr J. Bosco

N.B. The charitable benefactors of our missions are asked to send their offerings directly to Don Bosco in Turin, via Cottolengo, N. 32.

## SECTION FIVE

### THE ONGOING SEARCH FOR FINANCIAL RESOURCES

#### Presentation

*The extensive development of the buildings at Valdocco, construction of four churches, the dozens of foundations in Italy, Europe and Latin America, support for thousands of youngsters given free lodging or put up for a modest fee, the formation of hundreds of Salesian priests, brothers and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the many missionary expeditions and so many other expenses demanded huge capital expenditure of Don Bosco, money he certainly did not have.*

*Since his was a private initiative, and he wanted to keep his hands free, he only had two possibilities open to him for financing things: obtain aid from public bodies – but without being bound in any legal way – or appeal to free donations of a private kind. And precisely as he had done throughout his life, he went through Dante’s experience: “Thou shalt have proof how savoureth of salt the bread of others, and how hard a road the going down and up another’s stairs” (Paradiso, XVII 55-60). What he called “Providence” or “the will of God” in fact did not spare him constant worry, vigorous attacks from a hostile press, wearying journeys through Italy, into France, Spain, and insistent reminders to his sons of the poverty of life and hard daily work.*

*The risk of not being able to keep up with all the projects underway always weighed on him, given that the overall budget for the work he was head of was usually in the red. But the generosity of benefactors, while inevitably variable, never diminished.*

*Since there are no special studies on the economic dimension of Salesian work<sup>1</sup>, we think it would be helpful to at least briefly present at least the principal moments of this “economy in the making” at Valdocco while Don Bosco was still alive.*

<sup>1</sup> For the house at Valdocco until 1870 cf. Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)*. Roma, LAS 1980.

*Especially at the end of the 1840s and '50s Don Bosco, without any finances available had only some mass stipends, some religious services, a little from his priestly stipend and a few guests, some help here and there from friends, so had recourse mainly to public charity. This is how he did his first constructions and sometimes considerable extensions.*

*The decade that followed (1860-1870) did not augur well at the start. In 1860-1861, faced with the political situation and the denigratory campaign of the "Gazzetta del Popolo", Don Bosco underwent police raids, school inspections and physical attacks on his person. He defended himself by protesting to the government authorities who were never failing over those years to send him poor and orphaned lads. The more favourable time in 1862, with Rattazzi in government and the economic euphoria of the moment, was interrupted in December 1862 by the Farini and Minghetti, governments starting up a stage of rupture between their political programs and the work at Valdocco. Don Bosco went through another police raid in 1863 and accusations of not being patriotic, but he knew how to take shelter behind authorities (Prefects Pasolini, Radicati).*

*The purchase of land and buildings, thanks to income from a successful raffle (lottery), encouraged Don Bosco in 1864 to set about building a new church. Nothing prepared him for the trauma of the move from Turin to Florence of the capital of the kingdom with all the consequence of that. A new raffle did not bring the desired results and the financial situation gave no signs of improving in 1865-1866. The system he set up of novenas, letters, propaganda in the Catholic Readings was not enough to cover expenses. Don Bosco and his collaborator Chev. Federico Oreglia were then forced to undertake tiring journeys through Italy to rebuild and consolidate a network of friends in the better off areas of the country, viz. Florence, Genoa, Milan, Bologna, Rome. Obviously he did not fail to maintain contacts with the landed Piedmontese gentry which were already 'squeezed', but gradually became business-minded nobility.*

*At the end of the decade the image of Don Bosco the educator, founder, someone listened to by Government and the Holy See, was further enhanced by that of the miracle worker thanks to Our Lady Help of Christians. The vitality of this Marian cult helped increase the generosity of the faithful, including aristocrats. The sums*

*received brevi manu and not subject to legal control, were immediately invested mostly in buildings, maintaining buildings and pupils, acquiring equipment and workshops.*

*Meanwhile the Casati (1859) legislation prodded local councils to set up primary and secondary schools without depending financially on the State. Don Bosco then opened colleges in agreement with local councils outside Turin, and this meant a lessening though not the complete disappearance of his rapport with government officials and city councillors in Turin. Don Bosco could now rely on school fees from the colleges, contributions and agreements with local councils, on some land assets and bequests. The economy, as far as possible however, was always centrally managed from Valdocco, which was extending and becoming a citadel with some rather grandiose structures.*

*The late sixties and early seventies for Don Bosco were years of difficulties faced with the increased tax burden of the new kingdom, the enforced role of paper currency, the rising price of wheat and bread and other basic needs for the depression phase that was looming in 1872-1873. He had recourse to small occasional grants from the National Bank and other financial bodies and occasional and more or less substantial donations from land owners (e. g. the Callori from Vignale) and middle-class financiers (e.g. bankers Cataldi from Genoa). He also benefited from the publication of the first biographical profiles by some of his admirers. These made him known as the energetic founder of charitable and philanthropic works. As a consequence they channelled money, donations, bequests, loans in his direction.*

*In 1875 the enormous expenses of the missionary expeditions began and the ever burdensome foundations in France (Nice, Marseilles ...) and in Italy (Lazio, Sicily, Tuscany, Venice ...). In the eighties we have to add the construction of the church of the Sacred Heart in Rome to this. This mobilisation of charity took place especially by means of the Salesian Bulletin and his very strenuous journeys throughout Italy, France and Spain.*

*The raffles (lotteries)*

*This question of the raffles deserves separate treatment. Don Bosco ran these over a good fifteen years or so: ten between 1851 and 1870 and five from 1873*

to 1887. Some were merely clearances of items he had left over. The one he ran in 1865 went on till 1867 because of problems in getting private and public charity moving.

*The first ones were appeals to the landed gentry and local middle-class financiers, as well as to political and city council, diocesan and parish authorities. The last ones were launched on a national and even international scale.*

*They were governed by demanding legislation which was modified over time but needed a lot of time and personnel only justified by the hoped for financial outcome.*

*In general, it was necessary to obtain official permission from the authorities to publish the circular, form a committee of supporters with religious and secular personalities of some prestige, recruiting promoters who would collect gifts and sell tickets, print the catalogue of prizes with names of donors, exhibit them in large halls, find experts to value the items and determine the number of tickets to be issued at a price of 50 cents each. Then he had to get the newspapers to announce the place and date of the draw, etc. ... But those not claimed and therefore left to the organiser could be sold at 80% of the estimated price.*

*Just to take an example of the one Don Bosco ran in 1857, it involved 200 male promoters and 142 female ones, including members of the Royal family. He collected almost 3,000 prizes offered by members of noble families, by the judiciary, by the religious authorities, bankers, high and middle bourgeoisie, by single women and widows, the clergy (canons, priests, clerics), young people, families, anonymous individuals ... All social classes were represented despite the ongoing battles between church and state, and all social categories purchased tickets. The revenue, while never detailed, had to be considerable.*



## I. RECOURSE TO PUBLIC CHARITY

*As we have just said, for the financial resources needed to supply the ever-increasing costs of his work, Don Bosco appealed to institutions: the Royal family, Government authorities, public officials (local council, provincial, state ...), existing charitable organisations locally, the National Bank, parishes, dioceses, the Holy See itself through his best supporters, including the Pope.*

*For each request for help he provided ample and precise charitable and social motivations which in his opinion would open the "purse strings" of well-stocked individuals and would lead authorities to grant him exemptions, permits, authorisations, etc..*

*Empirical evidence shows that the support of the public authorities, both civil and ecclesiastical, to Don Bosco never wavered, although he always kept individual ownership of movable and immovable property in his hands or with individual Salesians and was reluctant to establish any legally recognised moral entity. And rightly so given that legislation in force was decidedly hostile to religious institutions. As for the vow of poverty, he found a modus vivendi acceptable to the Holy See.*

*In the fifteen or so letters we publish here by way of example amongst the hundreds that have been found, we see how Don Bosco turned to local authorities for his first school furnishings (no. 108) and twenty five years later (no. 123), for expenses for the three Oratories and debts for building the church of St Francis de Sales (no. 111), for maintaining the orphans from the cholera epidemic (no. 112). He asked the King for subsidies for his poor clerics (no. 109) and for titles of honour for his generous benefactors (no. 124). He asked the War Ministry for used uniforms for his boys, to ward off the cold winters (no. 113) or for help with emergency rations (no. 119). He asked the Ministers for the Interior to pay for board for those boys accepted at Ministerial request (no. 116) and a contribution to pay the tax on income from movable wealth at the College at Mirabello (no. 118). He approached the Minister for Finance with a request to reduce the heavy tax on flour (no. 121), and the Minister for Public Education for a contribution for the schools (no. 122). He asked the Prefect of the Province to mediate in an*

*already refused request to the Minister for the Interior for a reduction on train fares for boys attending Salesian colleges (no. 120).*

*Obviously Don Bosco did not fail to make frequent recourse to ecclesiastical authorities, including bishops (no. 110), and Popes (no. 125). The circulars to his promoters of raffles/lotteries are unforgettable (no. 114) and to potential buyers for tickets gone on sale (no. 115).*

*The correspondence published here all falls within the period 1847-1876, meaning from the beginnings of Salesian work in the Pinaridi house in Turin to the beginning of the Salesian work in Argentina. After this most of the requests to authorities for contributions were addressed to gain support for the missions. For this we need to look at the preceding section<sup>2</sup>.*

### **108. To the Mayors of Turin**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 75.

[Turin, prior to 22 April 1847]

Distinguished Gentlemen, the Mayors<sup>3</sup>,

Fathers John Borel and John Bosco, who are involved in the spiritual direction of young boys at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales opened in Valdocco near the pious home of the Refuge, knowing how many young boys want to come there to spend some time on weekends learning to read and write, would like to endorse this yearning. It also wonderfully supports the aim of keeping young people free from idleness and vice on these days, so they have decided with a council of wise individuals to open a charitable school for them.

<sup>2</sup> See nos. 98-107.

<sup>3</sup> At the time the two city Mayors were Marquis Vittorio Colli and Count Giuseppe Ponte. After the reform of 1848, requests for assistance from the city council were addressed to the Mayor and councillors. Thus for example the request in February 1850, where Don Bosco indicates that costs for renting the three Oratories amounted to 2,400 lire: cf. RSS 22 (2003) 343-344. See also no. 110.

This is why we turn respectfully to you, distinguished gentlemen, asking if perhaps in the storerooms of the schools in this illustrious city there might be school benches, desks, tables not being used, which you would like to give the applicants to use as they see fit.

The applicants,

Fr John Borel  
Fr John Bosco

### 109. To King Victor Emmanuel II

AST *Grande Cancelleria* m. 259/1 n. 1370, original ms ed. in RSS 13 (1994) 295-296.

Turin, 1 May 1851

Your Royal Majesty,

Clerics Ascanio Savio, Joseph Buzzetti, Charles Gastini, Felix Reviglio assisted by some charitable individuals, and with the permission of their ecclesiastical superior have donned the clerical habit, but because they lack worldly goods they have encountered serious problems in continuing with their studies, and are in straitened circumstances for providing for lodging, food and clothing. They do not know who to turn to in this serious time of need.

They humbly request Your Royal Majesty to take them into kind consideration and grant them a charitable subsidy as your fatherly kindness sees fit, so they can continue in their ecclesiastical career to which they feel God has especially called them.

The petitioners, ever mindful of the benefit they hope to receive, will pray daily to the Lord that you will thrive and that He will preserve Your Royal Majesty and all the Royal Family for many long years.

The petitioners,

[Clerics Ascanio Savio, Joseph Buzzetti,  
Charles Gastini, Felix Reviglio]

The undersigned, who is fully informed, declares that the four clerics making this petition are of exemplary conduct, are teaching catechism in the parish of Borgo Dora, and especially at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales where as well as catechism they are teaching evening classes, Gregorian chant, and music, and all without remuneration. He also declares that all four are without worldly goods, have been taken in to the Oratory, and are most worthy in this regard given their poverty and conduct.

Turin, 1 May 1851

Fr John Bosco director<sup>4</sup>

### **110. To the Bishop of Biella, Bishop Pietro Losana**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 155-156.

Turin, 4 May 1852

My Lord<sup>5</sup>,

With a keen sense of gratitude to Divine Providence who in the person of your illustrious and reverend Lordship has given us an outstanding benefactor of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, I humbly thank you, My Lord, for having so zealously recommended my church to the charity of the faithful in the diocese with a special circular on September 13 last year. The offerings came to the grand sum of a thousand lire which I declare I have received from you. This is evident proof that everyone knew of the need to keep the morality of the young intact and promote Christian instruction. This is why they so willingly responded to the pious expectations of their Pastor.

Be happy then, My Lord, for having given this great benefit for the young people of Turin, and rejoice also because of the advantage it brings so many young people in your diocese who have to spend a good part of the year in the

<sup>4</sup> Don Bosco also had recourse to the King's charity to give his clerics the patrimony [benefice, title, fixed income ...] they needed to receive Holy Orders.

<sup>5</sup> Giovanni Pietro Losana (1793-1873), professor at the University of Turin, then bishop of Biella (from 1833); attentive to social problems, he was a moderate liberal.

capital because of their work. A considerable number of them are exemplary in frequenting this Oratory to enjoy themselves, be instructed, and to keep holy the Lord's day<sup>6</sup>.

You know, My Lord, that notwithstanding the generous offerings of pious and charitable individuals, I still lacked the means to continue this sacred edifice<sup>7</sup>, but Divine Providence gave me a kind hand and helped me find new funds by means of a raffle. It was well accepted by public charity as soon as it was announced and very many distinguished individuals and worthy gentlemen took part with true Catholic zeal. They promoted it and thanks to them many more gifts came in than I had expected, both for their value and number, so today they amount to more than three thousand one hundred items. Now I hope that these pious and wealthy people continue their efforts by buying tickets, which the completion of this holy work depends on.

Thus comforted and assisted, I am happy to tell you that the construction works are going ahead with all possible activity, and I trust in the Lord that on June 20, a holy day for us dedicated to Our Lady of Consolation, and to satisfy an urgent need for us, you can come to this new church to bless it and celebrate the sacred functions there. My Lord, you can imagine the joy and consolation just at the thought of this solemnity that will take place on that long-desired day!

Unable as I am to show my gratitude to Your Lordship and the people of your diocese for the offerings and for having effectively helped me with the raffle, I will be keen to welcome all the youngsters from Biella who come to the Oratory with the maximum loving kindness, and I will spare nothing to help those who want to benefit from classes and religious instruction.

What I can do, and I will not fail to do so, is to join with the boys who have in a certain way been entrusted to me by Divine Providence, and pray constantly to the Lord our God with them that he may richly reward Your

<sup>6</sup> It seems that the young people of the Biella diocese who attended the Oratory at Valdocco were around 200 in number, a third of the total.

<sup>7</sup> The reference is to the building of the church of St Francis de Sales: see no. 6.

Lordship with his blessings, and all those who in their charity have helped and are helping this charitable work in whatever way.

Allow me, My Lord, to ask you to continue your protection of the Oratory and bless the new church, the raffle, and all the boys of the Oratory, and with them also myself, since I feel I have the greatest need of all.

Please accept my sincere gratitude, and with the deepest respect I have the honour of being,

Your Lordship's most humble, devout and obedient servant

Fr John Bosco

### **111. To the city authorities in Turin**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 201-202.

[Turin, 3 August 1853]

Distinguished Gentlemen,

With sentiments of sincere gratitude for the aid you gave me last year to benefit the oratories set up in this city for abandoned youth, I dare to approach you once more, finding myself more in need than ever.

I should firstly give you some indication of how these three oratories are going. This year they have gone ahead with great success given the greater number of youngsters who have been coming. Just in the Oratory at Valdocco they have sometimes surpassed two thousand, all youngsters who have spent their weekends fulfilling their religious duties while receiving moral and civic instruction such as reading, writing, arithmetic, the metric system, drawing, singing and some instruments. In the midst of all this there have also been games, basic gymnastics such as: hurdles, see-saw, bowls, quoits, running and jumping, especially to entice those who would not come otherwise. The evening classes this year were not able to achieve the results I expected because of our lack of means. Because they are all poor youngsters they often dropped out of school because they did not have what they needed. Nevertheless the number of students often rose to about three hundred.

Besides the cost of rent and maintenance of the church and paving of the Oratories at Vanchiglia and Porta Nuova, which cost no less than two thousand two hundred francs, we have to add the serious costs involved in the construction of a church in Valdocco as well as the construction or rather the restoration of part of the building intended as classrooms, and to provide shelter for those who are absolutely poor and abandoned.

The usual benefactors have dropped away due to the sheer number of expenses, to the point where I still owe an entire year's rent for the oratory at Porta Nuova. If the Council cannot help me in this particular need I will find myself forced to close one of these oratories, and this would mean that a considerable number of poor and abandoned boys would cease to receive instruction.

This is why I am turning to you, worthy gentlemen, asking you to take into kind consideration what I have explained above and grant me the charitable subsidy that your generosity will suggest to you, given the gravity of my current need.

We are all happy to put all our efforts towards the poor children of the people. I am only asking for aid to pay the debts contracted for the buildings mentioned above, and for the rent and maintenance of the respective venues.

Full of trust in the proven kindness of the Turin City Council, with the greatest gratitude I am,

Your distinguished gentlemen's humble petitioner,

Fr John Bosco

## **112. To the Mayor of Turin, Giovanni Battista Notta**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 243-244.

Turin, 25 January 1855

Your Excellency the Mayor<sup>8</sup>,

<sup>8</sup> He was Mayor from December 1852 to February 1861.

Given the serious expenses which the Turin City Council had to face during the fatal emergency of the *colera morbus* I had decided not to make a request for funds this year, but my present needs force me to. In addition to the many expenses involved in setting up the building in a healthy state as required in these times, I now have about ninety five boys to keep, clothe and provide a bed for. I wanted to decrease the number but the orphans resulting from the cholera<sup>9</sup> increased them instead. Amongst them are those given me by the charitable committee dealing with cholera victims, and those I myself encountered in the streets and squares. I have taken in around forty of these unfortunate lads.

I am not asking for aid to pay rent or for classrooms, nor for work carried out there. I am asking only for funds to help me provide bread for these poor boys of mine to get them through the winter. Later I hope the Lord will provide something and I can at least locate some of them elsewhere.

To this end I am recommending myself to your Excellencies' proven kindness asking you to help me with this exceptional need, convinced that you lack neither the means nor the willingness to help these children of the people who are the poorest and most abandoned of them.

With the sincerest feeling of gratitude, I am,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **113. To the Minister for War, Giacomo Durando**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 268-269.

[Turin, November 1855]

Your Excellency the Minister,

I respectfully put to Your Excellency the need to provide for more than a hundred boys taken into the home attached to the Oratory of St Francis de

<sup>9</sup> In October 1854 Don Bosco had offered to take into the Oratory many children orphaned by the cholera and the Mayor had agreed.



Sales, and also the need to provide for more than one thousand five hundred who attend the boys' oratories in Valdocco, Porta Nuova and Vanchiglia. I had recourse to the War Ministry asking for the gift of certain items of clothing which are either too worn or of no use any more for the regular troops. The request was favourably accepted and the good Minister came to my aid.

The straitened circumstances this year have put me in an even more calamitous situation than for past years, and I find the need to turn to Your Excellency, asking you to take into kind consideration the unfortunate state of these poor and abandoned young men, and give them items of clothing which are needed in the first instance if they are to ward off the cold of the coming winter, and so continue working and earning their bread by some honest trade.

I only note here that given the absolute poverty of these young boys we will accept with the greatest gratitude any kind of clothing items be they shoes, tunics, jackets, shirts, underwear, sheets, blankets, socks, no matter how patched or worn out, even torn blankets or anything else. We can mend them and they can serve our needs.

Full of trust in your well-known kindness, and with the greatest of gratitude also in the name of the above-mentioned boys I am,

Your Excellency's most indebted petitioner,

Fr John Bosco

#### **114. Circular for the Raffle**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 317-320.

Turin, [21] February 1857

The charity of the Gospel inspires a man to the most wonderful works of charity while avoiding calling the attention of others on himself. However, where the glory of God and the benefit of one's neighbour so requires it, he does not hesitate to overcome his shyness and extend his hand to benefit people, and sometimes tell others of the good done. This invites and encourages others

to come to the aid of needy. This thought has led the Committee running this Raffle to offer an idea of the main work done in these Oratories, and so let everyone know what the proceeds coming from it will be destined for.

We believe it is publicly well-known that Father John Bosco, in his desire to promote the moral benefit of abandoned youth, has opened three boys' Oratories in three main parts of the city, which on weekends gather the largest number of boys possible, the ones most at risk in the city and who come to the city from towns in the province. There is a chapel in these oratories for religious functions, some classrooms and a recreation centre. They are attracted there with prizes, amusements, some gymnastics or other honest form of recreation, after they have attended the sacred functions. The number who attend sometimes exceeds three thousand. When the season allows it, there are classes in reading, writing, singing, playing. A considerable number of pious gentlemen help this work by doing various things and teaching catechism. Boys who are unemployed are found work with an upright employer, and they are given all the loving assistance that a good father would give them.

At the Oratory at Valdocco there are also day and evening classes especially for boys who, because of their poor clothing, or their lack of discipline, cannot be accepted into the public schools.

The evening classes are very well attended. There too they are taught reading, writing, vocal and instrumental music, and this to keep them away from bad companions where they would certainly run the risk of losing what little they had earned from work, as well as their morality and religion.

Amongst these boys, either from the city or the towns in the province, we find some (mostly orphans) who are so poor and abandoned that they could not be set on the path to an art or trade without giving them lodging, food and clothing. We have provided for this with a home attached to the Oratory at Valdocco where more than a hundred and fifty have been taken in. There they are given what they need to become good Christians and upright young workers.

Having thus pointed out the situation of these oratories one can easily understand where the proceeds from this Raffle are directed to: paying the rent for the various buildings, maintaining the classrooms, the churches, giving bread to the hundred and fifty living in are all serious expenditures.

Moreover, three years ago with the fatal cholera epidemic we had to set up an appropriate place to accommodate forty orphans, a few of whom are still in the home. This year we had to complete one part of the building still under construction. All these works, although carried out with careful economy, meant expenditure of more than forty thousand francs. With the help of charitable individuals most of this sum has been paid, but twelve thousand francs are still owing.

To pay these expenses and offer the possibility of continuing the good begun, we have found no other way than to hold a raffle of some items, to open up the possibility for people in any situation to help in whatever way and to whatever extent their charity suggests.

For this purpose due authorisation was asked of the Royal government who looked favourably on our request, and by decree on the 2nd of this February gave us all the permissions we felt we needed for this raffle to succeed.

We are keenly convinced that our fellow citizens and charitable people in the provinces since the oratories also benefit them, will want to join us and take no small part, sending us items destined to serve as prizes, and buying tickets. A select number of good individuals graciously accepted to be promoters, committing themselves to collect items and sell tickets according to the attached rules.

We have simply explained the purpose of the oratories and the principal means by which they can continue. The work in itself seems to be sufficiently commendable without needing to add further words. We simply note that by taking part in this charitable work you will be providing for both a public and private utility and you will be blessed by both God and human beings. By God who will not fail to reward you; and by human beings since you will

have their deepest gratitude, while a group of young men will forever bless the kind hand that removed them from the perils of the street, set them on the right path to work and for the salvation of their soul.

The Committee<sup>10</sup>

### 115. Circular for promoters of the Raffle

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 476-477.

*Charitas benigna est patiens est.*

*Charity is kind and patient.*

*(St Paul)*

Turin, [30 January] 1862

Distinguished Sir,

The charity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is kind and patient in everything, gives me the hope that Your Excellency will kindly forgive any disturbance I am causing you. The matters that Divine Providence has placed in my hands has meant that this year I need to appeal to private and public charity through a raffle. It is true that this approach has been very often employed over time and has therefore become less acceptable to some, nevertheless I cannot find any other way suitable for our times and more adapted to our need. So that you can have a good idea of the kind of expenses we are dealing with I will give you a brief indication here.

Firstly there are the three Oratories - St Francis de Sales at Valdocco, St Aloysius at Porta Nuova, the holy Guardian Angel at Vanchiglia. We hold sacred functions in these three churches morning and evening, administer the Holy Sacraments and instruct young people who are most at risk, large numbers of these come along. These boys for whom we often have to provide

<sup>10</sup> Of all the Ministers, the Minister for War, Alfonso Lamarmora, accepted and paid for 40 tickets, the Minister for the Interior Urbano Rattazzi paid for all 400 and gave them back, the Minister for Public Education, Giovanni Lanza gave them back without paying for any, limiting himself to praising Don Bosco's charitable work, however later that year he did send a contribution of 1,000 lire.

food and clothing, inasmuch as we can, are then placed with an employer to learn a trade. But the three churches have no fixed income to provide what is needed for divine worship and are without appropriate furnishings. Furthermore we are renting the venues at Vanchiglia and Porta Nuova, the first at 650 francs a year and the second at 500 francs a year. As well as the current rent there are other debts which should be paid as soon as possible. In these same venues and for the day and evening classes we have had to carry out many essential repairs, most still to be paid for. We also have a considerable number of young students and working boys living in the home attached to the Oratory at Valdocco, for whom we provide bread, instruction, clothing, board and a trade; the cost for these is very great.

[Finally, a small but essential expense has been needed to establish workshops in the house. There are serious reasons why we have not been able to allow the working boys to go and learn their trade in the city workshops].

Having thus pointed out the purpose of the raffle I humbly invite Your Excellency to come to our aid:

1. To collect the items charitable individuals want to give us, then give a hand to distribute tickets at the appropriate time.

2. Should you know someone who would accept the kind role of promoter for this raffle, especially if lay people, could I ask you to give me their name, surname and place of residence so that I can invite them myself.

3. Should Your Excellency for some special reason not wish to be listed amongst the promoters I would ask you respectfully to let me know so that there is no need to bother you further.

I hope soon to be able to send you the draft regulations along with other information regarding the raffle that I am especially recommending to your well-known and proven charity.

May the Lord God who is infinitely rich in favours reward you substantially and grant you health and copious blessings. Meanwhile for my part and in

the name of the boys who will benefit I offer you my heartfelt thanks. With esteem, I have the honour of being,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco <sup>11</sup>

**116. To the [Secretary of the] Minister for the Interior,  
Ubaldo Peruzzi**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 625-626.

Turin, 22 December 1863

Distinguished Sir<sup>12</sup>,

Given the very many youngsters urgently requesting to be taken into this home, it was not possible to take up all the kind recommendations of your Ministry on behalf of certain poor young boys. Nevertheless the matter was not forgotten and things were done as follows.

*Malabailo Carlo Enrico*, recommended by letter on September 22, 6th division 2nd section 5826, was finally accepted on November 1 and placed with someone to learn a trade.

*Benna Giovanni Battista* from Biella recommended by letter on October 8 was accepted on November 10 last and since he was in serious need of instruction was admitted for studies.

*Grassero Giuseppe* recommended by letter on October 13, N° 6.522 has been definitely accepted and his entry has been fixed for January 12.

*Ferrero Lorenzo* recommended by letter on November 5, given the serious need he finds himself in, is also accepted and will enter the house on the 24th.

<sup>11</sup> At the same time as this circular, Don Bosco sent out another signed by 22 members of the Committee headed by the Mayor of Turin, Emanuele Luserna di Rorà, cf. E(m) I, pp. 478-479.

<sup>12</sup> With the approach of Italian unity (1861) and until the early 1870s, dozens of poor boys were recommended to Don Bosco by various ministers (the Interior, Justice and Worship, Agriculture, War, Public Education ...). He accepted almost all of them in exchange for a small payment for room and board.

I take this same occasion to repeat what I wrote halfway through October in response to the letter of September 22, regarding young *Pivetta*.

His mother at the time owed L. 330; now we have to add two months at 15 francs a month, which brings the total to 360 francs.

I enclose here also a note regarding the boys *Rissoli Gesualdo* from Naples and *Durazzo* from Turin who could not be taken into the home because they were too young, but following letters from the Ministry were placed with Master Miglietti at 65 cents each per day<sup>13</sup>.

Given his need and at his request I had to anticipate the sum due although I myself am in straitened circumstances.

In the hope that he wishes to continue giving bread to poor young people, of whom there are now more than seven hundred living here, could you please tell His Excellency the Minister for the Interior, that I will always do my utmost to accept abandoned young people and especially those who are in any way recommended to me by him.

Finally, at a time when we are wishing people the best, I pray that Heaven may bless you and I am, with the greatest respect,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### 117. To the Director General of Railways in Upper Italy

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 33.

[Turin, end of January 1864]<sup>14</sup>

[Distinguished Sir],

I am appealing to Your Excellency for a work of public charity. In the heavily populated suburb of Valdocco there has been an enormous housing

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Letter to the Minister for the Interior, Ubaldino Peruzzi, February 23, 1863, in E(m) I, pp. 555-556.

<sup>14</sup> Don Bosco made similar requests, always accepted, in the years that followed, especially for the transport of the construction materials needed for the church of St John the Evangelist.

development for around thirty thousand inhabitants who have no church, big or small, for divine worship.

Urged by the need and the desire to provide for this serious deficiency, I decided to attempt to build a church that can be used by our youngsters who usually come on weekends and for the public who wish to avail themselves of it. We bought land for this purpose and plans were drawn up for the building.

Everything begins with and is entrusted to the charity of the citizens. Many have already taken part. Now that we want to start on the construction we have acquired two hundred thousand miria [1 miria = ca.10 kg] of stone from Borgone. It is for the transport of this stone that also in the name of the citizens of Valdocco I am recommending myself to your kindness, asking you to provide free transport of these materials from Borgone to Turin.

This work is for the public benefit which you are willingly involved in. Therefore, confident of being heard I assure you of the gratitude of all those who will benefit and especially my own. I consider it always a great honour every time to wish you all of Heaven's blessings, and I am,

Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **118. To the Minister *Ad Interim* for Finance, Urbano Rattazzi**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 416.

Turin, 5 August 1867

Your Excellency,

Father John Bosco respectfully explains to Your Excellency how last year, for want of due completion of formalities, I had to pay a penalty on taxable income from movable goods. Your Excellency gave consideration to the circumstances and purpose of this institution, which is to remove poor and at risk children from danger, and granted a charitable subsidy of 600 francs corresponding with what I had to pay for the house at Mirabello, which is the issue at stake here.



Now I find myself in an identical situation for the current payment for the 2nd semester 1866 and I am asking Your Excellency to renew the same favour assuring you that it will be to the exclusive benefit of the most abandoned children of poor people. I note meanwhile that since I have been able to provide appropriate clarifications in good time, the tax agent has taken everything into kind consideration.

The petitioner, along with the young people who will benefit and full of trust in your proven charity, wishes you every heavenly blessing and is,

Your Excellency's humble petitioner,

Fr John Bosco<sup>15</sup>

### **119. To the Minister for War, Ettore Bertolè Viale**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 497-498.

Turin, 11 February 1868

Distinguished Sir,

Our growing poverty this year urges me to have recourse to Your Excellency's proven charity, which I have experienced many times. The number of poor boys [recommended] by the Minister has grown somewhat, but what is really putting us in difficulties is the high price of food staples. Last year at this time we were paying 0.30 cents a kilogram for bread; now it has almost doubled and we can say the same for other food items.

This is why I warmly recommend myself to your well-known kindness so that this year too you may come to the aid of these poor boys and grant us as much as you see fit.

<sup>15</sup> Though the request of June 7, 1867 to the Minister for Finance, Francesco Ferrara, was not considered, this one to his successor brought a grant of 600 lire.

Along with the boys, I do not fail to express my heartfelt gratitude and daily invoke blessings on you. Filled with respect, I have the distinct honour of being,

Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

**120. To the Prefect of Turin, Costantino Radicati Talice di Passerano**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 219-220.

[Turin, after 20 June 1870]

Distinguished Sir,

I have received the letter by which Your Excellency communicated that the Ministry for the Interior has decided not to continue the favour of repatriating poor young men who come out of this establishment<sup>16</sup>.

Since you, Mr Prefect, know the miserable state of this institution, I would thus ask you to remind His Excellency, the Minister for the Interior, of the state of the boys who have been recommended. Of around 800 who live here more than a hundred are sent by the Government and are given free board here.

If I do not have this favour of repatriation, I would find myself in a difficult position, since we are receiving no further favours from the Railways. At other times the Minister concerned gave us a grant every year, but this has also ceased for some years.

So after taking a boy into the home for nothing, in the end I now also have to repatriate him at my own expense. For example a few days ago I had to send two boys home, one to Ancona, the other to Tortorici in Sicily at a cost that was considerable for us given the straitened circumstances of this establishment.

Also note the tax of 10,000 francs we have to pay for flour<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> See previous letter.

<sup>17</sup> See following letter.

You can see from this, Mr Prefect, that despite all my good will I find myself needing to decrease the number that I take in, while continuous and insistent requests for shelter are on the increase.

I leave everything to you<sup>18</sup> and these poor boys will not fail to call down Heaven's blessings on you as they do each day for all their benefactors.

Believe me that I am grateful and,  
Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **121. To the Minister for Finance, Quintino Sella**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 236-237.

Turin, 15 August 1870

Your Excellency,

The straitened circumstances of the poor boys who have been taken in to the home known as the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, urge the undersigned to appeal to Your Excellency's charity.

The number of them, which between all our establishments amounts to 1,200, the decrease in charitable help, the increase in taxes, the multitude of abandoned children from all over Italy asking to be taken in, give me hope of, if not a complete exemption at least a partial one, from the tax on flour which exceeds twelve thousand francs.

This is the petition I make in the name of these poor boys and that I hope will be taken into kind consideration for this exceptional case.

With gratitude, I am,

Your Excellency's humble petitioner,

[Fr John Bosco<sup>19</sup>]

<sup>18</sup> A similar petition in April 1870 to the President of the Council of Ministers [Prime Minister] and the Minister for the Interior, Giovanni Lanza, had been rejected.

<sup>19</sup> The request was rejected.

## **122. To the Minister for Public Education, Cesare Correnti**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 279-280.

Turin, 11 December 1870

Your Excellency,

The concern Your Excellency has for promoting education for the lowest stratum of the population, a group so much in need of it, gives me hope that you will take into consideration what I am about to explain.

In this establishment we have around five hundred boys who live here. They belong precisely to the poorest level of the population and they are doing classical studies. There are, besides, around five hundred others, both boarders and day students, who attend primary classes we offer for poor youth both on weekdays and at weekends, not only during the day but also in the evenings.

Your Excellency can well understand how much it costs to run this establishment, both to maintain professors and teachers, and the classrooms, as well as providing books, exercise books and other school items, given that many of those who attend our classes are too poor to provide these things for themselves and we give them these items for free.

On the other hand note that we have no income, and that public charity is our only resource.

Although in the past we have been able to manage such huge expenses, we nevertheless now find ourselves in especially straitened circumstances and perhaps we will be obliged to limit our charitable work unless some kind hand offers us help.

This is why I turn to you, trusting in Your Excellency's kindness and asking you to help us in the way that you see fit. I assure you of our heartfelt gratitude, not just my own but of the entire administration of this house and the large group of young people who will benefit from your charity. They will certainly not fail to implore every blessing on Your Excellency.

Please accept my deepest respect, and I have the honour of being,  
Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

[Fr John Bosco<sup>20</sup>]

### **123. To the Mayor of Turin, Felice Rignon**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 463-464.

Turin, 26 August 1872

Your Excellency the Mayor,

Valdocco is certainly one of the most heavily populated parts of Turin and it is teeming with children. A few go to school in Santa Barbara which is of course not far away. But the greater number, either because their parents don't care, or because they are poorly dressed or are simply dissolute, spend their whole day wandering around to their own detriment and causing problems for authorities responsible for public safety.

In an effort to provide for these poor children, other than evening classes I have also begun day classes. Since this year I have a few more venues, the number of pupils has grown considerably and at the moment their number is effectively more than three hundred.

We need to educate them for free, and for not a few of them provide school items, books, paper and pens etc, and for some of them even, clothing and bread. These are all the efforts of a private individual who cannot continue without a special grant.

This is why I am appealing to Your Excellency asking you to take this need into careful consideration, and offer whatever financial help you consider appropriate.

<sup>20</sup> There is no indication of any response. Don Bosco would continue to renew his request. In January 1865 he informed the Director General of Railways for Upper Italy, Paolo Amilhou, that to the seven Salesian houses in Turin, the ones at Lanzo Torinese, Borgo San Martino, Varazze and Alassio he would need to add that of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Mornese, cf. E(m) IV, pp. 387-388.

If you would ever like to send someone to visit these classes, they are open in the area behind the church of Mary Help of Christians and he would be welcomed with all the respect to the invitee and the one who sent him. There are four elementary classes: some of these because of numbers are split into two and divided into two sections.

Please accept my usual gratitude,  
Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

[Fr J. Bosco<sup>21</sup>]

### **124. To King Victor Emmanuel II**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 557-558.

[Turin, 16 November 1875]

Your Royal Majesty,

The poor boys, around 850 of them who live at the Hospice of St Francis de Sales, through their director are appealing to Your Royal Majesty to ask for a sign of public recognition for one of the most upright citizens of Turin. This is Mr Michele Lanza a member of this city's City Council.

Under separate cover are the titles which make him especially worthy; here we highlight only his charity to us, especially the generous donation given not long ago of the sum of 10,000 francs.

Although this honourable citizen is not seeking honours, nevertheless given his domestic and social position he would receive with great satisfaction the awarding of the decoration of Saints Maurice and Lazarus. Indeed, such an honour would encourage him to continue dispensing his considerable wealth in works of charity for this and other institutes which are supported daily by charity.

<sup>21</sup> The Mayor's reply was delayed. Three years later Don Bosco would ask the same individual for school desks given the growing number of pupils at Valdocco, cf. E(m) IV, pp. 383-384.

These youngsters humbly petition Your Majesty that to the many benefits you have already granted them you would add the requested decoration for this outstanding benefactor.

In the hope of being heard, and with their hearts filled with gratitude, they pray that God will fill you with his blessings and grant you many years of happy life.

In their name and in my own, I am,

Your humble petitioner,

Fr John Bosco

Sir Michele Lanza di Vittorio, Turin, piazza Solferino, via Giannone 1, his private residence, 48 years old, former stearic acid industrialist for the Lanza Co. City councillor, member of the taxation commission; supports schools for poor children; meritorious for his work with correctional institutes, and for the destitute, and finally for the Oratory of St Francis de Sales with the sum of ...

### **125. To Pope Pius IX**

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 106-107.

[Roma, after 9 April 1876]

Most Holy Father,

Father John Bosco, kneeling before Your Holiness, humbly explains how four years ago he opened a shelter in Sampierdarena near Genoa for poor boys who come to the city from various towns.

It began with a small number but the very large numbers asking at any moment for bread and shelter forced him to buy more land and put up a new building.

Now there are around three hundred boys living there, of whom about thirty of the older ones have applied themselves to studies and are preparing for the ecclesiastical state; the others are doing arts and trades.

To buy the land, put up the building, provide furnishings, give bread and clothing to those living there we had to contract certain debts that we do not know how to pay. There are still more than seventy thousand francs weighing upon this poor institute or rather on this poor petitioner.

So in this exceptional need they are turning to the inexhaustible source of charity, to Your Holiness whom all proclaim to be the father of the unfortunate.

The help we are asking for depends on your supreme Authority and it is to allow the parish priests of this diocese of Genoa, to whose benefit this institute is especially directed, that on holy days of obligation they may be able to celebrate Mass *pro populo* and provide the stipend for the benefit of this orphanage.

We are limiting this to holy days of obligation, because the stipends for the ordinary Sundays and Feasts are already destined by the Ordinary of the diocese for the various needs of the young clergy.

This favour, which they say has already been granted in cases of serious need, would only be for three years.

Everything has been agreed with the Archbishop of Genoa, who will willingly present this work to his parish priests, and indeed he joins with me in making this request to Your Holiness in asking for this grace so long as it is the mind of the supreme pontiff.

With the greatest gratitude on the part of this petitioner and of the youngsters who will benefit, we assure you of our daily prayers that God may long preserve Your Holiness for the good of the Church and for the support of so many people in need. Kneeling, we all implore your holy blessing.

I have the honour etc.

[Fr John Bosco<sup>22</sup>]

<sup>22</sup> The pontiff granted the request, but for a local diocesan seminary and ecclesiastical vocations. Don Bosco managed to include his *Sons of Mary* amongst the beneficiaries.



## II. APPEALS TO PRIVATE CHARITY

*The financial contributions asked for and obtained from public authorities and institutions were certainly not enough to help him confront the huge expenses of the Salesian Work. It was necessary to appeal to private charity. Logically, Don Bosco turned especially to families and individuals who had financial possibilities, meaning those belonging to the nobility, mostly large property owners, and the upper and middle class of the time who were notably ready to dispense charity. Some of these, albeit modest in their private savings, could actually find an outlet in educational and charitable works such as those of Don Bosco.*

*These then slowly, but uninterruptedly extended the geographical area of his potential benefactors, moving from the restricted circles of Turin and Piedmont, whom he knew personally, to the broader national and even international circle that he could reach through circular letters and private correspondence. He wrote frequently to his more generous French benefactors of latter years: the Quisnard family in Lyon, mademoiselle Claire Louvet and especially the Colle husband and wife couple in Toulon (76 letters) who offered sums today worth millions of euro.*

*His most conspicuous benefactors (Callori, Fassati, Ricci des Ferres, Corsi, Uguccioni, Mother Galeffi, the already mentioned Colle family and Louvet in France, Dorothy Chopitea in Spain...) Don Bosco approached personally while on his many journeys, often organised precisely because he was looking for liquidity in the recurring and unpredictable moments of financial crisis, when national and local charity was contracting.*

*Don Bosco's response to such generosity was "simply" heartfelt thanks, a sincere promise of prayers to the Lord or the Virgin for his part and by his boys, warm wishes of earthly but also eternal happiness both personally and for the family, and possibly an invitation to visit him and join him at a meal.*

*Among the many letters written by Don Bosco to individual benefactors in the course of his forty years of life spent amongst young people we publish around twenty selected according to two criteria: to provide examples of particular approaches to financial assistance (simple offers, loans, inheritances, purchase of shares, of items, lottery tickets, etc..) and examples of the various stringent needs for which Don Bosco asked for money: to pay bills incurred for food staples, buy food and clothing,*

*pay off debt, pay off rents and taxes, pay exemption of the clergy from military service, decorate houses and churches, organise missionary expeditions, etc.. There were additional costs for new constructions, acquisition and adaptation of existing buildings.*

*Obviously Don Bosco's benefactors were in the thousands, of all social categories and their names will remain mostly unknown, as also the sums provided, often directly, into Don Bosco's hands.*

### **126. To Abbé [Fr] Antonio Rosmini**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 119-120.

Turin, 7 January 1851

Most Esteemed and Reverend Sir,

It is my duty to share with your reverend Lordship that at the time we were drawing up the plan for the new future building I saw a good opportunity to have another similar one but more advantageous.

The owner of the house I currently live in is ready to sell, due to private circumstances; and with regard to these negotiations, we could conclude a contract by which we would acquire a house which can accommodate twenty people and a fenced-off area of 95 tables [= 95 square metres approx]. The price is twenty eight thousand five hundred francs.

Note here that the site acquired for the new building, if we sold it without haste, would amount to no less than 30,000 francs: this way we would exchange an empty site with one of equal size, a building and a fence. The location of the two sites is very similar and of equal benefit in that they are the same distance from the city.

If your Lordship was presently willing to lend the sum which we had already agreed on at another time, it would be a great asset to the Oratory. The new purchase would be entirely settled and you could ensure money for a house and site free of any burden. In improvements to the building, any part could then be assigned at our pleasure for the above-mentioned Hospice.

Father Puecher, Fr Scesa, Fr Pauli<sup>23</sup> have full knowledge of the place, it being precisely where the Oratory of St Francis de Sales is, the hospice for abandoned youngsters etc. I only await an indication from you to conclude the contract.

In the hope that you wish to cooperate with this work that I believe is for the greater glory of God, I wish you every blessing in the Lord. It is my distinct honour to be,

Your esteemed and reverend Lordship's most humble servant,

Fr John Bosco<sup>24</sup>

### **127. To Count Clemente Solaro Della Margherita**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 212-213.

Turin, 5 January 1854

Your Excellency<sup>25</sup>,

Although I have never appealed to Your Excellency for help, nevertheless the role you play in many works of charity and the serious need I find myself in gives me hope that you will kindly read what I am about to explain.

The increasing costs of foodstuffs, the large number of abandoned and destitute youth, the decrease in the many donations that private individuals used to give me but are no longer able to, has put me into such need that I do not know a way out. Without calculating all the other expenses, just the bill from the baker for this quarter amounts to more than 1,600 francs, and I do not yet know where I can find even a penny of that. But we need to eat, and

<sup>23</sup> We are speaking of three Rosminian Fathers.

<sup>24</sup> The Rosminians accepted the proposal and offered 20,000 lire of the 28,550 which Pinardi had asked for, for the sale of the "house with hayloft, yard and part of the garden" to the tontine [a kind of group insurance plan] society made up of Don Bosco, Fr Borel, Fr Cafasso and Fr Robert Murialdo: see no. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Clemente Solaro della Margherita (1792-1869), Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1835 to 1847, a member of the ultraconservative party, supporter of the absolute monarchy, was friendly with Cottolengo and Fr Cafasso.

if I deny a loaf of bread to these boys who are at risk and are a risk to others, I expose them to great peril for soul and body.

In this exceptional case I have deemed it appropriate to recommend myself to Your Excellency to see if you could lend me the help that your charity sees fit and recommend me also to other charitable individuals whom you would prudently consider likely to help this work of charity. It is not a case of helping one particular individual but of providing a loaf of bread for young people whose hunger puts them at the even greater risk of losing their morality and their religion.

Convinced that you will take these calamitous circumstances of mine into kind consideration, I assure you that I will always keep you gratefully in mind. Wishing you and your respectable family every blessing in the Lord, I have the greatest honour of being,

Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

P.S. 1. If in your charity you consider making a donation in this case, you could, if you so judge, give it to good Fr Cafasso.

2. You are also respectfully invited to a religious performance that will take place tomorrow at 1.30 in the Oratory of St Francis de Sales.

### **128. To Count Pio Galleani d'Agliano**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 262-263.

Turin, 31 July 1855

Distinguished and worthy Sir<sup>26</sup>,

On return from the Retreat at Sant'Ignazio, it is my duty to write to your distinguished and worthy Lordship to thank you.

<sup>26</sup> Count Pio Galleani d'Agliano (1816-1889), former member of the Turin City Council, and a great friend of Don Bosco; in the summer he would stay in Caraglio (Cuneo), where he had Don Bosco as a guest.

With true sentiments of gratitude I received a hundred and thirty francs for raffle tickets that were recommended to your charity. I have also received 105 kg. of *grissini* from the baker which will help give something to eat to our poor orphan boys living here at the oratory. I also thank you for kindly arranging for fifteen kilograms a month for the benefit of this house.

These outstanding works of charity will be precious pearls, which along with others will adorn the crown of glory that your Lordship, with the prudence of the serpent and simplicity of the dove is ensuring and preparing each day in Heaven.

Now I find I have a new need, but of another kind. I am working on an article for the *Catholic Readings*, and this means I will need to be away from Turin for some days taking care of that. A few times I thought of going to Caraglio and to your Lordship's house to be precise, but before doing so we need to ask permission of the owner! If you could give me a corner where I can rest, and take some books and exercise books, and something ad *refocillandam famem* I could leave here the morning of August 6 and return on the Saturday of the same week.

You will say to me—is there need to pay board? Heaven forbid! We can go halves in the stipend for my work. Meaning: if souls can draw some advantage from this booklet, I will yield half the profit to you for the hospitality you show me.

Meanwhile I pray with all my heart that you will accept this letter written perhaps a little over-confidently. Of course I will not fail to pray and get others to pray for you and your family. Full of respect and gratitude I have the great honour of being,

Your distinguished and worthy Lordship's most indebted servant

Fr John Bosco

**129. Circular to Benefactors**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 392-393.

Turin, the... of... 1860

Distinguished Sir,

The keen desire to provide for the ever-increasing moral needs of youth, the great number of young people asking to be taken into this house known as the *Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, make it painful for me to daily have to refuse poor boys, who left to themselves, leave us fearing they have a sad future ahead.

The current building, especially since we set up workshops inside the house, does not allow for an increase in number, nor do I have the means for extending it. So I have decided on a plan which I believe could please your Lordship and at the same time be useful for collecting the funds needed for a place suitable for accepting a greater number of boys than at present.

It would be a case of taking up a certain number of shares of 500 francs payable as follows: over the next two months of

August and September	200	francs
In January 1861, another	200	francs
In July the same year 1861	100	francs
	<hr/>	
	500	

Each shareholder however would acquire the right to send a boy to this house for study or a trade according to the individual's attitudes and interests. (See the conditions further down).

This way Your Lordship would be helping with two works of charity, enlarging a home for poor boys and benefiting one young man who he deems worthy of such a favour. In addition to being rewarded by God, you will also have someone in the house here who will bless the hand that helped him, thus removing him from danger and setting him on the path that leads to good.

If you are pleased with this idea and you would like to take part, I express my heartfelt gratitude from this moment, and I would ask you to let me know as soon as possible so I know how to proceed. I also humbly ask you to let the contents of this letter be known to people who you believe would like to take part in this work of public charity.

If the opposite should be the case I simply ask you to forgive me for the bother I have caused you. Please accept my wish that Heaven may bless you. Full of respect I am,

Your Lordship's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **130. To Marchioness Maria Fassati**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 625.

Turin, 22 December 1863

Worthy Marchioness<sup>27</sup>,

I am passing on a ticket for Emanuele asking you to enclose it with a letter if perchance you are writing to him.

I received the package from Countess Callori and I thank you for it. Yesterday morning I began the novena of masses and I will also get the boys to pray for this spiritual need.

Marchioness, we are in difficult straits these days. You had already told me of some possible financial help. If possible I will pass by this evening and whether you call it board or a donation for us it is always charity gratefully received to pay for the bread our poor boys consume.

May God bless you and all your family. Believe me, I am

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

<sup>27</sup> Maria Fassati, nee de Maistre (1824-1905), former lady in waiting of Queen Maria Adelaide along with Countess Carlotta Callori (see no. 136), married Marquis Domenico Fassati (1804-1878). Great benefactors of Don Bosco, they had three children including Emanuele and Azelia.

### 131. To Baron Feliciano Ricci Des Ferres

Critical ed. in E (m) II, p. 740.

Turin, 15 March 1864

My dear Baron<sup>28</sup>,

I wanted to make a trip to Cuneo but I delayed, to check on the result of dealings with Mr Toselli.

However since he himself wrote to you and you will have already been able to discuss things, I will refrain from treating of this at length. Instead I prefer to speak to you about the continuation of his charitable efforts. This good Christian would be ready to bequeath or immediately give us twenty *giornate* [a 'giornata' is equivalent to about 3.8 square metres or the amount an ox can plough in a day] of land adjoining the other land he intends to give for Cuneo, and he would give it on behalf of this oratory, keeping for himself only what it brings in during his lifetime with some onus to be completed at the moment it no longer bears fruit. To the land he would also add a part of the building sufficient to make up a farmstead.

I need you, Baron, to help me make use of this donation. Would there be someone who would buy these twenty 'giornate' of land at his price? Could we not join it with the ten he would give for the infant school and make it all one farmstead? Would it not also be of some convenience for you, Baron?

These are the matters I wanted to take up personally when I went there but a minor indisposition has prevented me. Here we are dealing with someone who wants to buy, ensure his money for the land, while the work would serve to sustain expenses in this house and also set up the planned infant school.

Forgive me for bothering you, and I wish you, the Baroness and all your family every blessing from Heaven. I recommend myself and my boys to the

<sup>28</sup> Feliciano Ricci des Ferres (1816-1893), from Cuneo, friend and benefactor of Don Bosco. His son Carlo (1847-1925) married the daughter of the Marquis and Marchioness Fassati, Azelia in 1871 (1846-1901).



charity of your holy prayers and I have the pleasure of declaring gratefully that I am,

Your Lordship's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco <sup>29</sup>

### **132. To Chev. Zaverio Provana Di Collegno**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 146-147.

Turin, 5 July 1865

Dear Sir<sup>30</sup>,

Poor Don Bosco is in difficulties for going ahead with the church of Mary Help of Christians, so I am asking you if you would like to pay for a piece of it. The pieces would be:

1. Roof tiles.
2. The slats for the tiles.
3. The lintels supporting the slats.
4. The beams supporting the lintels.

Each of these lots (don't take fright) amounts to about four thousand francs, perhaps a few hundred less.

What do you say in your heart? I believe that Our Blessed lady will compensate you and prepare you and your dear Emanuele and Luigi a beautiful dwelling in Heaven because you are helping to build her house on earth.

<sup>29</sup> The Baron was ready to immediately offer 5,000 lire, but Don Bosco asked him for only 2,000 in May, as he had in the meantime received "some charitable help" and some other sums of money. He envisaged being able to pay the loan within a few months, thanks to the sale of some small real estate already about to be finalised. The Count set a preferred annual deadline (July 1865), even though he asked Don Bosco to repay the loan two months in advance.

<sup>30</sup> Francesco Zaverio Provana di Collegno (1826-1900), son of Senator Luigi (1786-1861), a close friend of Don Bosco. Widower since 1855, he had two children, Emanuele and Luigi.

Such an amount would not need to be paid immediately but during the year. I say with pleasure that the work has already reached the ceiling of the chapels and the middle of August I hope we will be at the roof stage.

I put the question, and I know the charity of your heart. Therefore do what you can and I will be ever content. At any rate I shall not fail to invoke the blessings of heaven upon you and your growing children, and I wish you every blessing.

I recommend myself and my poor boys to the charity of your prayers. I have the honour of declaring myself with great respect to be,

Your Lordship's most affectionate servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **133. To Countess Carlotta Callori**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 221-222.

Turin, 31 March 1866

Worthy Countess<sup>31</sup>,

Alleluia. It is Easter, so we are thinking of paying our debts. I have two thousand francs with your husband the Count. If he could give some thought to the other two, I will let him have them before the end of the week, otherwise I can use them up till June. If you have some place where I could bring them, good, and of course I can make a trip to Casale.

It was no longer possible for me to work on the booklet on the Blessed Sacrament<sup>32</sup>; but I believe the printing is being well looked after. The bishop

<sup>31</sup> Carlotta Callori (1827-1914), nee Sambuy, wife of Count Federico Callori di Vignale (1814-1890), member of the sub-Alpine parliament. Great benefactors of Don Bosco up until the 1850s, they are immortalised in a painting in the church of St Francis de Sales at Valdocco.

<sup>32</sup> *Pratiche devote per l'adriazione del SS. Sacramento*. Torino, Tipog. dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales 1866, 126 p.

of Mondovì<sup>33</sup> sent me the manuscript and in the coming week we will begin setting up the typeface. It is a little bit long, but it will be acceptable.

Alleluia, Countess, and enjoy these festive days. May God bless you abundantly, your pious husband and all your respectable family.

I forgot something: the statue of Our Lady to place on the cupola of the new church is going to cost much more than I had expected. It has to be four metres high so of very solid copper and needing a lot of careful work. It will cost twelve thousand francs; one gentleman is offering eight thousand. I do not intend to bind you to providing the remainder unless this Mother has rained down gold coins [*marenghini*] into your account<sup>34</sup>.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always, and save us from approaching peril.

With heartfelt gratitude, I am,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### 134. To Countess Enrichetta Bosco Riccardi

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 240-241.

Turin, 16 May 1866

Worthy Countess<sup>35</sup>,

I am unable to come and visit your worthy self as I would like to, but I will come in the person of Jesus Christ hidden amidst the rags I am recommending

<sup>33</sup> Arch. Giovanni Tommaso Ghilardi (1800-1873), a Dominican, bishop of Mondovì from 1842 till his death. In his rapport with Don Bosco he favoured pontifical approval of the Congregation, even though he did not have (or want) a house in his diocese.

<sup>34</sup> The Countess obviously had her own bank account separate from her husband's.

<sup>35</sup> Enrichetta Bosco di Ruffino, nee Riccardi (1896-1874), used go to Fr Cafasso for confession. In 1845 he asked her to involve her husband, one of the two Mayors of Turin, in appointing Don Bosco as chaplain to the cemetery of St Peter in Chains.

to you so that in your charity you can mend them. It is wretched stuff in earthly terms but I hope it will be a treasure for eternity.

May God bless you and your efforts and all your family. I am honoured and with much respect I am,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

**135. To the President of the Oblate Sisters,  
Mother Maria Maddalena Galeffi**

Critical ed. in E(m) III, p. 52.

Rome, 17 February 1869

Worthy Mother President<sup>36</sup>,

In times past you often came to the charitable aid of the church and the poor boys living in Turin. Now it is not the ones in Turin but in Rome I am recommending.

With the approval of the Holy Father I would like to start a small home similar to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, in Rome. San Caio also known as the Barberine with its attached building would be very appropriate. It is a nice area and would be convenient for boys living between this site and Trinità dei Monti to come for catechetical instruction and also to have a school there.

The difficulty lies only in the cost of the acquisition which comes to nine thousand four hundred *scudi*.

I already have some offerings, but I need you, out of love for the Lord and the Blessed Virgin to help me, between your charitable Sisters and others you are in good rapport with.

The other difficulty is the haste with which we need to finalise the contract, because others are about to begin negotiations should ours be interrupted.

<sup>36</sup> Maria Maddalena Galeffi (1810-1876), admirer and benefactor of Don Bosco, was the long-serving superior ("president") of the Oblate Sisters at the Oratory at Tor de' Specchi in Rome.

Mrs Merolli has shown herself willing to help us, and we need to encourage other pious individuals to join her; she will speak with you and you could encourage her and promise her God's blessing and that of the poor boys she will save thanks to her charity. They always pray for God to bless their benefactors<sup>37</sup>.

God bless you and all those who work in a particular way to benefit abandoned children, and recommending myself to the charity of your holy prayers I have the honour of most gratefully being,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### 136. To Countess Virginia Cambray Digny

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 101-102.

[Turin], 25 June 1869

Worthy Countess<sup>38</sup>,

After ten days of a slight illness today I can take up matters once more and the first thing is to write to your worthy self.

I received the gift of 20 francs for the *Association of Mary*<sup>39</sup> and I am very happy to enrol yourself and your daughter. Thus although we are far away from one another we will always be present in our prayers before the Lord.

Archbishop Gastaldi received an advance of 4,000 francs which he considers to be very timely. He had already decided to close the seminary but now he can continue. He thanks you with all his heart and assures you of his prayers on your behalf.

<sup>37</sup> This effort to find a place in Rome also failed; Don Bosco had to wait until the 1880s before he could have a house in the city.

<sup>38</sup> Virginia Cambray Digny (1822-1909), nee Tolomei Biffi, wife of Count Luigi Guglielmo (1820-1906), Senator, Mayor of Florence, Minister for Agriculture, Industry and Commerce (1867), then Minister for Finance (1867-1869).

<sup>39</sup> See no. 43.

From what you have given me to understand I can hope for some help from your husband which would nearly cover the tax I have to pay for flour. There is an increase of around ten thousand francs for the thousand two hundred and fifty boys I need to provide for. We have no more resources, charity has decreased, and we have no income of any kind. See whether it is possible to send me some substantial help. This is something that only you are capable of doing at the moment.

Note that as well as the above-mentioned increase there is a tax of more than two thousand francs that I have to pay for the buildings housing our poor boys.

Have patience and do everything for love of the Lord. I will pray and I will get them to pray so much for you and your family.

May God bless you and your efforts. Pray for me too. With much gratitude, I am Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **137. To Countess Virginia Cambray Digny**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 121-122.

[Turin], 6 August 1869

Worthy Countess,

Thank you for your constant concern on our behalf. You tell me that your contribution is little, but in view of the serious needs we are surrounded by it is worth much. My thanks also to the Count.

In the past [years] sometimes I was exempted from the tax on the building at our establishment where our poor boys stay. If you think it appropriate could you ask someone if it would be convenient to pass on another request.

The bishop of the house<sup>40</sup>, a holy and zealous man who is also very much in need, wrote me the letter that I am including. He does not know I am

<sup>40</sup> Maybe he meant the Archbishop of Turin Alessandro Riccardi di Netro.

writing to you so if for some prudent reason you do not want to be involved, things would remain between us alone. I note that the bishop does so much in his diocese and his need is real.

I received the photographs of Our Lady of Sorrows commemorating the death of your beloved son. I have entrusted them with pious people who assure me of special prayers for the soul of the deceased.

Lady Countess, you are so charitable to us and we thank you with all our heart. I assure you that especially at the Sacrifice of the holy Mass I will not fail every morning to include a special memento in the Mass.

May God bless you and all your family and especially your husband that amidst all your difficult affairs you may walk the way of salvation.

Just now something has come to mind. Could you not in some way speak of the Council and see that our Government be represented at least indirectly if not directly? If the government absolutely wants to remain apart from this, it would be setting itself on a very dangerous path. Past Sovereigns have known the reasons, and also present ones, even though they might not be orthodox, try to be favoured by the serious decisions these ecumenical councils usually make.

Thank you for the regards from Chev. Oreglia, and forgive the confidence with which I write. Please accept my profound gratitude. I am,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **138. To Senator Giuseppe Cataldi**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 329-330.

[Turin], 1 May 1871

My good Baron<sup>41</sup>,

<sup>41</sup> Giuseppe Cataldi (1809-1876), from Genoa, businessman and financier. In 1870 he had made a villa at Genoa-Marassi available to Don Bosco to temporarily house a group of young working boys and their small workshop.

The kindness which you have shown me on a number of occasions gives me hope that you will patiently hear out what I am about to explain.

Last year we opened a College at Alassio where given the unexpected cost of the place, its setting up and renovation, we underwent very serious expenses. According to our agreement, the local Council was to help us with a grant of 10,000 francs, but since it could not collect sufficient taxes, despite every good will it left us to manage these expenses on our own.

I now need to find a benevolent individual who could lend me the corresponding sum and relieve me of two thousand a year and then the entire amount in five years: that was the obligation the Alassio Council took on. The college in this city, and ones in Lanzo, Cherasco, Borgo San Martino are all guaranteed by the Turin City Council.

If you can help me in these circumstances and give me this amount you will be effectively contributing to so many boys. They will owe you their civil employment, their religious vocation for some, and some perhaps will even owe the salvation of their souls to you.

Somebody was already supposed to speak of this matter. I don't know what was done. Things are as I have explained them. As you can see I am writing with every confidence, but do as you can and as the Lord inspires you<sup>42</sup>.

Whatever you do, I will never fail now and always to pray for you and all your family and especially for that family that must embrace a new state. I ask Heaven to give you steady health, long years of happy life and the precious gift of persevering in doing good. *Amen*.

I also recommend myself and our providential work to the charity of your holy prayers and I am most gratefully,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

<sup>42</sup> Once he knew the Senator was agreeable, on May 23, Don Bosco reduced his request by half. In 1872 he was already able to give back half of the loan. A few months later on June 11, 1872 he had to deal with a huge expense (37,000 lire) for the Institute at Sampierdarena, Genoa. Don Bosco went back to his generous benefactor once more. He did similarly again in January 1876.



### **139. To Mrs Lucini**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 347-348.

Turin, 12 July 1871

My good lady<sup>43</sup>,

The kindness and charity I observed during your short stay in Piedmont and in our house encourages me to recommend myself to your help in an exceptional need.

We have 14 clerics affected by this recent legislation and they can seek release only until 31st of this month, July. After that they all join the army, no alternative<sup>44</sup>.

In my keen desire to keep these ministers of Jesus Christ for the Church I am appealing to your charity. The cost for each is L. 3,200 but I will accept with greatest gratitude whatever offering you are pleased to give. You will have the consolation of having cooperated in a very holy enterprise, while the clerics, once ordained priests, will gain souls for God and you, besides having the merit will also have people who will pray for you every day of your life.

Please greet Fr Cristoforo Fumagalli, Fr Paolo Colombo, Fr Giovanni Legnani for me, and your daughters Emilia, Carolina, Vittoria.

May God bless and keep you for many years of happy life and give you the precious gift of perseverance in doing good.

Pray for me. With gratitude, I am,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

<sup>43</sup> A benefactor from Bergamo, no further identification.

<sup>44</sup> According to the recent requirements of the law on military service, clerics can be exempted by paying the huge sum of 3,200 lire (about 14,000 euro today).

### 140. Circular for a small Raffle

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 35-37.

[Turin, January-February 1873]

Worthy Sir,

The exceptional year we are going through also forces me to appeal for the first time to exceptional means.

The increase in the price of all kinds of food staples, the notable decrease in alms from many benefactors whose income has decreased, have put me in very straitened circumstances and in serious difficulties in providing bread and clothing for the boys who number more than 800 and live at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. So we thought up the idea of asking for small donations of 10 francs, so that by multiplying the number of benefactors we could more easily cater for our need, as you will note from the accompanying tickets.

I am encouraged to appeal to the charity of N.... asking you to keep them for yourself or distribute them to particular people you know. One good person to encourage other donors has offered a valuable painting of Our Lady of Foligno(1); another good person offers thirty prizes of 100 francs each to be won in the draw that will be made after next March. All in all there are 31 prizes the first being the above-mentioned painting.

This work I am proposing is aimed at clothing the naked and giving bread to the hungry poor, so it is worthy of special gratitude before men and certainly has great merit before God.

For my part I will not fail to add my poor prayers to those of my poor boys to call down Heaven's blessings on you and all our donors, so they may be assured of the promise made by Our Saviour when he said: you will receive a hundredfold in this life and an eternal reward in the next.

With profound gratitude I have the honour of being,

Your most indebted servant,

Father John Bosco

(1) The *Madonna di Foligno o della pietà* is a work by the famous Raffaele Sanzio, born in Urbino in 1483 and died in Rome at only 37 years of age in 1520. This painting is a most expressive and vibrant one to the Holy Virgin in the clouds surrounded by a host of angels. Further down are St John, St Francis of Assisi, St Jerome, and in the centre a beautiful child playing with his heavenly Mother's mantle. The original of this marvellous work is in the Vatican Gallery. It has become a little discoloured over time. The best is the one being offered as first prize; an art expert says it is worth no less than 4,000 francs.

The poor boys at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales along with the undersigned, are appealing for the sale of these tickets.

*advice for those distributing them*

The one distributing them is asked:

1. To note the name and address of people given tickets so they can in time be notified of the numbers which have won prizes.

2. Before the end of March, remaining tickets, the charitable distributor does not wish to keep for himself, should be returned to the undersigned by whatever means causes less bother.

3. If instead of money someone wants to offer food, cloth, clothing or similar things, these will also be accepted with much gratitude, no matter how worn or used they may be.

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### 141. To Count Francesco Viancino di Viancino

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 160-161.

[Lanzo], 20 September[1873]

Dear Count<sup>45</sup>,

Now that the financial matter between Prussia and France is settled, I now have to exit from a battle more hotly contested than the one at Sedan<sup>46</sup>. Mr Coriasco, proprietor of the small house that separates the Oratory from the church of Mary Help of Christians, is finally ready to set up terms of sale.

One charitable person has helped me and I can provide fifteen thousand francs, also needed and which I deposited in the Credit Union.

Meanwhile to complete arrangements with the Protestant Morglia and get him to give a strip of land over for *public use* we have to send a declaration to the Council of State of what we are able to pay for the strip, and back that declaration with the fifteen thousand francs deposited in the above-mentioned Credit Union.

This means that *hic et nunc* we cannot use them.

At that moment I recalled what you once told me about the money deposited in the Credit Union as an offering for the hoped for church of St Aloysius or St John. So could you give me the sum of five thousand francs so I could scrape together what is needed for the Coriasco house? Free of the money above, I could use an equivalent amount for the church.

If you accept this proposal you will be worthy in the sight of Our Lady and her adopted son St John, both of whom are good payers. I am at Lanzo for the Retreat and will be in Turin on Saturday.

<sup>45</sup> Francesco Viancino di Viancino (1821-1904), leader amongst the Catholic nobility in Turin, president of the regional committee for the work of the Congresses.

<sup>46</sup> French-German battle in 1870.

I have not forgotten to pray for you while here and for Countess Luigia. I wish you both health and grace and recommend myself to your prayers. With gratitude, I am,

Your Lordship's most affectionate servant,

Fr John Bosco

### 142. To Fr Joseph Ronchail

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 98-100.

[Turin, after 22 March 1876]

Dear Fr Ronchail<sup>47</sup>,

Now that we have began, we have to carry things through to the end and resolve the problems that our *patronage de St. Pierre* are presenting us with. So if our good notary Sajetto can find 60 thousand francs worth of borrowings, amongst all the rest we can find 30 thousand which need to be paid in cash for the Gautier house. So:

1. Tell lawyer Michel and Baron Héraud to look for *ubique terrarum* to add something to something, meaning coins to coins, taking special care to cultivate Marchioness Villeneuve, who lives underneath the Baron, Count Aspromonte and all those who can help us in allotting charity from the Carnival.

Since the Mayor has often said he would take our side both as a citizen and head of the Council, which would also be looking for a contribution, it would be good to remind him to ask for a contribution to the 30 thousand that has to be paid in cash immediately for a work that is certainly most worthy of attention - the abandoned children in Nice.

<sup>47</sup> Fr Joseph Ronchail (1850-1898), Piedmontese, director of the house at Nice opened in 1875, was in charge of financial negotiations with local authorities and those promoting the purchase of a new location for the *Patronage Saint Pierre*.

Who knows if Mr Dellepiane might not come to our aid?

2. Working with Mr Pirone, Canon Daideri, and also Canon Bres to make some efforts in this exceptional case.

Tell Mr Audoli to use all his patience, charity and also his purse. Perhaps Fr Giordano could also help us. The bishop will still add something, but I will write to him at the appropriate time.

3. Meanwhile see that things go well, get an agreement, establish around two months to complete things. At the end of the month I am going to Rome and I will do what I can from there.

A fortnight before the date fixed for the notary deed write to me and tell me what is still lacking and I will find a way to send it to you, even at the cost of borrowing in Turin.

God wants this work and we cannot refuse without going against his holy will, and if we cooperate we will be sure of a good result. But it needs to be said that the devil will stick his tail in and we have to all act in agreement to cut it off.

It would also be good to tell the bishop about this matter but without making any demand of him.

Greet the above-mentioned gentlemen and let us pray in faith—Divine help will not fail us.

May God bless everyone. I am, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

### 143. Count Carlo Giriodi

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 479-480.

Vignale, 21 October 1877

Dear Chev. Carlo<sup>48</sup>,

In order not to go bankrupt I have fled Turin and I see that my only hope for salvation is the castle at Costigliole<sup>49</sup>.

So could you think about how to fix or better how to provide for my situation, which you can make your situation, since you did say that if I wanted something, just to come to you. That's right isn't it?

God willing I hope to be in Saluzzo on Thursday next at 5 in the afternoon, where I hope there will be an *omnibus* as far as your house.

There probably will be a teacher for the priest but there is something to adjust or better we need an understanding between you, the parish priest and myself and that will smooth things.

May God be good to you and all your family and pray for this poor individual who will always be in Jesus Christ,

A humble servant and friend,

Fr John Bosco

<sup>48</sup> Count Carlo Giriodi (1805-1878), from Turin, former President of the St Vincent de Paul Conference in Turin which many of Don Bosco's benefactors belonged to, such as Count Cays, Count Collegno, Marquis Fassati.

<sup>49</sup> Count's summer residence.

### 144. To Miss Clara Louvet

ASC A1870232 *Copie simplici*; ed. in E IV, p. 466.

Turin, 20 décembre 1884

Charitable Mademoiselle<sup>50</sup>,

Pendant que je vous écrivais ma lettre d'augure de bonnes fêtes, vous me prévenez avec votre charitable offrande de 300 francs.

Que Dieu récompense largement vos prières, vos augures, votre charité. Afin de témoigner notre reconnaissance nous ferons bien des prières à votre intention dans cette neuvaine; nos enfants feront aussi des prières, des communions, et moi j'offrirai le sacrifice de la sainte messe le jour de Noël.

Ma santé s'est beaucoup améliorée, mais je ne suis pas sûr de faire une promenade dans le printemps jusqu'à Lille. Nous verrons.

Que la crise agricole ne vous donne pas de la peine. Si les revenus diminuent vous diminuerez les bonnes oeuvres de charité, ou mieux vous les augmenterez, vous consommerez les capitaux, vous vous ferez pauvre comme Job et alors vous serez sainte comme Sainte Thérèse.

Mais non jamais. Dieu nous assure le *centuple sur la terre; donc donnez et on vous donnera!* Avec les fermiers soyez généreuse et patiente. Dieu est tout-puissant. Dieu est votre Père, Dieu vous fournira tout ce qui est nécessaire pour vous et pour eux.

Rélativement à la somme d'argent pour la famille de votre père, dans la crise actuelle c'est difficile de fixer. Je dirais de laisser par testament la somme de 30.000 francs. Vous ferez seulement une note testamentaire. Mais j'espère que le Bon Dieu permettra de nous parler personnellement, de nous entendre et de destiner mieux les choses.

<sup>50</sup> Clara Louvet (1832-1912) from Aire-sur-la Lys (France, Passo di Calais Department) generous benefactor, one of the most active collectors of offerings for the church and hospice of the Sacred Heart in Rome. She got to know Don Bosco in Nice in 1882 and entrusted herself to him for spiritual direction.



Je vous prie de dire à monsieur l'Abbé Engrand que je ne l'oublie pas et que toute la maison priera pour lui, et d'une manière toute spéciale pour vous, pour vos parents, vos amis, vos affaires pour le temps et l'éternité.

Veillez bien prier pour votre pauvre Don Bosco qui vous sera à jamais en Notre Seigneur,

Humble serviteur,

Abbé J. Bosco

*(Translation)*

My good and charitable lady,

While I was writing my letter of best wishes for these festive days, you beat me with your charitable offering of 300 francs.

May God richly reward your prayers, greetings and charity. To demonstrate our gratitude, we will pray for your intentions during this novena, our boys too will pray, offer their communions and I will offer my Mass on Christmas Day.

My health has much improved, but I am not sure I will make a trip in spring as far as Lille. Let us see.

I hope the agricultural crisis is not causing you difficulty. If the income lessens you will lessen your good works of charity, or better, you will increase them, consume capital, make yourself as poor as Job and then you will be holy like St Teresa.

Never. God will ensure a hundredfold on this earth so give and it will be given to you!

Be generous and patient with the farmers. God is omnipotent. God is our Father, God will provide everything needed for you and for them.

In reference to the sum of money for your father's family, in the current crisis it is difficult to establish. I would like to say, leave a sum of 30,000 francs as a testament. Make only a testamentary note. But I hope the good God will

allow us to speak personally, come to an understanding and direct things to the best.

Please tell Fr Engrand that I have not forgotten him and that all the house prays for him, and in a very special manner for you, your parents, friends, and for your temporal and eternal affairs.

Pray for poor Don Bosco who will always be, in Our Lord,

Your humble servant,

Fr J. Bosco

### **145. To Count Louis Antoine Colle**

ASC A1700842, Orig. Aut.; ed. in E IV, pp. 510-511.

Turin, 29 décembre 1884

Mon cher et charitable comte<sup>51</sup>,

Je voudrais vous faire une visite et personnellement vous faire bien des actions de grâces. Ne pouvant faire la chose avec des paroles, je désire, que par lettre je finisse l'année en vous écrivant, ô charitable monsieur le comte et madame la comtesse Colle.

Dieu soit béni et remercié, qui nous a conservés en bonne santé, et, je l'espère, aussi dans sa grâce.

Parmi les autres bonnes oeuvres vous avez payées pour don Perrot les dettes de la Navarre; et le bon Dieu ne manquera pas de vous récompenser largement, et nos pauvres orphelins prieront sans cesse à votre intention: heureux don Perrot qui a des payeurs de telle façon.

Mais pourquoi ne pouvons-nous pas trouver des bienfaiteurs semblables en Italie?

<sup>51</sup> Count Fleury Louis Antoine (1822-1888) from Toulon was the most munificent benefactor for the church of the Sacred Heart in Rome and the most generous amongst Don Bosco's benefactors for his work. By his wife Maria Sofia Buchet he had one son who died in 1881 at just 17 years of age. Don Bosco wrote him more than seventy letters.

Si telle payeur existe en Italie, qu'il vienne payer soixante et quinze mille frs. que D. Rua devra payer pour nos missionnaires d'Amérique, une autre somme presque semblable pour le trousseau, pour le voyage de ceux qui partiront au plus tôt?

Pourquoi ne vient-il pas payer les dettes de nos maisons de Turin, et de l'église et hospice de Rome?

La raison est claire. En France et en Italie il y a un seul monsieur le comte Colle; et nous bénissons mille fois le bon Dieu que ce monsieur et madame la comtesse Colle vivent pour nous aider, nous appuyer, nous soutenir dans nos difficultés.

Que Dieu vous conserve tous les deux bien longtemps en bonne santé, et vous donne la grâce de passer encore d'autres et bien d'autres années heureuses comme récompense de vos charités sur la terre, et enfin dans l'autre vie le vrai prix, le grand prix dans le séjour du paradis, où, j'ai pleine confiance, que nous pourrons nous trouver avec Jésus, Marie, notre cher Louis, à louer Dieu, à parler de Dieu éternellement.

Jeudi, premier de l'année 1885. Dans toutes nos maisons, on prie, on fera des communions pour vous.

Veillez aussi recommander votre pauvre à Dieu

Obligé humble serviteur

Abbé J. Bosco

*(Translation)*

My dear and charitable Count,

I would like to pay you a visit and thank you personally so much. Not being able to do so in words, I want to do so by letter as the year concludes, and write to you, dear Count and Countess Colle.

May God be praised and thanked for keeping you in good health, and I hope also in his grace.

Amongst other works, you paid Fr Perrot's debts at Navarre<sup>52</sup>. The good God will not fail to richly reward you, and our poor orphans will pray constantly for your intentions: lucky Fr Perrot who has such people to pay for him.

Why can't we find similar benefactors in Italy?

Why isn't there someone like this in Italy who would pay the 75 thousand francs that Fr Rua has to pay for our missionaries to America, another similar sum for the equipment for the voyage for those leaving as soon as possible?

Who would pay the debts of our house in Turin, and the church and hospice in Rome?

The reason is clear. In France and Italy there is only one Count Colle and we thank the good God a thousand times over that Mr and Mrs Colle are alive to help us, support us, sustain us in our difficulties.

May God keep you both in good health for many more years, and give you the grace to spend even more of the other good and happy years as a reward for your charity on earth, and then in the next life the real prize, the grand prize of being in paradise, where I have full confidence that we will find ourselves with Jesus, Mary, our dear Louis, to praise God, to speak of God eternally.

Thursday, first day of the year 1885. We will pray for you, make our communions for you in all our houses.

And please, recommend to God this poor,  
humble and indebted servant,

Fr J. Bosco

<sup>52</sup> Fr Pietro Perrot (1853-1928), first director of the house at Navarre.

### 146. Circular to Benefactors

ASC A1780705 *Lettere autografe*; ed. in E IV, pp. 363-364.

Turin, 1 November 1886<sup>53</sup>

Worthy Sir,

I received with genuine gratitude the generous offer that your Lordship in his great charity deigned to give for our missionaries who are going to work to win over the savages of America to the Gospel, especially in Patagonia.

Besides their sincere and dutiful thanks they pray in a special way for you and your families. Encouraged by your moral and material help, they will redouble their zeal, and if necessary, willingly give their lives to cooperate in the salvation of souls, spread the kingdom of Jesus Christ and bring religion and civilisation to the peoples and nations who know of neither of these things.

May God bless you all, richly reward your charity and make you happy now and happier still in eternal bliss.

I rejoice in being able to say that I am, in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

<sup>53</sup> The letter, printed in zincotype (pre-daguerrotype), was used many times (changing the date), until Don Bosco's death. A copy in French is also preserved.



PART TWO

**WRITINGS AND TESTIMONIES  
OF DON BOSCO  
ON EDUCATION AND SCHOOLING**

*by*

José Manuel PRELLEZO





## INTRODUCTION

*Don Bosco the priest, educator and “formidable man of action”, while not being a “pedagogue” in the rigorous or technical sense of the word, is the author of pedagogical writings, founder of Institutes intended for the education of youth and a promoter of fine educational initiatives which drew and still draw the attention today of educators and scholars of educational issues, not only from an historical perspective.*

*“Don Bosco the educator” is perhaps a more relevant, attractive and popular figure than “Don Bosco the writer”. In any case since his bibliographical and publishing production is somewhat conspicuous<sup>1</sup>, one could say that “there is nothing he wrote that does not have some relationship with youth and popular education, whatever its nature: historical, apologetic, didactic, catechetical, religious, hagiographical, biographical, normative.”<sup>2</sup>*

*In this second part of the volume—Writings and testimonies of Don Bosco on education and schooling—we have included, however, only documents which directly develop topics regarding education or specific matters strictly tied up with education or schooling, even if to different extents. In general these are writings which Don Bosco wrote or signed. In some cases, instead, we have oral accounts handed down by authoritative testimonies which Don Bosco acknowledged or adopted as his own work. To prepare and draw up other documents he could count on editorial work and more, from some of his closest and most trusted disciples and collaborators.*

*In the presentation which introduces each item, or group of items which share similar structure and themes, there is reference made to distinct features or peculiarities to help with reading, understanding and evaluation.*

<sup>1</sup> Pietro STELLA, *Gli scritti a stampa di San Giovanni Bosco*. Rome, LAS 1977; Saverio GIANOTTI (edited by), *Bibliografia generale di don Bosco*. Vol. I: *Bibliografia italiana 1844-1992*. Rome, LAS 1995, pp. 11-99.

<sup>2</sup> Pietro BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere. Il sistema educativo di don Bosco*. Rome, LAS 1999, p. 134; ID., *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*. Second Volume. Third edition corrected and revised. Rome, LAS 2009, pp. 243-279 (Don Bosco “Forgiatore di comunità religiose votate all’educazione giovanile”).

*Don Bosco did not leave a systematic treatise on pedagogy nor a complete explanation of his thinking on education and his educational or social institutions. In some of his more personal essays there is often a mixture of distinct themes and approaches. This is often mentioned in critical studies and popular literature. However we should also mention another factor which is in keeping with the criteria which have guided the organisation of all the documents collected in this current volume.*

*In this second part the reader will not find all writings where Don Bosco mentions education, even significantly, or offers broader reflection on the matter. To avoid unnecessary repetition some documents—especially personal letters to young people or to educators or teachers with a biographical or autobiographical feel to them—have been placed, for example, in the first or third part of the volume, bearing in mind that Don Bosco would pay special attention to historical matters and topics of a religious or spiritual nature, along with considerations of a pedagogical nature.*

*Considering the different genres of documents contained here and their varying characteristics, and at the same time seeking to make them easier to consult, this second part is broken into three sections: 1. Narrative documents, 2. Pedagogical insights, reflections and ideas, 3. Regulations and programmes. Their content shows a certain homogeneity. Each of these three sections opens with a brief presentation specifying the kind of documents, a mention of the guidelines used in presenting them and any points or themes that stand out.*

## SECTION ONE

# NARRATIVE DOCUMENTS

### Presentation

*Fr Giulio Barberis—appointed by Don Bosco, in 1874, as the first pedagogy teacher for young Salesians—makes this authoritative judgement in his Appunti di pedagogia sacra (Notes on sacred pedagogy) which he used in his classes: “Our great Father left us a mini-educational system partly in writing but most of it imprinted on the mind and hearts of those of us who had the fortune to be with him for many decades.”<sup>3</sup>*

*From this broadly documented statement the importance emerges of accounts and testimonies regarding Don Bosco’s educational practice, and especially our interest in the narrative documents where he displays his experience amongst young people in Turin’s suburbs and beyond. Given the particular nature of these writings, we thought it necessary—as already pointed out in the general introduction—to locate them in various sections of this volume. His historical sketches on the origin and development of Salesian work and the oratories have a particular place in the first part, for example: Historical Outline of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales (1854) and The Historical Outlines of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales (1862). In the fourth part of the volume instead the reader finds his various writings of a biographical and autobiographical nature. Amongst these, for example, we have the well-known and appreciated Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales (1815-1855), published after the author’s death.*

*But we have placed “A curious contemporary episode” entitled The Sway of a Good Upbringing (1855) in this second part of the volume. This story has a*

<sup>3</sup> Giulio BARBERIS, *Appunti di pedagogia sacra. Esposti agli ascritti della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales dal sac. –*. [Torino], Litografia Salesiana 1897, p. 8. Giulio Barberis (1847-1927). Entered the Oratory at Valdocco when he was 13. He became a Salesian in 1864. He did his doctorate in theology at the University of Turin. Ordained priest in 1870. In 1874 he was appointed at the first novice master for the Salesian Society; cf. Mario FISSORE, *Il Vademecum di don Giulio Barberis. Spunti di indagine e sguardi d’insieme*, in RSS 31 (2012) 11; cf. DBE, Scritti, pp. 89-167 (“Documenti di pedagogia narrativa”).

*number of references to Peter's (the main character's) involvement in the religious, recreational and cultural activities at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. On some occasions Don Bosco adds that Peter "was a model for his companions."*

*Also in reference to educational method are the two testimonies regarding Don Bosco's conversation with Italian politician Urban Rattazzi (1854), and his encounter with Francis Bodrato (1864), an elementary school teacher.*

*These three documents of course, at different levels and from different perspectives, enlighten us on aspects and occasions that are not without significance in the early educational experiences of the Founder of Valdocco.*

## I. EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN THE SCHOOL AND FAMILY SETTING (1855)

*The “document that properly begins the representation of Don Bosco’s real experience as an educator is *The Sway of a Good Upbringing*. Here we find the Director of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales as catechist, counsellor and confidant of young Peter”, even if he “is in the shade and not fully defined.”<sup>4</sup>*

*Well-known and authoritative Salesian scholar, Pietro Stella, in the passage just transcribed, refers to the account published in the “Catholic Readings” in 1855<sup>5</sup>. It is precisely with this document, *The Sway of a Good Upbringing*, with its historical and biographical background, that we have decided to open this second part regarding Don Bosco’s educational experience.*

*An “exemplary child” called Peter, and “a model mother” are the main characters in the story. The work consists of a popular pedagogical story—“A curious contemporary episode” as the subtitle of the document puts it—which particularly reflects the narrator’s concerns given the social and political circumstances of his time where religion is increasingly less recognised as the essential basis for education and where traditional religious practices are being questioned more and more<sup>6</sup>.*

<sup>4</sup> Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Volume secondo. *Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità*. Seconda edizione riveduta dall’autore. Roma, LAS 1981, p. 446; cf. P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani ...*, I, pp. 553-555.

<sup>5</sup> Other editions of: *La forza della buona educazione. Narrazione contemporanea*. Roma, nella tipografia Forense 1860; *Pietro ossia La forza della buona educazione. Curioso episodio contemporaneo, pel Sac. Giovanni Bosco*. Torino, tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1885. There are no significant variations in the content of the 1860 edition; some stand out in the 1885 edition though: Don Bosco’s introduction, “A word to the reader”, is substituted by another six signed by an anonymous “Publisher”. They are addressed to the “Worker reader”, and say: “The author is D. Bosco, sincere friend of every worker whom you should get to know and love as a benefactor and father” (p. vi). The work was translated into French, German and Spanish: (Barcelona, Librería Salesiana 1951).

<sup>6</sup> Jacques SCHEPENS, “*La forza della buona educazione*”. *Etude d’un écrit de don Bosco*, in José Manuel PRELLEZO (ed.), *L’impegno dell’educare. Studi in onore di Pietro Braido* promoted by the Faculty of Education. Roma, LAS 1991, pp. 417-433.

*The importance of education [it is best understood as ‘upbringing’ in English, since Peter never did any formal schooling] in the family emerges in the circumstance mentioned in this story, “especially at a tender age.” The important pedagogical elements here are: duty, study, cheerfulness, piety.*

*Don Bosco notes in his introduction that he does not intend to offer the reader a completely original presentation: “This book,” he states “was modelled on one entitled: Un mari comme il y en a beaucoup, une femme comme il y en a peu, meaning: A husband like many others: a wife like few others.”<sup>7</sup> But Don Bosco goes on telling us “honestly ... that the facts recounted here really happened; I myself saw or heard almost all of them” and he adds: “Here we will see the sway that a good upbringing has on a child’s future; we will see a model mother, an exemplary child. A mother who amidst a thousand difficulties succeeds in giving her child the best upbringing, and leads a wayward husband back to the straight and narrow path. A child who responds to the maternal concerns of his affectionate mother ... and at the same time becomes the support of his family, a model for his peers.”*

*The presentation of the facts closes with a keen appeal to parents, insisting on their role in good upbringing including with a view to social transformation: “if children are raised well this growing generation will love order and work .... “In short,” Don Bosco concludes “we will have better times, children who will be an honour to their country, the support of their families as well as being to the glory and honour of their religion.”<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> P. Stella has documented the coincidences we find between *The Sway of a Good Upbringing* and various texts drawn from: *Un mari comme il y en a beaucoup, une femme comme il y en a peu...*, published in Caen-Paris, in 1853 (cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica...*, II, p. 191).

<sup>8</sup> We note some lack of precision in numbering the chapters and this has been corrected by the editor of this edition, bearing in mind subsequent editions of the document.

## 147. The Sway of a Good Upbringing. A Curious Contemporary Episode

Critical ed. in *La forza della buona educazione. Curioso episodio contemporaneo* per cura del  
Sac. Bosco Giovanni. Torino, Tipografia Paravia e Comp. 1855.

### *A Word to the Reader*

The reader may ask if this episode contains true or credible facts, to which I can honestly answer that the facts recounted here really happened; I myself saw or heard almost all of them. Simply note that this book was modelled on one entitled: *Un mari comme il y en a beaucoup, une femme comme il y en a peu* that is: a husband like many others: a wife like few others. I cannot fill out the story completely because Peter, to whom the facts refer, is still alive. This has meant I needed to avoid some names and places so that individuals are not identified. I have also thought it better to remain silent about some things that would be of great interest, for the sole motive that they are presented in a way that contains the supernatural and this could give rise to inappropriate criticism.

Here we will see the sway that a good upbringing has on a child's future. We will see a model mother, an exemplary child; a mother who succeeds amidst a thousand difficulties in giving her child the best upbringing, and leads a wayward husband back to the straight and narrow path; a child who responds to the maternal concerns of his affectionate mother; a child whom we can say was the instrument of Divine Providence in leading his father back to religion and who at the same time becomes the support of his family, a model for his peers, a model of courage and resignation for every faithful Christian.

### *Chapter 1. The Match Factory*

*John:* "Really, wife, I am beginning to get annoyed at seeing Peter slouching on the streets, and me supporting him while he is doing nothing. We have four children, this one is the oldest at eight years of age and we need to put him to work. If he is unable to do anything else, let's put him in the Match factory run by Mrs Boccardi. He won't earn much that's for sure because he is

so young, but even if he brings just a handful of coins home a week that will be nice.”

*Wife:* “That’s true, John, with four boys ... I understand that it begins to be a burden, since you have to provide for everyone with your own work. But, my husband, I think it would be better to send him off to school for a time with the Brothers<sup>9</sup> who would teach him to read, write and pray, since he is still very young and unable to do work that might be of any great use. That would certainly be better than putting him in a match factory where there’s a crowd of unruly kids who will give him bad example and bad advice.”

*John:* “Quiet! You’re always going on about bad example. What on earth can boys get up to or say that is bad at that age? So it’s clear then; I want to put him to work with Mrs Boccardi.”

*Wife:* “But let’s at least try another factory where there are none, or at least fewer, of these types like the ones that work in the factory you are speaking of. Because we want to preserve this lad of ours from all kinds of bad encounters so he can keep the good principles I have tried to give him until now.”

*John:* “That’s enough! Leave me in peace about your principles; if he doesn’t go to Mrs Boccardi he will only earn about twelve *soldi* a week, and there he can earn at least eighteen, and with that ...”

*Wife:* “If I could just say one thing, not to contradict you, but it seems reasonable to get him to learn now. I really want him to learn to read, write and do at least some arithmetic. When he is able to take up an honourable profession he will need to know these things. At the same time he could learn his catechism and prepare for his First Communion and ...”

*John:* “The problem is solved. He will do what I did; I didn’t go to school and I grew up big and strong like the others. Maybe it’s true that I know

<sup>9</sup> Certainly a reference to the schools in Turin run by the Brothers of the Christian Schools (de La Salle Brothers), a Congregation founded by St John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719); cf. general introduction to this volume and Carlo VERRI, *I Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane e la storia della scuola in Piemonte*. Como, Ediz. Sussidi 1948.



nothing and I am mortified when everyone else races off to read a placard and I have to ask them to explain it to me; if someone asks me what was pasted up there I can't even say a thing. Be that as it may, I have to work Sundays to ensure I can have an extra little something on Mondays, and if my boy can earn eighteen *soldi*, you can make your polenta and I can have my little extra. So go to it, Peter, get your clogs on, get on the road and go to work."

*Wife*: "Since that's what you want, at least let me take him there and I will have a word with his employer."

The poor mother, sighing deeply, washed the lad's face and taking his arm she sat him on her knees. "Poor boy," she told him "you need to be obedient to your father and your mother. At your tender age we have to ask you to earn your share of your nourishment. Poor boy! But be patient: we are in wretched circumstances and that's why, as small as you are, you need to go off and work. I will find some workmates of your own age for you but always keep in mind the good advice I have given you. I am sure you know, Peter dear, that you need to love God and obey him and never offend him. If your friends put bad ideas to you, you don't need to reply. If they give you bad advice like slacking off work, taking someone else's things, disobeying your parents, don't stop and listen to them. Make sure, Peter, to tell me each evening what your friends said to you during the day. That way I can give you good advice about what you should do and what you must avoid. Do everything your employers ask you and be courteous to your friends; if someone hits you, don't hit back, because you know that God does not want that.

Work diligently, offer up your little sufferings to the good Jesus; think of him and the Virgin Mary from time to time; pray often to this good Mother of ours to obtain the graces you need. And pray too for your poor father. I am really sorry that he told you in your presence why he wants to send you to work so young, that he is counting on your work so he can have a better time at the tavern - that is really such a sad thought!"

After this discussion, and with anguished heart, the good mother took the boy by the hand and led him off to the match factory. She climbed up to the third floor on a steep and partly obscured staircase. She opened the second

door on the right, went in and said: “Good morning, Mrs Boccardi, here is an eight year old boy; could you place him with some of your working lads of the same age?”

*Mrs Boccardi:* “So here you are, my lad. What would you like to do? To be honest your dad told me you were not very big, but you are big enough for the job I want to give you. So relax, mother, he will do the same as the others.”

*Mother:* “I recommend to you, Mrs Boccardi, if he ever does something wrong, do not fail to let me know, please; and please see that he does not get caught up in indecent conversations with the other boys.”

*Mrs Boccardi:* “Away with you—stop being difficult! Don’t worry about it. Your boy will be no worse than the others.”

That kind of talk would give you a rather bad impression of the factory where the mother had placed her son. But she kept all her sad thoughts to herself and put all her trust in God, her only hope. How lucky she was that she found a balm in religion that could ease the pain she felt in her heart!

Now let’s spend a moment inside the match factory.

*A boy:* “Look, look at that boy over there! Look how clean he is! Luxury, eh? So well washed, and just look at the handkerchief in his suit pocket! His collar covers half his face!”

*Another boy.* “Hey! Have you got the tools our father Adam used? Give them to me; I’d like to have some fun. Hey, let me see your handkerchief! You’re crying! Why?”

*Yet another:* “They are just having fun, don’t take any notice of what they say. Come here. If someone asks you, tell them that I will be showing you what work you have to do.”

The latter who spoke to him this way was the oldest in the group. Reassured a little, Peter went and sat near his protector and Mrs Boccardi brought him the things he had to work on. He hurriedly set to work so he could earn the eighteen *soldi* his father was expecting.

Peter was a happy kind of character and he soon established an easy friendship with the other boys so that conversations got very lively each day and they spoke about many things.

*Friend:* “What does your father do, Peter?”

*Peter:* “My father is a carpenter, and yours?”

*Friend:* “Mine is a labourer. Do you have good fun on Sundays?”

*Peter:* “Yes, I have fun. I go to Mass with my mother, then Vespers, then afterwards I go for a walk with my brothers.”

*Friend:* “You go to Mass and Vespers, you ... well you ought to see how much more fun I have. My mother says: ‘Off to Mass’ and I say ‘Yes mum I’m going.’ Then when I get to the church door I go inside then run out the other door, then I go and play tops with my friends. On Sunday you can come with us, Peter, right?”

*Peter:* “No that won’t be possible because my mother comes with me and then even when she doesn’t come I know that one should go to Mass every Sunday.”

*Friend:* “Well, come at least while they are singing Vespers. You’ll see how much fun we have.”

*Peter:* “Even that’s impossible; my mother doesn’t always come with me but she tells me to be there and I obey her because she tells me that disobeying our parents is displeasing to God himself.”

*Friend:* “Then you are a hypocrite if you don’t want to come; you can go to ...”

And despite the frequent insistence of his young workmates, Peter remained unbending, and for two years kept on the straight and narrow path that his mother had always pointed out to him. That is much to his credit, but he had always had such great confidence in his mother; every day he told her what his workmates had said to him. His mother gave him good advice, they prayed together asking for God’s grace and God blessed the boy. He was able to be steadfast in the face of his work mates’ threats and inducements.

*Chapter 2. Preparations*

Things went on like this for two years. Peter by now was earning twenty four *soldi* instead of eighteen. Mrs Boccardi was happy with him, his father benefited from receiving twenty four *soldi* a week and knew how to spend the lot in an hour! But when it came time for his First Communion, his good mother found herself with more problems. His father had promised to leave this year free so his wife could attend to Peter's upbringing. But what did he do? His taste for the tavern had become more overpowering than ever, the other children were getting older, expenses were on the increase and none of the other children was earning a cent. "Wife," John said, "You'll need to be patient, because Peter has to keep working."

*Wife:* "And what about his First Communion?"

*John:* "Do what you can for his First Communion."

*Wife:* "But how can he possibly learn his catechism and go to church to hear explanations?"

*John:* "Do what you like about it but I have decided that he continues working. So off you go Peter, quickly. Get to work."

The poor mother just gave a deep sigh; the child obeyed.

The poor mother was taking a walk through the city when she stopped, filled with sadness, in front of a church. She entered and knelt tearfully before the tabernacle where God, the consoler of the afflicted, dwelt. There, like a child she abandoned herself into her Father's arms, placed before him all the crosses in her heart, begged him to inspire her with some good idea as to how to guide her boy during such an important year as this one of his First Communion. She felt her heart filled with consolation and leaving the church she went looking for just the right moment to speak with Peter alone and give him appropriate advice. That moment came.

"My dear boy," she began saying to him, "Here we are in the year when you should be making your First Communion and this is the most important thing in your life. You need to prepare yourself with fervent prayer, ready

obedience, and by detailed attention to all that the Church requires. One thing that pains me is the little time you will have available to learn the catechism and listen to the explanations from your parish priest.”

*Son:* “Do not worry dear mother. Thanks be to God I have a good memory and good will. On Sundays I have time to go and apply myself with all due attention. Then on working days I have an hour and a half for lunch; I can finish lunch in half an hour then go off straight away to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales where they offer catechism at midday during Lent. If I can’t finish eating before I go to catechism I’ll finish later with a loaf of bread on my return.

And then, mother dear, if you let me, I’ll go back there in the evenings, because they gladly instruct boys there for free. So to put it briefly I will make every effort, and I hope I can study and understand the catechism and be able to pass the exam our parish priest will give me. Indeed at the same time I hope to be able to learn how to read and write; oh how much I want to learn!”

*Mother:* “Dear child, let me embrace you; your words are a real comfort for my afflicted heart.”

To further encourage Heaven’s favour the poor mother redoubled her care and efforts to temper her husband’s unruly character. Although he only gave her twenty of the thirty *soldi* he earned daily, she knew how to have his supper ready for him when he returned from work. The house was kept very clean; not a grain of dust on the table, the floor always swept, the bed or rather straw palette shaken out and the blankets, little more than rags it is true, were always clean and mended. She always welcomed her husband with a smile despite his inflexibility, lack of religion and frequent visits to the tavern. She always treated him pleasantly and made every effort to do so in the hope that one day she could get him to mend his ways.

In fact how many men we meet each day who are brutalised and ruined by wine but would be very different if they could live within the bosom of a family where they could find a warm welcome, a kindly and patient wife, and respectful and submissive children!

Convinced of this the poor woman we are speaking about did everything she could every day to make the family a pleasant place for her husband, but how much she had to do just to see that he had everything he needed! What economy to make ends meet, how many privations, how many long vigils, how much thankless and unrewarding work, and all this to be able to offer her husband some soup tomorrow that could not be done with the mere one franc he offered her each day!

But let's come back to Peter. Faithful to the plan agreed on between his mother and himself he worked as before in the same match factory. By doing some fasting he learned his catechism; he did this by taking up an hour of his lunchtime to go to church. Often his lunch consisted of a piece of bread which he put in his pocket and would eat, partly on the way to, partly on the way back from catechism. Then in the evening he went off punctually to the Oratory to hear an explanation of things that he may not have understood properly at midday. I recall having often seen him in the evening when it was dark and snowing coming to catechism all on his own. One evening I asked him: "Are you not afraid coming here in such bad weather and all on your own?" "I am not alone," he answered. "Are not the good God and my Guardian Angel excellent companions?"

His young work mates mocked him because of his good behaviour; some of them were also supposed to be making their First Communion that year, but for them and their parents it seemed to be something that could be done in a hurry.

One of them used to say: "Last year I was sent off to Confession because I wasn't fasting in Lent, but my father told me not to be silly enough to tell the parish priest these kinds of stories this year of my First Communion."

Another said: "The same thing happened to me, but my mother got my father to agree that this year we would abstain so I can make my Communion, then we'll go back to how we did things before."

And yet another said: "My father has forbidden me from telling my more serious sins to the priest because that might stop me from making my First

Communion; for better or for worse I have to do it this year because that way I can earn more money.”

Peter was amazed at these revelations but restrained himself and said just a word or two of disapproval. “I really have nothing to say,” he said, “But for sure, someone who goes to Confession and doesn’t promise with all his heart to change his life is making a bad Confession; anyone who keeps quiet about a sin and doesn’t tell the confessor will not receive forgiveness for his sins and adds sacrilege to his conscience. And those who do not abstain are disobeying the Church which commands us to abstain from meat on Fridays and Saturdays and other vigils.” Meanwhile Peter made sure to tell his mother about all these blunders they were making. The good mother was terrified at knowing that her son was living amongst such badly brought up and badly advised boys. The maternal advice she gave him was in conformity with the healthy morality of the Gospel.

“How unfortunate,” she told poor Peter, “How unfortunate it is to have families with little religion and especially not to have good mothers who can keep their hearts away from the bad influence and advice of their fathers. Just remember, dear Peter, that First Communion is the most important thing in your life, and you need a long time to prepare for it, changing your bad habits and practising all the virtues compatible with your age like obedience, being docile, love for work, study of the catechism, respect and modesty in church.

As for the sins you should confess, you need to be sorry for them and also make a resolution not to commit them in future. And even if your family or friends should force you to break the fast, remember that you must obey God before you obey man. Also be careful not to stay quiet about any sin in confession; you need to confess all of them, be sorry for all of them and make a resolution to lead a better life with God’s grace. It would be a thousand times better to delay First Communion for a year if your confessor judges it would be better, than to hide a sin so you can do it, because someone who goes to Communion like that is like someone who invites a friend to dinner and then gives him dishes full of poison.”

*Peter:* “Don’t worry, mother, I’ve been going to Confession for four years and I have never failed to tell my confessor something I should. Sometimes I don’t remember something and he questions me and I immediately tell him.”

Thus the good mother continued preparing her son for the most serious moment in his life. How many mothers there are who spend so much effort looking after the body but do nothing for their children’s souls! And then what do we say of parents who as well as not caring about the spiritual and eternal good of their children, are actually an obstacle to their eternal salvation by giving scandal by their language and actions? Instead of preparing them properly for Communion, unfortunately they set them on the path to perdition. What a terrible account they must give before God’s judgement seat!

### *Chapter 3. Confession*

Peter went to catechism classes regularly; he was also obedient to the least indication of his father’s. His father was very proud of having a son who was so much better than many of his neighbours’ children and he was not unaware that his son’s good qualities were due to the religion his wife had so successfully taught their son to practise.

The day for Communion was approaching and Peter redoubled his fervour. He used to go to Confession often and had gone to the same confessor for four years. He had always opened every secret of his heart to him and never kept silent about anything in Confession so everything went well for him in Confession. But he wanted to be extra certain about past Confessions that he might not have given due care to for lack of knowledge, so he decided to make a general confession.

Firstly he invoked the enlightenment and help of the Holy Spirit so he could remember all his sins, then he made a careful examination of conscience then went to the church and quietly waited his turn to present himself to his confessor. He told all his sins or rather those he judged were culpable without hiding anything or lessening their seriousness. When he had finished



he prepared himself with all humility to receive absolution asking God many times to give him the strength to be truly sorry for his sins.

Usually, at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales they held a Triduum to prepare boys to make their Easter Communion well. During the three days of preaching, he was a model for all the others. Seeing him so recollected, so pious, so kind and so good with them, they were envious of him. One of his friends was so moved by Peter's modesty and devotion that he decided to tell a sin that, just to please his father, he had kept quiet about in an earlier confession.

Another day one of his friends said: "Come here Peter, look in the mirror and comb your hair." "Oh," he replied "I prefer to adjust my soul and prepare my heart as a proper place for Jesus." He made every effort to have a keen sense of repentance and practise all the little virtues of his age.

How many boys and especially older lads there are who are all worried about looking after their good looks rather than embellishing their souls by practising virtue? How many families have no other ambition than to see their children well-dressed so they can look better than their companions when they go to Communion! Peter's mother had no vain ideas like this in her head. She was always busy about things to do with her children and husband, and spent what little time she had left over praying and sewing a nice item of clothing for her first born child.

But the poor woman had no money to buy some nice material and had the parish priest not come to her aid good Peter would have run the risk of only having a simple and somewhat tattered jacket. But underneath those humble clothes what a wonderful soul there was! It was of great consolation to his mother to think about this.

The final day of the Triduum came and Peter had made his general confession and received absolution. It is impossible to describe the fervour with which he prepared himself. No distraction; perfect recollection; he went into the church and went to the confessional where he received forgiveness for his sins. How moved he was when he recited the act of contrition. He was

crying when he came out of the confessional. Covering his face with his hands he went to the altar, knelt down, renewed his act of sorrow and told God he would always belong to him and would serve him for the rest of his life. His heart was full of joy and he did not know how to thank God for lowering himself to be so good to a poor creature like him. All his thoughts then turned to the following day when he would be receiving him into his heart, even though he was so poor and the least of all people.

Where would one have found a mortal being who was happier than he was? And full of ideas like this he returned home. Seeing such a radiant look on his son's face his father was amazed, and he became a little more tender. Something indescribable was going on in his heart; he went up to his son and embraced him; and filled with joy the latter put his arms around his neck: "Ah, father, if you only knew how lucky I am!"

Yes, I was thinking about it, my son," his father said, "You will soon be finished with all that First Communion humbug."

"Oh father!" Peter said "You haven't understood me; It's the luckiest 'humbug' ever! The good God is coming into Peter's heart tomorrow, poor miserable creature he is! The one who made heaven and earth wants me to sit at his table, feed me with his flesh: by receiving him I will be one with him. Do you understand that, father? God has left me fully free to approach him and to give me his immense riches. How many riches I can use for my soul, how many graces I wish to ask for you and my mother! And being so good how can God refuse such favours when he is with me, in me. There is so much I want to say to him! Oh father, you will be so fortunate, because he has said: 'Ask and you shall receive'."

His father was so amazed that he began to say to himself: "There has to be some other happiness than the one found in the bottle; I am envious of my son's contentment, happiness. It seems so pure and undivided; on the contrary my own pleasures are always mixed with bitterness. The time I spend drinking, time I could well spend supporting my wife, is not spent without some sadness. She is so good, so kind to me despite my mistakes."

And right then a generous thought came into Peter's father's mind. "I want to share in this happiness my son will experience tomorrow" he said: "Here," he told his wife, "Take my entire week's wage. I will be here tomorrow, Sunday, and will spend the whole day with you. I will go with Peter to watch his First Communion. See that there is something extra on the table tomorrow, because I want us to be happy, all happy together."

Peter ran and hugged his father, embraced him, kissed him several times. His mother, whose eyes were full of tears, embraced all the children, and they all gathered around their lucky father, giving him a thousand caresses. And for his part he felt such a pure joy that he had never experienced in the past; family life and the happiness of a soul at peace were revealed to him.

Before going to bed that night Peter wanted to make amends and ask forgiveness of his parents for all the things he had done wrong in the past, and he did this in front of everyone else at home. In some places this ceremony happens in church with the children all together, just before they make their Communion; in other places it is done in the family.

"Forgive me," Peter said "Forgive me, dear parents, for all the displeasure I have caused you, though I believe you cannot overlook the offences I have committed. I hope that God has already forgiven me and you will complete my happiness if you tell me I can be sure of your forgiveness; you see a poor repentant boy before you who is promising unlimited obedience and respect in the future."

"Of course you are forgiven!"

Seeing Peter and meeting his gaze, his father was moved to tears, and almost beside himself as he said: "My poor boy here you are asking me for forgiveness and I should be asking it and throwing myself at your feet, begging mercy for a father who has been a tyrant." He was about to break down sobbing. Covering his face with his hands he wept, but they were sweet tears because they came from repentance.

After evening prayer, said with more fervour than usual, Peter went off to bed and fell straight asleep. His father came to him and contemplated

the face of his son lying on his straw mattress. It was a face of innocence and happiness, peaceful, with a half smile that made him look like an angel. Thoroughly moved, he went off to bed himself, but that night he could not sleep; remorse was getting to him; a good resolution came to him; he thought of his past life, and the happiness he once enjoyed; he thought of Peter's happiness and tranquillity; and meanwhile there was a terrible struggle going on in him between good and evil; the only way he could find peace was to renew his resolve to spend all Sunday with his family.

#### *Chapter 4. Communion day*

As soon as he awoke, Peter's first thought was an act of adoration and love, turning his heart to God whom he would be receiving that very morning. Having made this offer of his heart to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and consecrated his whole day to him, he got up and dressed himself with all due modesty. Let us not think that the sight of his new, decent clothes would have made the slightest impression on him, although it would have been the first time he had seen himself so decently dressed, since his usual clothing was ill-fitting and patched. But what is clothing for the body compared to a soul that adorns itself with virtue, carefully avoids the least little vanity, the slightest defect that could displease the guest who wants to take up his abode there?

Meanwhile the bells were ringing and the children were all lining up for church, one so proud of his nice clothes, the other all boastful because he was seen there with his family or because everyone was looking at him. Peter was humble and took no notice of anyone; he was dressed in clothes that came from the parish priest's charity, and he went off to church with exemplary composure.

What did it matter to him to have all the good things on this earth if he were not going there to soon possess the riches of Heaven, take part in the Heavenly feast, go to the same table as his lucky companions, and attract heavenly favours on himself and his family? Accompanied by his father he entered the church; his composure and simplicity shone through each of his movements; his gaze was fixed on the altar; not a word, not even a smile for

his companions. His father looked at him, filled with emotion; he stood still, his eyes fixed on the angelic figure.

When Mass began he had new cause for wonder when he saw his son reading from a book. He recognised his wife's goodness and her diligence in bringing up this dear child. Meanwhile they began reading aloud the prayer of preparation for Communion that the children say alternatively. How much attention Peter gave to those prayers! With what a fervent heart he read them! How humble he was before God! How unworthy he saw himself of the great favour he was awaiting! With what emotion he renewed his acts of sorrow for having offended a God who is so good and worthy of being loved! With what firm resolution he promised to avoid anything in the future that could harm his soul!

Finally the great moment that he had so long desired arrived. "Lord, I am not worthy of the honour you do me, I am not worthy for you to come into my heart, I receive you only by trusting in your mercy: Jesus, Jesus come and take possession of my heart." Having said these words he put his tongue out over his innocent lips and received the God of Heaven and earth, the sovereign of the heavenly choirs who adore him reverently.

At that moment Peter was no longer the child of a poor labourer but an angel. He possessed in his heart the one who makes us truly happy, the only happiness in life; he possessed God. He seemed radiant, his heart overflowing with joy, thanksgiving, and he repeated firmly that he would never abandon his duties. He talked with Jesus one to one. After having spoken of his poverty, his needs, the weaknesses of his soul, and after having asked him for some special graces, he began saying in his heart: "My good Jesus, I possess you in my soul, and your goodness to a poor creature encourages me to ask you for one more very big favour. I have a father who has seen my happiness in church, as you have seen: Oh my Jesus! I do not want to accuse him before you, but I can tell you that he is far from the practices of your holy religion. His soul has not been nourished by your adorable blood for a long time; bad friends have led him to certain places he should not be going to. Change his heart, O my good Jesus, have him return to you!

You have said: 'Ask and you shall receive': so I turn to you with so much confidence. I insist, lovable Saviour, that I will never abandon you while there is a ray of hope in my heart.

My poor mother, my good Jesus—reward her for all the good she has done for me; give her patience, the strength to complete my upbringing and that of my brothers and sisters; make her husband worthy of her virtue; and may the peace and happiness of pure souls begin to reign amongst us. Oh Jesus, we are very poor but I am not asking you to let us have more; I only ask for your love, your grace for me and my parents, and that we may always do your holy will.”

During this intimate talk his face radiated the emotions of his soul. His father, his eyes constantly fixed on him, would have liked to have gone to his son and bathed him in his tears but he did not want to interrupt the thanksgiving he had begun. Peter then recited the prayers alternatively with the others, the ones that are usually said after Communion, then he went to a corner of the church and spent half an hour reading a devout book. Then, to please his father and mother and filled with contentment at this greatest act in his life, he obeyed his parents and went home with them.

Throughout that memorable day Peter was a constant model for the other boys and anyone who saw him. After a frugal lunch, which his fortunate father and his still more fortunate mother were also present for, he went back to the church that evening to hear a short sermon meant to encourage all those who had made their Communion that morning to persevere in doing good. His father also wanted to go back with him. Peter, who was filled with thoughts of his God, was saddened to see how the boys who had made their Communion that morning were just frittering away their time that evening.

Another praiseworthy custom they have in some places, and it would be good if they did it everywhere, is the renewal of baptismal vows on the same morning that the children are making their Easter Communion. And because this was not usually the case amongst us, Peter wanted it done at home in God's presence and in the presence of his parents and the rest of the family.

So kneeling down, with a small crucifix in his hands, he said in a steady, loud voice; "I renounce forever the devil, all his pomp and works, and I promise to consecrate myself to Jesus for my entire life." His father could no longer handle these tender, sublime words. He felt his heart breaking. "I made this promise too," he said, "but did I keep it? For me First Communion was a mere formality to be accomplished. If only I had had a mother like Peter's, I certainly would not have abandoned the Sacraments the very same year I made my Communion. I would have been happy, my home would have been honestly managed and the family would have been happy. Oh Peter! You have let me know how happy you are; forgive your father. My God, forgive a poor man like me; and since you have been so good as to make my son happy like this, I also hope you will not reject my repentance and my resolve to begin a new life, because I would like to be as lucky as my son, and make my family happy."

And that evening it seems that God's peace came to that family. How sweet it was for all their hearts! How happy were mother and son now that the head of the family was with them. And what unspeakable joy was the father's, a joy that he hoped to preserve for the rest of his life!

That evening they prayed together, the father playing his part for the first time. Who can imagine the poor wife's consolation seeing her husband kneeling there with the rest of the family! No one could possibly measure up to her happiness. Just the same she had one fear; "Will these good intentions last?" she asked herself. I will pray with all my heart, and Peter, who is so intimate with the good God, will also ask God to listen to us and fulfil our wish.

Before going to bed Peter opened the window that looked out towards the church, and with one more thought for the One who had given himself to him that morning he said: "Just one final greeting, my good Jesus. May I remain yours now and forever." Then with his heart filled with these holy thoughts, his mind once more thinking of God, he went to sleep in the embrace of his Guardian Angel.

*Chapter 5. The father's conversion*

On Monday it was decided that Peter would return to work at the match factory until he was twelve, and that in the evenings he would go to school to learn to read and write better. The father worked as usual all that morning then after midday, according to his earlier sad custom, he left the workshop. His wife, who was very anxious, saw all this and was deeply upset when she knew that he was no longer at work.

One of his mates had enticed him back down to the tavern.

“What’s up with you?” his friend asked him, “Why so sad? Has your wife been beating you?” This last mocking jibe reminded him of what he had been thinking of the day before.

*John:* “I find myself here,” he said, “but it’s not where I should be; I am not fulfilling my duties here, am not doing what I should be doing. So goodbye. I’m going.”

*Friend:* “Come on, Is it Peter that’s affected your mind? Because they told me that yesterday you were an impostor—in church. So away with all this melancholy, be happy: cheers, here’s to happiness: church is good for women and children.”

*John:* “Yes, but my wife and boy are luckier than me; their conscience is at peace, while I am suffering terribly.”

*Friend:* “Relax. Have a drink, two drinks and you will see how good times return.”

*John:* “No, that’s impossible.”

*Friend:* “Look! I’ve got the solution. Madam (to the innkeeper) bring us your best bottle. Here is the remedy for all ills, drink up; to your wife’s health, and mine!”

Just then Peter went past on the way to work: his father saw him and it was like a bolt of lightning striking him. He stood up suddenly and ran to the door shouting. “Peter, Peter, listen, come here my dear boy.”



*Peter:* “Oh father, whatever are you asking me! You know what I promised God yesterday, so let’s have a hug but then I’m off to work.”

Poor Peter was sad when he went to the match factory. But he decided to say nothing but rather to redouble his prayers for his poor father. Meanwhile John went back in to the tavern, but he seemed to be dumb; his friend noticed and began talking to him: “I’m telling you my friend, it’s your boy that has affected your mind. Mine made his Communion yesterday too. Your boy has been fooled, don’t crucify him, he will be what he wants to be. Let him go to church when he wants; I would never stop him but when he becomes an adult he will be just like his father and mother, so ... Ah! Ah! To your health, and away with any melancholy!”

Far from making him laugh, all this idiotic behaviour just weighed even more on his heart; the thought of his wife and Peter were fixed in his memory.

*John:* “It is impossible for me to laugh my friend. I am not finishing this glass. Good afternoon, I’m going, I’ll see you another time.” And with that he left.

*Friend:* “Oh! Listen John, wait, just one more thing.” But John had left and never went back. “So,” his friend said “Just look at that impostor, following the platitudes of women and children.”

*Another friend:* “True, but he’s not completely wrong because he does have a virtuous wife and has such a good and well-deserving son. He loves his father, and he doesn’t answer back like mine does! When I think that yesterday morning, after he got back home after Communion he treated me like his dog! What’s he going to be like later when he’s eighteen or twenty! He will have no faith, will not be able to read, and he will treat his father and his commands just like I used to do once. So we need to admit it, it is religion that has made John’s wife so virtuous, his son so obedient and respectful; it is religion that brings good fortune to the family. Certainly if I had had a wife like his, and if my son had been brought up like his, I would not be so unlucky and not forced to relieve my sorrows in life through the bottle.”

But where did Peter's father go? He was almost out of his mind, wandering from the square to the streets without knowing where he wanted to go. And without realising it he found himself in front of the church where he had found such consolation the day before. "Go on," he said to himself, "Peter's and my wife's God is here; I'm going in, whatever happens." His steps led him irresistibly to the altar where he had witnessed his son's happiness; mechanically he knelt down. Going back over his thoughts from the day before, he felt such regret and emotion that he dissolved into tears. He was there for a long time caught up in his meditation when he felt the priest tap him on the shoulder. Thinking that the man was distraught with some terrible cross, the good priest took him by the arm and led him to the sacristy. "You seem to be weighed down by some terrible sorrow," he said to him "do tell me your troubles. I am a minister of the God of consolation; What can I do to help you?"

All he got was a deep sigh.

*Father:* "Speak, my friend, I am just a poor priest who has seen all kinds of misery, and nothing that has happened to a human being will disturb me, so open your heart to me and tell me. You are speaking to a friend." Encouraged by these kind words, words that he had never heard from his false friends, he spoke of his impressions of the day before, his sighs, his promises, his wife's kindness and loveliness, and his first-born's obedience and tenderness.

*Father:* "Well, my friend, then it is your wish to be worthy of your family and regain the friendship of the God who has been so good to your son!"

*John:* "Ah yes! This is what I want, and my soul has been in constant torment since yesterday."

*Father:* "It is not torment, my friend, but grace which is lifting you up, and God who is reminding you of your sins and his infinite goodness. It is your wife's and your son's prayers that have been heard in Heaven. So courage my friend. Make a good confession, a firm resolve to change your life, and this will be the remedy for your torment. So good friend, do you want to confide the sorrows of your soul in me?"

*John:* “I want this with all my heart, because you seem to me to be a very good man, but what will my friends say?”

*Father:* “Is it friends like those who will give you the happiness you do not have? Look at what your friends are worth. They are only good to get you drinking, wasting your money, staying away from a wife and a son who love you, and from the others who surely love you. Leave them to say what they want, show them you are a man and that you have a manly will and approach that shows no embarrassment at doing its duty. After they have spoken about you and laughed at you they will fall silent, then will praise you and will finally say to themselves: ‘At least he has willingly chosen to do his duty’.”

*John:* “You are right; see, my wife thinks I am at the tavern, and I was led there by my old habits; a friend induced me and I could no longer keep away: then I left and began wandering from street to street until I found myself in front of the church and went in ...”

*Father:* “Well, my friend, the Lord God brought you here; he loves you very much as you know. He wants to restore your peace of mind and give your family back its happiness. So my friend, listen to his voice, I feel compassion for you; you are not happy. Take my advice: kneel down and make a good confession and you will soon feel peace in your heart.”

The sacrifice of self love was made, and human respect overcome. Amidst tears and sighs he made his first Confession and then set aside a time the following day to continue. His long-remorseful soul was given a soothing balm; an ineffable joy shone from him. Like someone who had found a great treasure, John hurried off home filled with joy. His wife was astounded when she saw her husband arrive so happy, and even more so arriving home long before he usually would on a Monday.

“Where are you coming from, John?” she asked.

“I’m coming from the tavern, then from the church.” John said. “I said goodbye to one of them forever, and in the other I met the good priest who saw me all upset, so I told him all my troubles and he encouraged me to apply the only remedy—Confession. I was really moved by his kindness so

I did what he asked me, and here I am all happy; I am giving my wife back her husband, my children a father who had abandoned them for such a long time.”

It would not be possible to express the poor wife’s emotions, and Peter’s happiness when he found out that his father had said goodbye to gambling and the tavern and gone to the church to go to Confession. We would need a book to express the family’s happiness, reunited around the head of the family who had changed his behaviour and found God’s grace through absolution for his sins. He received into his own heart a God whom he had offended for so long.

Despite their poverty, joy took root in that family because they were all practising their religion, the only source of true happiness. Great kindness reigned amongst them, because on Sundays and Mondays the husband was no longer squandering the savings of an entire week in a single day. His good and attentive wife found a way to save something so she could offer her husband a gift of a half litre after Sunday lunch, so he would not be totally deprived of the things that filled him with delight at the tavern. They all went to the functions in church, and after the sermon and Benediction the father and his children went for a walk, and during winter spent their time at home in the family. Sometimes the father and Peter would come here to us to spend the evening in pleasant, honest recreation, and took part in the plays, comedies or other things that used to happen at the Oratory on winter weekend evenings.

Work continued on Mondays like every other day of the week.

John’s friends joked about him for a while because of his new life style; but they soon tired of that and it was replaced by esteem and he inspired them by his good behaviour.

Morning and evening they prayed together; they all went to Confession and Communion; you would often see father, mother and children go to Confession one after the other then all devoutly make their Communion.

Thus a family that had been in desolation for a number of years because the father had abandoned his family, carelessly forgotten his duties as a

husband and Christian and ignored his religion returned, after twelve years of tribulation, to days of peace and tranquillity, since only religion or God's grace can make a man content and happy.

*Chapter 6. The vicissitudes of youth*

The reader would certainly want to know how this story continued and I am happy to satisfy that wish. But to keep things fairly brief I judge it better to leave out some details concerning Peter's parents and just keep to facts regarding himself.

I will begin by referring to the resolutions from his First Communion and showing how he observed these as he grew up.

One day I happened to find a devotional book and opening it I saw a scrawled and badly spelled note. I read it and saw that it was something Peter had written to recall his First Communion. Despite the language, as you can imagine would be the case for an eleven year old just beginning to learn to read and write, just the same it testifies to the simplicity and importance of its contents which I intend to give you without any corrections, convinced that it can be a model for anyone making his First Communion. Here it is then.

“Rule of life set out by me, Peter, on the lucky day that I made my First Communion on 12 April 1845 when I turned eleven.

I will kneel down and in God's presence promise that tomorrow, as soon as I have received the host I will make the following resolutions so I can save my soul.

1. I promise that God will always be my father, and Mary my mother, and I will love and obey both of them.

2. I will go to Confession every fortnight or once a month and to Communion with permission from my confessor.

3. I will make Sundays holy by always going to Mass, the sermon and Benediction.

4. I will read something from a devotional book every day, and say a Hail Mary each day for my father and mother so they can be saved.

5. I will humbly ask Jesus when he is with me for two special graces, (1). that I will be able to avoid all bad companions; (2). that I will be able to preserve the virtue of modesty to the end of my life like St Aloysius did.

6. I will re-read and renew these resolutions once a month kneeling before a crucifix. Amen.

Holy Mary, save my soul and the souls of my father, mother, brothers and sisters. Amen.”

These are the resolutions Peter made at his First Communion. As we can all easily recognise, Peter had taken some of the ideas he had heard in sermons at the Triduum he made in preparation for Easter, and adjusted them so they could more easily apply to himself. However that may be, he gave himself the sacred duty of observing them.

Before giving him back the book with its memento, I asked him if he had kept these promises he had written down as a reminder, until now. “Until now, yes,” he said “and I hope to keep them until I die. I think it would be a terrible lie if you tell God something and don’t keep it.”

When he turned thirteen, Peter’s parents, seeing him able to tackle a better profession, placed him at a cotton factory. This new job, although it earned him a little more money in temporal terms, was somewhat of an obstacle to his religious practices because his employer, sometimes pretending work was urgent, and sometimes giving him particular work to do, made him work almost all of Sunday. Poor me, Peter thought, God told us to keep Sundays holy, and I am forced to profane them; how will God bless efforts like these! He spoke to his parents about it, and both were sorry that they had let their son stay with employment. His mother used to often say: “You can imagine, Peter, how sorry I am seeing you spend most of the Lord’s day doing profane work. But I don’t know what to do. I have spoken with the parish priest, and he advised me to be patient because there is nothing else that can be done; but meanwhile we should try to find other work and put up with the employer until such time as we find something better.”

Providence came to Peter's aid, proving that earnings from Sundays and other Holy days bring ruin to all the work during the week. Here is how it happened. First there was a fire at the factory; then the employer went broke; two of his children died; his wife fell sick for more than a year; he was forced to sell his factory to others and became a simple worker rather than the owner.

While he was with the employer, how was Peter to practise his religion? Whoever wants to do things well finds time to do so. Every Sunday, getting up very early, before he went off to work he went to Mass, after which there was the sermon. After lunch if he could, he still went to instruction; otherwise he went to Benediction late in the evening in some church. He found some time to go to Confession. If there was no other possibility, he went to his usual confessor on Saturday evenings, then went to Communion on Sunday morning; sometimes he went to Confession on Sunday evening and Communion on Monday early, before going off to work. He also persevered in reading a little bit each day from some devotional book and since he often had little time, he carried *The Companion of Youth* in his pocket with him, and would read some of it while coming from or going to work. He tried to memorise and "ruminate on them" as he used to say, and sometimes would repeat them to his work mates.

Peter's next employer was more humane and more Christian than the first. Having learned from his predecessor's disasters, and fully aware that God had commanded that Sundays be kept holy, bringing blessings on whatever was accomplished during the week, he looked after his workers and saw that they all had time; on Saturday evening he ordered the business to be closed and it would not open until Monday. This decision brought him good luck. Everyone liked working for him; they all found time to fulfil their duties, nobody took Mondays off and his business prospered.

Peter also gained much from his employer who, noticing his fidelity, punctuality, hard work, soon increased his daily earnings from ten to fifteen *soldi*. Meanwhile because he regularly attended evening classes, Peter was coming on with his arithmetic and metric system, with Italian grammar, and his employer gave him the job of keeping the register for a number of his

work mates, keeping an eye on things to see that there were no arguments, and that no breakdowns occurred with the cotton and thread machines. His work mates were happy; they could not have had a more patient and kind assistant; the employer was happy because it would have been hard to find a more faithful and diligent person than him to entrust things to. And Peter, too, was happy with these responsibilities because while checking that people were working he could also stop some of the blaspheming or taking the Lord's name in vain, or bad conversations. What else? When someone loves God, things go well. Seeing Peter's good behaviour, and the benefits that came from it, the employer increased his pay several times. Peter was only seventeen by this time but he was earning ten francs a week. This was a real stroke of Providence because his father had been sick for a few months and could no longer work all day, so keeping the family was almost entirely up to Peter.

How often his good mother blessed the time she had spent in his upbringing! How often his father thanked Divine Providence for having given him a wife who had known how to instil religious principles in Peter's heart. He was now the consolation and support of the entire family.

### *Chapter 7. Some particular facts*

Let's not think that Peter did not have some bad moments, because youth is a risky time, and such risks can be found anywhere and amongst all kinds of people. Peter had many difficulties but with his courage and the help of God's grace he freed himself from them without being drawn into wrongdoing. Let me tell you about some of these.

One Feast day (it was the Feast of St Peter) some of his friends invited him to go with them to a party. "Come Peter," they said "We will pay."

*Peter:* "Thanks friends, I will willingly go but only after the functions at church."

*His friends:* "Ok so we can go after church; there will still be time."

*Peter:* "We go and do what God asks first, then what people want afterwards."



*His friends:* “If we go to church, you will come later, won’t you?”

*Peter:* “Yes certainly, on one condition you already know about.”

*His friends:* “What’s that?”

*Peter:* “No bad talk.”

Because they wanted Peter to come with them, he was such pleasant company, but also because their parents wanted them to go, they went to Vespers, the sermon and Benediction. But then afterwards when they went off for something to eat, an unexpected and troubling event arose for Peter. St Peter’s Feast that year occurred on Friday, and the young men, who knows whether out of good or bad faith, had prepared a meat dish. Peter immediately saw the problem he was faced with. “I can see you have done well” he told his friends.

*A friend:* “Meaning what, Peter?”

*Peter:* “Did you not realise it is Friday? We Catholics are not allowed to eat meat on Friday.”

*His friends:* “That’s true, we didn’t think about it, but what can we do at this hour? What’s done is done.”

*Peter:* “It is still Friday despite the hour, and the Church’s obligation doesn’t stop because of it.”

*His friends:* “But we forgot about it and we didn’t do it intentionally.”

*Peter:* “But if we eat meat we will be thinking about it and we will be doing it intentionally.”

*Friend:* “Peter, I’m sure that just for once we can overlook it.”

*Peter:* “I know that it is forbidden to eat meat on Fridays, Saturdays, and other vigils; nor can I see that you can do so unless there is a serious reason, like maybe a serious illness.”

*Another friend:* “Peter, leave it all to my conscience; once, yes, it was forbidden but now everyone eats it.”

*Peter:* “You are very kind to put all this on your conscience but if I go to Hell then you won’t be coming down to pull me out! I have never heard it said that you can disobey the precepts of the Church without sinning.”

*Friend:* “But these days everyone’s doing it.”

*Peter:* “Excuse me but that’s not true, that everyone’s doing it: I know many who abstain on days they should abstain; so when someone says that everyone’s doing it, are they saying maybe there’s no room left in Hell for everyone? Maybe these days the Lord is not around any more. Is it God who commands? Times change, people change, but divine law never changes.”

*Friend:* “It is not God who tells us to fast but the Church.”

*Peter:* “But God governs the Church, so what the Church commands, God commands.”

*Friend:* “But Peter, be patient: what’s the problem for the Lord if I have a slice of salami this evening, or a piece of cheese?”

*Peter:* “What was the problem for the Lord if Adam ate the fruit or didn’t eat it? And you know what terrible punishment he suffered. Friend, in the things that God commands we should not ask how they matter to God, but what the consequences are for us. I can’t stop you from eating this; I could forbid you maybe, if I could; but I will not be eating it.”

*Friend:* “But don’t you know, Peter, that you can eat this when there is a serious enough reason: when my parents are ill they do not take any notice of Fridays.”

*Peter:* “What you say is ok but I see no serious reason here; we are in the best of health.”

*Friend:* “So what do you want to do with all this stuff?”

*Peter:* “I am your friend and companion, I am not your treasurer. This stuff can be kept or used in some other way, but not eaten.”

*Another friend:* “Listen up, Peter. You know well enough that this is a time of political freedom, constitutions; a time when everyone can write, think, speak, do what he likes.”

*Peter:* “The freedom you are speaking of has no place in things commanded or forbidden by legitimate authority, much less by God. There is no constitution in Heaven that can abrogate the divine law, and for God’s precepts there is no freedom to do and think as you like; the holy law is eternal, to be obeyed as much today as it was in the past; no human being can introduce the least change to it. So if you want to insist on freedom, then let’s do it like this: I will leave you in complete freedom to eat whatever you want, because I cannot stop you and you will certainly have the courtesy to allow me the freedom to eat what I want.”

At these words no one made any further comment to Peter and leaving aside any further discussion they sat down at table to eat and Peter with them. All eyes were on Peter. He happily took a slice of bread with cherries and began eating heartily. Seeing this one of them said: “If Peter is eating like this I want to follow him,” and leaving the chicken and salami aside that was already on his plate, he took a slice of cheese. A second, then a third, then a fourth did the same.

Only three were left eating meat. And although they seemed to regret being interrupted, nevertheless, confused by the others’ example, and feeling the remorse of their conscience, they too began eating fruit and cheese. They all ate happily. Peter could not contain the joy he felt at seeing that he had succeeded in preventing his friends from offending the Lord. When the meal was over Peter amused his friends with some innocent games and stories because, although somewhat reserved, Peter was always cheerful and good at conversation, and when he was with others he could be the life of the party.

After the fun they were about to say good night. As each one was about to go home, Peter greeted them thus: “You gave me great pleasure today my friends by giving me a chance to honour the Saint whose name I bear. But my consolation was even greater when I saw everyone abstaining. You will all be dear friends of mine in the future, and since you were paying today, let me invite you the day after tomorrow, Sunday evening, to eat some meat and everything at my expense. My parents love me very much and they will join in our good cheer.” His friends accepted the invitation and the following Sunday

after fulfilling their religious duties they went to Peter's place. His parents wanted to celebrate Peter's name day, and they were very happy with the party especially his mother who saw that nothing was missing that could contribute to a true feast for friends.

Thus Peter had the consolation of seeing his friends going to church and preventing them from violating the Church's precepts. Furthermore they became Peter's best friends and continued going to church with him on Sundays, never omitting what a good Catholic should do to keep these days holy. How much good a courageous and truly Christian friend can do when he does not let human respect win out!

### *Chapter 8. His outstanding devotion*

The Lord tells us that the road a young man takes when he is young he will continue along as he gets older, into his manhood, his old age and until he goes to his grave. Happy are those who give themselves to God as a young man! They already have an almost certain reward in eternal salvation. This was Peter's happy lot. He gave himself to God in good time, and as he grew in years he also grew wonderfully in virtue. What is most wonderful is that the more he strove to be known before God, the more hidden he became before man.

Here I shall point to some things regarding Peter's outstanding devotion.

On Sundays at our place after church we usually had some games at the Oratory, so that the boys who came could spend some time in pleasant and honest recreation. Peter used to come, talk with, and encourage the others in their games, but he rarely took part himself. What was he doing? When the rest were running around, singing, playing and the like, I would see him quietly pull aside from the games and slip into church. And keeping an eye on him, without him noticing me, I saw that he was slipping away to make a quiet visit to the Blessed Sacrament, say the Rosary, and make the *Stations of the Cross*.

I asked him to tell me one day in confidence why he chose that time to pray, and what particular purpose he had in mind for his prayers and he told

me: "I choose this time because with all the others busy with their games I know I won't be disturbed. And I direct all these prayers in suffrage for the souls in Purgatory. Poor souls," he said emotionally "Poor souls! We can pray for them so they can be with God in Heaven soon; would it not be an act of cruelty not to do whatever we can to help them?"

But despite his diligence in choosing a time he would not be disturbed, some of his friends noticed his devotion and followed his example. That is where the custom came from, and it is one we still keep today, of saying the Rosary after Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament for anyone who wants to, without any obligation, while most of the boys are having fun in the playground.

His heart was so good and affectionate that it enjoyed spending time with spiritual matters. You only needed to mention Heaven to him, God's love or his goodness, and he became all emotional. One day while I was there with some of his friends around I said to him: "Peter, if you continue as good as this what a great feast we will have one day in Heaven with the Lord! We will be with him always, enjoy him, love him for all eternity!" I said this almost casually but it produced such an effect that I saw him go white and he fainted and would almost certainly have fallen had not his friends caught.

I also remember something that happened at Giaveno when a number of boys had gone there to make a retreat. At the beginning of each of the talks he would sit in some corner to see what topic the preacher was going to speak about. And I saw that sometimes he would gradually move up closer to the speaker, and at other times he would hurry out of the church. When I saw this happen a few times I wanted to know why so I asked him one day: "Peter, what's all this, and why don't you go straight to the assigned place with the others? Why stop at the back of the church?" I do that," he said "so I don't disturb the others." "How is it," I asked "that you might disturb them?" And he replied: "You see, if the preacher is speaking about mortal sin, I can't handle it; I feel my heart breaking and I either need to leave the church or shout out."

And so I now knew why he would suddenly leave the Oratory church, sometimes really in a hurry, or why sometimes he would cry out or get very

agitated. This is why, if I noted he was at the talk, I tried to temper my words; but all that was needed was the words *mortal sin* said with a bit of emotion and he would jump up and go. So that is why he usually stayed near the church door.

These things, according to the spiritual masters, demonstrate two important truths. Firstly they demonstrate how pure and innocent Peter's soul was, if he had such sentiments whenever he heard or spoke of spiritual matters. Secondly it shows how deeply rooted was his aversion to evil; this was a sure sign he would continue in virtue in the future.

Despite the many things he had to do at his employment and at home, he found time for prayer and other religious practices. In the morning he would get up early, go to Mass, say his ordinary prayers and the Rosary, and would often go to Communion. At noon he had two hours free time, but instead of playing games or lying down somewhere like most others usually did, he would help his parents at home, or go over lessons with some of his younger brothers and sisters, and then a quarter of an hour before he needed to go back to the workshop he would already be there, handing out work to his work mates as they came back.

He occupied every minute of his time, and where he could he joined prayer with his work. Coming or going to work, or when he had things to do in some other place, if he was alone he would be praying. At this point I would not like to overlook one thing that I was witness to.

One evening as night was falling I was walking home along the road that comes from the Po to Porta Palazzo. When I got to a certain point along the road a young lad arrived carrying a long and heavy wooden pole, nailed together with heavy iron nails. He seemed to be groaning under the heavy load, and seemed to be saying something. Poor boy, I said to myself, he must be very tired. As I got closer to him I saw him bowing his head every now and again, like you do at the *Glory be to the Father*, or rather other moments of veneration: so I was aware that in fact he was praying. It was Peter.

“Peter,” I said to him “You look very tired!”

*Peter:* “Not so much; I went to do a job for my employer, to bring back this cylinder for a broken machine that can now be fixed.”

*I:* “You seemed to be speaking. Who was with you?”

*Peter:* “Ah you see, this morning I could not go to Mass, so I didn’t say the Rosary, and since I found myself alone on the road I was saying it while I was walking. I really wanted to say it today because it is Tuesday, the day one of my aunties died, and she was good to me and did many things for me. So having no other way to show my gratitude, every Tuesday I say the Rosary for her soul.”

What a fine example that could be imitated by those who have received some favour. Prayer is such an easy thing to do, and it is so effective as a way of saying thanks for those who have benefited in some way.

### *Chapter 9. He leaves home*

There was something that worried the whole family. It was the military service that Peter had to undergo. The ballot chose him and Peter had to enlist in the army. You just can’t describe his parent’s desolation.

“Woe is me!” his by now sickly old father was saying, “Here am I approaching old age; my strength and health are gone; I cannot earn a living; Peter was my only support. And now he has gone to the army; oh woe is me and my poor family! Desolation and poverty will see me to my grave.”

*Peter:* “Do not worry, father, as citizens we have to serve our country. We have to recognise God’s will even in things like this. It can happen to anyone, so we need to be patient and resigned. I certainly do not want to make you sad for fear of poverty. But let’s put our trust in God; if we observe his law he will not fail to come to our aid.”

*His father:* “But who will help me?”

*Peter:* “God will be our help; my mother will continue to help you, and two of my brothers have now begun to earn something and I will not cease doing what I can to help you.”

His mother, who was always good and solicitous for her son's spiritual welfare even more than for the temporal welfare of the family, on the evening before Peter left, took him into a room that was somewhat apart and taking her son by the hand said: "Peter, tomorrow you leave home, and your parents; who knows if we will see each other again in this life. How many strange thoughts are weighing down my mind at the moment!"

*Peter:* "Don't cry, mother, you worry me so much speaking like this."

*Mother:* "I am not crying because you are leaving. I am a Christian and I know my duties to God and the country! But my dear Peter, just thinking about the fact that you have spent twenty years under my eyes and have been so good, always loved your religion, always gone to the Sacraments, always kept far away from bad friends, and now I see you leave to become a soldier where there are so many perils, whether in the people you have to mix with or the places you will be sent to. This is what afflicts me, makes me sad and worried about what might happen to your soul."

*Peter:* "I understand mother, your fears are well founded. But I have already seen to this at least in part. This morning I went to Confession and Communion and with God's help I will be able to keep my good resolutions and observe the rule I have already established. I am sure I can avoid offending God."

*Mother:* "Will you be brave enough to avoid anything that might offend God?"

*Peter:* "I hope so; and that is what I have already promised and continue to promise before this picture of Our Lady whom I have always honoured as my loving mother since my First Communion; I promise, I say, to continue in the Lord's service, take no heed of those who speak evil, and keep up my prayer and the Sacraments as I have done so far."

*Mother:* "These words of yours, Peter, give me great consolation, and since we are here in front of the image of Our Lady, let us make this agreement: you will not let a day go without praying to Our Lady so that she may keep you free from sin; and every evening before going to bed I will come and kneel



before this picture wherever you are and beg the graces and blessings of this merciful mother.”

At this point both of them were moved to tears. The father had noticed and he joined them in the room and then the other children came and it was the most moving scene you could imagine in the world. They were all weeping, sobbing, sighing. They looked at each other tearfully without saying a word, until Peter, gathering his courage said, “It is time that we raised our eyes to Heaven and resigned ourselves to God our Creator. Let us offer him this sorrowful separation in expiation for our sins. Good night, let us get some sleep.”

His sorrowing parents were comforted by their son’s tender words and offered up their sorrow to God as a sacrifice and went off to bed, but they couldn’t sleep a wink.

The following morning before leaving, Peter gathered all his brothers and sisters together around his father’s bed, since he was forced to remain there through illness, and in his usual kind way he recommended that they all keep Sundays holy; he asked his brothers to avoid bad companions and blasphemy. Amongst other things he told them: “If you love God, serve him and are obedient to your mother and father, you will have great spiritual and temporal blessings.

And mother, please continue to take care of my father. He is not well and therefore even more worthy of our compassion and solicitude. He is my father.

And father, I recommend patience and resignation: we are not wealthy and therefore you will have to put up with things but the Lord will take account of everything. Although I have to go far away from you, I will not cease to think of you, and I will send whatever help I am able to. Meanwhile father, take ...”

“What are you giving me, Peter?” his father asked, astonished.

“Take this.” Peter said lovingly. “These are the savings I have made over the past years. You and my mother used give me whatever I needed for my small pleasures, so I can do no less; I am keeping some for myself to pay for when I

first go to my regiment but the rest I leave for you and I am leaving you two hundred and fifty francs. Goodbye everyone, and take courage.”

Peter wanted to go, his father wanted to speak and could not do so out of emotion, but he held his hand; meanwhile making every effort he could he said: “Come closer Peter, and listen to these words which may be the last you will ever hear from your father: leave consoled, may Heaven bless you, and may this thought be your consolation that through your efforts you brought great consolation and support to your father and saved his soul through your good behaviour.”

Peter was happy to see his parents so resigned to God’s will, and left to join the regiment he had been assigned to.

### *Chapter 10. Life in the army*

It is a fact that army life is full of dangers for good souls, although officers and simple soldiers of good conduct and truly Christian courage are not lacking; nevertheless because of idleness, especially in time of peace, or because of the godless books and papers that are everywhere, the conversations they have, certain places and certain kinds of people they come across out of sheer duty, it is rare to find people return from military service with the holiness of life and upright behaviour they had when they left home. Peter was amongst the few blessed by God and favoured by his grace.

He had decided not to omit any of the religious practices that were compatible with his military status, so on the first day he reached the corps, when it was supper time, before eating he made the usual sign of the cross and a brief prayer that he was unable to finish because interrupted by a long “Ohhh!”

“He is a friar!” said one, “He’s just putting it on” said another: “Well, well, well!” Without being discouraged, all relaxed, Peter said, “What’s the problem? Maybe I didn’t make the sign of the cross properly? Let me do it again and I will try to do it better.” So he made the sign of the cross and said his prayer again and the murmuring continued. He did the same when he had finished eating, but with a little less reaction this time.

During the day he was with one or another person. Some thought he was a young man with lots of good humour, others that he had been well brought up by his parents. And many, who had also recently just joined military service, and were still basically very good sought him out as a friend. Meanwhile there were some that wanted to write to their parents but because they were illiterate, Peter offered to read and write letters for them whenever they wanted to, but always as a good friend without expecting anything for it. And this meant he soon had other friends.

One evening, when it was time for bed, Peter knelt next to his bed to say his prayers. It caused such a rumpus that the captain himself had to come to the dormitory. When he asked why there was such a rumpus, he then began speaking severely: "Is that how you treat religion? You should all be practising it; but since everyone is left free to practise it, at least if someone doesn't want to, he should respect others. I will note this disorder, and if it happens again the miscreants will be severely punished."

The following day Peter was just as kind to anyone who asked him for something.

"What kind of young man is this Peter?" said one. "He read my letter for me, wrote another one and did it all for no cost; he even gave me the paper; he really is a good friend." "For me," another one said, "he read out a note, and helped me out with a debt of three francs, and did it all for nothing." The quartermaster corporal was told that Peter wrote neatly and knew arithmetic and the metric decimal system, so he got him to do some urgent work which even the corporal himself could not do.

Whenever it was time to eat or go to bed he regularly made the sign of the cross and said his customary prayers, and the scoffers diminished in number to the point where after a few days even they became his admirers. But the real marvel was this: some of his fellow soldiers who out of human respect did not say their prayers, little by little began to follow his example and three months had not passed with Peter amongst them before the entire barracks where he slept regularly said their prayers. He thanked God for the courage he had given him and was happy to see his fellows fulfilling their religious duties.

Despite this there were other men who invited him to certain parties or to go to certain places that a good and well brought up Christian young man should stay away from. Peter consistently refused. One day some wanted to drag him away almost by force and since he was absolutely not going to go they said: “What a wretched kind of soldier you are!”

“Why do you say that?” Peter asked.

And they replied: “Because you won’t do what all honourable soldiers do.”

“A soldier’s honour,” he replied “lies in preserving his body for his earthly King and his soul for his heavenly King; what you want is to dishonour the true soldier because it is forbidden by the King of Heaven and by the earthly King.” Peter put all his efforts into fulfilling his duties, doing favours for whoever asked him without ever getting involved in things that were against God’s law.

One of his fellows who had been the recipient of many of Peter’s services, said to him one day: “I would like to give you a gift, Peter, something you would like. Tell me: what would you like best?”

*Peter:* “If you would like to do something pleasing to me and at the same time of advantage to you, I would ask you not to take the Lord’s name in vain any more. This would be a very precious gift for me.”

*Friend:* “I give you my word of honour that I will give you this gift and I promise you I will not take the Lord’s name in vain again; but I would like you to ask me for something else.”

*Peter:* “Since you are so kind, could I ask you this Easter to make your Confession and Communion and at the same time pray for me and my poor family.”

*Friend:* “What a wonderful soul you are! You are a saint amongst us; you know that some of your friends are aware that your father is sick and in need. They have collected twelve francs and this is the gift they have asked me to give you. You have only asked me for things that are good for my soul, which I assure you I will do, but in the name of your friends I ask you to also accept this gift for your father.”

Peter accepted the money with gratitude and saw that his father, who was very sick, soon received it.

*Chapter 11. His father's death*

Peter's father really was in need. He had had many setbacks and had been confined to bed for some months for most of the time. The two hundred and fifty francs had kept the family going for about eight months. But with the costs of running the home on the increase, foodstuffs going up in price and with the two boys who had been earning something almost without work, poverty had reached a climax. We find out about the situation of the family from a letter Peter's mother had written to him. It went like this.

My dear Peter,

God's hand continues to lie heavily upon us; after you left your father's health got steadily worse and he was no longer able to do a day's work. Your brothers' employer had no more work for them so they are at home and unemployed. Almost anything of any value is at Monte di Pietà. But amidst all our woes there is one great consolation, that we are resigned to God's will. Your father shows the patience of a Christian. He sees God's hand in his sickness and often says: "I had fun in my youth, so it is right that I should suffer in old age: if the Lord sends me with illness it is a sign that he wants me to save my soul." I am writing this to let you know how things are at home. You certainly cannot send us any help, but you can ask God to bless us and help us. May the holy Virgin keep you good. Greetings from the whole family.

Your loving mother.

When he received this letter Peter could not but be saddened and almost by way of comfort he had confided his worries in some of his closer friends who like him wanted to live honest and upright lives. These are the ones who, having been helped so much by Peter, wanted to give him the gift of the twelve francs mentioned above, so he could help his father in some way. So he was keen to answer his mother, and the letter, a copy of which I have here, contained these precise words:

Cagliari, 5 September 1854

My dearest mother,

May Divine Providence be praised mother, and let us always trust in God, since he has advised us always to seek his glory first, promising that he himself would then give whatever we need in life.

Some of my friends who are aware of our need have given me twelve francs to send you; I am adding another twelve that I have saved over the months. So you have a postal order for 24 francs. This sum is certainly only a small help in your serious need, but let us revive our hope that infinite Providence which helps us today will also help us tomorrow. It pains me to hear that father's illness is getting worse. Nevertheless tell him from me that also with this we ought to be consoled; the road strewn with flowers and pleasures does not lead to Heaven; thorns, tribulations, sickness and poverty are special signs of the Lord's kindness. He says "*blessed are those who suffer and are sad*"; and he calls them blessed because of the great reward prepared for them in Heaven, for sure. So my consolation at the news you have given me grows, I mean that my father is resigned to the divine will in his pain, a clear sign that God's grace is with him. Tell my brothers to try to keep busy with something or find some trade or other; and if they find no work tell them to go to school and learn to read and write well; that will always be of some use to them. So I am enclosing a note for my old teacher, and I am asking him to give some schooling to my brothers if they have nothing else to do. He loved me and I hope that to the other good things he did for me he will add this one—to get my brothers into school.

I believe that my youngest brother wants to make his First Communion this year. I am happy about that because he is good. Make every effort to see that he does it well. Because the saying goes that when First Communion is well made the road to Heaven is almost prepaid. Instruct him at home as much as you can and get his teacher to get him to study his catechism well. Send him to Confession often and tell him to make his Confession well and not keep anything back from the confessor.

For some months I have been helping one of my superiors to write; he has promised me a small reward; as soon as I receive it I will write to you and send it to you.

My dear mother, I have so much love for my family that I cannot stop writing because I feel like I am there talking with you. But I have reached the end of the page so I will finish this letter asking you to tell my father that there is a beautiful church in this city dedicated to the Blessed Virgin where I go each evening and pray for him that he may have either health or patience; but that whatever happens he can do God's will. Tell those at home to always keep Sundays holy and especially to go to the sermon.

May God help you mother dear, greet all our relatives, and I am always,  
your affectionate son Peter.

The letter and the money did not arrive in time to help his father, who had already been dead three days when it came. As soon as his mother received Peter's letter she wrote to him immediately to tell him of the sad loss of his father; the letter went like this:

Turin 10 September 1854

Beloved Peter,

Your letter, Peter, did not arrive in time to console your father. He died on the 6th of this month. You may weep and be consoled. You have lost a father but he has gone to Heaven. He had been ill for four years; for three months he has been confined to bed; he suffered a lot but was always resigned. During these final months he often went to Confession, received Viaticum twice; he received the Holy Oils and anointing in time; he was also given the papal blessing; his soul went to his Creator at eleven thirty on the evening of the sixth, with our parish priest beside him, praying until he breathed his last. Some hours before he died he called the whole family around his bed and told us to love one another. We are poor, he said, but very rich if we have the fear of God. Love God and begin to love him while you are young. Pray for me now and after my death. And after saying that he looked around those at his

bedside: “Peter,” he said “my Peter! Peter is not here! Tell him to pray for me, he ... he saved my soul; Peter, how much I love you Peter ...” He wanted to say other things but just couldn’t.

We are still experiencing deep sadness.

I received the twenty four francs you sent me, so please thank your generous friends for me for giving the twelve francs. This will help pay some of the debts incurred in recent days because of your father’s illness. Your brothers have found work again with a good employer. Here we pray three times a day for your father’s soul, so pray with us too, and pray also for me. I am,

your sorrowing mother.

News of his father’s death was like an arrow piercing Peter’s heart. He could not even finish reading the letter. He drew aside so he could give full vent to his sorrow and emotions. He cried for hours and could take no food for a whole day. Some of his friends wanted to console him and he told them: “If you want to console me let me weep for my poor deceased father.” His only comfort was to go to church and place his sorrow at the foot of the crucifix: “My Jesus,” he said “accept this sorrow that I am experiencing as penance for my sins and in suffrage for my father’s soul. Yes, father, I loved you so much in life, and I still love you now that you are dead: may the Lord give you eternal repose; yes my beloved father, I pray to God that he will take you soon to Paradise.”

That evening he went to his superior and asked for twenty four hours leave so he could deal with some affairs concerning his father’s death. His superior spoke to him words of comfort and granted the favour he had asked. He spent the time in works of piety in suffrage for his father’s soul. He went to Confession and Communion, went to several Masses and after midday went to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and then made the *Stations of the Cross*; he said the Rosary and many other prayers. At the end of the day, like someone who had fulfilled an important duty Peter was resigned and said to himself: “I have done everything I can for my father’s soul; he would certainly not be pleased if I continued to feel sad, and nor will he gain any more benefit



from it. So I will be cheerful and resigned.” He then took a sheet of paper and wrote the following letter to his mother.

18 September, 1854

My dearest mother,

Your letter, mother, brought me all the grief that a child can feel for the loss of his tender, beloved father. I have cried, sighed, but since sorrow is no suffrage for the dead, I had recourse to religion. I asked for a day’s leave, which I easily obtained, and I spent it in works of piety in suffrage for my father’s soul. Alleviate your own sorrows and continue to pray for him, for in the future we can say with even more affection: “Our father in Heaven” because I really believe that right now my father is in Paradise. Let us thank God for giving him the time to receive all the Sacraments. That has to be a great consolation for us. Tomorrow all of you go to church for one more Mass, and let those who can, go to Communion for his soul.

If the Lord sees fit for me to return home I would like to bring you all the consolations a good son can for his mother: love, obedience, respect, diligence in my duties, and something I know you have very much at heart—regular practice of my religion. These are the things I promise.

I will write to you again soon when I feel a little calmer. Tell my brothers and my sisters that work makes them good citizens, and religion makes them good Christians and that work and religion leads to Heaven. May God grant you true happiness. Meanwhile mother, know that I am,

Always your most loving son, Peter.

### *Chapter 12. Departure for Crimea<sup>10</sup>*

After his father’s death it would seem that the situation for Peter’s family had improved. An uncle took his eight year old sister in and that took a burden

<sup>10</sup> Crimea: peninsula that until recently belonged to the Ukraine and in 2014 was annexed by Russia. It lies between the Black Sea and the Azov Sea. The Crimean War (1853-1856), was a conflict between Russia and an alliance made up of the Ottoman Empire, France, Great Britain and the Kingdom of Sardinia.

from the mother. The two older brothers found employment and between them both earned eight francs a week. A thirteen year old sister became a seamstress and earned two francs a week.

Peter had been made a Corporal so was also able to send something to help the family and set that at ten francs a month. His mother put all of this together and through hard work and economy was able to manage affairs properly.

This is how things were for Peter when an alliance was made between our Government, France and England to send fifteen thousand soldiers from Piedmont to the Crimea to fight the Russians. Amongst the regiments destined for this expedition was Peter's. He knew that his mother would be very sorry to hear this news so even though he had to tell her he adopted a facetious tone as if it was like someone going for a trip to pass the time. Therefore this is how he wrote to his mother.

Cagliari, 12 March 1855

Dearest mother,

Good news, mother; I am going for a trip that will cost me nothing. Transport, food, clothing, my stay there, return ticket (when we return) all gratis. We have been warned to get ready to leave for the Crimea. Some get frightened when they hear the name of this country; not me. That's my duty, so I go gladly. The world is like being in exile. Whether I remain here in Sardinia, or return to Piedmont or go to Turkey I am always in exile in a valley of tears; our homeland is Heaven.

Don't think I am heading off carelessly: my first preparations were for my soul and my conscience is fully at ease. We are in God's hands, and if I am to die in battle I will die with honour and even hope to die as a good Christian. But if I come back I will be able to tell you all about those places. As soon as I arrive at my destination I will write to you. Continue to take care of the

family, and if we do not meet again in this world we will meet in Heaven where our father is waiting for us. Goodbye, mother dear. goodbye. Keep cheerful: I am always,

your loving Peter.

Peter, as we have said, wrote this letter in a somewhat facetious tone so he would not cause too much sorrow for his mother. But far from being cheerful she was very sad. I tried to console her by telling her that her son was good at writing and therefore when he was amongst enemies it would be less likely that he would fall into their hands, and that she could be consoled because she had such a courageous and virtuous son. The mother became a little more resigned, and asked me to write him a letter in which I would encourage him warmly to avoid any offence against God and that she would be less sorrowful if she knew he had died in battle than if she were to think he had stained his soul with sin. I willingly carried out my commission, and also added some reflections of my own that I thought would be appropriate. He wrote back immediately and since this reply is full of good and frank thoughts I shall reproduce it here just as it is, asking you to take no account of what he says that concerns me.

Cagliari, 4 April 1855

Dearest friend,

You can imagine with what great pleasure I received your letter! Every word of it was a precious balm for me. You ask me if I am still a good man, if my heart is still good. Yes, dear Don Bosco<sup>11</sup>, I will tell you frankly that my heart is the same as it was when you knew me at twelve years of age. Only distance has stopped me from going to the Oratory, but tell all my friends that the rules of the St Aloysius sodality have always been my rule of conduct in life. The book you gave me as I was leaving I have looked after jealously, and I read a little from it each day. I have brought with me the resolutions I wrote down at my First Communion, and I read them once a month and even more

<sup>11</sup> Don Bosco D.B.

often, taking care to put them into practice. You tell me that you want my soul to be looked after, with all your heart. I believe that and you have always shown that. For my part I assure you I will do everything I can to be saved. I have already encountered serious perils but the Blessed Virgin has always helped me and I have come out of them without offending the Lord.

Please try to console my mother who I believe is very sad that I am leaving for the Crimea. I also ask you to try to teach the fear of the Lord to my brothers. Take care of their soul as you showed you did and still do for mine. So see that my relatives, friends, brothers and sisters will all be saved.

We still do not know the day of our departure but it will certainly be soon. Who knows if I will return one day and can come back to the Oratory and enjoy the pleasant company of friends, and attend religious ceremonies like you have there! Never forget the agreement we made. Every day I say the *Our Father* to St Aloysius. Do not forget to remember me at Mass.

I greet you with all my heart, and with all my heart I remain now and forever in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate son, Peter.

### *Chapter 13. His experiences in Crimea*

Peter left a few days after he wrote this letter. Of the trip, arrival and where he is in Crimea for now we only know what he wrote in two letters to his mother and that is all we know about this valiant soldier.

The first is as follows.

From East Camp, 26 May 1855

Dearest mother,

Today I can finally write something to you. I begin by telling you that my health is excellent; I can give you some idea of what I have seen. I left the shores of Sardinia on the first of May on a ship something like the boats

you see on the Po, but fifty times larger. The voyage took twelve days. On the high seas you could only see water everywhere. Many of my friends were suffering during the voyage, and three died from sea-sickness. I was able to go to Confession to a Friar who was with us but not to Communion since there was no Blessed Sacrament. The way the burials took place was very sad. A rock was attached to their feet and another to their legs and they were thrown into the sea; they soon sank who knows how deep. After seven days we came to a narrow straight called the *Dardanelles*, then there was the great city of Constantinople. We stayed there a day and I was able to see the Turks. How ugly they look! Their trousers look like sacks; they have hats on their head that could hold about three bushels of maize each. I wasn't able to hear them speak because we were forbidden to leave the ship.

Finally on the 13th we reached the Crimea. Oh! You might ask me, what is the Crimea?

Crimea is a country like others. It is a very large country surrounded mostly by water except for one part called Perecop, where it joins the Russian Empire. We spent six days tied up at the wharf after which we were allowed to disembark. The first to meet us were the English who showed signs of friendship, but I understood nothing, although I picked up some words; *“the italien: the ilalien pruk”*: words that I think mean: “Good for you, Italians, well done!”

We were sent to different places according to orders from our superiors. Some of our regiments had already disembarked, others followed us. You might ask where they could put all these people. Don't be surprised: the world is big; there is a place for everyone. Wide open spaces with sand, river banks, stones and some trees—that's the floor of our home. And the blue sky is our roof. Could there be better floors and roofs than the ones the Lord made? By day we are busy putting up tents where we had to put the munitions, and also some of the men who had fallen ill. Then when evening comes I wrap two scarves around my head, a woollen blanket around my body, a sack under my head, and lying on the ground I sleep there till morning. Sometimes we are disturbed by the noise of shooting or cannon fired by the Russians to frighten

us, but they are just distant noises for us. We have not engaged with the Russians up till now but must constantly fight other enemies. By day it is so hot that it seems to be the antechamber of Hell, with very annoying flies and horseflies that have no respect for people and have a bite like a wasp. At night it is cold, with mosquitoes and some kind of bug that runs and flutters around all over the place, and if we are not covered up and protected from them it is impossible to sleep. There is another enemy and it's the lice which everyone tries to keep away. Up till now this enemy has not made great advances on us but we fear for the future when we have less clothing. What gives me the greatest regret is that after leaving Sardinia I have not been able to attend Mass, a sermon, Benediction. They say however that shortly things will be adjusted so that we can at least have Mass on Sundays.

This letter is already too long; I have many things to tell you and therefore I will write again and soon. Until now the Blessed Virgin has assisted me and nothing unfortunate has happened to me so far. May God help us. Greetings, etc.

Your affectionate son, Peter.

Another letter on 2 July 1855.

Dearest mother,

It was not possible for me to write until today. I have always had to be going here or there without a moment's relaxation. I have no more pen or ink so am writing with a pencil, that is with a lapis.

Many serious things happened after I wrote to you. There was a terrible attack of cholera and some of our companions died! It is said that the death toll reached two thousand five hundred; it is now going down, but there is terrible fever, a kind of cholera. On the seventh of last month there was a great battle at Sevastopol: the French and the English were victorious. On the eighteenth of the same month there was another, and although the allies were very courageous they were pushed back by the Russians and many of our men died. In these battles, between dead and wounded there have been 18 thousand of ours and 12 thousand Russians. They were fewer because they

were in a fort and protected. We are now at the vigil of another great event. What causes the greatest sorrow is to think that in a battle almost all who die are angry and instead of calling on God's mercy, as they should, most are blaspheming and cursing. How many souls will go to Hell!

My health is very good; I lack shirts, and since I was used to not eating so well at home it helps me now to adjust to any kind of diet; but those who used to eat and drink well are suffering from one illness or another and not a few end up in the other world.

My job is no longer to write for my superior but I have been promoted to Sergeant; this means I earn more but it also means I am on service more and have to live in the field with the other soldiers. Do not worry about me. For my body I need nothing, and as for my soul my conscience is at peace. If I live I hope to live in God's grace; if I die I hope to enjoy him in Paradise. If some time passes before I write again do not worry, it could be just that I don't have time. Continue to pray for me and know that I am always,

Your affectionate son, Peter.

This is the last lot of news we have had from Peter. We do not know if he is alive or dead. However we hope that Heaven will preserve him so he can be the consolation of his widowed mother, support the family, and be an example of virtue for his friends.

#### *Chapter 14. Conclusion*

So, dear reader, here are the powerful effects of a good upbringing and we could also say the effects of a well made First Communion. Peter always remembered the promise he made to God to be faithful, despite bad example and advice from his friends for many of whom there was no improvement in their lives after the first or second Communion. Their behaviour just went from bad to worse.

Peter knew that the God whom he had received for the first time wanted and indeed commanded that he be received at least once a year, at Easter. He did not limit himself to once a year because, as he used to say: "How can you

do something well if you only do it once a year?" So he went to Confession and Communion with the frequency we have seen.

Many mothers would like to have children similar to Peter in their behaviour, who are the support and consolation of their family; instead they are a cross during their childhood, and their sorrow and desolation when they are older.

Fathers and mothers! If you want to have well brought-up children who are your consolation when they become adults, imitate Peter's mother, instruct them in religion especially at a tender age; look after them and see they go to church rather than go off with bad companions.

But you have to give the example; it would be silly if there were parents who had no scruples about speaking freely of things against customs or religion, especially in the presence of their children, who hold parties on Sundays when they should be attending the sacred functions and then hope their children will be good, recollected, devout.

Fathers and mothers, don't fool yourselves! You will certainly have to render strict account before the judgement seat of God for the upbringing you gave your children. It is certain that many children are damned because they have not been brought up properly and it is equally certain that many fathers and mothers go to eternal perdition for the bad upbringing they have given their children.

These are three great truths which should be given careful consideration. It is an undeniable fact that if children are raised well this growing generation will love order and work, will make sure to comfort their parents and help the family. In short, we will have better times, children who will be an honour to their country, the support of their families as well as being to the glory and honour of their religion<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> In the original this is followed by: "Litanies for the dead (Translated from English)" (pp. [104]-111).



## II. DON BOSCO'S EDUCATIONAL METHOD IN CONFIDENTIAL DISCUSSIONS WITH A POLITICIAN (1854) AND AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER (1864)

*“Even though these were written down later (1881-1882), two presentations which Don Bosco made regarding his educational system are trustworthy. They were conversations that took place in 1854 and 1864. The first was with a Minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia, Urban Rattazzi; the other with an elementary teacher, Francis Bodrato.”*<sup>13</sup>

*The two documents which follow one another present something special in this context of essays and testimonies presenting Don Bosco's pedagogical thinking, especially if we consider how the material is organised. The first document furnishes us with an account of a conversation in 1854 with Urban Rattazzi<sup>14</sup>. In the second, the other member of the conversation is Francis Bodrato<sup>15</sup>, an elementary school teacher at Mornese (Alessandria). This discussion of Bodrato's with Don Bosco took place ten years later in 1864 but the heart of the contents and how they are arranged is similar.*

*There is a similar departure point in both accounts: Rattazzi and Bodrato, when they meet the founder of Valdocco, and although on different dates and in different places, are struck by the exemplary behaviour of the many boys whom the Piedmontese priest is surrounded by. So they request a private talk with Don Bosco, so they can get to understand his educational approach and how he applies this in practice.*

<sup>13</sup> P. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere...*, p. 136.

<sup>14</sup> Urbano Rattazzi (1808-1873), lawyer and politician. The text of the conversation with Rattazzi “is part of Chapters 7 and 8 of the second part of the *History of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, published by Fr John Bonetti, main editor for the SB. We can suppose, then, that he was also the author of this text.” (*DBE, Scritti*, p. 76).

<sup>15</sup> Francis Bodrato (1823-1880), after his wife's death, became a Salesian priest and missionary in Latin America. The discussion with Bosco comes from the *Biographical sketch of Father Francis Bodrato*, of which an original text by Carlo Cays (1813-1882) exists and a “proof copy” in ASC B220 Bodrato Francesco; cf. *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 77 and 191.

*The version closest to the facts bears the date 1881 (Don Bosco is still alive). The account of the conversation with Rattazzi was published in the BS (Salesian Bulletin, 1882), probably by John Bonetti, the chief editor. The conversation with the teacher from Mornese is reproduced in the Cenni biografici del sacerdote don Bodrato Francesco (Historical sketch of Father Francis Bodrato).*

*It seems very likely that references to the “two systems of education” which emerged in the conversation with Rattazzi were suggested by the brief description: The Preventive System in the Education of the Young in 1877<sup>16</sup>. A similar consideration could be given to the version of the conversation with Bodrato. At any rate the two documents are of special interest for understanding Don Bosco’s pedagogical thinking and educational praxis as well as their development.*

#### **148. Conversation with the Politician Urban Rattazzi**

Critical ed. in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 78-87.

Leaving his political views to one side, truth demands that we acknowledge that the lawyer Rattazzi both as a member of Parliament and as a Minister has always looked upon our Oratory and hospice with a kindly eye. He used to say that the Government was obliged to protect an Institute such as ours, because it operated very efficiently to lessen the prison population and to produce intelligent citizens at the same time as it was making good Christians of them. In fact, he himself set a good example in this regard.

Therefore he encouraged Don Bosco in his work, made grants, recommended the admission of young people, and even entrusted a young cousin to him, Cesare Rattazzi by name, so that he could bring him to a positive point of view, and be guided by sound principles. Then, each time he was appointed to the Ministry, he would be so kind as to inform Don Bosco that he would have nothing to fear. He showed these kindly dispositions from the time of his first meeting with Don Bosco, coming to our Oratory *incognito*. The event is worth noting.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Pietro BRAIDO, *Breve storia del “Sistema Preventivo”*. Roma, LAS 1993, p. 98.

It was a Sunday morning in the month of April of the year 1854, about ten-thirty. The young people at the Boarding school along with many who attended during the day, were in church for the second time. They had sung Matins and Lauds of the Office of the Blessed Virgin, had heard Mass, and Don Bosco had gone up into the pulpit and was recounting an episode from *Church history*, a topic he had taken up some time ago. In the meantime, a gentleman comes in through the main door of our Church, one whom no one recognised, not even Don Bosco. Hearing the sermon in progress, he sat himself down on one of the benches provided at the back for the faithful, and stayed there listening till the end.

Don Bosco had begun on the previous Sunday to tell the life of Pope St Clement and that morning was explaining how the saintly pontiff, because of hatred for the Christian faith, had been sent into exile by Emperor Trajan to the Chersonese, today known as the Crimea, where this year the war mentioned above broke out.

Finishing the story, it was his custom to question some of the boys, see if they had questions to ask, or what moral could be got from this fact of history. He made sure in this way that every one paid attention, and at the same time it added great interest to the telling. So doing this morning, he questioned one of the young day boys. Contrary to what might have been expected he came out with a question which while appropriate, was inopportune considering the place, and for the times, very dangerous.

He said, "If Emperor Trajan committed an injustice by driving Pope St Clement out of Rome and into exile, has not perhaps our government done wrong to exile our Archbishop Frasoni?" To this unexpected question Don Bosco replied without at all losing his composure, "This is not the place to say whether our government has done good or evil, in sending our most revered Archbishop into exile. This is something that can be discussed at the right time. But it is true that through the centuries and right from the beginning of the Church the enemies of the Catholic Faith have always had its leaders in their sights—popes, bishops, priests—because they believe that if you pull down the columns the building will fall down, and that, having struck down

the shepherd, the flock will be scattered and become easy prey to ravening wolves.

Meantime, whenever we hear or read that this or that bishop, this or that priest has been condemned and sentenced, for example to exile, or even to death, we should not straight away believe they are guilty, as these people say they are. It could be that on this occasion he has been a victim of his duty, that he is a confessor of the faith, that he is a hero of the Church, as were the Apostles, as were the martyrs, as were so many popes, bishops, priests and simple faithful. And then let us always remember that the world, the Hebrew people, Pilate, condemned to death on a cross as an impious blasphemer and subverter of the people, the Divine Saviour himself, while in fact he was truly Son of God, and had urged obedience and submission to the constituted authority; while he had ordered to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

After adding a few other words on the duty of keeping oneself strong in the faith and spiritual life, and respect for the ministers of the Church, Don Bosco came down from the pulpit, and having said the usual *Our Father and Hail Mary* in honour of St Aloysius, and having sung the *Praised be forever the names of Jesus and Mary*, we left the chapel by the side door. The unknown gentleman came out behind us, and coming into the playground, asked to speak to Don Bosco. The latter had this moment gone up to his room, and a young man accompanied him up.

After the first greetings, a brief dialogue occurred between Don Bosco and Rattazzi, heard by the same young man, who as was the custom in those unhappy times, remained there until told by Don Bosco to leave, in case anything happened. This is the dialogue.

*Don Bosco:* "May I know with whom I have the honour of speaking?"

*Rattazzi:* "With Rattazzi."

*Don Bosco:* "With Rattazzi! With the great Rattazzi (*coul gran Ratass*), Member of Parliament, Former Speaker of the House, and now Minister of the Crown?"

*Rattazzi:* “Precisely.”

Don Bosco (Smiling) “Then I had better hold out my wrists for the handcuffs, and prepare myself for prisons dark.”

*Rattazzi:* “For Heaven’s sake why?”

Don Bosco: “Because of what Your Excellency heard a few moments ago in the Church concerning the Archbishop.”

*Rattazzi:* “Not at all. Leaving aside the matter of whether the question asked by the boy was opportune or no, you replied, and you got out of it admirably, and no Minister in the world could proffer the slightest rebuke. In any case, although I am of the view that it is not a good idea to discuss politics in Church, much less with young people, who are not yet capable of justly weighing things up, nevertheless, one should not have to deny one’s personal convictions on anyone’s account. I might add that in a Constitutional Government Ministers are responsible for their actions which can be verified by any citizen, and therefore also by Don Bosco. As for myself, although not all the ideas and actions of Archbishop Frasoni meet with my approval, I am happy that the severe measures taken against him did not occur during my term of ministry.”

*Don Bosco:* “If that’s the case,” Don Bosco concluded merrily “I can rest assured that this time Your Excellency will not throw me in the cooler, and will let me breathe the free air of Valdocco. So let us pass on to other things.”

After this pleasant beginning, there followed a serious conversation lasting nearly an hour. Rattazzi, plying Don Bosco with questions, had him describe in detail how the Institution of the Oratory, and the Boarding School attached to it began, what were its aims, how had it progressed, what results it achieved. Being as he was a good-hearted man, he gained such a good impression of it all, that from that day forward, as we have mentioned above, he became our advocate and defender.

This was a real stroke of good luck for us, insofar as the times becoming harder year by year, and with Rattazzi frequently having the reins of government in his hands, and continuing to be a man of influence, our Oratory had such

support from him, without which it would have taken some very hard knocks, and even suffered very heavy losses. Instead it was just the opposite. It seemed as if the Lord wanted to use him for our good, and for not allowing us to come to harm, as for the same end under King Nebuchadnezzar, a powerful minister was used to favour young Daniel and his companions. God never changes. He is always like a father who provides. Happy he who loves him and trusts in him.

Among the various questions asked of Don Bosco by Mr Rattazzi in the above-mentioned conversation, one concerned the means he used to keep order among the many young people who flocked to the Oratory.

“Does not Your Reverence have at his orders,” the Minister asked “at least two or three constables in uniform, or in civilian dress?”

“I have absolutely no need of them, Your Excellency.”

“Is that possible? But these youngsters of yours are simply no different from young people everywhere. They also will, to say the least, be unruly, troublesome, quarrelsome. What censures, what punishments to use then, to restrain them, to prevent disorders?”

“Most of these young people are as smart as they come, as the saying is. Notwithstanding this, here we do not use violence, or punishment of any kind.”

“This seems to me to be a mystery. Explain the secret!”

“Your Excellency would know that there are two systems of education; one is called the repressive system, the other is called the preventive system. The former sets itself to educate people by force, by repression, by punishment, when they break the law, when they commit a crime. The latter seeks to educate them with kindness, and gently helps them to observe the law, and it provides them with the most suitable and efficacious means for the purpose. This is precisely the system we use.

Above all here we try to inculcate in the hearts of the young the holy fear of God. One motivates them with love for virtue and horror of vice, by

teaching them their Religion, and with appropriate moral instruction. One directs them on the path of good and sustains them with opportune and kindly counsel, and especially with the life of prayer and religion.

Over and above this we surround them, as far as is possible, with loving assistance in recreation, in the classroom, at the work place. We encourage them with kindly words, and at the first sign they are neglecting their duties, we remind them in a kind way, and recall them to a good way of behaving. In a word, we do all the things Christian charity suggests so that they might do good and avoid evil ruled by a good conscience and supported by Religion.”

“Certainly this is the best method of educating rational beings, but does it serve for every one?”

“For ninety out of a hundred this system offers consoling results. On the other ten nevertheless, it has such a good influence as to make them less stubborn and less dangerous, because of which only occasionally do I have to send a young person away as untameable and incorrigible. So much so that young people arrive or are brought along to this Oratory, and to Porta Nuova and Vanchiglia too, who before many weeks are out, are no longer the same. They may have a bad attitude, or refuse to be guided, or they may be the despair of their parents and their employers through sheer malice, but from wolves, so to speak, they change into lambs.”

“It is a pity that the Government is not able to adapt this system for use in their penal establishments in which hundreds of guards are needed to prevent disorders. And the prisoners get worse every day.

And what prevents the Government from following this system in its penal establishments? Bring Religion into it; set down appropriate times for Religious Instruction and prayers. Let the one in charge give these things the importance they deserve. Let God’s Minister come in frequently and let him mix freely with these poor souls; let them hear a word of love and peace and then the preventive system will be well and truly in use. After a while the guards will have little or nothing to do, but the Government will be able to boast that it has given back so many morally upright and useful people to their

families and to society. Otherwise it spends good money in order to correct and punish for a more or less prolonged period difficult and blameworthy people, and when they will have been set free, it will have to follow them and keep them under surveillance in order to protect itself from them, because they are ready to do worse.”

Don Bosco continued in this vein for a good while, and given that he had known the situation of the juvenile and adult offenders since 1840, because following the example of Fr Cafasso and Fr Borel he was accustomed to visit these wretches frequently, he was in a position to emphasise to the Minister the good effects of Religion on their moral rehabilitation. “When he sees the priest,” he added “when he hears the words of comfort, the prisoner remembers the happy years when he took part in the catechism classes. He remembers the good advice given him by his Parish Priest and his teacher. He realises that if he has landed up in this place of punishment it is either because he stopped going to church, or because he did not put into practice the teaching he had received. So, calling to mind these happy memories, more than once he feels his heart moved, a tear springs from his eye, he repents, suffers with resignation, determines to improve his conduct. And when he has finished his sentence he goes back into society determined to make up for the scandal he has given.

On the other hand if the kind face of Religion and its gentle precepts and practices are removed, depriving him of the conversations and good advice of his soul’s friend, then what will become of the wretch in that hideous enclosure? He will never be invited by a loving voice to lift his soul above the earth, never urged to reflect that in sinning he has not only broken the laws of the land but offended God, the Supreme Law-giver. He will never be urged to beg God’s pardon, nor encouraged to suffer temporal punishment in place of the eternal one God wants him to avoid. In his miserable condition he will never see anything but the evil act of fortune going against him. So instead of bathing his chains with tears of repentance he will gnaw at them with ill-concealed rage. Instead of resolving to change his life, he will stubbornly cling to his evil ways. From his companions in crime he will learn fresh malice, and plot with them one day to commit crime more secretly so as not to fall



into the arms of Justice again, but he will not consider bettering himself or becoming a good citizen.”

Given the favourable occasion, Don Bosco pointed out to the Minister the usefulness of the Preventive System especially in Public Schools and houses of education where one is dealing with souls still innocent of sin, souls that willingly resound to the voice of persuasion and love. “I know well,” Don Bosco concluded, “that promoting this system is not a task assigned to Your Excellency’s Department, but a remark or word from you will always carry great weight in the deliberations of the Ministry for Public Education.”

Mr Rattazzi listened with keen interest to these and other remarks of Don Bosco. He was completely convinced of the goodness of the system in use in the Oratories, and promised that for his part he would cause it to be preferred to any other in Government institutions. If he did not always keep his word, then the reason is that Rattazzi at times also lacked the courage to display and defend his religious convictions.

#### **149. The discussion between Don Bosco and teacher Francis Bodrato**

Critical ed. in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 187-198.

Not satisfied with only admiring, Bodrato wanted to know more, and to this end asked Don Bosco for a personal interview, which was granted him that same night. He asked [Don Bosco] what secret he possessed to be able to have the mastery he did over so many boys, so that they became so obedient, respectful and docile, such that more could not be asked of them.

Don Bosco made short work of the answer: “*Religion and Reason* are the mainsprings of my system of education.

The educator should be convinced that all, or nearly all, of these fine young people are intelligent by nature, and can recognise the good done to them personally, and at the same time they are gifted with a good heart which is readily open to gratitude.

When one succeeds with God's help in inculcating the principal mysteries of our religion into their souls, these mysteries are all about love and make us think of the immense love God has for mankind; when you succeed in touching the strings of gratitude in their hearts, how much we owe Him because of what He has so generously done for us; when they have become convinced by reason that real gratitude to the Lord should be expressed by doing His will, respecting his precepts, especially those that require the doing of our duty to one another, believe me the greater part of our work of education is already done.

Religion in this system is like the bit in the mouth of a fiery steed, which dominates and rules it. Reason is like the bridle then which pulls on the bit and gives you the results you are looking for. True religion, genuine religion can control the actions of the young person. Reason correctly applies these holy precepts as a guide for all his actions. There you are—the system I use and which you wish to know the secret of, summed up in a couple of words.”

When Don Bosco finished speaking, Bodrato took up in reply. “Your Reverence, when you used that image of the bit which controls the young colts, you spoke to me of the moderating force of religion, and the good use of reason in guiding all their actions. This is very good, but it seems to me that you have said nothing about a third way the horse-breaker always uses, I mean he is never without his whip, which is the third element of his success.”

To this remark of Bodrato Don Bosco replied: “My dear sir, allow me to say to you that in my system the whip, which you say can't be done without, that is, the salutary threat of future punishment, is not excluded absolutely. Just recall that many and terrible are the punishments religion threatens for those who pay no heed to the Lord's precepts and dare to despise his commands. These are severe and terrible threats. If they are frequently recalled they will not fail to produce their effect, all the more so when we don't limit ourselves to emphasising external actions but we strike at their most secret ones, their most hidden thoughts.

In order to make the conviction of this truth penetrate even more deeply, we also include the sincere practice of the faith, attendance at the Sacraments

and the persistence of the educator, and we are certain that with the help of the Lord we will have much more chance of making very many boys, even the most difficult ones, into good Christians.

In any case, when the young come to be convinced that those in charge of them truly want to do them good, more often than not it is punishment enough to be a little reserved and show the displeasure you experience at getting so little return for your fatherly care.

Believe me, dear Sir, that this system is perhaps easier and certainly more effective because with its background of religious practice it will also be blessed by God. For proof you can see for yourself. I am inclined to invite you to come for a few days to see its practical application in our houses. Come at any time to spend a few days with us, and I hope that at the end of the experiment you can assure me that what I have said to you is verifiably the most functional and surest system.” This invitation, made partly jokingly and partly seriously, made an impression on our Bodrato. He thanked Don Bosco, saying he would give a definite reply later, but bearing in his heart the thought that he would take it up later with good results<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> The text of the first part of the dialogue needs to be completed with the other part of the report also drawn up by Carlo Cays and included by the publisher in the critical apparatus dealing with variants; cf. *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 196-197.

## SECTION TWO

### PEDAGOGICAL INSIGHTS, REFLECTIONS AND IDEAS

#### Presentation

*Having finally established his educational and social work at Valdocco in Turin, by 1846, Don Bosco very soon became aware of the urgent need to publish writings that could respond to the purpose of his work and the needs of the often illiterate poor and abandoned boys he was gathering there. Amongst his first publications are topics regarding education and schooling.*

*When selecting the writings and main documents to be offered in this collection we kept in mind the criteria indicated in the general introduction and referred to briefly at the beginning of this presentation.*

*Along with the better and more widely known items, documents—The Preventive System in Education, the Confidential Reminders to Rectors, the Letter from Rome on 10 May 1884—other lesser known items have been included, illustrating topics and themes which are still of considerable interest. Let me list the most relevant titles and core ideas: references to the practice of the preventive system, pedagogical orientations and disciplinary and scholastic matters, standards and guidelines for reading material, and the dissemination of good books.*

*These and other topics are presented or briefly mentioned by Don Bosco in circulars and, more frequently, in personal letters addressed to young pupils, members of the Salesian Society, educators in general, as well as civil or religious authorities.*

*By way of example this section also includes a collection of “Goodnights” or “little talks” to the boys at the Oratory in Valdocco.*

*For the organisation of the section and the order of the different items in it, we kept in mind their relevance and the requirements of various groupings of similar topics. Instead the criterion for arranging the items in each of the mentioned groupings is a chronological one.*

## I. GUIDELINES FOR RUNNING SALESIAN HOUSES (1863-1887)

*The origin of this authoritative document, the Confidential Reminders<sup>18</sup>, is a letter written to Fr Michael Rua whom Don Bosco called on to take up the running of the first Salesian house outside Turin in autumn 1863: the college or junior seminary of St Charles in Mirabello Monferrato<sup>19</sup>. In a letter sent to the young Rector/Director, Don Bosco wanted to pass on pedagogical and spiritual guidelines which had already been in practice at Valdocco. These were to also characterise the apostolic and educational work in the new foundation.*

*It is a document “dictated by immediate needs but under the cover of practical advice, concrete examples, brief notes and insights. It had all the signs of Don Bosco’s deep certainties and keen concerns. He was convinced of that, so much so that what was a simple private letter to Fr Rua in 1863 then became—from 1871, with some retouching and additions dictated by later experiences and reflections, the “Confidential Reminders for Rectors of Individual Houses of the Salesian Society.”<sup>20</sup>*

*The last printed version of the Confidential Reminders—the one in this volume—is dated December 8, 1886, about a year before Don Bosco’s death. The twenty six points or the original letter to Fr Rua were enriched by new content and doubled in number coming to forty seven. These are developed in eight brief paragraphs which cover the life, main tasks and ways of behaving for a Rector-Director-Educator of a Salesian house.*

*The item was given careful study and reflection in the Seventh Salesian General Chapter in 1895 and in the first American Chapter of the Pious Salesian Society (Buenos Aires 1901). Later, at meetings of European Salesian Provincials held in 1907, this guideline emerged: “Rectors/Directors would do very well if, on the*

<sup>18</sup> Francesco MOTTO, I “Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori” di don Bosco, in RSS 3 (1984) 25-166.

<sup>19</sup> Mirabello Monferrato: a district belonging to the Province of Alessandria (Piedmont).

<sup>20</sup> DBE, *Scritti*, pp. 173-174.

*day of the exercise for a happy death, they were to carefully read the Confidential Reminders of Don Bosco which contain so much pedagogical wisdom.”<sup>21</sup>*

### **150. Confidential reminders for the director at the house of .....**

Critical ed. in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 173-186.

*For yourself*

1. Let nothing disturb you<sup>22</sup>.
2. Avoid austerity in food. Let your mortifications be diligence in your duties and putting up with the annoyances of others. Get seven hours of rest each night. That can vary more or less for you and others when there is some reasonable motive. This is useful for your health and that of your dependants.
3. Celebrate Holy Mass and recite the breviary *pie, attente ac devote (piously, attentively and devoutly)*. This is for you and for your dependants.
4. Every morning never omit meditation and during the day a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. For other things, do as indicated in the Rules of the Society.
5. Learn how to make yourself loved rather than feared. Let charity and patience constantly accompany you in commanding and correcting and act in such a way that everyone knows by your words and deeds that it is the good of souls you are seeking. Put up with anything when it is a matter of preventing sin. Let your concerns be directed to the good of the youngsters whom Divine Providence has entrusted to you.
6. In matters of greater importance always lift your heart briefly to God before making a decision. When some report is made to you, listen to everything but try to discern the facts well and listen to both parties before

<sup>21</sup> *Atti del Primo Capitolo Americano della Pia Società Salesiana*. Buenos Aires (Almagro), Collegio Pio IX di Arti e Mestieri 1902, p. IV; ASC E171 *Convegni Ispettori 1907-1915*; José Manuel PRELLEZO, *Linee pedagogiche della Società salesiana nel periodo 1880-1922. Approccio ai documenti*, in RSS 23 (2004) 107.

<sup>22</sup> The opening words of a well-known prayer by Teresa d'Avila (1515-1582).

making a judgement. Often on first hearing of them, things seem like wooden beams that are merely splinters.

*With the teachers*

1. See that teachers are lacking nothing they need regarding food and clothing. Note their efforts and if they are ill or simply unwell, quickly send someone to substitute them in class.

2. Speak with them often, individually or together; see that they do not have too much to do, or if they lack clothing or books, or have some physical or moral concern or if they have pupils in class who need to be corrected or have particular disciplinary needs regarding the level and way of teaching them. As soon as you know of some need do whatever you can to accommodate it.

3. In appropriate Conferences recommend that their questions in class cover all the pupils without distinction. They should read each one's work in turn. Let them avoid particular friendships or favouritism and they should never allow pupils or others into their rooms.

4. If they need to give tasks or advice to pupils, they should use a room or hall made available for this purpose.

5. When there are Solemnities, Novenas or Feast Days in honour of Our Lady or the Patron Saint of some town, the school, or one or other Mystery of our Religion, they should say a few words about it beforehand and should never omit to do this.

6. Keep an eye out to see that teachers never send pupils away from the school or, should that be absolutely necessary, see that they are accompanied by the Superior. They should never hit delinquent or negligent boys. If something serious happens they should immediately advise the Director of Studies or the Superior of the House.

7. Outside of school, teachers cannot exercise any authority over their pupils and should limit themselves to advice, warnings or at most corrections that suggest that they mean to do so charitably.

*With the assistants and those in charge of dormitories*

1. Most of what has been said concerning teachers can be applied to those in charge of the dormitories.
2. Try to share out tasks so that both for teachers and for these they can have the time and ease for attending to their studies.
3. Deal willingly with them to listen to their opinion about the behaviour of the boys entrusted to them. The most important aspect of their duties is to arrive punctually where the boys come together to rest, or for school, work, recreation or the like.
4. If you see that one of them has engaged in a particular friendship with a pupil, or that his role or his morals may be at risk of being compromised, change his duties with all prudence; if the risk continues you should immediately let your Superior know.
5. Bring the teachers, assistants and those in charge of dormitories together every now and then and tell them to make efforts to prevent bad conversations, keep out every book, writing, image or picture (*hic scientia est*) or anything that endangers purity, the Queen of virtues. Let them offer good advice and be charitable to everyone.
6. Let them make it their common concern to discover the more risky pupils; Once they have been found, encourage them to let you know who these are.

*With the coadjutors and service personnel*

1. See that every morning they can hear Mass and approach the Sacraments according to the rules of the Society. Service personnel should be encouraged to go to Confession every fortnight or at least once a month.
2. Employ great charity in giving commands, letting people know by your words and actions that you want the good of their souls. Keep a special eye out to see that they do not engage in familiarity with the boys or people from outside.



3. Never allow women into the dormitories or the kitchen or allow them to deal with people in the house unless it is for charitable matters of something absolutely necessary. This article is of the greatest importance.

4. If arguments or disputes should break out amongst service personnel, assistants, the boys or others, hear each one out charitably, but ordinarily I would say offer your view separately so that one does not hear what is being said about the other.

5. A coadjutor of known probity should be appointed head of the service personnel to watch over their work and their moral conduct, so that there is no theft or bad conversation. And take special care to prevent anyone taking on jobs or engaging in business affairs with relatives or other people outside, whoever they may be.

#### *With the young pupils*

1. Never accept pupils who have been expelled from other [boarding] Colleges or whom you judge to be of bad conduct. If, despite due caution, you happen to accept one of this kind, appoint a companion you are certain of who will stay with him and never let him out of his sight. When he gets involved in some misdemeanour advise him at least once and if he fails again he should immediately be sent home.

2. Let the pupils get to know you, and you should get to know them by spending all the time possible with them, offering whatever word of affection in their ear you know best as you see the need, bit by bit. This is the great secret that will make you master of their hearts.

3. You might ask: what are these words? They are the same ones that were said to you once upon a time. For example, "How are you?" "Good." "And your soul?" "Just so-so." "Would you like to help me in a great task, will you help?" "Yes, but what is it?" "Make yourself good" or "Saving your soul" or "Make yourself the best of all the boys." And with the wilder ones: "When do you want to start?" "Start what?" "To be my consolation, behaving like St Aloysius." And for the ones who are a bit resistant to approaching the

sacraments: “When would you like to break the devil’s horns?” “How?” “With a good confession.” “When would you suggest?” “As soon as possible.” On other occasions:” When should we have a good clean-up?” or “Do you feel like helping me to break the devil’s horns?” “Do you want us two to be soul friends?” *Haec aut similia.*

4. In our Houses the Rector/Director is the ordinary Confessor, therefore see that you willingly hear each one’s confession but give them full freedom to go to confession to someone else if they wish. Make it well known that you take no part in the marks given for good conduct and try to eliminate any hint of suspicion that you make use of or even recall what was told you in Confession. Let there not be even the least hint of favouritism shown to someone who goes to confession to one rather than the other.

5. The Altar Boys, the St Aloysius, Blessed Sacrament, Immaculate Conception Sodalities should be encouraged and promoted. Show good will and satisfaction towards those who are enrolled, but you should only be a promoter and not their director. Consider such things as being for the boys. They are entrusted to the Catechist to run.

6. When you succeed in discovering some serious misdemeanour, have the guilty one or the suspect called to your room and in the most charitable way try to get him to admit his fault and the wrong he has committed. Then correct him and invite him to fix up his conscience. This way and by continuing to give kindly assistance to the pupil, wonderful results are obtained and improvements that one would never have thought possible.

### *With people outside*

1. We willingly lend our efforts for religious services, preaching, celebrating Masses for the public and hearing confessions any time that charity and our duties of state allow us to, especially for parishes our houses are in. But never take on tasks or other things that mean you have to be away from the house or that can affect the roles that each one has.

2. Out of courtesy priests from outside are sometimes invited to preach or are invited to a Solemnity, musical entertainments and the like. Similar invitations can be made to authorities or any well-deserving or charitable people who have given us favours or who would be able to.

3. Charity and courtesy are the characteristic features of a Rector/Director towards people both inside and outside.

4. In case of questions regarding material matters be as agreeable as you can, even if there is some disadvantage, so long as anything that is matter for dispute or any other thing that could cause a loss of charity are kept far away.

5: If it is a case of spiritual matters, questions are always to be resolved with whatever gives greater glory to God. Your tasks, or stubbornness, spirit of vengeance, self-love, arguments, pretensions and also honour - everything is to be sacrificed to avoid sin.

6. In matters of grave importance it is good to ask time to pray and take advice from some pious and prudent individual.

#### *With members of the Society*

1. The exact observance of the rules and especially obedience is the basis of everything. But if you want others to obey you, you must also obey your superiors. Nobody who is not able to obey is suitable for being in command.

2. Try to share things out in such a way that nobody is overburdened but see that each one does faithfully what is entrusted to him.

3. Let nobody in the Congregation draw up contracts, receive monies, offer loans or lend things to relatives, friends or others. Nor let anyone keep money or administer temporal matters without being directly authorised by the Superior. Observance of this article will keep some of the problems that have been fatal for other Congregations far away from us.

4. Abhor any modification of the Rules like poison. Their exact observance is better than any variation. The best is the enemy of the good.

5. Study, time, experience have allowed me to have first-hand knowledge that greed, interest and vainglory were the ruin of flourishing congregations and respectable religious orders. Time will also allow you to see the truths that perhaps you only think are unbelievable right now.

6. Take the greatest care to foster common life through word and deed.

### *Giving commands*

1. Never command things that you judge to be beyond the strength of your subjects or that you see they will not obey. Try to avoid repugnant commands. Indeed, take the greatest care to support the inclinations each one has by preferably giving them roles that you know they will enjoy fulfilling.

2. Never command things that are injurious to health or that hinder them taking the rest they need, or which clash with other tasks or orders from another superior.

3. When commanding, always use charitable and mild words and manner. Threats, anger, and even more so violence should always be far from your words and actions.

4. Where you have to command a subject to do difficult or repugnant things say, for example: “Could you do this or that other thing?” or “I have something important that I would prefer not to ask you to do because it is difficult, but there is nobody other than yourself who is up to it. You have the time and the health; it will not keep you away from other tasks” etc. Experience tells us over time that approaches of the kind have been very effective.

5. Be economical in everything, but ensure absolutely that those who are ill lack nothing. Amongst other things this lets people know that we have made a vow of poverty, therefore we ought not seek comfort nor even desire it in anything. We must love poverty and what comes with poverty, so avoid any unnecessary expense in clothing, books, furniture, trips etc.

This is like a Testament that I address to the Directors/Rectors of individual Houses. If this advice is put into practice, I will die happy because I will be certain that our Society will flourish even more before men and be blessed by

the Lord, and it will achieve its end, which is the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

Turin, 1886, Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary Most Holy,  
45th anniversary of the founding of the Oratory.

## II. PREVENTION AND EDUCATION (1877-1878)

The Preventive System in the education of the young (1877)<sup>23</sup> is one of the most important and widespread documents by the founder of the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. It is the first more or less complete account—despite its small size—that Don Bosco had put together on his educational approach. It is with this “small treatise” that his reputation as educator and pedagogue became so intimately linked.

With regard to the origin of the document, there are some pointers to be found in the unpublished diary of one of Don Bosco’s most attentive collaborators: Giulio Barberis<sup>24</sup>. On March 12, 1877, the opening of the new site of the Patronage de Saint-Pierre took place in Nice. Don Bosco gave a speech or ‘exposé’ which he then completed shortly after returning to Italy. After describing the celebration and after the text of his speech he followed up with a “summary” of what had to do with the “education system we use, which we call preventive.” The work cost Don Bosco “several days. He redid it three times and was complaining that he just could not find the right way to put things as he wanted.”<sup>25</sup>

In autumn 1877, the Salesian press at San Pier d’Arena printed a booklet containing all the material and details of the event in Nice, “with an appendix on the Preventive System in the education of the young.” From then on translations, reprintings and new editions multiplied. An ‘occasional’ work, then, became a pedagogical text of general interest in the light of the facts.

<sup>23</sup> The first version of this item was published in a bilingual edition, Italian and French, in a pamphlet called: *The opening of the Patronage de S. Pierre in Nice. Purpose of this work, explained by Father John Bosco with an appendix on the preventive system in the education of youth.* Torino, tip. e libr. salesiana 1877; cf. Giovanni BOSCO (s.), *Il Sistema Preventivo nella educazione della gioventù.* Introduction and critical texts by P. Braido. Roma, LAS 1985.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. M. FISSORE, *Il Vademecum di don Giulio Barberis ...*, p. 11; Eugenio CERIA, *Profili di capitolarli salesiani morti dall'anno 1865 al 1959 ...* Colle Don Bosco (Asti), Libreria Dottrina Cristiana 1951, pp. 305-324.

<sup>25</sup> *Cronachetta*, 12, p. XI; cf. *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 209-210.

*No traces of the handwritten original dossier on The Preventive System in the education of the young have been found as yet. “But there is no doubting Don Bosco’s authorship of this item. Other than Fr Barberis’ clear testimony, a careful lexical, syntactic and stylistic study of the text is more than sufficient when compared with similar writings by Don Bosco.”*<sup>26</sup>

*But he did not intend to draw up a systematic pedagogical treatise nor an original excursus on education. He considered the work as “a sketch” of something he was thinking of publishing. He then adds that “two systems have been used throughout time in educating the young: Preventive and Repressive”, and he states without any hesitation that he follows the former, the “Preventive system” which “is usually used” in Salesian houses, and—he emphasises—“which is based completely on reason, religion and loving kindness.”*

*The work which Don Bosco thought of completing remained simply as a planned one but the little booklet on pedagogy in 1877 is more than a simple “sketch”. Reflected in it are ideas and guidelines from the pedagogical culture of the time, assimilated and re-presented in a characteristic and original way, and located within authentic Christian and Catholic tradition.*

*“Alongside the value of the Preventive System as a formulation of pedagogical teachings we also need to recall its value in the history of educational praxis. The Preventive System incorporated into the Regulations of the Salesian Society became the basic document for pedagogical formation, was commented on and developed while Don Bosco was still alive by Fr Barberis in his notes on “sacred pedagogy”, and by Fr Francis Cerruti in brief essays and talks, and by Fr Dominic Giordano in various pedagogical writings.”*<sup>27</sup>

*After careful research, Pietro Braido came to this conclusion regarding the “short history” of the Preventive System: “Its first explicit literary formulation is due to Don Bosco, who put it into practice and gave it a sufficiently recognisable*

<sup>26</sup> DBE, *Scritti*, p. 210.

<sup>27</sup> P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica...*, II, p. 462. The Salesian scholar then mentions certain “limitations” in the work.

*shape amongst all the other models of pedagogy. We are not dealing with a perfectly complete and closed system but something open to additions and developments, theoretical and historical, which enrich it without distorting its essential original features.”*<sup>28</sup>

\* \* \*

*In 1878, Don Bosco sent the Minister for Internal Affairs, Francesco Crispi<sup>29</sup>, an item that borrowed the title already used—The Preventive System in the education of the young. Emphasising certain features of the content, this was also published with the title: The Preventive System as applied to young people at risk (1878).”*<sup>30</sup>

*The second document sent to Crispi was accompanied by a letter in which Don Bosco noted a number of buildings in Rome which he thought appropriate for founding a hospice or hostel where he could apply the Preventive System with young people at risk.*

*Different paragraphs of the two “versions of the preventive system” coincide almost literally but there are also differences between the two, both in their general arrangement and their contents. In the 1877 booklet his pedagogical concern stands out; the shorter memo in 1878 instead has a certain socio-political character, pointing to the phenomenon of social changes which were making the problem of “abandoned youth” more acute and threatening.*

<sup>28</sup> P. BRAIDO, *Breve storia del “sistema preventivo”...*, p. 5. One of Don Bosco’s first collaborators and scholars wrote in 1910: “I am certain that you all know the few but pithy pages by our good Father about this system, understood and taught by great pedagogues, which he made his own, threw wonderful soft light upon, so it shone out through his words and example. He embellished it with all the grace that comes from the Gospel.” (Francesco CERRUTI, *Educazione ed istruzione. Sistema preventivo. Ispezioni scolastiche e civili*. Torino, Tip. S.A.I.D. “Buona Stampa” 1910, pp. 7-8).

<sup>29</sup> Francesco Crispi (1818-1901), member of the historical Left in Italy; president of the council of ministers [Prime Minister] for the Kingdom of Italy (1887-1891 and 1893-1896).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. DBE, *Scritti*, p. 284.



*One of the many ministerial crises interrupted the procedures that had begun. Don Bosco presented his “project” to the new Minister for the Interior, Giuseppe Zanardelli<sup>31</sup> but according to accessible documentation, without positive result. Also of interest is the intention of the founder of the Salesian Congregation to present his educational approach for secular settings involving poor and at risk youngsters.*

### **151. The Preventive System in the Education of the Young**

Critical ed. in DBE, Scritti, pp. 248-257 (OE XXVIII, 422-443).

On a number of occasions I been have asked to express, verbally or in writing, a few thoughts concerning the so-called Preventive System which we are accustomed to use in our houses. Until now I have not been able to comply with this wish for lack of time, but I am giving an outline of it here which will serve as a sketch of a small work which I am preparing, if God gives me life enough to be able to complete it. I do this solely to help in the difficult art of the education of the young. Therefore I will say what the Preventive System consists of and why it should be preferred; its practical application, and its advantages.

#### *1. What the Preventive System consists of and why it should be preferred*

There have been two systems used through the ages in the education of the young: preventive and repressive. The repressive approach consists in making the law known to the students and then supervising them in order to detect transgressions, inflicting, wherever necessary, the merited punishment. Using this system the words and the appearance of the Superior must always be severe and somewhat menacing and he must avoid all friendly relationships with his dependants.

To give greater weight to his authority, the Director would need to be seen but rarely among his subjects, and generally speaking only when it was a question of punishing or threatening. This system is easy, less demanding

<sup>31</sup> Giuseppe Zanardelli (1826-1903), lawyer and politician, Prime Minister from 1901 to 1903, and affiliated with the Propaganda Masonic Lodge. He was Minister for the Interior for some months in 1878.

and is especially useful in the army and among adult and sensible people who ought themselves know and remember what is to be done according to the law and other regulations.

Quite otherwise, I would say its very opposite, is the preventive system. It consists in making known the rules and regulations of an Institute, and then supervising in such a way that the students are always under the vigilant eye of the Director and the Assistants, who like loving fathers will converse with them, act as guides in every event, counsel them and lovingly correct them, which is as much as to say, will put the students into a situation where they cannot do wrong.

This system is all based on reason, religion and loving kindness. Because of this it excludes every violent punishment, and tries to do without even mild punishments. It seems that this system is preferable for the following reasons:

1. Being forewarned, the pupil is not disheartened when he does something wrong, as happens when such things are reported to the one in charge. Nor does he get angry from being corrected, or threatened with punishment, or even from actually being punished, because there has always been through the affair a friendly voice forewarning him which reasons with him and generally manages to win his friendship, so that the pupil knows there must be a punishment and almost wants it.

2. The basic reason (why young people get into trouble) is youthful fickleness which can forget the rules of discipline and the punishments they threaten in a flash. For this reason a child often commits a fault and deserves punishment, to which he had not given a thought, which he did not remember at all in the act of committing the fault, and which he certainly would have avoided had a friendly voice warned him.

3. The Repressive system can stop a disorder but only with difficulty can it improve offenders. One observes that young people do not forget the punishments they have suffered, and generally remain embittered, wanting to throw off the yoke and even to take revenge. It seems at times they pay no heed, but anyone who follows them up in later life knows that the recollections of the young are dreadful, and that they forget the punishments inflicted by their

parents, but with great difficulty those given by their teachers. Episodes are known of some who in their old age have exacted an ugly revenge for certain punishments justly inflicted during their school days. On the other hand the Preventive system makes a friend of the student, who sees a benefactor in the assistant who gives him good advice, wants to make him good, shield him from unpleasantness, punishment and dishonour.

4. The Preventive System offers the student previous warning, in a way that the educator can still speak to him in the language of the heart, whether during the time of his education, or later. The educator, having won the loving respect of his protégé, will be able to greatly influence him, warn him, counsel him, and also correct him, even when he is employed, whether it be in the civil service, or in commerce. For these and many other reasons it seems that the Preventive System should prevail over the repressive.

## 2. Application of the Preventive System

The practice of this system is all based on the words of St Paul, who says: *“Charitas benigna est, patiens est; omnia suffert, omnia sperat, omnia sustinet.* Love is kind, and patient; it puts up with all things, but hopes all things and endures any disturbance.” For this reason only a Christian can successfully apply the Preventive system. Reason and Religion are the means the educator should constantly make use of, teaching them, making use of them himself if he wishes to be obeyed and to attain his goal.

1. For this reason the Director should be dedicated to his pupils. He should never assume tasks that would take him away from his duties; on the contrary, he should be among his pupils every time they are not taken up with other legitimate tasks, unless they are duly assisted by others.

2. The teachers, the technical instructors, the assistants should all be of known moral rectitude. The wrongdoing of just one person can compromise an educational Institute. They should act in such a way that the students are never alone. As far as possible the assistants should precede them to the place where they are required to assemble; they should remain with them until others come to assist them; they should never allow them to be idle.

3. Give them ample liberty to jump, run, make a din as much as they please. Gymnastics, music, recitals (of poems, etc.), theatricals, hikes, are very effective methods for getting discipline; they encourage good living and good health. Just ensure that the plot, the characters and the dialogue are not unsuitable. That great friend of youth, St Phillip Neri used to say, “Do whatever you wish; for me it is enough you do not sin.”

4. Frequent Confession, frequent Communion, daily Mass are the pillars that ought to support an educational edifice, from which one would want to keep at bay threats and violence. Never require the youngsters to go to the Holy Sacraments, but just encourage them, and offer them every opportunity to make good use of them. Then on the occasion of retreats, novenas, homilies, religious instructions, one should highlight the beauty, the greatness, the holiness of that Religion which proposes with such easy methods things as useful to civil society, to peace of heart, to the salvation of one’s soul, as are these holy sacraments. In this way the young people will become involved spontaneously in these religious practices, with pleasure and with fruit (1).

5. Exercise the strictest vigilance to prevent friends, books or persons who carry on bad conversations being allowed in the Institute. The appointment of a good doorkeeper constitutes a treasure for a house of education.

6. Every evening after the usual prayers, and before the students go to bed, the Director, or someone in his place should offer a few kind words in public, giving some good advice or counsel regarding things to be done or avoided, and let him try to glean these from events that have taken place that day in the Institute or outside. But his talk should never go on more than two or three minutes. This is the key to good behaviour, progress and educational success.

7. Avoid like the plague the opinion of any one who would want to postpone First Holy Communion to too old an age, when most times the devil has taken possession of the heart of a youngster with incalculable harm to his innocence. According to the discipline of the early Church it was customary to give to infants the consecrated Hosts left over from the Easter Communion. This helps us realise how much the Church loves to see children admitted to their First Communion in due time. Once a child can tell the

difference between Bread and bread, and shows himself to be sufficiently instructed, pay no attention to his age and let the Heavenly King come to reign in that happy soul.

8. Catechisms recommend frequent Communion. St Phillip Neri advised receiving once a week, or even more frequently. The Council of Trent states clearly that it greatly wishes every faithful Christian to also receive Communion each time he goes to Mass. But this communion should not only be spiritual but in fact sacramental, so that one may gain greater benefit from this august and divine sacrifice. (Council of Trent, session XXII, chap. VI).

### *3. Usefulness of the Preventive System*

Someone might say that this system is difficult in practice. I reply that from the point of view of the students it turns out easier, more satisfying, more advantageous. In the case of the educator, it does include some difficult features, which however are diminished if the educator addresses the task with devotion. An educator is one devoted to the well-being of his students, and for this reason ought to be ready to face every inconvenience, every fatigue in order to achieve his goal, which is the civil, moral and intellectual education of his students.

Over and above the advantages set out above, I would also add:

1. The student will have the greatest respect for the educator and will go on recalling with pleasure the orientation he was given, always considering his teachers and the other Superiors as fathers and brothers. Wherever they go, these students are generally the consolation of their families, useful citizens and good Christians.

2. Whatever might be the character, the attitude, the moral state of a pupil at the time he is enrolled, his parents can be secure in the knowledge that their son will not deteriorate, and one may confidently assert that one will achieve some improvement. Indeed, certain youngsters who for a long time were the scourge of their parents, and were even refused entry into houses of correction, when cared-for according to these principles, changed their

attitude, their character, they set themselves to live a decent life, and now fill honourable places in society, thus becoming the support of their families, and a credit to the area they live in.

3. Pupils having unfortunate habits who perchance should gain entry into an Institute will not be able to harm their fellows, nor will good boys be harmed by them, because there will be neither time, place, or opportunity, insofar as the assistant, whom we presume to be present, would rapidly put things right.

*A word on punishments*<sup>32</sup>

What criteria should one observe when inflicting punishment? Where possible, one should not make use of punishments, but when necessity demands repression, one should bear in mind the following:

1. The educator at work amongst his pupils should make himself loved, if he wishes to be respected. In this case the omission of an act of goodwill is a punishment, but a punishment that acts as a challenge, encourages, and never disheartens.

2. With the young, what is used as a punishment becomes a punishment. One can observe that a less-than-loving look is for some worse than being struck. Praise when something is done well, blame when there is negligence, are already reward and punishment.

3. Except in very rare cases, corrections, punishments should never be given in public, but privately, apart from companions, and one should use the greatest prudence and patience to have the student understand his fault through reason and religion.

<sup>32</sup> Not included in the collection is the so-called circular *On punishments to be inflicted in Salesian houses* (ASC A1750401), ms by Fr John B. Francesca dated 1883 and published for the first time in 1935 (cf. MB XVI, 440-449) by Fr Eugene Ceria. In this item wrongly attributed to Don Bosco and written down by Fr Rua, we find the oft-repeated phrase: "education is a thing of the heart". Cf. José Manuel PRELLEZO, "*Dei castighi*" (1883): *puntualizzazioni sull'autore e sulle fonti redazionali dello scritto*, in RSS 27 (2008) 287-307.

4. The Rector should make the rules well known, along with the rewards and punishments set down in the disciplinary policy, so that no pupil might be able to excuse himself by saying he did not know what was commanded or forbidden.

If this system is put into practice in our Houses I believe that we will be able to achieve excellent results without resorting either to corporal punishment, nor to other violent punishments. For these forty years during which I have dealt with the young, I do not remember ever having used any kind of punishment, and with the help of God I have always got not only what was necessary, but even had my wishes met, and that from those same young people for whom every hope of a good outcome seemed in vain (1).

(1) Not long ago a minister of the Queen of England, visiting an Institute in Turin was taken to a large hall where about 500 boys were studying. He was not a little amazed at seeing so many children in perfect silence, with no supervision. His amazement grew even more when he came to know that perhaps in an entire year, one did not have to complain of a word being said out of place, or so much as threaten a punishment, much less inflict one. "Tell me, how ever is it possible to obtain such silence and such discipline?" he asked. And he added to his secretary, "Write down whatever he says." "Sir," replied the Director of the establishment "the means we use is not available to you." "Why?" "Because they are secrets known only to Catholics." "What are they?" "Frequent Confession and Communion, and Daily Mass well heard." "You are absolutely right. We lack these powerful means of education." "Can't you do this in other ways?" "If you do not make use of these religious means, you must turn to threats and the stick." "You are right! You are right! Religion or the rod, I want to recount this in London!"

## **152. The Preventive System in the Education of the Young ["At Risk"]**

Critical ed. in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 291-294 ("Original by Don Bosco of a note for Minister Francesco Crispi").

There are two systems used in the moral and civic education of youth: repressive and preventive. One or the other can be applied in society generally, and in houses of education. We will give a brief general outline of the preventive system as it applies in society generally, then how it can be used in places of detention, in colleges, in hostels, and in boarding schools.

### *The Preventive and Repressive Systems In Society at Large*

The repressive system consists in making known the laws and the penalties they establish. Then the authorities must be vigilant to discover and punish offenders. This is the system used in the army and in general among adults. But young people who are uninstructed, non-reflective, urged on by companions or recklessness, often blindly permit themselves to be dragged into wrongdoing for the sole reason that they are left to themselves.

Whilst the law should look out for offenders, a great deal of effort should also be put into diminishing their numbers.

### *Which Young People Can be Said To be At Risk?*

I believe that one can identify the following [categories] not as bad, but as being at risk of becoming so:

1. Those who go from cities or other regions in the State to other cities and regions in search of work. Generally, they have little money with them, and in a short time, it is spent. If they don't find work soon, they run into the real danger of getting involved in theft, and of beginning a way of life that will lead them to ruin.

2. Those who have lost their parents and have no one to care for them and so are left to become vagabonds and associate with criminal elements, while a friendly hand, a loving voice would have been able to guide them on the path of honourable living and upright citizenship.

3. Those who have parents who cannot or will not look after their children and throw them out of the house or abandon them completely. Unfortunately, there are many such unnatural parents.

4. Vagabonds who fall into the hands of the police, but who are not yet Law-breakers. If these were admitted to a hostel where they could be taught, prepared for work, they would certainly be snatched away from the prisons and restored to society.



### *What Should be Done?*

Experience has taught us that we can provide effectively for these four categories of children:

1. With recreation centres opening on Sundays and holidays. With pleasant recreation, music, physical education, (the opportunity) to run, jump, recite, put on plays, they would readily come together. Add to that evening classes, Sunday school with religious instruction, and one gives adequate and essential moral nourishment to these poor sons of the people.

2. When they are brought together this way we must enquire and discover who is unemployed, then take steps to find them work and oversee their work during the week.

3. Beyond that, we come into contact with those who are poor and abandoned, and lack the wherewithal to feed and clothe themselves, or find a place to sleep at night. There is only one way of providing for them: with hostels and safe places which have arts and crafts, and also by means of agricultural schools.

### *Government Intervention*

The Government could cooperate in the following ways without taking on the minutiae of administration, or interfering with the principle of legitimate (public) charity:

1. Provide centres for activities on weekends, help equip the schools and the centres with the necessary equipment.

2. Provide locales for hostels, equip them with the necessary tools for the arts and trades which the young people admitted to them could be assigned to.

3. The Government would allow freedom in the enrolment of students, but would pay a daily or monthly subsidy for those admitted if they have found themselves in the conditions described above. Their condition would be verified either through government certification or through the normal

activity of the Police Department, which very frequently comes across children who are precisely in this condition.

4. This daily subsidy would be limited to one-third of what it would cost to maintain a youth in a state reformatory. Taking the correctional prisons of the *Generalata* in Turin as a norm, and reducing the total expense for each individual (by two-thirds), one could calculate this at 80 cents a day.

In this way the Government would help, but leave citizens free to play their part with private charity.

### *Results*

On the basis of thirty-five years' experience, it is possible to establish that:

1. Many boys coming out of the prisons can readily be guided to a trade with which to earn an honest crust.

2. Many who were at risk of being out of control, had begun to be public pests and were already causing a deal of trouble to the public authorities, were plucked out of danger and were put on the road to becoming upright citizens.

3. One can see from our records that no fewer than 100,000 youths have been cared for, taken in, educated with this system, some learning music, others liberal arts, some an art or craft and have become good-living workmen, shop assistants, owners of shops, teachers, hard-working clerks, and many have gained an honourable rank in the army. Many, endowed by nature with a good intelligence, were able to take up university courses, graduating in Literature, Mathematics, Medicine, Law or becoming engineers, notaries, pharmacists and suchlike.

### III. REMINDERS TO PRACTISE THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM (1884-1885)

*In his 1877 booklet on pedagogy, Don Bosco highlights the advantages of the Preventive System and other reasons for which it should be preferred. At the same time he recognises that the “practical application” of the educational approach he is proposing implies “certain difficulties” for educators.*

*There were no lack of these difficulties at Valdocco, especially in the disciplinary area. In the early 1880s there was often a felt need to tackle the delicate question of “punishments”. On 9 March 1883, in his “general conference” or meeting of everyone involved with the boys, the day’s agenda listed what was called an “important” item: “Finding out why the boys fear us rather than love us.” Those in charge of the house note that what is happening is contrary to the Salesian spirit or “at least the spirit of Don Bosco.”<sup>33</sup>*

*A few months later—on July 4, 1884—at a Superior Chapter meeting (today the General Council) of the Salesian Congregation, Don Bosco alluded to the question of “reforming the house at the Oratory” and emphasised the importance of observing in detail the “regulations practised since the early days.”<sup>34</sup>*

*The first of the texts that follows finds its place within these coordinates: the famous Letter from Rome in 1884 (addressed to the Salesian community at Valdocco in Turin), which tells of a “dream” of Don Bosco’s—which he told his secretary Fr John Baptist Lemoyne—regarding the state of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales on two occasions during its development: before 1870 (positive*

<sup>33</sup> José Manuel PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento tra reale e ideale (1866-1889). Documenti e testimonianze*. Roma, LAS 1992, pp. 257-258.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275. Similar considerations moved Don Bosco to interrupt the process that had begun to give him a “Reformatory” in Madrid in 1185. On March 17, 1886, he wrote to the Spanish senator, Manuel Silvela: “Despite our willingness to do good, we cannot move away from the practice established by our Rule, a copy of which I sent you last September. An Institute modelled on the *Talleres Salesianos* in Barcelona-Sarriá would be possible for us there but it could not at the same time be a reform school modelled on the Santa Rita one.” (E IV, pp. 353-354).

aspects) and as it was in 1884 (problematic aspects). There is also a shorter version in existence, addressed to the young students at Valdocco<sup>35</sup>.

*“We have no handwritten original of Don Bosco’s letter [dated May 10, 1884] but only an original (in two drafts) written by Fr Lemoyne and signed by Don Bosco. Despite this, it is considered, for its content, to be one of the best and richest of Don Bosco’s pedagogical documents.”*<sup>36</sup>

*There are various other letters written by Don Bosco in 1885 in a similar circumstance to the one mentioned in the preceding paragraphs. Information had arrived at Valdocco, Turin, from Latin America on less than satisfying application of his educational method in certain Salesian houses in Argentina, contrasting with the familiarity and kindness which was proper to the Salesian educational system. When he came to know about it, Don Bosco intervened personally and wrote frankly: “The Preventive System is something which is ours.”*

*Other than the text of the longer letter of May 10, 1884, are three letters addressed to well-known Salesian missionaries in 1885: John Cagliero, James Costamagna and Fr Dominic Tomatis<sup>37</sup>. Don Bosco offers fatherly reminders to practise a pedagogy of charity, patience and kindness. In other words: to take up*

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Pietro BRAIDO, *Due lettere datate da Roma 10 maggio 1884*, in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 344-390; José Manuel PRELLEZO, *La(s) Carta(s) de Roma (1884)*, in “Cuadernos de Formación Permanente” 17 (2011) 179-202.

<sup>36</sup> P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica...*, II, p. 469. In the preceding pages in reference to the “dreams”, Stella writes: “Of all of them, the one sent from Rome to the Oratory in a letter on May 10, 1884 could be considered the most effective ‘exegesis’ on loving and preventive assistance” (*Ibid.*, p. 467); cf. also Pietro BRAIDO, *La lettera di don Bosco da Roma del 10 maggio 1884*. Roma, LAS 1984, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> The addressees of these letters published here: Bishop John Cagliero (1838-1926), future first Salesian cardinal (1915). Fr James Costamagna (1846-1921), future bishop (1894), Vicar Apostolic of Méndez y Gualaquiza (Ecuador). Joseph Vespignani (1854-1932) who became a Salesian after his priestly ordination (1876); in 1877 he was sent as a missionary to Argentina; in the 1922 GC he was elected as the General Councillor for Vocational Schools. Dominic Tomatis (1849-1912), Director for many years at the San Nicolás de los Arroyos college (Argentina). Other Italian Salesian missionaries mentioned: Fr Joseph Beauvoir (1850-1930), Fr Dominic Milanese (1843-1922), Bishop Giuseppe Fagnano (1844-1916).

*the principles of the “Salesian spirit” he was proposing to “introduce in the houses in America”. The efforts of the founder of the Salesian Congregation were not in vain.*

### **153. Letter from Rome to the Salesian Community at the Oratory in Valdocco, Turin**

Critical ed. in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 377-390.

Rome, 10 May 1884

My dear sons in Jesus Christ,

Whether I am at home or away I am always thinking of you. I have only one wish, to see you happy both in this world and in the next. It was this idea, this wish of mine, that made me write this letter. Being away from you, and not being able to see or hear you, upsets me more than you can imagine. And so, although I shall be back very soon, I want to send you this letter in advance, since I cannot yet be with you in person. These words come from someone who loves you very dearly in Christ Jesus, someone who has the duty of speaking to you with the freedom of a father. You'll let me do that, won't you? And you will pay attention to what I am going to say to you, and put it into practice.

I have said that you are always and exclusively in my thoughts. Well, a couple of evenings ago I had gone to my room, and while I was preparing for bed I began to say the prayers my good mother taught me, and whether I simply fell asleep or became distracted I don't know, but it seemed that two of the former pupils of the Oratory in its early days were standing there before me. One of them came up to me, greeted me warmly, and said:

“Do you recognise me, Don Bosco?”

“Of course I do”, I answered.

“And do you still remember me?” the man went on.

“I remember you and all the others. You're Valfrè, and you were at the Oratory before 1870.”

“Tell me,” Valfrè, went on “would you like to see the youngsters who were at the Oratory in my time?”

“Yes, let me see them,” I answered “I would like that very much.”

Valfrè then showed me the boys just as they had been at that time, with the same age, build and looks. I seemed to be in the old Oratory at recreation time. It was a scene full of life, full of movement, full of fun. Some were running, some were jumping, some were skipping. In one place they were playing leap-frog, in another tig, and in another a ball-game was in progress. In one corner a group of youngsters was gathered round a priest, hanging on his every word as he told them a story. In another a cleric was playing with a number of lads at *chase the donkey* and *trades*. There was singing and laughing on all sides, there were priests and clerics everywhere and the boys were yelling and shouting all round them. You could see that the greatest cordiality and confidence reigned between youngsters and superiors. I was overjoyed at the sight, and Valfrè said to me:

“You see, closeness leads to love and love brings confidence. It is this that opens hearts and the young people express everything without fear to the teachers, to the assistants and to the superiors. They become frank both in the confessional and out of it, and they will do everything they are asked by one whom they know loves them.”

At that moment the other past pupil, who had a white beard, came up to me and said:

“Don Bosco, would you like to see and know the boys who are at the Oratory at the present time?” (This man was Joseph Buzzetti).

“Yes,” I replied, “it is a month since I last saw them.”

And he showed them to me.

I saw the Oratory and all of you in recreation. But no more could I hear the joyful shouts and singing, no longer was there the lively activity of the previous scene. In the faces and actions of many boys a weary boredom was evident, a surliness, a suspicion that pained my heart. I saw many, it is true,

who ran about and played in light-hearted joy. But I saw quite a number of others on their own, leaning against the pillars, a prey to depressing thoughts. Others were on the steps or in the corridors, or up on the terraces near the garden so as to be away from the common recreation. Others were strolling about in groups, talking to each other in low tones and casting furtive and suspicious glances in every direction. Sometimes they would laugh, but with looks and smirks that would make you not only suspect but feel quite certain that St Aloysius would have blushed to find himself in their company. Even among those who were playing there were some so listless that it was clear they were not enjoying their games.

“Do you see your boys?” asked my former pupil.

“I can see them” I replied with a sigh.

“How different they are from what we used to be” the past pupil went on.

“Too true! What an apathetic recreation!”

“This is what gives rise to the coldness of so many in approaching the sacraments, to neglect of the prayers in church and elsewhere; their reluctance to be in a place where Divine Providence heaps every possible blessing on their bodies, their souls and their minds. This is why so many do not follow their vocation, why they are ungrateful to their superiors, why they are secretive and grumble, with all the other regrettable consequences.”

“I see, I understand” I said. “But how can we bring these youngsters to life again, so that we can get back to the liveliness, the happiness, the warmth of the old days?”

“With love!”

“With love? But don't my boys get enough love? You know how I love them. You know how much I have suffered and put up with for them these forty years, and how much I endure and suffer even now. How many hardships, how many humiliations, how much opposition, how many persecutions to give them bread, a home, teachers, and especially to provide for the salvation of their souls. I have done everything I possibly could for them; they are the object of all my affections.”

“I’m not referring to you.”

“Then to whom are you referring? To those who take my place? To the Rectors, the Prefects, the Teachers, the Assistants? Don’t you see that they are martyrs to study and work, and how they burn out their young lives for those Divine Providence has entrusted to them?”

“I can see all that and I am well aware of it, but it is not enough; the best thing is missing.”

“That the youngsters should not only be loved, but that they themselves should know that they are loved.”

“But have they not got eyes in their heads? Have they no intelligence? Don’t they see how much is done for them, and all of it out of love?”

“No, I repeat: it is not enough.”

“Well, what else is needed?”

“By being loved in the things they like, through taking part in their youthful interests, they are led to see love in those things which they find less attractive, such as discipline, study and self-denial, and so learn to do these things too with love.”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to explain that more clearly.”

“Look at the youngsters in recreation.”

I looked, and then asked: “Well what is special about it?”

“You’ve been educating young people for so many years and you don’t understand! Look harder! Where are our Salesians?”

I looked, and I saw that very few priests and clerics mixed with the boys, and fewer still were joining in their games. The superiors were no longer the heart and soul of the recreation. Most of them were walking up and down, chatting among themselves without taking any notice of what the pupils were doing. Others looked on at the recreation but paid little heed to the boys. Others supervised from afar, not noticing whether anyone was



doing something wrong. Some did take notice but only rarely, and then in a threatening manner. Here and there a Salesian did try to mix with a group of boys, but I saw that the latter were bent on keeping their distance from teachers and superiors.

Then my friend continued: "In the old days at the Oratory, were you not always among the boys, especially during recreation? Do you remember those wonderful years? They were a foretaste of heaven, a period of which we have fond memories, because then love was the rule and we had no secrets from you."

"Yes, indeed! Everything was a joy for me then, and the boys used to rush to get near me and talk to me; they were anxious to hear my advice and put it into practice. But don't you see that now with these never-ending interviews, business matters, and my poor health I cannot do it any more."

"Well and good; but if you cannot do it, why don't your Salesians follow the example you gave? Why don't you insist, why don't you demand, that they treat the boys as you used to do?"

"I do. I talk till I'm blue in the face, but unfortunately not everyone nowadays feels like working as hard as we used to."

"And so by neglecting the lesser part they waste the greater, meaning all the work they put in. Let them like what pleases the youngsters and the youngsters will come to like what pleases the superiors. In this way their work will be made easy. The reason for the present change in the Oratory is that many of the boys no longer have confidence in their superiors. There was a time when all hearts were wide open to their superiors, when the boys loved them and gave them prompt obedience. But now the superiors are thought of precisely as superiors and no longer as fathers, brothers and friends; they are feared and little loved. And so if you want everyone to be of one heart and soul again for the love of Jesus you must break down this fatal barrier of mistrust, and replace it with a happy spirit of confidence. Then obedience will guide the pupil as a mother guides her baby; and the old peace and happiness will reign once again in the Oratory."

“How then are we to set about breaking down this barrier?”

“By a friendly informal relationship with the boys, especially in recreation. You cannot have love without this familiarity, and where this is not evident there can be no confidence. If you want to be loved, you must make it clear that you love. Jesus Christ made himself little with the little ones and bore our weaknesses. He is our master in the matter of the friendly approach.

The teacher who is seen only in the classroom is a teacher and nothing more; but if he joins in the pupils' recreation he becomes their brother. If someone is only seen preaching from the pulpit it will be said that he is doing no more and no less than his duty, whereas if he says a good word in recreation it is heard as the word of one who loves. How many conversions have been brought about by a few words whispered in the ear of a youngster while he is playing. One who knows he is loved loves in return, and one who loves can obtain anything, especially from the young. This confidence creates an electric current between youngsters and their superiors. Hearts are opened, needs and weaknesses made known. This love enables superiors to put up with the weariness, the annoyance, the ingratitude, the troubles that youngsters cause. Jesus Christ did not crush the bruised reed nor quench the smouldering flax. He is your model. Then you will no longer see anyone working for his own glory; you will no longer see anyone punishing out of wounded self-love; you will not see anyone neglecting the work of supervision through jealousy of another's popularity; you won't hear people running others down so as to be looked up to by the boys: those who exclude all other superiors and earn for themselves nothing but contempt and hypocritical flattery; people who let their hearts be stolen by one individual and neglect all the other boys to cultivate that particular one. No one will neglect his strict duty of supervision for the sake of his own ease and comfort; no one will fail through human respect to reprimand those who need reprimanding. If we have this true love, we shall not seek anything other than the glory of God and the good of souls. When this love languishes, things no longer go well. Why do people want to replace love with cold rules? Why do the superiors move away from the observance of the rules Don Bosco has given them? Why the replacement little by little of loving and watchful prevention by a system which consists

in framing laws? Such laws either have to be sustained through punishment and so create hatred and cause unhappiness or, if they are not enforced, cause the superiors to be despised and bring about serious disorders. This is sure to happen if there is no friendly relationship.

So if you want the Oratory to return to the happiness of old, then bring back the old system: let the superior be all things to all, always ready to listen to any boy's complaints or doubts, always alert to keep a fatherly eye on their conduct, all heart to seek the spiritual and temporal good of those whom Divine Providence has entrusted to him. Then hearts will no longer be closed and deadly subterfuge will no longer hold sway. The superiors should be unbending only in the case of immoral conduct. It is better to run the risk of expelling someone who is innocent than to keep someone who causes others to sin. Assistants should make it a strict duty in conscience to refer to the superiors whatever they know to be an offence against God.

Then I asked a question:

"And what is the best way of achieving this friendly relationship, this kind of love and confidence?"

"The exact observance of the rules of the house."

"Nothing else?"

"At a dinner the best dish is a hearty welcome."

With that my past pupil finished speaking, and I went on looking at that recreation with great displeasure. Little by little I felt oppressed by a great weariness that became worse at every moment. Eventually it got so bad that I could resist no longer, and I shook myself and woke up. I found myself standing beside my bed. My legs were so swollen and hurt so much that I could not stand up any longer. It was very late and I went to bed, resolved to write these lines to my sons.

I wish I did not have these dreams, they tire me so much. The following day I was dead tired, and I could hardly wait for the hour to come to go to bed that evening. But I was hardly in bed when the dream began again. Before me

once again was the playground, with the boys at present at the Oratory and the same past pupil as before. I began to question him.

“I’ll let my Salesians know what you have told me, but what should I say to the boys of the Oratory?”

“Tell them,” he said, “to realise how much the superiors, the teachers, the assistants, plan and wear themselves out for love of them, since they would not sacrifice themselves so much if they didn’t love them. Let them never forget that humility is the source of all peace of mind; let them be able to put up with each other’s shortcomings, because there is no perfection in this world, only in heaven. Tell them not to grumble because it freezes the heart. But especially, tell them to live in the holy grace of God. If you are not at peace with God, you cannot be at peace with yourself, nor with others.”

“Are you telling me then that among my boys there are some who are not at peace with God?”

“Among other reasons you already know, this is the principal cause of bad spirit. There is no need for me to tell you that you must do something about it. The one without trust is the one with secrets to guard, the one who is afraid the secrets will become known and bring him shame and trouble. At the same time, if his heart is not at peace with God he will be a prey to restless anxiety, intolerant of obedience, and get upset over nothing. Everything seems to go wrong for him, and because he has no love himself he thinks the superiors do not love him.”

“But see here, my friend; look how many go to confession and communion here at the Oratory.”

“It is true that many go to confession, but what is radically lacking in the confessions of so many youngsters is a firm resolution. They tell their sins but they are always the same, always the same occasions, the same bad habits, the same acts of disobedience, the same neglect of duty. This goes on, month in, month out, even for years and some even continue in this way till they leave school. These confessions are worth little or nothing, and so they do not

restore peace, and if a youngster in that state were to be called before God's judgement seat, it would be a serious matter indeed. But in comparison with the whole group in the house they are only a few. Look." And he pointed them out to me.

I looked, and I saw those boys one by one. There were not many, but in them I saw things that brought profound bitterness to my soul. I do not want to put such things in writing, but when I come back I want to have a word with each one about what I saw. For the moment I limit myself to saying that it is time to pray and make firm resolutions, with facts and not just words, so as to show that the Comollos, the Dominic Savios, the Besuccos and the Saccardis are still among us.

I put a final question to my friend:

"Have you anything else to tell me?"

"Preach to all, young and old alike, that they must remember they are children of Mary Help of Christians. Tell them she has gathered them here to take them away from the dangers of the world, so that they may love one another as brothers and give glory to God and to her by their good behaviour. Tell them that it is Our Lady who provides them with bread and the means to study, by endless graces and wonders. Remind them that they are at the vigil of the feast of their holy Mother, so that with her help that barrier of mistrust will fall which has been raised between boys and superiors by the devil, who knows how to use it to ruin certain souls."

"And will we be successful in breaking down this barrier?"

"Certainly you will, as long as young and old are ready to put up with some small mortifications for love of Mary and do what I have told you."

Meanwhile I continued to watch my youngsters, but at the sight of those I had seen heading for eternal damnation I experienced such heartache that I awoke. I still have to tell you many important things that I saw, but I have neither time nor opportunity at present.

And now I must finish. Do you know what this poor old man who has spent his whole life for his dear boys wants from you? Nothing else than, due allowances being made, we should go back to the happy days of the Oratory of old: the days of affection and Christian confidence between boys and superiors; the days when we accepted and put up with difficulties for the love of Jesus Christ; the days when hearts were open with a simple candour; days of love and real joy for everyone. I want the consolation and hope that you will promise to do everything I desire for the good of your souls.

You do not realise how lucky you are in having come to the Oratory. I declare before God: it is enough for a young person to enter a Salesian house for Our Lady to take him under her special care. Let us all agree on this then: may the charity of those who command and the charity of those who must obey cause the spirit of St Francis de Sales to reign among us.

My dear children, the time is coming when I will have to tear myself away from you and leave for eternity.

(Secretary's note: at this point Don Bosco broke off the dictation; his eyes filled with tears, not of sorrow but because of the inexpressible tenderness that was evident from his face and voice; after a few moments he went on.)

And so I want to leave you, my dear priests and brothers and my dearest boys, on the road the Lord himself wants you to follow. For this purpose the Holy Father, whom I saw on Friday May 9, sends you his blessing from the bottom of his heart.

I will be with you on the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, before the statue of our loving Mother. I want this feast to be celebrated with full solemnity, and that Fr Lazzero and Fr Marchisio see to it that you have a good time in the dining-room as well. The Feast of Mary Help of Christians should be a prelude to the eternal feast that we will all celebrate one day together in heaven.

With much love, your friend in Christ Jesus.

Fr John Bosco

### 154. Letter to Bishop John Cagliero

Critical ed. in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 445-447.

Turin, 6 August 1885

My Dear Bishop Cagliero,

Your letter has given me great pleasure, and although my eyesight has become very weak, I wanted to read it myself from beginning to end, despite that handwriting of yours, which you say you got from me, but which has degenerated from its original form. Others will respond to administrative matters for me. For my part what I have to say is as follows.

When you write to the Propagation of the Faith and the Work of the Holy Childhood be mindful of all that the Salesians have done at various times. I understand you have with you the proformas that you should make use of in setting our affairs out before their respective Presidents, who are quite happy to receive letters in Italian, whenever there is any difficulty with writing in French. If one does not suffice, write several letters concerning the travels of Fr Fagnano, Fr Milanese, Fr Beauvoir, etc. In particular note (the number of) those baptised, confirmed, instructed, given shelter, now or in the past. I am of the opinion that in setting things out for Propaganda, you should cover everything, but in general. For the Propagation of the Faith, travels, trade, discoveries; for the Holy Childhood say in detail the sorts of things that might concern boys and girls, the Sisters, or the Salesians.

If by chance you do not have exemplars for setting out these reports, let me know, and we will send them to you. There is real good will in wanting to help you. However it is good that at this end I should be aware, at least in general terms, of whatever you write from there, since I could be asked questions at any time.

Regarding the matter of the Coadjutor Bishops, I need a positive proposal, and at this stage I am hoping to achieve something. The formalities for getting a *Cardinal's* hat for the Archbishop were well-advanced under Cardinal Nina, but now unfortunately for us he has passed into eternal life. I have tested other waters, and I'll let you know in due course.

I am preparing a letter for Fr Costamagna, and for your guidance I will particularly touch on the Salesian Spirit we want to introduce into our houses in America.

Charity, patience, gentleness—never degrading rebukes, punishments, never— do good to those you can, evil to no one. This holds for the Salesians among themselves, with their students and others, those who live with us, and outsiders. In dealing with our Sisters have great patience, but be strict in the matter of the observance of their Rules.

In general then, although things are tight here, we will make every sacrifice to come to your aid. But urge everyone to avoid putting up buildings or acquiring property that is not strictly necessary *for our use*. Never buy things with a view to reselling them: neither fields or land or buildings with a view to financial profit.

Try to help us this way. Do what you can to get vocations whether for the Sisters or for the Salesians, but do not take on too many works. Those who want too much achieve little and waste much.

When you have cause to speak to the Archbishop Espinosa or personalities of that sort, say that I am entirely at their service, particularly in matters regarding Rome.

Tell my niece Rosina to take great care of her health, and that she take great care not to go to heaven alone. She should go, of course, but accompanied by the many souls she has saved.

God bless all our Salesian sons, our sisters the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. May he grant them all health, holiness, and perseverance along the road to Heaven.

We will pray for all of you morning and evening at Our Lady's altar. You too, pray for this poor, half-blind man who will always be yours in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco



PS. Countless people want to be remembered to you, and to pay their respects.

### 155. Letter to Fr James Costamagna

Critical ed. in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 448-450.

Turin, 10 August 1885

My dear and always beloved Fr Costamagna,

The time for our annual retreats is approaching, and in my declining years I would like to have all my sons and our sisters in America with me. This not being possible, I have thought to write you a letter at the time of your retreats, which are not far off for us, which might serve as a guide for you and our other confreres for becoming true Salesians.

Before anything else we ought to bless and thank the Lord who in his wisdom and power has helped us overcome many great difficulties, which we could never have done on our own. *Te Deum, Hail Mary*, etc.

Furthermore, I myself would like to give a sermon, or better a talk, on the Salesian Spirit which ought to inspire and guide our actions, and every word we say. The Preventive System is truly ours. Never punishments for their own sake, never humiliating words, no severe dressings-down in the presence of others. Instead, gentle, kind, patient words should be heard in the classrooms. Never biting words, never a blow, heavy or light. Use should be made of negative punishments, and always in a way that those who have been warned become our friends more than ever and are never discouraged when they leave us.

There should be no grumbling against the decisions of the Superiors. Instead we should put up with things not to our liking, or things that give us grief, or displease us. Every Salesian should become each one's friend, and should never seek revenge. He should be quick to forgive, and to forget the things he has forgiven.

The orders of the Superiors should never be criticised and everyone should strive to give good example, and encourage the giving of it. Every one should be urged—and this should be a constant recommendation—to promote religious vocations whether to the Sisters, or to the Salesians.

Gentleness in speaking, in acting, in giving advice will win over everyone and everything.

This will be the line you and the others who will share the preaching of the forthcoming retreats will follow.

Give everybody much freedom, show them much confidence. Anyone wanting to write to his Superior, or who might receive letters from him, should on no account have these letters read by anyone, unless the one who receives the letter would like that to happen. Regarding the more difficult matters, I warmly advise the Provincials and the Rectors to give appropriate talks. Indeed, I recommend that Fr Vespignani should have a clear understanding of these things and explain them to his novices and candidates with due prudence.

As far as it lies in my power, I hope to leave the Congregation without discomfiture. Therefore I have in mind appointing a Vicar General who would be an *alter ego* for Europe, and another for America. But you will receive instructions in this matter in due course.

From time to time during the year, it would be very appropriate for you to call a meeting of the Directors/Rectors of the Province to put to them the guidelines set out above. Read, and encourage the reading and the understanding, of our Rule, in particular the chapter dealing with the regular prayers, the introduction that I have written to this same Rule, and the deliberations taken at our General and local Chapters.

You can see that my words might require a lot of explanation but you are certainly capable of understanding them, and where necessary explaining them to our confreres.

As soon as you can, go and see Archbishop Espinosa, the Vicars General, Mr Carranza, Rev. Dr Terrero, and our other friends, and greet each and all humbly and respectfully, as if I were speaking personally to each one.

God bless you, dear Fr Costamagna, and with you may He bless and keep all our confreres and Sisters in good health. And may Mary, Help of Christians guide us always along the road to heaven. Amen.

Please pray for me, all of you.

Your loving friend in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

### 156. Letter to Fr Dominic Tomatis

Critical ed. in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 451-452.

Mathi, 14 August 1885

My dear Fr Tomatis,

Since I rarely get letters from you I must presume you are very busy, and I believe it. But letting your dear Don Bosco know how you are getting on surely merits being one of the matters you should not overlook. You will ask, "What should I write about?" Tell me about the state of your health, and that of your confreres; whether the Rules of the Congregation are faithfully observed; whether the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death is made, and how well; how many pupils you have, and what hopes you hold for their success. Do you do anything to cultivate vocations, do you have any hopes in this regard? Is Mons. Ceccarelli always a friend to the Salesians? I am looking forward with great pleasure to your replies to these matters.

Given that my life is fast racing to its conclusion, things I want to write to you in this letter are those I would want to recommend to you in the last days of my earthly exile, that is, my testament to you.

Dear Fr Tomatis, keep firmly in mind that you became a Salesian to save your soul. Preach and recommend the same truth to all our confreres. Remember it is not enough to know things, they must be put into practice. May God help us so that the Lord's words, "They speak, but they do nothing" not be addressed to us.

Try to see the things that concern you with your own eyes. When some one is lacking, or negligent, warn him promptly without waiting for evils to multiply.

Through your exemplary manner of life, by your charity in speaking, in giving orders, in putting up with the defects of others, many will be won over to the Congregation. Constantly recommend frequenting the sacraments of Confession and Communion.

The virtues that will make you happy in time and in eternity are humility and charity.

Always be a friend and father to our confreres. Help them in every way you can both in spiritual and worldly matters. Know how to make use of them for everything that will bring glory to God.

Each of the thoughts expressed on this page needs something of an explanation. You can do this on your own behalf, and for others.

God bless you, my ever-dear Fr Tomatis. Give my warmest greetings to all our confreres, friends and benefactors. Tell them I pray for them every morning during the Holy Mass, and that I humbly commend myself to the prayers of all.

God grant we might be able to see each other again in this mortal exile, but that in any case we might one day praise the holy name of Jesus and of Mary in a blessed eternity. Amen.

Before long I will write to you, or have others write, on matters of some importance.

May Mary keep us safe and guide us along the path to Heaven. Amen

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

#### IV. PEDAGOGICAL AND DIDACTIC PRINCIPLES AND DISCIPLINARY MATTERS (1846-1879)

*The ten brief documents that follow—some perhaps less known than the previous ones in Salesian history—are also interesting from the point of view of the maturing and practice of Don Bosco’s educational system. We have a necessarily limited selection here of personal letters to people responsible for public education, or to young people and teachers, and circulars on pedagogical and didactic issues.*

*The first, addressed to one of his most important helpers in the work of the oratories, Fr Borel, was written three decades before he published his booklet on *The Preventive System in the education of the young* in 1877. Already in 1846, Don Bosco had reacted when confronted by the fact that one of his helpers, Fr Joseph Trivero, was dealing rather strictly with the boys (“with much energy”).*

*A letter to the Superintendent of Studies, Francesco Selmi, is of particular interest. Don Bosco gives precise answers to criticism of some of his writings and highlights the lack of any basis for certain allegations made against him and against the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.*

*His letter to the city magistrate in Turin, sees important aspects of the real situation at Valdocco 1865 emerge. Reference is made to the problems created by “some boys mostly sent by the government.” One of the boys “is not only incorrigible, but insulted, threatened and swore at his assistant.”*

*Instead Don Bosco assures student Emanuele Fassati, that he will continue to pray for his success in studies, but adds: “You have to make an effort: work, diligence, knuckling down, obedience are all part of your passing your exams.”*

*Amongst these documents, all addressed to different people, we find other topics that were common at the time in Don Bosco’s writings and addresses: holidays as danger time, discipline (not understood as “punishment or the whip, things we never talk about here,” but “as a way of keeping to the rules and customs of the institute”).*

*In 1875, replying to the young Salesian priest Fr Joseph Bertello on the way to stir up a love for study in his pupils, Don Bosco advises him: “Think of them as your brothers; loving kindness, sharing, respect.”*

*In 1879, in a letter to Prince Placido Gabrielli, who— in the name of the Administration of the Hospice of St Michael in Ripa—wanted Don Bosco to look after the running of this social welfare and educational place for boys in Rome, Don Bosco was interested; he pointed out however that in houses run by the Salesians “we use a very special disciplinary system called preventive, where we do not use punishments or threats.”<sup>38</sup>*

### 157. Letter to Fr John Borel

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 71-72.

Castelnuovo d’Asti, 31 August 1846

Dear Father,

Well done. Your detailed letter was wonderful reading for me and some of my friends. I am very happy that things at the Oratory are going ahead as we hoped. It is good that Fr Trivero is helping at the Oratory. But note that he is rather over-energetic with the boys and I know that some of them have been quite put off by that. See that every dish at the Oratory is made tasty with oil. I am sending you two pigeons from our coop which I think Fr Pacchiotti will not be unhappy about. I wanted to send two chickens but my mother didn’t want to, because she believes this kind of food should be eaten in the place it was produced. But we can talk about this in another letter.

Yesterday near here a man was buried who had been much talked about. Doctors said his illness was incurable, but encouraged by a pious person he vowed to go to confession, communion and Mass. God was pleased and gave

<sup>38</sup> Addressees of the letters in this collection: John Borel (1801-1873), priest, theologian, friend and collaborator of Don Bosco’s (who writes: *Borrelli*). Joseph Trivero († 1874), priest helping in the work of the oratories. Lorenzo Turchi, farmer, father of John Turchi (1838-1909), student at the Oratory. Magistrate at Borgo Dora in Turin in 1865 was Giovanni Devalle (E[m] II, p. 122). Emanuele Fassati (1852-1874), son of Marchioness Fassati, whom Don Bosco write to regularly. John Cinzano (1854-), priest, former Salesian. Joseph Bertello (1848-1910), priest and Salesian, General Councillor for Vocational Schools (1898-1910). Placido Gabrielli (1832-1911), son of Prince Mario Gabrielli and Carlotta Bonaparte, nephew of Luciano Bonaparte Napoleone.

him back his health. But the man forgot about what he had promised to do and although his wife and others warned him to keep the word he had given the Lord, he did nothing about it. He enjoyed about a month of good health but suddenly fell ill last Saturday, and went to eternity within a few hours, the poor man, without being able to get to confession or communion. Everyone was talking about this yesterday at his burial.

Please send me a copy of the booklets: *The Six Sundays etc.*, *Louis Comollo*, *Guardian Angel*, *Church History*, which you will find in the wardrobe near my desk.

My health continues to improve, just that I have had a toothache for some days: but this *hurts for a while then goes away*. The grapes are ready, tell Fr Pacchiotti and Fr Bosio, and think about it yourself ...

I'd be very happy if you can give me more news of Genta, Gamba, the two Ferreros and Piola, if they are behaving well or causing chaos etc.

Greetings to our colleagues Fr Pacchiotti and Fr Bosio, and believe me I am with all my heart always, in the Lord,

Your affectionate servant and friend,

Fr John Bosco.

P.S. Give this letter to Fr Vola. I am leaving now to go to Passerano for a break.

### **158. Letter to the Superintendent of Studies in Turin, Francesco Selmi**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 588-590.

\*Turin, 13 July 1863

Your Excellency the Superintendent,

Heartfelt thanks to Your Excellency for clearly explaining things to me that, were they true, would put our classes for poor boys in contravention of government regulations. I believe you would want to accept my observations

as sincere. The differences, as you like to call them, were limited to a few accidental things which I believe should not cause any apprehension.

Just the same I would like you to understand well what I was saying in passing about your observations, so I would ask you to allow me to put my political profession of faith into just a few sentences.

I have been in Turin for 23 years and I have always put whatever I had and all my efforts into the prisons, hospitals, our city squares, all on behalf of abandoned boys. But I have never sought to get mixed up with politics, not while preaching nor when writing (these items are all printed with my name to them), nor in any other way. Being linked with any newspapers is forbidden in every respect in this house whatever their persuasion. Whatever is said otherwise is just unfounded rumour. With regard to the accidental matters that you noted, let me say:

1. They say that we instruct the clerics to be against the Government - this is not true because the only classes they are given here are Greek and Latin literature. For Philosophy, Hebrew, Bible, Theology they attend classes at the Seminary.

2. *History of Italy* is only used in our classes for Roman history. As for the Duke of Parma and other characters where I leave out their blameworthy behaviour, I did that to support the principle established by the famous educators Girard and Aporti, who advise that we omit anything in books for children that would leave a bad impression on the youngsters' tender and fickle minds. Nevertheless, in the next reprint I will also modify and take out any passages you have indicated to me or should still wish to.

3. We use no other curriculum than the Government ones as the Inspector, Cavaliere Torsi and your secretary Dr Vigna were able to observe.

4. The *Catholic Readings* cannot be called anti-political since they never speak of political matters. If there are things that someone considers inaccurate then I must ask them to forgive a poor historian who does what he can to write the truth and often cannot satisfy the reader, either because there are things he does not like, or because he has drawn from insufficiently 'purified' sources.



But here too I accept what you have indicated verbally. Note of course that I am merely a collaborator for the *Catholic Readings*. The office is in Turin, the management is made up of other individuals. The only thing I do is to print them, because it gives work to our poor boys.

5. Then there was an accusation that we have no picture of the King. This is completely incorrect, there is more than one of them; there is one in each of the three offices, in the secretary's office, in the parlour. It would be difficult to find a house of education where they pray for the King more than we do and for all the Royal family. With regard to the classes, if you allow me to continue this way until the current teachers have finished their exams, you will be doing something good for our poor boys, otherwise I will have to find registered teachers and therefore refuse admission to a good number of poor boys. But I very much hope that you continue your favourable approach.

Then remember that we are both public personalities: you by authority and I by charity. You need nothing from me but I need a lot from you. We can both deserve God's blessings, the gratitude of human beings by helping poor youngsters and taking them off the streets. May God bless you abundantly and all your family. Forgive me bothering you again and believe me that I am, with all respect,

Your Excellency's,

most indebted servant,  
Fr John Bosco.

### **159. Letter to the City Magistrate, Turin**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 120-122.

[Turin, 18 April 1865]

To the City Magistrate, City of Turin,

Having seen the accusations against cleric Mazzarello, an assistant in the book-binding workshop at the house known as the Oratory of St Francis de Sales; having likewise seen those concerning the youths Federico Parodi,

Giovanni Castelli, Giuseppe Guglielmi, and also carefully noting the attitude of Fr John Bosco the director of this establishment in wanting to resolve the matter with the least disturbance to the authorities at the city magistrate's court, he believes he can intervene in the name of all concerned in the matter concerning the youth Carlo Boglietti. He is ready to respond adequately to whoever requires it.

Before taking up the matter in question it would seem appropriate to note that article 650 of the penal code seems to be quite extraneous to this matter, since if one were to interpret it in the sense indicated by the city magistrate's office it would mean that families, parents and whoever takes their place could no longer correct their offspring nor prevent insolence and insubordination, [things] that would be injurious to private and public morals.

Moreover, to hold certain boys in check who are for the most part referred by government authorities, we have been given the faculty of taking what we consider to be appropriate action, and in extreme cases to request the arm of the Law, as we have done more than once.

Now coming to the case of Carlo Boglietti, we must regretfully but frankly assert that he was given fatherly advice on a number of occasions but to no avail; that he showed he was not only incorrigible but insulted, threatened, and swore at his assistant, the cleric Mazzarello, in front of all his mates. The assistant is of a very meek and mild nature and was so terrified that since then he has been ill and unable to re-assume his duties. He is still ill.

After this event, Boglietti ran away from the house without saying anything to the superiors he was sent to, and we only learned from his sister that he had taken flight, when she learned that he wanted to go to the police. She did not do this because she wanted to preserve his reputation.

Meanwhile his mates continued with their uproar and it was necessary to ask some to leave the establishment, while unfortunately we had to hand others over to the police, who sent them to prison.

So it is with great regret that we see a young hoodlum insulting and threatening his superiors and having the audacity to report those who have

dedicated their lives and livelihood for his benefit to the authorities. Public authority should come to the aid of private authority and not vice versa.

Should we wish to come to a detailed examination of what happened with the witnesses we have nominated, we would not oppose Carlo Boglietti being sued for costs that may be incurred and being held responsible for any serious consequences that may still eventuate.

Meanwhile we are requesting reparation for damages to the assistant's honour and person at least so he can resume his ordinary work.

We would like the costs of this to be borne by this young man. We also request that neither Carlo Boglietti, nor Mr Stefano Caneparo, his relative or adviser, no longer come to the above-mentioned establishment and repeat these acts of insubordination and the other disturbances committed at other times.

Fr John Bosco.

### **160. Letter to young Emanuele Fassati**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 253.

Turin, 1 June 1866

Dear Emanuele,

In the letter you were kind enough to send me, you asked me to pray to the Virgin to grant you the good will and energy to study. I did this willingly and with all my heart throughout the month of May. Of course, I do not know if my prayer was heard. I would dearly love to know, though I have every reason to believe that it is so.

Papa, mama and Azelia are well; I often see them at half past five in the evening and our conversation is mostly about you. The others are already afraid that you might not go ahead with your studies and so they add further concerns to the many you have already had this year. I always console them, supported by Emanuele's intelligence, good will and promises. Am I wrong? I believe not.

Just two months more and then what great celebrations if you pass your exams well! So then, dear Emanuele, I will continue to recommend you to the Lord. But you have to make an effort: work, diligence, knuckling down, obedience are all part of your succeeding in your exams.

May God bless you dear Emanuele. Always be your parents' consolation with your good behaviour. Also pray for me. I am with all my heart,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco.

### **161. Circular: Holidays**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 517-518.

[Turin, April 1868]

[Worthy Sir,]

Given frequent requests from many respectable fathers of families and after many invitations by people who have experience in educating the young, I thought it well to take the following decision. Holidays throughout the year will be reduced to just one month: from September 15 to October 15. This decision was taken for the following reasons.

1. The most respected colleges in Italy and the ones with the best results in studies only grant one month of holidays to their pupils.
2. Years of experience show that youngsters who spend three months away from school lose much of the profit they gained during the school year.
3. Time is gained for older students who might need to complete their course of studies more quickly.

I hope, good sir, that you will accept this modification which has been made solely in view of the advantage it can bring to our boys for whom we show all our good will in the Lord, to whose honour and glory we have dedicated and continue to dedicate our poor efforts.

During the warmer months we will try to see to extending the recreation and that they have more frequent outings so that the boys can maintain the necessary health of body to put all possible effort into their studies. This is for the comfort of the parents.

Your most humble servant,

The Director,  
Fr John Bosco

## 162. Circular to Salesians on discipline

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 177-180.

Turin, 16 November 1873

To my sons in the house of ...

### *On discipline*

As we begin this school year, beloved sons, it would be good for me to fulfil my promise to speak to you about the basis of morals and study which is discipline for our students.

I do not pretend to be giving you a treatise on moral or civil precepts which refer to discipline; I only want to explain what I have found to be fruitful ways of achieving good results in my experience of over 45 years.

I hope these efforts and results can help you in managing the various tasks that may be entrusted to you.

By correction I do not mean punishment or the whip, things we never talk about amongst ourselves, nor do I mean skill or mastering something or other. By discipline I mean *a way of life in conformity with the rules and customs of an institute.*

To get good results from discipline, first of all it is essential that the rules are observed in everything and by everyone.

Take a family where many are involved in collecting things but one loses things; or take a building where many are working to construct it but just one is working to tear it down—we will see the family end up ruined and the building collapse into a pile of rubble.

This kind of observance has to be found in the members of the Congregation and the youngsters which Divine Providence has entrusted to our care. Discipline will have no effect if the rules of the Society and the college are not observed.

Believe me, dear friends, that the moral and educational benefit, or their ruin, depend on this observance.

At this point you will ask me: what are the practical rules that can help us for acquiring such a precious treasure?

Two things: one general, the other particular. In general if you observe the rules of the Congregation, discipline will triumph.

Let no one ignore the rules proper to his role; let him observe them and have his dependants do likewise. If the one who presides over others is not observant, he cannot expect his dependants to do what he overlooks; otherwise they will say: *medice, cura te ipsum* (physician, heal yourself).

But to come to some practical situations, I would mention things that refer to individuals in particular.

1. *The Director*: He has to know about the duties of all the members and others who are part of the staff [*congregati*], who does what.

It is not that he has to do so much work, but he has to see that each does the task assigned to him.

Our houses can be compared to a garden. There is no need for the head gardener to do too much; it is enough that he has good practical workers, teaches them horticulture, helps them, alerts them in time, and is there for more important matters to help people who find the major occasions awkward. The Director is this gardener, the pupils are the tender plants, the staff are all

gardeners dependent on their employer or the Director, who is responsible for everyone's actions.

The Director will benefit then if he is not away from the house entrusted to him, except for serious reasons; and if these serious reasons arise he will never be away without first establishing who takes his place should anything happen.

He should often move around amongst them in all charity, or at least ask them to account for dormitories, the kitchen, infirmary, classrooms and study.

He should constantly be a loving father who wants to know everything, do good to everyone and evil to no one.

2. *Prefect*: The Prefect or one looking after discipline should see that the timetable of the house is observed. As far as possible he should prevent boarders from mixing with people from outside; he should see that assistants, and in general those in authority are amongst the boys during recreation.

He should see that outings keep on the move, meaning that there are no breaks where the boys can escape from the assistants' watchful eye.

No one should be allowed to step out of line, go of to cafes, taverns; they should not mix with outsiders or bring in books, newspapers, letters that have not been through the hands of the superior.

3. *Catechist*: The catechist should remember that the spirit and moral benefit of our houses depends on promoting the Altar Boys, the *Immaculate Conception*, the *Blessed Sacrament* and *St Aloysius sodalities*.

He should see that everyone, especially the coadjutors, find it easy to go to confession and communion.

If people involved in domestic work ever need instruction, he will see that no one misses out on receiving communion, being confirmed, serving Mass and the like.

He should talk to them some time before feast days are celebrated or with little talks or some sort of example prepare the students with all the decorum and solemnity possible.

4. *Teachers:* Teachers should be the first in the classrooms and the last to leave.

They should love all their pupils equally, encourage them all and show disregard for no one.

They should feel sorry for the more ignorant members of the class, look after them carefully, often question them, and if needs be speak to whoever is in charge to see that they are given help outside the classroom.

A teacher should never forget that he is a Christian teacher, so when the subject matter or some feast day offers the opportunity to offer a good thought, some advice or a warning to his pupils, he should never miss the opportunity.

5. *The assistants:* All those who have some authority in classrooms, dormitories, the kitchen, the reception or any other part of the house should carry out their duties in every respect, practise the rules of the Society, especially religious practices, but they should take great care to prevent murmuring against superiors or the way the house is run, and especially insist, recommend and spare nothing to prevent bad conversations.

6. We are all encouraged to tell the Director everything that can help promote what is good and avoid the Lord being offended.

The Lord told his disciples one day: *Hoc fac et vives*. Do this, that is, observe my precepts, and you will have eternal life. I say the same to you my dear sons. Put into practice what this loving Father has explained to you and you will have the Lord's blessing, enjoy peace of mind, discipline will triumph in our houses and we will see our pupils grow from virtue to virtue and take the secure road to their eternal salvation.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always be with me and you, so that we may all constantly love and serve him in this life to one day praise him and bless him forever in Heaven. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco



### 163. Letter to cleric John Cinzano and his pupils

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 244-245.

Romae, nonis martii [7 March] 1874

My dear Cinzano and all your very dear students,

That is an excellent suggestion you made when you asked your pupils to promise to give me two weeks of good behaviour as a gift. That was a praiseworthy idea and its success deserving of even more praise still.

You did not tell me about yourself, but by telling me that everything has been excellent, I believe that in the word 'everything' your own reverend self would be included. Is that right?

So thanks to you and thanks to all your students for the gift you have given me. I will demonstrate my gratitude once I return home. A glass of the best, a nice dish, a candy etc. etc. will be a sign of satisfaction that I will give everyone.

I will be with you all again shortly; you have all been occupying my thoughts and concerns. I will be with you who are the masters of my heart, and as St Paul says, wherever I go you are always *gaudium meum et corona mea*. I know you have prayed for me and I thank you for that. I will be able to tell you the results of your prayers.

But, my dear sons, *motus in fine velocior*, I now need you to redouble your prayers and fervour and continue in your good behaviour.

There is very little I can do for you but the thanks God is preparing for you are great. I will also pray for you, bless you with all my heart, and for me, go to communion once, with an *Our Father and Hail Mary* to St Joseph.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always be with you. Amen.

And you, *Cinzano my son, age viriliter ut coroneris feliciter, perge in exemplum bonorum operum. Argue, obsecra, increpa in omni patientia et doctrina. Spera in*

*Domino: ipse enim dabit tibi velle et posse. Cura ut coniuges comites Viancino visites, eosque verbis meis saluta, eisque nomine meo omnia fausta precare. Vale in Domino.*

Joannes Bosco sacerdos

### 164. Letter to Fr Joseph Bertello

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, p. 448.

Turin, 9 April 1875

My dear Fr Bertello<sup>39</sup>,

I am doing what I can to reawaken love for study amongst your pupils, but you do what you can as well to cooperate in this.

1. Look upon them as your brothers; loving kindness, forbearance, respect. These are the keys to their hearts.

2. Get them to study only what they can and no more. Get them to read and understand the textbook without going off the topic.

3. Question them often, invite them to explain, read, explain, read, explain.

4. Always encourage, never humiliate; praise as much as you can without showing disregard unless it is a sign of displeasure as a punishment.

Try putting that into practice then let me know the response. I will pray for you and yours and believe that I am, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr J. Bosco

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Giuseppe BERTELLO, *Scritti e documenti sull'educazione e sulle scuole professionali*. Introduction, critical text and notes by J.M. Prelezzo. "Istituto Storico Salesiano". Roma. LAS 2010, pp. 10-11.

### **165. Letter to a mother concerned about her son**

Published in E III, pp. 411-412.

Turin, 11 November 1878

My good lady,

Your son is certainly in a bad situation. Age, knowledge, substances are terrible snares the devil uses to lure so many unwary youths to spiritual and bodily ruin. A Christian mother in this case should:

1. Take him in hand, go with him everywhere if he will put up with it. Reason with him, advise him to go to the holy sacraments, listen to the sermons, do some good reading. If he does not give in, have patience, but keep it up.

2. If you want you can tell him that for sure, if he does not control himself better, his life will be short and maybe ...

3. Try to get him to mix with other family members or other upright people, and keep away from bad companions.

4. Pray to God and St Monica.

In my own poor way I will pray especially to Mary Help of Christians. And then, I also have much need of your spiritual and corporal charity. I have an abundant harvest in my hands; we could win over many souls, but I lack the material means.

May God bless you and all your family, and pray for me too. I will always be, in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

**166. Letter to Prince Gabrielli: The offer of the Saint Michael Hospice at Ripa and the practice of the preventive system**

ASC A1710601 *Handwritten original by Don Bosco* ms by G. Berto with corrections and original additions; ed. in E III, pp. 481-482<sup>40</sup>.

Rome, [30 June 1879]

Your Highness,

A number of affairs over these past days made it impossible for me to have the pleasure of responding promptly to your letter of 4 June.

Now I can offer my humble thanks to you and all the administration of the St Michael's Hospice for which you have been kind enough to turn to the Pious Salesian Society of St Francis de Sales to run that Religious Institute.

I would like the respectable administration to achieve its purpose and for my part I would like to satisfy the request. So it would be good for me to explain something about the most essential part of your letter: entrusting us with the direction of the boys and their immediate dependence and supervision.

In general all this is acceptable, and I would try to put it into practice as follows:

1. The administration exercises its authority in everything to do with finances, personnel related to that, buying, selling, building, repairs and the like.

2. Father Bosco will offer a Director, Bursar, Prefects, Doorkeeper, Trade Teachers, school Teachers and others for the number needed to ensure discipline, good morals and the personal benefit of the pupils. A fair remuneration will be established for the staff, individually or as a group.

3. The administration will pay a daily or monthly wage according to the boys it intends to have admitted to the Institute.

<sup>40</sup> The formalities that had begun did not conclude with a positive outcome: cf. G. BARBERIS, *Cronachetta* 1879, Quad. 15, p. 13.

4. The director of the boarding section will be responsible for everything regarding the Institute and will accept young pupils according to the conditions established by the administration.

The Director is prepared to retain current service personnel and trade teachers that the administration thinks convenient and who have proven their worth.

This way the administration will have all the financial advantages it wishes, the purpose of the Institute would be kept intact and it would be able to exercise its authority, while the *Salesian Society* for its part would put into practice everything essential for it to preserve its purpose, because we use a very special system of discipline in our houses which we call preventive, where we never use punishments or threats.

Kind ways, reason, loving kindness, and a very special kind of supervision are the only means we use to gain discipline and good morals amongst our pupils, as Your Highness would have noted from the Regulations of the house in Turin which is also in use for all our houses in Italy, France and America.

I would be very pleased if Your Highness or some of the gentlemen of the administration, should they be in Turin, would honour us with a visit to our hospice and see what could be taken from or added in applying this to the Regulations for the St Michael's Hospice in Ripa.

I have briefly explained some of my thinking here; should we need to talk about this further you could write to me, and I will ask a friend in the Roman Prefecture or the Ministry for the Interior who know something of how we do things, and they can offer the necessary clarifications and also take up matters in my name.

May God keep you in good health, and I am, with the greatest of respect,  
Your Highness' humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

## V. EDUCATIONAL READING AND SPREADING GOOD BOOKS (1860-1885)

*“Don Bosco,” Fr Michael Rua writes in a brief note in 1867 “sad at seeing the great evil that was happening especially amongst young students because of bad literature, planned to set up an association of good classical and modern literature.”*

*The plan became a reality the following year, when he began publishing the “Library for Italian Youth” or “Library of Italian Classics.”<sup>41</sup>*

*The initiative was part of accomplishments established previously and of many more others which were to be implemented later. In reality, “Don Bosco gave no truce as a writer, publisher and propagandist because he was personally convinced that preaching the good news in printed form was a service he simply could not fail to render to Religion, a necessary way of carrying out his vocation as an educator of the young and people.”<sup>42</sup>*

*Alongside the programme he published in 1868, this section includes four circular letters where he takes up the matter of educational reading, from different perspectives and with varying emphases. The two circulars published in 1884 and 1885 are of special interest. In the first, Don Bosco focuses on a point he considers “very important” regarding the “books to be removed from the hands of our boys” and “those that should be used for individual reading or reading in common.” The second, in a broader and more articulated fashion, develops the matter of “spreading good books” amongst the people in general and young people in particular, which, Don Bosco assures us, “is one of the principal ends” of the Salesian Congregation.*

<sup>41</sup> Eugenio CERIA, *Annali della Società salesiana. Dalle origini alla morte di S. Giovanni Bosco (1841-1888)*. Torino, SEI [1941], pp. 147-118, 686; cf. Francesco TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare*. Torino, SEI 1987; Francesco MALGERI, *Don Bosco y la prensa*, in José Manuel PRELLEZO GARCÍA (ed.), *Don Bosco en la historia. Actas del Primer Congreso Internacional de Estudios sobre San Juan Bosco*. Roma/Madrid, LAS/CCS 1990, pp. 441-450.

<sup>42</sup> Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. First volume: *Vita e opere*. Second edition revised by the author. Roma, LAS 1979, p. 247.

*Along these lines we also include a personal letter addressed to Fr J. B. Lemoyne, Rector/Director of the boarding school at Lanzo<sup>43</sup>.*

### **167. Circular: Donations for spreading good books**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 397.

Turin, 6 March 1860

#### Donations for spreading good books

Last year some pious people came together to provide donations so we could disseminate good books to hospitals, especially amongst the military. This went very well; many bad books were collected and consigned to the flames and then substituted by good books.

The effort to propagate perverse literature continues even now. Many priests and religious who are preaching during Lent or at Retreats, as also some parish priests and others, have sought to oppose this growing evil by asking for religious books or other devotional items that they can usefully distribute when teaching catechism or on many other occasions, but they lack the means for getting hold of them.

With this in mind I am appealing to charitable Catholics inviting them to take part and send along whatever donation they consider suitable for the needs of these times. The undersigned, in agreement with other priests, will try to satisfy the various requests made in this regard.

The Lord God will not fail to richly reward this work on behalf of our holy Catholic Religion.

Fr John Bosco.

<sup>43</sup> John Baptist Lemoyne (1839-1916), Priest, Salesian, writer, secretary of the Superior Council, collaborator and compiler of the Biographical Memoirs of Don Bosco.

### **168. Library of Italian Youth**

Critical ed. in MB IX, 429-430 [1868]

The universally felt need to educate young students in the Italian language should encourage all lovers of this noble language of ours to use the means in their power to facilitate study and knowledge of it.

It is with this in mind that we have created the *Library of Italian Youth*. Its purpose is to publish these texts of ancient and modern language that can more closely interest educated youth. To succeed in this enterprise a society of worthy and famous professors and doctors in literature has been set up, and they propose:

1. To collect and publish the best classics in Italian in modern spelling so the young reader can read and understand them;
2. Choose those among them which are best suited for this purpose for their agreeable content and purity of language;
3. Where commentary is needed, it will consist of only brief notes which help with the literal meaning of the text and these will follow the interpretations of the most respected commentators;
4. We consider it fit to omit some and in fact all authors, no matter how respected they are, containing material which is offensive to religion or morals;
5. The utmost care will be taken to see that the typography leaves nothing to be desired for the clarity of the characters, the quality of the paper and the accuracy of the printing.

That said, we are ready to go about this work in the hope that it will be a great success for the educators of the young and all who love the glory of the Italian language and the greater good of the young.

#### *Terms of association*

1. The Library of Italian Youth will comprise around a hundred volumes of about 200 pages each.



2. The association is obligatory for a year and we will publish a volume per month in such a way that every year there will be a complete set.

3. The cost of association is 6 lire a year to be paid in advance. The volumes will be shipped free within Italy. Proportionate costs apply abroad.

4. Whoever finds ten members will receive a free copy. Houses of education or others who subscribe for 50 copies will receive 60.

5. Payment will be made to the correspondents with whom the subscription was made, either in person or by postal order and also with stamps.

6. The central office is in Turin; every package, letter or any other correspondence should be franked.

The address is simply:

*To the Director of the Library of Italian Youth.*

*Oratory of St Francis de Sales*

Turin

### **169. Letter to Fr John Baptist Lemoyne**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 476-477.

Turin, 8 January 1868

Dear Fr Lemoyne,

Your letter eventually arrived along with the collection and special letters from the boys. I read them with great consolation and I must say I was very moved at so many signs of affection, benevolence. I regret that I have not had time to respond to each, one by one; I hope to do that personally shortly. Meanwhile I would ask you to tell them three things from me:

1. That I thank you all for the good will and affection you have shown me more than I deserve. I will try to do this by remembering you every day at holy Mass just as if you were all there around me.

2 This year I absolutely need charity to reign from the most important to the least in the house by patiently bearing with others' faults and by giving good advice and counsel every time the opportunity presents itself. This is the key that opens the door to happiness for the whole year.

3. Encourage frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament as an effective, indeed the only way of keeping at bay the many scourges that will trouble us this year in public and in private.

At the right time these things will be duly explained and made the topic of moral observations. I will let you know about these when it is appropriate.

This year we need to hinder bad literature and promote good literature and therefore I would be very pleased if all our dear pupils would subscribe to the *Catholic Readings*, while all the superiors and even the youngsters should try to present and propagate them amongst anyone who shows good hope of accepting the idea. I am including some programmes here; you and Sala can put a programme in with the most important letters, with some words of encouragement.

*Tu vigila, in omnibus labora, opus fac evangelistae, ministerium tuum imple; argue, obsecra, increpa in omni patientia et doctrina, et in perdifficilibus rebus dic constanter: omnia possum in eo qui me confortat.*

May God bless you and your efforts, the teachers, assistants and all the young people; pray for me. I am always,

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

P.S. De Magistris wrote me a letter—it contains some startling things. If these are really what he thinks I believe he is almost ready for a stroke.

Try to speak to him about this. When I go to Lanzo I will do the rest.

### 170. Circular: Disseminating the Catholic Readings and the Library of Italian Classics

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 582-583.

[Turin, second half of December 1875]

To our worthy correspondents and kind readers,

We are happy to announce, worthy Correspondents and kind Readers, that the *Catholic Readings* and the *Library of Italian Classics*, often recommended to your zeal, will continue to be published with the same regularity in 1876.

Indeed we can assure you that we will add a special effort regarding paper, printing and shipping, and even more so in the choice of articles so that as far as possible they can be useful, pleasant, interesting and moral.

But our efforts need your support and help in promoting and propagating these publications in ways and places that you judge appropriate given your enlightened prudence.

Many bishops, archbishops and the Holy Father himself have blessed and recommended that these booklets be disseminated and this helps ensure the value of this work. In fact the *Catholic Readings* are aimed at preserving the healthy principles of our holy religion amongst the people, while the expurgated *Italian Classics* are aimed at promoting and preserving the morals of our young students.

The sad consequences resulting from bad literature and the efforts that some go to spread it, certainly say to the good Christian that if bad people do so much to spread evil, should not good people at least do the same to propagate good?

Someone else not long ago had this to say: whatever you do to spread good books can be compared to the offering given to a poor hungry person.

So we trust in your cooperation and unable as we are to show our gratitude in any other way, we ask God to fill you with heavenly blessings and grant you

many years of happy life. In the name of all I have the honour of being, for the Management and our collaborators,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **171. Circular: Reading material**

ASC A1750409 Circolari ai Salesiani, with authentic signature; printed ed.  
in *Lettere circolari di DB*, pp. 15-20 (cf. MB XVII, 197-200).

Feast of All Saints[1884]

My beloved sons in Jesus Christ,

A very serious reason has led me to write this letter to you at the beginning of the school year. You know how much affection I have for the souls that Our Blessed Lord Jesus, in his infinite goodness, has chosen to entrust to me, on the other hand you should not misconstrue the responsibility that weighs upon the educators of the young and the strict account they will have to render for their mission to Divine Justice.

But I have to share this responsibility fully with you, my beloved sons, and I want it to be for you and for me the origin, source and cause of glory and eternal life. Therefore I have thought about drawing your attention to a very important point on which the salvation of our pupils may depend. I am speaking of the books that should be removed from the hands of our pupils and those that ought be used for individual reading, or reading in common.

First impressions on virgin minds and tender hearts of the young last for the rest of their lives, and books today are one of the main causes of this. Reading has a lively attraction for them and tickles their eager curiosity. Very often the final choice they make for good or for evil depends on this. The enemies of souls know the power of this weapon and experience teaches us how wickedly they use it to the detriment of innocence. Interesting titles, beautiful paper, sharp typeface, refined drawings, acceptable prices, popular style, varied plots, focused descriptions, all done with art and diabolical care.

So it is up to us to oppose weapons with weapons, wresting the poison from the hands of our youngsters that impiety and immorality is offering them: opposing bad books with good books. Woe to us if we are asleep while our enemy remains awake and is always at work sowing darnel [mischief-making].

Therefore, from the beginning of the school year practise what the Rules prescribe, carefully observe the books the boys bring with them when they enter the college, appointing someone who takes it upon himself to inspect trunks and packages. As well as that the Director in each House should ask the boys to conscientiously draw up a list of every book and give it to the superior himself. This is not a superfluous approach both because it makes it easier to see if some books have escaped attention, and because if these lists are kept, they can help in a particular situation to take action against someone who has maliciously hidden a bad book.

Similar vigilance should continue throughout the year, by asking pupils to hand over every new book bought during the school year or brought in by relatives, friends, day students; by observing that, either out of ignorance or malice, parcels for the boys are not wrapped in filthy newspapers; by carrying out prudent inspection in the study hall, dormitories, classrooms.

The care taken to achieve all this can never be too much. The teacher, the one looking after the study hall, the assistant should also see what is being read in church or in recreation, at school, in study. Unexpurgated dictionaries should also be removed. For many boys this is where malice and the traps set by bad companions begin. A bad book is a plague that affects many young people. The Director may consider he has done well when he has succeeded in wresting one of these books from a pupil.

It is unfortunate that the very boys who own these books find it difficult to obey and use every trick around to hide them. The Director has to fight greed, curiosity, fear of punishment, human respect, unbridled passion. That is why I believe it is essential to conquer the heart of the young and convince them through kindness. Often in the year from the pulpit, in the evenings, in class, take up this topic of bad books, let them see the evil they cause; convince the

boys that we only have the salvation of their souls in mind, and that after God this is what we love above everything else.

Do not be harsh, unless a young man is ruining others. If someone hands over a bad book through the year, gloss over his earlier disobedience and accept the book as a very fine gift. Even more so because sometimes it could be the confessor who asked him to hand it over and it would be imprudent to delve further into the matter. And if the superiors are known for their kindness it could also lead some boys to reveal that others are hiding books of this kind.

When a book is found that is prohibited by the Church or is immoral, it should be immediately thrown into the fire. We have seen priests and clerics ruined by books taken from the boys.

By acting in this way I hope that bad books will not enter our colleges or where they have entered, they will be quickly destroyed.

But as well as bad books it is necessary to keep an eye on certain other books which, while good or indifferent in themselves, can also be dangerous because not suited to the age, place, studies, inclinations, budding passions, vocation. These must also be removed. As with books of a good and enjoyable kind, where these can be excluded it will help with study; by regulating homework, teachers can help the pupils use their time well. But because there is an almost uncontrollable urge to read today, and because many good books too can fire up passions and imagination, if the Lord lets me live long enough I have thought of arranging and printing a collection of enjoyable books for boys.

This refers to books that are read privately. But for reading done in common in refectories, dormitories and the study hall, I would say firstly that no books should ever be read unless first approved by the Director and novels of any kind should be excluded unless they have come from our printing press.

In the refectory you can read the *Bulletin*, the *Catholic Readings* as they come out, and between these editions you can read books printed at the Oratory: the *History of Italy*, the *Church History* and the history of the Popes, stories about America and other subjects published in collections of the *Catholic Readings*, and history books or stories from the *Library of Youth*.

These latter could be read in study where the custom still exists of reading something in the last quarter of an hour before singing practice.

With regard then to reading in the dormitories, I would like to absolutely ban any kind of pleasant leisure reading but would like books to be used that put good thoughts into their minds as they prepare to sleep, thoughts that will make them better. So in this situation it would be good to use books that are attractive but with content that is rather holy or ascetic. I would begin with biographies of our boys *Comollo*, *Savio*, *Besucco*, etc., and would continue with the booklets from the *Catholic Readings* that deal with religion; I would finish with the lives of the Saints but choosing the more attractive and appropriate ones. I am certain they do more good with these books than could be achieved in a whole Retreat, following the brief talk in the evenings which comes from a heart that desires the salvation of their souls.

To fully achieve the desired effect and to see that our books are an antidote against bad books, I ask and beg you to love our own confreres' publications, avoiding any feeling of envy or contempt. Where you find them lacking something, then offer advice or if you have time volunteer yourself to help, so corrections can be done either by telling the author himself or telling the superiors who are responsible for overseeing our publications. But never let a word of criticism issue from your lips. The honour of one is the honour of us all. If the boys hear a teacher or assistant praising a book, they too will respect it, praise it and read it.

Recall one of the great things that our Holy Father Pius IX said one day to the Salesians: "Imitate the example of the Jesuit Fathers. Why are their writers so respected? Because the confreres involve themselves in reviewing and correcting as if the work of another confrere was their own; and in public, with all the newspapers and magazines they can find, by praising its merits they give him an outstanding reputation, and in private all you hear are words of praise. You will never hear one of these priests, and there are thousands of them, criticise or lessen the reputation of a confrere."

Do this amongst our boys and you can be certain that our books will produce immense good.

My dear sons, Listen, think about and practice this advice of mine. I feel that my life is coming to an end. Your years too will pass quickly. So let us work zealously so that an abundant harvest of souls saved can be presented to the good Father, who is God. May the Lord bless you, and may he bless our young pupils with you. Greet them for me, and recommend this poor old man to their prayers. He loves them so much in Jesus Christ.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

### **172. Circular to the Salesians on spreading good books**

ASC A1750411 Circolari ai Salesiani, Diffusione dei buoni libri; printed ed. in *Lettere circolari di DB*, pp. 15-20.

Turin, 19 March, St Joseph's Feast day, 1885

My dearest sons in Jesus Christ,

The Lord knows how keen my desire is to see you, be in your midst, speak with you about our things, and console myself with the mutual confidence of our hearts. But unfortunately, dear sons, my failing strength, the remnants of earlier illnesses, the urgent matters that call me to France, are preventing me for now at least, to follow the impulse of my affection for you.

Being unable to visit you in person, I am arriving by letter, and I am sure you will be happy with the constant remembrance I have of you, you who are my hope, my glory and also my support. I want to see you grow in zeal and in merit before God, every day, and so I will not hesitate to suggest various means to you from time to time which I believe will be an improvement so your ministry will be more fruitful.

One of these that I want to warmly recommend to you, for the glory of God and the good of souls, is the spreading of good books. I don't hesitate to call this means 'Divine', since God Himself used it to regenerate humankind. There were books inspired by Him that have brought correct teaching to all the world. He wanted all the cities and villages of Palestine to have copies and



that each Sabbath there would be reading in the religious assemblies. At the beginning these books were the sole patrimony of the Hebrew people but, once the tribes were taken into captivity in Assyria and amongst the Chaldeans, the Sacred Scriptures were translated into the Syro-chaldean language, and all of central Asia had them in their own languages.

Once Greek was in the ascendancy, the Hebrews brought their colonies to every corner of the world and with them the Sacred Books were multiplied 'ad infinitum'; and they even enriched the libraries of pagan peoples through their version of the Septuagint. Orators, poets and philosophers of those times drew not a few truths from the Bible. God prepared the world for the coming of the Saviour principally through his inspired writings.

It behoves us, then, to imitate the work of the Heavenly Father. Good books, spread amongst the people, are one of the active ways to preserve the kingdom of the Saviour in so many souls. The thoughts, principles, the morals of a Catholic book have substance drawn from the Apostolic books and tradition. They are so much more necessary today in the face of the army of impiety and immorality wreaking havoc in the sheepfold of Jesus Christ, leading on and dragging down to perdition those who are careless and disobedient. It is necessary to fight weapon with weapon. You can add that the book, even if on the one hand it does not have the power of the living word, on the other hand offers even greater advantages in certain circumstances. The good book can enter a house where the priest cannot, it is even tolerated by bad people as a gift or remembrance. It does not get embarrassed when presenting itself, and does not worry if it is neglected; when read it teaches truths calmly; if not liked, it does not complain, yet it leaves feelings of misgiving that sometimes spark a desire to know the truth. Meanwhile it is always ready to teach.

Sometimes it remains gathering dust on the table or in the library. No one gives it a thought. But come a time of loneliness, or sadness, or boredom or a need for relaxation, or a time of anxiety about the future, and this faithful friend shakes off its dust, opens its pages and the wonderful conversions of St Augustine, Blessed Columbine and St Ignatius happen all over again. Polite in dealing with those who are fearful through human respect, it arouses

suspicion in no one. Familiar with those who are good, it is always ready to talk things over; it goes with them at every moment, everywhere. How many the souls saved by good books, how many preserved from error, how many encouraged in doing good! Someone who gives a good book might have no other merit than to awaken some thought of God, but has already gained an incomparable merit before God. And yet how much more is gained. Even if not read by the one to whom it was given or for whom it was intended, a book in a family is read by a son or daughter, a friend or neighbour. A book in a village then passes into the hands of a hundred people.

God alone knows the good that a book given as a mark of friendship produces in a city, a travelling library, a worker's club, a hospital. No one should fear that a book would be refused by someone just because it is good. The contrary is the case. A confrere of ours used to take his store of good books with him every time he went down to the wharves at the port in Marseilles, to give to the stevedores, the craftsmen, the sailors. These books were always accepted happily and gratefully and sometimes read immediately with keen interest.

Having said all that, and leaving aside much of what you already know, I want to point out why, not only as Catholics but especially as Salesians, you should be enthusiastic and spare no effort or means to spread wholesome books:

1. This was amongst the main tasks Divine Providence entrusted to me, and you know how much effort I spent on it, notwithstanding the thousand and one other occupations I had. The raging hatred of the enemies of good, and attacks on me personally, show how error recognises a formidable opponent in these books and how they are an undertaking blessed by God, for exactly the opposite reason.

2. In fact, the marvellous distribution these books have had is an argument that proves God's special assistance. In less than 30 years the total number of publications and books we have spread among ordinary people amounts to about twenty million. If some of them have been ignored, others have had hundreds of readers, and thus we can certainly reckon that the number of

people who have benefited from our books is much greater than the number of books we have published.

3. This spreading of wholesome literature is one of the principal purposes of our Congregation. Article 7 of the first paragraph of our Regulations says of the Salesians: “They shall devote themselves to spreading good books among the people, using all the means which Christian charity inspires. By word and writing they will seek to counteract the godlessness and heresy that is trying in so many guises to creep in amongst the uncultured and unlearned. They should direct the sermons they preach to the people from time to time, triduum, novenas and the spreading of good books, to this end.”

4. Amongst the books to be spread I propose that we stick to those that have a reputation for being good, moral and religious, and we should give preference to those produced by our own presses. The reason is that the material benefit that results becomes charity through the support it provides for the many poor young people we have, and because our publications tend to form an orderly system, that embraces on a vast scale all the classes that make up human society. I won't dwell on this point; rather I am pleased to look at just one class, that of young people, to whom I have always striven to do good not only with the spoken but also with the printed word.

While I sought to instruct all the people with the *Catholic Readings*, its purpose was to get into the houses, let people know about the spirit in our Colleges, and attract young people to virtue, especially with the biographies of Savio, Besucco and others. With *The Companion of Youth* my aim was to lead them to church, instil the spirit of piety in them and get them to love going to the sacraments. With the collection of edited Italian and Latin classics and the *History of Italy* and the other historical or literary books I wanted to be at their side in school and preserve them from so many errors and passions that would be fatal for them now and for eternity. Like in the old days I wanted to be their companion in the hours of recreation, and I have thought about arranging a series of enjoyable books which I hope will not be long in coming.

Finally, amongst my many aims for the *Salesian Bulletin* I also had this one: to keep the spirit of St Francis de Sales and his sayings alive in boys who

have returned to their families, and to make these boys the saviours of other young people. I will not tell you I have reached my ideal of perfection. On the contrary, I am telling you that it is up to you to co-ordinate it in such a way that it will be complete in all its parts.

I ask and beseech you then not to neglect this most important part of our mission. Work at it not only amongst the young people Providence has entrusted to you, but with your words and example make them into many other apostles who spread good books.

At the start of the year the pupils, especially the new ones, are alight with enthusiasm at the offer of our associations, even more so when it costs so little. But make sure that they join spontaneously and are not forced in anyway to belong. With well reasoned encouragement lead the young people to join, not just for the good the books will do them, but also for the good they can do to others, sending them home as soon as they are published, to their father, mother, brothers, benefactors. Besides, parents who do not practise their religion much are moved by this thoughtfulness of a son or brother who is away from home, and they are easily lead to read the book out of curiosity if for no other reason.

Let them be careful though that what they send never looks like preaching or talking at their relatives, but is always and only a thoughtful gift and an affectionate memento. When they return home, they should strive to increase the merits of their good works, by giving them as presents to their friends, lending them to relatives, giving them as thanks for a favour done, passing them on to their parish priest, asking him to distribute them and get more members.

Be convinced, my dear sons, that such industriousness will draw the Lord's choicest blessings down on you and on our young people.

I will finish: draw the conclusion to this letter yourselves by seeing that our young people get hold of moral and Christian principles especially by means of our productions, without despising other publishers' books. I must tell you, however, that I was cut to the quick when I got to know that the

books we printed were at times not known or held in no regard, in some of our houses,. Do not love, nor lead others to love, the knowledge which the Apostle says *inflat* (pumps up, makes us proud). And remember that even though St Augustine was an eminent teacher of fine letters and an eloquent orator, after he became a bishop, he preferred the incorrect use of language and the absence of stylish elegance rather than running the risk of not being understood by the people.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always be with you. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

## VI. “SUMMARY” OF GOODNIGHTS TO THE BOYS AT VALDOCCO (1864-1877)

*Amongst the more original practices put in place as part of the educational praxis at Valdocco, and maintained in the Salesian tradition that then followed from it, we would have to highlight the “Goodnights”: brief “talks” or “short speeches” after night prayers. Don Bosco addressed the pupils in the presence of their educators (superiors of the house, teachers assistants), in a familiar way using simple and attractive language.*

*Thus far we have not found handwritten originals of these kinds of interventions. But the Central Salesian Archives in Rome have a considerable number of relevant texts with either all or at least summaries of their contents. They are interesting testimonies handed down by careful listeners; in particular, members of a kind of “society” or “commission” of young collaborators who in 1860-1861 proposed “preventing anything belonging to Don Bosco being forgotten”, doing everything possible to “preserve their memory.” This was precisely the purpose of the diaries, brief chronicle notes compiled by some members of this commission. Amongst the better known ones are: Giulio (Jules) Barberis, Dominic Ruffino, Michael Rua, John B. Francisia<sup>44</sup>.*

*The “summary” of seven “goodnights” given to the students at Valdocco in November and December 1864 offer practical guidelines, with a view to helping their listeners “benefit from their study”. Speaking on this topic, Don Bosco gave strong emphasis to the good religious and moral conduct of the student as an essential prior condition.*

*Included here are two “goodnights” from 1877—the most complete and probably closest to the original—which take up the topic of study and reading but also other topics characteristic of Don Bosco’s educational approach: holidays, fleeing idleness, recreations and play.*

<sup>44</sup> Domenico Ruffino (1840-1865), Salesian priest, General Spiritual Director (1863); Director/Rector of the college at Lanzo (1864); compiler of some of the *Cronache dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*.

### 173. Ways of getting the best out of study

ASC A0090102 *Sunto di Buone notti di don Bosco*, ms allog., 1864/65 (cf. MB VII, 817- 829).

24 November

*1<sup>st</sup> Way* - to study well is the fear of God: *Initium sapientiae timor Domini*. Do you want to become learned and benefit from your classes? Fear the Lord. See that you don't commit sin because: *sapientia non habitabit in corpore subdito peccatis*; human wisdom comes from God's wisdom. So what pleasure can one gain from studies if one's heart is all disturbed by passions? How can you overcome the difficulties you meet without God's help? Truly learned people were never ones who offended God. Look at St Francis de Sales, St Thomas. Experience constantly teaches that those who benefit from studies are those who keep far away from sin. It is true that there are certain evildoers who currently stand out for intelligence and knowledge. But maybe at other times they deserved this great gift from the Lord, because of their good conduct and good works, but then abused it. Furthermore, most of them do not have true wisdom: their mind is filled with errors which they then teach to others. Because even if the Lord has allowed these bad people to benefit from their knowledge despite being his enemy, that will become a greater punishment and curse for having been abused<sup>45</sup>.

25 November

*2<sup>nd</sup> Way* – Never waste a moment of time. Time, my dear friends, is precious. *Fili conserva tempus*. Give all the time you have to, to study. Never look for excuses to get out of class. It is sad to see boys looking for excuses not to do their duty. Not reading during study time or reading other books that have nothing to do with the subjects they are doing in school. Reign in your imagination. Can you see that young lad who is so intent on his books? Do you think he is studying? Tut tut! His mind is a thousand miles away. Look, he is smiling. He still seems to be in recreation playing tops and thinking how he beat his friend. And the other one is thinking about the chestnuts and

<sup>45</sup> The passage from: "Look at St Francis de Sales" to: "abused" is taken from MB VII, 817. The "summary" only says: "St Francis de Sales". St Thomas etc."

salami he has in his lunch box. And another one is thinking about an idea he has, a picnic, a joke he heard. I am not talking about boys who are thinking of offending God, because I hope there are none of those in the Oratory. So study and let's not waste time.

27 November

*3<sup>rd</sup> Way* – Eat at the right time. The throat kills more people than the sword. Do you want to learn something? Do not live to eat, eat to live. Eat lightly in the morning and at the afternoon snack and don't eat immoderately. If you have a tasty morsel stashed away in your trunk, don't be greedy and eat it all at once. Keep some of it for other days and it will not do you harm. Don't believe I am telling you this for my own interests: no really, because experience says that if you eat a bread roll less at breakfast you will eat three extra at lunchtime. Whoever has his stomach too full goes to school or study with a full head. Sometimes the stomach prevents us sleeping, and if we stay awake we end up doing nothing. Or if we want to work, and this is even worse, we have a headache and do nothing for a few days while at other times we have indigestion.

28 November

*4<sup>th</sup> Way* – Keeping company with studious types is the best way to benefit from study. When you are at recreation join the cleverer school mates and clerics. Ask them something about geography, Latin, history. Speak about these things amongst yourselves and how much benefit you will have! When on walks, talk about these kinds of things and leave the company of certain loafers and tale-tellers. You lose rather than gain knowledge with them. Useless chatter helps nobody and only dissipates the mind or cools the heart. If you want to be wise, practice wisdom.

1 December

*5<sup>th</sup> Way* – Get fully involved in recreation, because by doing this you will get new strength to study better when time for class comes. Don't turn recreation time into study time, because when you then have to study your mind is tired and you will get little benefit from it. But be careful about immoderate and



excessive recreation. At recreation time there are some who run here and there with such a fury that they are not recreating at all, but killing themselves. They shout and throw their friends to the ground, break noses, smash limbs, and when everything is finished they are all sweaty and out of breath and head off to study, but their head is still in revolt and they need a rest.

I'm not speaking of those who scream so much they've got a headache for the rest of the day; or of those who spend their recreation in dirty conversations; or of others who get into a fight to amuse themselves: I am only saying that it is unthinkable that there could be any benefit when the fear of God is lacking. So be orderly in any of your recreation; and I'm not telling you not to play tops, *bara rotta* etc. So jump around and have fun but avoid excess. When I don't have to see people who come looking for me, I too go to recreation, I welcome taking a break with you, playing around. I laugh but I never break my neck just to have recreation.

So the fifth way of benefiting from study, is having orderly recreation as is required for orderly students. I also note that there are boys who speak of outings or afternoon snacks with so much enthusiasm that they have nothing else they can think about in class. as you can see, you could expect little benefit for them.

4 December

*6<sup>th</sup> Way* – To study with benefit and overcome difficulties you find in studying some writers: when you encounter difficulties, don't get discouraged. What did you come to do here at the Oratory? Study: so it is natural that you need to learn what you do not know. So courage, do not leave things half done. People don't do well if they encounter a problem then skip it, saying: I don't understand this, then they go on to something else. No, you don't need to go on to something else until the problem is beaten and overcome. To obtain this you first need to appeal to Jesus and Mary with some little brief prayer and you will see that the problems just disappear. Never forget this way of overcoming problems, my dear boys, because God alone is the Father of knowledge and he gives it to who he wants and how he wants; and every day in the Litanies you say about Mary that she is *Sedes sapientiae*, the seat of

wisdom. As well as this turn to your teachers, the assistants: they will be keen to help you; they not only make efforts to overcome the problems but they rejoice when they come across them because these are the things that make our intelligence grow. What kind of a boast is it if you learn something easy to understand?

5 December

*7<sup>th</sup> Way* – Get down to things to do with your study. We need to keep this in our mind, that any kind of study that has nothing to do with our classes needs to be put aside. There are boys who read a lot, but they read so many things that without realising it all they are doing is cheating their minds. There are many who read poets, stories, good things, but they leave aside their duty. When you have done your duty, will there be some time left over? Well then, go back over the explanations given, return to some grammar rules you have forgotten and don't waste time reading the life of *Gianduja* or *Bertoldo and Cacasenno*.

#### **174. Holidays, amusements, fleeing idleness**

ASC A0000303, *Conferenze*, 1877-1878, Quad. III, ms allog., pp. 17- 21  
(cf. MB XIII, 431-433).

Friday 31 August 1877

I have some good news to give you. Holidays begin Monday. Do you like this news? I see some do. And I am happy for you to go on holidays. But I can tell you that many have asked if they could have them here. I am also happy about this but I want them to do it willingly. They too will have time for recreation, lots of outings, but our holidays will be a bit more withdrawn and exposed to less harm. The one thing I recommend to either group is to flee from idleness. I know that for some it doesn't sound very nice going on holidays and working. The term *vacanze* (holidays) does not mean resting up as some think, but applying oneself, attending to things. So *vacare studio*, attending to study, *vacare agriculturae*, applying oneself to agriculture.

But I want us to understand the terms we use. Fleeing idleness means not hanging around doing nothing, it does not mean constantly doing manual work, although there is nothing wrong with that, and in fact I recommend it. I remember that when I used to go on holidays, I would take some leather, make some shoes then give them away as gifts. I used to take cloth, canvas, cut out a pair of pants or underwear, sew them together and did what I wanted. Or I got some wood and made chairs, benches. There are still some tables at home that I made. Sometimes I went out to cut hay, or turn over the hay with Virgil or some other book in hand.

I am not giving these as examples for you to do, but just to let you see how you can occupy holiday time somehow.

So I recommend that when you go home, if you have vineyards eat the ripest grapes; if you find fish, figs, pears or apples, eat the best ones.

I recommend that you enjoy yourself: play bocce, soccer ... Everyone will have special amusements at home: playing cards, draughts, chess, etc. Take some good walks; I recommend that a lot. Each of you will have time to read, study a passage that you haven't understood properly.

So, always work and play? No, at lunch eat, also at breakfast, and supper too. Serve at table, clean up afterwards, serve bread too, just don't be idle. Rest in the evening, sleep a little in the morning, but watch out for the kind of rest we call the *demonium meridianum*. This means the nap we take after lunch: this is the devil's time. If you let him get you the devil can sing a song of victory. He'll walk around and whistle in your ear. Oh, what terrible conversations come to mind! Then he'll squint at you. Oh, what a terrible picture comes to mind! These temptations remain there, can't be got rid of and you end up in the devil's hands. So, no going to bed after lunch. If you really need to, sit on a chair and snooze a bit.

Oh what a thing to talk about! Let's put it in just a few words: have great holidays, but never remain unoccupied; if you are not working the devil will be working. Work by day; sleep by night.

There are other things I would like to say to you, but I hope to speak to you on Sunday before you leave. Tomorrow and the day after, the last days you are here with us I want you all to come and see me and I will have something to tell each of you.

Would like you also to note that Don Bosco suggests you spend your holidays happily. It is so you can spend your holidays happily that I give you these warnings and if you heed them you will have happy holidays. Good night.

### 175. Invitation to reading

ASC A0000303 *Conferenze*, 1877-78, Quad. III, pp. 22-24 (cf. MB XIII, 437-438).

7 October 1877

Heartfelt greetings to everyone, since this is the first time I have seen you since the holidays. It is true that not everyone has arrived as yet, but I see there is already a good number of us and if the table is prepared we will do justice to it just as we are.

Most of you are here to get ready to enter secondary school or move on to a higher grade or correct something that didn't go too well in the final exam, and this means you all need to study. There are others who at the beginning of the year have to repeat the exam for some subjects studied last year, and these also have to study to complete and repeat these exams. The clerics are mixed up in these various groups too.

And does that mean that others without a specific task can continue their holidays? If there were no more books to read, none in the bookshop or library, or if you had already read them all, then I would say: take a rest. But while there are still books to read, I say: Read. Amongst you there are some going on to study philosophy and I would advise these to read the treatise they have to study this year; then they can read or study a book by Virgil, Horace, Ovid or one of Dante's poems or repeat what they studied in language and literature. One book I would advise everyone to read is the *History of Italy*, and even if you have read it five times, I would say read it again. Because these days

all our history books distort things: the Church's enemies use history books to discredit and besmirch it, speaking about exaggerated or even completely fictitious things. Instead, in this history book, the facts are presented as a whole, briefly yes but it gives you the key to studying the *History of Italy* in detail and the *Church History* which is so closely bound up with it.

I am not trying to boast by saying nice things about my own history book, but it is only because I see that it can be of great use.

I have just heard of the death of Fr Cerruti. Tomorrow we will pray for his soul. This is not the only death notice I have received in these days. I came to know of a famous actor who did not recover and died suddenly on stage, and another who was acting with him, seeing him collapse, also collapsed and died. The audience who had come to watch a comedy went away having seen a cruel tragedy. This is not the only such case. I have heard of others. It is about being ready, so that when death comes, we can respond like Abram did when the Lord called him: *Abraham, Abraham! Ecce, Domine, adsum.*

Meanwhile, good night.

## SECTION THREE

### REGULATIONS AND PROGRAMMES

#### Presentation

*In his booklet on pedagogy in 1877, Don Bosco, intending to clarify the meaning of the Preventive System, writes: "It consists in making known the rules and regulations of an Institute, and then supervising in such a way that the students are always under the vigilant eye of the Director and the Assistants, who like loving fathers will converse with them, act as guides in every event, counsel them and lovingly correct them."*<sup>46</sup>

*From these assumptions it follows that knowledge and practice of rules form part of, to put it this way, "the essence of the Preventive System."<sup>47</sup> According to Don Bosco, in fact, direct and explicit reminders of the rules are essential in educational institutes for the success of the educational system of method he was offering. Without forgetting on the other hand that in his letter of 10 May 1884, which we already know, there is the question that one of the characters in the "dream" puts in the following terms: "Why do you want to substitute the coldness of a rule for love?"<sup>48</sup>.*

*It is also worth noting in this regard, even if rapidly, the situation of the educational and social welfare work that finally found its place at Valdocco in 1846. In the early 1880s a rather delicate situation to do with discipline had arisen in the students' section at the Home attached to the Oratory.*

*Don Bosco, in this situation, did not limit himself to sending a letter to the Salesian community: the letter from Rome in 1884 already mentioned in this collection. Once he got back to Turin a few weeks later, he brought those responsible*

<sup>46</sup> DBE, *Scritti*, p. 248; see also P. 490 of this volume.

<sup>47</sup> Pietro BRAIDO, *Regolamenti*, in S. Giovanni BOSCO, *Scritti sul sistema preventivo nell'educazione della gioventù*. Introduction, presentation and indexes by P. Braido. Brescia, La Scuola 1965, p. 355; Francis DESRAMAUT, *Règlaments de la Societé salésienne*. Lyon, Secrétariat Provincial Don Bosco 1953.

<sup>48</sup> P. BRAIDO, *Due lettere datate da Roma...*, p. 385.

for the house together on a number of occasions. At a meeting on June 5 he decided to set up a “committee” to study what should be done to foster good behaviour amongst the boys at the Oratory. Some days later, after having hinted at “reforming the house at the Oratory”, Don Bosco said: “I have examined the Regulations we practised in the early days and I can say that I am convinced that we should practise them even today since they provide for and anticipate all our needs. The Director needs to give the orders. He needs to know the rules that apply to him well and also the regulations for others and everything that has to be done.”<sup>49</sup>

The “Regulations that were practised in earlier days” – which the great Piedmontese educator thought were still valid and relevant in 1884 – were probably the ones printed in 1877: Regulations of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales<sup>50</sup>. But in autumn 1877 he also printed the Regulations for the Houses of the Society of St Francis de Sales<sup>51</sup>. To these two general “official” sets of regulations in this section, we have added his programme and regulations for the first houses founded outside Turin: Mirabello Monferrato (Alessandria), in 1863, and Lanzo Torinese, in 1864. We also have the programme and regulations for the boarding school at Mornese (Alessandria) and Nice: the first two houses of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians founded in 1872 by Don Bosco, with Mary Domenica Mazzarello.

Finally we include the brief set of regulations for the festive oratories, drawn up at the Third Salesian General Chapter in 1883 – presided over by Don Bosco – and published in 1887.

The choice of the regulations to be included in this collection of main Salesian sources could be broadened. But we have limited ourselves to some of the most significant ones using this authoritative criterion: “Not to be exaggerated, for sure, but not to be underestimated either is the place and function of the Regulations in

<sup>49</sup> ASC D869 *Verbali delle riunioni capitolari*; cf. J.M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 275.

<sup>50</sup> *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per gli esterni*. Torino, Tipografia dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1877.

<sup>51</sup> *Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*. Torino, Tipografia Salesiana 1877.

*Don Bosco's educative community and within the framework of his pedagogical vision.*"<sup>52</sup>

*The section concludes with two documents on the festive oratories and formation of the young trade boys—"the worker aspect of Salesian Houses"—drawn up in General Chapters from 1883 and 1886, the two last assemblies that the founder of the Society of Francesco di Sales presided over. The deliberations of these two Chapters were published in 1887.*

<sup>52</sup> P. BRAIDO, *Regolamenti...*, p. 355.



## I. FIRST SALESIAN COLLEGES FOUNDED OUTSIDE TURIN (1863-1864)

*“One and not the last study by Don Bosco this year,” writes J. B. Lemoyne referring to 1863 “was the foundation of the college at Mirabello. He had written up its regulations, using the ones at the Oratory as a basis, specifying all the duties of individual superiors and of the pupils, changing what might not be appropriate for the nature of this Institute.” These “regulations,” that remained simply handwritten for many years, according to what we have from Lemoyne, “had to be the founding statute for all the other Houses that would be opened over time. This meant they were given much importance.”<sup>53</sup>*

*Don Bosco planned them and after getting them printed he sent a copy to parish priests in the diocese of Casale and neighbouring dioceses.*

*In the Central Salesian Archives in Rome there are some examples of the handwritten copies and some of those Don Bosco had printed, even though not all are complete.*

*Here we have: the programme for the Archbishop’s junior seminary of St Charles, at Mirabello (1863) and the first part of the regulations for it, published by J. B. Lemoyne in volume VII of the Biographical Memoirs. The Draft Regulations for the College of St Philip Neri in Lanzo (1863-1864)<sup>54</sup> are of special significance, handwritten version (by someone else), with many corrections and additions in Don Bosco’s hand.*

*A comparison between these documents, though not complete, with the ‘official’ regulations from 1877 can be quite enlightening.*

<sup>53</sup> MB VII, 519-520; cf. also E. CERIA, *Annali della Società salesiana. Dalle origini ...*, pp. 27-40 (“Inizi di espansione: Giaveno e Mirabello”).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. E. CERIA, *Annali della Società salesiana. Dalle origini...*, pp. 71-77 (“Fondazione del collegio di Lanzo”). Lanzo Torinese (Province of Turin, Piedmont Region). The Salesian House in Lanzo was founded in 1864.

### **176. Archbishop's Junior Seminary of St Charles at Mirabello**

Critical ed. in *Piccolo seminario vescovile di San Carlo in Mirabello*. Torino,

Tipografia dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1863.

A Junior Seminary named after St Charles has been opened for young students at Mirabello, a pleasant and healthy town in fertile Monferrato. Although the principal purpose of this is to educate young aspirants to the ecclesiastical state, just the same no condition is placed on them when admitting them, and when they complete their studies they have full freedom to follow the vocation and career which Divine Providence has called each of them to.

This is why primary and secondary classes will be offered according to the discipline and curriculum similar to programmes established by the Ministry for Public Education.

The greatest care will be taken to see that pupils lack nothing that could contribute to their benefit in morals, health and learning.

#### *Terms of admission*

1. On entry each pupil should have his birth and Baptism certificates, smallpox certificate, school and good behaviour references explicitly mentioning regular attendance at parish functions.

2. He must have had his eighth birthday and at least finished first elementary level.

3. The curriculum includes 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> elementary; the five secondary years up to but excluding philosophy.

4. There are three levels of boarding fees. The least is 24 francs a month, providing bread and breakfast and a snack; bread, wine, soup, one other course for lunch; soup for supper.

The middle level is 32 francs and includes bread as above, wine, soup and two courses at lunch time; wine, soup, one course for supper.

There is also a third level of 42 francs, including bread as above; coffee and milk for breakfast; wine, soup and two courses with fruit at lunchtime; wine, soup, a course with fruit at supper time.

5. 3 francs per month for medical care and surgery; for bed and straw mattress; haircuts, ink, lighting and heating in winter.

In every class, the one who gets the best results in the final exam will not have to pay the annual amount indicated in this item, once promoted.

6. The fee should be paid quarterly in advance; there will be no reduction for someone who has been away from the junior seminary for fewer than fifteen days.

There will also be a deposit for small expenses.

7. Cost of laundry, ironing, mending of clothes and shoes is borne by parents.

Whoever chooses not to do these things may entrust them to the seminary who will do them for 5 francs a month.

8. Given regular payment of this fee, as well as the instruction for each class all are able to take part in the Gregorian chant practice, vocal music, basic gymnastics, public speaking and tutoring where the respective teachers consider it necessary.

### *Clothing*

1. There is no uniform, but a black tunic is advised for outings, Sundays and any time they go out.

2. Each one should bring whatever he needs for clothing and sleeping, with the exception of the bed and mattress.

3. The normal wardrobe will include at least 4 sheets, 6 shirts, 2 pairs of underwear, 2 pairs of shoes, 4 pairs of socks, 6 napkins, 8 towels, pitcher and basin, combs, clothes brush, another for shoes, two changes of clothes in good condition, one to wear for daily tasks, the other when going outside the seminary.

*Directions*

1. One can reach the Junior Seminary by train from Turin—Alessandria—Valenza getting off at Giarole or San Martino.

Or from Turin—Vercelli—Casale getting off at San Martino or Giarole, both stations near Mirabello.

2. The dates for beginning studies and exams in the respective classes will conform to what has been established by the Government for public schools. This year classes begin on October 20.

3. Each one will endeavour to bring clothing items with the number given at admission affixed to them.

4. Requests (for admission) are made to *His Grace Arch. Luigi di Calabiana Bishop of Casale and Senator of the Realm*, or to *the Director of the Junior Seminary of St Charles at Mirabello*.

Torino, 1863 - Tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales.

**177. Draft regulations for the boarding college  
of St Philip Neri in Lanzo**

ASC D4820401 *Regolamento di Lanzo, Piano di Regolamento per il Collegio Convitto di San Filippo Neri in Lanzo*, ms by another, corrections and additions by Don Bosco.

*PART ONE*

*Purpose of this college*

The purpose of this college is the moral, literary and civil education of young people aspiring to a career in studies. Moral education will be provided by teaching the principles and maxims of our holy Catholic Religion. Literary or academic education is given in elementary and secondary classes. This teaching will be imparted in accordance with Government programmes for public education.

*[Chapter I] - Terms of admission*

1. On entry each pupil should have his birth and Baptism certificates, smallpox certificate, school and good behaviour recommendations from his parish priest.

2. He should be between eight and not older than fourteen years of age, and should not have been expelled from any other education centre. With the greatest of prudence the Director will examine special cases where these terms could be modified. Other understandings can be read in the separate programme.

*Chapter II - Director*

The Director is the head of the college: it is up to him to admit or send pupils away, and he is responsible for duties, the moral standard of each employee and pupils at the college.

Only the Director has the power to establish what each one's role is and nobody can introduce variations to the timetable or discipline without his express consent.

*Chapter III - Prefect*

1. The Prefect or Bursar looks after the material running of the college, and takes the Director's place in administration and all cases he has been expressly put in charge of.

2. He is there when contracts are drawn up, keeps account of income and expenditure, provides whatever is needed for food, clothing and fuel; but always within limits established by the Director.

3. In accordance with the rules for administration in our houses, the Prefect will look after the main Roll recording the name, surname of pupils and their terms of admission.

4. He will also see that new pupils are soon entrusted to the Catechist to be instructed regarding the rules of the college.

5. If some student should cease to belong to the college, he will note the day of exit and the reasons for it.

6. The Prefect will be vigilant over exact observance of discipline throughout the college, especially of coadjutors, meaning those entrusted with material work in the establishment.

7. He will not overlook time, place, people to give advice, counsel or correction any time there is a need and when the opportunity presents itself.

8. He will provide for what is needed but will endeavour to avoid useless or superfluous expense. Repairs, clothing, furnishings, or unnecessary trips are all matters where economy is required. The same can be said for lighting, foodstuffs, wood and the like.

9. Every month he will endeavour to have a report on each pupil and from the catechist, so he can issue advice or corrections according to need.

10. At an established time he will bring the coadjutors together, direct and assist them in saying their prayers, and then leave them with some Christian reminders.

11. The Prefect will follow the requirements of the Director in his administration and should he need to modify something he will see that he has an understanding with him.

#### *Chapter IV - Catechist*

1. The Catechist supervises the pupils and provides for their spiritual needs. In as far as it is possible he should be a priest of exemplary and irreproachable conduct in the mind of all the pupils at the college.

2. He should provide a fixed place for every pupil in the chapel, refectory, dormitory then accompany him to the Inspector of studies so he can be given his place in the classroom and the study hall. Both the catechist and the inspector will see that none of the pupils is left to his own devices, without books or outside the classroom.

3. He will inform the pupils of the rules of the college and in the kindest and most charitable way will enquire as to what religious instruction they have most need of and will then take the greatest care to see that it is given them.

4. It is up to him to insist that the pupils all learn the little catechism of the diocese. For this purpose he will give each week at least one catechism lesson. He will take note of those who have already been promoted to holy communion, whether they have been confirmed, and whether they need to be given greater consideration for learning catechism and morning and evening prayers.

5. He will note their faults so he can correct them at the right moment and each month he will give a conduct mark to each pupil.

6. He will see that everyone is in time for prayers and all the other practices of piety, that they are devout, pray properly aloud, clearly and distinctly.

7. Every week he will give a lesson in the New Testament to the clerics, explain it briefly and get them to recite it; unless the Director himself chooses to carry out this task.

He will teach the ceremonies for serving at the altar.

8. He will look after vestments, candles, wine, cleanliness of the sacristy and church. He will agree with the Director on what is needed for singing, preaching and catechetical instruction, and on Feast Days he will either give an explanation of the Gospel or a brief instruction with the Director's permission.

9. He will see that all the boys learn to serve holy Mass well, pronouncing the words clearly and distinctly, in being at the correct position at the altar that this religious activity requires.

10. He will see that the dormitory heads are diligent in their duties and well behaved and that they act in a way that nobody is missing for the sacred functions either on Sundays or weekdays. They will have decurions [monitors or prefects who look after 10 boys] to help them with this.

11. The Catechist also looks after the infirmary, and if someone is sick and will see that no one is lacking in spiritual or material needs. But he should be careful in suggesting remedies without doctor's orders.

12. He will zealously praise and promote the St Aloysius, Blessed Sacrament and Immaculate Conception Sodalities, and the Altar Servers.

### *Chapter V - Dispenser*

1. The Dispenser is in charge of all the little things that pupils need like books, exercise books, and other stationery. He will make a list of all the boys who have taken some or all of these things in the college and will note the quality, value of the item, name and surname of the pupil who received it and each month will add up each individual's expenses.

2. He will run things in such a way that each month he can give an overall account to the Prefect of the House.

3. Each week he will look around and ensure that the boy's hair is neat, insisting that no one has hair that is too long, because this has a considerable influence on generating nits.

4. For those who receive linen from the house he will see that every Saturday they take a shirt and towel from the wardrobe, and every month two sheets, handkerchiefs and socks according to need.

5. On Sundays he will have dirty linen collected, being careful to see that nothing gets lost in the dormitories or private rooms.

6. He will take great care to see that all items of laundry or clothing, both of the college and the pupils, are marked so that they are not confused.

7. It is also his duty to receive clothes or shoes from pupils that are worn out and if he knows of someone in need of new clothes and shoes he will tell the Prefect so they can be provided.

8. The Dispenser depends entirely on the Prefect who can alter his tasks in the way and at the time that he judges is for the greater glory of God.



## Chapter VI - Director of studies

1. The Director of studies or classrooms is in charge of whatever regards the pupils, teachers and whatever refers to them.

2. Once a pupil has been admitted the Director will see that he is placed in a class suitable for him, and has his place in the study and in the classroom.

3. If school items are needed or there are fights amongst the pupils, or complaints from teachers, pupils will go to the Director of classes.

4. He will take great care to see that pupils are clean when they go for outings, providing an assistant to see that no one can drop out of line and disappear. It is a serious offence if someone drops out of line and goes off to buy books, food, liquor or anything else in the shops.

5. In agreement with the Director he will provide or see to the repair of benches, tables, chairs, desks, study booths, classrooms, and when needed he will pass this work on to the bursar for prompt action.

6. He will establish who is teaching the main courses, supplementaries, teachers for ancillary courses, assistants, prefects and study prefects [decurions], leaders for the dormitories and outings. He will deal frequently with employees to hear what they have to say about discipline and the boys' behaviour, and also to give advice he feels would be useful for them. He will often remind the teachers that they are working for supernatural motives; therefore while teaching literature they should not omit recalling the knowledge that has to do with salvation of souls.

7. Establishing times for exams, both semester and final, changes to school days, holidays, giving out what is needed for teaching, tutors and tutoring for whoever needs it are all part of the competence of the inspector of classes, but always with previous understanding with the Director of the college.

## Chapter VII - Assistants dormitory leaders

1. Each dormitory should have a leader and vice leader who are obliged to render account for whatever can contribute to good behaviour and good upbringing of the youngsters entrusted to them.

2. They should be outstanding for good example, and show that they are always just, exact, full of charity and the fear of God.

3. They should correct the faults of the boys in their dormitory and if simple correction is not enough then they will speak to the superior in good time. In the evening before retiring they will visit their dormitory and if they note someone missing they will inform the Director.

4. They will insist on silence being observed especially after night prayers until breakfast time in the morning. When it is time to get up in the morning they will be punctual in rising, and until the pupils have gone out will not leave the dormitory, which they will then lock and take the key to a place established by the superior.

5. They will keep a close eye on things to prevent any kinds of bad conversations, any word or deed that could be interpreted as being against modesty. St Paul did not even want Christians to mention such things. *Impudicitia ne quidem nominetur in vobis*. If the Assistant sees any such failures he is seriously obliged to inform the Director.

### *Chapter VIII - Coadjutors*

1. There are three types of coadjutor: cook, attendants, doorkeeper. They should help one another in all things compatible with their respective obligations and duties.

2. The Coadjutors are warmly recommended never to take on duties outside their own nor manage affairs or contracts that have nothing to do with the interests of the house. If they need something that would be personally useful, let them talk to the Prefect about it.

3. They should be faithful even in the smallest things. Anyone who begins to steal when buying, selling or other without this being noticed, becomes a thief.

4. Modesty in eating and especially in drinking - anyone who cannot control his greed is a useless servant.

5. No familiarity with boys in the house; respect and charity with everyone in matters regarding their duties, and no special confidences or particular friendships amongst themselves.

6. They should devoutly go to the holy sacraments of confession and communion every month, and they should do so if they can in the church at the college so that their Christian behaviour will be known to the pupils at the college.

7. No one should refuse even the least kind of work, and should believe that God asks us to account for the fulfilment of the duties of our state in life and not whether we did the most outstanding jobs or had these roles. In his daily tasks each one should remember that both the one with the lower duties and the one whose life is taken up in preaching, hearing confessions and the other more sublime duties of the priestly ministry, will receive the same reward in heaven so long as they are working for the greater glory of God. Since there are occupations that directly regard each one in particular, here we give an indication of their particular duties.

*[Chapter IX] - Cook or head of the kitchen*

1. The Cook or Head of the kitchen should see that food is healthy, economical and ready at the established time. Even a small delay can cause problems in the community.

2. The Cook should keep the kitchen clean, take great care of neatness and see that neither quality nor any portion of food goes bad.

3. Any portion of food, fruit, main course or drink left over at table, should be put aside and kept and not made available unless it is the superior's wish.

4. He should strictly prevent any domestic or other individual from outside from entering the kitchen unless with special permission of the superior.

5. When he has finished his work in the kitchen, if he has free time, he will busy himself with other work and be careful not to be idle.

6. The Head of the kitchen has to supervise everyone who works there and when he sees anything out of place he will advise the Prefect or Director.

*[Chapter X] - Domestic*

1. The Domestic or Domestics should tidy the superiors' rooms, serve at table, help the cook to keep the kitchen and the refectories clean, wash the plates, bowls and take them to their proper place.

2. If there is free time during the day they follow orders from the Prefect.

3. The tasks for each Domestic are fixed by the Prefect.

*[Chapter XI] - Doorkeeper*

1. It is the very strict duty of the Doorkeeper always to be at the reception office and kindly receive whoever turns up. When the Doorkeeper has to go elsewhere to fulfil his religious duties, take food to someone, he will see that his place is taken by someone appointed by the Director.

2. He will never allow people into the house without the superior's knowledge, directing to the Prefect anyone who has business regarding the material interests of the House, and to the Director anyone who wants to deal with him directly.

3. He will not allow any pupil to leave without having a note from the Director indicating the time of his departure and return.

4. Any letter or parcel addressed to a boy in the house will be presented to the Prefect before being given to the one to whom it is addressed.

5. In the evening he will see to closing all exits and doors leading out of the college.

6. He will mark the time and receive any lamps brought to him, which he will keep clean and ready for service of the whole house whenever needed. If he cannot fulfil this latter duty by himself he will ask the Prefect for someone to help him.

7. It is strictly forbidden to buy or sell foodstuffs, keep money and other things with him for any boys or their parents.

8. He will do what he can to prevent any disorder, any undue noise in the courtyards during sacred functions, school, study or rest time.

9. He will receive the keys from the dormitories, classrooms and other places and will not give them out to anyone who is not in charge of the place where they are needed.

10. The time for speaking with the boys is between one and two after midday. The Director will see when it may be convenient to vary this time for speaking with the boys and for limiting this to fewer days. At other times it is forbidden to let people in to talk to them. Women should remain in the parlour and wait there for the pupils they have asked for.

11. He will note down all requests, but in both receiving and doing them he will always be kind and approachable, believing that meekness and approachability are the principal gifts of a doorkeeper.

NB. 1. The ordinary time for the Director to receive people is weekday mornings from 9 to 11.

2. The best time for dealing with administrative, school or domestic economy matters with the Prefect is every weekday from 9 to 12 midday and from 2 till 5 after midday.

## *PART TWO*

### *Discipline at the college*

#### *Chapter I - The study hall*

1. The study timetable will vary according to the seasons of the year, but everyone must observe it.

2. Study will have an assistant who is responsible for each one's behaviour, both for diligence in turning up and for application to study. Every study row will have a prefect [decurion] and vice prefect helping the assistant.

3. Anyone who does not apply himself to study or causes disturbance, when discovered, will be warned that if he does not correct his ways the superior will be told who will take appropriate action. Time is precious so it is important to take away all obstacles that could hinder people from being busy.

4. Strict silence will be observed in the study hall at all times to help keep people busy and also so that there will be one place where people can quietly read or write according to need, without being disturbed.

5. Whoever has no fear of God neglects study, and works in vain. Knowledge does not enter an unwilling mind, nor will it live in a body which is a slave to sin. *In malevolam animam scientia non introibit, nec habitabit in corpore subdito peccatis*, says the Lord.

6. The virtue especially recommended for any young person is humility. A proud student is a stupid and ignorant one. The beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord. *Initium sapientiae timor Domini*: says the Holy Spirit. *Initium omnis peccati superbia scribitur*, says St Augustine.

## *Chapter II - Piety*

1. Remember, boys, that we were created to love and serve God our Creator and that it would be of no value to have all the knowledge in the world if we lacked the holy fear of God. Our true spiritual and temporal good depends on it.

2. The means that can contribute to acquiring and keeping the fear of God and as a consequence ensuring the way that leads to eternal salvation are: prayer, sacraments and the Word of God.

3. Prayer is to be frequent and fervent but never out of bad will or as a disturbance to our friends. It is better not to pray than to pray badly.

4. Go to confession every fortnight or at least once a month as the catechism tells us. Saint Philip Neri however, that great friend of the young and our special protector, recommended that his spiritual sons go to confession every week and communion more often in accordance with the confessor's advice.

5. Assist at holy Mass devoutly, and remember that the church is the house of God and a place for prayer.

6. Do not forget to make a spiritual communion every day and to always listen carefully to sermons and other moral instructions. Do not ever leave a sermon without bringing away with you some maxim to practise while you are busy with other things.

7. Practise virtue as a young man because the one who waits to give himself to God when he is much older runs the risk of being eternally lost. The virtues that are the most beautiful adornment for a young person are: modesty, humility, obedience and charity.

8. Have special devotion for the Blessed Sacrament, the Blessed Virgin, Saint Philip Neri and Saint Aloysius Gonzaga who are the spiritual protectors of this college.

9. Never take up any new devotion unless with your confessor's permission, and remember what St Philip said to his sons: Do not take on too many devotions but persevere in the ones you have taken on.

10. Have great respect for the sacred ministers of the Church and all things of our holy Religion. Whoever talks badly of these matters is to be considered an enemy and as such keep away from him.

### *Chapter III - Work*

1. Man, my dear boys, was born to work. Adam was placed in an earthly paradise to cultivate it. The apostle St Paul says: Whoever does not work is not worthy of eating: *Si quis non vult operari, non manducet.*

2. By work we mean the fulfilment of the duties proper to your state.

3. Work will make you well-appreciated by society and religion and will do great good for your soul especially if you offer up everything you do.

4. Amongst your daily occupations the first are always the ones prescribed by obedience. be sure never to omit any of your obligations to undertake things you were not asked to do.

5. If you know something give glory to God for it, who is the author of everything good, but do not become proud, because pride is a worm that gnaws away and makes you lose all the merits of your good works.

6. Remember that you are in the spring of life at your age. Anyone not accustomed to working at a young age will become lazy and ignorant in old age, will be a disgrace to his town and family and will possibly do irreparable damage to his soul, because laziness brings all the other vices with it.

7. Whoever is obliged to work and does not do so, is robbing God and his superiors. People who are idle will feel great remorse at the end of their life for the time they have wasted.

#### *Chapter IV - Behaviour towards superiors*

1. The basis of every virtue is obedience to the superiors. Recognise God's will in them, and submit to them without any kind of opposition.

2. Here is what St Paul has to say about obedience; obey those who have been placed over you to tell you what to do and be submissive to them. They, and not you, have to render account to God for your souls, so obey willingly and not through force so that your superiors can carry out their duty happily and not with tears and sighs.

3. Be sure that your superiors know they are under serious obligation to do their best in promoting what is to your benefit, and that in advising, commanding and correcting you they only have in mind what is good for you.

4. Honour and love them as people who take God's place and the place of your parents, and when you obey them remember that you are obeying God himself.

5. Let your obedience be prompt, respectful and cheerful in whatever they command you to do, and do not make excuses to avoid doing what they ask. Obey even if they ask you to do something difficult and not what you like.

6. Open your heart to them freely. Think of them as you would a father who eagerly desires your happiness.



7. Accept their corrections gratefully and if necessary receive the punishment for your faults without showing either hatred or disrespect for them.

8. Avoid being amongst people who complain about those who are working so hard for you. This would be a sign of real ingratitude.

9. When a superior asks you about the behaviour of some of your friends, answer according to what you know, especially if it is a case of preventing or remedying some evil. Keeping quiet in these situations would be cruelty and could harm your friend and could cause a disorder for the whole college.

#### *Chapter V - Behaviour towards your friends*

1. Honour and love your friends as brothers and try to edify one another with good example.

2. Love one another, says the Lord, but be careful of giving scandal. Anyone who gives scandal through words, talk, actions, is no friend but a murderer of your soul.

3. If you can offer some service and give some good advice, do so willingly. At recreation, welcome any of your companions into your conversation without any kind of distinction and be nice to them by letting them join your games. Take care never to talk about your friends' faults, unless you are being asked by your superiors. And in that case do not exaggerate in what you say.

4. We should recognise that everything good and also the not so good things come from God, therefore don't laugh at your companions for their physical or spiritual defects. What you laugh at in others today, the Lord may let happen to you tomorrow.

5. True charity asks us to put up with the defects of others patiently and to be quick to forgive them when they offend us, but we should never attack others, especially ones inferior to us.

6. Flee pride especially. Pride is hateful to God and despised by man.

### *Chapter VI - Modesty*

1. By modesty we mean a decent and controlled way of speaking, moving and walking. This virtue, boys, is one of the most beautiful adornments of your age, and ought to be evident in your every action, in everything you say.

2. Your body and clothing should be clean, your demeanour serene and cheerful, without moving your shoulders or body about, unless honestly necessary.

3. Modesty of the eyes is recommended; they are the windows through which the devil brings sin into the heart.

4. Never lay your hands on others and never play with your hands on someone else nor walk hand in hand or put your arms around your friend's shoulders, as people sometimes do in the square.

5. Walk in a moderate way, not in too much of a hurry unless there is a need to do otherwise. When your hands are not busy keep them down and at night cross them upon your breast inasmuch as you can.

6. Be modest when you speak, never using expressions that offend against charity or decency. At your age it is better to be quiet and modest than to foster boisterous and talkative discussion

7. Be slow to criticise the actions of others or boast of your merits or virtues. Accept blame and praise equally, and be humble before God when you have been scolded over something.

8. Avoid every action, movement or word of a boorish nature, and do your best to overcome faults of temperament, and try to develop a meek and constantly controlled approach following the principles of Christian modesty.

9. Your way of behaving at table is also part of modesty, given that food is given to us, not as if to animals just to satisfy hunger, but to keep the body healthy and vigorous as a material means of achieving happiness of soul.

10. Say grace before and after meals and while you are eating also try to feed the spirit by listening in silence to the little bit of reading that is done.

11. You should eat or drink only the things that are provided by the establishment. Anyone who receives fruit, foodstuffs or drinks of any kind should give them to the superior who will see that they are made available in a moderate way.

12. It is warmly recommended that you never waste even the smallest amount of soup, bread or the second course. Anyone who wilfully wastes food, as well as being severely punished, should greatly fear that the Lord will make him suffer hunger.

### *Chapter VII - Behaviour in the house*

1. In the morning when the bell rings or there is a signal from the superior promptly get out of bed, dress with all possible decency, and always in silence. When you are dressed and have made your bed, go and do your chores such as washing and similar.

2. Never leave without combing your hair, cleaning and putting all your things in order.

3. When the bell rings a second time go to the chapel (the place indicated) to say prayers in common and assist at holy Mass. When Mass has been moved to after study, the other practices of piety are also moved.

4. During the sacred functions abstain, as far as you can, from yawning, sleeping, looking around, chatting or leaving the church: these defects show little desire for the things of God, disturb others and even scandalise your friends.

5. When things have finished in church, go in an orderly way and without noise to the place for study and see that you do not leave any of your work undone. When study has begun it is no longer allowed to take or lend things unless there is a need.

6. Also avoid making a noise with paper, books, your feet or dropping things or in any other way. When there is a real need, make a sign to the assistant and do everything with minimum disturbance. No one should move or make a noise until the bell indicates that study is over.

7. It is forbidden to look in or rummage around in someone else's bag or desk. And through the day it is forbidden to go to the dormitory without special permission.

8. Avoid taking other people's things, even the least little thing; if you find something give it immediately to the superiors. Whoever is foolish enough to hang onto them would be severely punished in proportion to the theft.

9. Letters or other items received or sent should be handed opened to the superior who may read them if he believes it is appropriate to do so.

10. You are not allowed to keep money with you, or with others, but this must be deposited with the Prefect who will give it out according to need. It is absolutely forbidden to make contracts to buy, sell, exchange, or have debts with anyone without the superior's permission.

11. It is forbidden to bring anyone into the house or rooms. If you need to talk with someone outside, go to the common parlour. Don't stand around other people while they are engaged in particular conversation. It is likewise forbidden to bring anyone into the dormitories, be closed in a room, write on walls, hammer nails in, or break anything of any kind. Whoever breaks something should pay for it out of the money he has in deposit. Finally it is strictly forbidden for anyone to enter the kitchen except for those who are working there.

12. Be charitable with everyone, put up with other's faults, never use nicknames or say or do anything you would not want said or done to yourself.

### *Chapter VIII - Behaviour outside the house*

1. Remember boys that every Christian is bound to edify his neighbour and that no sermon is more effective than good example.

2. When you leave the college be reserved in your looks, your language and every other action. Nothing can be more edifying than a well-behaved young man. He lets it be known that he belongs to a community of young, well brought up Christians.

3. Never point at anyone on the road, nor laugh loudly, and much less throw stones, jump over ditches and aqueducts, things that show bad upbringing.

4. If you meet people of dignity remove your cap and let them have the better part of the road. You do this for priests and religious and anyone in authority especially if these people come into or cross the courtyard or you meet them on the stairs in the college.

5. When you go past a church or statue or picture do not fail to take off your cap as a mark of reverence. If you happen to go past a church when the divine services are on, be quiet and stay a good distance away so you do not disturb those inside.

6. When you enter a church take holy water, make the sign of the cross and bow if there is only a cross or a picture or statue. Genuflect if the Blessed Sacrament is in the tabernacle; go down on both knees if the Blessed Sacrament is exposed. But see that you do not make a noise, or talk or laugh. It is better not to go into church rather than behave there without due respect.

7. If you do not behave well in school or study or outside the college, besides having to give an account to the Lord, you will also be a disgrace to the college you belong to.

8. If you happen to be with a neighbour or have to deal with a friend who is doing or saying bad things share this immediately with the superior to have the necessary advice and so do things prudently without offending God.

9. Never speak badly of your companions, or how the house is run or the commands of your superiors. Everyone is completely free to stay or not, and it would be a disgrace if he complains about a place that he stays in with full freedom.

10. Outside of normal holidays, no one has permission to leave the college. If you want to do a lot of good for yourself and the college, speak well of it always, looking for reasons to approve what is done and what the superiors do for the smooth running of the college.

11. Those who break these rules will be duly punished, and those who observe them, as well as a reward from the Lord, will also be rewarded by the superiors for their perseverance and diligence.

#### *Chapter IX - Forbidden items*

1. Since it is forbidden to keep money in the house, likewise forbidden is any kind of gambling.

2. Also forbidden is any kind of game where there is a danger of someone being injured or where there is something against modesty.

3. Smoking and chewing tobacco are forbidden at all times, and for whatever reason. Taking snuff is tolerated within limits to be established by the superior on the doctor's advice.

4. Permission is never given to go out with parents for lunch or to buy clothes. If these are needed they can take your measurements and buy them or ask the Prefect of the college to do so.

#### *Chapter X - Three evils to be avoided at all costs*

Although young people at the college should do everything they can to avoid any kind of sin, nevertheless we especially recommend avoiding the following evils which are especially harmful to youth. They are: 1. Swearing and taking the Lord's name in vain; 2. Dishonesty; 3. Theft.

Believe me boys, that just one of these sins is enough to bring down Heaven's curses on the entire house. On the other hand by keeping these evils far from us we have good reason to call down Heaven's blessings on us and on our college.

Whoever observes these rules will be blessed by the Lord.

Every Sunday evening or other days of the week the Director or whoever he appoints will read some article of these rules with a brief explanation so they may be known, understood and observed.

## II. SCHOOL AND BOARDING HOUSE AT MORNESE NIZZA MONFERRATO - FMA (1873-1878)

*The Programme—also called Regulations—of the school in Mornese was printed by Don Bosco at the Oratory Press like all the other Regulations for Salesian houses. The text copies many of the items in use at colleges he founded<sup>55</sup>.*

*There are details in it about the educational purpose of the boarding section and terms of admission, as well as the principal tasks of the pupils. At a didactic level the programme is divided into three areas: literary teaching, domestic chores, religious teaching. The curriculum, which follows the same lines as government schools, includes the four elementary classes and envisages optional classes of drawing, French and pianoforte, other than public speaking, writing letters and good manners.*

*The woman which it aims to form should not abandon the traditional housewife role, but added to this formation in a harmonious way are moral and religious dimensions and the essential cultural ones so a girl could be part of the family and society.*

*The Regulations of the educative community of the boarding section at Nizza Monferrato comprises 12 articles and the daily timetable for a girl admitted into the boarding section. The text offers a summary of the institution's identity, how teaching and formation were set up, the composition and style of community life totally at the service of the boarders. The Regulations were sent in November-December to the inspector for schools to gain approval for the school. In fact this was one of the documents that was essential for explaining how things worked.*

<sup>55</sup> Cf. for example, the *Regulations* for the boarding college at Valsalice opened in 1872 (cf. MB X, 411-414) and the college at Varazze (cf. MB X, 223-225).

### **178. Programme. House of Mary Help of Christians for girls' education in Mornese**

AGFMA 051 01-4-01. Printed copy in *Programma. Casa di Maria Ausiliatrice per l'educazione femminile in Mornese*. Torino, Tipografia dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1873.

*Mornese, 1873*

A house of education for girls has been opened in Mornese, a pleasant and very healthy town in the diocese of Acqui. The aim is to offer moral and academic teaching which leaves nothing to be desired for a girl from an upright Christian family<sup>56</sup>.

#### *Literary teaching*

The curriculum covers the four elementary classes, a complete course in Italian, calligraphy, arithmetic, the metric system, accounting, and keeping books for domestic use. Public speaking, special practice in letter-writing are also part of the curriculum. There are also lessons in drawing, French and pianoforte; but the pupils' parents must make the request.

#### *Domestic chores*

Domestic chores consist in making their own clothes according to the circumstances of the pupils, knitting, making socks, shirts, curtains, mending, ironing, and doing all the ordinary chores of an upright family.

To prepare the girls for home chores those older than twelve will take their turn at serving in the refectory, helping in the kitchen and working in the garden, inasmuch as this fits in with their other duties. Management of these chores is up to and on behalf of the Institute.

<sup>56</sup> They were aiming at forming women of the ordinary classes and therefore had to avoid anything that smacked of affectation and luxury. In fact the first text of the Constitutions said: "They can also admit to the house girls of middle class status but they will never teach them the learning and arts that are typical of noble and aristocratic education. All their efforts will be to form them in piety and everything that would make them good Christians and good mothers of families" (*Costituzioni per l'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice [1872-1885]*. Critical texts by Cecilia Romero F.M.A. Roma, LAS 1983, p. 43, art. 3°).



### *Religious teaching*

Given that religion and morals are a fundamental part of good education, the textbooks for religious teaching will be the Catechism and Bible History with reflection and application. There will also be lessons in good manners.

### *Terms of admission*

1. On entry each pupil should have her Baptism certificate, vaccination or smallpox certificate, and have completed at least her sixth year. .

2. The monthly boarding fee is 20 francs to be paid quarterly in advance.

3. The house is open throughout the year. If they so desire parents may grant the pupils some days of holidays from 15 September to 15 October but there will be no reduction in the quarterly payment for that time. Outside this time and other than for reasons of illness pupils are not allowed to go out with their parents.

Parents, or someone in their stead, may visit their daughters once a week.

These visits may be more often in case of illness.

4. Every care will be taken to see that foodstuffs are healthy and suitable for the age and condition of the pupils.

In the morning they will have bread, coffee and milk, or fruit.

For lunch, bread if they wish, soup, a main course with wine.

Bread for afternoon snack. At supper, bread for those who want it, soup, main course or fruit with wine<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> There is a clear difference between the menu established for the pupils and the poverty of the Sisters' fare. There are many testimonies from the FMA that recall the scarcity of food and the hunger at Mornese (cf. the testimony of Sister Emilia Mosca in the first *Cronistoria* of the Institute published in Ferdinando MACCONO, *Santa Maria D. Mazzarello confondatrice e prima superiora generale delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, I. Torino, Scuola Tip. privata 1960, pp. 234-235). We need to note just the same that the austerity of the religious community was not experienced by the girls who were given what was necessary, also by asking help from families.

Whoever wishes better fare can have it with an appropriate understanding with the superior.

5. Every quarter the parents will receive information regarding the health, behaviour and benefit gained by the pupils in their respective classes.

At the end of each year there will be a final exam with distribution of prizes and honourable mentions.

Italian will be spoken in the boarding house.

6. Vocal music, medical and surgical care, laundry, ironing, ink, lighting and heating for winter will be covered by the Institute, but 20 francs will be paid for this at the beginning of the year. Nothing of this will be given back even if the girl stays at the Institute for only part of the year.

Other accessory expenses such as books, paper, medicines, clothing, trips and similar are to be borne by the parents.

Half payment is requested if the month has already begun; other than this half the rest requires full payment. There is no reduction for anyone who remains outside the Institute for fewer than fifteen days.

7. Pupils must not keep money with them for small pleasures, but if they receive it from their parents they must deposit it with the Sister in charge who will distribute it regularly.

### *Clothing*

The Institute provides an iron bedstead and a pallet. The pupils must provide a mattress, pillow, blankets for winter and summer, 4 sheets - 6 shirts - 6 pairs of socks - 4 petticoats two of which are white - 1 woollen skirt - 4 slips - 4 white handkerchiefs and four coloured ones - 6 towels - 6 small towels - 4 changes of underwear - 3 nightshirts - 4 white aprons and 3 of various colours - 2 combs - 6 collars and ties for winter - 3 pairs of shoes - 4 vests of any kind and a uniform one.

There will be one uniform [*sic*] for summer and winter provided by the Institute but paid for by parents. On request it will also provide other

wardrobe items. Each item of clothing must be marked with the number provided at admission<sup>58</sup>.

### *Directions*

The easiest way to get to this town is Novi Ligure, Castelletto d'Orba, Montaldeo, Mornese or the stations at Serravalle Scrivia, Gavi, Parodi, Mornese. Soon there will be an Omnibus which will regularly bring passengers and their luggage from Serravalle to Mornese.

Requests can be made to Fr Domenico Pestarino, or the Directress of the house at Mornese, and also to the Very Rev. Don Bosco, Director of the Society of St Francis de Sales, Turin.

## **179. Regulations for the boarding house at Nizza Monferrato**

School Archives of "Our Lady of Graces" Nizza Monferrato, orig. ms<sup>59</sup>.

Nizza Monferrato [1878]

1. Classes and the boarding house depend on the superior who has special responsibility before the school and civil authorities and the parents of the boarders.

2. Teaching will be done by two teachers, one for the upper course the other for the lower course, both with registration.

3. If the number of pupils increases, other teachers will be added in proportion to need, always with previous authorisation from the competent authorities and in conformity with the law.

4. These teachers, conveniently helped by assistants, will also provide supervision of the girls when dining, in recreation, on outings and when sleeping.

<sup>58</sup> From what we see in the *Cronistoria*, which collects the memories of three Sisters, we learn that the FMA learned from the Sisters of St Anna the usual practices relating to organising a boarding school: admission of the girls, clothing needs, relationships with the girls' parents, writing letters etc. (cf. *ibid.*, II, p. 21).

<sup>59</sup> It is not easy to identify the author. Probably it is sister Elisa Roncallo who was the directress of the school for a short period.

One teacher for female chores will offer a course for three hours a day for girls occupied in chores appropriate to their age and condition.

5. Material administration is entrusted to a bursar who will see that everything is in order, clean and with a view to economy.

6. There will also be someone looking after the wardrobe taking care of linen and the girl's personal effects.

7. A cook and assistant cook will provide food for the boarders and personnel of the house, taking great care to see that it is healthy, hygienic and of the necessary quantity.

8. There will also be service people in charge of the cleanliness of various parts of the house.

9. The curriculum will fully follow the programmes and regulations of the government for elementary schools.

10. The educational system at the Institute is based essentially on religion, morals and respect for constituted authority.

11. The approach followed in the application of this system is paternal, taking the way of the heart rather than hardness and strictness, and this, little by little, introduces the girls to doing good spontaneously and sincerely<sup>60</sup>.

12. Remember that school is not to be separated from life, and the Boarding house has to present an image of a well-ordered family. The educators will take every care to see that the pupils are formed to live as housewives, simple and dignified at the same time, which is one of the most beautiful values of feminine social life.

<sup>60</sup> This brief reference to the educational method of the Institute mirrors some elements of Don Bosco's preventive system. He also uses the term "paternal" when addressing school authorities to indicate the spirit animating his institutions (cf. G. BOSCO, *Scritti sul sistema preventivo...*, pp. 473-549).

*Timetable*

Hours	6	Rising
“	6 ½	Prayers and Mass
“	7	Study
“	8	Breakfast and recreation
“	9	School
“	11	Study
“	12	Lunch and recreation
“	2	Women’s chores
“	4 ½	Snack and recreation
“	5	School
“	6	Study
“	7 ½	Supper
“	8	Prayers and bed

N.B. Every day there will also be educational gymnastics<sup>61</sup> and singing. For outings the timetable varies according to season.

<sup>61</sup> Teaching of gymnastics in classes is made obligatory by law on 7-7-1878 and the regulations approved in December the same year (cf. L. 7-7-1878; R. D. 16-12-1878, in *Raccolta ufficiale delle Leggi e dei Decreti*, n. 4677). Within five years of promulgation of this law, teachers had to be prepared. (Presentation of documents 178 and 179: Sister Piera Cavaglià FMA).

### III. THE TWO “OFFICIAL” REGULATIONS (1877)

*In the years from 1853 to 1862, Valdocco was transformed from a festive Oratory—an open institution—into a complex work: hospice and boarding, college with boarding section, trade workshops, internal classes and publishing centre, amongst the most important sections.*

*Such transformation brought with it a clear reinforcement and consolidation of preventive and disciplinary instances. The “new face of the educational system” was emphasised in the decades to follow with the gradual development of the Oratory – by now the central house for a new religious Congregation—and especially with the broader experience of the colleges. This “new face”—with more marked preventive and disciplinary features—is described in a special way in the booklet on the Preventive System in 1877, in the Regulations of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales for non-residents and in the Regulations for the houses of the Society of St Francis de Sales, published the same year: 1877<sup>62</sup>.*

*The detailed Regulations of the Oratory at Valdocco consist of three parts, 29 short chapters and around 270 articles describing the organisation and duties for 12 roles—covered by one or more individuals—responsible for the running of the work. On the occasion it was printed, in October 1877, there was a mention in the “Salesian Bulletin” of the origin, arrangement, and the principal characteristics of the document itself:*

*“We maintain however that the regulations of these Oratories is none other than a collection of observations, precepts and sayings that a number of years of study and experience (1841-1855) have suggested. There were trips, visits to colleges, penitentiaries, charitable shelters, shelters for the destitute, they studied their constitutions, held conferences with respected educators. All of this was collected and became a treasure trove of things that could help.”<sup>63</sup>*

<sup>62</sup> Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani...*, I, pp. 314-315.

<sup>63</sup> “Oratori festivi” ..., in BS 1 (1877) 2, 1.

*Other than the context and likely sources of inspiration, we also need to highlight the interest of the document itself, that “mirrors at least in part what had been Don Bosco’s habitual practice as a compiler of regulations or statutes never considered to be fundamental codes but rather a condensation of experiences he had had in developing and gradually giving structure to his institutions. His oratory did not come out of the regulations, but preceded it by many years; therefore the use of earlier regulations could only mirror some of his spontaneous experiments.”*<sup>64</sup>

*In the Salesian Central Archives (D482, fasc., 01), a handwritten manuscript of Don Bosco’s has been preserved—Piano di Regolamento per l’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales in Torino (Draft Regulations ...)—probably drawn up in 1852-1854 and containing, with few variants, the text of the first and second part of the Regulations of the Oratory of St Frances de Sales for non-residents, which follows here. We see a number of corrections in the pages of the manuscript, these also by Don Bosco.*

*At the origin of the Regulations for the houses we find the manuscript Draft regulations for the Home Attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, most probably written in the period indicated above. In this manuscript—kept in the Salesian Central Archives (D482)—we see writing by Don Bosco, Fr Rua, Fr Berto and others. There is also a copy of the Draft regulations kept there, written in careful calligraphy and dated: 1867.*

*The strict rapport—and often coincidence—between the contents of the Draft Regulations and the Regulations for the houses in 1877 is especially found in chapters regarding educational topics. Amongst others: religious conduct of the students, study, discipline of the house, work, behaviour towards superiors, class mates, modesty.*

<sup>64</sup> P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani...*, I, pp. 309-310. “In the light of this”, Braidò observes “they needed to mitigate some categorical and risky statements dependent on earlier regulations of the idea of the Oratory and the welfare and educational system followed in it. One can see some detailed differences from the text written by Don Bosco: his special humanity and kindness, the real attention given to the psychology of youth, the notable simplification of religious practices, more room given to play and recreation, the lively nature of festivities and gatherings” (*Ibid.*, p. 310).

*However we need to note a difference between the two documents: the inclusion, in the 1877 Regulations, of the writing on the Preventive System.*

*The pages on the Preventive System in the education of the young, signed by Don Bosco, were then and for a long time the introduction or frame of reference of the broad and articulated Regulations for the houses, and together they were a single item.<sup>65</sup>*

### **180. Regulations of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales for non-residents**

Critical ed. in *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per gli esterni*. Torino, Tipografia Salesiana 1877 (OE XXIX, 31-94).

First Part

#### **PURPOSE OF THIS WORK**

The aim of the festive oratory is to hold onto young people on weekends and feast days with pleasant and honest recreation after they have attended the sacred functions in church.

1. Holding on to young people at weekends, especially with a view to young workers who at weekends especially are exposed to great risk to body and morals; but students are not excluded if they want to come on weekends or during holidays.

2. Pleasant and honest recreation aimed truly at recreating, not oppressing. However no games, playthings, jumping, races or any form of recreation which might compromise the health or morality of the pupils will be allowed.

3. After attending the sacred functions in church—because religious instructing is the primary aim, the rest is an accessory and an inducement which gets the youngsters to come along.

<sup>65</sup> The text of *the Preventive System in the education of the young* included in the early pages of the *Regulations for the houses* (pp. 3-13) is not included here because it is already presented in full in its own right in document 151 of this collection.



We have placed this Oratory under the protection of St Francis de Sales, because those who intend to dedicate themselves to this kind of work should take this Saint as a model of charity, good manners which are the source of the results we hope for from the Work of the Oratories.

The duties that need to be carried out by those who wish to work effectively can be divided between the following appointees. They are all considered to be superiors for their respective responsibilities.

1. Director.
2. Prefect.
3. Catechist or Spiritual Director.
4. Assistants.
5. Sacristans.
6. Monitors.
7. Invigilators.
8. Catechists.
9. Archivists.
10. Peace-makers.
11. Cantors.
12. Recreation monitors.
13. Protectors.

Each one's responsibilities are subdivided as follows:

#### *Chapter I - Director*

1. The Director is the principal superior responsible for everything that happens at the Oratory.

2. He should stand out amongst the other appointees for piety, charity and patience; he should always show that he is a friend, companion, brother to everyone, therefore he always encourages each one in fulfilling his duties, but as a request, never a severe command.

3. When appointing someone to a responsibility, he will ask the opinion of other appointees, and if they are clergy he will consult the ecclesiastical superior or the parish priest of the parish where the Oratory is located, unless they are very well known and one can assume that there is nothing that might be held against them.

4. Once a month he will meet with his appointees to listen to them and propose whatever he believes would be for the benefit of the pupils.

5. It is up to the Director to advise, and see that everyone carries out his respective duties, and to correct and even remove appointees from their post should there be a need.

6. When he has finished hearing the confessions of those who wish to approach the sacrament of penance, the Director or another priest will celebrate holy Mass. This will be followed by an explanation of the Gospel, or a story drawn from Bible or Church history.

7. He should be like a father in the midst of his children, and do everything possible to instil in young hearts the love of God, respect for holy things, frequenting the sacraments, a childlike devotion to Our Lady, and everything that is true piety.

### *Chapter II - Prefect*

1. The Prefect should be a priest, and will take the Director's place any time there is a need.

2. He will take his orders from the Director and will communicate with all other appointees regarding their duties; he will see that catechism classes are provided at the time assigned for each Catechist, and will also keep an eye on things to see that no rumpus or disturbances take place during these classes.

3. In the absence of an appointee, he will quickly see that someone takes his place.

4. He must insist that cantors have the antiphons, psalms and hymns to be sung all prepared.

5. The Prefect will also carry out the duties of the Spiritual Director in places where there is a lack of priests.

6. The Prefect will also look after day, evening and Sunday classes.

### *Chapter III - Catechist or Spiritual Director*

1. The Spiritual Director assists at and directs the sacred functions, therefore he should be a priest.

2. In the morning at the established time he will begin or be present for Matins to Our Blessed Lady. After the singing of the *Te Deum* he will vest for holy Mass with the community.

3. He will teach catechism in the group, be present for Vespers and will prepare whatever is need for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

4. He should keep himself well informed as to the behaviour of the boys so he is able to give them the information that is their due, and provide certificates of diligence and behaviour when requested.

5. When there is a solemnity he will try to see that there is a sufficient number of confessors and Masses; he will prepare whatever is needed for service of the sacred functions.

6. The Spiritual Director of the Oratory is also the director of the St Aloysius Sodality and his responsibilities are described where we speak of this.

7. If he comes to know that an older boy needs religious instruction, as often happens, he will take the greatest care to fix a time and place which are best suited to do this himself or see that others can give the catechetical instruction needed.

8. The duties of Prefect and Spiritual Director may be combined in the one individual easily enough.

### *Chapter IV - Assistant*

1. The Assistant is meant to be present for all sacred functions at the Oratory and see that there are no disorders during them.

2. He will insist that there is no disarray on entering the church, and that each takes holy water and makes the sign of the cross, then genuflects towards the Blessed Sacrament altar.

3. If it should happen that any youngsters are shouting or crying in church, he will kindly advise someone who is responsible for taking them outside.

4. When advising someone inside the church he will rarely use his voice; if he needs to correct someone at length then he will do that after the functions, or take him outside the church.

5. When Vespers are being sung or there are other sacred ceremonies, if needs be he will indicate the place where the item being intoned can be found.

#### *Chapter V - Sacristans*

1. There should be two Sacristans; one a cleric, one a lay person chosen from amongst the more pious and cleaner of the boys and someone who is best suited to this task.

2. The cleric is the first Sacristan, and it is up to him especially to read the calendar, put the bookmarks in the right place in the missal, and where necessary teach how to serve a private Mass and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

3. When they arrive in the sacristy in the morning the first concern will be to set up the altar for holy Mass, prepare water, wine, the hosts, particles, chalice and the monstrance, if needed for Benediction; then while Lauds from the Office of the Blessed Virgin are beginning, they invite the priests to vest for celebration of holy Mass.

4. When it is time for the sermon they advise the preacher, accompany him to the pulpit, and then after take him back to the sacristy.

5. Ordinarily they light only two candles for Mass; four at the community mass on Sundays; six for other solemn Masses. For ordinary feasts, four at Vespers, six for Solemnities; for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament they should light at least fourteen (*Sinod. Dioces. Tit. X, 22. - Taurin.*).

6. They should never light the candles while preaching is going on, since that disturbs the preacher and the listeners.

7. Silence should be kept in the sacristy. They should never discuss matters there which have nothing to do with sacred things, or are just about the sacristans' duties.

8. It is warmly recommended that one Sacristan should put himself near the usual bell for Benediction to ring when the priest turns towards the public with the Blessed Sacrament, but not ring it a second time until the tabernacle has been closed. This is to remove the temptation of the boys to stand up and leave the church showing a lack of reverence towards the Blessed Sacrament.

9. They should be in the sacristy before the sacred functions commence, and never leave until the vestments have been folded and all other items from the Mass have been put away under lock and key.

10. They should never leave the sacristy without seeing that the cupboards and gates have been closed.

*Advice for others working in the sacristy*

1. Their principal duty is to open and close the door to the church, keep it clean, all the furniture and any item used on the altar, for the sacrifice of the holy mass such as bowls, cruets, candles, altar cloths, towels, corporals, purifiers, letting the Prefect know when there is a need to wash linen, clean or repair items.

2. One of the sacristans is in charge of ringing the bells, and ringing a bell to indicate the end of recreation, the time for coming to church and for sacred functions.

3. In the evening, a little before ringing the close of the day, they should adjust the benches in church, putting them into their distinct class groups as indicated by the numbers hung up on the wall.

4. While the boys are entering church the sacristans should give out the numbered catechisms to the catechists, and five minutes before catechism

finishes two of them, one on the right the other on the left, will distribute the books for singing Vespers; towards the end of the *Magnificat*, they should go round and collect them and put them away; they then close the cupboard and give the key to the head Sacristan.

### *Chapter VI - Monitor*

1. The Monitor has responsibility to controlling vocal prayer at the Oratory.
2. Every Sunday when he goes into the church he begins the morning prayers and says the Rosary.
3. On feast days of major solemnity, at the *Sanctus* he reads out the preparation for holy communion, and then the thanksgiving.
4. After the sermon he says a *Hail Mary*, and in the morning adds an *Our Father and Hail Mary* for benefactors and another *Our Father and Hail Mary* to St Aloysius, and finishes by intoning: *Praised be forever*.
5. In the evening before catechism, as soon as they come to church, a number of competent boys will sing the *Our Father and May God save you*. When catechism is over he will say the *Act of Faith* as in the morning, and will try to put himself in a part of the church where he will be more easily heard by everyone.
6. He should take great care to read in a loud voice, distinctly and devoutly so that the listeners will understand that he means what he is saying.
7. He should also see that during holy Mass, at the elevation of the Sacred Host and the Chalice, and at the *Ite Missa est*, and when the priest is giving the blessing, the prayers in common are suspended, so that each one at the great moment can speak to God alone with the affections of his heart.
8. The same should happen in the evening when there is the blessing of the Blessed Sacrament.

### *Chapter VII - Invigilators*

1. The Invigilators are boys chosen from amongst the most exemplary ones who are responsible for helping the assistant especially at sacred functions in church.

2. There should be at least four of them, and they will take their place at four main points or corners of the church, and unless they have some reason they should not move from that position. When there is a need they should advise the boys not to hurry their prayers or never pass in front of the main altar without making a genuflection (1).

3. They supervise the boys while they are coming into church, then taking their place, do their adoration and show respect by the way they stand and how they sing.

4. If they see someone talking or sleeping, they should gently correct them but moving as little as possible from their place, and never striking anyone even for serious reasons; nor should they shout using harsh words or raised voice. In serious cases they may take the guilty person out of church and give the due correction.

### *Chapter VIII - Catechists*

1. One of the principal responsibilities at the Oratory is that of the Catechist. The primary aim of this Oratory is to instruct the boys who come there in Christian doctrine: "By teaching catechism you catechists are doing a work which has great merit in God's eyes, because you are cooperating in the salvation of souls redeemed by the precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ; by pointing out what is needed to follow the way to eternal salvation: and you have great merit before human beings as well, and those listening to you will bless your words forever because with these you pointed out the way to become good citizens, useful to their families and to civil society."

2. Catechists as far as possible should be priests or clerics. But because we have many classes, and we also have the good fortune of having some exemplary gentlemen helping us in this work, we gratefully offer them a class to catechise. In classes for adults, where possible, there will always be a priest.

3. When the number of Catechists is fewer than the number of classes, the Prefect will choose from amongst the better instructed, more suitable boys, and will put them in a class that lacks a Catechist.

4. While the *Our Father* is being sung, each Catechist should be with the class assigned to him.

5. The Catechist should arrange his class in a semi-circle with himself at the centre; he should never go to the pupils to ask them questions or hear their answers but stay where he is and simply often turn around to face his pupils.

6. He should never leave his class. If he needs something he will let it be known to the Prefect or Assistant.

7. Each one is with his own class until the Acts of Faith, Hope and Charity, and if he can will not move from his place until the sacred functions are over.

8. Five minutes before catechism finishes, at the sound of the bell, he will recount some simple example from the Holy Bible, or from Church history, or will clearly and in simple language explain a fable, or moral story highlighting the ugliness of some vice, or the beauty of some particular virtue.

9. No one should attempt to explain something without first having learned the subject he is talking about. Explanations should be brief and of just a few words.

10. Do not tackle difficult subjects, nor question areas that he does not know how to clearly and simply resolve.

11. Vices you must often insist against are blasphemy, profaning Sundays, dishonesty, theft, lack of sorrow, good resolutions and sincerity in confession.

12. The virtues to be mentioned often are: charity to your companions, obedience to superiors, love for work, fleeing idleness and bad companion, going to confession and holy communion.

13. Catechism classes are divided as follows: the group of those who have been finally admitted to holy communion, and those who have completed their fifteenth year. In the chapels of St Aloysius and Our Lady, those who



have been finally admitted to holy communion but are under fifteen years. Other classes will be divided according to knowledge and age down to the youngest. In setting up these classes for those not yet admitted to communion, be careful not to mix younger ones with older ones. For example, have one class of those older than fourteen; another from twelve to fourteen, from ten to twelve. This will effectively help in keeping order in the class, and lessen the human respect that older ones feel when put with the little ones.

14. The order to follow in teaching Christian doctrine is indicated by the numbers of the questions in the catechism. Questions marked number 1 should be absolutely taught to both little ones and adults. Those marked with number 2 are for those preparing for Confirmation or first Communion; those with 3 and 4 for those who want to be promoted for a year. Questions marked with number 5 and 6 are for those who want to be finally promoted.

15. The Catechist for the choir has mostly only boys admitted finally to holy communion, therefore he does not demand literal responses from the catechism but when he puts a question he should explain it briefly and clearly and to regain attention can offer practical examples along the lines of the subject he is talking about, but never things that are not suited to the age, condition of his listeners.

16. Each Catechist should look cheerful, and make it clear that he is in fact cheerful, and that what he is teaching is important. When correcting and advising he should always use encouraging words, never discouraging ones. He should praise those who deserve it but be slow to assign blame.

17. All employees who are free at catechism time are also considered to be Catechists, because they are better able than others to know the characters and ways to deal with the boys.

#### *Chapter IX - Archivist or chancellor*

1. The purpose of the Archivist is to keep a record of what happens in the Oratory in general and in particular.

2. On a card he will write the name, surname and responsibility of each appointee, and hang it up in the sacristy. He will make a list of all the things used in church, especially items used for or donated for use at a particular altar. He will follow orders from the Prefect.

3. He will look after and account for books, the list, and other things to do with the St Aloysius Sodality and the Mutual Aid Society.

4. He will lock away all the Oratory music in the appropriate booth, and will only give it out to the head cantor. He will never lend music to be taken away. But he can allow someone to come and make copies at the Oratory.

5. He is also entrusted with a small library of books chosen for the boys which he can freely lend out to be read there and also to be taken home, but he should note the name, surname and address of the one it was lent to. See the rules for the library in part 3.

6. The principal concern of the Archivist is to see that nothing that belongs to the Oratory is lost, since no item of any kind should leave here without him taking a note of it.

### *Chapter X - Peace-makers*

1. The task of the Peace-makers is to prevent fights, altercations, swearing and any other kind of bad talk.

2. When faults of this kind occur, (which thanks be to God are rare amongst us), they should immediately warn the guilty one, and patiently and charitably get him to see that faults of this kind are forbidden by the superiors, contrary to a good upbringing, and what is more important, forbidden by God's holy law.

3. Where corrections have to be given, see that they are done in private, and as much as possible never in the presence of others except where it is necessary to make up for a public scandal.

4. It is also the responsibility of the peace-makers to collect the boys they see near the Oratory, lead them into church by promising some small prize, which the Director will certainly not refuse.

5. The Peace-makers should graciously try to prevent people leaving during religious functions. No one should stop and make noise, or play games near the church during these; and when these things happen they should encourage them patiently to go into the church as soon as the bell sounds.

6. The Peace-makers also have the task of reconciling someone who has done something wrong with the superiors; taking boys who have run away back to their parents; and during the week encouraging their companions to be diligent in coming to the Oratory on Sunday.

7. The prior and vice prior of the St Aloysius Sodality are Peace-makers.

### *Chapter XI - Cantors*

1. It would be desirable for everyone to be a Cantor so that everyone can take part in the singing; nevertheless to prevent certain inconveniences that could occur, some boys are chosen who have a good voice and health and directing singing is entrusted to them.

2. There are two kinds of Cantors amongst us: those for the choir and the others for the altar. No one should be chosen as Cantor if not well behaved, and only if he can correctly read Latin.

3. To be a Cantor in the choir the pupil needs to know solfeggio and know the tones for Gregorian chant.

4. Care of the choir is entrusted to a chorister, or the head Cantor, and a vice chorister. They should see that singing is divided between cantors in such a way that everyone has a part in leading the singing.

5. In the morning the Office of the Virgin Mary is sung in choir, except for the *Hymns, Readings, Te Deum, and Benedictus* which are sung according to the rules for *Gregorian chant*. On solemn feast days everything is sung in Gregorian chant. In the evening Vespers are sung as marked in the diocesan calendar (2).

6. When a psalm or antiphon is intoned, everyone should sing in unison, avoiding shouting, or singing too high or too low. When someone makes

a mistake in singing, do not laugh or put your companion down, but the chorister should try to intervene with his voice to bring him back on tone.

7. The cantors before the altar should be careful to align their tone and voice with everything being intoned by the choir or orchestra (3).

8. On the last Sunday of the month the office for the dead is sung for deceased companions and benefactors, and this office is also sung in suffrage for any appointee and his father or mother as soon as we know of their death.

9. Cantors are warmly recommended to avoid vanity and pride; two blameworthy vices which mean we lose all the benefits of what we do, and cause enmity amongst our friends. A truly Christian cantor should never offend, and have no other aim than to praise God, and unite his voice to that of the angels who bless and praise him in Heaven.

### *Chapter XII - Recreation monitors*

1. It is keenly desirable that everyone can take part in recreation and any game in the way and at the time permissible.

2. The games and equipment permissible are bocce (bowls), quoits, see-saws, stilts, large merry-go-round, bullseye (with ball), tug-of-war; gymnastics, *oca* (a dice game), draughts, chess, bingo, *carriere or bararotta, mestieri, mercante*, and any other kind of game that can contribute to bodily skills.

3. Prohibited games are card, tarots and any other game that includes offence to God or might harm our neighbour or cause harm to oneself.

4. Ordinary recreation times are from 10 to 12 in the morning, and from 1 to 2 ½ in the afternoon, and after religious functions until nightfall. In winter also during the evening but no later than eight, there can be recreation at times that don't disturb classes.

5. Games and equipment are entrusted to five invigilators one of whom is the head.

6. The head Invigilator keeps a register of the number and quality of the games items and is responsible for it. When there is a need for new ones or repairs to equipment he will let the Prefect know.

7. The Invigilators will lend their services in such a way that there are two every Sunday. The head one only needs to see there are no problems, but he does not have to go into action unless one of the other ones is missing.

8. All games items are marked with a number, for example: if there are nine games of bocce, there are nine cards numbered 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9. If there are five pairs of stilts they are numbered 10-11-12-13-14. And so on through all the other games.

9. When it is time to give them out, whoever wants a game has to leave something in its place, and the invigilator will place the corresponding number of the game item on it.

10. During recreation the invigilator should walk through the courtyard seeing that nothing is broken or taken away; the other one should stay beside the games room but not allow anyone in under any pretext, to the place where the games are kept.

11. It is especially recommended that the invigilators see that everyone can be playing something, giving preference to those who are known for coming to the Oratory most often.

12. When recreation is over, and you have checked that nothing is missing, games are put in order, then the room locked, and the key taken to the Prefect.

### *Chapter XIII - Patrons and Protectors*

1. Patrons and Protectors have the very important duty of finding someone to look after the poorest and most abandoned and seeing that apprentices and working boys who come to the Oratory are not with employers who put them at risk of their eternal salvation.

2. It is the responsibility of Patrons to take boys who have run away back home, and placing those who need to learn a profession, or are without work, with an employer.

3. There will be two Protectors, and they will see that they note the name, surname and address of employers who need apprentices and workers so they can send them boys they are protecting.

4. The Protector will assist and correct those he is protecting but take on no other financial obligation, not even with the respective employers.

5. In agreements with employers the first condition is that they leave the boy free to keep Sundays holy.

6. If it is noticed that the boy has been placed in a risky situation he will help him not get into trouble, tell the employer, and if it seems convenient will meanwhile look for a better arrangement for the one he is protecting.

## Second Part

### *Chapter I - Responsibilities regarding everyone employed at this Oratory*

1. The responsibilities of this Oratory, given that everyone is working voluntarily, should be carried out zealously, in homage to our Divine Master, therefore everyone should encourage one another to persevere in their respective responsibilities and fulfil the duties attached to it.

2. They should encourage boys coming to the Oratory to be diligent, and during the week to invite new ones.

3. It is a great venture to teach some truth of the Faith to someone who is ignorant of it, and to prevent even a single sin.

4. Charity, patience with one another, putting up with other's faults, promoting the good name of the Oratory and the people who work there, and encouraging everyone to be benevolent to and to trust the Rector, are things warmly recommended for everyone, since without them we cannot keep order, promote the glory of God and the good of souls.

5. There is a problem in finding individuals to cover all these responsibilities, so with this in mind several responsibilities can be covered by the same individual: for example the responsibilities of Peace-maker, Patron and Assistant could be all covered by the same person.

6. Similarly the office of Prefect could be one and the same with that of the Spiritual Director. The Peace-maker, Invigilator and Monitor could be one and the same. Also the Archivist, Assistant, Librarian could be entrusted to one of the sacristans who is capable enough.

### *Chapter II - Terms of admission*

1. Since the purpose of this Oratory is to keep young people away from idleness, and from bad companions especially at weekends, everyone can be admitted without exception.

2. However boys who are poor, most abandoned and ignorant are taken in and looked after by preference, because they have greater need of assistance if they are to keep on the path to eternal salvation.

3. Eight is the lowest age, so little children are excluded as also those who cause problems or cannot understand what they are taught.

4. It does not matter if they have personal problems, so long as they are not inveterate wrongdoers, or might cause serious problems for their companions; in these cases even one could keep many others away from the Oratory.

5. They need to be occupied in some kind of art or trade, because idleness and unemployment bring all the other vices with them, then any kind of religious instruction becomes useless. Whoever is unemployed and wants to work can be sent to the protectors and will be helped by them.

6. When a boy enters this Oratory he must be convinced that this is a place of religion where we want to produce good Christians and upright citizens, therefore it is strictly forbidden to blaspheme, engage in conversations against good morals, or against religion. Whoever commits these faults will be advised in a fatherly way the first time; if there is no improvement the Director will be made aware and he will send him away from the Oratory.

7. Even troublesome boys can be accepted so long as they do not give scandal and show a willingness to improve their behaviour.

8. There is no payment either for entering or staying at the Oratory. Whoever wants to join a profit society can join the Mutual aid Society, with its separate rules.

9. All are free to come to this Oratory, but everyone must submit to the orders given by each person in charge, and behave properly in recreation, church, and outside the Oratory.

### *Chapter III - Behaviour in recreation*

1. Recreation is the best attraction for the young, and we would like everyone to take part, but only in the games we use here.

2. Everyone should be happy with the equipment given him, and use it in the place assigned for that kind of game.

3. During recreation and at any other time it is forbidden to talk politics, bring in newspapers of any kind, read or keep books without the Director's approval.

4. It is forbidden to play for money, foodstuffs or other items without special permission from the Prefect; there are serious reasons why this article should be strictly observed.

5. Should someone enter the Oratory during recreation who seems to be of some dignity, everyone should be keen to greet him, take off his cap, allow him to pass, and sometimes even stop the game.

6. It is generally forbidden to play cards, tarots, ballgames, yell too loudly, disturb others' games, throw stones, blocks of wood or snowballs, damage the plants, inscriptions or pictures; break walls or furniture, make graffiti with carbon or anything else that makes marks.

7. It is especially forbidden to fight, hit people, or even place your hand on another in an uncivil manner, swear or do anything that shows disrespect for companions. We are all children of God and we should love each other with the same charity as brothers.



8. A quarter of an hour before recreation finishes at the sound of the bell everyone should finish his game without beginning again. When the bell goes a second time you should take the game back to where you got it, and then you will be given back the item you swapped for it.

9. No one should use the games equipment to play outside the Oratory boundaries.

10. At recreation time everyone should show due respect to those in charge, and be obedient to the invigilators.

#### *Chapter IV - Behaviour in church*

1. When the signal has been given to go to church, everyone should go promptly and in order, clothes tidied up, and those who know how to read should not forget the proper book.

2. Going into church each one should take holy water and make the sign of the cross, then go to his place to genuflect and say a brief prayer, and remember that he is in God's house, the Father of Heaven and earth.

3. No assistant should be needed in church; the mere thought of being in God's house should be enough to prevent any distraction. But since someone could forget himself, or his place, therefore each one is recommended to be obedient to the orders of the assistant, and the peace-makers, and no one should try to leave without serious reason.

4. Everyone is encouraged not to sleep, talk, joke, or make noises that could cause problems or disturbance. These faults will be immediately corrected and even punished following the example of the Divine Saviour who threw the buyers and sellers out of the temple and whipped them.

5. When someone has been rightly advised of some defect or mistake, he should accept it quietly and in good part, and if he has any reasons for what he did he can explain it after the functions in the church.

6. In the mornings no one should try to leave until the *Praised forever be the names of Jesus and Mary* has been sung. In the evening no one should get off his knees until the Blessed Sacrament has been put back into the tabernacle.

7. Everyone is encouraged to do what he can not to leave the church during the sermon. When the sacred functions are over everyone can go out to recreation or go home.

#### *Chapter V - Behaviour outside the Oratory*

1. Remember boys that keeping Sundays holy brings you the Lord's blessing on all your work during the week; but there are other things you must do as well, other things you must avoid even outside the Oratory.

2. Every day try to never omit your morning and evening prayers, make some minutes of meditation or at least a little bit of spiritual reading, listen to holy Mass, if your work allows you to. Do not pass a church, cross or devout image without doffing your cap.

3. Avoid all obscene talk, or talk against religion, because St Paul tells us that bad conversations are the ruin of good morals.

4. You should at all times keep away from theatre performances by day or night, keep away from betting shops, cafes, games parlours and other similar dangerous places.

5. Do not nurture friendships with boys who have been sent away from the Oratory, or who speak ill of their superiors, or who try to keep you away from your duties; especially flee those who advise you to steal from home or elsewhere.

6. Finally, swimming is forbidden, and stopping to watch others swim. This is one of the most serious transgressions of the rules of the Oratory.

#### *Chapter VI - Religious practices*

1. Religious practices amongst us are: confession and communion, and every Sunday and holy day of obligation there will be an opportunity for whoever wants to approach these two august sacraments.

2. The Office of the Blessed Virgin, holy Mass, reading Bible or Church history, catechism, Vespers, moral addresses, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament are religious practices on Sundays.

3. For particular practices with holy Indulgences attached, something will be said in the appropriate place.

### *Chapter VII - Confession and communion*

1. Believe me boys, that the two strongest supports for staying on the road to Heaven are the sacraments of confession and communion. Therefore consider anyone who distances you from these two practices of our holy religion as an enemy of your soul.

2. Here we do not force anyone to go to these two sacraments; this is to leave everyone to go freely out of love and not out of fear. This can be of great advantage, since we see many going every fortnight or even every week, and some in the midst of all their daily occupations give great example by going to communion every day. Communion used to be daily for Christians in early times; the Catholic Church in the Council of Trent states clearly that it greatly wishes every faithful Christian to also receive Communion each time he goes to Mass.

3. Nevertheless I advise all boys at the Oratory to do what the catechism of his diocese says, that is: it is good to go to confession very fortnight or at least once a month. Saint Philip Neri however, that great friend of the young, recommended that his spiritual sons go to confession every week and communion more often in accordance with the confessor's advice.

4. Everyone is encouraged and especially the older ones to go to the sacraments in the church at the Oratory to give good example to his companions; because a boy who goes to confession and communion with true devotion and recollection sometimes makes a greater impression on others than any long sermon would.

5. The ordinary confessors are the Director of the Oratory, the Spiritual Director and the Prefect. Other confessors will be invited for public benefit on Solemnities.

6. Although it is not sinful to change your confessor, nevertheless I advise you to choose a stable one, because for the soul it is like a gardener with a plant, or a doctor with a sick person. Then in case of illness the ordinary confessor can easily know the state of our soul.

7. On the day you choose to go to the holy sacraments, when you come to the Oratory do not stop in the courtyard for recreation, but go straight away to the chapel, prepare yourself according to the directions given at religious instruction, and as you find in the *Companion of Youth* and in other books of piety. If you need to wait do so patiently and as a penance for your sins. Never make a commotion to prevent others going first, or walk in front of others.

8. The confessor is the friend of your soul, therefore I encourage you to have complete confidence in him. Also tell your confessor every secret of your heart, and be convinced that he cannot reveal the least thing heard in confession. Indeed he cannot even think about it. In matters of grave importance, such as choosing your state in life, always consult your confessor. The Lord says that whoever listens to his confessor is listening to God himself. *Qui vos audit me audit.*

9. When you have finished your confession, go aside and with the same recollection, make your thanksgiving. If your confessor agrees, prepare yourself for communion.

10. After communion stay at least a quarter of an hour to make your thanksgiving; it would be a serious irreverence if a few minutes after receiving the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, someone should leave the church and begin laughing and chatting, spitting or looking around the church.

11. Act in such a way that from one confession to another you remember the advice given by the confessor, trying to put it into practice.

12. Another thing regarding communion is this: having made your thanksgiving, always ask God for this grace, to be ready to receive holy Viaticum before you die.

*Chapter VIII - Topics for preaching and instructions*

1. The topics for sermons and moral instructions should be chosen and adapted to the young, and as much as possible mixed with examples, parables and fables.

2. The examples can be drawn from holy scripture, church history, the Fathers, or other respectable authors. But avoid stories that could encourage ridicule of the truths of the faith. Analogies are very enjoyable, but they need to be about things the listeners know or can easily understand; they need to be studied and have a clear application to the needs of the listeners.

3. We insist that examples must only be used to confirm the truth of the faith, which are to be proven beforehand. Analogies then only serve to enlighten a proven truth or one to be proved. Sermons are given in Italian but in as simple and popular way as possible and where there is a need also use the dialect of the Province. It does not matter if they are youngsters or other listeners who understand elegant Italian; whoever can understand elegant speech also understands popular speech very well, including Piedmontese (4).

4. Sermons should never go longer than half an hour, because our St Francis de Sales says it is better that the preacher leaves some desire to be heard and does not bore people. Young people particularly, need and want to listen, but you have to use every strategy to see that they are not bored.

5. Those who deign to come to this Oratory to explain the Word of God are strongly requested to be clear and as popular as they can. They should do that in such a way, that at any point of their talk listeners understand what virtue is being inculcated, or what defect urged against.

*Chapter IX - Feasts which have Indulgences attached to them*

1. There are no holidays at the Oratory; sacred functions occur on all Sundays and feast days. But since the supreme pontiffs have granted many indulgences for certain solemnities, on these occasions we encourage particular devotion and recollection. The reigning Pius IX grants a plenary indulgence for the following Solemnities:

1. St Francis de Sales, after whom, the Oratory is named.
2. Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, our principal patron, and after whom the Oratory at Porta Nuova is named.
3. The Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin.
4. The Assumption of the Virgin Mary.
5. Our Lady's birthday.
6. The Holy Rosary.
7. The Immaculate Conception.
8. The Holy Guardian Angel.

2. It is good to note here that to gain the above plenary indulgence, 1st sacramental confession and communion are prescribed. 2nd Visiting this church. 3rd Offering a prayer for the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff.

3. The feasts of St Francis de Sales, and St Aloysius Gonzaga are celebrated with particular pomp and solemnity. The Rector, Spiritual Director and Prefect will together make due agreements with the prior of the St Aloysius Sodality for whatever is needed those days.

#### *Chapter X - Particular practices of Christian piety*

1. One important practice of piety is the communion which the Supreme Pontiff has allowed us to have on midnight before Christmas Day. We have the faculty of celebrating three Masses consecutively and going to communion with the plenary indulgence for whoever goes to confession and communion. Beforehand is the solemn Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament. On that evening then everyone can freely take supper or breakfast, then prepare themselves for holy communion. The reason is that because of the need to fast from midnight onwards, this communion is after midnight.

2. On the last four days of Holy Week there are the divine offices [for the dead], and the holy burial. On Thursday then at five in the evening, if the time does not prevent you, everyone will go in procession to visit the holy sepulchres. After which comes the usual function of the washing of the feet.

3. There are also special exercises of piety in May in honour of Our Lady, and in the final week of this month there is an octave to close the month.

4. On the last Sunday of each month there is the exercise for a happy death which consists in careful preparation for confession and communion, and adjusting spiritual and temporal affairs as if the end of our life were near. For the Forty Hours and the exercise for a happy death there is a plenary indulgence.

5. On the first Sunday of each month we usually have a procession in honour of St Aloysius Gonzaga around the oratory boundaries, and all who come earn 300 days of indulgence granted by the reigning Pius IX.

6. There is also a plenary indulgence for the exercise of the Six Sundays of St Aloysius Gonzaga. This exercise consists in choosing the six Sundays before the Saint's feast, and doing some devotional exercise such as printed in the small booklet and also in the *Companion of Youth*. Whoever goes to confession and communion on these Sundays can earn a plenary indulgence for each of them.

7. The state of grace is essential for earning these holy indulgences, because one cannot obtain remission of temporal pain who deserves eternal pain.

8. All the above-mentioned indulgences are applicable to the souls in Purgatory.

### *Chapter XI - St Aloysius Sodality*

1. The reigning Pius IX has granted a plenary indulgence on the day one enrolls in the St Aloysius Sodality. The aim proposed to members is to imitate this Saint in virtues compatible with their state, and to have his protection in life and at the moment of death.

2. The approval of the Archbishop of Turin, and the reigning Pius IX should encourage us to join this Sodality.

3. For everyone's peace of mind it should be noted that the rules of the St Aloysius Sodality do not oblige under pain of sin, not even venial sin; so

anyone who overlooks some rule of the Sodality is depriving himself of a spiritual good but is not committing any sin. The promise made before the Altar of St Aloysius is not a vow; but someone with no intention of keeping it would be better not to enrol.

4. This Sodality is directed by a priest with the title of Spiritual Director, and by a prior who does not need to be a priest.

5. The Spiritual Director is appointed by the Superior of the Oratory. His responsibility is to see that all members observe the rules; he admits those who seem to him to be worthy; he keeps a list of the living and the dead; he is the visitor of the sick for the Mutual Aid Society. His time in office has no limit.

6. The prior is elected by a majority of votes with all the members of the Sodality together. His time in office is one year and he can be re-elected. The time established for electing the prior is Easter Sunday evening.

7. The prior's office does not carry any financial responsibility with it. A donation is offered on the feast of St Aloysius, St Francis de Sales, or on other situations and is regarded as giving alms. It is also his responsibility to look after the choir, and see that the singing is well organised and that Solemnities are done with decorum.

8. The disciplinary side of the rules of the Oratory are recommended to the prior, who is helped by a vice prior, also elected by a majority of votes on Sunday in *Albis* [*Low Sunday*].

### Part Three

#### PURPOSE OF THIS WORK OF DAY AND EVENING ELEMENTARY CLASSES

##### *Chapter I - Classes and terms of admittance*

1. The Oratory classes include the entire elementary course for the year, the evening classes from the beginning of November to Easter or the autumn holidays.



The subjects are those prescribed by government programmes.

2. Everyone can take part in these classes except those who have not turned 6 or have infectious diseases in accordance with the rules of the festive Oratory (second part, chap. I, art. 4).

3. When admitted there must be an indication of name, surname, father's name, place of birth, age and address, whether admitted to communion and how often, whether baptised.

All students are strictly obliged to attend functions at the festive Oratory.

4. The school is free, but each one should provide books, exercise books and whatever is needed for school, and whoever is extremely poor and unable to provide what is needed will ask the Director. He will not refuse to help once having verified the need and the pupil's good behaviour.

5. Although these classes are open to all, nevertheless when there is no more room, preference is given to the poorest and most abandoned and those who attend the Oratory on weekends.

#### *General notices*

1. Each pupil should be respectful to superiors and teachers, and whoever cannot attend class should inform the Director or his teacher.

2. At the beginning of the year each one will be given a booklet where he can indicate his attendance at functions at the festive Oratory. Care should be taken to have it stamped morning and evening each Sunday, and every Monday morning bring it with him to present to the superior should it be asked for.

3. Parents should see to sending [their sons] along clean in person and clothing, and come along from time to time to find out about the pupil's behaviour.

4. It is strictly forbidden for any pupils to 1. take on commissions for boarders; 2. bring books, newspapers, written or printed material of any kind, without them first being seen by the Director of the Oratory.

5. It is strictly forbidden to throw stones, cause a rumpus on the way to and from class.

### *Chapter II - Doorkeeper*

1. It is the strict duty of the Doorkeeper to be in time at the reception, and to kindly receive the boys and whoever comes.

2. If a new boy comes he should receive him kindly, tell him how the Oratory is run, send him to the Director or to whoever takes his place, so he can be enrolled in the register of pupils and assigned a class.

3. It is strictly forbidden to allow outsiders to go through into the Institute. In such cases he should send the person to the doorkeeper of the houses or hospice.

4. Parents of boys coming to find out about their sons, should stand at the back of the courtyard if they are women.

5. He should prevent communications between boarders and non-residents, commissions, buying and selling of any kind.

6. Once youngsters have entered the courtyard they should not leave, and when there is some reasonable motive they should ask permission of the superior, or at least their respective teacher.

7. It is severely forbidden to allow one of the boarders to leave by the door for the non-residents.

8. The Doorkeeper should see that nobody brings books, newspapers, papers of any kind into the courtyard unless first seen by the Director. Constantly remind people that it is forbidden to smoke or chew tobacco in the courtyard or in other places in the Oratory.

### *Chapter III - Evening classes for business and music*

1. Business and music classes are free; but whoever wants to attend them is obliged to come to the practices of piety at the festive Oratory; pupils must have completed their 9th year. For singing class they should be at least able to read Italian and Latin.

2. When admitted they should give their name, surname, father's name, place of birth, profession, age and home address, whether they have been promoted to communion and how many times, whether they are confirmed.

3. Each music pupil should make a formal promise not to go and sing or play in public theatres nor other places where religion or morals could be compromised.

4. At the beginning of class the *Actiones nostras* etc., with the *Hail Mary* will be said. At the end of class the *Agimus* with the *Hail Mary* and the ejaculation *Maria Auxilium* etc. will be said then each one will return home.

5. Whoever for whatever reasons wishes to be exempted from class should advise the teacher or Director.

6. At the end of the year there will be a public prize-giving for those who have stood out for behaviour and scholastic benefit.

#### *Chapter IV - Teachers*

1. The teacher will endeavour to be in class in time to prevent disorders before or after class.

2. He will endeavour to prepare his subject for lessons; this will help much for an understanding of problems in the topic and will make the teacher's job easier.

3. There should be no partiality, no animosity; warning and blame if needed but forgive easily.

4. The least intelligent in the class should be the object of special care; encourage and never discourage.

5. Question everyone without distinction and often, and show great respect and affection for all pupils.

6. Punishment is administered in the classroom; never send anyone out of class to punish them. It is strictly forbidden to slap, beat or strike them however the pupils may be. When a serious case arises send for the Director or have the culprit accompanied to him.

7. If serious decisions need to be made concerning a pupil, speak to the Director first about it.

8. Encourage neatness in exercise books, neat, perfect writing; cleanliness of books and their pages, which need to be shown to the teacher.

9. At least once a month give a test, and after correcting it give the page to the Director.

10. Keep your registration so that whoever asks for it on any day can be shown it, and in case anyone of authority visits the classes.

11. Watch out for bad books being read, recommend and indicate authors that can be read and kept without religion and morals being compromised.

12. Whether the classes are on sacred or profane matters draw some moral conclusion when the subject matter offers the opportunity but without being too snobbish about it.

13. Teachers should not visit the boys' parents.

14. When a parent comes to ask about a pupil, give them satisfaction but do this in the courtyard or parlour, not in the classroom.

#### *Chapter V -*

#### *General rules for the Feasts of St Aloysius and St Francis de Sales*

1. For the nine days prior to the Feast we will sing the *Iste confessor ...* or *Infensus hostis* etc. in church, with some prayers and a brief sermon, or at least a little reading on the saint, or some part of his life.

2. For the functions on the morning and evening preceding the Feast the boys will be encouraged to go to the holy sacraments of confession and communion.

3. At this stage the cantors will be prepared, the altar boys taught the ceremonies, and other things regarding the sacred ceremonies. The boys will also be reminded that if they approach the sacraments on these days they can gain the plenary indulgence.

*End of carnival and beginning of Lent*

1. On Sexagesima Sunday the boys will be advised that on the following Sunday, it being the last in Carnival, they can have something special by way of games or other amusements.
2. The oratory will be open on the last Monday and Tuesday of Carnival. Over these three days or at least the Sunday and Tuesday after midday, after recreation Vespers will be sung, followed by a dialogue instruction and Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament.

*Lenten catechism and Confirmation*

1. At the beginning of Lent, we will note from amongst the boys who attend the Oratory, if any one has not been confirmed. In case it is affirmative, those to be confirmed will be split into two or three classes and separate instructions given on how to receive this sacrament. No later than halfway through Lent they need to be confirmed in order to prepare them for Easter.
2. The boys should be divided according to age and knowledge, with no more than ten in each group.
3. The catechist will take an exact note of his pupils and give them a mark each day for conduct and diligence.
4. Before Lent is over see that the pupils are sufficiently instructed in the main mysteries and especially for confession and communion.
5. During Holy Week all the pupils will be examined and he will promote those who are suitable, and pass on the marks to the Director who will enter them in a separate register.
6. When noticing someone who is already an adult is part of the class, but ignorant of religion, he should be passed on to the Director, who will give him appropriate instruction.
7. On Thursday halfway through Lent, there will be no catechism morning or evening to avoid certain jokes that often cause disruption and fights.

8. On Saturday evening there will be teaching, but leave time for confessions for those who want. Take great care that those attending catechism during Lent go to confession at least once and even more often to avoid problems that arise when they go for their Easter confession. At the end of Holy Week notice will be given that the retreat starts the following week.

#### *Easter exercises*

1. The exercises begin on the day and at the time in Holy Week that the Director believes is most convenient for the boys.

2. Every day there will be a number of sermons compatible with the circumstances and work of the boys.

3. The Monday following Palm Sunday there will be confessions for the younger ones not yet promoted to holy communion.

4. On holy Tuesday for students already promoted to communion (5).

5. Easter Sunday is the Easter celebrations for the working boys.

#### *The Seven Sundays of St Joseph and the Six Sundays of St Aloysius*

1. On the seven Sundays prior to the Feast of St Joseph and the six before the Feast of St Aloysius Gonzaga there is a plenary indulgence for whoever goes to the sacrament of confession and communion; therefore they will be advised in time and special words of encouragement given to the boys.

#### *Grouping the boys for catechism*

1. It is good to set up the classes twice a year; after Easter because that is when many new boys arrive, and it is also necessary to give new places to the boys who have just been promoted to holy communion.

The second time is at the beginning of the classes in autumn for a great number of boys who usually come to the Oratory. So it is good to have two groups, Workers and Students.

### *Raffles*

1. It has been established that raffles will take place every quarter, that is: St Francis de Sales, the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, St Aloysius Gonzaga, All Saints.
2. Whoever wins will get a prize in accordance with his attendance and conduct.
3. Raffle items will be devotional books, nice reading, holy pictures, crucifixes, medals, various kinds of toys, and for the most exemplary a pair of shoes or some clothes.
4. On *Low Sunday* there will be a solemn prize distribution for those whose attendance and behaviour at catechism have been outstanding during Lent.
5. On the second Sunday after Easter there will be a raffle for those attending the festive Oratory.
6. Peace-makers will remain in the courtyard near the raffle to keep anyone making a disturbance quiet.

### *Librarian*

1. The librarian is entrusted with a small choice of pleasant and useful books to be given out to boys who want them and who he hopes will get some benefit from them.
2. He will register the name and surname of those who have borrowed a book, letting them know that at the end of the month they need to return it.
3. He will also keep account of the books coming and going out of the library so he can give account to the one in charge.
4. Two people work in the library, the librarian who gives out the books, and the general assistant who give permission and notes down the name and address of the student, and the title of the book.
5. The responsibility of the librarian and the assistant could be given to the same person, and they might also swap position if one or other is absent.

6. Everyone is encouraged not to lose books, destroy them or write their own name on them, and to return them within a month.

Seen, nulla Osta for printing,  
Turin, 2 November 1877.  
Zappata vicar general.

Turin, 1877. Tipografia Salesiana.

(1) In places where there are catechists from beginning to end of the function, one assistant is enough, helped by the catechists from each class.

(2) Where matins cannot be sung at least in the evening Vespers of the Blessed Virgin will be sung or just the *Ave Maris Stella* with the *Magnificat*, and *Oremus* etc.

(3) The head chorister will see that the psalms and hymns are sung alternatively first by the choir then the church.

(4) In the early days of the Oratory from 1840 to 1850 they only used Piedmontese; but when boys came from other parts of Italy later, and from other countries, they adopted Italian as it was spoken throughout the peninsula.

(5) Where many are making their first communion, it would be good to do it on a special day on their own, at the Director's choice.

### **181. Regulations for the houses of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales**

Critical ed. in *Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*. Torino, Tipografia Salesiana 1877 (OE XXIX, 97-196).

#### GENERAL ARTICLES<sup>66</sup>

1. Those who find themselves in a position of responsibility or who must care for the young people whom Divine Providence has entrusted to us all have the duty to advise and counsel any boy in the House, every time there is occasion to do so, especially when it is a case of preventing the offence of God.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. critical edition for these ten "General articles" in DBE, Scritti, pp. 281-283.



2. If one wishes to be respected, he should set about making himself loved. He will achieve this important goal if by word, and even more by deed, he makes it understood that his exclusive concern is for the spiritual and earthly good of his pupils.

3. Assistance requires few words, but a lot of work. Students should be allowed to express their thoughts freely, but take care to straighten out, and even correct, expressions, words, actions that might not be consonant with Christian education.

4. Young people generally exhibit one of the following character traits: good, ordinary, difficult, bad. It is our strict duty to study the best means of reconciling these diverse characters so as to do good to all without anyone being the cause of harm to anyone else.

5. For those who are blessed by nature with a 'good' character or temperament, general supervision is sufficient, explaining the disciplinary rules and recommending their observance.

6. The greater number is made up of those who have an 'ordinary' character or temperament, being somewhat lively, and being prone to take things easy. These need brief but frequent tips, reminders, advice. They need to be encouraged to work, even by giving them small rewards, and - without ever losing sight of them - showing great confidence is placed in them.

7. But our care and efforts must be directed in a special way to those in the third category, those students who are difficult, even troublesome. One can reckon these as being about one in fifteen. Every staff member should make a point of getting to know them, of informing themselves of their previous history; should show themselves to be their friends. They should let them speak a lot, saying little themselves, and when they do, they should use brief examples, sayings, stories, and so on. We should never let them out of sight, without however making it appear that we do not trust them.

8. When teachers or assistants join their students, they should immediately cast their eye over them, and if they become aware that one of these (difficult ones) is missing, they should send someone to look for them, under the pretext of having something to say or recommend to them.

9. Whenever one of them needs to be reprimanded, counselled or corrected, it should never be done there and then, and in the presence of his fellow-students. One may, however, make use of facts or episodes that have befallen others to express praise or blame which will find its way to the one for whom you have intended it.

10. These are the introductory articles to our Regulations. But everyone needs patience, application and much prayer, without which, I believe, any regulation would be useless.

## First Part

### PARTICULAR REGULATIONS

#### *Chapter I - Director*

1. The Director is the head of the establishment: it is up to him to admit or send boys away, and he is responsible for duties, the moral standard of each employee and the education of the pupils. He can however delegate admissions to the Prefect who will do this in the name of the Director. He will follow the prescriptions of the college and the limitations and norms indicated at the end of these regulations.

2. Only the Director may modify the responsibilities of his dependants, the established discipline and timetable, and without his permission no variation may be introduced.

3. The Director is responsible for the spiritual, scholastic and material running of things.

#### *Chapter II - Prefect*

1. The Prefect looks after the material running of the college, and takes the Director's place in administration and all cases he has been expressly put in charge of.

2. He will write the name, surname, town and situation of those asking to be accepted for work or for study in the book for applicants; he will especially note if the applicant is at moral risk. This factor means he would be preferred over all others. He will also note any admission conditions, and anything else he considers appropriate.

3. Every pupil will be welcomed by the Director or by the Prefect delegated by him, who will note down in the register the day of entry, conditions of admittance, whether he brought any money with him, or article of clothing, the class or trade he will be assigned to, and the address of the one who recommended him with any other necessary indications.

4. He will be assigned a place in the dormitory and refectory. If he is a student he will be sent to the school councillor to be given his class. If destined for work he will also be assigned a place in a workshop or office which seems most suited to the need, and his name will be passed on to the Director and Catechist.

5. If some student should cease to belong to the house, the Prefect will note the day of exit and the reasons for it. If this should be because he has died he will see to giving immediate notice to who needs to know, noting down the details and circumstances that could lead to good example and grateful remembrance.

6. The Prefect is the point of reference for all expenditure, and all financial income under whatever category they belong to for the house.

7. Therefore he will keep account, at least in overall terms, of expenses needed for the boys and the staff, the classes, workshops, foodstuffs and maintenance of the house. But in his administration he must always stay within the limits and orders established by the Director or Superior of the Congregation.

8. He will receive any money that comes from the workshops, contracts of sale, donations, boarding fees from the boys and hand it to the Director, from whom he will receive what he needs for the day and for payments on fixed dates.

9. He will take great care to keep registers in order according to the rules of accountability established for our Houses, and he will keep up to date in accounting, when needed, for income and expenditure, so he can give a monthly account of his administration when it is asked for. Every three months he will see to sending out an account for fees, provisions and repairs to parents of the young pupils, and every quarter organise the entries for other houses in the Congregation and outsiders with whom he is keeping an open account.

10. As well as the accounting the Prefect is entrusted with looking after the Coadjutors, and in general the boys' discipline, and cleanliness and maintenance of the house.

11. As for maintenance his activity and authority are limited to repairs and preserving any mobile or immobile items of the house. So whoever needs work of this kind should turn to the Prefect but he cannot do anything new without the express consent of the Director; in fact if it is a case of demolition or building or something else of this kind, he must wait for the permission of the Rector Major.

12. Regarding families, in agreement with the Director, he will see to personnel according to need, will see that everyone fulfils his duties, is busy, and will especially see that no one takes on outside commissions to do with his responsibility. However he will recommend that if time is left over they should willingly help each other when there is a need.

13. In the morning he will go or ask another to go and call the Coadjutors and service personnel so that they can all come to holy Mass and say their prayers together; he will go with them for prayers in the evening and will give them some advice that will be to their spiritual and temporal benefit. He will also take account of what they do and of any breakages or disorders they find around the house.

14. The cleanliness of the boys and their clothing is especially entrusted to him. Each week he will go and look around and ensure that the boys' clothes, hair is neat, insisting that no one has hair that is too long.

15. He will see that doors, exits, windows, keys, locks are not broken. If he finds something broken he will see that it is repaired as soon as possible, and in the most economical way.

16. By himself or by means of others he will assist in giving out bread at breakfast time, afternoon tea and at table. He will see that if someone does not feel like eating something, it is put back on the table. Whoever willingly wastes bread, soup or second course will be severely admonished, and if he does not improve the Director will be immediately informed.

17. It is up to the Prefect to see that foodstuffs are healthy and in good condition, that the bread is not too fresh, that provisions are weighed or measured when brought into the house, and will take note to compare this with the weights and measures offered by the retailers.

18. While ensuring that the boys are punctual with their duties, in agreement with the School Councillor and the Catechist he will see in a nice way that the teachers, trade teachers and assistants are ready to take their places when the boys arrive in the church, study, classroom, workshop and dormitories thus preventing the problems that usually can happen at such moments.

19. Where there are workshops the Prefect will be in direct contact with the trade teachers and assistants, will get them to keep note of work coming from outside, of agreed prices, what has been paid and not paid for, the time and expense that occurred, provisions, and all this so he can give a detailed or at least overall account to whoever needs to know.

20. By himself or by means of the one with responsibility for the workshops he will receive income from each workshop, pay each one's agreed upon salary, and see that all equipment is the property of the house.

21. He will see that no outsiders are allowed into the dormitories, classrooms, workshops, sending anyone who needs to talk to the pupils or deal with work to be done or already done to the parlour or office at the workshops.

22. The Prefect could have a vice prefect and secretary helping him, to whom, he could entrust accounting and correspondence. He could also be helped by a Bursar when the extent of the house and the multiplicity of affairs

requires it.

23. The Bursar will be given charge especially of things to do with cleanliness of the house and the boys, the Coadjutors, and preserving and repairing domestic items.

24. The Bursar, those who do the shopping, the one providing books and stationery should all be in direct contact with the Prefect, and will ordinarily depend on him. The Prefect will increase his number of helpers according to need.

### *Chapter III - Catechist*

1. The Catechist supervises the pupils and provides for the spiritual needs of the boys of the house.

2. As soon as he is informed that a boy has come, he will inform him of the main rules of the house and in the kindest and most charitable way will enquire as to what religious instruction he has most need of and will then take the greatest care to see that it is given him.

3. He should insist that all at least learn the small catechism of the diocese. For this purpose each week he will assign at least one catechism lesson to be learned. He will take note of those who have already been promoted to holy communion, whether they have been confirmed, and will take special care of those who need to be instructed to worthily receive these sacraments.

4. He will note their faults so he can correct them at the right moment and each month he will give a conduct mark to each pupil.

5. He will see that the pupils are diligent in approaching the sacraments, are in time for the sacred functions, for morning and evening prayers, and will prevent whatever could disturb the exercises of Christian piety. He will be helped in this by the assistants and decurions.

6. In agreement with the Prefect, he will see that dormitory heads are in time for their duty, that everyone is punctual for sacred functions, in their assigned place, and stand out before the boys for their good example.

7. He will see that those who are ill lack nothing for their spiritual or temporal needs, but will not administer remedies without doctor's order.

8. He will often talk to the Prefect so he can prevent disorders.

9. The Catechist will do what he can to see that everyone learns how to serve mass well, whether it is pronouncing the words clearly and distinctly, or devoutly observing the prescribed ceremonies for this august mystery of our holy religion.

10. The Catechist for the students will often talk with the assistants in the dormitories, the study, the decurions and the school assistants, with the teachers and the School Councillor himself so that he can give appropriate information on the pupils, and correct those who need it.

11. He will promote the Sodalities of St Aloysius, the Blessed Sacrament, the Altar Boys, the Immaculate Conception. In case of need he can also be helped by a priest or an older cleric especially for conferences.

12. He will look after the clerics working at some responsibility in the house, seeing that they learn the sacred ceremonies and attend to their study of theology. If he can, each week he will get them to recite a passage from the New Testament, and prepare the service for a Solemnity.

13. He will also look after service of the church, the religious functions, and items used for divine worship.

14. For major solemnities, where it is possible there will be vocal music with an orchestra; for ordinary feasts there will be Gregorian chant with organ or harmonium.

15. He will choose two clerics in turn from the lower courses to do a week of service in the church. Every morning and evening they will be in the sacristy at the time for Masses, and if there is need, remain there till 9 o'clock. But on Sundays their service will be for the whole day.

16. These clerics will see that they learn how to vest the celebrant and help him take off his vestments, fold up the amice, cotta and alb, prepare the chalice and put the bookmarks at the right place in the missal, following the calendar of the diocese.

17. He will keep a list of items in the oratories, and see that whatever is needed for divine worship is there; nothing should be lost, laundry done at the right time, ironing and mending of sacred items.

18. He will make moderate use of wax and see that it is not used except for divine worship. If lighting is needed for things outside the church other candles will be provided.

19. He should foster decorum at sacred functions, and see that strict silence is kept in the sacristy, especially during divine office.

20. For the Mass timetable, preaching and catechism, and cases of provision or expense of any kind, he will be in agreement with the Director and in his absence with the Prefect of the House.

21. For regular execution of what is needed for the sacristy, one or more Coadjutors will be chosen who will help in matters entrusted to them.

22. In colleges where there is a public church and many clergy, the Catechist could have a prefect for the sacristy helping him, especially for what is prescribed in art. 14 at the end of the current chapter (1).

#### *Chapter IV - Catechist for the trade boys*

1. The Catechist for the trade boys other than what is noted in the preceding chapter should see that his pupils go every fortnight or at least once a month to confession and communion, and that no one is missing from practices of piety either on Sundays or weekdays.

2. He will keep in contact with the trade teachers, assistants in the workshop and dormitory, with the Bursar and the Prefect to give and receive information about the boys entrusted to his care.

3. He will see that the boys are quiet when they enter or leave the church, workshops, when leaving the refectory, when going to bed, and in the morning after rising, when going down to church or elsewhere for religious duties.

4. He will insist that no one stops to chatter, fight, and if he notes some disturbance he will use much diligence and charity to prevent and stop it.



5. In the evening and, if possible in the morning on Sundays, he will give his pupils an appropriate lesson, and do so in such a way that no one is wandering around the house.

6. Every evening he will see that the prayers are said and after that collect the lost items. He will give them a brief moral thought as a goodnight. It would also be good if he spent a little time on the more important points of good manners.

7. He will see that all the trade boys learn to serve Mass, and he will encourage them to join a Sodality such as St Joseph, St Aloysius, and the Immaculate Conception.

8. His vigilance should also extend to the instrumental music class, especially regarding behaviour and discipline (2).

#### *Chapter V - School Councillor*

1. The School Councillor is in charge of controlling and providing whatever pupils and teachers need for class and study.

2. When he receives a student he will assign him a class which he believes suited to him and also a place in the study.

3. If there is a need for school items, or if there are problems amongst the students, complaints from the teacher, they are to be addressed to the School Councillor.

4. If someone has nothing to do or is unemployed for any reason, he will give him something to do or study, read, write or the like, and never leave him idle.

5. He will see that the students are clean when they go on outings and that no one moves out of line. It is to be considered a serious fault if someone leaves his companions to go and buy food, liquor or other items.

6. He assists the students when they go to church, study, class, dormitory, to see that they keep order and silence.

7. It is also up to him to present the Director or Prefect with the supplies, repairs needed for chairs, desks, booths for study and classrooms.

8. In agreement with the Director he will establish who are the teachers, substitute teachers and teachers for accessory courses, assistants, decurions and vice decurions in study, leaders for outings.

9. It is also his task to promote Gregorian chant, vocal music, and in agreement with the Director establish Teachers, Assistants, and see that discipline is observed in these classes.

10. He will ask Teachers and Assistants for their thoughts on the discipline and behaviour of students to give them the guidelines and advice he considers necessary. He will often remind Teachers that they are working for the glory of God, so while they are teaching a secular subject they should not overlook anything to do with saving souls. He will keep the Director and Prefect informed monthly and more often where needed. He will note however that only the Director or Prefect are to be in contact with parents to give them news of the boarders.

11. Establishing times for exams, both semester and final, changes to school days, holidays, giving out what is needed for teaching, tutors and tutoring for whoever needs it are all part of the competence of the School Councillor but always with previous understanding with the Director.

12. Ordinarily care of public speaking, theatrical performances, academies and the like will be entrusted to the School Councillor.

### *Chapter VI - School teachers*

1. The first duty of Teachers is to be in class on time and prevent any disorders that may arise before or after school. If he notes a pupil missing he will immediately advise the School Councillor or Prefect.

2. Teachers should prepare their lesson topics well. This preparation will do much to help the students understand difficult topics and lessons and it will be effective in lightening the load for the teacher himself.

3. There should be no partiality or animosity; they may warn, correct if needed but should easily forgive, avoiding punishments as much as possible.

4. The least intelligent in the class should be the object of special care; they should encourage and never discourage.

5. Question everyone without distinction and often, and show great respect and affection for all pupils, especially those who are a bit slow. They should avoid the pernicious habit of some who tend to leave the negligent and slower pupils to their own devices.

6. If there is a need for punishment it should be given in the classroom. Never send a student out of class as a punishment. Where there are serious cases send for the school councillor or have the guilty one brought to him. It is severely forbidden to hit or inflict humiliating punishment or anything that will damage health.

7. Where there is a situation requiring punishment to be given outside class, or taking decision of major importance, refer everything to the School Councillor or the Director of the house. Outside of school the teacher must not threaten or inflict punishment of any kind, but limit himself to warning and advising his pupils kindly and as a sincere friend.

8. Encourage neatness in exercise books, neat, perfect handwriting; cleanliness of books and their pages, which need to be shown to the teacher.

9. At least once a month give a test, and after correcting it give the pages to the superior of the house or at least to the School Councillor.

10. Keep your registration certificate so that whoever asks for it on any day can be shown it, and in case anyone of authority visits the classes. Remember however that it is up to the Director or Prefect to give any information out about the pupils.

11. Watch out to see if bad books are being read, recommend and name authors that can be read and kept without religion and morals being compromised, and choose passages more suited to promoting good morals, avoiding those that could damage religion and behaviour. Be very careful never to name, as much as is possible, the title of any bad books.

12. Whether the classes are on sacred or profane matters draw some moral conclusion when the subject matter offers the opportunity but without being too snobbish about it.

13. If there is a novena or solemnity, offer an encouraging word, but briefly and with some example if you can.

14. Once a week give a lesson on a Latin text by a Christian author.

### *Chapter VII - Trade teachers*

1. The Trade Teacher has the task of teaching the boys of the house the trade that the superiors have assigned to him. He must share his work with his pupils, and do so in such a way that none of them remains unoccupied.

2. His principal task is to be on time when the boys come in, so he can occupy them immediately, and to prevent some disorder arising because they are talking or playing.

3. If the Teacher has to leave the workshop to take some measures or other duty, he will tell the assistant without whose consent he should never leave the room.

4. He should observe silence and in agreement with the assistant see that silence is observed during work.

5. He should never have contracts with the boys of the house, nor take on any professional work for his own benefit, nor occupy himself in things outside the work of the workshop.

6. He should not begin any work in the workshop unless there is some prior understanding from the office or the assistant, price has been agreed upon, name and address of the person noted for whom the work is to be undertaken.

7. The Trade Teacher along with the assistant must take great care to avoid any kind of scurrilous talk.

8. The Trade Teachers should stand out from their pupils for their good example, both in the workshop and in the way they fulfil their religious duties.

*Chapter VIII - Assistants in class and study*

1. The class Assistants are to watch over discipline and good order for the time and class they have been given, and in case of need, for other classes too.

2. They should assist their class in school, church, recreation and on outings.

3. They will accompany the boys from study to church, and from church to study, and they will see they go in order and in silence. They will also accompany them when they go to the refectory until they enter there.

4. At recreation they will see that everyone stays in the courtyard assigned to him, stop fights, bad conversations, rough or offensive language, undesirable activity like laying hands on another, and they will constantly encourage everyone to speak Italian.

5. Each week and more often if needed, they will tell the school councillor about the behaviour of each boy, but when there are serious matters he will be immediately in contact with him.

6. When an assistant is given a temporary task which means he cannot be in his class, he should first let the School Councillor know, and not move from his place until he is substituted by another.

7. In church he should see that each pupil has his book for the exercises of piety and not some other book, and he will support the singing, stopping the boys from yelling, since this usually disturbs everyone's devotion. If he sees some of his class missing from church, he will immediately tell the catechist or school councillor once the functions are over.

8. So that the weekly report can be precise he should recall the faults he has noted and any observations made about someone.

9. For any situation, in the absence of the School Councillor, he will pass on his reflections to the Prefect.

*Chapter IX - Assistant in the workshops*

1. The Assistant in the workshops sees to behaviour, how time is being used, and on everything that could benefit the establishment.
2. He will be there in time for the boys as they come in and leave the workshop to stop disorders that could happen at those times and to note if anyone is late. If someone is missing he will advise the Prefect or Catechist for the trade boys to see what needs to be done.
3. He will keep a close eye on the pupils' behaviour, their diligence, and at the end of each week having heard the trade teacher's opinion, he will give the Prefect or Catechist a note on his pupils' behaviour, and on that basis give due reward or blame.
4. He is strictly obliged to stop any kind of bad conversations, and if he knows of someone who is guilty he will immediately tell the superior. It will be useful for the assistant to spend time with the boys, especially with those making best progress in the trade, to understand any breakdowns and any disorders that usually happen and can be avoided.
5. As much as possible he should never leave the workshop. When he needs to be away temporarily he will advise the Trade Teacher.
6. The Assistant (if it was not already done in the office) will note the work entrusted to the workshop with the date, agreed price, name, address of who brought it or sent it, with other essential indications; if agreements are needed he will see that they are clear and as far as possible in writing. He then enters this in the register, using the precise words of the buyer. It would be convenient to keep these letters and other written material of the kind.
7. He will also note the day the work was given back and if it was paid for or not, but he should not keep his own money supply. Therefore he will hand the money to the Prefect or Bursar, and will go to them when he has need.
8. No work can be carried out without prior permission from the Prefect or Bursar.

9. Should supplies or materials be needed, the assistant will advise the Prefect or the workshop office head to give appropriate orders to the ones who do the buying. Meanwhile he should keep everything of greater value under lock and key especially if they are likely to be taken away. He will also keep an eye on wear and tear in his own workshop.

10. When there is a need for supplies which the shopper or assistant has not done, he will take the trade teacher or someone else with him, choosing the time of least disturbance for the workshop, but first seeing to the assistance of the boys.

11. Since he has to make note of work and supplies, he should keep the registers so that every year he can present the Prefect with a comparative picture of income and expenditure, worn items or broken tools or tools unusable for any reason, and give account to the superiors whenever they should ask for it.

12. In agreement with the trade teacher he will keep himself informed of developments in the trade, current prices, and the work that workers would usually accomplish over a given time.

#### *Chapter X - Assistants or dormitory leaders*

1. In every dormitory there is a leader and vice leader who are obliged to give account of whatever goes wrong with discipline or behaviour in the dormitory entrusted to them.

2. He should stand out from others for his good example, and show that he is just, exact, full of charity and fear of God.

3. The Assistant must correct his pupils' faults, and he may threaten punishments but their application is reserved to the Prefect or Director. In the evening before retiring he will visit the dormitory and if he notes a pupil missing he will quickly advise the Prefect.

4. He will insist that in the evening, after prayers, strict silence is observed in the dormitory until after morning Mass. When the signal is given for rising he gets up quickly, and does not leave the dormitory until all others have left.

5. He watches very closely to prevent any kind of bad talk, any word, gesture even facetiously, that might be contrary to the virtue of modesty. St Paul did not even want Christians to mention such things. *Impudicitia nec nominetur in vobis*. If the assistant sees any such failures he is seriously obliged to inform the Director.

6. He is also in charge of looking after personal cleanliness, the beds and clothing of the boys entrusted to him.

7. Every time the boys need to go to the dormitory the assistant should be there first, and be the last to leave. He should show everyone he is a model of example. *Praebe te ipsum exemplum bonorum operum* (St Paul).

NB. If a pupil should fall ill, the Assistant will accompany him to the infirmary, or advise the Prefect or Catechist. As far as possible he will not leave any boy alone in the dormitory.

### *Chapter XI - Dispenser*

1. The Dispenser is in charge of the little things to be given out which students and trade boys need: books, exercise books and other stationery items.

2. He will have a list of the boys who have taken some or all these things in the house, and will note the quality, value of the item, name, surname of the pupil, and at least every month will add up each one's expenses.

3. Under the responsibility and care of the Prefect he will take note of tips for the trade boys, and according to merit will give them no more than half. The rest he will keep for them. If there is bad behaviour, the tip will be reduced according to demerit. He will also take account of student deposits, distributing them by order from the Prefect.

4. He will manage things in such a way that he can give at least an overall account to the Prefect of the House once a month.



5. The Dispenser depends entirely on the Prefect who can modify his tasks in the way and time he thinks is to the best advantage of the house. But he will not give out any item other than according to the established guidelines and orders given by the Prefect.

### *Shoppers*

1. The Director will choose one or two Shoppers to do the smaller expenditures of the house, kitchen, workshops.

2. The Shoppers will depend on the Prefect or whoever takes his place for their duties both inside and outside the house.

3. They will carry out orders previously received from the Prefect or whoever takes his place, will keep the files they use to manage things in order so they can give specific or overall account at the end of the year or any time they are asked.

4. The Shopper will also do any other tasks entrusted to him by his superiors.

### *Chapter XII - Coadjutors*

1. The Coadjutors or people to whom domestic work is entrusted are of three special categories: cooks, domestics and doorkeepers, who should help each other in anything that is compatible with their respective duties.

2. The Coadjutors are strongly recommended never to take on tasks outside their proper duties, not to take tips from anyone, and not to carry out business or contracts that do not regard the house. If they need to do some personal business they will speak with the Prefect.

3. They should be faithful even in small things. Woe to anyone who begins making small thefts in buying, selling or otherwise. Without noticing it he ends up becoming a thief.

4. Modesty in eating and especially in drinking. Whoever cannot control his greed is a useless servant.

5. No familiarity with boys in the house; respect and charity with everyone in matters regarding their duties, and no special confidences or worse still, particular friendships amongst themselves.

6. They should devoutly go, not less than once a month to confession and communion, and do this in their own church or at the Oratory, so that their Christian behaviour is known by the boys of the house and serves as good example for them.

7. The Coadjutors who belong to the Salesian Congregation should keep to the practices of piety established by their rules.

8. No one should refuse even the least kind of work, and believe that God asks us to account for our fulfilment of the duties of our state of life and not whether we did the most outstanding jobs or had these roles. The one who does even the most menial work has the same reward in Heaven as the one whose life is spent in glaring or public roles. Since each one has special duties, here below is a brief account of what refers to each.

### *Chapter XIII - Cook and kitchen helpers*

1. The Cook or Head of the kitchen should see that food is healthy, economical and ready at the established time. Any delay can cause problems in the community.

2. The Cook should keep the kitchen very clean, and see that no food goes bad. He will also see that lights are not left on where and when they are not needed.

3. Any leftovers of food, fruit, main course or drinks should be kept and not given out except as arranged by the superior.

4. He should strictly forbid any boys or any person from the house from entering the kitchen unless they are working there or have to carry out an order from the superior.

5. According to the needs of the various Houses he can have other people help in with the work in the kitchen, canteen or refectories, and all of them

will take great care of neatness where they are working, tables and stoves, also seeing that there is ventilation.

6. For distribution of foodstuffs they should recall that they are only dispensing it and not the masters, therefore they should follow the guidelines and orders of their superiors.

7. If there is a need for repairs or supplies they advise the Prefect or Bursar.

8. When they have finished their work they will be busy with other domestic tasks and never idle.

9. The Cook or Head of the kitchen should supervise people subordinate to him, and if he notices anything out of place he will immediately advise the Prefect or whoever takes his place.

#### *Chapter XIV - Domestics*

1. It is the Domestics' task to tidy and clean rooms, dormitories, classrooms, stairs, corridors, porticoes, courtyards etc., and take great care of beds, mattresses, linen and clothes.

2. If they find linen, clothes or similar items they should give them to the right person: their owners or the Assistant or the Prefect. In fact when recreation is over, a domestic should see if anything has been left behind and bring it to the Prefect.

3. They will also advise the prefect of breakages or problems they find in the house.

4. They will see that the dormitories and rooms receive the ventilation they need, reminding people to close windows in time and place, especially during bad weather.

5. During the day, if they have free time, they will be available to the Prefect who gives them their respective tasks.

6. Those who look after beds, linen, clothing will take great care to see that they are numbered so as to distinguish items belonging to one or other person.

7. They should see that laundry takes place at the right time, and the necessary mending of linen and clothes is done.

8. Also at the correct time they will see to giving out what each one needs for his bed, and personally, and will collect dirty laundry, seeing that nothing that should be collected is left behind.

9. If someone should leave the house, a Domestic should quickly collect his items and look after them diligently, keeping an orderly note of trunks, boxes, mattresses etc.

10. Order and diligence in preserving and returning what is entrusted to them is of great advantage to the community.

#### *Chapter XV - Doorkeeper*

1. It is the very strict duty of the Doorkeeper to always be at the reception office and kindly receive whoever turns up. When the Doorkeeper has to go elsewhere to fulfil his religious duties, take food or some other good reason, he will see that his place is taken by someone appointed by the superior.

2. He will never allow people into the house without the superiors' knowledge, directing to the Prefect anyone who has business regarding the boys in the house, and in accordance with the rules given by the superiors, he will direct anyone to the Director who wishes to speak directly with him. He will not admit anyone to have an audience with the superiors other than in the hours indicated.

3. He will not allow anyone to leave without having a note indicating the time of his departure and return, except for people who have a note from the superior.

4. Any letter or parcel addressed to the boys or others in the house will be presented to the Prefect or at least he will be given a note, before being given to the one to whom it is addressed. The Prefect may choose to look at it or have it looked at.

5. In the evening he will see that all exits leading out of the establishment are closed.

6. The Doorkeeper will also signal the timetable in the way and at the time indicated by the superior.

7. It is strictly forbidden to buy or sell foodstuffs, keep money and other things with him to please the boys or the parents, as it is also forbidden to receive tips from anyone.

8. He will see that things are quiet, try to prevent shouting, scuffling or any other thing that could disturb the sacred functions, classes, study and work.

9. If necessary he receives the keys from the dormitory, classrooms, workshops and others, and will not give them out to anyone who is not in charge of the place for which they are needed.

10. He gives permission to speak to the boys on the days and at the times established by the superiors. He insists that parents or acquaintances do not speak to the boys outside the parlour, and he should not call anyone to the parlour unless there is an understanding with the superiors. If needed he will ask someone to help him call the pupils.

11. He will note down all requests, but in both receiving and doing them he will always be kind and approachable, believing that meekness and approachability are the principal gifts of a good Doorkeeper.

12. He will also note in appropriate registers any items placed in his care as people enter or leave, and if needs be will ask for the receipt before handing them over. He will not let anyone leave without the permission of the superiors.

13. He will give a note to the superiors if anyone has left without permission, or stays out beyond the time given him. Meanwhile he will be careful to avoid idleness, occupying free time in ways that will be indicated.

### *Chapter XVI - Small theatre*

*Teatrino* (small theatre), carried out according to the norms of Christian moral behaviour, can be of great advantage to the young when its only purpose is to cheer up, educate and instruct the young more than can be done by moral instruction. So that this aim can be achieved it is good to establish:

1. That the subject matter is suitable.
2. Anything which could generate bad habits is excluded.

#### *Suitable subject matter*

1. The subject matter should be suited to the listeners, that is help as instruction and recreation for the pupils without worrying about externals. Guests and friends who come will be satisfied and happy if they see that the entertainment is useful for the boarders and adapted to their intelligence. That said tragedies, dramas, comedies and farces should be excluded which represent cruelty, vindictiveness, immoral behaviour, even if the performance is aimed at correcting this.

2. We believe that vividly represented things make an impression on the boys' hearts, and it is difficult to get them to forget these things by using reason or contrary arguments. Duels, gun or pistol shots, violent threats, atrocious acts should never be part of small theatre. God's name should never be taken unless by way of prayer or teaching, and even less so should there be blasphemy or cursing in order to correct this. Words should also be avoided that if said elsewhere would be regarded as uncivil or too blatant.

3. What should predominate is recitations from passages chosen by good writers, poetry, prose, fables, history, facetious things, as ridiculous as you want so long as not immoral; vocal or instrumental music, solo and choral, duets, trios, quartets, choirs. They are chosen for enjoyment, and to promote both education and good manners.

#### *Things to be excluded*

Amongst things to be excluded are fully theatrical costumes.

1. Costumes should be limited to changing what they own, or things already in the houses or that someone has donated. Costumes that are too elegant flatter the vanity of the actors, and they encourage the boys to go to public theatres to satisfy their curiosity.

2. Another source of disorder are the drinks, candies, foodstuffs, breakfasts, snacks, sometimes given to the actors or stage hands.

3. Experience has convinced us that these exceptions generate vanity and pride in them and envy and humiliation for the ones that miss out. We can add other serious reasons to this for which we believe it is appropriate to establish that the actors receive nothing special and join in with the common table and amusements. They should be happy to take part in common recreation, either as actors or spectators. Having permission to learn how to sing, play, do recitals and the like should already be considered sufficient satisfaction. Then if someone earns a special prize, the superiors have enough means to provide it worthily.

4. So choice of subject matter, moderation with costumes, exclusion of the above-mentioned things are the guarantee of moral value in small theatre.

5. The Directors should carefully see that these separate rules from small theatre are observed as established, and be reminded that this should serve as respite and education for the boys whom Divine Providence has sent to our houses.

6. Every Director, therefore, and the other superiors, is invited to send the Provincial the dramatic components that can be performed according to the above rules. He will collect all the scripts he knows of, examine the ones referred and keep them if suitable, making due corrections.

#### *Duties of the one in charge of small theatre*

1. Someone will be put in charge of small theatre. From time to time he should inform the Director of the House of what he wants to have performed, on what day, and speak to him about the choice of recitals, or the boys who are to go on stage.

2. Amongst the boys chosen for recitals preference should be given to the best behaved. From time to time, for encouragement of everyone, they can be substituted by other boys.

3. Those who are singing or playing should not be involved in recitals: but they can recite a poem or something else at interval.

4. The Trade Masters should be left free of recitals as much as possible.

5. See that compositions are pleasant, and help amuse, but are always instructive, moral, and short. When things go on too long, other than the disturbance for getting them ready, they generally tire the listeners and the value of the performance is lost. It causes even the best material to be boring.

6. The one in charge should always be present for practice and when this is in the evenings it should not go beyond 10. Those who are not part of the recitals should not be at the practices. When practice is over see that each one goes immediately and in silence to bed without stopping to talk. This can be dangerous and cause disturbance to those already resting.

7. The one in charge should see that the stage is prepared on the first day of recitals so there is no need to work on Sunday.

8. He should be rigorous in seeing that the wardrobe is decent.

9. At every pause he should have an understanding with the ones leading the singing and playing as to what music is to be presented.

10. Without good reason he should not allow anyone on stage, less so in the changing rooms; and in that regard he should see that no one is hanging behind chatting there during performances. He should also see that the greatest decency possible is observed.

11. He should see that the theatre does not disturb the ordinary timetable, and if this needs to be changed he will speak first with the superior of the house.

12. In preparing and then dismantling the stage he will prevent breakages as much as possible, costumes being torn, or theatre equipment damaged.



13. If he cannot do everything established in these regulations alone, he will have a helper appointed, a so-called prompter.

14. Actors are to be encouraged to avoid affectation in their voice, clear pronunciation, casual but decisive gestures; this will be easier if they have learned their lines.

15. What is nice and special about our small theatre is that pauses between one act and the other are short, and that recitals are well prepared and from good authors.

NB. In case of need the one in charge could entrust a teacher of the students, an assistant for the trade boys, to help their pupils prepare and recite a short farce or drama.

#### *Chapter XVII - Regulations for the infirmary*

1. Every pupil in the House who feels ill should go to the Catechist, or in his absence the Prefect to have permission to enter and stay, if he needs to, in the infirmary.

2. For all the time he is there he should be obedient to the Catechist, whose place is represented by the Assistant or Infirmarian, one of whom will always be in the infirmary.

3. Those who are convalescing should not leave the infirmary without permission, nor have any contact with people who are not ill. Whoever transgresses this rule will be considered to be well again and must return to common life and his ordinary tasks.

4. Playing games or making noise is not something sick people do. Therefore silence will always be observed in the infirmary, except for the time established for recreation for those convalescing or who are lightly indisposed, but amongst themselves and in an appropriate place. They may not freely enter the room where the more seriously ill ones are without permission, and this will only be given in case of absolute need.

5. The Infirmarian will never allow others to stay by the bedside of those who are sick, unless to fulfil some charitable task that the sick person cannot do himself.

6. It is the Infirmarian's task to see that the doctor visits the sick, and that they are given to him as soon as possible. It would be best for the catechist or whoever takes his place to be present.

7. Every sick person, as soon as he feels that the illness is a bit serious, should ask to receive the sacraments, and the catechist or Infirmarian should also insist on this. Being in God's grace is of the greatest comfort to someone who has to suffer.

8. The Assistant should see that those who are convalescing or are only slightly indisposed do not spend their time in idleness, the father of all vices. According to their condition they can do some pleasant reading, study the catechism, help keep the infirmary clean and things like that.

9. When the doctor or Infirmarian declares that someone is well again, these immediately cease to be in the infirmary, but present themselves to the Catechist or Prefect to be given work to do.

10. It is forbidden to bring in or take food other than what is normally provided for the infirmary, or particularly suggested by the doctor. None of the food found in the infirmary is to be touched without permission.

11. Any kind of bad conversations are strictly forbidden. Whoever comes to know of a companion guilty of scandals of this kind, is seriously obliged to tell the superiors.

12. Whoever wants to enter the infirmary to visit someone who is sick should have permission from the Catechist or Prefect.

13. The Assistant and Infirmarian should see that these regulations are charitably applied for the greater glory of God.

14. Patience is required with the sick people he is looking after. *Patientia vobis est necessaria*, says the Psalmist, and by patience you will possess your souls. *In patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras*.

NB. Every two days the Infirmarian will present the Catechist or Prefect with a note on those who remain in the infirmary to eat.

## Second Part

### REGULATIONS FOR THE HOUSES OF THE CONGREGATION OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

#### *Chapter I - Purpose of the Congregation of St Francis de Sales*

The Houses of the Congregation are established for the general purpose of working for the good of neighbour. In particular they are established for the education of the young during those years of their life when they are most at risk. Accordingly, young people are instructed in the arts and sciences and guided into the practice of Religion and virtue.

In its work of charity the Congregation does not exclude any class of people, but it works by preference for people of the middle and lower classes, since these have the greatest need of help and assistance.

Among the young people of our cities and towns not a few find themselves in situations so desperate that unless they are helped materially every effort expended for their moral education is without effect. Then there are others, somewhat older, who either are orphans or are totally neglected because their parents cannot care for them or refuse to do so. These young people grow up without a trade and without schooling, and their future is put at serious risk unless they find some one who will take them in, start them on a line of work, and teach them discipline and religion. For such as these, the Congregation of St Francis de Sales operates homes (*ospizi*), oratories and schools, located by preference in populous districts where the need is usually greatest. Since it would be impossible to accommodate all those who apply, guidelines are established so that those in circumstances of greater need will be given preference.

## *Chapter II - Admissions*

1. Every college will have a programme or prospectus noting conditions of admission according to the class of people it is working for. For boys to be admitted to a college they need to fit those conditions and this needs to be verified.

2. Everyone needs to have certificates of age, vaccination or smallpox, and state of health. If a health certificate is lacking it can be gained by visiting the doctor. Special care will be taken not to admit amongst healthy and well-disposed boys those who have obnoxious and contagious diseases, or deformities that make them unable to work, or follow the rules and behaviours of the college.

3. Likewise boys will not be admitted who because of their bad behaviour and language could be a stumbling block for their schoolmates. Each one should have a reference from his parish priest concerning his behaviour. As a general rule boys will not be admitted into our houses of education who have been expelled from other colleges.

4. If it is a case of free admission this requires a certificate showing that the father and mother are deceased and that they are poor and abandoned. If they have brothers, uncles or other relatives who can look after them, then they are outside our scope. If the applicant has something of his own he should bring it with him to the house and it will be used to his benefit. It is not right that someone who has something of his own should enjoy the charity of others for that.

5. Our charitable houses will give preferred admission to those who attend our festive oratories, because it is of the greatest importance that we know something of the boy's character before finally accepting him into the house. Every boy admitted to our houses should consider his companions as his brothers and the superiors as those who take the place of his parents.

6. For people who wish to work in the house, other than the above-mentioned certificates, they will need to declare that they are ready to follow the rules and the orders of the superiors for those tasks and places they will

be assigned to. As a general rule we observe that such people should not be too young.

7. Generally speaking, boys admitted free will be guided towards some trade. But since there will be some amongst them to whom God has given a special aptitude for study or liberal arts, our charitable houses will offer to help these boys although they cannot pay anything or at most a modest fee. By doing so these boys can use the gifts that God the Creator has generously given them for their own and their neighbour's benefit. They will not be left to being useless and even a problem for others for want of material means and education.

8. However it would be good to see that these studies do not disturb the rules and timetable of the house, and such students should be models of example for their schoolmates, especially in the practices of piety.

9. No one along these lines will be admitted to study: 1. Unless he has completed his elementary education, 2. Unless he is of outstanding piety which would generally be proven by good behaviour maintained over some time in our houses, 3. Unless his course of study is classical or secondary, running from the first year of Secondary until but excluding Philosophy.

10. Students will be asked to lend some service in the house, like serving at table, teaching catechism and the like.

### *Chapter III - Piety*

1. Remember, boys, that we were created to love and serve God our Creator and that it would be of no value to have all the knowledge in the world if we lacked the holy fear of God. All our temporal and eternal good depends on this holy fear.

2. Prayer, sacraments and the Word of God will help to keep this fear of God.

3. Let prayer be frequent and fervent but never with bad will or disturbing our companions; it is better not to pray than to pray badly. First thing in the

morning as soon as you wake make the sign of the cross and raise your mind to God with a brief prayer.

4. Choose yourself a stable confessor, open every secret of your heart to him every week or fortnight or at least once a month, as the Roman Catechism says; once a month you will make the exercise for a happy death, preparing yourself by listening to some brief sermon or other exercise of piety.

5. Assist at holy mass devoutly and never forget to do some spiritual reading every day, or listen to some.

6. Listen carefully to sermons and other moral instructions. Do not sleep, cough or make any other noise during these. Do not ever leave a sermon without bringing away with you some maxim to practise while you are busy with other things, and give much importance to the study of religion and the catechism.

7. Practise virtue as a young man because the one who waits to give himself to God when he is much older runs the serious risk of being eternally lost. The virtues that are the most beautiful adornment for a young person are: modesty, humility, obedience and charity.

8. Have special devotion for the Blessed Sacrament, the Blessed Virgin, Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, Saint Joseph who are the special protectors of every house.

9. Never take up any new devotion unless with your confessor's permission, and remember what St Philip said to his sons: Do not take on too many devotions but persevere in the ones you have taken on.

#### *Chapter IV - Behaviour in church*

The church, dear boys, is God's house, a house of prayer.

1. When you enter a church first take holy water, make the sign of the cross and bow to the altar if there is only a cross or a picture. Genuflect if the Blessed Sacrament is in the tabernacle; go down on both knees if the Blessed Sacrament is exposed. But see that you do not make a noise, or talk or laugh.

Either be there with respect or do not go to church. The church is God's house, the house of prayer, devotion and not for conversation or distraction.

2. Do not stop at the threshold of the church. Never kneel on just one knee, rudely leaning your elbow on the other. Do not sit back on your heels like puppies do, or lie down on the benches. When walking in the church do not stamp your feet and cause disturbance to anyone praying. Remember too that it is a bad habit, as soon as you enter a church, to stop to look at the people, objects or masterpieces of art in the church before you make an act of adoration to God. It is also a bad habit to stand during Mass only kneeling during the elevation, as it is the custom to do in some towns.

3. During the sacred functions abstain, as far as you can, from yawning, sleeping, looking around, chatting or leaving the church. These defects show little desire for the things of God, disturb others and even scandalise your friends.

4. When you go to your place take care not to move the benches or seats or let them make a noise if you just move them a bit. Never spit on the floor, since this is unbecoming and may risk staining anyone who kneels down.

5. Be recollected also when you leave church, and don't race to the door to be first out. Wait till you have passed the threshold before putting your cap on, and do not stop to talk near the church.

6. When praying do not raise your voice, nor keep it so low that you cannot be heard. Prayers are to be said with composure and not in a hurry. There should not be someone who goes fast and finishes while others are only halfway.

7. When singing divine office, observe the pauses marked by the asterisk, and do not begin the next verse until the choir or other side has finished. Keep your voice in tune and do not shout or sing out of tune, or cause voices to be straggling at the end of verses or refrains.

8. Never open your mouth just to hear your own voice. Think instead that with this hymn you are praising God and your voice echoes the angels in Heaven.

9. When you have the good fortune of serving Mass, note especially what St John Chrysostom says: “around the holy altar, while we celebrate, the choirs of angels are there with the greatest devotion and reverence, so serving the priest in such an exalted ministry is more an angelic than a human responsibility.”

10. See that you learn the ceremonies exactly, bowing and genuflecting properly at the right time. Say the words well pronouncing them clearly, distinctly and devoutly.

11. Never have your hands in your pockets. Do not laugh with your companion or turn around. Only at the right time should you look towards the communion rail to see if anyone is receiving communion.

12. Walk properly as you come and go from the altar but see that the celebrant never has to wait.

13. Go willingly to confession and do not wander through the corridors or courtyard at confession time. Try to prepare yourself well and be recollected.

14. Do not push your companions to pass in front of them but wait patiently for your turn, praying or reading some devout book. But most of all do not talk, even in a low voice.

15. When you go to confession take the best position for the confessor, not forcing him to bend or be uncomfortable. Do not force him to ask you questions at the beginning, but tell him immediately how long it is since your last confession, if you did your penance and went to communion, then tell him your sins.

16. When going to communion do not run to go there fast. Do not wait until the end and if you are very small, remain standing.

17. After communion make at least a quarter of an hour of thanksgiving.

18. During the day have the fine habit of making a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. It may last only a minute but do it daily if possible.



### Chapter V - Work

1. Man, my dear boys, was born to work. Adam was placed in an earthly paradise to cultivate it. The apostle St Paul says: Whoever does not work is not worthy of eating; *Si quis non vult operari non manducet*.

2. By work we mean the fulfilment of the duties proper to your state, be it art or trade.

3. Work will make you well-appreciated by society and religion and will do great good for your soul especially if you offer up everything you do.

4. Amongst your occupations the preferred ones are always the ones commanded by your superiors or prescribed by obedience. Be sure never to omit any of your obligations to undertake things you were not asked to do.

5. If you know something give glory to God for it. He is the author of everything good, but do not become proud, because pride is a worm that gnaws away and makes you lose all the merits of your good works.

6. Remember that you are in the springtime of life at your age. Anyone not accustomed to working at a young age will become lazy and ignorant in old age, will be a disgrace to his town and family and will possibly do irreparable damage to his soul.

7. Whoever is obliged to work and does not do so, is robbing God and his superiors. People who are idle will feel great remorse at the end of their life for the time they have wasted.

8. Always begin work, study and class with the *Actiones*, and the *Hail Mary*, and finish with the *Agimus*. Say these brief prayers well so the Lord will guide your work and your studies, and you can gain the indulgences granted by the Supreme Pontiffs for whoever does these practices of piety.

9. In the morning before beginning work, at midday and in the evening, finish you work and say the *Angelus Domini*, in the evening adding the *De profundis* in suffrage for the souls of the faithful departed. Always say this kneeling except on Saturday evening and Sunday when you say it standing. The *Regina coeli* is said standing, at Easter time.

*Chapter VI - Behaviour in school and study*

1. After piety, study is most to be recommended. Therefore your first task must consist on doing obligatory work and studying your lessons. Only when this is finished can you read a book or do something else.

2. Take great care of books, exercise books and whatever belongs to you; try not to get them dirty or ruin them however they are. Never take the books, paper or exercise books of others. If you need something ask your companion nicely. Do not throw paper under the desks or benches.

3. In the classroom stand up when the teacher or professor arrives or if he is late in coming do not make a noise but wait seated and quietly, going over your lesson or reading a book.

4. Try not to ever arrive late for class. In study or classrooms take off your hat, overcoat and scarf if you have them.

5. If you need to be missing from class or study, for whatever reasons, tell the teacher beforehand so he does not have to come to you. Or at least through a schoolmate. When you come back to the class, before going to your place, tell the teacher the reason for your absence.

6. While explaining avoid the bad habit of whispering, drawing on your book, making paper pellets, scratching the bench, making signals so people admire what you say, or worse showing disgust or annoyance at explaining yourself.

7. Do not interrupt explanations with badly timed questions, and if asked a question, stand up promptly and answer without being in a hurry and without making the other wait.

8. If you have been scolded never answer arrogantly even if you have a thousand reasons. Be humbled yes, but glad that you have been warned. Never be one of those who throws things, throws his books on the ground, lies his head on the desk, all of which indicate pride and bad upbringing.

9. Never laugh at someone who makes a mistake, or doesn't pronounce well or stutters. It is also against charity to make fun of schoolmates who might be behind at school.

10. Scribbling on the blackboard, or writing things on it that might be offensive or make fun of someone, dirtying the walls of the classroom or maps or anything else, pouring out ink or squirting anything on others' clothes, these are all things to be absolutely avoided.

11. Your work should be done with great attention, and pages always kept neat, well-written, not torn at the edges and always leaving a margin.

12. Respect your teachers whether they are from your class or other classes. Always show special respect for those who taught you in earlier years. Gratitude to those who helped you is one of the virtues that is the best ornament for a young man.

13. The study timetable will vary according to the school timetable, but everyone must find out about it.

14. Study begins with the *Actiones and Hail Mary*, and finishes with the *Agimus* and another *Hail Mary*.

15. When study has begun it is no longer allowed to talk, take or lend things unless there is a need. Also avoid making a noise with paper, books, your feet or dropping things or in any other way. When there is a real need, make a sign to the assistant and do everything with minimum disturbance.

16. No one should move or make a noise until the bell indicates that study is over.

17. Study will have an assistant who is responsible for each one's behaviour, both for diligence in turning up and for application to study. Every study row will have a prefect [decurion] and vice prefect helping the assistant.

18. Every Sunday evening there will be a conference for the students, where the school councillor or whoever takes his place will read out each one's marks with some fatherly reflection which will encourage the pupils to improve in study and piety.

19. Anyone who does not apply himself to study or causes disturbance, when discovered, will be warned that if he does not correct his ways, will immediately be given other things to do or sent to his parents.

20. To contribute to keeping people precisely busy and also so that there will be one place where people can quietly read or write according to need without being disturbed, strict silence will be observed in the study hall at all times.

21. Whoever has no fear of God neglects study, and works in vain. Knowledge does not enter an unwilling mind, nor will it live in a body which is a slave to sin. *In malevolam animam scientia non introibit, nec habitabit in corpore subdito peccatis*, says the Lord (Wisdom).

22. The virtue to be especially inculcated in students is humility. A proud student is a stupid and ignorant one. The beginning of wisdom is fear of God. *Initium sapientiae est timor Domini*, says the Holy Spirit. Pride is the beginning of all sin; *initium omnis peccati superbia scribitur*, says Saint Augustine.

#### *Chapter VII - Behaviour in the workshops*

1. In the morning when the practices of piety are over, every trade student will have his breakfast quietly and immediately and in an orderly way, go to his workshop, stopping neither to chat or play around, and he will see that he is not lacking in whatever he needs for work.

2. Work always begins with the *Actiones* and the *Hail Mary*. At the signal for finishing work the *Agimus* with the *Hail Mary* will be said. At midday and in the evening the *Angelus Domini* will be said before leaving the workshop.

3. In each workshop all workers must be submissive and obedient to the assistant and the trade teacher, their superiors, taking great care and diligence in performing their duties, and learning the trade with which they must earn their bread in life.

4. Every pupil should be in his own workshop and never go to the other ones without absolute need and never without due permission.

5. No one should leave the workshop without permission from the Assistant. If there is a need to send someone for a job outside the house, the Assistant will get permission from the Bursar or Prefect.

6. It is forbidden to drink wine, play, fool around in the workshops since these are places for work and not for amusement.

7. Inasmuch as it is compatible with the trade being learned, silence will be strictly observed.

8. Each one should be careful not to lose or break tools from the workshop.

9. Consider that each one was born to work, and only one who works with love and diligence has peace of heart and find his work pleasant.

10. These articles will be read by the catechist or assistant every Saturday in a clear voice. A copy will be kept in the workshop.

### *Chapter VIII - Behaviour towards superiors*

1. The basis of every virtue in a young man is obedience to the superiors.

Obedience generates and preserves all the other virtues, and while it is necessary for everyone, it is especially so for youth. If therefore you wish to acquire virtue, begin with obedience to your superiors, submitting to them without any opposition as you would to God.

2. Here is what St Paul has to say about obedience: “Obey those who have been placed over you to tell you what to do and be submissive to them. They must render account to God for your souls. Obey willingly and not through force so that your superiors can carry out their duty happily and not with tears and sighs.”

3. Be sure that your superiors know they are under serious obligation to do their best in promoting what is to your benefit, and that in advising, commanding and correcting you they only have in mind what is good for you.

4. Those who never let themselves be seen by their superiors do badly. Indeed some hide or flee as soon as they arrive. Remember the example of the chickens. Those who keep closest to the mother hen usually end up getting some special tidbit from her. Those who usually approach their superiors always receive some special advice or counsel.

5. Give them also some external signs of respect that they deserve, greet them respectfully when you meet them, take you cap off in their presence.

6. Let your obedience be prompt, respectful and cheerful at their every command, and do not make excuses to get out of what they ask you to do. Obey even if they ask you to do something you do not like.

7. Open your hearts to them freely, considering them to be a father who dearly wants you to be happy.

8. Accept their corrections gratefully and if necessary receive the punishment for your faults without showing either hatred or disrespect for them.

9. Avoid being amongst those who complain about those who are working so hard for you. This would be the worst sign of ingratitude

10. When a superior asks you about the behaviour of some of your friends, answer according to what you know, especially if it is a case of preventing or remedying some evil. Keeping quiet in these situations could harm your friend and offend God.

#### *Chapter IX - Behaviour with companions*

1. Honour and love your friends as brothers and try to edify one another with good example.

2. Love one another, says the Lord, but be careful of giving scandal. Anyone who gives scandal through words, talk, actions, is no friend but a murderer of your soul.

3. If you can offer some service and give some good advice, do so willingly. At recreation, welcome any of your companions into your conversation without any kind of distinction and be nice to them by letting them join your games. Take care never to talk about your friends' faults, unless you are being asked by your superiors. And in that case do not exaggerate in what you say.

4. We should recognise that everything good and also the not so good things come from God, therefore don't laugh at your companions for their physical or spiritual defects. What you laugh at in others today, the Lord may let happen to you tomorrow.

5. True charity asks us to put up with the defects of others patiently and to be quick to forgive them when they offend us, but we should never attack others, especially ones inferior to us.

6. Pride is to be avoided most of all. Pride is hateful to God and despised by man.

### *Chapter X - Modesty*

1. By modesty we mean a decent way of speaking, dealing with people and walking. This virtue, boys, is one of the most beautiful adornments of your age, and ought to be evident in your every action, in everything you say.

2. Your body and clothing should be clean, your demeanour serene and cheerful, without moving your shoulders or body about, unless honestly necessary.

3. Modesty of the eyes is recommended; they are the windows through which the devil brings sin into the heart. Walk in a moderate way, not in too much of a hurry unless there is a need to do otherwise; When your hands are not busy keep them down and at night cross them upon your breast inasmuch as you can.

4. Never lay your hands on others and never play with your hands on someone else nor walk hand in hand or put your arms around your friend's shoulders, as people sometimes do in the square.

5. Be modest when you speak, never using expressions that offend against charity or decency. At your age it is better to be quiet and modest than to foster boisterous and talkative discussion.

6. Do not be judgemental of others and do not boast of your own worth or virtue. Be indifferent to blame or praise, and humbly accept as from God any correction given to you.

7. Avoid any action or word that is in any way rude or discourteous, and try to correct your defects of character early on. Make every effort to develop a gentle disposition and a way of acting in conformity with the principles of Christian modesty.

8. Modesty also has to do with the way you behave at table. You should bear in mind that food is given to us not as to brute beasts, solely for the satisfaction of a desire. We eat in order to keep our bodies healthy and strong, to serve as means of securing the soul's happiness.

9. Before and after eating join in the customary prayer. And as you eat your food, take care to nourish the soul as well by listening in silence and with attention to the customary short reading.

10. Only food and beverage provided by the house are allowed. Any food or drink received from other sources should be handed over to the superior, who will see to it that it is used properly.

11. You are urged and entreated never to waste even the smallest particle of food. We should always keep in mind the example of our Saviour, who commanded his apostles to collect the leftover pieces of bread, lest they be lost: "*Colligite fragmenta ne pereant.*" Anyone who wilfully wastes even a small amount of food is severely punished, and should be afraid lest the Lord will let him die of hunger.

### *Chapter XI - Cleanliness*

1. You should have cleanliness very much at heart. Neatness and order indicate the cleanliness and purity of the heart.

2. Flee the foolish ambition to be all spruced up and hair done just to look good but do see that your clothes are never torn or dirty.

3. Cut your finger nails in good time and never let them grow too long. Don't leave your shoes undone, and wash your feet often especially in summer.

4. Never leave the room without tidying the bed, cleaning and adjusting your clothes and putting everything in order. Do not leave old shoes or other things under the bed but put them in a cupboard or give them to the right person.

5. Remember to wash your hands and face every morning, for your own health but also not to cause a bother to others.



6. Clean your teeth; this will free you from the bad breath that often comes from your mouth, and from toothache and rotten teeth that often result.

7. You should comb your hair every morning. To take less time and also to keep your head clean, keep your hair short.

8. Make sure your fingers are not dirty with ink, and if you have any dirt on you do not clean it away with your clothes, nor use them to clean your pen when you finish writing.

### *Chapter XII - Behaviour in the house*

1. In the morning when the bell rings or there is a signal from the superior promptly get out of bed, dress with all possible decency, and always in silence.

2. Never leave the room without tidying the bed, combing your hair, cleaning and adjusting your clothes and putting everything in order.

3. When the bell rings a second time go to the chapel to the place indicated to say prayers in common and assist at holy Mass or to your chores, then go to Mass at the time established.

4. While mass is being celebrated say your prayers and the Rosary and at the end make a brief meditation.

5. It is forbidden to look in or rummage around in someone else's bag or desk. Through the day it is forbidden to go to the dormitory without special permission.

6. Avoid taking other people's things, even the least little thing; if you find something give it immediately to the superiors. Whoever tries to pretend it is his will be severely punished in proportion to the theft.

7. Letters or other items received or sent should be handed opened to the superior who may read them if he believes it is appropriate to do .

8. It is strictly forbidden to keep money with you but you should deposit it with the Prefect who will give it out according to particular needs. It is

absolutely forbidden to make contracts to buy, sell, exchange, or have debts with anyone without the superior's permission.

9. It is forbidden to bring anyone into the house or rooms. If you need to talk with someone outside, go to the common parlour. Don't stand around other people while they are engaged in particular conversation. Never bring anyone into the workshops or dormitories since this is a disturbance for whoever enters or works there. It is likewise forbidden to be closed in a room, write on walls, hammer nails in, or break anything of any kind. Whoever is guilty of breaking something is obliged to have it repaired at his expense. Finally it is strictly forbidden for anyone to enter the doorkeeper's room, kitchen except for those who are working there.

10. Be charitable with everyone, put up with other's faults, never use nicknames or say or do anything you would not want said or done to yourself.

### *Chapter XIII - Behaviour outside the house*

1. Remember boys that every Christian is bound to edify his neighbour and that no sermon is more effective than good example.

2. When you leave the house be reserved in your looks, your language and every other action. Nothing can be more edifying than a well-behaved young man. He lets it be known that he belongs to a community of young, well brought up Christians.

3. When you are out on walks, or at school, or doing some job outside the Oratory, never point at anyone on the road, nor laugh loudly, and much less throw stones, jump over ditches and aqueducts. These things show bad upbringing.

4. If you meet people who hold public roles, remove your cap and let them have the better part of the road. You do this too for priests and religious and anyone in authority especially if these people come into or you meet them at the Oratory.

5. When you go past a church or statue or picture do not fail to take off your cap as a mark of reverence. If you happen to go past a church when the

divine services are on, be quiet and stay a good distance away so you do not disturb those inside. If you come across a funeral cortege, take off your cap, and quietly say the *requiem aeternam* or the *De profundis*. If it is a procession stand there with your cap off till it passes. Whenever you meet the Blessed Sacrament being taken to the sick, go down on both knees to adore it.

6. Remember well that if you do not behave well in church or school, at work or on the street, besides having to give an account to the Lord, you will also be a disgrace to the college or house you belong to.

7. If you happen to be with a neighbour or have to deal with a friend who is doing or saying bad things share this immediately with the superior to have the necessary advice and so do things prudently without offending God.

8. Never speak badly of your companions, or how the house is run or the commands of your superiors. Everyone is completely free to stay or not, and it would be a disgrace if he complains about a place where he has full freedom to remain or go where he pleases.

9. When you go for walks it is forbidden to stop on the street, go into shops, make visits or have fun by dropping out of the line. Nor is it allowed to accept invitations to lunch, because you will never be given permission.

10. If you want to do a lot of good for yourself and the college speak well of it always, looking for reasons to approve what is done and what the superiors do for the smooth running of the community.

11. You should give reasonable and spontaneous obedience to all these rules. Those who break these rules will be duly punished, and those who observe them, as well as a reward from the Lord, will also be rewarded by the superiors for their perseverance and diligence.

#### *Chapter XIV - Outings*

1. Outings are a very useful exercise for preserving health, therefore when the rules make provision for them, never refuse but take part.

2. Be ready when it is time to go out, and immediately get into order without people having to wait for you. Note that it is not allowed for boys in one team to go with the other.

3. Every team must have an assistant who is responsible for anything that could go wrong.

4. Those whose clothes and shoes are not clean will not be allowed to leave. Go to the established places and obey the assistant in everything.

5. Walks are not a race, nor should you stop without permission from the superiors. Walks are ordinarily of an hour and a half and never longer than two hours. Personal composure, custody of the eyes, a proper pace should be observed by everyone. The carelessness of one could bring shame on the whole group.

6. When someone is missing, and this will be carefully watched for, it is those who drop out of line. The assistant may not give this permission. Whoever buys things or goes for coffee or into taverns merits expulsion from the house.

### *Warnings*

1. Assistants for the outing should note exactly the time of departure and return.

2. They should not allow someone from another team into their team.

3. They should see that the boys are clean in person and clothes.

4. They should never take the boys into the city or to visit museums, galleries, parks, palaces etc. without special permission.

5. They should not allow anyone to stop along the way, or go away from the assistant for any reason.

6. If it happens that someone commits a fault the Director of Studies or Prefect should be immediately informed.

7. Finally the Assistants should remember that it is a great responsibility before God they have for the boys and in the eyes of the superiors.

*Chapter XV - Behaviour in small theatre*

1. Theatre performances are allowed for your amusement and pleasurable instruction but small theatre is aimed at cultivating the heart and should never be cause for even the least offence to the Lord.

2. Take part cheerfully and be grateful to your superiors who allow you to do this, but never give a sign of disapproval if you have to wait or if something happens that is not to your liking.

3. Running there, also at risk of harm to your companions, or trying to pass in front of the others and find the best place not assigned to you, keeping your cap on while you recite, standing and blocking others' view, and more so crying out aloud, whistling in anyway, or giving other signs of discontent are things to be avoided at all costs.

4. As soon as the curtain goes up be quiet and if you cannot see well do not stand up and cause discomfort to others. If others are standing in front of you do not shout or push them, but kindly ask them and if they do not hear then be quiet and suffer in patience.

5. Do not mock those who make a mistake or do not speak well; never show your disapproval and outside do not complain in any way. When the curtain falls always clap even if the item did not go ahead with the precision people expected.

6. When leaving the theatre do not race to the door but go out in the order indicated. Cover yourself well because the air outside is usually very cold and could be bad for your health.

*Chapter XVI - Things strictly forbidden in the house*

1. Since it is forbidden to keep money in the house, gambling of any kind is also forbidden.

2. Also forbidden is any kind of game where there is a danger of someone being injured or where there is something against modesty.

3. Smoking and chewing tobacco are forbidden at all times, and for whatever reason. Taking snuff is tolerated within limits to be established by the superior on the doctor's advice.

4. Permission is never given to go out with parents or friends for lunch or to buy clothes. If these are needed they can take your measurements and have them bought or ask someone in the office at the establishment.

*Three evils to be avoided at all costs*

Although young people at the college should do everything they can to avoid any kind of sin, nevertheless we especially recommend avoiding the following evils which are especially harmful to youth. They are: 1. Swearing and taking the Lord's name in vain; 2. Dishonesty; 3. Theft.

Believe me boys, that just one of these sins is enough to bring down Heaven's curses on the entire house. On the other hand by keeping these evils far from us we have good reason to call down Heaven's blessings on us and on our entire community.

Whoever observes these rules will be blessed by the Lord. Sunday evening or on another day of the week the Prefect or whoever takes his place will read some article of these rules with a brief moral reflection and analogy.

## Appendix

### TO THE REGULATIONS OF THE HOUSE ON HOW TO WRITE LETTERS

#### *General rules*

We need to write letters every day, therefore it would be appropriate to add some guidelines here as an appendix.

1. Letters are a way we can express our ideas and affections to people who are absent, just as we express them with our voice to our parents.

2. To write good letters it is helpful to read a collection of letters, and I would suggest for this Annibal Caro and Silvio Pellico. Extremely beautiful too are the letters of St Jerome, St Francis de Sales and St Catherine of Siena.

3. The style of the letters should not be too ornamental. Love simplicity. It needs to be spontaneous, like spontaneous speech which is never too refined or abstruse. The style should be precise, brief, but without detriment to clarity. (See no. 10 and 11 at the end of this appendix.)

4. When you need to ask a favour, do not do so in an exaggerated way, making promises you cannot keep, but consider that there is nothing better to move someone in your favour than simple words and frank sentiments.

5. "Sentences," says St Gregory Nazienzen, writing to Nicebolo about literary style, proverbs, maxims and humour "give a letter grace." But they have to be planted, not poured out. Never doing it is rudeness, but the contrary is affectation.

6. Nothing about letters is affectation; everything should be easy and natural.

7. A civil approach does not allow us to question our superiors but if we need to we can use simple forms like these or similar: Allow me, May I ask you ...; Excuse the liberty I take in asking you ... You should not entrust them with tasks or giving greetings and if you wish to you should do this kindly and as a request.

8. It is also good to do this amongst equals, saying for example: Would you be kind enough to see that everything is ready ... I would ask you kindly ... etc.

9. When you mention someone who has a dignified position, do not just say Canon so and so, your Director, but Rev. Canon, your Reverend Director, etc.

10. There can be many kinds of letters: political, scientific, erudite, artistic, didactic, should they regard matters to do with politics, science, literature, arts or study. Instead they are called familiar when they deal with matters of common life.

11. As we speak in everyday life, sometimes to question or answer, to pray or give thanks, to warn or to chide, and when we recommend for or against, or hope for something, so familiar letters *can be letters where we ask a question, or respond, ask for something, or thank, warn, or chide, consult or advise, hope, etc. etc.*

#### *Parts of the letter*

12. Parts of a letter are the introduction, topic and greeting. The introduction is an opening by the writer, a suitable way of coming to the topic he has in mind to write about. This part should be very short and sometimes it can even be left out to come straight to the point. However, when you reply to letters or notes from people in authority or public employees, you should mention the date and subject of the letter you are replying to, saying, for example: *I should respond to your good letter of the 10th of this June regarding ...*

13. The subject is what you want to make clear to the other, a question or invitation, or congratulations or a reprimand, etc.

14. Under the heading of greeting we mean greetings, compliments, protestations of reverence or friendship, that we use to bid farewell to the person we are writing to. It can vary according to what our status is and how we relate to the person we are writing to. For example, writing to a superior you might conclude: with sincere respect, with the greatest respect, with deep reverence ... To simple acquaintances who are not superiors: with real esteem.



To family, friends: with particular affection, with true love. For letters of request it would help to use words like: with the certainty of being listened to ... In thank you letters: with much gratitude ... or similar sentiments in other cases. When letters are sent to illustrious personages the final greeting as such is omitted, and you write only a statement of respect and reverence.

15. When the letter is finished you can sometimes add something, either because you forgot, or because they are outside your subject. This appendix is marked with the letters P. S. (*Post scriptum*); and since it usually means distraction or lack of attention it is better to only use it in familiar letters.

16. When you conclude you should always make it known that we are not pagans, so always add a Christian thought: for example: May Heaven bless you; I will not fail to ask God to keep you in good health; I recommend myself to your prayers. With bishops and cardinals you usually use this formula: I humbly ask your holy blessing, and similar.

### *The writing and form*

17. The letter paper should be clean and complete; for family and friends even half a page is good but use a larger sheet for more distinguished people.

18. The writing should be neat and clear. It is not good to send a letter with marks and crossing out or so badly written that the one who receives it struggles to read it.

19. The lines should be straight. Always leave a small margin. The paper should be cleanly folded.

20. Whoever writes letters should see to the inscription, the date, the subscription and the superscript.

21. The inscription or title of the letter, that is the attribution of honour or affection you give the person you are writing to, should not be abbreviated.

22. After the inscription at the beginning of the letter you leave a smaller or larger space according to the higher or lower status of the person you are writing to; the same rule can be observed for the left margin.

23. Above and below each page it is good to leave a space of at least a complete line, and continue on the other side, beginning at the height of the inscription.

24. In order not to finish the letter right at the bottom of the page, when respect for the person demands it, one usually finishes in such a way as to leave one or two lines for the other side.

25. The date expresses the place, day of the month and the year you are writing in. Ordinarily this is on the right almost at the top of the page. When you are writing to an honourable person it goes to the left, after the letter is finished, and after renewing the title. But see that the date is either before or after the letter without interrupting the thoughts or words that the letter refers to.

26. The subscription is the name of the person writing, and can be accompanied with one or more other items expressing respect or friendship for the person you are writing to. It is slightly detached from the letter, on the lower extremity of the page, to the right.

27. When writing to a person of respect, one line below the conclusion to the letter on the left repeat that person's title, according to his status, and further down on the right put the subscription. For example:

Your Excellency's  
most indebted servant  
N. N.

28. The superscript or address contains the name and surname you are writing to preceded by his titles; then the name of the place the letter is addressed to, and if that person has some employment, or you need to indicate the actual house, that is expressed on another line to the left under the name and surname.

29. The superscript needs to be exact and clear, writing the general title on the first line: for example: To the Distinguished; on the second put the name and surname, then his role, and only on the third line the house and similar,

and when these are not necessary, then the role or employment is best put on the third line. The name of the town or city the letter is addressed to should be written in bold on the bottom right and is usually underlined.

30. When the letter has to arrive at a little known village, it is useful in the superscript to indicate the subdivision or Province where it is found.

31. As for frequency of writing—avoid excess. They are at fault who write in a great hurry and send long letters to others for every little thing, but no less at fault are those who have the opposite vice, find it difficult to respond to the other when there is an urgent need to do so.

32. The frequency of letter writing should follow the same rule as for visits. When there is a need or it would be convenient to write to some, then no one should be remiss. But also no one should go to excess stain the page uselessly.

33. Regarding the most used titles, here are the main ones:

To the Pope: Your Holiness.

To cardinals: Your Eminence.

To bishops and archbishops: Your Reverend Excellency. [My Lord and Your Grace respectively, in English]

To theologians, canons, ecclesiastical dignitaries: Distinguished and very Reverend.

To priests: Very Reverend.

To clerics: Reverend.

To professors: *Chiarissimo* [Just 'Dear' in English!].

To Senators, parliamentarians: Honourable.

To secular dignitaries and some Knights: Distinguished.

To businessmen and artists: *Pregiatissimo* [Just 'Dear' in English!].

To young students: *Ornatissimo* and *Gentilissimo* [Just 'Dear' in English!].

(1) In cases where there are many students and many working boys a catechist can be given their spiritual care.

(2) *Notes for those working in the sacristy.*

1. Observance of silence in the sacristy is recommended for everyone, especially during sacred functions, and the one working in the sacristy should also remind others.

2. Neatness in the church, the sacristy, of all furnishings, the altars, vestment, church benches and pulpit.

3. Great care not to tear, stain vestments or church furnishings, and take care to collect, store and drain the remains of candles, oil, wine.

4. Candles should not be lit before the right time, nor cause disturbance lighting them before the preacher has finished his sermon.

5. Be diligent in folding albs, chasubles and other sacred vestments, except for amices and purifiers which are to be cared for by each celebrant.

6. Sacristans should bring the laundry for washing at the right time, for ironing and also for mending if needed.

7. At community Mass prayers in common are suspended when the *Confiteor*, *Misereatur*, *Indulgentiam*, *Ecce Agnus Dei* are said, for communion and at the sign for elevation of the Host and the Chalice and when the priest gives the blessing.

8. Treat anyone who comes to the sacristy for tasks kindly, and especially if asking for confessors. Warmly thank those who give an offering or stipend for celebration of Masses.

#### IV. DELIBERATIONS OF THE LAST GENERAL CHAPTERS DON BOSCO PRESIDED OVER (1883-1886)

*Amongst the documents drawn up by the third (1883) and fourth (1886) General Chapter of the Salesian Congregation – which the founder also took part in – of particular merit is the new Regulations for the festive oratories and deliberations regarding Orientations for the working boys in Salesian houses. The two documents were published, as already recorded, in 1887.*

*The contents of the Regulations, formulated in the ten short articles it comprises, offer many and marked differences compared with the almost 270 articles of the broader and systematic Regulations of the Oratory of St Frances de Sales for non-residents, found in the earlier pages. It is enough to point to one: of the thirteen roles or responsibilities—with their respective duties—proposed in the 1877 Regulations, the new version in 1887 only has two: the Director of the House and another priest, responsible for the oratory.*

*Such simplification of the organisation however does not mean that the importance of oratory activity has diminished in Don Bosco's thinking and experience. In fact the 1883 General Chapter gave this rule at the same time: in all places where there is a Salesian house there will be a festive oratory to be considered as "the most important work"; the Salesians, priests and lay, are called to cooperate in its smooth running, regarding it as the "single prospect for salvation" for many boys.*

*In the third General Chapter in 1883 the agenda for the first time contained a theme regarding the "worker's side of Salesian houses", then studied further in the fourth (1886) <sup>67</sup>.*

*In the manuscripts preserved in the Salesian Central Archives we find no handwritten interventions by Don Bosco, president of the Assembly. The draft of the last two stages in drawing up the document shows traces of some of the*

<sup>67</sup> *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale della Pia Società salesiana tenuti in Valsalice nel settembre 1883-86. San Benigno Canavese, Tipografia Salesiana 1887, pp. 18-22.*

*more outstanding chapter members: Luigi Nai, Michele Rua, Giovanni Marengo, Giulio Barberis, amongst others.*

*In this regard, Eugene Ceria writes: “Don Bosco in 1886, a little more than a year before his death, called together and presided at the fourth General Chapter in which they aired improvements to be introduced amongst the working boys. A range of norms resulted, few but fundamental ones drawn up under Don Bosco’s gaze and communicated to the houses by him. They are almost a brief charter of Salesian vocational centres for every time and place.”*<sup>68</sup>

*The “important norms” of 1887 were a relevant step in transforming the early trade workshops at Valdocco into schools of arts and trades*<sup>69</sup>.

*The variations between the critical text of the final document of the fourth General Chapter and the one printed in 1887 are few, and in general more of a stylistic or formal nature. Only in a couple of cases is it considered appropriate to signal the modifications introduced by a footnote.*

## **182. Regulations for the festive oratories**

Critical ed. in *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale della Pia Società salesiana tenuti in Valsalice nel settembre 1883-86*. San Benigno Canavese, Tipografia Salesiana 1887, pp. 22-24.

Article 3 of Chapter 1 of our Constitutions says that the first exercise of charity of the Pious Society of Saint Francis de Sales is to gather poor and abandoned boys to instruct them in the holy Catholic religion, especially on Sundays.

To attend more effectively and widely to this noble intention it helps very much in the cities and towns where there is a Salesian house, to also set up a

<sup>68</sup> E. CERIA, *Annali della Società salesiana. Dalle origini...*, p. 653.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Sante REDI DI POL, *L’istruzione professionale popolare a Torino nella prima industrializzazione, in Scuole, professioni e studenti a Torino...* Torino, Centro Studi sul Giornalismo Piemontese 1984, p. 81; cit. by José Manuel PRELLEZO, *La “parte operaia” nelle case salesiane. Documenti e testimonianze sulla formazione professionale (1883-1886)*, in RSS 16 (1997) 370.

recreation ground or festive Oratory for non-resident youngsters who most need religious instruction and are exposed to the risk of depravity.

For which the third General Chapter deliberates as follows:

1. Every Director should take care to set up a festive Oratory near the house or Institute, if it does not already exist, and develop it if it has already been founded. He should consider this work to be one of the most important entrusted to him, and should recommend the place to the charity of benevolent and well-to-do people to have the necessary funds. He should speak often of it in conferences, encouraging the confreres to be involved and instructing them about it, and never forget that the festive Oratory was once the cradle of our humble Congregation.

2. As a lasting memory of this and as an example and help for other houses the festive Oratories of St Francis de Sales and St Aloysius Gonzaga in Turin, and the one attached to the house at San Benigno Canavese are to be especially promoted and supported, and as far as possible clerics and other Salesians are to be employed in them so they can be made more capable of exercising an important ministry of charity on behalf of youth at risk.

3. In distribution of personnel for each house the Provincial, in agreement with the Director of the House should have in mind each year to establish a priest put especially in charge of the festive Oratory, and the Director should take loving care to see that he has the material and personnel help necessary for its smooth running.

4. All Salesians ecclesiastical or lay should consider themselves fortunate to lend a hand to the work, convinced that this is an apostolate of the highest importance, since at present the festive Oratory is for many young people, especially in the cities and suburbs, their only prospect of salvation.

5. For the regular setting up and development of the Oratory everyone should try to keep good and harmonious relations with the local ecclesiastical authority.

6. Where there are colleges and hospices, communications between boarders and non-residents are to be prevented. To obviate any danger and

disturbance, inasmuch as it is possible, design a place next door with an appropriate courtyard, separate chapel and whatever is needed for games, classrooms and bad weather.

7. Especially encouraged are games and amusements of various kinds in accordance with age and the usage in the area, this being one of the most effective means of attracting boys to the Oratory.

8. To foster frequent attendance and good behaviour in the festive oratories it also helps much to have prizes to distribute at fixed times, for example books, devotional items, clothing; also raffles, outings, simple small theatre, music classes, celebrations etc.

9. The smooth running of the festive Oratory depends above all on having a true spirit of sacrifice, great patience, charity and kindness to all, so the pupils will always have and keep a dear memory, and come even when they are adults. Also to be promoted amongst them are the Sodalities of St Aloysius, Altar Boys, etc.

10. The General Chapter approves the regulations for the festive oratories printed separately.

### **183. Orientation to be given to the work section of Salesian houses**

Critical ed. in RSS 16 (1997) 388-391<sup>70</sup>.

Amongst the principal works of charity that our Pious Society carries out is that of taking in, as far as possible, boys that are so abandoned that any care seems useless for instructing them in the truths of the Catholic Faith, and also setting them on the path to some art or trade. Therefore in houses where the number of working boys is considerable one member could be put in charge of taking particular care of them. He can be called the professional councillor.

<sup>70</sup> *Indirizzo da darsi alla parte operaia nelle case salesiane, e mezzi onde svilupparne e coltivarne le vocazioni [1887]*, in J.M. PRELLEZO, *La "parte operaia" nelle case salesiane...*, pp. 353-391; ID., *Las escuelas profesionales salesianas. Momentos de su historia*. Madrid, Editorial CCS 2012; cf. *Dei giovani artigiani, in Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale...*, pp. 18-22.



The aim that the Pious Salesian Society proposes in accepting and educating working boys is to bring them up in such a way that when they leave our houses, and once completed their practical training period, they have a trade with which they can honestly earn their bread in life. They will be well instructed in religion and have the scientific knowledge appropriate to their state.

It follows that there must be a threefold orientation given to their religious and moral, intellectual and professional education.

### *Religious and moral orientation*

A good religious and moral education is gained by putting the following norms into practice:

1. By taking great care to see that the regulations of the houses are faithfully practised.
2. The pupils are often reminded to think of God and their duty, and are convinced that good behaviour and the practice of religion is proper and necessary to every kind of person.
3. Care is taken that they know they are loved and respected by the superiors, and this is obtained by treating them with the spirit of true charity. Only this can make them good.
4. To revive the study of the catechism, establish an appropriate exam (twice a year?) and special prizes to be given out with a certain solemnity to those who do best.
5. They should also be taught Gregorian chant so that when they leave they can take part in religious functions in the parishes and confraternities.
6. Other than the existing Sodalities the Blessed Sacrament Sodality can be introduced to encourage frequent communion.
7. Where possible the younger ones should be separated from the older ones, especially in the dormitory and recreation.

8. Avoid the inconvenience of having students amongst the working boys who have been reprimanded for their behaviour. If the Director believes he should make an exception for special reasons he should send them to other houses.

9. Every two months the Director should hold a conference for the assistants and workshop heads to hear the observations they have, and to give them guidelines and appropriate instruction for the good running of the workshops, and when needed also invite outside instructors if there are some.

10. In view of the great need we have for many trade teachers so we can always open new houses and reach out to a greater number of boys to give them the benefit of education, each confrere should try by his good example and charity to inspire in some pupils the desire to join our Pious Society, and when someone is accepted as a novice he be sent, even at some sacrifice, to the novitiate.

11. It is important to place the pupil who has finished his practical training with good and Christian employers and that he be given a letter to be given to his parish priest.

12. It would be appropriate<sup>71</sup> to enrol them amongst the Salesian Cooperators and recommend them to some Catholic Workers Society.

### *Intellectual orientation*

So that the working pupils may follow up their professional training with some literary, artistic and scientific knowledge they need, it is established that:

1. They have a hour of class every day: for those with greater need they can have class in the morning after community Mass until breakfast. Where the law requires more it is best to adapt to what is prescribed.

<sup>71</sup> In the printed *Deliberations* it adds: "if their conduct is good enough" (*Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale...*, p. 18).

2. A school programme will be drawn up to be implemented in all our houses with working boys also indicating the books to be read and explained in class.

3. The boys will be classified after they have sat a trial exam, and their instruction will be entrusted to practical teachers.

4. Once a week a superior will give a class on good manners.

5. No one can be admitted to special classes like drawing, French etc. if not sufficiently instructed in material from the elementary classes.

6. At the end of the school year there will be an exam to see the benefit each pupil has gained and the most worthy will receive a prize.

7. A certificate will be printed to give the young man when he has finished his practical training and wishes to leave the institute. This certificate will clearly note what he has learned in arts and trades, his religious instruction and his good behaviour.

### *Professional orientation*

It is not enough for a working pupil to know his profession well. For him to practise it with profit he needs to have practice with different kinds of work and do them skilfully.

### *To obtain the first of these it will help:*

1. To support the likely inclination of the boys in their choice of art or trade.

2. To provide able and upright trade teachers, also at some financial sacrifice, so that in our workshops they can do the various kinds of work to perfection.

3. The professional councillor and trade teacher will divide, or consider as divided, the gradual range of works involved in the art taken as a whole into many courses or grades. The pupil will move through these so that after his apprenticeship he will fully know his trade and how to carry it out.

4. It is not possible to determine the duration of the practical training period since not all the arts require equal time to learn, but as a general rule we could establish five years.

5. In every professional [vocational] house there should be an annual display of work done by our pupils when prizes are given out. Every three years there should be a general exhibition involving all of our trade schools.

To obtain ability and skill in work it will help:

1. To give the pupils a weekly mark in both work and conduct.
2. To distribute work according to contract establishing a percentage for the young man in accordance with a system prepared by the committee.
3. The house for the trade boys' novitiate should be well stocked with the necessary items to perfect them in their various professions and have the best Salesian trade teachers.

PART THREE

**WRITINGS AND TESTIMONIES  
OF DON BOSCO  
ON SPIRITUAL LIFE**

*by*  
Aldo GIRAUDO



## INTRODUCTION

*Don Bosco, a prolific religious writer, is not considered a “spiritual writer” in the classic sense of this term. We don’t find texts by him which are analogous to the autobiographical writing of Saint Teresa d’Ávila, St John of the Cross or St Teresa of Lisieux. Nor did he write treatises or manuals of spiritual life similar to the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola, or the Spiritual Combat by Lorenzo Scupoli, the Introduction to the Devout Life by Francis de Sales, the Exercise of Perfection and Christian Virtues by Alonso Rodriguez or other ascetic works by Alphonsus Liguori. Nevertheless he left a broad testimony of spiritual teaching throughout his many writings and documented in memoirs collected by his disciples. This is why he can be considered a “master of spiritual life” especially for his very fruitful activity in forming saints, a spiritual guide of communities and individuals, founder of congregations, initiator of a historical movement with unmistakable features which become a true school of Christian holiness<sup>1</sup>.*

*If we compare features of his magisterium and praxis with those of other spiritual schools we see clear connections with the teaching of St Francis de Sales, and substantial elements assimilated, through St Joseph Cafasso, of the moral and ascetic teachings of St Alphonsus Liguori, classic spirituality, Jesuit literature. In his apostolate too and especially in his outstanding charity to the young we see many points of contact with St Philip Neri. But Don Bosco remains original.*

<sup>1</sup> On dependence and originality of Don Bosco’s spiritual teaching cf. Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Vol. 2. *Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità*. Roma, LAS 1981. Amongst the more significant summaries of Don Bosco’s spirituality, other than the already cited one by P. Stella, we have: Francis DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco et la vie spirituelle*. Paris, Beauchesne 1967; Joseph AUBRY, “La scuola salesiana di don Bosco”, in Ermanno ANCILLI, *Le grandi scuole della spiritualità cristiana*. Roma, Pontificio Istituto di Spiritualità del Teresianum; Milano, O.R. 1984, pp. 669-698; Pietro SCOTTI, *La dottrina spirituale di don Bosco*. Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale 1939; Alberto CAVIGLIA, “Savio Domenico e Don Bosco. Studio”, in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco nuovamente pubblicati e riveduti secondo le edizioni originali e manoscritti superstiti*. Vol. 4. Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale 1943, pp. 5-590; ID., “Magone Michele” una classica esperienza educativa. Studio, in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco...* Vol. 5. Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale 1965, pp. 131-200; ID., *Un documento inesplorato. La Vita di Besucco Francesco scritta da Don Bosco e il suo contenuto spirituale*, in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco...* Vol. 6. Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale 1965, pp. 105-262.

*Through the Introduction to the Devout Life and the Spiritual Treatises, Francis de Sales passed on to him, reworked, the substance of Italian spirituality of devout Humanism stressing the beauty of piety, source of spiritual joy, keeps a balance between human will and grace, and loves simplifying practices so they can be readily available to common people. The Italian spiritual school also has a somewhat combative approach that comes from awareness of the presence in the human heart of the “double law” encouraging ‘spiritual warfare’, mortification of the senses, prayer and sacramental practice with a view to growth in virtue. Like Francis de Sales, Don Bosco looks optimistically at this struggle, in the certainty of victory, because of his belief in the power of sanctifying grace, the effectiveness of the Blood of Christ which makes human effort fruitful and makes the way to holiness possible for the little ones including youngsters. In consideration of this latter group’s psychological structure, he looks after little things, gives more importance to inward mortification than corporal mortification, relies on inner joy and emotion in piety, insists on unifying the life of prayer and action, educates to a spirit of adaptation and conciliation without ever detracting from the total gift of self to God.*

*This “giving oneself to God” which he insisted on with his boys is none other than the invitation to conversion through generosity and to the primacy of divine love, overcoming attachment and withdrawal. Substantially it is about leading each one to fully and finally take up his baptismal promises, live out one’s baptism as a boy or teenager; being happy to put God at the centre of one’s life, thoughts, interest. What springs from this is an inner energy which is fruitful in daily life in spiritual terms, gives rise to purification, virtue, aims at an active holiness, that is a well-integrated and joyful Christian existence which expresses itself in fleeing from sin, practical charity, union with God, fidelity to one’s duties especially duties of one’s state in life, and fervent and fruitful human relationships.*

*The consequence of this choice is a life of zeal, marked by fidelity, obedient and joyful observance, permeated by kindness, warmth, service, action; it is an ongoing thing demonstrating self-control, purification of the heart and practising virtue; it becomes testimony, apostolic energy, vocation to serve the Church and society. From this point of view Don Bosco is more ascetic than mystic, even if love of God is the driving force, and even though the piety he fosters is characterised by perfect union of contemplation and action. It could not have been different given*



*his contemplative but active character. He was a contemporary apostle. He wanted to be salt and light, the Gospel leaven in the earthly city in view of reaching the heavenly one.*

*Unmistakeable features of Don Bosco are his insistence on the centrality of obedience as a way of perfect conformation to Christ in the generous gift of self; his emphasis on the “beautiful virtue”, chastity, as essential for loving intimacy with God and a source of grace, as perfect realisation of giving oneself to Him who is loved above all things; the pedagogical worth of the sacraments of penance and Eucharist; promotion of a devotion to Our Lady inseparable from the decisive inner orientation to virtuous perfection by corresponding in practical terms to grace, zeal for the glory of God, the spirit of prayer, the exercise of everyday virtue, Eucharistic and apostolic fervour: a Marian devotion which could kindle a desire in young people for perfection at the highest level<sup>2</sup>.*

*A special aspect of his spirituality is the active and decisive role given to the Christian educator, his or her patient guidance, burning charity, zeal, daily dedication, and particular style of “assistance”. This is where we can place any discussion on the role of the confessor as educator, a friend of the soul who earns trust and gives rise to confidence; teaches the art of examination of conscience, forms to perfect contrition, encourages good resolutions, guides along the path of purification and virtue, introduces to taste for prayer and practice of God’s presence, teaches ways to fruitful communion with Christ in the Eucharist. Frequent confession and communion are intimately bound up with Don Bosco’s spiritual pedagogy. Regular diligent confessions promote life “in God’s grace” and nurture a virtuous energy enabling one to approach frequent communion more worthily; at the same time conditions are created so that in Eucharistic communion God can take possession of the heart, so that grace finds the ideal inward conditions for it to be effective, transforming and sanctifying.*

*These features can be found throughout Don Bosco’s spiritual magisterium. The spirituality of the Salesian religious is also imbued with this. The resolute*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. CAVIGLIA, Il “Magone Michele” una classica esperienza educativa, in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di don Bosco*. Vol. V, p. 156.

*giving of oneself to God which he proposed to the boys becomes a more radical, total thing in religious consecration, underlining the absolute primacy of God and the practical demands of following him unconditionally through the vows, a movement of complete conformation to Christ who is offered up in sacrifice. The substance is the same, that of an ardent charity that nurtures the unconditional gift of self in a practical but energetic unity which becomes obedient availability, spirit of sacrifice, ongoing work in the service of the mission, simplicity of life, serene chastity, fraternity, loving and solicitous service, and faithful observance.*

*In this third part, dedicated to Don Bosco's writings and testimonies on spiritual life, the quantity and variety of documentation meant a selection had to be made. The criteria adopted are historical relevance, significance and the role they can play as examples. There are six sections: 1. Guidelines on spiritual life for the young; 2. Indications on spiritual life for Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians; 3. Guidelines for consistent, active Christian life; 4. The Marian dimension of Salesian spirituality; 5. Zeal for the salvation of souls: Don Bosco's models; 6. His Spiritual testament. Each section is introduced by a brief "presentation" illustrating and contextualising the sources it contains and criteria for choice.*

## SECTION ONE

### GUIDELINES ON SPIRITUAL LIFE FOR THE YOUNG

#### Presentation

*There is no systematic writing by Don Bosco on spiritual formation of the young. However we find a good amount of printed material, biographical testimonies, formative interventions where we can identify a well-defined view of Christian life, along with some specific recurring themes, emphases on values and attitudes, insistence on virtuous behaviour to be nurtured and risks to avoid. All this allows us to reconstruct Don Bosco's spiritual horizons well-anchored in cultural parameters and sensitivities typical of his time and setting, and which clearly belong to earlier spiritual traditions. Just the same they display spiritual principles and pedagogical features which are particular to him and allow him to transpose them into a historical context and culture which was different from 18th century Italy. The items we present here are significant and exemplify this.*

*The section has four parts.*

*The first comprises substantial parts taken from the Companion of Youth (1847). This was a fundamental work by Don Bosco, “adapted to the times and the young”—as he writes in his Memoirs of the Oratory—“appropriate for their religious ideas, based on the Bible”, and in which he explains “the basics of the Catholic religion with maximum brevity and clarity.”<sup>3</sup> It is not just a collection of prayers but a small handbook on spiritual life with meditations, edifying readings, instructions and devotions aimed at nurturing the spirit of piety, touching youngsters' hearts and guiding them towards a complete and joyful Christian life. Study of this document is fundamental for grasping the basic features of Don Bosco's spiritual pedagogy<sup>4</sup>.*

<sup>3</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*. Introductory essay and historical notes by Aldo Giraudo. Roma, LAS 2011, p. 164.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Pietro STELLA, *Valori spirituali nel “Giovane provveduto” di san Giovanni Bosco*. Roma, Scuola Grafica Borgo Ragazzi Don Bosco 1960.

*The second part includes a sample of letters addressed to individual boys or Salesian educational communities. We see features of Don Bosco's spiritual direction, his practical realism and tendency to simplify things—this was not a lowering of ideals but an educational strategy. The Christian orientation of his proposals is very clear. His suggestions are demanding ones. We see his constant reminders of daily life, its challenges and the responsibilities stemming from it. Don Bosco has the art of providing transcendent horizons of meaning and enthusiastic visions of the future and these inspire a very active life. Convinced of God's effective action in the human heart, he knows how to work with a youngster's better feelings, native generosity, in order to arouse real cooperation with sanctifying grace.*

*The third part draws on the original Regulations for the sodalities: St Aloysius Gonzaga (1847), the Immaculate Conception (1856) and the Blessed Sacrament (1858). The sodalities were excellent tools for spiritual formation of the youthful élite at the Oratory and in Don Bosco's houses. They were reserved for boys who were more sensitive to interior life, and available for an all-encompassing spiritual journey, open to cooperating in educating their companions. The sodalities were an excellent nursery for Salesian vocations.*

*The fourth part has examples of Don Bosco's talks to the boys, usually as Sunday instructions, or evening conversations ( "goodnights") or accounts of his dreams. They are a good demonstration of a style of formation which was all Don Bosco's own.*

## 1. THE COMPANION OF YOUTH

*The first edition of Il giovane provveduto (in English The Companion of Youth) appeared in 1847 and was Don Bosco's greatest publishing success. The year he died it had reached its 119th edition. It was reprinted with minor adaptations until 1961<sup>5</sup>. It is also the book which Don Bosco most liked and constantly recommended.*

*It represents a point of arrival for his pastoral experiences amongst boys at the early Oratory and is the basis for developments in his plans for youthful holiness. We find in it the content and model of Christian living which he offered the boys, his unmistakable "horizons of youth spirituality."<sup>6</sup> This was the author's intention, declared right from the preface, where he says he wants to teach "a method of Christian living which is cheerful and content at the same time", "brief and easy, but sufficient" so young people can become "the consolation of their parents, an honour to their town, good citizens on earth to then be the fortunate inhabitants of heaven."*

*From the point of view of its content the book is split into three parts plus an appendix with hymns. The first part has a series of instructions and reflections on God, his special relationship with the young, Christian duties, eternal truths and the example of St Aloysius Gonzaga.*

*The second part offers a range of "particular exercises of Christian piety" which are out of the 18th century devotional context but chosen and organised for the special kind of Christian life Don Bosco liked to offer and in tune with his personal sensitivities: morning and evening prayer; suggestions for assisting fruitfully at holy Mass and approaching the sacraments; prayer for a visit to the Blessed Sacrament*

<sup>5</sup> [Giovanni BOSCO], *Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de' suoi doveri, degli esercizi di cristiana piet  per la recita dell'ufficio della beata Vergine e dei principali vesperi dell'anno coll'aggiunta di una scelta di laudi sacre ecc.* Torino, Tipografia Paravia e Comp. 1847; Giovanni BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de' suoi doveri e degli esercizi di cristiana piet ...* 119a ed. Torino, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1888; ID., *Il giovane provveduto per la pratica dei suoi doveri e degli esercizi di cristiana piet . Latest edition, revision of the original*, adapted for current use in the devotional section. Torino, Societ  Editrice Internazionale 1961.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. P. STELLA, *Valori spirituali nel "Giovane provveduto"...*, pp. 80-126.

*and for spiritual communion; prayers to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Our Lady of Sorrows and other devout practices; prayers for the exercise for a happy death; an instruction on choice of state (included much later, after 1878).*

*The third part of the Companion of Youth has the Office to Our Lady and prayers for Vespers throughout the year.*

*Here we include the complete first and second parts of the Companion of Youth, including prayers and devotional practices common to 19th century Catholicism. Even here Don Bosco's publishing work has an unmistakable feel about it. It is very instructive for the reader to retrace the texts the boys at Valdocco used for prayer every day, full of devout affections and spiritual energy, fruitful practical resolutions and ethical responsibility, targeted at ascetic and virtuous activity.*

*Scholars have identified the authors Don Bosco referred to frequently, but have also noted his criteria for selection or exclusion, his emphases and the connotations which give the work an unmistakable personal imprint<sup>7</sup>. For example, the comment on the traps the devils sets for the boys to distract them from giving themselves to God from their childhood and the statement of perfect harmony between religion and happiness. Especially his insistence on childhood as a favourable time for working on virtue, and on a complete baptismal way of life with good results throughout life. The age of youth, according to Don Bosco, is the "key to one's whole earthly existence"<sup>8</sup>, a responsible and constructive age, a happy occasion for entering into a special relationship with God and for undertaking a virtuous and happy journey to holiness (Servite Domino in laetitia).*

*Other issues arise, and will recur constantly in the Saint's magisterium: the need to always be ready, because death can come at any moment, by always keeping our eye on our fate; union with God in a loving and self-giving relationship through prayer, devotional practices, and brief thoughts about God, offering things*

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Vol. 2. *Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità*. Roma, LAS 1981; Francis DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco e la vita spirituale*. Leumann (Torino), Elle Di Ci 1970.

<sup>8</sup> Pietro BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*. Third edition corrected and revised. Roma, LAS 2009, vol. I, p. 232.

*up; Marian devotion; the exercise of specific virtues such as love and fear of God, obedience and purity, charity and service; the exact and joyful fulfilment of one's duties of state; seeing to meditation, listening to the word of God, catechetical education; the need to mortify the senses, flee bad companions and occasions of sin; the strategic centrality of the sacraments of confession and communion which are the pillars of the formation approach Don Bosco used.*

*The importance of the Companion of Youth emerges especially when read in the light of all of Don Bosco's teaching and "his entire system and lifestyle" by which he immerses young people at the Oratory in daily life<sup>9</sup>. The reader can see this by comparing with other texts in this collection, especially the lives of Dominic Savio, Michael Magone and Francis Besuccho.*

#### **184. The Companion of Youth in the Practice of Religious Duties**

Critical ed. in [Giovanni BOSCO], *Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de' suoi doveri degli esercizi di cristiana pietà per la recita dell'ufficio della beata Vergine e dei principali vesperi dell'anno coll'aggiunta di una scelta di laudi sacre ecc.* Torino, Tipografia Paravia e Comp. 1847, pp. 5-143 (OE II, 185-323).

##### *To the young*

There are two main snares by which the devil usually tempts young people away from virtue. The first is to convince them that the service of the Lord consists in living a life of melancholy, devoid of all pleasure and enjoyment. This is not the case, my dear friends. I would like to teach you a kind of Christian life that will make you happy and contented. I want to show you what true enjoyment and pleasure is, so that you may follow the advice of the holy prophet David: "Serve the Lord with gladness: *servite Domino in laetitia.*" This, then, is the purpose of the present book: to teach you how to serve God and to be always happy.

The second snare is the hope of a long life, with the expectation of conversion in old age or when death threatens. Be careful, my dear boys, because many have been deceived in this manner. What assurance have we got that we shall

<sup>9</sup> P. BRAIDO, Don Bosco prete dei giovani..., I, p. 233.

ever reach old age? We cannot expect death to await our convenience at old age, since life and death are in God's hands, and he apportions them as he sees fit. If God, however, grants you a long life, listen to the serious warning that he has uttered: A young man according to his way—even when he is old, he will not depart from it. *Adolescens iuxta viam suam etiam cum senuerit non recedet ab ea*. In other words, if we lead a good life when we are young, we shall be good when we are old, and our death will be happy, the beginning of eternal bliss. On the other hand, if vice takes hold of us in youth, it will gradually grow in the course of the different stages of our life until death, which will be the terrible herald of a most unhappy eternity. That this misfortune may not befall you, I have drawn up a scheme of life, brief and easy enough, which will enable you to be a joy to your parents, and a glory to your country, making you good citizens upon earth, and one day blessed inhabitants of Heaven ...

My friends, I love you with all my heart, and your being young is reason enough for me to love you very much. You will certainly find books written by persons much more virtuous and much more learned than myself; but, I assure you, you would be hard put to find anyone who loves you more than I do in Jesus Christ, or who cares more about your true happiness than I do. May God be always with you, and grant that by the practice of these few suggestions you may save your souls, and thereby increase His glory. That is the sole purpose of the writer of these pages.

Live happily and may the Lord be with you.

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

## **Part one: Things needed for a young person to become virtuous**

### *Article 1 - An understanding of God*

Look around you, my dear children, and see the wonders in the heavens and upon earth. The sun, moon, stars, air, water and fire are things that at one time did not exist. They could not have come into existence of themselves. God in his omnipotence made them out of nothing; hence he is called the



“Creator”. When God, who always was and ever will be, had created what we see in this world of ours, he gave existence to man, who of all visible creation is the most perfect. Therefore our eyes, ears, tongue, hands, and feet are all gifts of God.

Man is distinguished from all other animals in a special manner, for he is endowed with a soul that thinks and reasons, and desires what is good, and judges what is good or what is evil. The soul, since it is a spirit, cannot die with the body; for when the body has been carried to the grave, the soul enters on another life that will never cease. If during its time on earth it has done good, it will be ever happy with God in Paradise, where it will enjoy happiness for all eternity. But if it has done evil, it will be punished with terrible pain in hell, where it will undergo the torments of fire and loss forever.

Bear in mind, my dear children, that we were created for Heaven. God, who is our loving Father, will condemn to Hell only those who deserve it on account of their sins. Oh! How much God loves us! How much God desires that we perform good works, so that we may share in that great joy which he has prepared for all of us in the eternity of Heaven.

*Article 2 - God loves the young exceedingly*

Since we are persuaded, my dear children, that we are created for Heaven, we should direct all our actions to this great end. The reward that God promises, and the punishment with which He threatens us should move us to act accordingly. Though He loves all people, since they are the work of His hands, still He has a particular love for the young, and tells us that He finds pleasure in their company: *Deliciae meae esse cum filiis hominum*. So then you are the delight and the love of the God who created you. God loves you, and He expects many good works of you; He loves you, because you are natural, humble and innocent; in a word, because you have not yet fallen a victim to the snares of the devil.

Our Divine Saviour also shows a special kindness towards you. He assures us that he considers all favours done to you as done to him. He threatens terribly those who give you scandal. Here are his own words: “But he that shall

scandalise one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea.” He wished children to follow him: he called them to himself, he embraced them and gave them his blessing.

Since Our Lord loves you so much as the young people you are, you should form the sincere resolution to act in response to his love by doing whatever pleases him, and by avoiding whatever might offend him?

*Article 3 - The salvation of the soul depends greatly upon the time of our youth*

Two places have been prepared for us in our future life. Hell for the wicked where they will suffer every pain. Heaven for the good where they will enjoy all sorts of good things. Our Lord also wants you to know that if you practise virtue in your youth, you will be confirmed in it for the remainder of your days, which will be followed by an eternity of glory. On the other hand, if you begin badly in your youth, you will surely continue so until death, and inevitably secure hell for yourself. Therefore, when you see people addicted to the vices of drunkenness, gambling or swearing, you can be sure that these vices began in their youth: *Adolescens juxta viam suam, etiam cum senuerit non recedet ab ea* (Pr 22:6). Ah! “Remember your Creator,” we are admonished, “in the days of your youth”; Indeed, elsewhere he declares that the man who began to observe the commandments from his youth is a happy man.” This truth was well known to the saints, especially to St Rose of Lima and St Aloysius Gonzaga, who very early on began to serve the Lord fervently, and later found no satisfaction save in what pertained to him, and thereby became great saints. The same can be said of the son of Tobias, who from the earliest days of his childhood was always obedient and submissive to his parents. When they died, he continued to live most virtuously until his death.

But some of you may object: if we begin to serve God now, we shall become sad and depressed. This is not true. He who serves the devil is miserable, even if he pretends to be happy, because in his heart he never ceases to hear the reproach: You are unhappy because you are the enemy of God. Who was more affable or more cheerful than St Aloysius Gonzaga? Who was more happy

and joyful than St Philip Neri? And yet we know that their lives were entirely spent in the practice of every virtue. Courage then, my dear friends; employ your time virtuously, and I assure you that your heart will always be happy and contented. As a consequence you will experience how sweet and pleasing it is to serve the Lord.

*Article 4 - The first virtue of youth is obedience to parents and superiors*

A tender plant, though planted in good soil in the garden, will put down weak roots and finally wither away unless cultivated carefully until it gains strength. So you, my dear children, will surely yield to evil if you do not allow yourselves to be guided by those who have responsibility for guiding you. This guidance is the responsibility of your parents and those who take their place; to them you owe willing obedience. "Honour your father and your mother," says Our Lord, "that you may have long life upon the land." But in what does this honour consist? It consists in obeying, respecting, and assisting them. As for obedience, when they give a command you should carry it out promptly, without any show of opposition. Do not act like those who murmur, shrug their shoulders, shake their heads, or worse still answer back insolently. Such children give great offence to their parents and to God himself, for the Will of God is expressed through the commands of our parents. Our Saviour, although all-powerful, submitted himself to the Blessed Virgin and to St Joseph, the humble carpenter, becoming obedient to his Heavenly Father unto death, even to the death on the cross.

You should likewise show great respect to your father and mother, and never undertake anything without their permission. Never show impatience in their presence, and never reveal their faults. St Aloysius always first sought his parents' permission, or, if they were absent, he even asked leave of the servants. Young Louis Comollo was obliged one day to stay away from home longer than his parents had allowed, but when he returned he humbly and sorrowfully asked pardon for his involuntary disobedience.

You must also be ready to wait on your parents, and assist them when they are in need, both for the domestic services you are capable of doing but even

more by giving them any money, gift, clothing you might receive and other such ways that are open to you. Pray to God for them morning and evening, asking him to grant them every spiritual and temporal good.

What I have said to you about obedience and respect for parents, you should also practise towards your superiors, be they ecclesiastics or lay. Likewise you should obey your teachers with respectful humility and willingly accept instruction, counsel and correction. Be assured that whatever they do is to improve you. Be convinced also that obedience shown to your superiors is, as if it were, shown to Jesus Christ himself and to Mary most holy and to St Aloysius.

I recommend two things to you with all my heart. The first is that you be sincere with your elders, not covering up your failings by pretending, much less denying them. Always tell the truth frankly; as well as offending God, lies make you a child of the devil, prince of lies, and when the truth is known you will then have a reputation as a liar and will not be trusted either by superiors or friends. Secondly, let the advice and warnings of your superiors be your rule of life and work. Blessed are you if you do this; your days will be happy; everything you do will be properly ordered and will edify everyone. So let me conclude by saying to you: give me an obedient child and he will be a saint. Otherwise he will be lacking in every virtue.

*Article 5 - The respect due to churches and other things belonging to religion*

Obedience to and respect for your superiors needs to be joined by respect for churches and all other things belonging to religion. We are Christians, therefore we should respect everything regarding this state and especially the church which is called the Lord's temple, a place of holiness, a house of prayer where anything we ask God for will be given us. *In ea omnis qui petit accipit* [Lk 11:10]. Ah my dear boys! What great pleasure you give Jesus Christ, what good example you give to the people if you are there devoutly and recollectedly! When Saint Aloysius went to church the people ran there to see him and they were all edified by his modesty and behaviour. When you come into church, without running or making a noise take the holy water and then kneel and adore the Blessed Trinity with three *Glory be to the Fathers* etc.

In case it is not yet time for the sacred functions you can recite the joys of Mary or some other exercise of piety. See that you do not laugh in church, or speak without necessity, because just one word or smile is enough to cause scandal and disturb those present at the sacred functions. Saint Stanislaus Kostka was so devout when he was in church that often he did not hear people call him nor felt them when they pushed him as his servants used to do when they wanted him to return home.

I recommend the highest respect for priests and religious. Accept with respect whatever they suggest to you; take off your cap as a sign of reverence when you are speaking with them or you meet them on the street. But mainly do not show disrespect for them in words or deeds, because when some young men mocked the Prophet Elisha by calling him names, God punished them by letting bears come out from the forest and mauling forty of them. Whoever does not respect the sacred ministers must fear that the Lord will do something bad to them. Whenever you speak about them imitate young Louis Comollo who used to say: “Either speak well of priests or keep quiet.” I should also warn you never to be ashamed of being Christians outside of Church. When you go past a church or statue or picture of Mary, do not fail to take off your cap as a mark of reverence. Thus you will show that you are true Christians and the Lord will fill you with blessings for the good example you have shown to your neighbour.

#### *Article 6 - Reading and the Word of God*

As well as the usual morning and evening prayers I also urge you to spend some time reading some books dealing with spiritual matters, like the *Imitation of Christ*, the *Introduction to the Devout Life* by St. Francis de Sales, the *Preparation for Death* by St Alphonsus, *Jesus at the Heart of the Young*<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> The *Imitation of Christ*, the *Introduction to the Devout Life* by Saint Francis de Sales and the *Preparation for Death* by St Alphonsus Maria de Liguori were commonly known in Don Bosco's day and are even still published today (especially the first two); *Jesus at the Heart of the Young* was a small book by Canon Giuseppe Zama Mellini (1788-1838), written in terms of an affectionate conversation between Jesus and the reader.

If you read some parts of these books indicated above you will find they are of great advantage to your souls. You will have twice the merit before God if you recount what you have read to others, or you read it in their presence, especially if someone cannot read.

A body without food gets sick and dies, and the same thing happens to our soul if we do not give it its food. The Word of God is food, nourishment for the soul, meaning sermons, explanations of the Gospel, and the catechism. So make every effort to be in church when you should be, pay close attention while there and then try to apply the things they offer you to your state in life. It is very important that you attend catechism lessons; it is no good your saying: "I have already been promoted for holy communion" because even then the soul needs food just like the body needs food; and if you deny the soul this food you put yourselves at risk of very serious harm.

I recommend that you make every possible effort to go to your parishes and fulfil these duties of yours. God has given your parish priest the special task of looking after your souls. Be careful too of the snares of the devil when he suggests to you: he is doing this for my friend Peter, or yes, that would be good for Paul. No, my dear friends, the preacher is speaking to you. All the truths he is telling you are intended for you to apply to yourselves. And on the other hand what is not helpful for correcting you will help to keep you away from certain sins.

When you listen to a sermon, try to remember it throughout the day, and in the evening, especially before going to bed, pause a moment to reflect on what you have heard. If you do this it will be of great advantage to your soul.

### **Things that young people should flee from most**

#### *Article 1. - Flee from idleness*

Idleness is the principal snare the devil puts before youth, and a sorry source of all other vices. So be convinced, my dear boys, that man was born to work and when he ceases to do so he is off-centre and runs a great risk of offending the Lord. There is nothing that torments the damned in hell more

than having spent the time God gave them to save themselves in idleness. On the contrary there is nothing that consoles the blessed more in heaven than the thought that a little time spent for God has earned them an everlasting good.

However I do not mean you should be busy from morning to evening without a break, for there are many things you can do that can bring delight but also can be very useful.

For example this could be studying history, geography, mechanical or liberal arts, other studies and domestic work. You can enjoy yourself but also gain useful and honest knowledge and keep your superiors happy; and indeed you can also enjoy yourself with games and legitimate amusements which can be recreation and not weigh you down. But do not undertake these amusements without first asking proper permission and prefer ones that give you bodily skills since they are better for your health. Keep far away from certain kinds of chicanery, confidence tricks, sleight of hand, quirky stuff which sows discord and offends charity amongst your friends. While you are playing, or in conversation or other pastime raise your mind to God sometimes, offering these very amusements for his greater honour and glory.

Once St Aloysius was asked, while happily playing with some of his peers, what he would have done at that moment if an angel had warned him that the Lord would be calling him to his fearful judgement in a quarter of an hour's time. He promptly answered that he would have continued his game, "Because I know for sure," he said "that these games please the Lord."

But what I warmly encourage you to do in pastimes and recreations is to keep away from bad companions like the plague.

### *Article 2 - Fleeing bad companions*

There are three kinds of companions. Some are good, others are bad; some are not completely bad but neither are they good. You can be with the first group and it will do you good; you can deal with the last group when there is a need, without becoming too familiar. You have to keep away absolutely from

the bad ones. But who are these bad companions? Pay attention and you will understand who they are. All those boys who are not ashamed of using obscene language in your company, or dubious or scandalous words, murmuring, lies, perjury, curses, blasphemy, or try to keep you away from church or ignore your duty - these are bad companions, ministers of Satan whom, you should avoid like the plague and the devil himself. Ah my dear friends, I beg you with tears in my eyes to flee and abhor companions like these!

Listen to what the Lord says: “The one who walks with virtuous people will also be virtuous. The friend of idiots will also be like them. Avoid the bad companion like you would avoid being bitten by a snake: *tamquam a facie colubri.*” So if you go with the good people, I assure you you will go to heaven with good people. On the contrary if you stay with the bad ones, you will be bad yourself to the irreparable loss of your soul.

Someone will say: there are so many bad companions around that you would have to get away from this world to avoid them all. I know there are many bad companions and that is precisely why I am so warmly recommending your fleeing them. And if that means you have to be alone to avoid them, well, lucky you. You will have Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin, your guardian angel as company. Could you find better companions than these? Nonetheless we can also have good companions and these will be ones who frequent the sacraments, go to church, encourage you to do your duty and do not engage in talk that offends the Lord. So go with them and you will draw great profit from it. When the young David began going with a good companion called Jonathan, they became good friends to their mutual advantage; one encouraged the other in practising virtue.

### *Article 3 - Avoiding bad conversation*

How many young people end up in hell because of bad conversations! Saint Paul already preached this truth when he said that filthy things should never come out of the mouth of the Christians, since they are the ruin of good morals: *Currumpunt bonos mores colloquia prava.* Think of these conversations like food: a dish might be good but just one drop of poison in it can kill



whoever eats it; the same goes for obscene language. A word, a gesture, a joke are enough to teach malice to one or more companions and boys that were innocent little lambs of Jesus Christ become the unfortunate prey of the devil.

Someone might say: "I know of the sad consequences of bad conversations but what can we do about it? I find myself at school, in a workshop, in a shop, or doing the work I have to do and there they carry on with this kind of talk." I too know there are these kinds of places, so I am suggesting the rule for getting away without offending the Lord. If these people are less important than you then correct them quite firmly; when they are people you cannot reprimand then get away from them if you can and if you can't, then be quite firm about not taking part, neither with words or a smile and say in your heart: "Jesus, have mercy on me." There will not be any lack of people who laugh at you and mock you, but that does not matter. There will come a time when the laughter and mockery of the evil ones will turn into wailing in hell, and the contempt that the good have felt will change into the most consoling happiness in heaven: *Tristitia vestra vertetur in gaudium* [Jn 16:20]. If you remain firm on the Lord's behalf, it will come to pass that these same scoffers will be forced to appreciate your virtue in such a way that they will no longer dare to trouble you with their perverse reasoning.

Wherever St Aloysius Gonzaga was, no one dared use an indecent word and if someone was about to say something like that he was soon told: keep quiet - Aloysius is here.

#### *Article 4 - Avoid scandal*

When the devil does not succeed in catching a boy, he makes use of scandalous individuals. How many grave sins must weigh on the conscience of boys who give scandal in church, on the street, in class or elsewhere in their work? They are guilty in God's eyes for all the sins of the people who have observed them. And then what should we say about those who teach evil to people who are still innocent? Let these wretches hear what the Saviour says to them. Taking a child by the hand one day and turning to the multitudes listening to him, he said: "Woe to the one who scandalises a child;

unfortunately there is scandal in the world, but woe to the one who gives it. It would be better for him to have a millstone around his neck and be thrown into the depths of the sea.” If we could ever remove scandal from the world, how many souls would go to paradise who on the contrary are eternally lost in hell. So watch out for this breed of villains and flee them more than the devil himself. A girl of tender age, when she heard scandalous talk said to the one saying it: away from here, your accursed devil. My dear boys, if you want to be true friends of Jesus Christ and make up for the great evil that scandals cause to souls, try to give good example. So let your conversations be good and modest; be devout in church, obedient and respectful to your superiors. Oh how many souls will imitate you and walk the way to paradise! You will be sure to go there too, because anyone who saves a soul can basically hope to save his own: *Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti*. These are the main things, my dear boys that you must avoid in the world: they are few but enough to go about life in a virtuous and Christian way. Happy are you if you avoid them. I assure you that you will gain your eternal salvation.

*Article 5. - How to act during temptation*

Even at your tender age, my dear children, the devil sets snares to steal your soul. You have to be very careful not to fall when you are tempted, or when the devil suggests to you to do something wrong. One way of keeping out of temptation is to avoid occasions of sin, such as evil conversations and immoral public shows, which are not good for you and worse still where you always learn something bad. Always try to keep busy and when you don't know what to do, decorate your little altars with images or holy pictures, or spend some time in healthy amusement, if your parents allow you. When you are tempted, do not trifle with the temptation and let the devil take hold of your soul. Rid yourself of it at once by work or prayer. If the temptation still remains make the Sign of the Cross, kiss some holy object and say: “St Aloysius, help me not to offend God.” I am naming this Saint because he is proposed by the Church as the special protector of the young. In order to conquer temptations he avoided all occasions of sin; he fasted frequently on bread and water; he scourged himself so violently that his clothes, the walls, and the floor were

stained with his innocent blood. Thus St. Aloysius mastered his temptations. In this manner you also will triumph, if you strive to imitate him at least in the mortification of the senses. Above all, in temptations against modesty have recourse to him, and you will keep free from sin.

*Article 6 - Some tricks the devil uses to ensnare the young*

The first trick the devil uses to trap your soul is to suggest to you, however could it be possible for forty, fifty or sixty years for you to promise you will walk the difficult road of virtue always avoiding all pleasures.

When the devil suggests this you answer him: “Who can assure me I will reach that age? My life is in the Lord’s hands, and even today could be the last one of my life.” How many were once happy, doing well, having fun and today are being taken to their grave? And even when we have had to work hard for some years for the Lord, will we not be abundantly compensated by an eternity of glory and pleasure in heaven? Also we see that those who live in God’s grace are always happy, and even when there are problems their heart is content. On the other hand those who always give themselves to pleasure are upset and make every effort to find peace in their pastimes but are always more unhappy: *Non est pax impiis* [Is 48:22].

Someone might say: “We are young. If we start thinking of eternity, hell, this will make us melancholic, and it might even send us off our head.” I grant that thinking about a happy or unhappy eternity, thinking of never-ending punishment may be a dark and scary thought. But tell me: if just thinking about it sends you off your head, what would it be like going there? Better to think of it now and not end up there in the future; and for sure if we think of it now we will be saved from it. But observe that if the thought of hell is sad, the hope of paradise where we will enjoy everything that is good, fills us with consolation. Therefore the saints, while they thought seriously of an eternity of punishment, lived very happily with a firm trust in God that they could avoid such punishment and one day possess the endless infinite good that the Lord has prepared for those who serve him. So courage my dear boys, try to serve the Lord and then you will see how content your heart will be.

*Article 7 - Warnings for boys who have enrolled in some congregation or oratory*

If you have the good fortune to be enrolled in some congregation or oratory try to go there regularly and observe all the rules exactly as explained by the superiors. I especially recommend the greatest respect for the directors of these holy places. Always try to ask permission if you have to be absent. Be especially modest and quiet in church, reading or listening to some devout book being read until it is time for the service. Then with your mind uplifted and in recollection sing the Lord's praises. If you are going to confession or holy communion always try to do it in your congregation or oratory, since this will contribute much to good example and will encourage others to frequent the sacraments.

Then if your oratory has good things like recreation on Sundays take part willingly and avoid fights, using nicknames or showing dissatisfaction with the games that are given out. If you hear of something in that holy place that is going wrong, run quickly and tell the superior quietly so he can prevent any other wrongdoing that might eventuate.

It would be wonderful if those who are better instructed could tell some stories to the others.

Be sincere in your words and avoid telling lies, because if you are caught lying, other than offending God, you are disgraced before your friends and your superiors. I also encourage you to have a childlike confidence in your director turning to him when you have some doubt of conscience. Be very respectful also to your superiors especially if they are priests, and when you meet them doff your cap and kiss their hand reverently. When they speak to you answer their questions humbly and sincerely. Those who have some task as cantors, assistants and the like should take care to be the most devout and zealous in everything regarding the practices of piety. I encourage everyone to be very exact in observance of the rules, each vying to show himself the most devout, the most modest and the most accurate in the exercises of devotion.

## Seven reflections for each day of the week

Since I would really like you to do a little spiritual reading each day, and not everyone can have the right books, I am giving you seven very brief reflections, one for each day of the week. They should be helpful for those who do not have the right books. When you are kneeling down say: “My God, I am sorry with all my heart for having offended you. Give me the grace to understand well the truths I am about to reflect on. Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, pray for me.”

### *First reflection for Sunday: The purpose of man*

1. Consider, my son, that this body of yours, this soul of yours were given to you by God without any merit of yours, creating you in his image. He made you his child by holy baptism. He loved you and does love you as a tender father, and the only purpose for which he created you is to be loved and served in this life, to then be happy in heaven. You are not in the world only to enjoy, become rich, to eat, drink and sleep, like the animals but your purpose is to love your God and save your soul. If you do this, how much consolation you will have at the moment of your death! On the contrary, if you do not serve God, how much remorse you will feel at the end of your life when you realise that your wealth, pleasures have only saddened your heart! You will regret having wasted so much time with no benefit for your soul. My son, see that you are not one of these that only think of pleasure, amusements and at the final hour will be eternally lost. A secretary of the King of England when he was dying said: poor me! I used so much paper writing letters for my King but never used a single sheet writing down my sins to make a good confession.

2. You should also consider that if you save your soul, everything will go well and you will rejoice forever, but if you err, you will lose body and soul, God and Heaven and will be forever damned. See that you are not amongst those who say: “I will commit this sin then confess it afterwards”, since God condemns the one who sins while hoping for forgiveness: *maledictus homo qui peccat in spe*. Everyone in hell had some hope of amending their behaviour, but now they are eternally lost. Who knows if he will have time to confess?

Who can assure you that you will not die soon after sinning and that your soul will not go straight to hell? And besides, how stupid can it be to catch a disease in the hope that there will be a doctor to cure you? So let go of sin. It is the worst of all evils and deprives you of everything that is good.

3. How many there are in the world who think of everything except saving themselves! If I tell someone to go to the sacraments, do some prayer each day and he answers: "I have other things to do. I have to work, I have to enjoy myself." Oh God! Do you not have a soul? So whatever you do, say or think, see that it is all for your soul, because it would be the greatest imprudence to think seriously about something that is going to soon come to an end and think so little about eternity which never ends. Saint Aloysius could enjoy pleasures, riches and honours but gave everything up saying: "How does this help me for eternity? *Quid haec ad aeternitatem.*"

You should also conclude: "I have a soul; if I lose it I have lost everything. Even though I gain the whole world, if it does harm to my soul what have I gained? If I become a great man, if I acquire riches, if I gain a reputation for wisdom and know all the arts and sciences of mechanics, music but I lose my soul, what good does it do me? All the wisdom of Solomon is of no use if you are lost. So only the soul should be the purpose for all my activity. It is a case of being always blessed or always unhappy, so let everything go as long as I am saved. Oh my God, forgive me my sins and see that I never ever have the disgrace of offending you, and that indeed I may faithfully serve you in the future. Mary, my hope, intercede for me."

*Monday: On mortal sin*

1. Oh if only you knew, my dear children, what you do when you commit a mortal sin! You turn your back on God who created you, and who has granted you so many favours. You despise his grace and his friendship. The sinner in fact says to Our Lord: "Depart from me, I no longer wish to obey you; no longer do I want to serve you, to recognise you as my Lord: *Non serviam.* I want no other God than pleasure, vengeance, anger, bad talk or blasphemy." Can one imagine an ingratitude more monstrous than this? And yet you do this every time you offend your Creator.

2. Greater still will this ingratitude appear to you when you reflect that, in sinning, you employ those very gifts God gave you. Ears, eyes, mouth, tongue, hands, feet—they are all gifts of God, and you made use of them to offend Him. Imagine Our Lord speaking to you: “My child, I created you out of nothing; I gave you all that you have; through me you were baptised, and brought up in a good Catholic atmosphere. I gave you everything you have. You were condemned to death by sin, and I died for you. I shed my blood to save you, and you still wish to offend me?” Who is not overcome with sorrow for having offered so great an insult to God, who is so good and so gracious towards us, his wayward creatures?

3. Moreover you should consider that this God, who is so good, always feels greatly indignant when you offend him. Hence you should greatly fear lest your sins become so numerous that he will finally abandon you. *In plenitudine peccatorum puniet*. Not only will the divine mercy be withheld from you, but you will also lack time to seek it, because he who abuses the mercy of God in order to offend him, does not deserve mercy. How many have hoped in conversion and not having had time to adjust their conscience, on the approach of death have been eternally lost? Take heed lest the same fate befall you. After Our Lord has pardoned you so many times, you should rightly fear lest, for a fresh mortal sin, the divine wrath may strike you and send you to hell. Thank God for withholding his judgement, and make a firm resolution, saying: “Too often, Lord, I have sinned against you. I do not want to spend the few remaining years of my life offending you. Instead I will spend them in loving you and repenting for my sins. I am heartily sorry for them all. My Jesus, I want to love you. Give me strength. Most holy Virgin and my Mother, help me. Amen.”

### *Tuesday: Death*

1. Death is the departure of the soul from the body, and complete separation from the things of this world. Consider, therefore, my child, that your soul will one day have to leave your body. You do not know whether death will come to you in bed, at your work, in the street or elsewhere. The bursting of a vein, a bad cold, a haemorrhage, a fever, a wound, a fall, an

earthquake, a stroke of lightning – any of these is enough to deprive you of life. Death may take place a year hence; within a month, a week, an hour, or perhaps a moment after finishing the reading of this meditation. How many there are who have gone to sleep at night feeling well and in the morning have been found dead! How many there are who meet with some accident and die instantly; and then what is their fate? Happy are they who have been in the grace of God for they are eternally happy, but if instead they were in mortal sin, they are eternally lost. Tell me, my dear child, if you were to die at this moment, what would happen to your soul? If you are unprepared take heed of this warning. He who today is unprepared runs the great risk of dying in mortal sin.

2. Although the time and place of your death is uncertain, yet there is nothing more certain than that death will come. However let us hope that the final hour of your life may not come unexpectedly or violently but gradually and with the usual sickness. A day will come at any rate when you will find yourself stretched on a bed, awaiting your departure to eternity. You will be assisted by a priest who will recommend your soul to God. Your gaze will be fixed on a crucifix and in your hand you will hold a candle lighted for you by another. Around will stand your weeping relatives. Your head will be in dreadful pain, your sight weak, your tongue parched, your mouth closed, your chest congested, your blood chilled, your body worn out, and your heart laden with sorrow and depression. When you have breathed your last your body will be wrapped in a few rags and lowered into a grave. There your flesh will decay and be consumed until only the bones and a little dust will be all that remains of you. Open a tomb and see what has become of a youth who, perhaps, was once rich, proud and ambitious. Read this, my child, and prepare for a good death. Now the devil, to induce you to sin, will try to cover and belittle your faults, telling you there is no great evil in such and such a pleasure, in disobedience, in missing Mass on Sundays, but in death you will discover the seriousness of your sins and they will all be brought before you. And what will you do then at the point of your departure for eternity? Woe to those, who at that moment are not in the state of Grace.



3. Consider that your eternal happiness or your eternal damnation depend on that fateful moment. On the brink of eternity, as the last sighs escape our lips, in the light of that candle how many things will be known! Twice is a lighted candle held before us; once at baptism and then at the moment of our death. The first time, that we may know the precepts of Divine Law, which we are to keep; the second to let us see if we have kept them. Then, my child, in the light of that candle you will see if you have loved your God or neglected him; if you have honoured his Holy Name or if you have taken it in vain. You will see if you have misspent the Holy days of Obligation and failed to attend Mass on Sundays. You will see all the disobedience to superiors, and scandal given to your companions. You will see the pride which deceived you; you will see everything in that moment on the threshold of eternity: *momentum a quo pendet aeternitas*. Oh awful, terrible moment on which depends eternal glory or eternal misery! Do you understand what I am saying? On that moment depends whether you go to heaven or to hell; whether you will be always happy or always tormented; whether you will be forever a child of God or a slave of the devil; whether you will rejoice with the angels and the saints in heaven or groan and burn with the damned in hell for all eternity. These are great issues for your soul and reflect that upon a good life depends a happy death and eternal glory. Therefore delay no longer but prepare to make a good confession and to put your conscience in order. Promise God to forgive your enemies, to repair the scandal you have given, to be more obedient, to abstain from meat on the appointed days, to waste no more time, to keep the Holy days of Obligation in a worthy manner, to fulfil the duties of your state. Meanwhile place yourself in the presence of God and tell him with all your heart: “My God, from this moment I return to you. I love you and I want to love and serve you unto death. Most Holy Virgin, my Mother, help me in that moment. Jesus, Joseph and Mary, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with you.”

#### *Wednesday: Judgement*

1. As soon as your soul has left your body you will immediately stand before the Divine Judge. The first thing that renders this appearance terrible

to the sinner's soul is that it stands alone before the God it has despised, who knows every secret of the heart and every thought. What do you bring with you? You shall bring as much good and evil as you have done in life: *refert unusquisque prout gessit sive bonum, sive malum* [2 Cor 5:10]. One can then find no excuse or pretext. You will see before you an angry Judge. On one side will appear the sins that accuse you, and on the other the devils ready to lead you away to condemnation. Your conscience will trouble and torment you. At your feet a gaping hell will be ready to engulf you. In such straits where will you turn, where will you flee to? Happy will you be my child if you have done good things in life. The Divine Judge will open the book of conscience and begin the scrutiny: *Iudicium sedit et libri aperti sunt*.

2. Then the examining Judge will say: "Who are you?" "I am a Catholic", you will answer. "Very well," he will reply "if you are a Catholic let us see if you have acted as one." Then he will begin to remind you of the promises made at Holy Baptism, in which you renounced the devil, the world and the flesh. He will remind you of the grace bestowed upon you, the sacraments you frequented, the sermons, instructions, counsels of your confessors, corrections from your parents. Everything will be laid open before you. "But," the Divine Judge will say, "you have despised many of my gifts and graces. Oh, how badly you have corresponded to your Christian profession! At the time when you had hardly begun to know me, you began to offend me with lies, with lack of respect in church, with disobedience to your parents and with many other transgressions. At least with the increase of your years you could have regulated your actions better; but no! With your years you also grew in disregard for my Law. Masses missed, Holy days ignored, blasphemy, confessions badly made, communions often made sacrilegiously, scandal given to your companions; this is what you did instead of serving me." He will then turn with anger to the scandal-giver and say: "Do you see that soul treading the path of sin? By your scandalous talk you are the cause of that. As a Catholic you should have shown your companions the way to heaven by your good example; but instead, betraying my Blood, you have shown them the way to perdition. Do you see that soul down there in hell? It was you who by your evil counsel snatched that soul away from me and handed it to the devil. You were the

reason for it going to eternal perdition. Render up your own soul now for the soul you have lost by your scandal: *Repetam animam tuam pro anima illius.*” What are your thoughts, my child, at this scrutiny? What is your conscience telling you? There is still time, ask God forgiveness for your sins with a sincere promise never to sin again. Whatever heat, cold, hunger, thirst, illness or displeasure you have to suffer, do it for the Lord as penance for the sins you have committed.

3. To this rigorous account that the Supreme Judge exacts, the sinner will try to present some excuse or pretext. He will plead that he did not know he had to undergo such a strict examination. But he will receive the answer: “And did you hear no sermons? In the catechism did you not read that I would exact a strict account of everything?” The unfortunate one will then commend himself to the Divine Mercy but it will be in vain because the time for mercy is over. He will turn to the angels, the saints, to Mary Most Holy, and she will answer in the name of them all: “Do you seek my help now? You did not want me for your mother in life and now I cannot have you as my child. I know you not: *nescio vos.*” The sinner, finding no escape, will cry to the mountains, the stones to cover him and they will not stir. He will call upon hell and he will see it open: *Inferius horrendum chaos.* At that moment the inexorable Judge will pronounce the terrible sentence: “Unfaithful son, depart from me. My heavenly Father has condemned you; I also condemn you. Depart and go into eternal fire to weep and suffer with demons for all eternity: *Ite, maledicti, in ignem aeternum* [Mt 25:41].” When these words are uttered the soul is abandoned into the demons’ hands. They will take it away, plunge it into the abyss of suffering, pain and torment for eternity. Do you not fear a judgement such as this? Ah for the love of Jesus and Mary prepare a favourable sentence for yourself by good works. Remember that though the condemnation pronounced against the wicked is a terrible one the invitation of Jesus will be a consolation to the one who has lived as a good Christian. “Come,” he will say, “posses the glory I have prepared for you. You served me, now you shall rejoice eternally: *Intra in gaudium Domini tui*” [Mt 25:21]. “My Jesus, grant me the grace to be one day numbered amongst the blessed in heaven. Most Holy Virgin, help me; protect me in life and in death, and especially when I present myself before your Divine Son to be judged.”

*Thursday: Hell*

1. Hell is a place destined by Divine Judgement for the eternal punishment of those who have died in mortal sin. The first pain the damned suffer in hell is to find themselves in an abyss of fire. Fire in the eyes, fire in the mouth, fire in every part. Every sense will suffer its own pain. The eyes are blinded by fire and darkness, terrified by the sight of the devils and other lost souls. The ears, day and night, hear nothing but continual howling, lamenting and blasphemy. The sense of smell suffers terribly from the suffocating fumes of sulphur and burning pitch. The mouth is afflicted with a burning thirst and ravenous hunger: *famem patientur ut canes* [Ps 58:7]. The rich man, in the midst of these torments, raised his eyes towards heaven and begged for just a tiny drop of water to moisten his parched tongue, and a drop of water was denied him. Then those unfortunate souls, burning with thirst, devoured by hunger, tormented by fire will cry out moaning and despairing. Oh hell, hell, how unhappy are the souls that fall into it! What do you say my child? If you died at this moment, where would you go? If now you cannot hold your finger over a candle flame, cannot suffer a spark of fire on your hand without crying out, how will you stand those flames for all eternity?

2. Consider, my child, the remorse that the conscience of the damned will feel. They will continually remember the reason why they are lost; for some pleasure, giving vent to some passion; this is the worm that will never die: *vermis eorum non moritur* [Mk 9:45]. They will remember the time given them by God to save themselves from eternal perdition, the good example of their companions, the good resolutions they made and never carried out but will see this at a time when there is no remedy. The will can no longer have what it desires; on the contrary it suffers every evil. The intellect will know the great good it has lost, meaning paradise. Oh God! Who could put up with such torment! My child, if you care not now whether you win or lose paradise and God, you will know your blindness when you see so many of your more ignorant companions and people poorer than you are in triumph, enjoying the kingdom of heaven while you, condemned by God, are being sent away from that blessed land, the enjoyment of God himself, from the company of the Blessed Virgin, the angels and the saints. Do penance now, do not wait

until there is no time left. Give yourself to God. Who knows but this may be the last call, and if you do not correspond, God may abandon you and let you plunge headlong into eternal suffering.

*Friday: Eternity of suffering*

1. Consider my child, that if you go to hell you will never leave it. There all pains are suffered throughout eternity. A hundred years will pass after you are sent to hell; a thousand will go by and hell will be only beginning; a hundred thousand, a hundred million years, millions and millions of centuries will pass and even then hell will still only be beginning. If an angel were to bring the damned news that God would free them from hell after so many millions of centuries as there are drops of water in the sea, or leaves on trees or grains of sand on the shore and the earth, these tidings would bring them the greatest consolation: "It is true," they would say, "that all these centuries of torment have yet to come, but one day they will come to an end." But all these centuries will go by and all the time imaginable, and hell will always be at the beginning. Each lost soul would willingly make this covenant with God: "Lord increase my pains as much as you wish, let me suffer these torments as long as you want, only give me the hope that one day they will end." But no, this end will never come. If only this lost soul could deceive and delude himself, saying: "Who knows, maybe one day God will have mercy on me and release me from this abyss!" No, he will always see written before him the sentence of eternal unhappiness. So he will say: "All these pains, this fire, these agonising cries, will they have no end for me?" "No," will be the answer, "never." "Will they last forever?" "Always, for eternity." 'Forever', he will see written in the eternal flames that burn him; 'forever', he will see written on the blades of the swords that pierce him; 'forever', will flash from the eyes of the devils who torment him; forever will be stamped on those doors closed for him for eternity. Oh accursed sin! What a terrible punishment is in store for those who sin! Ah! There shall be no more sin in my life.

2. What ought to keep you from this terrible fate is the thought that this horrible furnace is always open before your feet and that a single mortal sin is enough to make you fall into it. What could you do, what could you say

in the midst of those flames, far from your God, deprived of heaven forever? You would turn your gaze for the last time to heaven and at the height of your desolation you would say: “Goodbye my companions, goodbye friends living in the kingdom of glory; goodbye father, mother, brothers, sisters rejoicing forever. I will be always in torment; goodbye guardian angel, all the angels and saints in paradise, I will never see you again; goodbye my Saviour, goodbye holy cross, goodbye blood spilt for me in vain. I will never see you again.” Right then I cease to be a child of God and will be forever a slave of the devils in hell. Do you understand, my child, what you are reading? Eternal punishment for just one mortal sin. So do everything to avoid it. If your conscience disturbs you because of some sin go quickly to confession and commence a good life. Put into practice all the means the confessor suggests to you. Fly from dangerous occasions of sin, bad companions and if God also calls you to leave this world behind, comply immediately. Whatever one may do to escape an eternity of pain is little, nothing: *Nulla nimia securitas ubi periclitatur aeternitas* (Saint Bernard). Oh, how many have left the world, their country, their family and have sought solitude in caves, in deserts living only on bread and water, and a few roots and herbs, and all this to avoid hell! And what are you doing after deserving hell so often by your sin? Kneel at the feet of God and say: “Lord, here I am ready to do your will; let me suffer any pain in this life so long as I save my soul.”

### *Saturday: Heaven*

1. Just as the thought and consideration of hell is terrible, so is the thought of the heaven prepared for you consoling. To form an idea of heaven consider a clear night. How beautiful it is to see the sky sparkling with stars of great number and variety! Add to this the vision of a beautiful day, but such that the splendour of the sun does not hinder you from seeing the stars and the moon. Try to imagine all the beauty that can be found in the sea, on land, in the country, in cities and in Kings’ and monarchs’ palaces all over the world. Add to this every delicious drink, tasty food, beautiful music, the sweetest harmony, and all this together is nothing compared with the excellence of heaven. Oh how desirable and wonderful is this place where enjoyment is

complete! The blessed can only cry out: “I am filled with the glory of the Lord: *Satiabor cum apparuerit gloria tua.*” [Ps 16:15].

2. Consider then the joy your soul will experience on entering heaven. The meeting and reunion of parents and friends; the nobility and beauty of the multitudes of Cherubim and Seraphim and all the angels, saints who in their myriads praise and bless their Creator. The choir of the Apostles, the immense array of Martyrs, Confessors, Virgins. There is to be seen also that glorious multitude of the young, who because they preserved the virtue of purity sing a hymn to God that no one else can sing. Oh how they rejoice in that kingdom of the blessed! They are always happy, there is no sickness, no trouble, no anxieties to disturb their happiness and peace.

3. Observe, my child, that all this is as nothing compared to the wonderful consolation experienced at the sight of God. He consoles the blessed with his glances of love and floods their hearts with an ocean of joy. Just as the sun illumines and beautifies the world, so God with his presence brightens paradise and fills all with an inexpressible gladness. For that reason the choirs of angels and the blessed sing his glory: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, to Him be honour and glory forever.” So courage, my child. Suffering may come to you in this world but that does not matter. Your reward in heaven will infinitely compensate for all you have to suffer in this life. What consolation will be yours when you find yourself in heaven in the company of your parents, friends, the saints and the blessed and you will say: “I will be with the Lord forever: *Semper cum Domino erimus.*” [1 Ts 4:17]. Then it is that you will bless the day on which you renounced sin, made a good confession and frequented the sacraments; when you forsook bad company and devoted yourself to the practice of virtue. Full of gratitude you will turn towards God and sing his praise forever and ever. Amen.

### **Devotion to Mary Most Holy**

It is a great support for you, my children, to have devotion to Mary Most Holy. Listen to her inviting you: “*Si quis est parvulus veniat ad me.* If you are a child, come to me.” She will assure you that if you are devoted to her as well as

filling you with blessings in this world, you will gain heaven in the next. *Qui elucidant me vitam aeternam habebunt* [Sir 24:31]. So be fully convinced that all the graces you ask of this good Mother will be granted you, so long as you do not ask for things that could harm you.

In a particular way you should immediately ask for three graces which everyone absolutely needs, but you especially at a young age. The first is that of *never committing a mortal sin in your life*. I want you to implore this grace through Mary's intercession at any cost, because without this one any other grace would be of little avail.

Do you know what it means to fall into mortal sin? It means refusing to be children of God and becoming children of Satan. It means losing the beauty that makes us as beautiful as the angels in God's eyes, and taking on the deformities of the devils in his sight. It means losing all the merits you have already gained for eternal life; it means dangling above the jaws of hell, being held there only by a slender thread; and it means reviling his infinite goodness, which is the greatest evil imaginable. Ah! If Mary obtained many graces for you but not that of ever falling into mortal sin, she would have obtained very little. You must implore this grace morning and evening and in all your exercise of piety.

The second grace that you should ask for is to *preserve the holy and precious virtue of purity*. If you keep guard over such a beautiful virtue you will be very like the angels in Heaven, and your guardian angel will regard you as his brother since he will enjoy your company so much.

And since I have it very much at heart that you preserve this virtue, I would like to indicate some ways for preserving it from the poison that could infect it. First of all avoid the company of persons of the opposite sex. Understand this well: I am trying to say that boys should not become very familiar with girls; this virtue would be at great risk.

Something that helps very much to preserve it is custody of the senses and especially the eyes. You should therefore avoid all excess in eating and drinking, theatre, balls and similar pastimes which are the ruin of morals. The



eyes are the windows through which sin makes its way into our hearts and by which the devil comes to take possession of our soul. So never stop to look at even the least little things contrary to modesty. Saint Aloysius Gonzaga did not even want to look at his feet when he went to bed or got up. He did not allow himself to stare at his own mother. He spent seven years with the Queen of Spain as a page of honour but he never looked her in the face.

Another young man when asked why he was so careful in his looks gave this answer: "I have resolved never to look at a woman to preserve my eyes to look for the first time (if I am worthy to) at the beautiful face of the mother of purity, Mary Most Holy."

Secondly, flee the company of boys who engage in bad talk, that is topics which you would not raise in the presence of your parents or some other good person. Keep far away from them even if they are your relatives. I can assure you that the company of a devil would sometimes not be as bad as the harm that company of this kind can cause you.

And from this comes the need for the third grace that will also be of very great help to you in preserving the virtue of purity. It is the grace of *running away from bad companions*. How happy you will be, my dear boys, if you flee the company of the wicked! By doing this you will be sure of taking the road to paradise; otherwise you run the grave risk of being lost for eternity. Therefore, when you hear your friends swearing, blaspheming, or putting down religion, or trying to draw you away from the Church, or worse still speaking in language that is contrary to the virtue of modesty, keep away from them like the plague, and be sure that the purer is your gaze, your speech, the more pleased Mary will be with you and the more graces she will obtain for you from her Son and our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

These are the three graces that are needed more than any other, at your age, and they are enough to keep you on the right path from your youth. They will ensure that you will be men of honour in old age, and are a sure pledge of the eternal glory that Mary undoubtedly procures for those who are devoted to her. What should you do for Mary to obtain the graces indicated above? Very

little is needed. If you can, say the Rosary, but at least never forget to say three *Hail Marys* and three *Glory be to the Fathers* adding: “Dear Mother Mary, ever a Virgin, help me to save my soul.”

### **The six Sundays and the novena to St Aloysius Gonzaga**

Saint Aloysius Gonzaga is proposed as an example of innocence and virtue to all, but especially to the young for whom he has at all times obtained very many favours from Our Lord.

In order to increase devotion to this great saint, the Roman Pontiffs have granted a plenary indulgence on each of six Sundays to all those who perform some special practice of devotion in his honour on any six consecutive Sundays of the year. The indulgence may be gained on any one of these Sundays. In order that you may know the required works and prayers I have here arranged some exercises of piety that may be used for the six Sundays and the novena of St Aloysius. Thus you will be able to share in the wonderful graces and favours which the great model of youth every day obtains for his devotees.

#### *First Sunday - First day of the novena: Saint Aloysius weeps for his sins*

Although it can be said that St Aloysius never committed a deliberate sin, he wept bitterly for what he considered an offence against God. On one occasion when he was four or five years old, he took a small quantity of gunpowder from his father’s soldiers in order to fire a small canon of his and besides, uttered some unbecoming words he had heard from the soldiers, but which he did not understand. He wept all his life for these two lapses and when he confessed them for the first time he fainted at the feet of his confessor. He could not go on with his confession that day nor could he ever recall them in the years to come without shedding tears. What shame ought we not feel who have committed so many and grievous sins, yet we laugh about them and show no sign of repentance. Ah! If only we could stop to consider that a single sin outrages God, who is infinitely good; that it makes us lose heaven which contains everything that is good, makes us deserving of hell with all its evil within. Who could hold back tears at such thoughts? This is what made St Aloysius weep.

*Brief prayer:* My amiable protector, you who had so little to weep for and yet continually shed so many bitter tears, obtain for me the grace to weep for my sins and detest them, in order to obtain God's pardon.

*Practice:* If you find that your conscience reproaches you on account of some sin, heartily beg Our Lord's forgiveness and promise him to go to confession as soon as possible.

*Prayer:* O Saint Aloysius, adorned with angelic virtue, I your most unworthy suppliant, kneeling humbly before you, adore the Infinite Majesty which raised you to such glory; I bless the Holy Trinity a thousand times over for granting you such innocence and adorning you with so many heroic virtues. Pray! for so many superhuman gifts, for your innocence and penitence, for the love you bore God on earth, I humbly beg you today to accept me amongst your devotees and obtain for me true contrition for my sins, a purity of heart far from every fault or offence to my God. I beg you to be my protector in every action in life and especially at the moment of death, when I will have greater need of your patronage. And you, Mary, great Queen of heaven, who so loved and encouraged Aloysius while he was alive on earth, make these prayers of mine effective, listen to them, not for any merit of my own but for the merit of Aloysius and because of your maternal love. Dear Mother, may I imitate Aloysius in life and after a holy death be part of that happiness enjoyed forever and ever by the blessed in heaven. Amen.

*Six Our Fathers, six Hail Marys, and six Glory Bes etc.*

*Second Sunday - Second day of the novena: Penance of St Aloysius*

The life of St Aloysius is a summary of the virtues which he preserved and perfected by very severe penance. Even when a boy he used to punish his body by very long fasts. By degrees he cut down his food to very small quantities. He used to scourge himself till the blood began to flow: he placed pieces of wood in his bed that he might suffer even while he slept and wore spurs under his clothes because he had no hair-shirt. Whether standing, sitting or walking he chose the most uncomfortable position. Aloysius' desire for penance went so far that when he was dying, he begged his superior in tears

to be scourged without mercy from head to foot. When this was denied him he asked at least to be laid upon the bare ground and thus to die as a true penitent out of love for the one who died for him upon the hard wood of the Cross. If Aloysius, a prince, and a pure and innocent youth of delicate health, performed such penance, what must be the confusion of those young people who find a thousand excuses to fly from every occasion of doing acts of penance or abstinence for the love of God who suffered so much for us!

*Brief prayer:* O glorious St Aloysius, obtain for me an ardent desire to do penance for my many sins, so that I may not have to weep uselessly for them in the next life with the torments of hell.

*Practice:* Do not put off penance till your old age, when your health will no longer be able to stand it. If anyone tells you that it is of no use to chastise your body, tell him that he who does not suffer with Jesus Christ upon earth will not rejoice with Jesus Christ in heaven.

*Prayer:* O Saint Aloysius, etc.

*Third Sunday - Day three of novena: St Aloysius, model of holy Purity*

Every virtue was practised by St Aloysius to an heroic degree, but the radiance of his purity outshone all the others. He was commonly called a little angel, an angel in human flesh, an angelic youth. Whenever conversations in the least improper were being held, on the approach of Aloysius no one dared to continue the subject, for fear of offending his modesty and innocence. It must be noticed however that in order to preserve this beautiful virtue, St Aloysius kept a strict watch over his external senses and especially his eyes. For years he was at his post every day as page of honour with the Empress of Austria, yet he never gazed at her face. Indeed even in the presence of his mother he kept his eyes lowered, so that he did not know what she looked like. Once when invited to a ball he fled away and hid himself in a room where he scourged himself until he bled. He was only ten years old when he came to know the great worth of this virtue, and he offered it by vow to the Queen of virgins, Mary Most Holy. To show him how much she appreciated this vow she obtained for St Aloysius the grace of being forever free of

temptations against this virtue. Thus he had the grace of bearing his baptismal robe unspotted to heaven. My dear children, if you too wish to preserve this virtue which renders you so pleasing to God, to the Blessed Virgin, to all the angels, place yourselves as he did under the special protection of Mary and she will be the faithful guardian of your purity. Oh how much she loves souls that are pure and chaste, more than any others! How much she obtains for them! However this virtue can never be preserved without fleeing from bad talk and bad companions and if we do not keep a guard over our senses, especially the eyes.

*Brief prayer:* Obtain for me the grace, St Aloysius, to flee from those companions who by their improper conversations seek the ruin of my soul.

*Practice:* Resolve never more to look at dangerous objects or to speak of things contrary to the virtue we have just spoken about.

*Prayer:* O Saint Aloysius, etc.

*Fourth Sunday - Fourth day of the novena: St Aloysius detached from earthly goods*

St Aloysius regarded all the goods of this earth as nothing. He looked with compassion on the rich and the great in this world, who seek goods so vile and frail and often times for a little money or a piece of land run the risk of losing their eternal salvation. He despised all human respect and although he was often scorned and derided, he never ceased to appear humbly dressed even in important places. He let everyone say what he would but he was modest at home, on the streets and especially in church where the only thing that mattered was to frequent the sacraments and everything concerning God's honour. But since he was in the midst of wealth and luxury, and because his heart was in danger of being attached to earthly goods, he abandoned his princely life, his family and friends and after being so much attacked by those who loved the world he became a religious with the Jesuits, where he achieved a high degree of Christian perfection. If we also wish to detach our hearts from the vanities of this world and attach ourselves to God, let us begin to despise worldly goods which are a hindrance to our salvation saying

with St Aloysius: “That which is not eternal is nothing: *Quod aeternum non est nihil est.*” We shall easily do this if, despising human respect, we attend to those things which regard the love of God and especially to frequenting the sacraments of confession and communion which are the two most effective means of overcoming human respect and withdrawing our hearts from earthly things and inspiring them with the love of the things of heaven.

*Brief prayer:* Dear St Aloysius, through the merits of the intimate union you had with God, obtain for me the grace for the future to think of nothing but the things of heaven and ever to despise the things of earth.

*Practice:* Let us resolve today to go to confession and communion as often as possible.

*Prayer:* O Saint Aloysius, etc.

*Fifth Sunday - Fifth day of the novena: St Aloysius' charity towards his neighbour*

The love we have for our neighbour is the measure of our love for God. Not only did St Aloysius have a great love for his neighbour, but he knew marvellously well how to bear with the defects of everyone. Even from his earliest years he bore insults, outrages, and ill-treatment from his companions that far from taking offence he rejoiced and loved most of all the one who had made him suffer most. As soon as he found out that there was a poor man at the door he would immediately go to see him and he would run joyfully to the Marchioness, his mother, to have something to give him. Having obtained it he would go himself to give it to the poor beggar. More ardent still was his charity for the spiritual needs of his neighbour. When he was still in the world he used to teach catechism to the ignorant. He always tried to correct their defects and find ways to settle their discords and quarrels. As a Religious he went through the streets of Rome instructing the beggars and bringing them himself to the priests that they might be freed from their sins and receive God's grace. Wanting to do the best he could for his neighbour by giving his own life, he did this too. A plague was raging in Rome and he obtained

permissions to serve the victims of the disease. Aloysius gladly lent his services where they were in the worst condition. Hanging some bags around his neck he went through the city begging alms from door to door, then he returned to the hospital to help the poor wretches, performing the very lowest services for them. It was not long before the Lord satisfied Aloysius' vow and allowed him to contract the terrible disease, which slowly consumed him and eventually took his life. We also, my dear boys, can imitate this great Saint in his work of charity, if we bear patiently with the defects of our companions and forgive those who have offended us. But our charity will be much greater if we instruct them as to what is needed for eternal salvation, or at least take them to places where they can be instructed. How many souls we will then save from perdition and bring back to the path that leads to salvation; and then how many graces we shall receive from God through the intercession of St Aloysius!

*Brief prayer:* O most loving St Aloysius, inflame my heart with true love of my neighbour that the love of God may ever increase in me.

*Practice:* Endeavour to lead one of your companions to listen to the Word of God or receive the sacrament of confession.

*Prayer:* O Saint Aloysius, etc.

#### *Sixth Sunday - Sixth day of the novena: St Aloysius' love of God*

In his love of God St Aloysius was truly seraphic. So burning was his love that even when he thought he heard someone speak of God he would almost fall into a swoon. He had a very particular love for Jesus crucified. Every time he was despised by others or suffered a headache or some other pain, he was very happy and desired only to suffer more for the love of God. How great was his love towards Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament! He spent many hours before the altar of the Blessed Sacrament. He spent three days preparing for holy communion, then three days making his thanksgiving. When receiving the Sacred Host he often burst into such a flood of tears that his strength gave way and he was unable to rise from the ground. Why is it that we feel such little

taste for spiritual things? The reason lies in the fact that our hearts are so little inflamed with the love of Jesus crucified and that we receive holy communion so seldom or perhaps unworthily. It is impossible to approach these two inexhaustible fires of God's love and not be inflamed nor feel comfort and contentment. Let us therefore draw near to Jesus in the future with hearts kindled with burning love and fervent acts of faith, hope and sorrow. and we shall also experience the delights and joys of St Aloysius.

*Brief prayer:* O great Seraph of love, inflame my heart with true Divine love, so that I may desire nothing but to love God and serve him alone.

*Practice:* Endeavour to say your morning and evening prayers before an image of Jesus crucified and kiss it often. The Supreme Pontiffs have granted many indulgences to those who kiss the crucifix. Try to visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament often, especially when exposed for the Forty Hours devotion.

*Prayer:* O Saint Aloysius, etc.

### **Three considerations which serve to complete the novena to St Aloysius**

*Seventh day: St Aloysius gave himself to God at an early age*

Usually it is not until we have lost it that we realise the value of divine grace, and many have to remedy the past by weeping for the sins they have committed. It was not so with St Aloysius. As soon as he was able to come to know God he immediately began to love him. His first words were the sweet names of Jesus and Mary. His first inclinations were towards piety. His first delights were exercises of sincere devotion. And thus he lived until his death. "My son," his mother said, "was always a little angel." From his seventh year until the moment of his death he always led a holy life, the life of an angel and the true ideal of perfect holiness. God is pleased with us in a very special way when we serve him in the time of our youth. St Aloysius knew this and the Lord filled him with many graces and he became a great saint. If St Aloysius had waited until old age to give himself to God undoubtedly he would not have become such a great saint, since he died very young and it could even



have happened that he would not have been saved. Why then not consecrate the springtime of our life to God, as he so much wants you to? Why delay from day to day to renounce sin and begin to live as a true Christian? All those now in hell had the intention of turning to God 'later on', but death prevented them and now they are lost forever; they are crying out amidst the flames: "We fools were mistaken: *nos insensati erravimus.*"

*Brief prayer:* Obtain for me, St Aloysius the grace to lament the time that I have lost and to employ all that God may yet grant me in serving him.

*Practice:* Flee from bad companions who are the sad reason for so much lost time and every day begin a new life that is pleasing to God.

*Prayer:* O Saint Aloysius, etc.

*Eighth day: St Aloysius, a model of prayer*

The gifts and sublime virtues that adorned St Aloysius must also be said to be the fruit of his prayers. Enlightened by God he knew that whatever we ask for our souls is granted us: *petite et accipietis* [Lk 11:9]. As soon as he was able to say the words of a prayer suggested to him by his mother, he loved them greatly. At the age of four he would withdraw from the company of the others and would be found by his mother kneeling on the ground in some corner with his hands joined fervently in prayer. So absorbed was he in the delight he found in talking to God that he could hardly hear those who called him. This manner of life became so perfect as Aloysius grew older that he obtained from heaven the rare privilege of being free from distractions in his prayers. It was a great penance for him to interrupt his prayer. By this means he reached a sublime degree of holiness that is almost without parallel. Let us also strive to acquire this spirit of prayer. In all our needs, sufferings, troubles, and difficult undertakings let us never fail to have recourse to God. But above all let us call trustingly on him for the needs of our soul and we can be sure we will be heard. Let us also beg God to let us know the state of life he wants us to serve him with, that we may spend the time which has been given to us well and on which depends our eternal salvation.

*Brief prayer:* O glorious St Aloysius, obtain for me a spark of your devotion and an increase in the spirit of prayer and devotion.

*Practice:* Examine how you have been with prayer in the past and try to be more fervent, mostly by saying some brief prayer to God during the day and to your advocate, St Aloysius.

*Prayer:* O Saint Aloysius, etc.

*Ninth day: St Aloysius' happy death*

What causes us most trouble at the point of death is our past sins and the fear of God's punishment in the next life. St Aloysius had nothing of this to fear. His life was a continual thinking about death which he considered as the only means of ending his exile on earth and going to possess the heavenly goods he so much desired. After so many fasts, such severe penances, such long meditations and prayers, in a word, after a truly angelic life, what had he to fear? Hence when he was advised he was dying he sang the *Te Deum*, and filled with happiness kept on saying: "Let us go rejoicing: *Laetantes imus*." God revealed to him the moment of his death and he enjoyed the glory of paradise in an ecstasy which though it lasted the whole night, seemed to him to last only a moment. Then after promising all those present to intercede for them with God, Mary, the other saints, he kissed Jesus crucified and peacefully breathed his last. What a beautiful way to die! Without doubt we admire the wonderful death of St Aloysius. If only we wish it ours can be the same. But be aware that at the point of death we gather what we have sown during our life. If we have done good works, then happy are we, death will find us content, heaven will be opened for us. But woe to us if we have done otherwise. Remorse of conscience and hell await us: *quae seminaverit homo haec et metet* [Gal 6:8].

*Brief prayer:* O glorious St Aloysius, obtain for me the grace to lead a good life so I can die a holy death.

*Practice:* Every evening think of what would be your lot if you were to die that night.

*Prayer:* O Saint Aloysius, etc.

*Feast of St Aloysius: The glory of St Aloysius in heaven*

The glory which a soul enjoys in heaven is in proportion to the innocence of its life: its penance and its charity. These virtues shone brilliantly in St Aloysius. In his whole life we cannot find one fault that was committed deliberately. No sooner had he reached the use of reason than he turned to God to love him. To innocence he added very rigorous penance. Now, if in heaven even a glass of water given for God is taken into account, what of so much blood shed by St Aloysius who drenched his clothes with blood from his scourging? What of his praying at night when he knelt on the bare ground shivering with cold? What of his austere fasts? What of the many sufferings he devised to punish his innocent flesh? What glory all these must have merited for St Aloysius in heaven! His love for God and his neighbour was so intense that his whole life from the time of the use of reason until death was naught but an act of love for God. No great wonder then that St Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, rapt in a vision and contemplating the happiness of the blessed, upon seeing St Aloysius cried out that she had never believed such glory existed in heaven as that which adorned him.

Behold my dear friends, the fruits of a good and virtuous life, a blessed eternity of delight, incomparable glory in seeing God face to face, where we will praise him, bless him together with Mary, the angels and all the blessed forever. Have courage then and let us begin to work early for Our Lord. We shall have to endure some pains in this world, but our reward in the next life will be forever.

*Brief prayer:* O most merciful St Aloysius, obtain for me the grace to be a saint so that I may join with your glory in heaven.

*Practice:* Offer the saint all your exercises of devotion today to obtain the grace of final perseverance.

*Prayer:* O Saint Aloysius, etc.

## **Second part - Particular exercises of Christian piety**

### *Morning and evening prayers*

A good boy, as soon as he awakens, should make the sign of the cross, and offer his heart to God saying: “Jesus, Mary and Joseph I give you my heart and my soul.” Then he should rise and dress himself with the greatest modesty. St Aloysius Gonzaga did not even want to look at his bare feet, because he looked on the virtue of purity as a spotless mirror that is tarnished by the least breath.

While dressing you could say: “Angel of the Lord, by his merciful providence you are my guardian. Watch over me through this day, enlighten my intellect, rule my affections, govern my feelings, so that I will not offend the Lord my God. Amen. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world with out end. Amen.” By saying this prayer you will earn many indulgences.

When you have dressed, kneel down before an image of Jesus crucified or of the Blessed Virgin, and then say the following prayers:

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

“My Lord and my God, I give you my whole heart.

I adore you and I love you with all my heart. I thank you for having created me, made me a Christian and preserved me through the night. I offer you all my actions and I beg you to give me the grace never to offend you, especially today.”

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen.”

“Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed are you amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.”

“I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in

Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary: Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried: He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead: He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty: From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church: the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Amen.”

“Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve: to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O merciful, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.”

*The ten commandments of God are:* 1. I am the Lord your God; you shall not have strange gods before Me. 2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. 3. Remember to keep holy the Lord’s day. 4. Honour your father and your mother. 5. You shall not kill. 6. You shall not commit adultery. 7. You shall not steal. 8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. 9. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife. 10. You shall not covet your neighbour’s goods.

*There are five commandments of the holy Church:* 1. You shall attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation. 2. You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church. 3. You shall confess your sins at least once a year and go to communion at Easter. 4. You shall not celebrate weddings on days that are forbidden. 5. You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church.

*Act of Faith:* “I firmly believe that there is one God who rewards the good and punishes the bad. I believe that there are three really distinct persons in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I believe that the Son of God became man in the pure womb of the Virgin Mary by the work of the Holy Spirit: as man he died on the cross for our sins, and on the third day he rose again. I believe

these and all the other truths of our holy Faith, because the one true God revealed them to the holy Church and through the Church teaches them to us.”

*Act of Hope:* “My God you are all powerful, merciful and faithful, I hope that you will give me pardon for my sins, the grace to live and die well, and heaven, that you promised me through the merits of Jesus Christ, if I do the work of a good Christian, as I resolve to do with your help.”

*Act of Charity:* “My God, I love you above all things, I love you for the good things I have received from you, and I love you for what I hope to receive from you; but I love you mainly because you are an infinitely good God and therefore are worthy to be loved above all things. I love my neighbour as myself for love of you.”

*Act of Contrition:* “O my God, I am sorry and beg pardon for all my sins and detest them above all things, because they deserve your dreadful punishments, because they have crucified my loving Saviour, Jesus Christ, and most of all because they offend Your infinite goodness. And I firmly resolve by the help of your grace, never to offend you again and carefully to avoid the occasions of sin. Jesus, have mercy on me.” (The reigning Pius IX grants an indulgence of 100 days every time you say: Jesus, have mercy on me).

*Throughout the day:* “Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, St Aloysius Gonzaga, help me to be a saint.” When you have finished your prayers go to your parents to see what they tell you to do and do not do anything without their permission.

*In the evening* say the rosary (if you have not already said it during the day) with your brothers and sisters, but do so devoutly, not in too much of a hurry, or in an unbecoming posture. When you do not have enough time to say the rosary, say at least three Hail Marys etc. to obtain her protection. Then say the same prayers as in the morning, adding this prayer to St Aloysius Gonzaga: “O glorious St Aloysius, I humbly beg you to take me under your protection and obtain for me from the Lord the help to practise your virtues in life so I can die a holy death and one day be partaker of your glory in heaven. Amen.”  
*Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be.*

Pause for a few moments to consider the state of your conscience and if you find that your conscience reproaches you on account of some sin, heartily beg Our Lord's forgiveness and promise him to go to confession as soon as possible. While you are undressing imagine that you see the soldiers stripping Jesus of his clothing to whip him. As soon as you are in bed say: "Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, assist me in my last agony. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I breathe my soul in peace with you." Then thinking of the presence of God go to sleep with your hands joined upon your breast.

*During the day*, or after morning and evening prayers read something from a life of a saint, like Saint Aloysius, or one of the meditations on page 31 [*Seven meditations for each day of the week*], or think of the advice your confessor gave you at your last confession.

During the day a good child should diligently attend to the things regarding his proper state and direct every action to the Lord, saying: "Lord I offer you this work. Give it your holy blessing."

In the morning, at midday and in the evening when you hear the *Angelus bell* kneel (except for Saturday, Sunday and at Easter, when you stand) and say the following prayer:

*Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariae, et concepit de Spiritu Sancto. Ave Maria etc.*

*Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum. Ave Maria etc.*

*Et verbum caro factum est, et habitavit, in nobis. Ave Maria etc.* Three *Glory be to the Fathers*.

*Ora pro nobis, sancta Dei Genitrix.*

*Ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi.*

Oremus: *Gratiam tuam, quaesumus, Domine, mentibus nostris infunde, ut qui, angelo nuntiante, Christi filii tui incarnationem cognovimus, per passionem eius et crucem ad resurrectionis gloriam perducamur. Per eundem Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.*

Benedict XIV granted 100 days indulgence every time you do this devotion. There are also some indulgences for someone who accompanies the holy Viaticum, when it is taken to the sick, or if you cannot go, say an *Our Father and Hail Mary*. At the moment of death there are many other indulgences that can be gained when someone goes to church and prays for the dying person and says at least an *Our Father and Hail Mary*. The same goes at the moment of death for whoever says three *Requiem aeternams* in suffrage for that soul.

*Before meals* make the sign of the cross and say: “Bless us O Lord and these your gifts, which of thy bounty we are about to receive, through Christ Our Lord. Amen.” Before sitting down to his meal one day St Benedict saw his wine glass in which poison had been put by an enemy break into pieces, just as he was blessing himself according to his usual custom.

*After meals:* “We give you thanks, Almighty God, for all your benefits, who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.”

#### *Practical way of assisting with profit at holy Mass*

*Notice:* Mass is the offering and sacrifice of the body and blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which is offered and distributed under the species of consecrated bread and wine. Understand well, my dear children, that when you assist at Holy Mass it is as if you saw the Divine Saviour leaving Jerusalem and carrying the Cross up to Calvary, where he was crucified after the most barbarous torments, and shedding his blood to the last drop. The priest renews this same sacrifice when he celebrates Holy Mass with the difference however that the sacrifice on Calvary was painful to Jesus and accompanied by the shedding of blood, while that of the Mass is unbloody, that is without the shedding of blood. As one cannot imagine anything more holy, more precious than the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ, so, while you are assisting at Mass you ought to be convinced that you are performing a great and holy act, which redounds to the glory of God and the good of your soul. At Mass Jesus Christ comes in person to apply to each one of us in particular the merits of that most adorable blood, shed for us on the Cross at Calvary.



This ought to inspire us with the greatest reverence for Holy Mass together with a lively desire of assisting at it worthily. It is however no uncommon thing to see young people wilfully distracted at Holy Mass, behaving without decorum, attention, respect, often fidgeting and looking about. They renew the crucifixion of Jesus, giving scandal to their companions and causing harm to our holy religion!

To avoid such a great evil, enter with the dispositions of a true Christian in the spirit of Jesus Christ and imagine you see him beginning his awful passion, exposed to the most barbarous treatment for our salvation. During Mass behave with modesty and recollection so that you may avoid distraction. Let your mind, heart and sentiments be intent on honouring God. I recommend to you the practice of assisting at Holy Mass every day even at the cost of making some sacrifice. Saint Isidore, who was a farm labourer, used to rise very early in order to go to Mass so that he might get back in time to do his master's work. In this way he drew upon himself many blessings and all his work succeeded very well.

*At the beginning of Mass:* "My Lord Jesus Christ, I offer you this holy sacrifice for your greater glory and for the spiritual good of my soul. Grant me the grace that my heart and my soul may have no other thought than of you. My soul, drive away every idle thought and prepare me to assist at this Holy Mass with the greatest recollection."

*At the Confiteor:* "I confess to almighty God, to Blessed Mary ever Virgin, to Blessed Michael the Archangel, to Blessed John the Baptist, to the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul and to all the saints, that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word and deed. Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault. Therefore I beseech the Blessed Mary ever Virgin, Blessed Michael the Archangel, Blessed John the Baptist, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul and all the saints to pray to the Lord our God for me."

*As the priest goes up to the altar:* "May all the earth adore you O Lord and sing praise to your holy name. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Amen."

*At the Kyrie eleison:* “My Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on this poor soul of mine.”

*At the Gloria:* “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will, because God alone is worthy to be praised and glorified forever.”

*At the Oremus:* “Receive, O Lord, the prayers addressed to you for us by the priest. Grant me the grace to live and die as a good Christian in the bosom of holy Mother Church.”

*At the Epistle:* “Inflame O Lord my heart with your holy love, so that I may love and serve you all the days of my life.”

*At the Gospel:* “I am ready, O Lord, to confess the faith of the Gospel at the cost of my life, and to confess the great truths contained therein. Give me the grace to do your will and to flee from sin and all occasions of sin.”

*At the Credo:* “My God I firmly believe all that you have revealed to your Church because you are infallible truth. Increase in me the spirit of lively faith, firm hope and ardent charity.

*At the Offertory:* “I offer to you, my God, through the hands of the priest, the bread and wine which are to be changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. I offer to you at the same time my heart and my tongue, so that for the future I may desire nothing and say nothing, but what regards your holy service.”

*At the Orate fratres:* “Receive, O Lord, this sacrifice to the honour and glory of your holy name, to my advantage and for that of the holy Church.”

*At the Preface:* “Raise my heart up to God O my soul and consider what Jesus Christ has suffered on account of your sins.”

*At the Sanctus:* “O my soul join in spirit with the chorus of the angels and sing a single hymn of glory saying: ‘Holy, holy holy Lord, God of hosts.’ May you be glorified and blessed forever.”

*At the Commemoration of the living:* “I beseech you, Jesus, to bless my parents, friends, benefactors and even my enemies; remember especially the

sovereign Pontiff, the whole church and all authority spiritual or temporal. May there be peace, harmony and blessing.”

*At the elevation of the Host:* “My Lord Jesus, prostrate with all humility, I adore you and firmly believe that you are present in this sacred host. O wondrous mystery that God should come down from heaven for my salvation! Blessed and praised every moment be the most Holy and Divine Sacrament.” (100 days indulgence every time).

*At the elevation of the Chalice:* “My Lord, Jesus Christ, I adore the blood you shed for the salvation of my soul. I offer it to you in memory of his passion, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. Receive it in expiation for my sins and for the needs of holy Church.”

*At the commemoration of the dead:* “Remember, O Lord, the souls in purgatory especially those of my relatives and benefactors, spiritual and temporal. Free them as soon as possible from those torments and grant to all the glory of paradise.”

*At the Our Father:* “I thank you, my Jesus, for this wonderful prayer you have given me. Grant me the grace to say it with the attention and devotion it deserves. Grant also those graces which the celebrant asks of you in it for me, and above all that I may not fall into mortal sin which is the greatest and only evil that can ruin me for all eternity.” Say the *Our Father*, etc.

*At the Agnus Dei:* “Jesus, Immaculate Lamb, I beseech you to have mercy on me and on all the people in the world so that they may return to you and enjoy the true peace that is given to those who live in your grace.”

*At the Domine non sum dignus:* “O Lord, because of the number of my sins I am not worthy that you should come to dwell in my soul; say but the word and all my sins will be forgiven. I am very sorry for having offended you. Grant me the grace to never displease you again.”

*At the communion:* If you are not going to receive Holy Communion sacramentally, at least make a spiritual communion, which consists in an ardent desire of receiving Jesus into your heart, and say: “My dear Jesus, since I cannot receive your holy Sacrament this morning, come and take possession

of me by your grace, that I may always live in your holy love. The grace that I particularly ask is to be able to avoid bad companions, because if I have the fortune to associate only with good companions, I too will be good and will save my soul.”

*At the Postcommunion:* “I thank you, my God for having offered yourself as a sacrifice for me. Grant that I may from this moment give myself wholly to you. Sorrows, fatigue, heat, cold, hunger, thirst and even death I will willingly accept from your hands. I am ready to sacrifice everything and to lose everything if only I can fulfil your holy Law.”

*At the Blessing:* “Bless O Lord my good resolutions. Bless me by the hand of your minister and grant that the effects of this blessing may always remain with me. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

*At the last Gospel:* “Eternal Word, made flesh to save my soul, I adore you with deep respect and I thank you for having suffered for me. Grant me the grace to preserve the fruits of this Holy Mass; forgive me if I have not assisted with due attention and grant that when I leave this church my eyes, tongue and all my senses will recoil in horror at anything opposed to the truth of your holy Gospel.”

Say a *Hail Holy Queen* to the Blessed Virgin and an *Our Father* to St Aloysius so they may help you keep the resolutions you have made and especially avoid improper conversations.

### *Practical way of approaching the sacrament of confession worthily*

Dear boys, if you do not learn how to confess well when you are young, you run the risk of never learning how to do so again during your lifetime, and as a result, of never going to Confession as you should, which will be harmful to you and could even put your eternal salvation at risk. But firstly I would like you to be convinced that anything you may have on your conscience will be forgiven in Confession, so long as you approach it with the correct dispositions.

The first of these is the examination of conscience, meaning that you go back over what you have done to find out what was good and what was sinful. Begin by *asking the Lord to enlighten you* saying: “My Lord Jesus Christ, my Redeemer, I put myself at your feet and beg you to have pity and mercy on me. Enlighten me with your grace so that I may recognise my sins as I would if I were to present myself to you at the time of judgement. My God, may I detest them with true sorrow and may I be forgiven through the infinite merits of the most precious blood of Jesus Christ, shed for me on the cross. Most Holy Virgin, St Aloysius Gonzaga, pray for me that I may make a good Confession.”

*Examine yourself* to see whether you have spoken badly of religious matters; or if you have blasphemed, taken the Lord’s name in vain. Did you attend Mass on Sundays or holy days? Have you performed works of mercy on those days or did you work instead, as is forbidden? Examine whether you have been disobedient at home, or to your superiors or teachers, or if you have answered them back. Have you acted badly in church or outside, especially through bad talk or by giving bad advice? Have you stolen anything at home or outside? Note that ‘stealing’ also includes the misuse of time that should be spent on things you have been asked to do. Have you thought of, listened to, done or allowed others to do or even just considered things that are dishonest? I must tell you that this examination is not only about discovering what sins, but you should also say the number of times you committed this or that other sin. For example: it is not enough to say: I disobeyed my parents, but you should add, I disobeyed them two or three times, that is give a precise or an approximate number of times your were disobedient. Do the same with other sins.

These are the main things you should examine your conscience about. But again, it is not enough just to make a good Confession. You must also *be truly sorry* and seriously consider that sin is a real evil. Sin opens up hell beneath your feet. What an evil; how terrible this is! It locks you out of heaven: what a terrible loss this is! It makes you God’s enemy and slaves of the devil. Every one of your sins is the cause of acute pain to the loving heart of Jesus, who was whipped for you, crowned with thorns, and shed his blood on the cross; and you treated him this way, looked down on him, did these things. Sin is

an offence against the God who is so good to you and so loving by nature. He created you and sustains you in life. Holiness, the air you breathe, the bread you eat are all gifts that God gives you. He has preserved you from constant misfortune and from hell itself which you have so often deserved. And your response to his goodness has so often been monstrous ingratitude by committing these sins and offending him.

In view of the great evil you do by sinning, you should be very sorry for whenever you have offended God because it is worse than any other terrible thing that might have happened to you, or than any punishment you might have received from your parents or others. Your sorrow should lead you to *a good resolution*, a promise never to offend God again in future. For example: you have said bad words, or were disobedient, so if your confession is to be real you should promise the Lord that you will never commit these sins again even at the cost of suffering.

After these reflections, make an act of contrition and then humbly approach your confessor, and if you need to wait, don't waste time talking or smiling or looking around, but recollect yourself and wait until it is your turn. I must warn you *never to remain silent about some sins in confession*. Before you sinned, the devil was telling you that doing such and such was not a bad thing; afterwards he does what he can to make you feel ashamed so you will keep quiet about it and make a sacrilegious confession. So never be afraid of what your confessor may think. He will be happy knowing that you confide in him about what you have done. You can also be certain that the priest can never tell anyone what you have confessed, nor can he make use of anything you have said even if it means his avoiding death. So courage then, and first confess the sin that weighs upon you most.

Once you have entered the confessional make the sign of the cross and say: "Bless me Father, for I have sinned." Then tell him how long it is since you last confessed and tell him the state of your conscience, giving him the number and kind of your sins. When you have finished, listen to what he tells you, and while he is giving you absolution, consider that this is precisely the moment when the blood of Jesus Christ is being shed for you. Then make a sincere act

of contrition. When you have finished your confession, remain by yourself and thank the Lord for the good things he has done for you.

*After Confession.* Heartily renew the act of sorrow you made in Confession, promising the Lord that you want to do everything suggested by the confessor to avoid falling into sin again and make these three resolutions: 1. To behave very well in church; 2. To be readily obedient to your parents and to your other superiors; 3. To be ready to do all of your duties according to your state in life and that you want to work for the glory of God and the salvation of your soul. Devoutly say this

*Prayer,* “Oh my God, how grateful I should be for the mercy you have shown me in forgiving all my sins! You love me and may you love me even more if I am faithful in serving you. Oh! I really do want to make amends. I promise to avoid all occasions of sin. I will never forget that you are everywhere, and that you see and know everything I do and think. Help me and may I die rather than offend you again. Mary, my dearest mother, never let me offend my good Jesus again through sin. My guardian angel, all the saints, help me and watch over me always.”

*Three Angel of God and three Glory be.*

### *Preparing for Holy Communion*

Before presenting yourself to receive the adorable body of Jesus Christ you should consider whether you have the correct disposition of heart. Know then that the child who does not want to make amends after sinning, meaning that he wants to offend the Lord again, is not worthy of being enriched by grace; instead he becomes even more guilty and worthy of greater punishment.

On the other hand if you do correct your ways, go and receive the food of the angels and you will give Jesus Christ much pleasure. When he was on this earth he invited people to follow him, but showed special kindness to good and innocent children, saying: “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them”, and he blessed them. So heed his loving invitation and go not only to receive his blessing, but to him in person.

*Prayers before Communion*

“My Lord Jesus Christ, I keenly believe that you are really present in the Blessed Sacrament in your body and blood, soul and divinity. Lord, I adore you in this Sacrament and I acknowledge that you are my creator, redeemer, sovereign, master, my highest and only good.”

“Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed. Lord I detest all my sins. They make me unworthy of receiving you into my heart but with your grace I resolve not to commit them in future, to avoid the occasions of sin and to do penance for them.”

“Lord I hope that by giving yourself totally to me in this divine Sacrament you will show mercy on me and grant me all the graces I need for my eternal salvation. Lord, you are infinitely lovable, you are my Father, my Redeemer and my God, therefore I love you with all my heart above all things and because of your love I love my neighbour as myself and heartily forgive anyone who has offended me.”

“Lord, I earnestly want you to come into my heart, so that I may never be separated from you and that you may always remain with me through your divine grace.”

“Immaculate Virgin, through the love you showed to your child Jesus, make me always worthy of receiving him; and when I approach the altar to receive the sacred host, I will consider that I am receiving him from your very hands accompanied by the choirs of angels who praise and bless him in Heaven. My Guardian Angel, St Aloysius Gonzaga, my special protectors, pray to the Lord for me and obtain for me the grace of making a holy Communion. *Omnes sancti et sanctae Dei, intercedite pro nobis.*”

Then pause for a while to consider who you are to receive him. This is Jesus Christ, God so great and of infinite majesty, God of kindness and mercy who comes to you, poor miserable creature, poor sinner that you are; and he comes to be your father, brother, friend and spouse of your soul. He wants to heal you, to be your teacher and your food. Oh how good he is! Oh such love! Oh such infinite mercy!



### *After Communion*

“My God, creator and redeemer of my soul, I adore you with profound respect and deepest reverence. Oh how great is your kindness! Such pure majesty, so holy and infinite but you come in person to visit such a miserable creature, a handful of dust, an ungrateful sinner. My dear and good Jesus, I thank you for such a great favour, I praise you and bless you within me. All the power of my being, all the sentiments of my body, exult in the presence of your God. One heart, O my good Jesus, is too little to love you, praise you and thank you for so many benefits and especially for having given me as food for my soul your body, blood, soul and divinity.”

“If only I had the heart of the Seraphim in Heaven, so that my heart could burn forever with the love of my God who has deigned to choose my poor soul for his dwelling, for his delight! Ah, dear Jesus, how sweet and precious is this visit of yours, this time spent with me, this union with you!”

“I am not worthy of such great favour, nor do I know what to offer as thanksgiving but relying on your infinite merits I offer you these very same merits. I thank you with all my heart and I claim that in the future you will always be my hope, my comfort, my only wealth, my pleasure, rest for my soul. You are my only good, my possession, and my heart’s treasure. I would like to be able to give you all the praise and glory the Saints give you in Heaven; but since I cannot do everything I offer you my entire self; I offer you my will so that it may want nothing other than what pleases you; I offer you my hands, my feet, my eyes, my tongue, my mouth, my mind, my heart: I offer them all to you. Watch over all my feelings so that every thought and action may have no other aim than to do what is to your greatest glory and to the spiritual advantage of my soul.”

“Most holy Virgin, dear mother of my Jesus, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, my Guardian Angel, obtain this grace for me, my family, my companions, friends and enemies, and especially for the people who are here in church today.”

“O Virgin Mary, believing that I am yours I consecrate all of my life to you, my eyes, ears, tongue, heart and all my being. I want to be all yours;

defend me as your own. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my soul with all my heart. Jesus, Mary and Joseph assist me in my last agony. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I breathe my soul in peace with you.”

#### *Visit to the Blessed Sacrament*

Always remember, my dear young friends, that Jesus is always present in the Most Holy Sacrament and that he has an abundance of graces ready to bestow on anyone who asks him for them. One day when St John Berchmans was visiting the Blessed Sacrament, he saw Our Lord in the form of a little child holding in his hands a crown of roses. The saint asked what the roses meant and received this reply from Jesus: “These roses are the graces which I give to those who come to ask for them.”

#### *Prayers during a visit to the Blessed Sacrament*

“My Lord Jesus Christ, who for the love you bear for us remain day and night in this Sacrament, full of mercy and love, inviting, awaiting and receiving all those who come to visit you, I believe that you are present in the Sacred Host which is your body, blood, soul and divinity. I adore you humbly and thank you for all the good things you have given me, especially for having given me yourself in this Sacrament, for having given me your holy Mother Mary as my advocate and for having called me to visit you in this church. I salute your most loving heart and I desire to do so for three reasons: 1. In thanksgiving for this great gift; 2. To atone for the injuries you have received in this Sacrament from people without faith, heretics and all bad Christians; 3. To adore you in all places where you are least honoured and most neglected in this Holy Sacrament.”

“O my Jesus, I love you with all my heart. I am sorry for having hitherto displeased your infinite goodness. I resolve with the help of your grace never to offend you again. From now on I wish to be all yours; do with me whatever you wish, I only ask for your love, perseverance in doing good and perfect fulfilment of your will.”

“I recommend to you the souls in purgatory, especially those who were most devoted to the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Most Holy; I recommend to you also all poor sinners. I unite all my affections with those of your most loving Heart and thus united I offer them to the eternal Father and I beseech him in your name to accept and hear them. May the most holy and Blessed Sacrament be praised at every moment.” Three *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory* etc.

### *Chaplet of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*

Say this chaplet to the Divine Heart of Jesus to make up for the outrages he receives in the Holy Eucharist from heretics, unfaithful people and unworthy Christians. Either alone or with others if you can say this prayer before an image of the Sacred Heart or before the Blessed Sacrament.

*V/ Deus, in adiutorium meum intende.*

*R/ Domine, ad adiuvandum me festina. Gloria Patri etc.*

1. “O most amiable heart of my Jesus, I humbly adore you in the Blessed Sacrament where you show such wondrous mercy and sweetness to all poor sinners. I grieve to see you so ungratefully requited and I will endeavour to console you for the many insults you receive in the most Holy Eucharist from heretics, unfaithful people and unworthy Christians.” *Our Father* etc.

2. “O most humble Heart of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, I adore your profound humility in this Blessed Sacrament, hiding your divinity for us under the species of bread and wine. Grant I beseech you, my Jesus that such a beautiful virtue be in my heart too; meanwhile I will try to make up for all the offences you receive in the most Holy Eucharist from heretics, unfaithful people and unworthy Christians.” *Our Father* etc.

3. “O Heart of my Jesus who has suffered so much, I adore you in your passion so ardently embraced for love of us and in the Blessed Sacrament where you receive, as you foresaw, so many injuries in return for your love. My Jesus I resolve to make reparation with my own life; I would like to prevent

those offences that unfortunately you receive in the Eucharist from heretics, unfaithful people and unworthy Christians.” *Our Father* etc.

4. “O most patient Heart of my Jesus, I humbly venerate your invincible patience in bearing for love of me such great pain on the Cross and so many insults in the Eucharist. O my dear Jesus! Since I am not able to wash with my blood those places where you were so cruelly treated in both of these Divine Mysteries, I promise you, good and kind Jesus, to use every means in my power to make up for the many outrages your Divine Heart has received, and that you receive in the Eucharist from heretics, unfaithful people and unworthy Christians.” *Our Father* etc.

5. “O Heart of my Jesus, who so lovingly condescended to institute the most Holy Eucharist, I adore you and thank you for the immense love you bore us by giving us your divine body and blood as food. Our hearts should be consumed at the thought of such immense charity. O my dear Jesus fill my heart with sorrow and compassion and grant that I may console you for the offences you receive in the Blessed Sacrament from heretics, unfaithful people and unworthy Christians.” *Our Father* etc.

6. “O Heart of Jesus thirsting for our salvation, I humbly venerate the love which has prompted you to sacrifice yourself so completely for us on the Cross, renewed every day on the altars in Holy Mass. Why are not our hearts burning with gratitude at the sight of so much love? Unfortunately not, my God; I promise to do all in my power to make up for so many outrages you have received in this mystery of love from heretics, unfaithful people and unworthy Christians.” *Our Father* etc. (This exercise can serve as a novena for the Feasts of Our Lord Jesus Christ).

#### *Prayer to the most Sacred Heart of Mary*

“God save you, august Queen of Peace, Mother of God; by the Sacred Heart of your Son, Jesus, prince of peace, grant that his anger may soften and he may reign over us in peace. Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I

fly to thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother; to thee do I come; before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me.” (*Pius IX grants an indulgence of 300 days every time you devoutly say this prayer*).

“Sweet and good Jesus, I do not wish to offend you again.”

“Sacred Heart of Mary, grant that I may save my soul. Sacred Heart of Jesus, grant that I may love you more and more.”

...<sup>11</sup>

### *Chaplet of the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady*

*Preparation.* Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, let us make our usual exercises by meditating on the bitter sorrows that the Blessed Virgin Mary suffered in the life and death of her beloved Son, our Divine Saviour. Imagine that we are close to Jesus hanging from the Cross and that his afflicted Mother tells each of us: Come and see if there is any sorrow equal to mine. Convinced that this merciful Mother wishes to grant us special protection and meditating on her sorrows we invoke divine help with the following prayers:

*Veni, Sancte Spiritus, reple tuorum corda fidelium et tui amoris in eis ignem accende.*

*Vl. Emitte spiritum tuum et creabuntur,*

*R. Et renovatis faciem terrae.*

*Vl. Memento congregationis tuae,*

*R. Quam possedisti ab initio.*

*Vl. Domine, exaudi orationem meam,*

*R. Et clamor meus ad te veniat.*

*Oremus: Mentis nostras; quaesumus, Domine, lumine tuae claritatis illustra, ut videre possimus, quae agenda sunt, et quae recta sunt agere valeamus. Per Christum Dominum nostrum. R. Amen.*

<sup>11</sup> This is followed by the mysteries of the Rosary and the Litany of Our Lady, which we leave out here.

First sorrow: *The Prophecy of Simeon*. The Blessed Virgin Mary suffered the first sorrow when she presented her only Son, Jesus, in the Temple. As she laid him in the arms of the holy man, Simeon, he said to her: And your own soul a sword shall pierce; meaning the passion and death of Our Lord Jesus Christ. An *Our Father* and seven *Hail Marys*.

Second sorrow: *Flight into Egypt*. The Blessed Virgin suffered this sorrow when they had to fly to Egypt because of cruel Herod's persecution who impiously sought to kill her beloved Son. An *Our Father* etc.

Third sorrow: *Jesus lost in the Temple*. The Blessed Virgin suffered her third sorrow at the time of the Pasch after she went with her spouse Joseph and her beloved Son to Jerusalem. On her way back to her poor home she missed her Son and sought him sorrowing for three days. An *Our Father* etc.

Fourth sorrow: *Meeting Jesus carrying the Cross*. The Blessed Virgin suffered her fourth sorrow when she met her beloved Son carrying a heavy Cross upon his delicate shoulders on the way to Mount Calvary to be crucified for our salvation. An *Our Father* etc.

Fifth sorrow: *Crucifixion of Jesus*. The Blessed Virgin suffered her fifth sorrow when she beheld her Son Jesus lifted up on the hard Cross shedding blood from every member of his sacred body. An *Our Father* etc.

Sixth sorrow: *The descent from the Cross*. The Blessed Virgin suffered her sixth sorrow when her beloved Son, after being pierced with a lance and taken down from the Cross after death, was placed in her arms. An *Our Father* etc.

Seventh sorrow: *The burial of Jesus*. The Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady and advocate of poor sinners, suffered her seventh sorrow when she accompanied the sacred body of her son to the tomb. An *Our Father* etc.

Say 3 *Hail Marys* in profound veneration of the tears shed by the Blessed Virgin in all her sorrows to obtain true sorrow for our sins. *Hail Mary* etc.

At the end of this chaplet sing the hymn: *Stabat Mater dolorosa* ...

*Vl. Ora pro nobis, Virgo dolorosissima!*

R. *Ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi.*

Oremus: *Interveniatur pro nobis, quaesumus, Domine Iesu Christe, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae apud tuam clementiam beata Virgo Maria Mater tua, cuius sacratissimam animam in hora tuae passionis doloris gladius pertransivit. Per te, Iesu Christe salvator mundi, qui cum Patre et Spiritu Sancto vivis et regnas in saecula saeculorum.* R. Amen.

### *The Seven Joys of Mary in heaven*

1. Rejoice O Immaculate Spouse of the Holy Spirit, with the joy that is yours in heaven, because through your purity and virginity you have been exalted above all the angels and raised above all the saints. *Hail Mary* etc. *Glory* etc.

2. Rejoice O Mother of God with the joy you experience in heaven, because as the sun illumines the whole earth here below so do you adorn and render all heaven resplendent with your radiant beauty. *Hail Mary* etc.

3. Rejoice O Daughter of God, on account of the happiness you enjoy in heaven. All the choirs of Angels, Archangels, Thrones, Dominions, and all the blessed spirits honour you, revere you and acknowledge you as the Mother of their Creator and are most obedient at the least sign from you. *Hail Mary* etc.

4. Rejoice O Handmaid of the Most Holy Trinity, on account of the joy you experience in heaven, whereby all the graces you ask of your divine Son are instantly granted you; even more so as St Bernard says, that no grace is granted here on earth without first passing through your most holy hands. *Hail Mary* etc.

5. Rejoice O most August Queen, because you alone did merit to sit at the right hand of your most holy Son, who sits at the right hand of the Eternal Father. *Hail Mary* etc.

6. Rejoice O Refuge of Sinners, comforter of the afflicted, for the heights to which you have been elevated in heaven, so that all those who praise and revere you in this world, the Eternal Father will reward with his holy grace and his immense glory. *Hail Mary* etc.

7. Rejoice O Mother, Spouse and Daughter of God, because all the graces, glories, joys and privileges that you now enjoy in heaven, far from diminishing will continue to increase until the day of judgement and endure through all eternity. *Hail Mary* etc.

*Prayer to the Blessed Virgin:* O glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of my Lord, source of all our consolation, I beseech you through these your joys which with all devotion I now recall to mind, obtain for me from God the remission of my sins and the continual aid of his holy grace. May I never become unworthy of your protection but may have the happiness of receiving the heavenly blessings which you obtain and bestow upon all who devoutly meditate upon the joys that fill your Immaculate Heart, O immortal Queen of heaven.

*Devotion to our Guardian Angel*

1. “My Guardian Angel, you did not disdain to take good care of me, a miserable sinner! I beseech you, animate my soul with a lively faith, firm hope and an ardent charity, so that despising the world I may think only of loving and serving God.” *Three Angel of Gods and three Glory bes.*

2. “O most noble prince of the Heavenly Court, you take such good care of my poor soul. Defend it from the snares and assaults of the devil, that I may never more offend my God.” *Three Angel of Gods* etc.

3. “O most glorious spirit who watches over my poor soul with such tender and constant care obtain for me the grace ever to be devoted to you, and faithfully to put into practice the counsels which you suggest to my mind and inspire in my heart.” *Three Angel of Gods* etc.

4. “O most loving guardian of my soul who humbled yourself so much in descending from heaven to minister to a creature so vile, grant that I too may obtain a love of true humility fully persuaded that I can do nothing without your help and the grace of God.” *Three Angel of Gods* etc.

5. “O most kind spirit who labours so much for the salvation of my soul, obtain for me from God that at the end of my life my soul may pass from your hands into the loving arms of Jesus.” *Three Angel of Gods* etc.



*Prayer:* “O most loving Guardian, since all you do for me in this world has no other purpose than the salvation of my soul grant I beseech you, that when I am on my deathbed, deprived of my senses, and plunged into the abyss of agony, you will protect my soul as it is about to leave my body to appear before its Creator; defend it from its enemies and lead it victorious with you to enjoy forever the glory of paradise. Amen.”

*Short form of the Way of the Cross*

*Vl. Adoramus te, Christe, et benedicimus tibi.*

*R. Quia per sanctam crucem et mortem tuam redemisti mundum.*

*Oremus: Respice, quaesumus, Domine, super hanc familiam tuam, pro qua Dominus noster Iesus Christus non dubitavit manibus tradi nocentium et crucis subire tormentum. Qui tecum vivit et regnat in saecula saeculorum. Amen.*

Act of contrition: My Redeemer and my God, behold me at your feet, repenting of my sins with all my heart, because they are an offence to your infinite goodness. I would rather die than offend you again because I love you above all things. *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.*

Holy Mother, grant that the Lord’s wounds may be impressed on my heart.

*Stabat Mater dolorosa / iuxta crucem lacrymosa / dum pendebat Filius.*

*Station I*

*Vl. Adoramus te, Christe, et benedicimus tibi.*

*R. Quia per sanctam crucem, et mortem tuam redemisti mundum.*

The first station presents us with the Praetorium of Pilate where our Divine redeemer is condemned to death. Consider O my soul how Pilate condemned to the death of the Cross Jesus the most innocent, and how he willingly submitted to this sentence in order that we might be free from eternal damnation. Oh Jesus! I thank you for so much love and I beseech you to cancel the sentence of eternal death which I deserve for my sins, so that I may be made worthy to enjoy eternal life. *Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be etc. Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.*

Holy Mother, grant that the Lord's wounds may be impressed on my heart.

*Cuius animam gementem, / contristatam et dolentem / pertransivit gladius.*

*Station II*

*Vl. Adoramus te, Christe et benedicimus tibi.*

*R. Quia per sanctam crucem et mortem tuam redemisti mundum.*

The second station recalls to our minds how Jesus was loaded with the heavy weight of the Cross. Consider O my soul how Jesus took upon his shoulders the Cross which was made heavy by your numerous and grievous sins. Oh Jesus! Pardon me and give me the grace not to wound you again for the rest of my life by sin, but rather to bear constantly the cross of true repentance. Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be etc. *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.*

Holy Mother, grant etc.

*O quam tristis et afflicta / fuit illa benedicta / Mater Unigeniti!*

*Station III*

*Vl. Adoramus te, Christe et benedicimus tibi.*

*R. Quia per sanctam crucem et mortem tuam redemisti mundum.*

The third station represents to us how Jesus fell the first time beneath the weight of the Cross. Consider O my soul, how Jesus, not being able to bear the heavy weight, fell beneath the Cross thus experiencing excessive pain. My Jesus, my repeated falls into sin are the cause of your suffering. Grant I beseech you, the grace never to renew your pain by any more sins. Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be etc. *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.*

Holy Mother, grant etc.

*Quae maerebat et dolebat, / pia mater dum videbat / nati paenas inclyti.*

*Station IV*

*Vl. Adoramus te, Christe et benedicimus tibi.*

*R. Quia per sanctam crucem et mortem tuam redemisti mundum.*

This fourth station represents to us the sorrowful meeting between the Blessed Virgin and her Divine Son. Consider O my soul how deeply wounded was the heart of Our Blessed Lady at the sight of Jesus, and the Heart of Jesus on seeing his Sorrowing Mother. You were the cause of this sorrow for Jesus and Mary by your sins. Oh Jesus! Oh Mary! Grant that I may feel true sorrow for my sins, so that I may repent of them all my life and may merit your pity at the hour of my death. Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be etc. *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.*

Holy Mother, grant etc.

*Quis est homo, qui non fleret / matrem Christi si videret / in tanto supplicio?*

*Station V*

*Vl. Adoramus te, Christe et benedicimus tibi.*

*R. Quia per sanctam crucem et mortem tuam redemisti mundum.*

This fifth station represents to us how Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry the Cross after Jesus. Consider O my soul how Jesus had no longer the strength to carry the Cross, and the Jews out of a pretended compassion relieved him of its enormous weight. Oh Jesus! It is I who should bear the Cross on account of my sins. Grant that I may at least accompany you by bearing for your love the cross of all adversities. *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be* etc. *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.*

Holy Mother, grant etc.

*Quis non posset contristari / piam matrem contemplari / dolentem cum Filio?*

*Station VI*

*VI. Adoramus te, Christe et benedicimus tibi.*

*R. Quia per sanctam crucem et mortem tuam redemisti mundum.*

This sixth station represents to us Veronica as she wiped the face of Jesus. Consider, O my soul, the homage rendered to Jesus by this pious woman and how he at once rewarded it by imprinting his sacred countenance on the cloth. My Jesus, grant me the grace to cleanse my soul from every stain and to imprint on my mind and heart your most sacred passion. *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be* etc. *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.*

Holy Mother, grant etc.

*Pro peccatis suae gentis / vidit Iesum in tormentis / et flagellis subditum.*

*Station VII*

*VI. Adoramus te, Christe et benedicimus tibi.*

*R. Quia per sanctam crucem et mortem tuam redemisti mundum.*

This seventh station represents to us the second fall of Jesus, which increased his torture and ignominy. Consider O my soul, the sufferings of Jesus in this new fall, inflicted by my repeated falls into sin. Oh Jesus, I am covered with confusion before you and I beg you to give me the grace so to rise from my falls that I may never again relapse into them. *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be* etc. *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.*

Holy Mother, grant etc.

*Vidit suum dulcem natum / morientem desolatum / dum emisit spiritum.*

*Station VIII*

*VI. Adoramus te, Christe et benedicimus tibi.*

*R. Quia per sanctam crucem et mortem tuam redemisti mundum.*

This eighth station represents to us when Jesus met the women who were weeping over him. Consider O my soul, how Jesus told these women not to cry over him but over themselves, in order that we might learn to grieve for

our sins before feeling sorry for his sufferings. Oh Jesus, grant me the tears of true contrition so that my sympathy with your sorrows may be meritorious. *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be* etc. *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.*

Holy Mother, grant etc.

*Eia, Mater fons amoris, / me sentire vim doloris / fac, ut tecum lugeam.*

### Station IX

*VI. Adoramus te, Christe et benedicimus tibi.*

*R. Quia per sanctam crucem et mortem tuam redemisti mundum.*

This ninth station represents to us the third fall of Jesus, bringing him fresh wounds and further sufferings. Consider O my soul, how the good Jesus fell a third time because our obstinacy in sin has caused us to fall so repeatedly. Oh Jesus, I am determined to renounce sin once and for all to bring you consolation. Grant that I may strengthen my resolution and make it effective through your grace. *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be* etc. *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.*

Holy Mother, grant etc.

*Fac ut ardeat cor meum / in amando Christum Deum, / ut sibi complaceam.*

### Station X

*VI. Adoramus te, Christe et benedicimus tibi.*

*R. Quia per sanctam crucem et mortem tuam redemisti mundum.*

This tenth station represents to us how Jesus, as soon as he reached Mount Calvary, was stripped of his clothing and given bitter gall to drink. Consider O my soul, the deep confusion of Jesus on being stripped of his clothes and his suffering at being forced to drink the bitter mixture of gall and myrrh. He suffered because of my immodesty and intemperance. Oh Jesus, I am sorry for the many liberties I have taken in the past and resolve never more to afflict you in such a manner but to practise modesty and temperance. This I am confident of doing with the help of your grace. *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be* etc. *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.*

Holy Mother, grant etc.

*Sancta Mater, istud agas, / Crucifixi fige plagas / cordi meo valide.*

*Station XI*

*Vl. Adoramus te, Christe et benedicimus tibi.*

*R. Quia per sanctam crucem et mortem tuam redemisti mundum.*

This eleventh station represents to us how Jesus was nailed to the Cross in the presence of his afflicted Mother. Consider O my soul, the racking pain that Jesus suffered as he felt the nails pierce his hands and his feet. Oh the cruelty of those Jews! Oh what love Jesus has for us! My Jesus, you suffered so much for me yet I avoid every pain. Grant that I may nail my will to your holy Cross so that it may be resolved never again to offend you but rather to suffer every pain for your love. *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be* etc. *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.*

Holy Mother, grant etc.

*Tui nati vulnerati / tam dignati pro me pati / paenas mecum divide.*

*Station XII*

*Vl. Adoramus te, Christe et benedicimus tibi.*

*R. Quia per sanctam crucem et mortem tuam redemisti mundum.*

This twelfth station represents to us the death of Jesus on the Cross. Consider O my soul, that after three hours of agony our redeemer died upon the Cross for our salvation. My Jesus, very justly should I spend the remainder of my life for you who sacrificed yours amidst such tortures for me. This I resolve to do. Help me by your grace through the merits of your death. *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be* etc. *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.*

Holy Mother, grant etc.

*Fac me tecum pie flere, / Crucifixo condolere / donec ego vixero.*

*Station XIII*

*Vl. Adoramus te, Christe et benedicimus tibi.*

*R. Quia per sanctam crucem et mortem tuam redemisti mundum.*

The thirteenth station represents for us how the most sacred body of Jesus was taken down from the Cross and laid in the arms of his Blessed Mother. Consider O my soul, the overwhelming grief of Mary as she beheld her divine Son in her arms. Ah most holy Virgin! Through the merits of Jesus obtain for me the grace never to renew the reason for his death in my life, but that he may always live in me by his divine grace. *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be* etc. *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.*

Holy Mother, grant etc.

*Iuxta crucem tecum stare / et me tibi sociare / in planctu desidero.*

*Last station*

*Vl. Adoramus te, Christe et benedicimus tibi.*

*R. Quia per sanctam Crucem et mortem tuam redemisti mundum.*

This last station represents to us the burial of our Redeemer. Consider O my soul, how the most sacred Body of Jesus was buried in the new sepulchre prepared for him. My Jesus, I thank you for all you have suffered for me and I beg of you the grace to prepare my heart well to receive you well in Holy Communion and thus to make my soul your habitation forever. *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be* etc. *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.*

Holy Mother, grant etc.

*Quando corpus morietur, / fac ut animae donetur / paradisi gloria.*

*Vl. Salva nos, Christe Salvator, per virtutem crucis.*

*R. Qui salvasti Petrum in mari, miserere nobis.*

Oremus: *Deus, qui unigeniti Filii tui pretioso sanguine vivificae crucis vexillum sanctificare voluisti, concede, quaesumus, eos qui eiusdem sanctae crucis gaudent honore, tua quoque ubique protectione gaudere. Per eundem Christum Dominum nostrum. R. Amen.*

*VI. Divinum auxilium maneat semper nobiscum.*

R. Amen

*Prayer of Pope Benedict XIII to implore from God the grace of not dying an unprepared for death*

“Most merciful Lord Jesus, by your agony and sweat of blood and by your death deliver me, I beseech you, from a sudden and unprovided death.

Most benign Jesus, by your cruel and ignominious scourging and crowning with thorns, by your Cross and most bitter Passion, and by your goodness, I humbly beseech you not to let me die an unprovided death nor to pass away from this life without the sacraments.

My most loving Jesus, my Lord and my God, by all your sufferings and sorrows, by your precious blood and most sacred wounds and by your last words, : *Deus, Deus meus, ut qui dereliquisti me?* [Mk 15:34]. and by that loud cry: *Father into your hands I commend my spirit*; I most earnestly entreat you to preserve me from a sudden death. Your hands, O my Redeemer, have entirely made and fashioned me. I beg you to give me time for repentance and a happy death in your grace, that I may love, praise and bless you for eternity.

My Lord Jesus Christ, by those five wounds which you received on the Cross for love of us, help your servants redeemed by your most precious Blood... *Sanguinisque pretiosi quem in mundi pretium.* Amen.”

*Prayer to St Joseph*

“O most glorious St Joseph, fortunate spouse of Mary, you who merited being the guardian of the Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ, and embracing him tenderly already enjoyed heaven in anticipation! Obtain for me from the Lord complete forgiveness of my sins, the grace to imitate your virtues, so that I may always walk on the way that leads to heaven. Since you merited having Jesus and Mary around your bed at the point of death and sweetly breathed your last in their arms, I beg you to defend me from the enemies of my soul at the end of my life; so that consoled by the hope of flying with you to possess



eternal glory in heaven I may breathe my last pronouncing the holy names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.”

*Prayer for a happy death*

“Lord Jesus, God of goodness and Father of mercies, I approach you with a contrite and humble heart: to you I recommend my last hour and the decision of my eternal doom.

When my feet, benumbed, shall warn me that my mortal course is drawing to a close, *merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.*

When my hands, cold and trembling, shall no longer be able to clasp the crucifix, and against my will I am forced to let it fall on my bed of suffering, *merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.*

When my eyes, dim and troubled at the approach of death shall fix themselves on you, my last and only support, *merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.*

When my lips, cold and quivering, shall pronounce for the last time your adorable name, *merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.*

When my face, pale and livid, shall inspire the bystanders with compassion and awe, and my hair, bathed in the sweat of death, and stiffening on my head, shall forebode my approaching end, *merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.*

When my ears, soon to be shut forever to the words of men, shall be open to hear your voice pronouncing the sentence by which my condition is to be fixed irrevocably for all eternity, *merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.*

When my imagination, agitated by fearful and horrible spectres, shall be drowned in an abyss of anguish; and my spirit, troubled with the memory of my ill-doings, and the fear of your justice, shall wrestle with the powers of darkness, who will strive to take from me the consoling sight of your mercies and plunge me into the pit of despair, *merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.*

When my weak heart, weighed down with the pain of my illness, shall be overtaken with the horror of death, and be exhausted by the efforts it has made against the enemies of my salvation, *merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.*

When I shall have shed my last tear, the sign of my dissolution, receive it as a sacrifice of expiation so that I may expire a victim of penance, and then in that dreadful moment, *merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.*

When those present encircling my bed shall be moved with compassion for me, and invoke your clemency on my behalf, *merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.*

When I shall have lost the use of my senses and when the world shall have vanished from my sight; when my agonising soul shall feel the sorrows of death, *merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.*

When my last sigh shall summon my soul from my body, accept it as a sign of holy impatience to come to you, and you, *merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.*

When my soul, trembling on my lips, shall bid adieu to this world, and leave my body lifeless, pale and cold, receive this separation as a homage which I willingly pay to your Divine Majesty and then, *merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.*

When at length my soul, admitted to your presence, shall first behold the immortal splendour of your Majesty, reject it not but receive me into the loving bosom of your mercy where I may ever sing your praises: *merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.*

*Let us pray:* Oh God, who have doomed all men to die but concealed from all the hour of their death, grant that I may pass my days in the practice of holiness and justice and that I may deserve to quit this world in your holiness and love. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord, who lives and reigns in the unity of the Holy Spirit ... Amen." (*Pius VII granted an indulgence of 100 days to whoever recites this prayer every day and a plenary indulgence if you do so for a month.*)

#### *Prayer for the souls in purgatory*

“O almighty God, who by the love which you bear for men deigned to take our humanity, to live laboriously, to suffer a most cruel Passion and finally to die on a Cross! I beseech you by the infinite merits purchased for us by your Precious Blood, look mercifully on the torments suffered by those

holy souls in purgatory who, having departed this vale of tears in your grace, still suffer in cruel flames in order to atone for the sins for which they have not yet made full satisfaction to your Divine Justice. Accept, O merciful God the prayers which I offer for them, deliver them from that dark prison and call them to the glory of heaven. I recommend to you the souls of my relations and benefactors, spiritual and temporal, and in a special way those for whom I have been an occasion of sin by my bad example. Most Holy Virgin, Mother of Mercy, Comforter of the afflicted, intercede for those souls, that by your powerful intercession, they may be admitted to enjoy the kingdom which is prepared for them.”

*Vl. Te ergo, quaesumus, famulis tuis subveni.*

*R. Quos pretioso Sanguine redemisti. Pater, Ave e Requiem.*

### **On the choice of a state of life**

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto per la pratica dei suoi doveri negli esercizi di cristiana pietà per la recita dell'Uffizio della B. Vergine, dei Vespri di tutto l'anno e dell'Uffizio dei morti coll'aggiunta di una scelta di laudi sacre*. Torino, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1880, pp. 75-78.

In His eternal decrees, God has destined each one of us to a state of life with its corresponding graces. Accordingly, as in every other case, so also in this all-important matter, the good Catholic should seek to discover the will of God following the example of Jesus Christ who said in fact that his sole purpose in coming down to us was to comply with the will of his eternal Father. It is then most important, dear children, that you choose your vocation wisely, so that you may enter the career for which the Lord has destined you.

Some souls, whom God wishes to favour particularly, receive a clear indication of the state to which he calls them. You cannot expect so much, but you have the consoling guarantee that God will direct you in the right way, provided you do not neglect the right means for making a prudent choice.

One of these means is to spend your childhood and youth without offending God, or else to atone by sincere penance for the time misspent in

sin. Another means is humble and persevering prayer. Often repeat with St Paul: “*Lord, what is it that you wish me to do?*” Or with Samuel: “*Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.*” Or with the Psalmist: “*Teach me to do your will, for you are my God.*” Or use some other aspiration of love.

When the time has arrived for a decision, have recourse to God in frequent and very fervent prayer. Pray for guidance during the Holy Mass at which you assist, and offer up each Communion for the same purpose. You could also make a novena or a triduum, perform some act of mortification, or go on a pilgrimage to some noted shrine. Pray to the Blessed Virgin, who is the Mother of Good Counsel, ask the help of St. Joseph, her spouse, who faithfully kept the divine commandments; pray to your Guardian Angel and to your Patron Saints. It would be well also to prepare for your decision in such an important matter by making a retreat or a day of recollection.

Resolve to follow God’s will whatever happens, and despite the disapproval of those who might give you more secular advice.

Should your parents or other individuals begin to oppose what you perceive to be the will of God in your regard, remember that this is the occasion to put into practice the great advice to obey God and not human beings. Conduct yourselves towards your parents respectfully and honourably; answer and treat them submissively and humbly, but without putting at risk the supreme welfare of your soul. Seek good advice on what to do, and then confide in him who can do all things. Consult experienced and God-fearing persons, and especially your confessor, to whom you should confide your vocation and your dispositions.

### *The young man who is faithful to his vocation*

When St Francis de Sales understood at home that God was calling him to the priesthood, his parents observed that as the first born son he ought support and sustain them, and that his inclination to the clergy came from an indiscreet devotion and that he could also be holy in secular life. They felt it was better if he followed their intentions to offer him an honourable and advantageous marriage. But nothing could move him from his holy resolution.

He constantly put God's will before that of his father and mother, and while he loved them tenderly and respected them deeply he preferred renouncing all the temporal advantages before lessening the grace of his vocation. His parents, notwithstanding their worldly outlook, were pious people and later were happy with their son's resolve.

*Prayer to know one's proper vocation*

Here I am at your feet, O merciful Virgin, to implore from you the most important grace of my state in life. I only want to perfectly do the will of your Divine Son throughout my life. I ardently desire to choose the state that will most console me at the hour of my death. Grant Mother of Good Counsel, that I may hear a voice which removes every doubt from my mind. Since you are the Mother of my Saviour, also be the Mother of my salvation; because if you, O Mary, do not enlighten me, who will? If you do not instruct me, Mother of Wisdom, who will teach me? Hear then, Mary, my humble prayers. Guide me, doubtful and vacillating, put me on the right path that leads to eternal life, because you are the only hope of virtue and life, the fruits of which are nothing but the fruits of honour and honesty. Three 'Our Fathers, Hail Marys and Glory bes'.

## II. SPIRITUAL COUNSEL IN DON BOSCO'S LETTERS TO BOYS AND OLDER YOUTH

*St John Bosco's correspondence mirrors his manifold activities as a promoter of educational and welfare type work, publishing and missionary enterprises. Also documented is the broad network of relationships he had built up. His letters are those of a man of action, the tireless organiser, avid communicator, religious founder and a passionate animator of Catholic initiatives. Little space is given to spiritual aspects which he prefers to deal with in preaching, personal talks or in the context of the Sacrament of Penance.*

*But there is no lack of letters, brief though they may be, with spiritual input and valuable counsel, and from these emerges the wisdom and experience of someone who is forming souls.*

*Here we find an example set of correspondence, addressed to boys and young men, with suggestions and some small life programmes that echo the characteristic features of his spiritual teaching, all aimed at practical Christian living filled with good work and virtuosity.*

### **185. To Stefano Rossetti**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 500-501.

Sant'Ignazio presso Lanzo, 25 July 1860

My beloved son,

The letter you wrote me truly gave me pleasure. You have really shown by this that you have understood how I feel about you. Yes, my good friend, I love you with all my heart, and this love urges me to do whatever I can to help you progress in your studies and in piety and guide you on the way to Heaven. Call to mind the advice I have given you at various times; be cheerful, but let this cheerfulness be truly that of a conscience free from sin. Try to become wealthy - but in terms of virtue, and the greatest wealth is a holy fear of God. Keep away from bad boys and be friends with good ones; place yourself in the hands of your parish priest (arch priest) and follow his advice, and all will go well.

Greet your parents on my behalf; pray for me, and while God is keeping you some distance from me, I pray that he will always keep you as one of his own until you return to us. Meanwhile, I am yours in fatherly affection.

Fr John Bosco.

### **186. To Severino Rostagno**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 423.

Turin, 5 September 1860

Beloved son,

Your letter brought me much pleasure. If you found great consolation in the brief time we were together for a chat, what joy will it not be for us when, God-willing, we will be forever blessed in heaven where we will praise our Creator for eternity with one voice?

So courage my son, remain firm in faith, and grow each day in the holy fear of God. Keep away from bad companions as you would from poisonous snakes. Go to the sacraments of confession and communion. Be devoted to Mary and you will certainly be holy.

When I saw you I seemed to have an inkling of Divine Providence's plans for you. I will not tell you this yet, but if you come another time and see me I will speak more clearly and you will know the reasons for certain things said then.

May the Lord give you and your mother health and grace; and pray for me, who loves you dearly,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco.

### **187. To Giovanni Garino**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 144.

Calliano, 10 October 1860 [?]

My dear Garino,

I received your letter with much pleasure and I am delighted that you want so much to be good so you can become an excellent ecclesiastic. I will do everything I can for my part; but I also need you to do something. What is it? Unlimited confidence in everything regarding the good of your soul. I need you to go out and catch souls, but afraid that you might instead be caught by others I suggest that you simply make yourself a model for your companions in doing good. Moreover you will be greatly fortunate if you can do some good or prevent some wrong amongst your companions.

Love me as I love you in the Lord, and pray for me, since I am yours with all my heart,

Yours affectionately,

Fr John Bosco

### **188. To Emanuele Fassati**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 459-460.

Turin, 8 September 1861

Dear Emanuele,

While you are enjoying the countryside with good Stanislao, I am arriving along with your mother to visit you by means of this note that I should write to you.

My idea is to put a plan to you; so listen up. Your age and your preparation would seem to be adequate enough for you to be admitted to Holy Communion. So I would like next Easter to be the great day for your First Holy Communion. What do you say about that, dear Emanuele? Try to talk to your parents about it and hear what they have to say. But I would like you



to start now to prepare yourself and therefore be especially exemplary in the following:

1. Exact obedience to your parents and your superiors, not complaining about anything they ask you to do.
2. Fulfilment of all your duties, especially at school, without complaining about them.
3. Have great regard for your devotions. So make the sign of the cross well, kneel up straight and pray, and be exemplary at church.

I would be very happy to hear your answer regarding these proposals. Please greet Azeglia and Stanislao for me. Always be happy in the Lord. May God bless you all; pray for me, especially you, dear Emanuele, and honour me by your good behaviour. I am always your affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

### **189. To the boys at the Oratory**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 694.

From the Sanctuary of Oropa (Biella), 6 August 1863

My dear students,

If you could find yourself on the top of this mountain, dear boys, you would certainly be moved by the experience. There is a large building with a church at the heart of it, and together they make up what is commonly known as the Sanctuary of Oropa. There is a constant coming and going of people here. Some are thanking the Virgin for graces she obtained for them; others are asking to be freed from some spiritual or temporal evil; while others are praying to the Virgin to help them persevere in doing good, and asking for a holy death. There are young and old, rich and poor, farmers and gentlemen, Knights, Counts, Marquises, workers, merchants, men, women, farmhands, students of all kinds can be seen in great numbers going to the sacraments of confession and communion then going to the foot of a huge statue of Our Lady to ask for her heavenly help.

But in the midst of so many people I have one great regret. What is this? I could not see my own dear students. Ah! Yes. Why can't I have my boys here, take them to Mary's feet, offer them to her, put them under her powerful protection, make them all like Dominic Savio and also St Aloysius?

To give my heart some comfort I went before her special altar and I promised that once I got back to Turin I would do what I could to encourage devotion to Mary in you and while recommending you all to her I asked for these special graces for you. Mary, I said to her, bless all our house, keep even the least shadow of sin away from our boys; be a guide for our students; be the true seat of wisdom for them. Let them be all yours, always yours, and keep them as your sons, keep them amongst your devotees. I believe that the Holy Virgin will have heard my prayer and I hope you will give me a hand so we can correspond to Mary's voice, and to God's grace.

May the Holy Virgin Mary bless me, bless all our priests and clerics and all those who are working in our house. May she bless you all. She helps us from heaven so let us make every effort to deserve her holy protection in life and in death. *Amen.*

Your affectionate friend in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco.

### **190. To Emanuele Fassati**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 607.

From your village at Montemagno – 1 October 1863

Dear Emanuele,

Before I leave, dear Emanuele, listen to two words from a friend of your soul.

Since you will have arrived at the College which your parents have prudently chosen for you, try to put this advice into practice:

1. Have great confidence in your superiors.
2. See that you put the advice of your confessor into practice.
3. Avoid idleness and companions whom you

happen to hear speaking improperly. 4. Pray to the holy Virgin every day that she may allow anything to happen to you except falling into sin.

May God bless you and keep you in health and grace until we see each other again in August 1864, if we are still alive. *Amen.*

Your affectionate friend in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco.

### **191. To the pupils at Mirabello**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 629-630.

Turin, 30 December 1863

To my beloved boys at the Junior Seminary of St Charles in Mirabello.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us. *Amen.*

The signs of filial affection you showed me, dear boys, when I had the pleasure of visiting you, made me resolve to visit you again over these days of festivity and best wishes. But now that my special work is preventing me from doing that, I restrict myself to writing you a letter to manifest some of the thoughts of my fatherly heart.

But first of all I want to thank you for what you have done for me, the greetings you have sent me, the prayers lifted up to God for the good of my soul. I also thank you for the affection you have shown Fr Rua and the other superiors at the Seminary. Since I was with you and often went to see what kind of spirit you had, I believe it might be good to tell you what I observed in particular (I will write some separate notes on this) and in general.

To my real satisfaction I observed more people frequenting the holy sacraments of confession and communion, more devout behaviour in church and prayer, especially in the evening, more charity in putting up with your companions and a real effort by many to do better in their studies, fight vices and bad temptations. I observed all this with great pleasure, but do allow me to tell you that I also saw many things which made me sad.

I saw some going to church without giving any sign that they were entering a holy place; listening to the sermon (and there was more than just a few) but constantly distracted and without taking away something to put into practice for the good of their soul. I saw a few others begin their prayers but then get to the end without having any idea what they had said and mostly not even opening their mouths. I found others pushing and shoving, and others who because they could not take revenge were getting their bile and hatred up for the ones they didn't like.

Then there were a few who were escaping from hard work like it was an enormous boulder hanging over their heads. But what saddened me most were the ones trying to introduce ideas and topics that St Paul did not want Christians even to mention. Then there were a few others, very few, who, well, what can I say? They approached the holy sacraments unworthily.

These, my beloved boys, are the things I noted about how things are going at the junior seminary at Mirabello. Do you think maybe I am writing these things as a reprimand? No, I am writing only to advise you so that the good ones can be encouraged to persevere, the lukewarm ones can be encouraged to fire up a bit with the love of God and whoever needs to can get out of the situation he finds himself in. I have many things to write to you about this but I will reserve them until my next visit. Let me tell you what the Lord God wants from you during this year for you to deserve his blessings.

1. Avoid idleness, and be very diligent in fulfilling your religious and school duties. Idleness is the father of all vices.

2. Frequent communion. What a great truth this is that I am telling you at the moment. Frequent communion is the great column which supports the moral and material world to stop it falling into ruin.

3. Devotion and frequent recourse to Mary Most Holy. It has never been known anywhere in the world that someone who has trusting recourse to this heavenly mother is not promptly heard.

Believe me my dear boys, I believe I am not saying too much if I state that frequent communion is the great column that one pole of the world balances

on; devotion to the Madonna is the other column on which the other pole balances. So I tell Fr Rua, the other superiors, teachers, assistants, and all the boys to recommend, practice, preach, insist with all the efforts of the love of Jesus Christ that you never forget these three reminders I am sending you for the greater glory of God and the good of your souls which are so dear to Our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

While I assure you that every day I recommend you to the Lord at Holy Mass, I also recommend my soul to the charity of your prayers. All the boys in this house also recommend themselves to your prayers and wish you every blessing from heaven. May the holy Virgin preserve you as her own, always. *Amen.*

Yours most affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco.

## **192. To Fr Michael Rua, the Salesians and the boys at Mirabello**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 57.

Turin, 19 June 1864

To Fr Michael Rua and all my dear sons at Mirabello.

Dear Fr Rua, and all my beloved sons at Mirabello, I know you are waiting for me for [the feast of] St Aloysius. And you can easily imagine how great would be my pleasure in being able to satisfy you. But I have some ongoing business matters that are absolutely going to prevent me from coming. Amongst other things they are digging the foundations for the new church and that needs constant assistance for the modifications that might be needed at any moment to adjust the boundaries. So we shall have to put off this pleasure until the first fortnight in July and then we can chat, laugh and joke and have a nice celebration [*brindisi*] together.

Just the same I would like to celebrate St Aloysius here with you. The 21st here will not be solemn since we have shifted the Solemnity to the 29th of

this month. So I can celebrate Mass for my beloved Mirabellians. So let's come together in the spirit of the Lord and ask St Aloysius for three things:

1. Health and grace so you can prepare well for the exams and that way your holidays can be more enjoyable.

2. Imitating St Aloysius in his good example especially in avoiding improper talk.

3. That Fr Rua on my account will make you happy first in church, then at dinner and finally with a nice outing. If you celebrate St Aloysius like this we will all be happy.

Of course I love you all in the Lord and few hours of the day go by when I do not 'visit' you and think about you. Let us love one another, but love one another to serve the Lord throughout our life so we can enjoy him in eternity.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us. Amen.

With all my affection, I am,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr J. Bosco

P.S. Greetings to your mother, subdeacon Franceschino, Fr Bonetti and all the Provera family. Amen.

### **193. To the pupils at Mirabello**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 58-59.

[Turin, beginning of July 1864]

To my dear boys at Mirabello.

I have delayed, dear boys, in visiting you as I had promised, but what saddens me is that I could not even come to celebrate the Feast of St Aloysius. I am now looking for a way of making up for this delay by staying longer with you. God willing, I will be at Mirabello late on Tuesday evening. But why warn you? Wouldn't it be enough just to come as I usually do? No, my

dear friends, it would not be enough. I need to speak to you in public to tell you some things that I know you will like, then to speak privately of less pleasurable matters, but which are necessary for you to know. Then I would like to offer a word in the ear to some of you to break the horns of the devil who wants to become your master and owner. Here I add a note that in a visit made recently, I was able to offer some warnings for those who had special need of them and I ask Fr Director to tell them for me that I seriously need to speak to their soul, heart, conscience, but this need of mine is only so I can do good for their souls.

I also tell you that in the frequent visits I make, I have seen things that give me much consolation; especially those who are exemplary in going to holy communion and in doing their duties. I have also noted minor carelessness by some, but I do not want to make too much of this.

Do not be too worried about all of this: I am coming amongst you as a father, friend and brother; just put your heart in my hands for a while and we will all be happy. Be happy for the peace and grace of the Lord which your soul will certainly be filled with; and I am happy that I will have the great and much-desired consolation of seeing you all friends of God your Creator.

So is all this about the soul and nothing for the body? For sure, once we have given the soul what it needs we will not leave the body without anything. Right now I am recommending Fr Prefect to give the right orders so you can spend a nice day and if time allows to also go on an outing together.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always be with you and may the Holy Virgin make you all rich with the true richness which is the holy fear of God. Amen.

Pray for me. With all my heart I am,

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

P.S. Special greetings to the priests, teachers, assistants and the Provera family, especially to dear papa.

### **194. To Annetta Pelazza**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 60.

Turin, 20 July [1864]

My precious young Annetta Pelazza,

1. Obedience is your sure path to Heaven.
2. To carry out the idea you sometimes are thinking about (you have not told me but I seem to see it in your mind: to become a Sister) put yourself entirely into the hands of your good superiors.
3. When you need something go and ask Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Immaculate, and you will be heard.

May God bless you and grant that you all may progress along the way that leads to the salvation of your soul.

Pray for me,

Your humble servant in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

### **195. To Fr Michael Rua and the pupils at Mirabello**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 97-98.

Turin, 30 December 1864

To my dear boys at Mirabello.

The kindness and signs of filial affection you showed me when I had the beautiful pleasure of visiting you, the letters, greetings that some of you have sent me and which I preserve as grateful memory, encourage me to return as soon as possible and spend some time with you, my dear and beloved boys. Up till now I have not been able to satisfy this desire of mine, but I will shortly. Meanwhile to satisfy the affections of my heart in some way, I thought of writing you a letter that can be a messenger for my arrival there.



But what good is a letter to say the many things I would like to say? I will just keep things brief.

So let me say that I want to thank you for all the signs of kindness shown me and the confidence you showed me on that beautiful day I spent at Mirabello. The voices, the liveliness, the kissing and shaking my hand, the warm smiles, our speaking about matters of the soul, the mutual encouragement to do good are all balm for my heart and there is little I can think of in this that does not move me to tears.

I often have you in my thoughts and I enjoy seeing the good number of you that go to holy communion; but if they don't do better I'd like to have a sharp word with Prot, Maggiore, Pernigotti, Cigorza ... the names escape me; let me say no more.

I also tell you that you are the apple of my eye and that every day I remember you at Holy Mass; I ask God to keep you healthy, in his grace, make progress in learning, and that you may be able to be the consolation of your parents and Don Bosco's delight. He loves you so much.

What will Don Bosco give you as a Strenna (New Year's gift)? Three very important things: a warning, a piece of advice and a means.

*A warning.* My dear friends, flee every sin of immodesty; deeds, thoughts, looks, desires, words, conversations against the sixth commandment should never, as St Paul says, even be mentioned amongst you.

*A piece of advice.* Jealously guard the most beautiful, sublime queen of all virtues, the holy virtue of purity.

*A means.* The most effective means for holding down and overcoming the enemy with certainty and ensuring you preserve this virtue is frequent communion, but made with the right attitude.

Here I would like to say more things to you which are not for a letter; I merely recommend to Fr Rua that he be good enough to give you no fewer than three brief instructions or reflections on each of the topics mentioned.

Finally, dear friends, let me tell you I have great affection for you and desire so much to see you. That will be soon. I want you all to give me your heart so that every day I can offer it to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament while I am saying Mass. I am coming to see you with the great desire of speaking to each one about matters of your soul and to tell each of you three things; one about the past; one about the present; and the third about the future.

May the Holy Virgin keep you as her own always and may the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always be with us. Amen.

Long live my dear boys at Mirabello.

Your affectionate friend in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco.

P.S. Courage, patience and tolerance are my wishes for your director, prefect, teachers, assistants, domestics, dear papà Provera and all his family, Mamma Rua and my little friend Meliga, Chiastellardo, dear Ossella who wrote me a beautiful letter etc.

### **196. To Gregorio Cavalchini Garofoli**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 252.

Turin, 1 June 1866

My dear Gregorio Garofoli,

I was very pleased to receive your letter and I gave your news to the boys who were part of the caravan at Tortona. They were delighted and gave me the pleasant task of thanking you and greeting you. I would certainly like to speak with you at some length, but the things I would like to tell you cannot be entrusted to a letter. If you would like to you can visit me next holidays and I will tell you what I would like to be writing.

As a friend of your soul, I can but give you certain basic reminders. There are three of them, three 'F's. They are:

1. Flee from idleness.

2. Flee companions who indulge in immoral conversations or give you bad advice.

3. Fervent and frequent Confession and Communion.

Please greet your two brothers for me, Emanuele Callori and other Piedmontese there whom you have made known to me. May God bless you and keep you in his holy grace. Pray for me.

I am yours affectionately in the Lord,

Fr John Bosco

### **197. To the pupils at Mirabello**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 279-281.

Turin, 26 July 1866

To my dear boys at Mirabello.

I had decided to come to you next Sunday, then suddenly demanding reasons have forced otherwise. I am very sorry about this. I had already set my mind on what I wanted to tell you. Patience, God wants us to hold our consolation until after the holidays so then I hope to spend not one day but a week with you.

Meanwhile I think I should wish you happy holidays with some fatherly advice that I feel is necessary for your souls.

1. I thank your director, prefect, teachers, assistants and all the others at the junior seminary for all their courtesies, patience shown me and the prayers for my poor soul. Continue, dear boys; I assure you that I pray for you every day in my Holy Mass.

2. Before leaving each one should clean his conscience with the firm resolution to keep it that way until the return from the holidays, for the week or day established for returning. Don't allow yourself to stay at home for some frivolous reason beyond the established time, unless it is your health that does not allow you to return.

3. Once you arrive home immediately greet your parents, parish priest, teachers and others you should greet on my behalf and on behalf of your superiors. This is a strict duty of gratitude which will please others and will also benefit you.

4. At home make your usual meditation, go to mass, do some daily reading as you do at college. Be just as regular with confession and communion.

5. Let it be seen by your behaviour with the family that your year at school was not wasted; be models for your relatives and friends in the virtue of obedience, charitably put up with others, make no demands in food, rest, clothing and the like.

6. Let it never be said that you got involved in improper talk or even only listened to such. If you hear someone doing this, imitate our protector St Aloysius: either reprimand the one doing it or immediately leave such a dangerous friend.

7. Try to recount some deed, some example you have read, heard, studied to those who want to listen to you; or read a good book, but avoid bad books as being deadly poison for your souls.

Certainly, my dear boys, there are many other things I would say to you if a brief letter would allow me. I can certainly tell you that when you go elsewhere you will find people who are more learned and far more virtuous than me, but it will be difficult to find someone who seeks what is good for you more than I do.

So remember me each morning when you hear Mass. For my part I will not fail to remember you each day as I am celebrating it. What a great consolation for me, what great fortune for you if you go home and return without losing the Lord's grace! Make sure you rest, be happy, laugh, sing, go for walks and do whatever you like, so long as you do not commit sin.

Happy holidays, my dear boys, and happy return as well. May the Lord's blessing accompany you at every step.

The director of classes will get you to read and also copy this letter for whoever wishes to.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always be with us and may the Holy Virgin Mary assist and help us to persevere on the way to heaven. *Amen.*

Believe that I am always, with fatherly affection, completely yours in the Lord,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco.

### **198. To the pupils at Lanzo Torinese**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 407-408.

Turin, 26 July 1867

Dear boys at the College in Lanzo,

I have put off writing to you until now, dear boys, because I thought I could personally speak with you before the holidays. But now I see that the demands of my work are going to deprive me of this pleasure, which I will try to satisfy through the pen.

Let me tell you that I am grateful for the offering you made for the church of Mary Help of Christians and the dear letters that you have been pleased to write to me. You cannot imagine how much pleasure it has given me to read each one and it felt I was speaking with each one of you. While reading, my heart was giving the answer that it was not possible to give in writing to each one of you.

Be convinced my dear boys that you have written some beautiful thoughts, but these thoughts find echo in my heart and I hope that your heart and mine will be one in loving and serving the Lord. So be blessed and thanked for your charity and the kindness you have shown me.

Meanwhile, since the holidays are approaching, I would like to farewell you with some friendly words.

1. As much as possible, come back on the day that classes are due to recommence, which I believe is the 16th of August; unless some illness prevents you.

2. Greet your family, parish priest, teachers on my behalf.

3. If you find a virtuous companion in your village try to get him to come back to college with you; for those who don't seem so good do not talk to them about coming to college.

4. While you are at home at least go to communion on Sundays. During the week do not omit your meditation every morning.

5. Every morning say an *Our Father* and a *Hail Mary* with a *Glory be* to the Blessed Sacrament so you can join with me as I pray for you every day at Holy Mass that none of you become a victim of cholera which is having a terrible impact on nearby towns. And regarding this terrible disease I would advise that if it is in your town do not go there for holidays, so that you do not endanger your life unnecessarily.

Pray to God for me, dear boys and let us pray for one another that we can avoid offending the Lord during our life and be together one day to praise, bless and glory the divine mercies in heaven. *Amen.*

Your affectionate friend, father, brother,

Fr John Bosco

P.S. Long live the Director, Prefect, Teachers, Assistants and all my dear sons at Lanzo.

### **199. To Giovanni Turco**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 445.

Turin, 23 October 1867

My dear Turco,

Your letter gave me much pleasure and was so much the more pleasing in that you spoke to me with our old confidence, and this for Don Bosco is the dearest thing in the world.

Looking at your letter from just one point of view I thank the Lord that during the most difficult years of your life he helped you to maintain the

healthy principles of religion. One could say that the difficult age has passed and that the more you progress in years, the more will the illusions man has about this world vanish and you will be more confirmed than ever in what you have told me - that only religion is steady and can always and in any age make man happy now and in eternity.

With that bit of philosophy behind us I advise you to continue on with your work as a surveyor, and practising your religion especially with frequent confession which is a true balm for you; but do everything possible to be with and console your good father in his current old age which, thanks be to God, seems to be going well.

As I have always prayed for you at Holy Mass in the past, I will do so even more gladly now in the future because you have asked me to. You will also pray for me, that's right isn't it?

I have some nice books to be translated from French. Would you translate some for me? They are to be printed in the *Catholic Readings*.

I will always find consolation when you write to me.

May God bless you and your father and keep you both *ad multos annos* with a happy life.

Fr Francesca, Fr Lazzero, Chiapale and many other of your friends greet you. I will always be, in the Lord,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

## 200. To Luigi Vaccaneo

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 458.

Turin, 11 December 1867

My dear Vaccaneo,

I received your letter and you gave me pleasure by writing to me; I will not fail to pray to the Lord for you at Holy Mass. You pray for me too.

For now God does not want us to live under the same roof; who knows what will happen at another time? May everything be for his greater glory.

There are three things I recommend to you: attention to meditation in the morning; going with more prayerful companions; temperance in eating.

May God bless you and all my boys from the Oratory who are with you; greet them for me, and pray for me. I am with all my heart,

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

**201. To Fr Joseph Lazzero and the trade boys'  
community at Valdocco**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, p. 208.

Rome, 20 January 1874

My dear Fr Lazzero and dear boys,

Although I have written a letter to all my beloved boys at the Oratory, because the trade students are the apple of my eye, and since I have asked the Holy Father for a special blessing for them, I would like to please you and satisfy my own heart by writing to you.

There is no need to tell you how much affection I have for you. I have given you clear proof of that. Nor do I need you to tell me of your love for me, because you have shown that so often. But what is our mutual affections based on? On money? Not mine, because I spend it on you; not yours because (and don't be offended) you have none. So my affection is based on the desire I have to save your souls. You were all redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and you love me because I try to lead you along the path to eternal salvation. So the good of our souls is the basis of our affection.

But, my dear boys, does each of us really behave in a way that leads to saving our souls, or rather to losing them?

If our Divine Saviour would call each of us at this moment to his divine tribunal to be judged would he find us all ready? Resolutions made and never



kept; scandals committed and not amended for; conversations which teach bad things to others are all things we should fear reproach for.

However while Jesus Christ could rightly reproach us for these, I am convinced that many will present themselves with a clean conscience and with their state of soul well-adjusted, and this is my consolation. At any rate my dear friends, take courage; I will not cease praying for you, working for you, thinking of you. Help me with your good will.

Put into practice St Paul's words which I translate here for you: persuade the younger men to be moderate, never forget that it has been established that all must die and that after death we must all present ourselves before the law court of Jesus. Whoever does not suffer with Jesus Christ on earth cannot be crowned with glory with him in Heaven. Flee sin as your greatest enemy, and flee the source of sin, the immoral talk which is the ruin of good behaviour. Give one another good example in what you do and say, etc. etc.

Fr Lazzerio can tell you the rest. Meanwhile my dear friends, I recommend myself to your charity. Pray for me especially, and for members of the St Joseph Sodality. May the most fervent amongst you make a holy Communion for my intentions.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always and help us persevere in doing good until death. Amen.

Your affectionate friend,

Fr J. Bosco

## **202. To the Salesians and pupils at Lanzo Torinese**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 385-386.

Turin, vigil of the Epiphany [5 January] 1875

To my dear boys, the director, teachers, assistants, prefect, catechist, pupils and others at the college in Lanzo.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always remain with us. *Amen.*

Up until now, my beloved boys, I have not been able to satisfy the keen desire of my heart to visit you. An uninterrupted series of complicated affairs and some minor health problems, have prevented this.

Just the same I want to say something that you will find it hard to believe: many times a day I think of you and every morning at Holy Mass I pray for each of you in particular to the Lord. For your part you also give clear signs that you remember me.

Oh! What pleasure it gave me to read your greetings; with what pleasure I read the name, surname of each pupil, each class, from the first to the last at the college. I seemed to be in your midst and in my heart I often said: *Long live my boys at Lanzo!*

I begin then by thanking you all from my heart for the Christian and filial greetings you sent me and I ask God to bless you a hundredfold, you and all your relatives and friends. Yes. May God give you all many years of happy life.

But since I want to give you a particular greeting I ask heaven to give you health, study, good behaviour.

*Health.* This is a precious gift from heaven so look after it. Beware of excess, perspiring too much, getting overtired, moving too quickly from hot to cold. These are the ordinary sources of illness.

*Study.* You are in college to learn things with which in due time you can earn a living. Whatever be your situation, your vocation, your future state you ought to act in such a way that should you no longer receive support from home, you can still be able to earn an honest crust. Let it never be said that we live off others' sweat.

*Good behaviour.* The bond that holds health and study together, the platform on which they are based, is good morals. Believe me my dear boys, I am telling you a great truth. If you maintain good moral conduct you will progress in studies, in health; you will be loved by your superiors, your companions, relatives, friends, patriotic people, and if you want me to say so, you will be loved and respected even by wrong-doers. Everyone will compete to have you with them, praise you, be good to you. But give me people who

do not have good morals - oh what an ugly thing. They will be lazy and they will be known as donkeys. They will use improper language and will be known as scandalous types to be kept away from. If they are known at college everyone dislikes them and sings a *Te Deum* on the happy day they return home. And at home? Generally despised. The family and town dislike them, no one supports them, everyone avoids their company. Their soul? Alive they are unhappy, and when they die since all they have sown is bad they only have sad fruits to reap.

So courage, dear boys, look for and try to study, preserve and promote three great treasures: health, study, good morals.

One more thing. I hear a voice from afar crying out: "O young man, O pupil at Lanzo, come and save us!" These are the voices of so many souls looking for a kindly hand, one which will pull them back from the brink of perdition and set them on the way to salvation. I am telling you this because a few of you are called to a sacred career of winning over souls.

Take courage; there are many of them waiting for you. Remember St Augustine's words: "*Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti.*"

Finally, boys, I recommend your director to you. I know that his health is not so good; pray for him, console him with your good behaviour, be good to him, be boundless in your confidence in him. These will be of great comfort to him and of great benefit to yourselves.

While I assure you that every day I pray for you at Holy Mass, I recommend myself to your good prayers also, so that I may not have the misfortune of preaching to save others and then lose my own poor soul. *Ne cum aliis praedicaverim, ipse reprobus efficiar* [1Cor 9,27].

May God bless you all. I am, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

N.B. Fr Director is asked to explain these things in case they are not well understood.

### **203. To young seminarian Antonio Massara**

ASC A1720724 *Copie semplici*; ed. in E III, p. 390.

Turin, 26 September 1878

My dear friend in Jesus Christ,

Your neat writing shows your good will and invites me to speak to you with confidence. God is great, God is merciful. We sometimes do not think about him, but he thinks about us and when he sees us running away he places his hands on our shoulders and stops us to bring us back to him. Is that not true? May the Lord be blessed in everything and his decrees adored. When your health allows you to take up your studies again, I will not be far from advising you to push on ahead as far as priesthood. If you would like a life in common and would like to come with me, I will list you amongst my dear and beloved sons.

Meanwhile prayer, work, mortification, frequent confession and communion, will help you conquer the old enemy of your soul. Other matters cannot be entrusted to a letter.

Goodbye my dear friend and may God bless you.

Pray for me, your ever affectionate friend in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

### **204. To Fr Giovanni Branda and the trade school boys at Valdocco**

ASC A000206 *Cronichetta 1878-1879*, Quad. 14, ms by Giulio Barberis, pp. 104-106;  
ed. in E III, pp. 435-436.

Marseilles January 1879

My dear Fr Branda,

I am always thinking of my poor working boys and praying for them. If only I could visit them I would be amongst them to speak with and console them often during the day. But I would like to demonstrate with deeds that

I remember them in a special way. So tell them that the greetings they gave me at Christmas and New Year were very pleasing and I thank them with all my heart. I have heard good news about them and I bless the Lord who gives them good will and the grace to be virtuous.

I find myself here in the house in Lyon where there are already around sixty boys who little by little will become true followers of the working boys at the Oratory. Indeed some of them have shown that they are committed to being better than them in obedience and piety. I have told them that they won't succeed! Let's see!

Meanwhile tell everyone that I heartily recommend that they go frequently to confession and communion; but let both these sacraments be received with due dispositions so that each time we can see progress in some virtue. God willing I could say that every working boy is a model and good example to the others! That depends on you my dear boys, to give me this great consolation.

I know that you pray for me and I attribute the improvement in my sight to your prayers; continue them. I thank you and may God reward you.

The gift that I ask is a holy communion for my intentions.

May God bless you, dear Fr Branda, bless all the assistants, workers, all the boys and grant them the great grace of being one heart and soul in loving and serving God on earth and then one day being able to praise and enjoy him forever in heaven.

I am, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

## **205. To pupils in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> secondary at Borgo San Martino**

ASC A1920601 *Copie semplici*; ed. in E III, pp. 476-477.

Turin, 17 June 1879

My dear sons,

I would have liked to have replied before now to some of the letters written by your dear teacher and some of you. Not being able to do so for each one in particular, I am writing a letter to you all, reserving the opportunity to speak to each one privately on the coming feast of St Aloysius.

You know then that men in this world must walk on the path to Heaven in one of two states: ecclesiastical or secular. For the secular state each one must choose the studies, employment, profession that allows him to fulfil his duties as a good Christian and which will also please his parents. For the ecclesiastical state we have to follow the rules established by our Divine Saviour: renouncing comfort, worldly glory, earthly enjoyment to give oneself to God's service, and so assure oneself of the everlasting joys of Heaven.

In making this choice each one should listen to the opinion of his confessor and then without worrying either about superiors or inferiors, parents or friends, resolve to do what will facilitate the way to salvation and console you most at the moment of your death. The young man who enters the ecclesiastical state with this intention, has the moral certainty of doing great good to his own soul and the soul of his neighbour.

In the ecclesiastical state there are many branches which spread out from one point and tend to the same centre, who is God. Secular priest, religious priest, priest in the foreign missions are three fields in which labourers of the Gospel are called to work and promote the glory of God. One must choose what one has most at heart, most adapted to one's physical and moral strength, accepting advice from pious, learned and prudent people.

At this point I should deal with the many difficulties that refer to the world that would like to have all young people at its service, while God would like them all for himself. Nevertheless I will try to respond verbally or better

explain the difficulties which each one could face in making one of these very important decisions.

The basis of a happy life for a young man is frequent communion and reading the prayer to Mary Most Holy every Saturday, for his state in life, as described in *The Companion of Youth*.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with you and grant you the precious gift of persevering in doing good. I recommend you to the Lord every day. Please pray for me.

I am affectionately yours in Jesus Christ.

Fr John Bosco

### III. SODALITIES AND SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIPS

*Christian education of youth in popular works with a markedly missionary character like the Oratories on the outskirts of Turin, frequented by boys who were mostly abandoned and uneducated, required processes that were gradual and geared to each one's possibilities. The Companion of Youth offered a complete but essential proposal adapted to everyone. Starting with this, Don Bosco used the sacrament of penance, personal chats, suggestions of optional and practical devotions and offered books to read and meditate on. He set up personalised processes which were more adapted to youngsters who were more capable of greater moral and ascetic effort.*

*Mindful of his fruitful experiences as a boy, like the Society for a Good Time, which he had led while he was attending school in Chieri, he was concerned with promoting amongst the boys at the Oratory and house an organised set of sodalities and free friendly societies with a clear spiritual and apostolic purpose, to encourage amongst the more sensitive and well-disposed boys to develop a holistic and virtuous Christian lifestyle, guiding them to act as a leaven in their youthful community.*

*The founding of the St Aloysius Sodality (April 12, 1847) was the result of a process of consolidation of the festive Oratory and testifies to a shift towards a more systematic formation aimed at "encouraging piety through stable and uniform practice", and encouraging members "to give good example in and outside of church; avoid improper conversations and frequent the sacraments."<sup>12</sup>*

*The Immaculate Conception Sodality, which came into being through Dominic Savio's initiative with some of his friends in June 1856<sup>13</sup>, is a further development of Don Bosco's spiritual proposal. It was made up of a choice group of young students in view of a vocation to priesthood and decidedly leaning towards Christian perfection and apostolic activity amongst their companions. This*

<sup>12</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*. Introductory essay and historical notes by Aldo Giraud. Roma, LAS 2011, p. 170.

<sup>13</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, in ID., *Vite di giovani. Le biografie di Domenico Savio, Michele Magone e Francesco Besucce*. Introductory essay and historical notes by Aldo Giraud. Roma, LAS 2012, pp. 78-81.



*Sodality's regulations contain "an entire programme of spiritual pedagogy perfectly in tune with the Regulations for the students of the house."*<sup>14</sup>

*The ever clearer awareness of the centrality of the Eucharist for nurturing interior life inspired the founding of the Blessed Sacrament Sodality (1858). Later on the St Joseph Sodality (1859) came into being to nurture devotion and spiritual commitment amongst the trade students and the working boys and to foster Salesian lay vocations.*

*Don Bosco's best disciples were forged in these spiritual 'upper rooms' which were true "schools of practical faith and charity."*<sup>15</sup>

*From the regulations of the St Aloysius Gonzaga, Immaculate Conception and Blessed Sacrament Sodalities included here, it is possible to see the moral and spiritual quality of Don Bosco's educational approach and the fervent atmosphere that he was able to infuse amongst his boys.*

## **206. St Aloysius Gonzaga Sodality (12 April 1847)**

ASC A2300201 *Compagnia di S. Aloysius. Regolamento*, ms by another hand, with authentic corrections by Don Bosco (cf. MB III, 216-220).

The aim of this sodality is to engage young people in practising the main virtues that stood out most in this Saint. Therefore before joining, each one will have a month's trial to carefully think about the requirements and will not go ahead unless he feels he can fulfil them.

### *Requirements*

1. St Aloysius was a model of exemplary conduct; therefore, all who want to become members of his Sodality must follow his example. They must behave in such a manner as not only to avoid giving any kind of scandal, but also to strive constantly to set a good example everywhere but especially in church. When St Aloysius went to church, people flocked to see his modest demeanour and his recollection.

<sup>14</sup> P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani...*, I, p. 330.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322.

2. Endeavour to go to confession and communion every two weeks or even more frequently, especially on solemn feast days. These Sacraments are the weapons by which we triumph over the devil. As a young boy, St Aloysius received them every week, and as he grew older, more often. Any member unable to fulfil this obligation may substitute some other act of devotion, with his superior's advice.

3. Flee from bad companions as from a plague, and be very careful to avoid improper conversation. St Aloysius not only shunned such talk, but showed such modesty that no one even dared to utter an unseemly word in his presence.

4. Practice the greatest charity toward your companions, readily forgiving any offence. St Aloysius repaid insults with friendship.

5. Be very committed to keeping good order at the Oratory. Urge others to practise virtue and join this sodality. St Aloysius, out of love for others, volunteered to nurse the victims of a plague, and thereby sacrificed his own life.

6. When a member falls sick, all the others should pray for him and also give him material assistance according to their means .

7. Be very diligent in your work and in the fulfilment of your other duties. Promptly obey your parents and superiors.

### **207. Immaculate Conception Sodality**

ASC E452 *Compagnia dell'Immacolata*, ms by Giuseppe Bongioanni with Don Bosco's own notes (cf. MB V, 479-483)<sup>16</sup>.

We, Joseph Rocchietti, Louis Marcellino, John Bonetti, Francis Vaschetti, Celestine Durando, Joseph Momo, Dominic Savio, Joseph Bongioanni, Michael Rua, John Cagliero, after receiving the sacraments of Confession and

<sup>16</sup> These regulations, with certain variants, were published by Don Bosco in his *Life of Dominic Savio*, cf. Giovanni BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell'Oratorio di san Francesco di Sales*. Torino, Tip. G. B. Paravia e Comp. 1859, pp. 76-83 (OE XI, 226-233).

Communion, this day, June 8th [1856], give ourselves completely to Mary Immaculate and promise to work unceasingly for her and with her: to help ourselves to do this and to maintain our love for her we, here before her altar, solemnly promise, in agreement with our spiritual director, to follow in Louis Comollo's footsteps to the best of our ability. Here we bind ourselves as follows:

1. To carry out with the greatest exactness the rules of the house;
2. To help and encourage our companions: helping them by pointing out in a friendly way whatever needs correcting; encouraging them to do good through our words but especially through our good example;
3. To always be busy, making strict use of our time.

To make it possible to be faithful to these obligations and to help us to persevere in them, we submit the following rules to our spiritual director for his approval.

Charity makes us perfect, but only by obedience and chastity can we acquire this state that brings us close to God.

1. Our first rule therefore is to be perfectly obedient to our superiors and submit ourselves to them with boundless confidence.
2. The carrying out of our duties will be our first and special concern, and this will be preferred to those religious practices which we are not obliged to observe.
3. A true spirit of charity will unite the members of the group in genuine friendship among us and also with our fellow members. We will not hesitate to correct anyone when so doing in a friendly way would help.
4. We will meet each week for half an hour and after a prayer to the Holy Spirit and a short spiritual reading we will consider how the Sodality is getting on in its work of devotion and virtue. We will help each other with doubts and to get rid of any faults or wrong habits which we have. This we will do privately except when someone has displayed quite blameworthy indifference and diminished his zeal for obedience and fervour.

5. Separately, however, we will admonish each other even while acknowledging that there are faults which we must correct in ourselves.

6. We will try hard to be even-tempered and good-humoured, being patient with each other, and trying to help each other.

7. There are no special prayers to be said; whatever time is left over after having carried out our own duties should be devoted to whatever will be most useful for our souls and this out of fear that there being too many of these, we not prevent fulfilment of those that each one has taken on himself for want of time, especially since true devotion does not consist in long vocal prayers, but rather in purity of heart and the total sacrifice of our will. However, we do take upon ourselves these few practices: We will go as often as possible to the Sacraments when we have been granted permission to. We trust that the greater use we make of such a means of salvation, so much the more will we feel encouraged to persevere in our enterprise and so much greater will be the strength we will have to overcome obstacles.

8. We will receive Holy Communion every Sunday, holy days of obligation, days dedicated to the Oratory's patron saints and all Solemnities of Our Lady.

9. We will also receive Holy Communion on Thursdays, unless we are prevented by some necessary obligation.

10. We will add the Rosary to frequenting the Sacraments. We keenly recommend it be said, but without saying that it is a daily obligation.

11. We will recommend our society to Mary each day, asking her to obtain for us the grace of perseverance, and the virtues necessary for an exact observance of these rules and to win her patronage.

12. Every Saturday we will try to practise some mortification or prayer or other practice in Mary's honour.

13. We will try our best to edify our neighbour. We will be very well behaved during prayer, reading, services in church, study and at school. We will jealously treasure the Word of God and will go over the truths we have meditated on. We will carefully avoid any wasting of time to safeguard

ourselves from the temptations which come so easily and so strongly at times of idleness.

14. Therefore whatever time remains after the discharge of our own duties will be spent in useful and good reading or in prayer.

15. Recreation is tolerated and indeed is desirable after meals, and when the mind is tired from studying it cannot help but be a relief, except when the company of superiors or just good manners might hold us back in order not to be rude.

16. We will make known to our superiors whatever will help our spiritual progress, guaranteeing that our actions will be submitted to their judgement.

17. We will not abuse the goodness of those over us by constantly asking for those permissions which in their goodness they are willing to give. The exact observance of the school rules to which we have pledged ourselves should help us to avoid this abuse of too many exceptions.

18. We will observe strict silence while studying, putting aside any pretext for speaking, making noise, or going outside. We recommend the greatest caution and patience in this rule.

19. We will accept from our superiors whatever is spent on food, and not try to be any different from our companions nor accept (anything special) that might be offered us, lest it becomes a cause of harm to someone.

20. We will not complain about our food and we will try to dissuade others from doing so, whatever it tastes like.

21. Whoever wants to be part of this society should first of all purge his conscience at the tribunal of Confession and then eat from the Eucharistic table; he should then do a week of novitiate; he should read these rules carefully and promise God, Mary Immaculate and his spiritual director that he will observe them in detail.

22. On the day he is admitted, his fellow members will go to Communion (approach the table of the angels), and ask the divine Majesty to give the neophyte the virtue of perseverance and obedience, love of God and Mary our mother.

23. The society is placed under the aegis of the Immaculate Conception, from whence it draws its name and whose medal we will devoutly carry. A sincere, filial and limitless confidence in Mary, a constant devotion and loving affection for her, will make us overcome all obstacles, clinging tenaciously to our resolutions, be firm with ourselves, gentle and kindly towards others, exact in everything. The members are urged to write the holy names of Jesus and Mary first of all in their hearts and minds and then on their books and other objects that might come to mind.

The most reverend Don Bosco is requested to examine these rules and give us his opinion about them. We assure him of our complete willingness to accept whatever modifications and amendments he will consider suitable. He will be, as has been till now, our good and loving father and we will be (what we unfortunately have not been till now) his sincere and obedient children.

And you, O Mary, bless our efforts, since the idea of the Sodality is all yours. Smile on our hopes, accept our promises, and thus under your mantle and made strong by your loving care, we will come safely through the storm-tossed sea of this world and be victorious over the temptations of the devil. So too will we be able to help our companions by what we do, give joy to those over us, and in all things be your loving sons.

And if God gives us the grace of becoming priests, we promise you to give all our energies and powers to this work, distrusting ourselves, trusting completely in God; and so after our exile on this earth we trust that, consoled by Mary at our side, we shall safely receive the eternal reward that God reserves for those who serve him in spirit and truth.

Seen. Approved with the following conditions:

1. That the above-mentioned promises do not have binding force as vows.
2. They do not oblige under pain of sin.
3. When you meet, set up some kind of external work of charity: like neatness in the church, taking the wilder boys in the house in hand, or the more ignorant ones, etc.

4. Share out the days of the week so each day will have some going to communion.

5. Do not add any religious practices without the permission of the superiors.

6. Make it your fundamental purpose to promote devotion to Mary Immaculate and the Blessed Sacrament.

7. Before accepting anyone get him to read the life of Louis Comollo.

The first two and the fifth conditions are obligatory, the others advisory.

Turin, June 9, 1856

Fr John Bosco

### **208. Blessed Sacrament Sodality (1857)**

ASC A2300202 *Compagnia del SS. Sacramento*,  
ms by Don Bosco himself (cf. MB V, 759-761)<sup>17</sup>.

Here are the main articles in the regulations for this sodality:

1. The principal aim of this sodality is to foster adoration of the Blessed Eucharist and make reparation to Jesus Christ for the insults he receives in this most august Sacrament from infidels, heretics and bad Christians.

2. For this purpose members will try to share their times for going to Communion so that someone receives Communion every day. Each member, with the permission of his confessor, will go to Communion on Sundays and once during the week.

3. A member will be especially ready to attend all functions directly concerned with the worship of the Blessed Eucharist like serving at Mass,

<sup>17</sup> This document was drawn up by Don Bosco when he wrote the Life of Michael Magone and was reproduced in a note to Chap. XIII of this life cf. Giovanni BOSCO, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*. Torino, Tip. G. B. Paravia e Comp. 1861, pp. 69-70 (OE XIII, 223-224).

assisting at Benediction, accompanying Viaticum when it is brought to the sick, visiting the Blessed Sacrament during the 40 Hours exposition.

4. Each member will try to learn how to serve Mass well carrying out all the ceremonies properly and devoutly and distinctly repeating the words that belong to this sublime ministry.

5. There will be one spiritual conference a week, which everyone will be keen to attend, and invite others to come and to be punctual.

6. During the conferences, deal with matters directly regarding worship of the Blessed Sacrament, like encouraging going to communion with the most recollection, instructing and assisting those making their first communion, helping those who need it to do their preparation and thanksgiving, distributing books, holy pictures, pamphlets about this sort of thing.

7. After the conference make a practical spiritual resolution to be put into practice during the week.



#### IV. SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF THE YOUNG THROUGH PREACHING, “GOODNIGHTS” AND DREAM ACCOUNTS

*In Don Bosco's educational system preaching has special importance, both that which is bound up with the liturgical or catechetical context, and that of the informal, familiar kind. The saint often addressed the community of young people with brief and fervent talks aimed at stirring up their emotions, nurturing their minds, encouraging good resolutions and devout sentiments, and looking ahead to stimulating horizons.*

*In his familiar community chats before they went to bed at night ( “goodnights”) he mixed in the oratory genre of spiritual exhortation, imaginary and allegorical stories, communication, and educational reminders.*

*The material in the archives is huge: we have chosen a few talks offering a panorama of Don Bosco's preferred themes and his expressive style. The texts here are written up from notes taken by some of his listeners during or immediately after the saint spoke. Not every word is literal but they certainly contain the substance. The Biographical Memoirs make extensive use of this material, correct the language, integrate text and various testimonies. We have preferred to go with the sources.*

*In the “goodnights” to the boys, Don Bosco made broad use of his dream accounts. He was a very able narrator, and this enabled him to imprint on the minds of his listeners the messages that he had most at heart. When recounting his dreams to the educative community at Valdocco “the pedagogical motive is often interlaced with the supernatural or openly providential.”<sup>18</sup> We see this in the four examples here (nos. 210, 213, 217, 223) which, “in their allegorical construction”, are an excellent example of his communicative style and pastoral concerns<sup>19</sup>.*

*The goodnights and Sunday preaching generally deal with the recurring themes of sin and grace, purification of the heart through the sacrament of confession, frequent communion, spiritual fervour, exact fulfilment of duty and doing good,*

<sup>18</sup> P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani...*, I, p. 374.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia delle religiosità cattolica...*, II, p. 505.

*a peaceful conscience (nos. 211, 214, 216, 218, 219, 220). The instruction on the “beautiful virtue” (no. 209)—one of his preferred topics—is a particularly interesting Sunday talk for its argument, all made up of examples drawn from the Scriptures following a typical approach of Don Bosco’s, and with a particular spiritual and eschatological outlook where he presents virginity: the “beautiful” virtue introducing one to a taste for spiritual life. It allows a more intense and intimate relationship with God. It makes it possible to follow Christ more wholeheartedly. It introduces one into the band of blessed spirits who are the “crown of the divine Lamb and follow him wherever he goes”.*

*The insistence on vocational discernment and choice of state of life emerges in particular (nos. 212, 215, 221, 222). The conference on March 19, 1876 (no. 212)—reserved for Salesians but open for any boys who were interested—effectively represents the way Don Bosco was able to present an apostolic vocation, opening up horizons of meaning as wide as the world itself, enthusing and motivating. Everyone, he says, is called to work in the Lord’s vineyard for the salvation of souls; it is a vast harvest that needs many kinds of workers, some dedicated to preaching and teaching, others to a variety of essential services; all aimed at conquering the hearts of the young to lead them to God through prayer, good example, word, works of charity, meekness, fraternal correction. The only condition is right intention, meaning the sincere desire to cooperate in the salvations of one’s brothers and sisters and generous availability for any service and sacrifice as good disciples of the crucified Christ.*

### **209. Instructions on the beautiful virtue**

ASC A0040601 *Memoria di alcuni fatti 1858-1861*, ms by Giovanni Bonetti, pp. 1-7<sup>20</sup>  
(cf. MB VI, 62-66).

Sunday 17 October 1858

The Church largely dedicates October to Our Blessed Lady. The first Sunday of this month is dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary in memory

<sup>20</sup> This was an afternoon instruction given in church after Vespers and before Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

of the many graces obtained, the wondrous miracles wrought through her intercession, to keep the keen memory alive in the hearts of the faithful of the many favours that Mary, invoked under that title, has shared with those who are devoted to her. On the second Sunday we celebrate the Virgin Mary's motherhood reminding Christians that Mary is our mother, and that we are all her dear children. Today, the third Sunday, we celebrate her purity, the virtue that makes her so great in God's eyes, and the virtue that made her the most beautiful creature that ever came from the Lord's hands.

Given that you have heard me speak for the last two Sundays about the glories of the Virgin Mary, this evening instead of speaking to you about Mary Most Holy, I would like to speak of this beautiful virtue, showing you the esteem not just that the Gentiles had for it, since they greatly venerated those who preserved this virtue, but I would like to show you the esteem that God himself had for it. Oh how happy I would be if this evening I could fill your tender hearts with love for this angelic virtue! So pay attention and I will begin.

What is the virtue of purity? Theologians tell us that by purity we mean a hatred, an abhorrence of everything against the sixth commandment. Any person, each in his own state, can preserve the virtue of purity. This purity is so pleasing to God that in every age he severely punished the vice that is contrary to it, and rewarded those who preserved it with wondrous deeds. From the earliest times in the world, when human beings, though not so numerous, had already descended into disorder, corruption, as the Scripture tells us: "*omnis caro corruperat viam suam*" [Gen 6:12], God had rewarded purity. Enoch who was the only one to have kept his soul pure for God, was believed by God to be unworthy of remaining amongst such a sinful people, so God sent two of his angels who took Enoch away from the company of men, carried him to another place where he was then brought to Heaven by Jesus Christ after his death.

Let's move on. Once mankind had multiplied on earth, they forgot about their Creator and gave themselves to carnal pleasures, the worst vices, the vice of dishonesty, impurity. God was so outraged by such iniquity that

he promised to wipe out the human race with a flood all across the land. Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives were saved from this universal extermination. Why this preference for them? Because they had kept this beautiful and inestimable virtue of purity.

Let's move further ahead. After the flood the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah gave themselves over to all sorts of foul deeds. God decided to eliminate them not with a flood of water this time, but with a flood of fire. But what did he do first? He cast his gaze on that unhappy city and saw that Lot and his wife had preserved their purity. He then immediately sent an angel to tell them to flee, because God wanted to incinerate all the people. As soon as they had left the city a sea of fire, with terrible thunder and lightning rained down on that poor city and on all its inhabitants. Lot and his wife were saved from the fire, but his wife, out of curiosity, did not escape God's wrath. The angel had forbidden them to look back when God's punishment rained down on the inhabitants, but Lot's wife, hearing so much noise that it seemed that all of hell had been provoked, could not resist turning around; and at that very moment she was turned into a pillar of salt. So though God had saved her from the common slaughter for her purity, he nevertheless wanted to punish her for the immodesty of her eyes, to show us that we need to be modest with our eyes, not satisfy every curiosity, otherwise we will be its victim, not only in our body as was Sarah, but also in our soul since our eyes are the portals through which the devil enters.

Let's move on yet again. Go back in your thoughts to Egypt, and there you will see a young man who, because he did not want to consent to an infamous and immodest action his mistress wanted to force him into, suffered a thousand punishments and even prison. Who was he? Would God even allow Joseph to perish? No, wait and you will see him come out of prison and in an instant ascend the throne of Egypt; you will see that he alone with his advice saves not only Egypt from death, but Judah, Syria, Mesopotamia and a thousand other nations. But where does such glory come from you will ask me. From God, who wanted to reward Joseph's heroic deed in not heeding blandishments. He wanted to reward his love for the beautiful virtue of purity,

wanted to reward his constancy in preserving his heart chaste and pure at the cost of persecution and prison itself.

I would never finish if I wanted to recall all the deeds of this kind, and of Judith, because of whose purity God saved Judith from an entire army, or the chaste Susannah lifted up to Heaven, and of Esther who saved the Hebrew nation. But why did God work so many wonders for them? For their purity. Yes, the virtue of purity is so beautiful, so pleasing to God who at all times and in all circumstances never left those who preserved it without protection.

But let's keep going, since this is not enough. The much awaited time had come, the one whom the people had waited so long for, the Saviour of the world. But who was she of whom the Son of God, Creator of the Universe wished to be born? God turned his gaze on all the daughters of Zion and found one with whom he fell in love. Who was she? Mary most holy. The Saviour of the world was born of her, not through the work of man but through the work of the Holy Spirit, since God wanted to accomplish a wonder never done before and that would never happen again. Why so many privileges? To reward Mary's purity. She was the purest, the most chaste of all creatures.

What do you believe would be the reason why our Divine Saviour loved to be with children so much, wanted to embrace them, if not because they had not yet lost the beautiful virtue of purity? The Apostles wanted to chase them away because of all their noisy chatter, but the Divine Saviour, calling them back, commanded them to let them come to him, *sinite pueros venire ad me* [Mk 10:14]; telling them they would not enter the Kingdom of Heaven unless they became simple, pure and chaste like those children. Our Divine Saviour raised up a young boy and girl, but why? Because, so the Fathers interpret it for us, they had not lost their purity.

Why did Jesus Christ show so much predilection for St John? Did he want to go up Mt Tabor for his transfiguration? He wanted St John with him. Did he want to go fishing with his apostles? Well then, he preferred to get into St John's boat. He went to Gethsemane, to the garden, but he wanted John with him. Hung upon the cross, he turned to John and said: "Son behold

your mother; woman behold your son.” But why did Jesus entrust John to his mother, the greatest creature that had ever left God’s hands, and no greater would there ever be? Why such preference? Because, my dear boys, John more than all the other apostles had preserved the beautiful virtue of virginity, of purity. He allowed John to rest his head on his divine breast, why? Because John had preserved and possessed the beautiful virtue of purity. If Jesus loved all of his apostles with a particular love, he loved John more than all; the others believed that John would not have to die because Jesus had told Peter: and if I want him to live until I come, what is that to you? In fact St John was the apostle who lived the longest. It was he whom Jesus Christ had made to see in spirit the glory enjoyed by those in Heaven who had preserved the beautiful virtue of purity in this life. He left it written in the Apocalypse that, entering the highest Heaven, he saw a crowd of souls dressed in white, with a girdle of gold and carrying a palm in their hands. These souls made a crown for the Lamb and followed him wherever he went. They sang such a beautiful hymn, so sweet that he could not comprehend such beautiful harmony and was outside of himself, and turning to the angel accompanying him, said: “Who are those surrounding the Lamb singing such a beautiful song that all the other blessed do not know how to sing?” Then the angel told him: “They are the ones who have kept the beautiful virtue of purity, *isti sunt qui cum mulieribus non sunt coniugati*” [Rev 14:4].

O what fortunate souls are they who have not yet lost the beautiful virtue of purity! Redouble your efforts to preserve it. You have such a beautiful treasure, one so great that even the angels envy you. You are, as our Redeemer Jesus Christ says, like the angels.

And for those of you who have unfortunately lost it, do not lose courage, do everything possible to recover it. It is true, you will no longer be virgins, you will no longer have the good fortune of being in that group which has a place apart from all the others in Heaven; you will no longer be able to sing that hymn that only the virgins can sing, but that does not matter - there is still a beautiful place for you in Heaven, so majestic that the thrones of the richest emperors, the richest kings that have ever been or could be on this earth, pale by comparison. You will still be surrounded by so much glory

that neither human nor angelic tongue could explain. You will still be able to enjoy the beautiful company of Jesus, Mary, that good mother of ours who anxiously awaits us; the company of all the saints and angels who are always ready to help us so long as we want with all our heart to preserve the beautiful virtue of purity.

### 210. The snake and the Hail Mary

ASC A0080302 *Cronaca dell'Oratorio 1862*, ms. by Francesco Provera<sup>21</sup>, pp. 1-6  
(cf. MB VII, 238-239. 241-243).

Wednesday 20 August 1862

I would like to tell you a dream I had a few nights ago (it would have been the night of the Feast of the Assumption). I dreamt that I found myself with all the boys at Castelnuovo d'Asti at my brother's house. While everyone was out playing, one came up to me (I don't know who), and called me to go with him. He led me to the field near the playground, and pointed to a snake lying there in the grass, about 7 to 8 metres long. It was a very big one. Horrified at the sight, I wanted to run away.

"No, no," the man said, "Don't run away. Come here and see."

"What?" I gasped, "Don't you realise that monster could spring on me and gobble me up in no time?"

"Don't be afraid, no harm will come to you. Come with me."

"Nothing doing; I'm not crazy."

"Well then," he continued, "stay there." Then he went and fetched a rope and brought it to me there where I was, and said:

<sup>21</sup> Francesco Provera (1836-1874), native of Mirabello Monferrato, entered the Oratory at Valdocco when he was 22 years of age, in 1858; he was one of the founding members of the Salesian Society (18 December 1859). In 1863, still a cleric, he was sent with Fr Michael Rua to open the first Salesian Institute outside of Turin in Mirabello (his home town), and was given the job as prefect and bursar; the following year he went on to Lanzo Torinese with the same role and was ordained priest that year. He died of an ulcerated foot, which turned into cancer, at 38 years of age.

“Take this rope by one end and hold it tightly in both hands, and I will take the other and go on the other side and we will dangle it over the snake.”

“And then?”

“And then we’ll snap it across its back.”

“Ah! No, for Heaven’s sake! The snake will leap up and tear us to pieces.”

“No, no; let me do it.”

“There, there! I have no intention of risking my life for a thrill like this.”

Again I tried to run away. Again he insisted that I need not be afraid, that no harm would come my way. I agreed to his plan and stayed put. Meanwhile he went round to the other side, we stretched the rope and then snapped it across the snake’s back. The snake leaped up and struck at the rope, but instead of breaking the rope it got ensnared in the noose. Then the man shouted:

“Hold it tight, hold it tight and don’t let it escape from the noose.”

And he ran to a pear tree nearby and tied the rope to it. Then he came to me and tied my end to the iron grating of a window in the house. The snake kept furiously struggling to free itself, writhing, thrashing and flailing about. In its fury it tore itself to pieces, scattering its flesh over the area, till it was slashed to a mere skeleton.

When the snake was dead the man untied the rope, coiled it up and then said:

“Now watch!” He dropped it into a box and closed it, then opened it again. We were amazed. The rope was no longer coiled up, but arranged in the shape of a Hail Mary.

“How did that happen?” I asked. “The rope was thrown into that box and now it looks so orderly.”

“Well,” he said: “the snake is a symbol of the devil and the rope is the Hail Mary, or rather the rosary which is a succession of Hail Marys with which we can destroy all of hell’s demons.”



Up to here is the first part of the dream. There is another part which is even more curious and interesting for everyone. But it is already late so we will put it off until tomorrow evening. Meanwhile let's keep in mind what that man said about the Hail Mary: let's say it devoutly when any temptation comes, assured that we will always be victorious. Good night.

Thursday 21 August 1862

Given that you have been pestering me I will tell the second part of the dream, and even if not all of it, at least what I can tell you about. But I must place two conditions first. The first is that nobody should write or talk about it outside: you can talk about it amongst yourselves, laugh, do what you want, but just amongst yourselves.

Now while we were talking about the rope, the snake and what they meant, I turned around and saw some boys who were picking up pieces of snake flesh and eating them. I immediately cried out:

“What are you doing? Are you mad? Don't you know that meat is poisonous and will do you harm?”

“No, no,” they said, “it's really good.”

And yet no sooner had they eaten it than they fell to the ground, swelled up and then hardened like stone. I was helpless, shouting at one, then another; I even slapped one, punched another, trying to stop them eating, but in vain. As soon as one fell to the ground, another would start eating.

So I called the clerics to help me and told them to use whatever means they could to stop any more eating, but to no avail. [Questioned afterwards privately about the clerics, he answered that in fact some of the clerics began eating and collapsed like the others]. I was beside myself, seeing such a huge number of boys lying on the ground. I turned to the man and said:

“These boys know that this meat will kill them, yet they eat it. Why?” He answered:

“You know that *carnalis homo non percipit quae Dei sunt*” [1Cor 2:14].

“But isn’t there some way of saving these boys?”

“Yes, there is.”

“What is it?”

“Only a hammer and an anvil.”

“A hammer and an anvil? what should we do with them?”

“We need to use them on these boys.”

“You mean put them on the anvil and hit them with the hammer?”

Then the man explained, saying:

“Look, the hammer symbolises Confession and the anvil is holy Communion. We need to use these two means.”

I set to work and found this helpful, but not for everyone. Many came back to life and recovered, but for some it didn’t work. These were the ones who hadn’t made good Confessions.

### **211. The storm in the sinner’s heart**

ASC A0000309 *Piccole locuzioni del molto R.do don Giovanni Bosco*, Quad. IX, 1876, ms  
by Francesco Ghigliotto<sup>22</sup>, pp. 3-7 (cf. MB XII, 131-132).

Tuesday 14 March 1876

I have visited various houses in Liguria and have seen that there is much to be done. Yes, there is much good to be done, and if all of you listening to me were ordained priests and were true labourers of the Gospel, you would all have good to do. ...

Arriving on the coast, I was able to see how stormy the weather was. For about five days there had been a storm at sea, but especially in one part. I had already heard it spoken of, but had never seen it, but I can tell you that

<sup>22</sup> Francesco Ghigliotto (1859-1900) was a novice that year and had received from Fr Barberis, the novice master, the job of writing down Don Bosco’s talks to the boys and the novices.

it made me wonder. The waves were as high as our house, running into each other, and they made such a powerful, terrible noise together as if four canons were going off. This collision of waves produced white foam that went so high that if there had been a building amongst all those waves it would have been tossed into the air so high that if people were in it, they would have died before they hit the water. But there was no building there of course. I found myself about thirty metres from the shore and often wanted to pull back further so I wouldn't get drenched. Observing this spectacle I admired God's power in it. When he wanted to he could make the sea peaceful and calm and could walk on it. And then with just one word he could make it turbulent again, making it terrible to witness. If parliamentarians and senators were to go and shout at the sea to stop, well, we'd see what they could do about it.

Looking at this sea I thought of the sinner who is constantly in a storm like that sea was then. His conscience is always gnawing away at him and he never has peace and tranquillity. Sometimes he has a bit of recreation, and then pulls aside, sad. His friends invite him to enjoy himself, but his shoulders slump and he has no will to do so, because his heart is reproaching him, telling him: "You are no friend of God's." He goes to lunch and tries to be cheerful, trying to chase away all the thoughts gnawing at him, but meanwhile his heart tells him: "And if you should die now, while you are eating, you would be excluded from paradise and hell would be ready for you". He goes to bed in the evening and tries to put aside the sad but just remorse of his conscience, telling himself: "I want to go quietly to sleep; at least I would be free of all these tormenting thoughts." Indeed that evening he did not say his prayers in order to repress the remorse he felt. But all in vain because his heart tells him: "If you should die this evening you would go into eternity, disgraced before God." So, he has no peace and tranquillity but is always caught up in a storm.

These thoughts went through my mind seeing such a stormy sea. Good night.

## 212. Everyone is called to work in the Lord's vineyard

ASC A0000408 *Conferenze e prediche di D. Bosco 1875/1876*, Quad. XIX, ms by Giulio Barberis<sup>23</sup>, pp. 63-78<sup>24</sup> (cf. MB XII, 625-631).

Sunday 19 March 1876

One day the Divine Saviour, walking through the countryside near the city of Samaria, looked around him at the plains and valleys, and saw that the harvest everywhere was abundant. He invited his apostles also to enjoy the view of this wonderful country scene, but they quickly became aware that despite the abundance of the harvest there was nobody to gather it up. So alluding to something higher, he turned to his apostles and told them: "*Messis quidem multa operarii autem pauci* [Mt 9:37], the harvest is great, but you see how few workers there are." This is the agonising cry of the Church and the people over the ages: the harvest is great but the labourers are few.

Our Divine Saviour, and you understand it well enough, meant by the field or vineyards around him, to speak of the Church and everyone in the world; the harvest is the salvation of souls, since all souls must be gathered up and brought to the Lord's granary; oh how abundant is this harvest; how many millions of people there are on this earth! How much work there is to be done to see that everyone is saved; but *operarii autem pauci*, the labourers are few. By the labourers working in the vineyard of the Lord is meant all those who in some way work for the salvation of souls. And note well that labourers here does not only mean priests, preachers and confessors, as some believe,

<sup>23</sup> Giulio Barberis (1847-1927), intimate confidant of Don Bosco's, had been appointed by him as first master of novices for the Congregation (1874), a role he kept for 25 years. His work in formation was decisive for the spiritual consolidation of the Congregation. He was a member of the Superior Council and, from 1910, Spiritual Director General of the Congregation. His *Vade mecum for young Salesians* (1901, 2 vols.; 2 ed. 1905, 3 vols.) is considered the first systematic text on Salesian spirituality.

<sup>24</sup> Fr Barberis introduces the text with this note: "Conference given by Don Bosco on the evening of St Joseph, 19 March 1876, after prayers in the small chapel to all the professed, novices, aspirants and those who wanted to be aspirants at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. Publicly invited to the Conference were all those who belonged or wanted to belong to the Congregation, and including adults, there were 203 present. It had a great effect." (A0000408 *Conferenze e prediche di D. Bosco...*, p. 63).

who certainly are put there to work and are directly involved in gathering the harvest, but they are not alone, they are not enough.

The labourers are those who in some way work for the salvation of souls; like those who work in the fields are not just the ones gathering the grain but all the others as well. Look around a field and see the variety of labourers. One is ploughing, another turning over the soil; others are using a hoe; someone has a rake or is breaking open the clods and flattening them; others are sowing seed, others still covering it over; somebody is weeding, pulling out dandelion, grass, vetches; one is hoeing, another uprooting, another one cutting; others are watering just at the right moment and pressing the seeds in; others instead are reaping, making bundles of sheaves,<sup>25</sup> there are others loading the cart and pulling it; one is spreading out the wheat while another is beating it; one is separating wheat from chaff; others are cleaning, using a sieve, putting it into sacks, carrying it to the mill to make flour; one is sifting,<sup>26</sup> another kneading, another baking. So you can see, my friends, what a range of labourers are needed before the harvest can fulfil its purpose of giving us bread from Heaven.

As it is in the field, so it is with the Church; all kinds of labourers are needed, all kinds; No one can say: "Although my behaviour is irreproachable, I would be no good working for the greater glory of God." No, nobody can say that; everyone can do something. The labourers are few. Oh if only there were so many priests to send everywhere around the world, to every city, town, village, countryside, and convert the world. But it is impossible to have so many priests; so others are needed. How could priests be free for their ministry if they did not have people to bake the bread and cook their meals; if they had nobody to make their shoes and clothes? The priest needs to be helped; and I believe I am not mistaken if I say that all of you here, priests and academic students and trade students, working boys and coadjutors, all of you can be true labourers for the Gospel and do good in the Lord's vineyard. How? In many ways.

<sup>25</sup> *Borla*, the word Don Bosco uses, is Piedmontese and means a bundle of sheaves (cf. C. ZALLI, *Dizionario piemontèis, italian, latin e fransèis*, Carmagnola, Barbiè, vol. 1, p. 151).

<sup>26</sup> *Burattare* is Don Bosco's word here; an archaic word for sifting.

For example you can all pray. Certainly there is no one who cannot do this. Oh you see, you can all do the main part that the Divine Saviour spoke of there; after saying that the labourers are few, he added: “Pray then that the master of the harvest sends labourers into his harvest, *Rogate ergo dominum messis ut mittat operarios in messem suam*” [Mt 9:38]. Prayer touches God’s heart; God becomes obliged to send them. Let us pray to him for our towns, for far away towns; let us pray to him for the needs of our families and cities; and let us pray to him for those who are still caught up in the darkness of idolatry, superstition, heresy. Oh let us pray with all our hearts, pray much to the master of the harvest.

One thing everyone can also do, and it is of the greatest help and real work in the vineyard of the Lord, is to give good example. Oh how much good one can do this way; good example through encouraging words for others to do good, good advice, good counsel. There might be someone who has doubts about his vocation; or there is another who is about to make a decision that will bring him harm forever; if people like this are advised, comforted in doing good, how much advantage they can draw from it! Often just a word is enough to get someone to stay on or to take the right path. St Paul told the faithful to try to be a *lucerna lucens et ardens* [Jn 5:35]. If only we could see ourselves in this light! May everybody be edified by our words. But that is not enough: may there also be works. May we be inflamed by a charity that makes us disregard everything else so long as we do good to our brethren; if only there could be that perfect chastity that has us claim victory over all other vices; if only there could be that meekness that attracts the heart of others! Oh, I believe that the entire world would be drawn into our net.

Something else that we can all do is to be regular with our religious duties, practices of piety, taking part in things that can promote the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. Speaking well of the Church, ministers of religion, especially the Pope, and the arrangements of the Church. These are things that anyone from the oldest to the youngest can do; and amongst us here in the house, speaking well of superiors, the Congregation, the house, the things we do.

But even this is not enough. Something that everyone can do is to help pull out the weeds, rye grass, bermuda grass, the vetches and all the other weeds that only do harm; I am trying to say that when there is some sort of scandal, don't tolerate it; whoever in the house can get rid of it, do so, and do everything to stop it; if you can't don't ignore it, speak about it to someone who can and not just once, but two or three times; just so long as the scandal is avoided.

If you hear someone complaining of things at table, you can all correct him; someone might be intending to go out without permission or complaining because he can't go out, but you can all encourage him, and patiently advise him. One kind of weed you can all stamp out is scandalous talk. It often happens that there is something going wrong in the house and the superiors do not know about it and therefore cannot correct it; it is absolutely necessary for you to speak up about it, make them aware of what is wrong; you are in close contact with them while the superiors are somewhat distant.

Another way of rooting out weeds is fraternal correction. It happens while you are here or at home with your parents in your village that your friends might inadvertently, in your presence, talk about things that are not proper for a young Christian; they write letters with unchristian thoughts and expressions that can make us angry or give us bad thoughts. So? Answer them kindly: "Look, you say such and such, but you know, these words do not sound nice in the mouth of a young Christian. I know that you are my friend and that you write without thinking about it; but because you are my friend I believe you will not be offended if I correct you for one thing or another." Or: "I'm sorry, but I can't accept what you are offering me because they do not measure up to how a young Christian should be living." Often a friendly correction done like this produces better results than a sermon in the hearts of your friends and companions, and it can happen that they begin to serve God or love their religion more just because they found this courteous way of finding out about religious practice.

And unfortunately it often happens that one needs to practise this kind of charity with one's own parents, instructing, correcting, advising them. We

need fortitude and we need this; be courageous about it, but always do so charitably, kindly, with the gentleness that St Francis de Sales would have used if he were in our house. All these and a thousand others, are ways that each one, priest, cleric, lay of any age or status, can use to work in the Lord's vineyard. You see then that everyone can work in the evangelical harvest in many and various ways, so long as each one is zealous for God's honour and the salvation of souls.

Now someone might ask: "But Don Bosco, what are you alluding to? What are you trying to tell us? Why are you telling us this this evening?" Oh, my dear friends! That cry "*operarii autem pauci*" was not only heard in ancient times, in centuries gone by but we, we in our own times hear it more and more demandingly. The Salesian Congregation's harvest is daily growing beyond proportion so that I can say that we no longer know where to begin or how to organise our work. It is for this reason that I would like to see you all be labourers in the Lord's vineyard, quickly! Requests for colleges [boarding schools], houses, missions are arriving in extraordinary numbers both from around Italy, or France, or foreign parts. From Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria in Africa, from Arabia, India, China and Japan in Asia; from Australia, the Argentine Republic, Paraguay, Gibraltar and one could say from all over America there are requests to open new houses because everywhere there is such a lack of labourers for the Gospel that it frightens anyone who observes the amount of good that could be done and that has to be left undone through lack of missionaries.

From the Argentine Republic we have particularly distressing news from Fr Cagliari. When they come to Confession, you mostly don't ask: how long since your last Confession, but: how many times have you been to Confession? And it is not an unusual occurrence for men and women not to have been for thirty or forty years. It is not that they hate the Church or Confession, no. This happens because they haven't had the possibility. And just imagine how many, oh how many on the point of death who want to at least have a priest to confess their sins to and receive absolution, but not even that is granted them because they rarely find a priest to satisfy that need for them!



However my aim is not to invite you to go to such far-away places; some can do this but not everyone, partly because the need here is so urgent, and also because for various reasons not everyone who feels called to the Salesian Congregation would be ready to go such huge distances. But in view of so many needs, such a lack of labourers for the Gospel, noting that all of you here, in one way or another can work in the Lord's vineyard, could I just stay quiet and not manifest the secret desire of my heart? Oh how much I would like to see you encouraged to work like the apostles! All my thoughts turn to this, all my concerns, all my efforts. and that is why we get you through your studies, make everything possible for you to take up the clerical habit, set up special schools.

Could I stay silent in view of such pressing needs? And while they are calling on us from everywhere and it would seem to be the voice of God manifested in so many mouths, could I just pull back? After the manifest signs from Divine Providence of the great things he wishes to achieve through the Salesians, could I remain quiet and not try to increase the number of evangelical apostles?

Now I have just one more thing to say and it is the most important. While I am inviting you all to remain constant and to join the Salesian Congregation, I would not like someone without a vocation to try to enter. I see the great good we can do; I point out to you how great the harvest is before our eyes, how we need many people to cultivate the Lord's vineyard if they hear an inner voice saying: in the Congregation you could more easily do good for the health of your soul and the soul of your neighbour; you know how things are and it is easy to join up. But I want all the others to follow their own vocation. What I want and what I insist on is this, that wherever you may be you be, as we read in the Gospel, "*lucerna lucens et ardens*".

I am not against a young man who wishes to go to the seminary and become a secular priest. What I want and what I insist on and will insist on while I have the breath and voice to do so is that whoever becomes a cleric, becomes a holy cleric; he who becomes a priest becomes a holy priest; that he who wants to be part of the Lord's inheritance by embracing the ecclesiastical

state not get caught up in secular things, but aims only to save souls. I require everyone, but especially the ecclesiastic, to be a light which enlightens people around him and not darkness which is a snare for those who follow.

This light is not only manifested through words: it is to become deeds. Let each one try to adorn his heart with the charity which urges him to give his life to save souls; and this means not looking to any bodily interest when it is a case of doing good, and saying with St. Paul that worldly interests and things of this earth are filth by comparison with gaining souls for Jesus Christ "*omnia arbitror ut stercora ut Christum lucrifaciam*" [Phil 3:8]. That means not being dominated by gluttony, intemperance which unfortunately wrecks so many young lives, and let us also say, the lives of many ecclesiastics. The one who wants to work with fruit in the Lord's vineyard, in whatever state of life he chooses, must also know how to be moderate and practise mortification, especially with wine.

The true labourer of the Gospel, wherever he finds himself, is one who willingly takes part in religious practices, promotes them, and celebrates them solemnly. If there is a novena, they are happy about it; they also have some special practice and invite others to join them.

To be a true labourer for the Gospel one need not to waste time, but to work: a bit here, a bit there; someone studying, another assisting and teaching; someone looking after material things, and others in the pulpits or confessionals; someone working in the offices or similar. But keep well in mind that time is precious and anyone who wastes it or does not keep busy, can never be a good labourer for the Gospel.

So, my dear sons, here are the things I wanted to tell you about being a good Gospel labourer. Oh if only we would do all these things in every detail! Let's take a look: are these things practised in our Congregation? Oh, if I could but say that these things really happen and are practised in detail. I would be so lucky, I could really go around proudly. If the Salesians would really practise religion in the way St Francis de Sales understood it, with the zeal he had, led by the charity he had; moderated by the zeal and gentleness he

had, yes I could really go around proudly and there would be reason to hope for immense good in the world. Indeed I could say that the world would back us and we would be its masters.

There is still one thing that I believe is of extraordinary importance and that we look to see if we have it now and always preserve it. This is fraternal love. Believe me, the bond that keeps the Society, the Congregation united is this fraternal love. I believe we can call it the bond, the fulcrum around which ecclesiastical Congregations revolve. But what degree should it reach? Our Divine Saviour told us: *Diligite vos alterutrum sicut et ego dilexi vos* [Jn 13:34]. Love one another as I have loved you. And in the Scriptures we find this requirement to love one another at every step. But for this love to be as is requested it must be such that the good of one is everyone's good and what is going wrong for one is going wrong for everyone. We need to support one another and never criticise the other; never any jealousy. "Let him do that, I won't"; "Everyone sees him in a good light while no one takes any notice of me"; "Look, if something good can happen it happens to him but nobody thinks about me". No, I forbid these jealousies, the good of one has to be everyone's good. And what is going wrong for one must also be felt as going wrong for everyone. Is someone being persecuted? We should all feel persecuted and suffer with him and help him. Is someone sick? We should feel bad as if it were us. So attempt good things together and let the initiative come from whoever. We know that not everyone has the same ability, studies, means. So great fraternal love. If we do, do you know what will happen? It will happen as it happened for the Church. Some were apostles, but besides the apostles there were 72 disciples. Then there were deacons, people who worked for the Gospel. But they all worked together, all worked together with great fraternal love and so they succeeded in what they did, which was to change the face of the world. We can do the same so long as we save souls and above all save our own soul. We have need of it.

All these things will only be obtained at the price of great sacrifice, by suffering something. We never achieve great things without great efforts; and that is why we have to show we are ready for everything.

Yes, let everyone join the Salesian Congregation, but let him say: I want to take this path only to save souls; and this includes that while saving other souls I first want to save my own. And so this will require sacrifice? Well, I am ready to make any kind of sacrifice. I would like to follow Jesus Crucified; if he died on the cross suffering terrible pain, I who wish to follow him must show myself ready for any suffering, even dying on the cross with him.

Besides, look! In the Gospel I find it written: blessed those who are troubled and never: blessed those who are enjoying life. So, if I have to suffer? Blessed am I, this way I can more closely follow in the steps of the Divine Redeemer. Those who enjoy this world just enjoy the moment and their enjoyment will be small, indeed, nothing is worse than nothing, as far as eternity is concerned. Those who are troubled instead might suffer somewhat, but this does not last long and every suffering will be changed into a precious stone up there in Heaven and console them for eternity.

I finish with what St Paul says, “*Vos delectat magnitudo praemiorum; non vos deterreat magnitudo laborum*”: do you take delight in the great reward of paradise? Then do not be afraid if you have to suffer something on this earth.

### **213. Faith, Temperance, Idleness**

ASC A0000301 *Conferenze e sogni*, Quad. I, 1876, ms by Giacomo Gresino<sup>27</sup>, pp. 1-9  
(cf. MB XII, 349-356).

Sunday 15 June 1876, Corpus Christi

I seemed to find myself in the midst of the courtyard heading towards the exit surrounded by my boys, some greeting me, others telling me something, as usual. Then from the trade school boys' side I heard: “Help! Help!” and I saw them running full pelt from there, many going through the gate at the back of the courtyard. Then the students too began shouting out, thronging around me. I wanted to go and see what had so scared my boys but they kept

<sup>27</sup> Giacomo Gresino (1859-1946) was a novice that year and had received the job of writing down Don Bosco's talks from Fr Barberis, the novice master,

telling me not come any further forward, that there was a monster that would devour me, and they held me fast in their midst.

While I was wondering what to do, behold this awful monster appeared and came right up to us. That animal or devil or whatever it was, was so ugly, disgusting, terrible, enormous that there wasn't anything else like it on earth. It was something like a bear, but with a small rump compared with its other parts; it had enormous shoulders and a huge stomach, with an enormous head and grotesquely disproportionate mouth with two large tusks like swords sticking out.

All the boys, terrified as they were, crowded around me for advice; but I was also afraid and not a little embarrassed. I told them all to stay together under the porticoes and kneel down and pray to the Blessed Virgin. We were all on our knees quickly, praying with more than the usual fervour to Mary Help of Christians, asking her to free us from the monster, who meanwhile was slowly advancing towards us as if it was going to attack us.

We were there for some minutes when, I don't know how, but we all found ourselves in the clerics' dining hall which had recently been extended and seemed all lit up. And in the middle we could see Mary, similar to the statue above the porticoes or like the one on the cupola, or the church, I can't remember; however, there were rays of light coming from it, and it was surrounded by the Saints and the Blessed so that the dining hall looked like Heaven itself. Wonder replaced fear, and we were all attentive to and focused on Mary who seemed to want to say something to us; she reassured us: "Do not fear, have faith; my Divine Son is only testing you."

I then carefully noted those who were around the Virgin and I recognised Fr Alasonatti, Fr Ruffino and Bro Michael of the Christian Schools, my brother, and others who used to belong to the Congregation but were now in Heaven. Then one of them said in a loud voice: "*Surgamus*." We were already standing and we did not know what to say. And then the same voice said, but louder: "*Surgamus*"; and since we were already standing we wanted to see how things were going to finish. I was about to ask for an explanation when Our lady began to speak, her voice wonderfully strong: "But you, as a priest, should

understand *surgamus*: when you celebrate Mass and say: ‘*Sursum corda*’, what are you saying? Do you mean stand up, or do you mean raise your minds and hearts to God?”

So then I said to my boys: “As best as we possibly can, let’s make an act of love and repentance before God.” And all kneeling again, we began quietly praying. A moment later again we heard “*Surgite*”, and we all stood up. Then we heard Mary singing St Paul’s hymn with such harmony: “*Sumite scutum fidei*” [Eph 6:16], so clear, full and melodious that we were in ecstasy because in just the one voice we could hear all the notes from the lowest to the highest; it sounded like a choir of a hundred voices all united in one voice.

While we were there in ecstasy listening to that concert, we all found ourselves raised off the ground by some supernatural force, one holding onto a spike, another to a frame. I was holding on to a window frame, and was amazed we had not fallen to the floor where I could see countless beasts of all kinds and all of them wild running around the dining hall eyeing us suspiciously, and it seemed that they might leap on us at any moment, but had not yet done so.

While we were listening to that heavenly singing, many graceful boys came down from around Mary; they had wings, and approaching us they placed a shield on everyone’s heart. It had a steel centre, a ring of silver near the steel centre, another on the outside of diamonds then one of gold. When we all had a shield and the singing had finished, then we heard this voice: “*Ad pugnam*”; we saw the animals stir, hurl leaden balls, arrows at us, but they either did not reach us or hit our shields; after a long battle we were left unscathed. Then we heard Mary say: “*Haec est victoria vestra, fides vestra*” [1 Jn 5:4], and we found ourselves all on the ground, the animals had gone.

Immediately afterwards were heard an agonising cry in the courtyard: they were our boys that seemed to have been torn apart by those wild animals. I wanted to leave the dining hall to see if I could in some way bring them relief. They did not want me to leave, afraid that something terrible would happen to me. I took no notice of their fear and said to them “I want to go and see what has happened, even if I should die with them.” I went out and saw a

terrible sight: all the animals were pursuing our boys, injuring them, tearing them apart. But the animal that was creating the most frightful scene of all was the one that had first appeared: he was piercing the boys on both sides of their chest, in their stomach, in the heart, right and left with those two big tusks, and many fell to the ground, some dead, some wounded. When I appeared I ran at the monster, but he could not hurt me or the others who had followed me out, because our shield defended us.

I looked carefully at the monster's two swords, and what a mess they were making of my boys. On the point of one of them I read *Otium*, and on the other, *Gula*. Then I understood, but found it hard to explain why my boys were sinning through idleness, or gluttony, because it seemed to me they had been working or studying when and where they should be, and they were not wasting time in recreation; and regarding gluttony, they had not seemed intemperate to me.

I went back to the dining hall very sad, and I asked someone who was with Mary to explain it to me, and he answered: "Ah my good friend, you are still a novice in these things, and you think you have had lots of experience. Know that by idleness we mean not only not working or keeping busy or not just time spent amusing oneself in recreation, but we also mean time left for fantasy to roam free, leading to harmful thoughts; odd moments not properly occupied and especially in church. As for gluttony, you need to know that we can sin by lack of temperance even with just water and when we eat and drink more than we need; that is always intemperance. If you can get your boys to be temperate in these little things, they will always overcome the devil; and with temperance comes humility, chastity and the other virtues. If they are always busy doing their duties, they will never fall into the devil's temptations and will live and die as holy Christians."

I thanked him for such a beautiful instruction and went up to Brother Michael and the others I knew, to find out if what I had seen and done was real or just a dream. But while I was trying to shake their hand, I seemed to be quite beyond myself. Seeing my amazement one of them spoke to me: "You should know, and you have studied this, that we are pure spirits and to be seen

by mortals we have to take on our former likeness until the final resurrection when we will get our bodies back but with all the gifts of immortality.” Then I wanted to get up close to Mary who seemed to want to say something to me, but when I found myself almost up close, I heard a noise from outside and awoke.

### 214. Spiritual Fervour

ASC A0000310 *Discorsetti di D. Bosco*, Quad. X, 1876/1877,  
ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 4-6 (cf. MB XII, 557).

Friday 27 October 1876

The Novena for All Saints is in progress and I am hoping that someone will become a saint, or at least do miracles: maybe someone is already like this but I have not yet become aware of it. At the time of Dominic Savio, Besucco, Magone they made these novenas with more commitment; we could not have wanted anything better. I am not saying that you make them badly now, no, there are good boys; but there is no longer that commitment. I do not know why things are like this now. Perhaps it is me, for not speaking to my boys, not getting them to understand; or maybe it is them, not wanting to understand me; or it could be both. However, I don't see that general fervour any more like in the times I was telling you about where there were sixty or seventy boys and every morning sixty or seventy communions. But there is still time. I say this because, things being as they are, a match just takes a moment to light a fire in a haystack and we get a huge fire, a bonfire. Each of us can do this. Let each one think of Heaven; some have brothers, sisters, friends and companions, others their superiors or inferiors who are enjoying the rewards of their virtue. They were flesh and blood like us; and we are away from danger, can easily practise our religion, adjust matters on our conscience: so if they became saints, why not us? — But, you say, we need God's grace! I assure you the Lord gives us his grace. — So what is missing? A little bit of good will is missing. and if you do not have good will, if you cannot do it alone, ask the Lord, ask him insistently, and he will do it for you. And if your own prayers are not enough, turn to the saints who are ready to help us just at this time,



and especially to Mary most holy: ask them to give you a burning divine love, constant love; and the Lord, if he does not grant it for you, cannot deny so many saints. Good night.

### **215. Grow up quickly and become apostles**

ASC A0000302 Discorsetti di D. Bosco, Quad. II, 1876, ms by Emanuele Dompè<sup>28</sup>, pp. 7-9  
(cf. MB XII, 557-558).

Sunday 29 October 1876

Today we have had a group depart for Rome, not a decisive step yet to go to America, no, but to set up a small college/boarding school in a town near Rome called Albano, where Alba la Lunga once lived. Then in three or four days time there will be another small group departing to set up another small college in Ariccia; then another to set up a small one in Trinità. In the meantime let's pray for those travelling tonight perhaps until two in the afternoon tomorrow. Now we are making the Novena to the Saints and we need to remind ourselves not to waste any of these days, pray for those who have to leave for America. Let the priests also remember them in their Masses. This time 24 will be leaving, I am not sure if all at once, but at most one or two weeks apart. We do not want the number in our army to decrease. Now that the older ones are leaving we need the other smaller ones to grow and take their place. So we need these little 'loaves' which we 'bake' here under the protection of Mary Help of Christians, to grow bit by bit, a metre long. We need you all to grow up into big boys! But let's trust in Divine Providence and I hope with the Lord's help, and a little bit at a time, we will make it. Meanwhile let me remind you that tomorrow evening, perhaps around five thirty, as I have already told you, there will be a conference for members of the Congregation, and I am telling you here publicly so you can all know about it. Meanwhile let's stay with the Lord who guides all our actions; and let's behave in such a way that he will not have to reproach us on judgement day when he comes to judge us. Good night.

<sup>28</sup> Emanuele Dompè (1860-1926) was a novice that year and had received the job of writing down Don Bosco's talks from Fr Barberis, the novice master.

### 216. At the beginning of the school year

ASC A0000302 *Discorsetti di D. Bosco*, Quad. II, 1876, ms by Emanuele Dompè, pp. 18-21 (cf. MB XII, 565-567).

Thursday 2 November 1876

The regular timetable begins tomorrow. Some were already complaining: too much recreation, too many outings, too little time for study. So at least tomorrow when the regular timetable starts, everyone will be happy. But the timetable alone is not enough; you also need to study; so starting from tomorrow put every effort into avoiding idleness. If only you knew how precious time is! The sages tell us that time is a treasure, so someone who loses a minute of time loses part of that treasure. So we need to begin right away, so that at the end of the year we won't regret time lost. True wisdom comes from the Lord alone: "*Initium sapientiae est timor Domini*" [Ps 110:10]. Therefore we must first of all adjust our consciences well. "*Sapientia non introit in animam malevolentem*". This was written on a poster hung up in the study hall; I don't know if it is still there or not. Fr Durando can hang another one up there. And now I have the same advice that I usually offer at the beginning of the year: frequent Confession and frequent Communion.

As for frequent Confession, the Fathers recommend every week, fortnight or once a month. Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine say weekly. I haven't got special advice on that, just that you go to Confession when your conscience is worrying you about something. Some can go ten days without offending the Lord, others fifteen and others twenty. But some can only go three or four days then suddenly fall into sin; they should go more often, unless it's a case of little trifling things.

As for frequent Communion, I don't want to prescribe the time, but just remind you of a little something. Looking at my watch I see it is not too late: it is only eight minutes past nine. I can tell you this in five minutes. There was once a man who used go to Confession to St. Vincent de Paul. He did not like going to this confessor because he used to recommend frequent Communion. So he thought about changing advice and going to another

confessor and told him: “I used to go to Father Vincent, but he asked me to go to Communion too often, so I have come to you to receive your advice.” This priest worked out his answer and said: “My son, start with something small: go every week, then every fortnight, then after you can go once a month.” The poor man followed his advice and after a short while he discontinued going for communion and went only for confession. Then he began going to the theatre, dancing, etc. Then he stopped going both for confession and communion: he began to live a dissolute life. Some time went by and he was no longer as happy as he used to be, his faults were bothering his conscience, and he went back to St. Vincent and said: “I see that by letting go of holy communion I have also let piety go and become worse; from now on I want to follow your advice and go to holy communion frequently.” I recommend the same to you; do this to keep your conscience clean and acquire true wisdom from the Lord. Good night.

### **217. Lanzo dream, or the dream of the Salesian garden**

Critical ed. in Cecilia ROMERO, *I sogni di Don Bosco*. Edizione critica. Presentation by Pietro Stella. Leumann (Torino), Elle Di Ci 1978, pp. 40-44<sup>29</sup>.

Friday 22 December 1876

A plain like a perfectly calm sea, but made of shining crystal. The eye gets lost over the vast surface.

So many plants, grasses, flowers, vineyards, little woods, all kinds of flowers covering the surface. Wonderful lanes, magnificent buildings were an extra adornment. Everything was like on earth, but beautiful, unutterably so.

Instrumental music that sounded like thousands of instruments, each with a different sound, higher or lower, but all in perfect harmony. The same can be said for the voices. A huge number of people could be seen enjoying listening

<sup>29</sup> This is a much-valued dream in the Salesian tradition. The saint writes in simple, no stilted language. The version in the *Biographical Memoirs* (MB XII, 586-595) is a more elaborate one, made after the oral account at a goodnight on December 22, 1876.

and taking part in singing and playing. The more one listened the more the desire grew to listen and everyone was yearning to hear more.

At a certain point all the music stopped and then many of the listeners turned to me. I was not on that marvellous plain, but nearby on a small hillock. I knew many of them. The ones who came closest were Dominic Savio, Fr Alasonatti, Fr Giulitto of whom I had thought much during the day. They were close enough to touch my hand. I was trembling and did not dare speak. The others looked at me with smiling faces as if they had wanted to say something, but nobody said a word.

Dominic Savio was dressed thus: a white tunic studded with diamonds covered him; a red sash edged in gold encircled his hips. His face was ruddy, shining, as beautiful as an angel's. In one hand he held a garland of flowers as if to give it away. I noticed a lily, rose, violet, sunflower, perennials, a stalk of wheat, gentian and others, but beautifully interwoven and of indescribable beauty.

With his free hand Savio made a sign for me to listen and began to speak like this:

“Why are you feeling afraid here where everything should inspire courage?”

“I am afraid of where I am and what I do not know; and I do not know what all this is or who I see.”

“The earth you are on now, if cultivated, will become a floor of precious stones in Heaven. These are the Lord's servants who had faith in him and now enjoy the fruits of their labour.”

“But why are you alone speaking and not the others?”

“Because I am the one who has been here longest.”

“What is this white tunic you are wearing?”

Savio went quiet and the others sang as a chorus: “*Dealbaverunt stolas in sanguine Agni, ideo sunt ante tronum Dei*” [Rev 22:14].

“Why this sash?”

Fr Alasonatti, Fr. Chiala and others answered, singing: *“Habuerunt lumbos praecinctos, virgines enim sunt, ipsi sequuntur agnum quocumque ierit”* [Rev 14:4].

“Is this garden the Heaven that you are enjoying?”

“Not at all. It is nothing other than material beauty; any mortal who saw supernatural light would fall dead. Would you like to see a small ray of supernatural light? Close your eyes then quickly open them again.”

As soon as I opened my eyes I saw a light from which a tiny ray like lightning flashed towards me, but so bright I cried out involuntarily as if my eyes had been pierced. A little later I opened my eyes and everything was as before.

“This,” said Savio, “is still all natural light, that is, it is formed by material substances and is a hundred million times less resplendent than the smallest ray or rather a shadow that is separated from matter. Man, as long as he is alive on this earth cannot see even a ray of diving light. The reason is this: material creatures cannot appear and survive in front of the infinite Creator who is the purest spirit. Only the soul, separated from the body, can fly to contemplate the inaccessible light of God and see God as He is in Himself.”

“What I see of you is body or spirit? So saying I put my hand on his. But I did not touch anything and felt as if I were touching a shadow.”

“It is useless to try to touch me. What you see is nothing else than the form or shadow of my body, and God conserves these features for souls till the day of the universal resurrection, when each one will put on immortality reunited to the body one had before dying.”

“But tell me why this visit of yours, and first of all tell me if I am awake or dreaming.”

“Neither one nor the other. You are about to receive a strict command from the Lord and woe to you if you do not put it into practice. Some things refer to the past, others the present, and not a few to the future. Regarding the

past, it is lack of faith, being too timid. Look how many souls the Oratories have brought to Heaven and we can see multitudes of them. There would have been a hundred thousand more had you had the faith that the minister of the King of kings should have.”

“But this frightens me too much: tell me something of the present.”

“For the present you have here a *bouquet* of flowers; take it, and give it as a gift to your sons of any age and condition, and you will ensure the Kingdom of Heaven for them.”

“But I don’t understand what this means.”

“I will give you a hint: the rose is charity; the violet humility; the lily is chastity; the sunflower obedience; the perennials are for perseverance; the ivy, mortification; the stalk of wheat is Holy Communion; the gentian is penance. Each of these things must be duly and fully explained, and you will give your Salesians a finite treasure that will lead them to an infinite reward.”

“Tell me something for the future.”

“I will not say more, but the merciful God alone knows it and says this: ‘Next year you will lose six and then another two people very dear to you’; but who must be transplanted from the earth into a place of delight, the paradise of the Eternal One.

A bright dawn of glory will come forth from the Congregation to the four corners of the earth. Battles and triumphs there will be, but the soldiers will increase by many unless the leaders allow the chariot on which the Lord is seated to go off course. The time is near when good and bad alike will be astonished by the marvels that will quickly occur, but it is all mercy and everyone will be consoled.”

“What is the actual state of my boys?”

“You have to guide the children of God whom he entrusted to you and for which in time you will have to render account. Take these three sheets of papers and on each you will see what is needed.”

I took the sheets and on each of them was written as follows: *Note those who are currently on the right path to heaven.* And I saw many names I knew and many which in fact I did not know. The second was entitled: “Vulnerati” and it was a large number also; but not like the first. On the third one it said this: “*Lassati sumus in via iniquitatis*” [Wis 5:7].

“You can see the names of the first two and they can be seen by the spirits. But not those of the third group. Those in Heaven, although pure spirits, would have to put up with an unbearable stench just seeing them. If you want to know the names and see them turn the page over.”

I turned the page and saw, not the names, but individuals, doing the most abhorrent things. There was a voice like thunder that deafened me: “*Execrabiles viae eorum coram Deo et coram omnibus viventibus.*”

And just then with that noise, I awoke. I looked up, but everything had become dark, I could not see anyone and only then I realised I was in bed, but so battered and so worn out by that dream that I could neither rest, nor think of anything else but the dream, which still torments me day and night.

## 218. A tranquil conscience

ASC A000303 *Conferenze*, Quad. III, 1877-1878, ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 10-13  
(cf. MB XIII, 427-429).

Tuesday 21 August 1877

Holidays are approaching, both for the academic students and for the trade boys: one lot to give their heads a rest, the others their shoulders and arms; but everyone will go on holidays. I need to give you some advice for these holidays. The advice I give is one only and it is that you be really free, maybe play up a bit, but to do this go to a place where God cannot see you. You all know such a place: home, bell tower, the cellar. But I don't think anyone would be such a fool as to believe that there is such a place where the Lord does not see him. And this thought of God's presence should go with us all the time, everywhere and in everything we do. Who would have the courage to do something wrong, offend the Lord, if he knows that the one he wants to

offend can, right that moment before he can utter a word, dry up his tongue, or paralyse the hand that has thought to commit that sin?

You don't need to think of the Lord as all justice, inflexible. No, in fact he is all mercy, kindness, love. And just as the one who offends should fear him, so the one who can say: "I have nothing on my conscience" can be happy. And I say to this individual: go to sleep in peace, enjoy your recreation, live happily. If the one in harmony with God leads a happy life, the one who cannot say he has a good conscience ought be afraid lest God take away the time (to repent). Yesterday for example the assistant priest at Lanzo was walking in the garden with the parish priest, praising the sermon he gave; and he was happy about it because he had satisfied his listeners. Then all of a sudden the priest saw that Fr Oggero was no longer beside him and he saw him lying on the ground: "Fr Oggero, Fr Oggero!" No answer. He went and shook him: "What's the matter? Are you ok?" He was already dead. This priest had nothing to fear. He was from the Oratory and already a holy individual, but it says that one can die going for a walk, or eating, sleeping or at any moment. Likewise, not long ago, near Fr. Cagliero, at San Nicolás, the priest died. He was a parish priest who was here, visited the Oratory and I remember him. I speak of these two, but I could talk about many who have died suddenly and in all sorts of ways. So tomorrow when you leave, it could be that one of us does not come back. "Who died?" "Don Bosco." "Oh, how come?" "He is no longer." And what could happen to Don Bosco could happen to any one of us. If anyone is not prepared, let him do something about it, adjust matters. When someone has a tranquil conscience he can be cheerful, sleep peacefully and have peaceful dreams because he need not fear God's judgement. Good night.

### **219. Cleaning your clothes when you come back from a trip**

ASC A000303 *Conferenze*, Quad. III, 1877-1878, ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 24-26  
(cf. MB XIII, 438-440).

Sunday 29 October 1877

The reason I have called everyone together here is to welcome you and tell you some news after your holidays. One of the latest items, just come



in from Fr Ronchail, is the opening of a new house at Cannes, not far from Nice. We will soon be opening others in other places and we will continue as far as America. So we will be opening at La Navarre, Tonon, Marseilles, Bordeaux ... then on to Barcelona etc. All along the coast, and then two weeks of continuous voyage by steamer to Rio de Janeiro. But I need you to become good priests and good teachers.

But what I wanted to tell you is that after a journey you always end up with clothes covered in mud or at least dirt. So, although there mightn't have been any mud during these holidays, there will be at least some dirt on your clothes or a splash of mud. You have more or less all been on holidays so you need to think how, after you come back from a trip, to clean your clothes. Now you have an opportunity on this Feast of All Saints to go back over your conscience; to prepare well I thought we would have a triduum with a short sermon each evening. Try to put into practice what you will be told. What I would suggest over these days which the Church dedicates to the souls of the faithful departed, is to try to do something in suffrage for them. Those who can go to Communion, let them do so. You can all pray and pray much, and apply indulgences you have gained to them. This is one of the most beautiful ways of making suffrage for their souls. Do this for them as an act of charity, especially for the souls of your family, and you all have some family members, recently or in the past, who have died. These prayers, this good that you can do for the souls in purgatory, is really good for you too; it is like food which you give to someone who likes it but in reality it nourishes the person who takes it.

So spend these days well, reflect on your conscience, and offer up all the good you do for the souls in purgatory; so when we present ourselves for eternity we will find ourselves well prepared, and the good we have done will preserve us from the flames of purgatory and open to us the gates of heaven. Good night.

## 220. “Cleanliness and Exactitude”

ASC A000303 *Conferenze*, Quad. III, 1877-1878, ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 27-30  
(cf. MB XIII, 417-419).

Wednesday 28 November 1877

So, Don Bosco welcomes you all back and brings you good news. The Novena to the Immaculate Conception begins tomorrow. Our boys have always had a special devotion to Mary Immaculate. There is a Sodality by that name, begun by Dominic Savio when he was alive, along with the regulations he and his friends wrote for it. Many of you belong to this Sodality (only those who are outstanding in virtue).

I recall how at the beginning of the Novena to the Immaculate Conception, Dominic Savio made the resolution to do it well; he came to me and wanted to make a general confession (he had not previously done so as far as I know); and then he kept a clean conscience throughout the novena so he could go to Holy Communion every day. As the Church earnestly wants all Christians to do, and, I would add, all the boys at the Oratory, they should act well in such a way that they can approach the Eucharistic table every day.

What advice can I give you for this novena as a memento? Two things: Exactitude and cleanliness. They rhyme [in Italian: *esatezza e pulitezza*] and they go well together. Exact observance of all the rules of the house, all without exception. Exactitude in church and study, eating and sleeping. Exactitude in everything. The other thing is cleanliness, not by polishing our shoes, but keeping our conscience clean. It is also good to keep clean like you should, but if someone feels a little niggle in the heart and looking back over his confessions sees the same things all the time: same lies, same wasting time, same faults, sins and confession, confession and sins; well, let him talk about these things, and if he believes he should, make a general review or general confession or mainly on the points he believes necessary. Someone else will feel a little niggle in the heart and will say: “But I’m afraid I once made a bad confession and I am not in a good state; it is true that I forgot that sin but I did it on purpose”. He too—and there are some of these—should speak to his director about it and put it all to him. And another one might say: “I

have been worried for some time, and am afraid my conscience is not in a good state.” Let him confide in his spiritual father and if he wants also make a general confession since this is just the right time for that. And the same can be said for everyone who is aware that his confessions lack something by way of sorrow or resolution or preparation.

So remember always, but especially for this novena: exactitude and cleanliness. Be exact in everything and keep your conscience clean so you can go to Holy Communion. Just like I recall Dominic Savio doing in such an exemplary way during his last Novena to the Immaculate Conception, making himself a worthy imitator of St Aloysius; worthy of a boy who at seven and a half years of age at his first Communion, resolved: death, but not sin. And if we do this, Mary Immaculate will do a favour for all of us that will be of most advantage to our soul. Good night.

### **221. How to make the retreat**

ASC A000303 *Conferenze*, Quad. III, 1877-1878, ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 31-35  
(cf. MB XIII, 752-754).

Sunday 2 June 1878

A word after about six months! See how long it is since I have given you a good night. But if I didn't come in person, I was mentally here with you all the time. While I was in Rome and while I was on my way to Nice or San Pier d' Arena, I was thinking of you at Mass in the mornings, and in the evenings my thoughts went irresistibly back to you. But I have been back for a while now and I hope I will not be going away again too soon. We are here for your spiritual and also temporal advantage.

What I have come to tell you however is that tomorrow evening we will begin the students' retreat, and then immediately afterwards for the working boys. Everything I usually recommend for the retreats can be put in a word: pay attention and put into practice what you hear in the sermons or read. How do we put it into practice? In all the sermons, the readings, there is always something for us: it may be our examination of conscience was not

well done or we have been lacking in sorrow or good resolutions; or we may have forgotten the confessor's advice etc. We can think about how things were, are, will be; whether there is something in our past actions to be fixed up; or if we are on the right road that Jesus Christ points out to us, and what we need to do in future.

This is the best time to think of your vocation, because in solitude *Deus loquitur*, and the retreat days are for drawing back and being alone. The trade and working boys too need to think of their vocation, because some need to think whether God wants them to stay here and work in the Congregation and be part of it or if they are being called to something quite different. Everyone needs to take a pause for some days from the usual occupations to apply themselves exclusively to matters of their soul.

Consider that we do not receive great graces so often; and being able to make a retreat is a great grace. How many were here last year listening to these same words and now they have passed on to the next life. I believe everyone made the retreat well last year, but if they hadn't, would they still have had time? And who can promise us that we can still make the retreat here another year? I cannot assure you of that. Only God can tell us that, and in fact he says the contrary: "*Estote parati, quia qua hora non putatis filius hominis veniet*" [Lk 12:40], and he shows us through experience that we can also die young. If this is how things are, let us always be ready, so whenever death comes we can present ourselves tranquilly before the gates of heaven.

So now that we have the opportunity, let's make this retreat well. Since the Lord tells us: "*Ante orationem praepara animam tuam*" [Sir 18:23], so I tell you: "before the retreat, prepare your soul", that is, before starting have the intention of drawing profit from it.

And given that I think of you day and night, during these days of retreat I am consecrated completely to your spiritual advantage. In my Mass I will always pray especially for this, that the retreat goes well—and what I say on my own behalf I say on behalf of all those with me and those coming especially for this occasion. These evenings I hope to speak again with you and so I don't keep you too long let's conclude these words with this beautiful

conclusion: being able to make a retreat is a great grace which we don't always have; therefore we must make it well; to make it well we must put into practice what we hear in the sermons and readings; and since all favours come from heaven, I for my part and you for yours, let us ask God that we can gain the best result possible for our souls. Good night.

## **222. Discerning and deciding on our vocation**

ASC A000303 *Conferenze*, Quad. III, 1877-1878, ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 35-40  
(cf. MB XIII, 807-808).

Tuesday 18 June 1878

For all the Solemnities of Our Lady that have been or are to come, the Feasts of the Consolation, St Aloysius and St John, St Peter and others before the end of the year, one thing that would be of great importance is to think about your vocation. Some will have already thought about it and are waiting some weeks, some days to make a final decision. That is why every year I usually offer some time for someone who wants to talk about this and this year I would be happy if the boys from 5th and 4th Year and others too who want to talk about their vocation, would come to my room any time after Vespers.

But we can also say something in general now. When we become aware that we are called to the ecclesiastical state, it is also of major importance to see whether it is better to become a secular priest or join some congregation. Whoever wants to embrace the ecclesiastical state must have a right and holy intention: that is, if he wants to save his soul. And could he not also support his family? It is a right and just thing to help our family; so you can be businessmen, shoemakers or whatever you want and then help your family and others with what you like from your earnings. But a priest no, he can give them alms like to anyone else, if they should find themselves at that point, but no more than that. And then you hear the usual objection: "But many priests, this one, that other one have done this, bought that; they have become wealthy, made their families wealthy etc." So have they all done badly? I do not want to judge anyone, I only note what the Divine Saviour says and the holy Church. Jesus Christ says it explicitly: whoever wants to be God's

minister should not be concerned about temporal affairs; indeed not only should he not be concerned, but “*non implicet se*”, Scripture says precisely, “do not get involved, not get mixed up in: *non implicet se in negotiis*” [2 Tim 2:4]. The words are clear. Saint Ambrose or Saint Gregory says that whatever the priest has is the patrimony of the poor: not his, you see; it belongs to the poor. His labours are for God, the means are God’s and also the earnings must be God’s and also belong to the poor. The priest must only be interested in saving souls: that means a holy purpose.

What I can also tell you is that someone who does not feel called to the ecclesiastical state should not even think about becoming a priest, and would get nothing good out of it. Whoever does not feel he can preserve the virtue of chastity is not made for the priesthood, and should turn to something else, since as a priest he would only do evil to himself and others. I tell you this so you can have time to think about it and do things well. Good night.

### 223. The lambs and the storm

ASC A000303 *Conferenze*, Quad. III, 1877-1878, ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 41-48  
(cf. MB XIII, 761-764).

Thursday 24 October 1878

I am happy to see my army of soldiers again *contra diabolum*. Although in Latin, even Cottini can understand it! And I have so many things to tell you, this being the first time I am speaking to you after the holidays, but for now I only want to tell you a dream. You know that we dream when we are asleep and that we don’t have to put much faith in them; but if it is not wrong not to believe, sometimes there is nothing wrong either with believing them and they can also instruct us, like this one for example.

I was at Lanzo for the first of the retreats and I was sleeping, as I said, when I had this dream. I found myself in a place and did not know where it was, but I was close to a town where there was a garden and near this garden was a very large meadow. I was in the company of some friends who invited me to come into the garden. I came in and saw a huge number of lambs gambolling,

running, and prancing around like they do. Then a gate opened onto the field and the lambs scampered out to graze. But many did not want to go out. They stayed in the garden and went around nibbling some grass here and there and grazed that way, though there was not as much grass there as there was outside where the larger group had gone.

“I want to see what the lambs outside are doing.” We went out and we saw them peacefully grazing; and then almost immediately, the sky darkened, there was lightning and thunder and a storm was brewing. “What will happen to these lambs if they are caught in the storm?” I was saying; “let’s bring them in and save them.” And I started calling them. Me on one side, my companions on the other, we tried shepherding them back into the garden, but they did not want to know about it. We chased them here we chased them there; ah but they had faster legs than us. Then it began to spit, then rain but I couldn’t get them in. One or two though came into the garden, but all the others, and there was a lot of them, stayed out in the meadow. “Well, if they don’t want to come, bad luck for them; meanwhile, we’ll go back in.” And we went back into the garden.

There was a fountain there on which were written in red letters: *Fons signatus*, sealed fountain. It was covered. And then it opened, the water shot up, and made a rainbow, but shaped like this arch. We and the lambs in the garden with us got under it and the rain and hail couldn’t reach us. “But what is this?” I was asking my friends, “And what about those poor lambs outside?”

“You will see.” they answered. “Look at the foreheads of these lambs. What do you see?” I looked and on the forehead of each lamb was written the name of a boy at the Oratory.

“What is this?”

“You will see, you will see.”

Meanwhile I couldn’t hold back any longer and wanted to run out and see what the poor lambs left outside were doing.

“I will pick up the ones that were killed and send them straight to the Oratory”, I was thinking. I got wet as well and I saw those poor little lambs

collapsed on the ground struggling to limp into the garden but they couldn't walk. I opened the gate but all their efforts were useless. The rain and hail had so battered them and they were a pitiful sight as it continued to do so. One was hit on the head, another on the face, another on the ears, another the legs, others elsewhere. The storm had ceased meanwhile.

"Look," those near me said, "at the foreheads of these lambs." I looked and on the forehead of each lamb was written the name of a boy at the Oratory.

"But," I said "I know the boy by this name and to me he seems like a little lamb". "You will see, you will see."

Then a golden jar with a silver cover was presented to me, and I was told: "Dip your hands into this ointment and touch the lambs' injuries with your hand. They will recover." I began calling them:

"Baa! Baa!"

Nothing. Nothing happened. I tried approaching one and it ran away.

"It doesn't want to, so bad luck for him!" I went to another and it ran away. And this useless game went on.

I finally reached one whose eyes were hanging out of its sockets, so badly had it been struck, poor thing. I touched it with my hand and it recovered and went into the garden. Many others were no longer afraid and allowed themselves to be touched and healed, and went into the garden. But there were still many left, mostly the worst off, and it was impossible to approach them.

"If they don't want to be healed, then that's their problem; but I don't know what I can do to get them back into the garden."

"Let them go," one of the friends with me said "they will come, they will come."

"We will see."

I put the jar back where it was before and returned to the garden. It had all changed, and at the entrance I read: *Oratory*. As soon as I went in, the lambs



who did not want to come entered by sneaking in and were playing hide and seek; not even then could I approach any of them. There were a few of them unwilling to be given the ointment which then turned into poison for them and instead of healing them made their injuries worse.

“Look, do you see that standard?”

“Yes, I see it. I was reading this word in huge letters: *Holidays*.”

“So, this is the result of the holidays”, one who was with me explained, because I was already beside myself with grief. “Your boys go out to pasture with good will, but then come the storms, the temptations; then the rain which is the devil’s assaults; then comes the hail when they fall into sin. Some go to confession and are healed, but others either don’t make a good confession or don’t go at all. Keep it in mind and never tire of telling your boys that holidays are like a devastating storm for their souls.”

I was looking at the lambs and I saw terrible injuries on some; I was looking for a way to heal them when, as I said, I was sleeping and Fr Scappini made a noise in the room next to me while getting up and I awoke.

This is the dream, and although just a dream, just the same it has a meaning that will not do harm to anyone who puts his faith in it. And I can tell you that I noted some names amongst the lambs in the dream and comparing these with the boys, I saw that these behave just like it happened in the dream. However things are, during this novena for All Saints we should respond to God’s loving kindness. He wants to show us mercy and through a good confession purge the wounds on our conscience. We then should all agree to fight the devil and with God’s help we will be victorious and receive the crown of victory in Heaven.

## SECTION TWO

### GUIDELINES ON SPIRITUAL LIFE FOR THE SALESIANS AND THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

#### Presentation

*Don Bosco's first trip to Rome between February and April 1858 was crucial for the successive development of his Work. His main purpose was a pilgrimage to the places of martyrdom at the heart of Catholicism. But the saint was also moved by a desire to "meet the Pope in person and receive suggestions and encouragement from him regarding the work undertaken in Turin for the salvation of the young."<sup>30</sup> In particular he wanted to talk to him about setting up a kind of association that would guarantee the stability of the Oratory and the house attached to it. He was guided by Pius IX to found a religious congregation with vows and was asked to present a draft Rule. Thus began the process that would lead, step by step, to consolidation of the project from a religious and legal point of view<sup>31</sup>.*

*After the official act of foundation of the Society of St Francis de Sales (December 18, 1859), Don Bosco, who already for some years had been seeing to the formation of his boys as collaborators with ecclesiastical spirit, detachment of heart from all personal ambition, apostolic zeal in exercising virtue, committed himself with even greater determination to shaping them spiritually so they could gradually acquire the mindset and lifestyle of consecrated religious.*

*This section contains documents which are fundamental for grasping the idea of the Salesian religious in Don Bosco's mind and the spiritual features which, in his opinion, had to characterise it, starting from his initial cautious suggestions to the more robust and demanding formative interventions in the Seventies and Eighties.*

*The section is in five parts.*

*The first is the instruction "To the Salesians" (no. 224), which the saint put as the introduction to the Constitutions, aiming to give his disciples a key for authentically interpreting the Salesian religious vocation.*

<sup>30</sup> Francesco MOTTO, *Don Bosco mediatore tra Cavour e Antonelli nel 1858*, in RSS 5 (1986) 6.

<sup>31</sup> On the process of foundation and its stages, until the gaining of the "benefices" (1884), see the first part of this volume, section two: *Don Bosco the founder*, nos. 30-39.

*The second part includes some early constitutional texts: the first draft of the rules of the Salesian Society drawn up between 1858 and 1859 (no. 225), the translation (1875) of the definitive text approved by the Holy See in its Latin version in 1874 (no. 226), the Rule of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians printed in 1885 (no. 227).*

*The third part includes a selection of circular letters of considerable spiritual substance sent by Don Bosco to the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (nos. 228-237).*

*The fourth part is made up of personal letters of the saint to his male and female disciples, with very significant and concrete spiritual pointers, which document the robust, ascetic model the founder was proposing (nos. 238-257).*

*The fifth part has five conferences and three dreams addressed to the Salesians (nos. 257-265). They are a sample of Don Bosco's efforts to infuse a sense of belonging to the Congregation in his sons, along with a correct idea of religious consecration and its practical repercussions on life.*

*The item To the Salesians, the central chapters of the early Constitutions and the selection of circular letters, correspondence, conferences and "dreams", reveal what was the spiritual and moral temper of the religious Don Bosco wanted; the vigorous concept he had of the spirit that should animate the Salesian vocation. This demanding model was understood within the horizon of the absolute primacy of God and the Gospel ideal of following Christ, including radical detachment from self, giving of oneself without any going back.*

*The practical implications of this view are such as to constitute a way of life so radical and austere that it leaves us stunned: generous obedience without limits, an ascetic and essential, yet joyful life, an impressive diligence in view of the community mission, benign, patient, endless charity, loving fraternity, strictly guarded chastity, "A piety that gives maximum development to prayer life, or union with God"<sup>32</sup>, an absolute fidelity to the smallest requirements of the Rule, flexible and creative adaptability, an ardent apostolic energy to the point of complete sacrifice of self.*

<sup>32</sup> P. SCOTTI, *La dottrina spirituale di don Bosco...*, p. 74.

## 1. DON BOSCO'S 'THEOLOGY' OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

*As an introduction to the first Italian edition of the Salesian Constitutions, published in 1875, Don Bosco wrote a wide-ranging letter To the Salesians, to guide them in interpreting the rules and to infuse in them a correct idea of religious life. He later refined and extended it with the help of the master of novices, Fr Barberis, for the third Italian edition of the Constitutions (1885). It is a relevant document from a spiritual point of view. "One can think of it as a brief summary, the most complete one, of what could be called Don Bosco's theology of religious life. Ideas flow together in it which had matured in him little by little, beginning from when he wrote the history of the Church and the Popes, then as he drew up the Constitutions and documents written to gain approval, further enriched by local and general conferences, instructions given at retreats in the late 1860s and early 1870s, and expressed in individual letters and circulars and in private advice."*<sup>33</sup>

*We find classic themes there of consecrated life drawn from the spiritual works of St Alphonsus, but reformulated in the light of personal experience: the importance of corresponding generously to God's will, ways of guarding our vocation, the spiritual and temporal advantages of religious life, the significance of the vows and their practice, fraternal charity as a particular element of Salesian community, how to overcome our doubts about our vocation, faults to be avoided.*

*What emerges from this document are the efforts of the Founder to give his budding Salesian Society a more defined religious character, a "compact structure ad intra and ad extra, guaranteed in stability and continuity by pontifical authority and solidly gathered around the general and local superior."*<sup>34</sup>

*The second edition of this item—the one found here—indicates a broadening of themes and vision. Religious life is solidly anchored in its evangelical roots. Three new paragraphs are included: on the importance of following one's vocation, on fraternal charity and on the monthly manifestation to the superior of the House.*

<sup>33</sup> P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani...*, II, p. 277.

<sup>34</sup> Pietro BRAIDO, *Tratti di vita religiosa salesiana nello scritto "Ai Soci Salesiani" di don Bosco del 1875*, in RSS 13 (1994) 393-394.

*Also emerging is his concern to shape a kind of consecration which is intimately connected with the specific mission and charism. We find above all a strong emphasis on obedience ordered to apostolic work and Salesian education which, according to Don Bosco, demands unity of direction and complete cooperative consensus on everyone's part. From this perspective we also understand his insistence on the monthly manifestation, aimed at reinforcing solidarity and confident familiarity between superior and subjects in an atmosphere of fraternal charity and the tendency to perfection.*

## **224. To the Salesians**

Critical ed. in RSS 14 (1995) 112-154.

Our Constitutions, my dearly beloved sons in Jesus Christ, were definitively approved by the Holy See on April 3, 1874.

We should welcome this fact as being amongst the most glorious in the annals of our Society, since through it we have the assurance that by observing our rules we rest upon a firm, secure and, I may add, infallible basis since the judgement of the Supreme Head of the Church who sanctions them is itself infallible.

But whatever its inherent value may be, this approval would be of little avail if the rules were not known and faithfully observed. It is precisely so that they may be easily known, read, meditated upon and put into practice by everyone that I consider it good to present them to you as a translation from the original text. The Latin text was printed separately. Here you have the rules common to all Salesian confreres.

I believe it would be useful to bring some practical matters to your notice which will make it easier to understand the spirit informing the rules and which will help you observe them carefully and devotedly. It is from my heart that I speak, whilst briefly placing before you what experience leads me to judge to be conducive to your spiritual good and the benefit of the whole Society.

*Entrance into religion*

The enemy of the human race exercises his malignant power against man in three ways: by pleasures or earthly satisfaction, by temporal goods, especially riches and the abuse of freedom. "For all that is in the world," says the Apostle St John, "is the concupiscence of the flesh, and concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life." How are we to free ourselves from these pernicious chains by which the devil unceasingly tries to bind us and drag us into perdition? Only religion can provide the arms with which to combat these three formidable foes. If a Christian who desires to place his soul in safety, embraces the religious state, he breaks these chains to pieces with a single blow and puts his enemies to flight. By the vow of chastity he renounces every satisfaction of sense; by the vow of poverty he frees himself from the grievous anxieties inseparable from temporal things; by the vow of obedience he puts a bridle on his own will and is thus beyond the risk of abusing it.

For this reason those who leave the world to enter a religious Congregation are compared to those who were saved by Noah's Ark at the time of the Flood. In the midst of the world we are as though on a stormy sea where iniquity and malice are everywhere borne in triumph. "*The whole world,*" writes the aforementioned Apostle, "*is seated in wickedness.*" The religious is similar to one who goes on board ship, and trusting himself entirely to the care of a skilful captain, reposes tranquilly even in the midst of storms. The religious is in a fortress guarded by Our Lord.

"*When a strong man armed,*" says our Divine Saviour, "*keeps his court, those things are in peace which he possesses.*"

Such great peace and tranquillity are enjoyed in this mystical fortress, that if God were to make them known and experienced by those who live in the world, we should see them all fleeing away from it and taking the cloister by storm in order to enter and abide there the rest of their earthly days. St Laurence Giustiniani writes, "God has providentially concealed the grace of the religious state, since if its happiness were generally known, everyone would forsake the world and run to embrace it."

*Importance of following a vocation* (<sup>35</sup>)

Almighty God who is most merciful and infinitely rich in graces, at the time when he created man, appointed a path for him by which, if he pursues it, he can easily secure his eternal salvation. The man who enters on that path and walks along it has little difficulty in fulfilling God's will, and abides in peace; whereas if he were not to enter on that way he would then run the great risk of not having afterwards the graces necessary for salvation. For this reason Father Granata called the choosing of the state of life the mainspring of one's whole career. And as in a watch, if the balance wheel is out of gear, the whole mechanism is out of gear too, so in regard to our salvation, if a wrong state is chosen the whole life will be wrong, as St Gregory Nazianzen says; and if we wish to secure our eternal salvation we must endeavour to follow the divine vocation in which God will furnish us with special aid to gain eternal life. Because, as St Paul writes, *"Everyone has his proper gift from God."* In other words, as St Cornelius A Lapide explains, God gives to each his vocation and chooses for him that state in which it is His will to save him. This is precisely the order or the predestination described by the Apostle in these words: *"Those whom he predestined, them also he called; and whom he called, them also he justified ... and glorified."*

It must, however, be observed that the question of vocation is a matter little understood by the world.

To men of the world it seems the same thing to live in the state to which one is called by God as it is to live in the state chosen by one's inclination. And thus so many lead bad lives and fall into damnation. But it is certain that on this all important point depends our eternal salvation.

To vocation there follows justification and glorification. "If you do not follow out your vocation," says St Augustine, "you run well but out of the way: out of the way, that is, in which God has called you to the end that he may save you. God also threatens with great chastisements those who turn a deaf

<sup>35</sup> This chapter and the one that follows express the sentiments of St Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori, Doctor of the Church (note in the original text).

ear to his calls and follow the counsel of their own inclinations instead; saying by the Prophet Isaiah: *‘Woe to you apostate children.’*”

The divine calls to a more perfect life are indeed special graces, and very great ones, which God does not vouchsafe to all. He has good reason, therefore, to be indignant with those who treat them with disdain.

How deeply offended an earthly prince feels if he calls a subject to his palace to serve him in a position nearer to himself and the subject does not obey! And will not God also resent the like? The chastisement of the disobedient will commence even in this life by the disquietude he will always feel therein. On this account Habert the theologian says: “Not without great difficulty will such a one be able to provide for his eternal salvation.” It will be very difficult for such a person to secure his salvation if he remains in the world.

A remarkable vision was seen by a certain novice to whom (Pinamonti writes in his treatise on *The Victorious Vocation*), whilst thinking of leaving religious life, Jesus Christ appeared on his throne, full of indignation, commanding his name to be blotted out of the Book of life. Whereupon, overcome with terror, he persevered in his vocation. Our Lord says: *“Because I called you and you refused, I will also laugh in your destruction, and will mock at you in your perdition”*, words the meaning of which is that God will not hearken to the voice of those by whom his voice has been despised.

Consequently when God calls anyone to a more perfect state of life, he ought to obey, and obey immediately, if he would not greatly endanger his salvation. Otherwise the same might befall him as befell the young man in the Gospel, who when invited by Our Lord to follow him, asked that he might go first and bid farewell to his relatives; but Jesus replied that *he was not fit for the kingdom of God* uttering these solemn words: *“No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”*

#### *Promptitude in following a vocation*

The religious state is one that is sublime and truly angelic. Those who, for the sake of God and of their eternal salvation, feel their heart moved by the desire to embrace this state of perfection and holiness, may without doubt



conclude that this desire comes from heaven, since it is too generous and too elevated to spring from the sentiments of nature.

And let them not fear that they will lack the strength to fulfil the obligations which the religious state imposes. Rather let them have great confidence since God, who has begun the good work, will bring it to a successful issue and entire fulfilment, according to the words of St Paul: *“He who has begun a good work in you, will perfect it unto the day of Jesus Christ.”*

It is also to be observed, says the angelic doctor St Thomas, that the divine vocation to a more perfect life ought to be followed promptly: *“Quanto citius.”* In his *Summa Theologica* he proposes the question whether it is a commendable thing to enter religion without consulting many advisers and without long deliberation. And he replies in the affirmative, saying that counsel and consideration are necessary in those things whose goodness is doubtful, but not in this which is certainly good, since Our Lord himself has counselled it in the Gospel. How strange it is that when it is a question of entering religion in order to lead a life of greater perfection and of greater security from the dangers of the world, men of the world say that for such a resolution there is need of long deliberation in order to make certain that the vocation really comes from God and is not a temptation of the devil. They do not speak thus, however, when it is a question of accepting some honourable office in the world where there are so many risks of perdition. On the other hand, St Thomas says that even though the religious vocation were to come from the devil it ought to be followed, just as a good counsel ought to be taken even though it has come from an enemy.

St John Chrysostom asserts that when God has given such calls, he does not want us to hesitate even for a moment, to follow them.

Elsewhere the same saint says that when the devil is unable to dissuade a person from resolving to consecrate himself to God, he seeks at least to get him to defer the execution of his resolve and if he obtains that postponement for a single day, an hour, he esteems it a great gain, because after that day or hour, when another occasion comes, he will then find it easier to obtain a further extension of time, until at last the youth who has received the call,

becoming weaker and less assisted by grace, yields altogether and abandons his vocation.

Hence it is that St Jerome gives this advice to one who is called to leave the world: “Hasten, I beseech you, and cut asunder rather than untie the rope that holds your barque fast to the shore.” The saint means by this that just as one who finds himself in a boat fast anchored and in danger of being sunk would endeavour to cut the rope rather than untie it, so he who finds himself in the midst of the world should endeavour to free himself from it as soon as possible and thus with all speed deliver himself from the risk of perdition into which it is very easy to fall.

And now let us hear what our own St Francis de Sales says about religious vocations. “To have a sign of a good vocation, there is no need of a constancy that is sensibly felt, as long as it remains in the superior part of the soul. Therefore the vocation ought not to be considered as not true if, before carrying it out, the person who has received it no longer experiences those emotional sentiments which he had before; nor even though he feels repugnance and coldness towards it, which may cause him at times to vacillate and think that all is lost. It is enough that the will remains constant in not abandoning the divine call, provided that there also remains a certain amount of affection towards it. To know whether it is God’s will that anyone should be a religious, there is no need to wait for God himself to speak to him, or to send an Angel from heaven to signify his will. Nor is there any need for an investigation by ten learned divines to see whether the vocation ought to be followed or not. But it is necessary to correspond and cultivate the first motion of the inspiration, and not to be discouraged if distaste or tepidity arises. Because if this be done, God will not fail to make all redound to his own glory.”

### *Ways of safeguarding our vocation*<sup>36</sup>

The vocation to the religious state can be thought of as the precious pearl the Gospel speaks of which we should safeguard jealously and diligently. Saint

<sup>36</sup> This chapter is drawn from Alphonsus Maria DE’ LIGUORI, *Opuscoli relativi allo stato religioso, in Opere ascetiche di S. Alfonso Maria de’ Liguori*. Vol. 4. Torino, Giacinto Marietti 1847, pp. 400-404 (opuscolo I, § 2).

Alphonsus suggests three practices in order not to lose it. They are: *Secrecy, prayer and recollection*. Here is what St Alphonsus says: “Firstly, speaking universally, you need to keep your vocation a secret from everyone except your spiritual director, since ordinarily, others have no scruples in telling poor young people called to the religious state that they can serve God anywhere, even in the world. Yes, someone not called to religion can serve God anywhere, but not someone who has already been called and wants to remain in the world; it will be difficult for him to lead a good life and serve God.

“Then especially, we need to hide our vocation from friends and relatives. This was already Luther’s view, as Bellarmine tells us, that the children sinned by entering religion without their parents’ consent because, he said, children are obliged to obey them in everything. But this view has commonly been rebutted by the Councils and the Fathers. The 10th Council of Toledo, in its last chapter, said expressly that it was licit for children to become religious without their parents’ consent, so long as they were older than 14. The same is said in the Tiburtine Council, chapter 24. It is also the teaching of St Ambrose, St Jerome, St Augustine, St Bernard, St Thomas and others, like St John Chrysostom, who wrote in general terms: *When parents get in the way of spiritual matters, they should not even be recognised as parents any more.*

“Father Pinamonti wisely adds that parents have no experience in these matters, and to the contrary often have some temporal interests for advising otherwise and therefore become enemies. Saint Thomas, speaking of religious vocations, says: *“Where vocation is concerned parents are not friends but enemies, according to what the Lord says: Man’s enemies are those of his own household”*. And soon the Fathers agreed that children are damned with them but saved away from them. Then Saint Bernard exclaims: *Oh inhuman father! Oh cruel mother! They prefer to see you perish with them, than reign without them.* Saint Cyril, explaining Jesus Christ’s comment to the young man in the Gospel: *No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back, is fit for the Kingdom of God*, comments that whoever looks for time to confer with relatives about his vocation is precisely the kind that the Lord declares unfit for the Kingdom: *The one who delays and goes to discuss things with his parents is looking back.*

We have seen many saints leave home without their parents' consent. Thomas Aquinas, St Francis Xavier, St Philip Neri, St Louis Bertrand, St Clare, St Teresa and many others did so.

And we know that the Lord has even approved such glorious flight with miracles. St Peter of Alcantara, while going to the monastery to become a religious, fleeing from his mother at home, since he was under her care after his father's death, found himself blocked by a huge river; he recommended himself to God in that predicament and was immediately transported to the other bank. St Stanislaus Kostka too had fled from home to become a religious without his father's consent. His brother went after him at full speed in a carriage. But just as he was about to catch up with him, the horses, no matter how much they were whipped, would not take another step forward, turned back and ran back to the city unbridled.

Secondly you need to be of the view that these vocations are only preserved through prayer. The one who puts prayer aside will certainly leave his vocation. It takes prayer, much prayer; therefore do not omit at least half an hour of prayer morning and evening. Do not omit the visit to the Blessed Sacrament and Mary most holy each day, in order to obtain perseverance in your vocation. The religious should not omit going to Communion a number of times during the week. He will meditate often on his vocation, considering how great is the grace that God has given him by calling him to himself. The more he ensures that his eternal salvation is guaranteed, the more he will be faithful to God in following his vocation. And to the contrary, what danger he will expose himself to if he is unfaithful!

Thirdly, there is need for recollection, and this cannot be achieved without drawing aside from conversations and secular amusements. What does it take to lose one's vocation in the world? Nothing much. An entire day doing little, a comment from a friend, an unbridled passion, attachment to something, a fear, a regret not put behind one—any of these are enough. Anyone who does not abandon his pastimes needs to be persuaded that he will doubtless lose his vocation. He will suffer remorse at not following it but he will certainly not follow it. How many have lost their vocation, and their souls, for lack of attention to this fact.” (St Alphonsus, Doctor of the Church).

### *Temporal advantages*

One who enters religion should do so guided solely by the thought of making his eternal salvation secure, but still he may rest tranquil that in this blessed fortress God will provide whatever is needed for his temporal life. In religious societies each individual is a member of one great family which has for its head Jesus Christ, represented in the person of the Superior. "Take no thought," he tells us, "for what you need for your meat, your drink or your clothing. Be solicitous only for the kingdom of heaven and for the works that lead thereto and leave the care of all other things to your heavenly Father." "*Seek first,*"—these are his divine words—"*the kingdom of God and his justice and all things else shall be added unto you.*" And indeed, in our own Congregation which has no possessions whatever, have any of the necessities of life been found wanting? With the assistance of this loving Divine Providence we have been able to build both churches and houses, to furnish them and provide for the pupils in them. Of these many have completed a course of study, and others learned some art or trade and all this without having lacked anything in the way of lodging, food or clothing, either in sickness or in health. We have, moreover, begun our missions in America, whither we have sent several expeditions of evangelical labourers and we are even now preparing to send others.

Not only our own but all religious institutes and congregations and above all the mendicant orders, have always experienced the same loving treatment at the hands of Divine Providence.

It is the saying of a saint that a religious abandons one home and acquires a hundred; that he leaves one brother and gains a thousand.

In the case of sickness we have places for a change of air, whether lowland, upland or the seaside, according to what is most suitable—opportunities we would never have had if we had remained in the world, not even among our nearest relatives.

*Spiritual advantages*

We do not, however, want to give ourselves to God's service for the miserable things of this earth. We are going in search of spiritual goods, goods never liable to be stolen from us or snatched away. We desire goods that may be useful for the life to come and that may put us one day in possession of the joys of heaven.

Saint Bernard (*De bono religionis*) gives us a brief but clear idea of the advantages of religious life in these words: "*Homo vivit purius, cadit rarius, surgit velocius, incedit cautius, irroratur frequentius, quiescit securius, moritur confidentius, purgatur citius, remuneratur copiosius.*" Here is a succinct explanation of it.

*Vivit purius*; he lives more purely. The one who consecrates himself to God in religion frees himself from all the snares and allurements of the world and so lives with greater purity of heart, will and work. Consequently all that he does and every word he speaks are spontaneously offered up to God with purity of body and cleanliness of heart: *Casto corpore et mundo corde*. And this, if we would not call it impossible, is certainly very difficult for one who lives in the world.

*Cadit rarius*; he falls more rarely. Religious profession does not make anyone impeccable, but it does supply means for him to practise which either prevent him from falling or on the strength of which he will fall more rarely and generally in things of slight importance, in failings or venial faults into which the just fall several times a day.

*Surgit velocius*; he rises up more quickly. If anyone who lives in the world has the misfortune to fall into some evil, he is all alone, and has no one to aid him; indeed he is generally ridiculed and reviled if he endeavours to rise up again. Hence the Holy Spirit says: "*Woe unto him who is alone, for when he falls he has no one to lift him up.*" Whereas in religion, if anyone has the misfortune to fall, he has immediate help at hand. The rules, practices of piety, the example of his brethren, the persuasion and counsel of his superiors, everything contributes to assist him to rise up again: "*If one falls, another*

*sustains him.*” He is assisted by his brethren to rise up again, says St Thomas.

*Incedit cautius;* he walks more circumspectly. He lives in a fortress watched over by the Lord. A thousand means are at hand to help him, protect him and enable him to be victorious in his temptations.

*Irroratur frequentius;* upon him the dew of heavenly grace falls more often. He has renounced the world and all its vanities. By observing the religious vows, occupied solely in what is for the greater glory of God, he constantly deserves divine blessings and special graces.

*Quiescit securius;* he sleeps more securely. Whoever lives in the world, willingly or otherwise, must often experience the disquiet and bitterness which life is full of. But he who lives apart from temporal worries can freely busy himself with serving the Lord, entrusting every thought of the present and the future into God’s hands and the hands of his superiors who take God’s place. If he faithfully observes the holy rule he can enjoy heaven in advance.

*Moritur confidentius;* he dies with greater confidence of his eternal salvation. People in the world are afraid at the point of death for what they have enjoyed that they now must leave behind and for which they must render account at the judgement seat of the Lord. But whoever has abandoned everything to give himself to God, whoever renounces all earthly enjoyments in the hope of a heavenly reward, no longer loves any earthly thing, therefore awaits nothing else but to leave this vale of tears to fly to the Creator’s bosom. Moreover a good conscience, the sacraments and other religious comforts received, the assistance and prayers of his brethren, allow him to see death as the end of his labours which open the gates of heaven for him.

*Purgatur citius;* his time in purgatory is shortened. Indulgences gained, the merit from the sacraments, the suffrages of the Congregation both at death and after death, assure him that he will have little or no Purgatory to endure. “Blessed are they who, dead to the world, die in the Lord” says the Holy Spirit. Because, as St Bernard observes, “such people fly with ease from their cells to heaven.”

*Remuneratur copiosius*; has a more plentiful reward in heaven. Whoever gives a glass of fresh water for the sake of his heavenly Father, will have his reward. So he who forsakes the world, renounces all earthly satisfaction and gives life and substance to follow his divine master, what reward will he not have in heaven? Moreover the penances he has done, his prayers, the sacraments received, the souls saved through good example and by his efforts, the many suffrages which will continue to be made in the Congregation, will undoubtedly place him on a majestic throne of glory, where in God's sight, like a bright sun, he will shine forever.

### *The vows*

The first time the Supreme Pontiff, Pius IX, spoke of the Salesian Society, he said: "vows are necessary in a religious congregation or society, so that all its members may be united by a tie of conscience to their Superior, and the superior keeps himself and his subjects united with the Head of the Church and as a consequence, with God himself."

Our vows therefore may be called so many spiritual cords by which we consecrate ourselves to the Lord and place our will, our goods, our physical and moral faculties in the power of the Superior, so that we may all form but one heart and soul in order to promote the greater glory of God, according to our Constitutions, precisely as the Church invites us when in her prayers she says: *That the faith in their minds and the piety of their actions may be one.*

The vows are a generous offering by which the merit of our works is greatly increased. St Anselm teaches that a good work without vow is like the fruit of a tree. He who does it by vow offers up the fruit and the tree itself. St Bonaventure likens the work done without vow to the offering up of interest without capital. With a vow both interest and capital are offered to God. Furthermore the holy Fathers of the Church unanimously teach that every act performed by vow has a twofold merit, that of the good work itself, and that of carrying out the vow which has been made.

Furthermore, the act of pronouncing religious vows, according to St Thomas, restores our baptismal innocence, that is, it puts us in the state as if we



had just received baptism. The Doctors of the Church were also accustomed to comparing religious vows to martyrdom, saying that the merit of the one who professes vows is that of one who receives martyrdom; because what the vows fall short of in intensity is made up for in duration.

If the religious vows so greatly increase the merit of our works and make them acceptable to God, then we ought earnestly strive to fulfil them.

He who feels he is not able to keep them should not make them, or should at least defer professing them until he feels in his heart that he is firmly resolved to keep them. Otherwise he makes a faithless and foolish promise to God, which cannot but displease him: "*For,*" says the Holy Spirit "*the foolish and unfaithful promise is displeasing to God.*" Let us therefore prepare ourselves well for this heroic consecration; once we have made it, let us endeavour to keep it even at the cost of long and burdensome sacrifice: "*pay your vows to the Most High*" is what he himself commands.

### *Obedience*

"The perfection of every virtue lies in true obedience" says St Jerome. "All religious perfection consists in suppressing one's own will, in other words in the practice of obedience" says St Bonaventure. "The speech of the obedient will always be heard" says the Holy Spirit. St Gregory the Great concludes that obedience leads to the possession of all other virtues and likewise preserves them all.

This obedience however ought to follow the example of the Saviour, who practised it even in the most difficult things, even to death on the cross. And should the glory of God demand as much from us, we also ought to be obedient, even to the point of sacrificing our lives.

The express orders of the Superiors, therefore, and the rules of the Congregation and the customs of each house ought to be obeyed. And should anyone at times be guilty of failing in them, let him readily ask pardon of the one whom he has disobeyed. This act of humility helps immensely towards obtaining forgiveness for the fault committed, and obtains grace from the Lord for the future and so keeps us on our guard from falling into the same fault again.

St Paul the Apostle, recommending the practice of this virtue, says: “Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls as men who will have to give account. Let them do this joyfully and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

Note well that doing only the things that are pleasing to us and which are for our gratification, is not true obedience but is merely following our own will. True obedience, which makes us dear to God and to our Superiors, consists in cheerfully doing whatever is commanded by our Constitutions or by the Superiors themselves; for, as St Paul says, “*God loves the cheerful giver.*” It consists too in showing ourselves docile, even in things which are most difficult and contrary to self-love, and performing them courageously even at the cost of pain and sacrifice. In these cases obedience is more difficult, but it is also more meritorious and leads us to the possession of the kingdom of heaven according to the words of our divine Redeemer: “*the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force.*”

If you practise obedience in this way I guarantee, in the Lord’s name, that you will lead a truly peaceful and happy life in the Congregation. But at the same time I must also tell you that the day you choose not to act according to obedience but according to your own will, you will begin to feel discontented with your state in life. And if in religious orders some are found to be discontented or for whom community life is a burden, it will be seen on close observation that this springs from the want of obedience and submission of their own will. If you become discontented reflect on this and know how to remedy it.

### *Poverty*

If we do not leave the world for the sake of love, one day we shall have to leave it of necessity. Those on the other hand who leave it spontaneously will receive a hundredfold of graces in the present life and an eternal reward in the life to come. Whoever cannot make this sacrifice voluntarily will have to make it at the point of death, yet without recompense for it, and with the obligation of rendering to God a strict account of all the things he has possessed.

It is true that our Constitutions permit the possession and use of all civil rights; but after entering the Congregation one cannot any longer either administer or dispose of things that are his own without the consent of the Superior and then only within the limits prescribed by him, so that in the Congregation one is considered as literally possessing nothing, having made oneself poor to become rich with Jesus Christ. He is following the example of our Saviour who was born into poverty, lived deprived of all things and died stripped of his clothes on the cross.

Let us listen to what our divine Master says: *“So therefore whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”* To another who desired to be amongst his followers he said, *“Go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”* To his disciples he used to say that they should not have more than one garment, nor give thought to what they might need in their preaching. In fact we do not read that Jesus himself or his apostles, or any of his disciples possessed land, houses, furniture, clothes, food or drink or the like. St Paul says clearly that the followers of Christ, wherever they go and whatever they do, ought to be content with the food that is strictly necessary for life and with clothing to cover them. *But if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content.*

Everything that goes beyond food and clothing is superfluous for us and contrary to a religious vocation. It is true that at times we shall have to suffer some inconvenience on our journeys, at work, in times of health and in sickness; we shall sometimes have food, clothing or other things not to our liking; but it is precisely then that we ought to bear in mind that we have made the profession of poverty and that if we wish to have its merit and reward we ought to bear with its consequences. Let us be on our guard against the kind of poverty censured by St Bernard when he says: *“There are some who glory in being called poor, but who will not bear the consequences of poverty. There are those too who are content to be poor provided they want for nothing.”*

Should our state of poverty however cause us any inconvenience or suffering let us rejoice with St Paul who declares that he is overjoyed with his affliction. Or again let us do as did the apostles who were filled with happiness when

they returned from the Sanhedrin, because they had been counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. It is precisely to this sort of poverty that our divine Redeemer not only promised heaven, but assured us of it saying: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* Moreover to live in such a state, to dwell willingly in a room that is uncomfortable or poorly furnished, to wear plain apparel, eat coarse and common food, greatly honours him who has made the vow of poverty because it makes him like Jesus Christ.

It is also part of poverty not to damage anything, to take care of books, clothes, shoes; or also not to be ashamed of using things or wearing garments that are old, mended, or somewhat threadbare.

### *Chastity*

The virtue that is supremely necessary, the great virtue, the angelic virtue, the one to crown all others, is the virtue of chastity. He who has this virtue can apply to himself the words of the Holy Spirit: *“All good things come to me along with her.”* Our Saviour assures us that those who gain this priceless treasure become, even in this life, like the angels of God. But this spotless lily, this precious rose, this pearl beyond all price is beset everywhere by the enemy of souls because he well knows that if he succeeds in snatching it from us, the whole affair of our sanctification may be said to be ruined. Light is changed into darkness, flame into black coal, and the angel of Heaven into Satan, so that every virtue is lost. Here, my dear sons, I believe it will be very useful for your souls if I single out things, which if put into practice, will be to your great advantage; indeed I feel that I can assure you they will preserve this virtue for you and all others as well. Bear in mind then:

1. Do not enter the Congregation before you have consulted some prudent person who will judge if you are likely to be able to keep this virtue.

2. Avoid familiarity with persons of the other sex, and never indulge in special friendships with any of the boys Divine Providence entrusts to our care. Charity and good manners with all but sentimental attachment to none. On this point St Jerome says: *“Either love none or love all equally well.”*

3. After night prayers go straight to rest and hold no further conversation with anyone until after holy Mass the next day.

4. Keep the senses under control. The Holy Spirit clearly says that the body weighs down the soul. St Paul therefore, although weighed down by his labours, subdued his body with severe self-discipline and wrote: "*I pommel my body and subdue it.*" I recommend special moderation in eating and drinking. Wine and chastity cannot go together.

5. The haunts, persons and things of the world present grave dangers for chastity. Keep away from them with all care and not only in body but also in mind and in heart. I do not remember having read or heard it said that a religious had visited his native place and brought back any spiritual advantage. On the contrary there are thousands and thousands who, showing themselves unconvinced of this, have tried it out but were bitterly deceived, while not a few of them found themselves the unhappy victims of their own imprudence and temerity.

6. The exact observance of our holy rules, and especially of the vows and the practices of piety, triumphs over every vice, and is the faithful guardian of chastity. The Christian religion may justly be compared with a strong and fortified city, according to these words of Isaiah: "*We have a strong city: he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks.*" The vows and rules of a religious community may well be regarded as so many lesser advance fortifications. The walls, the ramparts of religion are the commandments of God and his Church.

To cause their violation the devil makes use of every strategy and deception. But in order to induce religious to transgress, he contrives in the first place to level the outposts and advanced fortifications to the ground, the rules and constitutions of their institute. When the great enemy of souls seduces a religious and makes him violate the divine commandments he first causes him to be careless in things of less importance, and then in things of greater moment; afterwards, he leads him easily enough to break the law of the Lord so proving the truth the Holy Spirit proclaims: "*He who despises small things will fail little by little.*"

Let us then, dear sons, be faithful to the exact observance of our rules, if we want to be faithful to the divine commandments, especially to the sixth and ninth. Let us also with constancy and diligence be solicitous in the exact observance of the practices of piety, the foundation and support of all religious institutes, and then we shall live chaste, almost angelic lives.

### *Fraternal charity*

We cannot love God without also loving our neighbour. The same precept which commands us to love God, commands us also to love our neighbour. In fact we read these words in the First Letter of St John the Evangelist: *“And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.”* In the same verse the apostle warns us *“If someone says he loves God and hates his brother, he is a liar.”*

When this brotherly love reigns in a community towards one another and all rejoice in the other’s good just as if it were their own, then that house becomes Heaven itself and justifies the words of the Prophet David: *“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live in unity.”* But as soon as self love gains dominion there, and disagreements and dislikes arise amongst the members, then that house quickly resembles Hell. Our Lord takes great pleasure in seeing brethren living in his house in *unum*, that is, united in heart and mind, serving God and helping one another in charity. This is the praise that St Luke had for the early Christians, that they so loved one another that it seemed they had but one heart and one soul.

A great deal of harm is done in religious communities by fault-finding, which is directly opposed to charity. *A murmurer defiles his own soul and is hated in his neighbourhood.* On the contrary what edification that religious gives who always speaks so well of his fellow religious and when occasion arises seeks to excuse his failings! Be careful therefore to avoid all that savours of fault-finding, especially against your companions and still more against your superiors. It is also a case of fault-finding and even worse to put a bad interpretation on virtuous actions or say that they were done with a bad intention.

Be on your guard against telling a companion the evil another may have said of him, for the trouble and rancour that come from it may last for months and even years. What an account these tale-bearers in communities will have to render to God! A man who sows discord among brothers ... is an abomination to him. If you hear anything against another, do what the Holy Spirit enjoins: *“Have you heard a word? Let it die with you.”*

Be careful not to vex any of your brethren even though it be in jest. Jokes which cause displeasure to our brother and give him offence are contrary to charity. Would you like to be laughed at and derided by others as you hold up your brother to be?

Be on your guard too against disputes. Disagreements will sometimes arise over trifles which are mere nothings, from which it is easy to pass to insults and wrangling which destroy unity and offend deplorably against charity.

If you love charity, try to be affable and gentle in manner to everybody. Meekness is a virtue well loved by Jesus Christ: *“Learn from me,”* he said, *“for I am gentle and humble of heart.”* Whatever you do or say show well-mannered kindness, not only towards superiors but towards all, especially to those who have offended you in the past or who look upon you now with an unkindly eye. Love bears all things; So he who will not bear another’s defects will not have true charity. There is no man on earth, no matter how virtuous he be, who does not have his faults. If therefore he wishes others to bear his defects he should begin by bearing those of others, and thus, as St Paul enjoins, fulfil the law of Christ: *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”*

We now come to the practice. In the very first place control of one’s temper, so easily lost when there is a disagreement; then be careful not to use words which displease and more still guard against crude and harsh ways of dealing with people, for a rude manner can often be more offensive than insulting words. Whenever a brother who has offended you comes to ask your pardon receive him well, do not treat him curtly and give him a harsh reply; quite otherwise, show true kindness, affection and good will.

If it should happen that it is you who have offended someone, put things right at once, and try to remove all feelings against you from the other’s heart,

mindful of the teaching of St Paul, “Do not let the sun go down on your anger”, and do this as soon as you can and be reconciled with your brother, overcoming the repugnance that you have in your heart.

Do not content yourself with just loving your companions with words only, but go out to help them. St John, the apostle of charity, advises: “*Let us not love in word or in speech but in deed and in truth.*” Charity also requires compliance with the reasonable requests of others; but the best of all acts of charity is to have zeal for our neighbour’s spiritual good. Whenever an occasion arises for doing good never say that this is not my business, I will not meddle with it; this is the answer given by Cain who dared to answer God, saying: “*Am I my brother’s keeper?*” Everyone is bound when he can to save his brother from ruin. God himself commands that we take due care of our fellow man. Endeavour therefore to help everyone, both by word and deed, but especially in prayer.

It is a great stimulus to charity to see Jesus Christ in our neighbour and to recall that the good we do to someone is regarded by the Lord as done to himself: “*Truly I say to you: as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.*” From what has been said you see how necessary and how desirable is this beautiful virtue of charity! Practise it and you will receive blessings in abundance from Heaven.

### *Practices of piety*

Just as food nourishes and preserves the body so do the practices of piety nourish the soul and make it strong in time of temptation. As long as we observe our practices of piety, we shall live in harmony with everyone and we shall see the Salesian cheerful in spirit and happy in his vocation. If on the other hand he neglects them, he will begin to have doubts about his vocation and will undergo strong temptations. Church history shows us that Religious Orders and Congregations have all flourished and promoted the good of religion as long as piety was maintained in vigour amongst them; on the other hand we have seen not a few fall into decay, and others cease to exist, and when? Only when the spirit of piety grew lax and their members began to seek



the things that were their own, and not the things which are of Jesus Christ, as St Paul lamented concerning certain Christians.

If therefore, my sons, we value the glory of our Congregation; if we want it to spread and continue its prosperity for the good of our own and for our neighbours' souls, let us be really solicitous never to omit meditation, spiritual reading, the daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament, our weekly Confession, frequent and devout Communion, the Rosary of Our Lady, a little mortification on Friday and other things like that. Although each one of these practices taken by itself does not seem to be a thing of any great necessity, nevertheless it contributes efficaciously to the building up of our Christian perfection and salvation. *"If you would increase and grow great in God's sight,"* says St Augustine, *"begin with the little things."*

The fundamental practice of piety which in some way embraces them all, consists in making the retreat each year and the exercise for a happy death every month.

He who cannot make this latter exercise in common, should with the permission of his Superior, make it by himself, and he whose occupations will not allow him to employ a whole day upon it should employ at least a part, putting off to another day such work as is not strictly necessary. But let all, more or less, follow these rules:

1. Besides the usual morning meditation, let there be a half-hour's meditation as well the preceding evening on the last things.
2. The Confession which all should make on that day should be more than an ordinary act, having in mind that it may indeed be the last, and holy Communion should be received as though it were Viaticum.
3. Let each one reflect for at least half an hour on the progress or otherwise in virtue during the month, and this especially with regard to observance of the rule; and let firm resolutions be made.
4. Let all the rules of the Congregation, or at least part thereof, be read on that day.

5. On that day it would be good, say, to choose some saint as a protector for the coming month.

It is my belief that the salvation of a religious may justly be said to be assured if he approaches the Sacraments every month and puts his conscience in order as if he were really about to leave this life for eternity. If therefore we hold the honour of our Congregation dear, if we really desire the salvation of our soul, let us be observant of our rule and let us also be exact in the most ordinary things, for he who fears God neglects nothing which contributes to his greater glory.

*The “Rendiconto” (manifestation) and its importance*

Confidence in Superiors is one of the things that contributes in a special way to the well-being of a religious society, and to the peace and happiness of each member. By this confidence the members open their hearts to their superior to find relief for the troubles they may have, anxieties connected with their duties cease, and the superiors are able to make provision to avoid unpleasantness and discontent. They get to know the moral and physical strength of the confreres and in consequence can give them those tasks for which they seem best suited. Should any disorder creep in, it is at once discovered and a remedy applied. For this reason it has been laid down that each one should meet with his Superior at least once a month. In this connection our Constitutions say that each one should make known with simplicity and readiness his external faults against the rule, progress made in virtue, difficulties met with, and whatever else he feels the need to reveal to receive counsel and comfort.

The chief points with which such a manifestation ought to deal are as follows: 1. Health. 2. Study or work. 3. Whether he is able to fulfil his obligations and what diligence he shows. 4. Whether he has sufficient time to perform his religious duties and what diligence he shows in fulfilling them. 5. How he manages at prayer and meditation. 6. With what frequency, devotion and fruit he approaches the Sacraments. 7. How he observes his vows and whether he has any doubts about his vocation. But it should be noted well

that the manifestation only concerns external matters and not matters for Confession. 8. Whether he has any vexations or troubles, or feels any coolness towards anyone. 9. Whether he knows of any disorder to which a remedy can be applied, especially if it is a case of preventing some offence against God.

Here now are some words of St Francis de Sales on this subject:

“Every month let each one, in a brief and concise manner, open his heart to his superior, and in all simplicity and faithful confidence lay before him all his secrets with the same simplicity and candour that a child has when it shows its mother the scratches and bruises, wasp stings it may have received. In this way each one shall give an account, not so much of his acquisitions and progress, as of his losses and failings in the exercise of prayer, virtue and the spiritual life, indicating also his temptations and interior troubles not only for his consolation, but for his humiliation too. Happy are those who devoutly and sincerely practise this rule, which contains a portion of that holy infancy which is so much recommended by Our Lord from which proceeds and by which is preserved all true peace of mind.”

Rectors are urged never to omit the manifestations of their members. Let all be persuaded that if they make it well, with perfect openness and humility, they will find in it great relief of soul and a powerful aid to progress in virtue, and the whole Congregation will greatly profit by it.

One point on which I recommend the greatest clarity is that of vocation. Let no mystery be made about this with superiors. This is the most important point of all, because on it depends the thread of the life we have to lead. Unhappy he who hides doubts he has about his vocation and determines to leave without seeking good advice and without the opinion of his spiritual director. Such a one might endanger his eternal salvation.

The first reason why it is important and necessary to deal with Superiors in all sincerity is because it enables them the better to govern and direct the members. The Superior is obliged to rule and direct; this is his office. To be a Rector and Superior is precisely this. But if he does not know them because they are not open with him, he cannot possibly direct and help them with counsel and suggestion.

The second reason, which makes what has gone before more obvious, is that the greater the knowledge that the Superiors have of the confreres, the greater will be their care and concern to guard and guide them in times of danger and in difficulties of all kinds arising from time and place.

There is a third reason why sincerity and confidence with Superiors is important: they are thus better enabled to arrange for and provide what is best for the whole Congregation of whose well-being and honour, together with the honour of each member, by their office they have the duty to take care. When anyone therefore deals frankly with them and gives a full account of himself, the Superior, while safeguarding the member's honour and never compromising him, can then have regard for the general good of the whole Congregation. But if the member does not so open his heart, he could perhaps expose to danger both his own honour and his own soul, and also the honour of the community itself, which depends in some measure on his own. Very great indeed is the happiness and satisfaction of the religious who is as an open book to his superior to whom all that disturbs him is well known! If he is charged with office, then he can put his whole trust in God who will come to his aid and keep him free from trouble. "Lord," he will be able to say "I did not put myself here; I made known my lack of qualities, my too small spiritual worth: you, Lord, it is who have sent me, you have commanded it, so supply for my shortcomings." With this trust he can say with St Augustine: "*Lord, give me what you command and command what you will.*" God is placed, as it were, under an obligation of giving what he asks. But he who is not open, does not reveal his weaknesses, what consolation can he expect? It is neither God nor obedience that sends him, but his own will to put himself forward; he is an intruder, neither called nor bidden and he will not succeed.

#### *Doubts about vocation*

He who consecrates himself to God by the holy vows makes a most precious offering and one that is most pleasing to the Divine Majesty.

But the great enemy of souls, being aware that by this means one emancipates himself from his service, is wont to trouble his mind with a

thousand illusions in order to make him turn back and induce him to walk along the perilous way of the world. The chief stratagem which he employs for this purpose is to raise doubts respecting vocation, and these doubts are followed by discouragement, tepidity and often a return to that world which we have so often found to be a traitor and had at last abandoned for the sake of God.

Should you, my dearest children, ever be assailed by this dangerous suggestion, you should immediately reply in your heart that when you entered the congregation, God granted the precious gift of a vocation; and if this has now become doubtful you are facing a temptation to which you are perhaps giving occasion and which you ought to treat with contempt and fight against as a real diabolical suggestion. Often the agitated mind says to the doubting one: *"You could do better elsewhere."* But you respond immediately with the words of St Paul who says: *"Let every man abide in the same calling in which he was called."* Indeed St Paul begs us to walk virtuously and firmly in the vocation in which we find ourselves, saying: *"I beg of you, walk in a manner befitting the vocation to which you are called, with all humility and meekness, with patience."* If you remain in your Institute and observe its rules exactly you will be assured of attaining your salvation. On the other hand we know from sad experience that those who have left for the most part remain deceived. Some regretted their action and found no more peace; others were exposed to serious dangers and some even became a stumbling block [scandal] to others with great risk to their own and others' salvation.

While your mind and your heart are troubled by doubts or some passion, I urge you not to take any decisions whatsoever, because such decisions cannot be in accordance with the will of the Lord, which, as the Holy Spirit says, *"is not found in the whirlwind."* In these cases I advise you to present yourself to your superiors, open your heart to them sincerely, faithfully follow their advice. Whatever they suggest, do it and certainly you will not make a mistake. For the Saviour pledges himself to the advice of our superiors, assuring us that their answers are as if given by himself, saying: *"Whoever listens to you, listens to me."*

*Five faults to be avoided*

Experience shows us five faults, which like the woodworm destroy religious observance and ruin religious Congregations. They are: an itching for reform, personal selfishness; complaining; neglect of duty; forgetfulness that we work for God.

1. Let us fight shy of all itching for reform. Let us instead apply ourselves to the observance of the rule without being preoccupied with its improvement or reform. “If the Salesians,” said our great benefactor Pius IX “without pretending to make their Constitutions better make the effort to preserve them precisely, their Congregation will flourish ever more and more.”

2. We renounce our self-interest. Therefore let us not seek our own personal good, but rather let us work with zeal for the common good of the Congregation. We have to love one another, help one another by counsel and prayer; we have to advance the honour of our confreres not as if it concerned just one alone but as a noble and essential heritage in which we all share.

3. Let us not complain about our superiors nor disapprove of the arrangements they make. Whenever we become aware of something materially or morally wrong, with humility let us point it out to the superiors. They have the duty before God to watch over both persons and things so that they, and they alone, have to give an account of their government and administration.

4. Let no one neglect his own duty. The Salesians considered together form one single body—the Congregation. If all members do what is expected of them, then things will proceed with order, and give satisfaction; otherwise their will be disorder, disunion, rupture and the final undoing of the body itself. Let everyone do his duty well, with zeal and humility, with confidence in God; let him not yield in defeat if he is called to some sacrifice which costs much. Let him take heart that his endurance and fatigue benefits the Congregation to which we are all consecrated.

5. In all we do, our duty, work, troubles or sufferings, we must never forget that we are consecrated to God; it is for love of him alone that we work and from him alone that we hope for reward. The least thing done for his name’s

sake is not left forgotten. It is of faith that in his own good time he will give us rich recompense. At the end of our lives as we stand before his judgement seat, he will say, with radiant love: *“Well done, good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.”*

*My dear Salesians,*

All that I have briefly touched on here will be more fully developed for you in an appropriate manual. Meanwhile receive these rules as an inheritance for the whole Congregation.

Receive the thoughts that preface them as reminders that I leave you as a father before my departure for eternity which I see is rapidly approaching.

Pray to the Lord for the salvation of my soul and I will pray constantly for you too, so that by the exact observance of our Constitutions we can live faithfully here on earth, and through the Divine Mercy, be all together one day to enjoy and praise God in eternal bliss. Amen.

Feast of the Assumption, August 15, 1875.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

## II. CONSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTS

*The first document contained in this part (no. 225) is the oldest text of the rule that we have. It was written in beautiful handwriting by cleric Michael Rua between 1858 and 1859, beginning from an earlier draft by Don Bosco which has not been preserved. From this draft came all the other constitutional drafts up to the definitive document in 1874<sup>37</sup>. To draw it up Don Bosco, who had no experience of consecrated life, had recourse to constitutions of other religious institutes.*

*The text, divided into nine articles—origin; purpose; form; vow of obedience; poverty; chastity; internal government; other superiors; admission—and introduced by a preface and a historical outline on the origins of the Congregation, is still at the stage of being a draft and incomplete, the result in part of experience and in part of literary elaboration. Nevertheless it already presents a range of important choices attributable to Don Bosco himself. In particular the vows, common life and form of government take on their specifically Salesian character in the way they have been formulated, in terms that go beyond simple rules and reflect the urgent spiritual needs of the founder. Coming together in a congregation is motivated by three things: the imitation of Christ the “divine saviour”, the exercise of the Christian virtue of charity and the need to renew society by taking care of the young, especially the poorest of them, and the “ordinary people”.*

*The theme of charity, “understood as participation in divine grace and the extension of Christ’s salvific work”, is what best distinguishes the relationship between Salesians and the beneficiaries of their work. It is charity, “theologically understood and psychologically enriched, that gives a particular meaning to the classic evangelical virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience.”<sup>38</sup> But the most interesting aspect is the function assigned to the Oratory and the “home attached”: consecration of Salesian religious is in function of the oratorian mission, that is,*

<sup>37</sup> On the various stages for the drafting process of the Constitutions cf. Giovanni BOSCO, *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales [1858]-1875*. Critical texts by Francesco Motto. Roma, LAS 1982.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Pietro STELLA, *Le Costituzioni salesiane fino al 1888*, in *Fedeltà e rinnovamento. Studi sulle costituzioni salesiane*. by Joseph Aubry and Mario Midali. Roma, LAS 1974, pp. 30-31.



*the boys to be gathered together and instructed in religion, to be given some art or trade, “as was actually done in the house attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales in this city”. In a word, other than models of reference, the charismatic feature emerges in this tendency of Don Bosco to give what is done at the Oratory a legal status<sup>39</sup>.*

*The second document (no. 226) is the Italian translation of the Rules or Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales, published in 1875. The edition here, compared with the Latin text approved by Rome (1874), has some special features to it: certain legal clauses are rendered less clearly; the chapter on the novitiate, made up of thirteen articles, is reduced to only seven; the 9th and 10th articles of Chap XI (De acceptatione)—not contracting even indifferent habits; for the glory of God and the salvation of souls being ready to put up with things like heat, cold, hunger, thirst— are transferred to Chap. XIII (Pietatis exercitia), as concluding articles, 12 and 13; an article on setting aside the Rector Major (deposing him!) in case of unworthiness is eliminated<sup>40</sup>. But the most important modifications concern economic matters, formulations which effectively sanction the almost complete autonomy in the matter from any competent civil and ecclesiastical authority; it is a legal exegesis that Don Bosco formulates in a note to Article 3 of Chap. VII on Internal Government of the Society: “The Salesian Society owns nothing as a moral entity, so except in the case where it is legally approved by some government, it would not be bound by this article. For the same reason each Salesian may exercise the civil rights of purchase, sale, etc., without recourse to the Holy See.”*

*The third document (no. 227), Rules or Constitutions for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians aggregated to the Salesian Society (1885), is the definitive draft, the last one revised by the Founder, and in force until 1906<sup>41</sup>.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>40</sup> *Constitutiones*, cap. VII, art. 8: “At si forte contingat, quod Deus avertat, ut rector maior gravissime officia sua negligat, praefectus vel quisque de superiore capitulo [...] poterit rectorem efficaciter admonere. Quod si non sufficiat [...] deponi potest” (G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales...*, p. 125).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Giovanni BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (1872-1885)*. Critical texts by Sr. Cecilia Romero fma. Roma, LAS 1983, p. 161.

*The text was preceded by a letter of presentation by Don Bosco (cf. no. 48) and an Introduction, substantially the same as the item To the Salesians, which we do not include here. The document was written up on the basis of the rules for the Daughters of the Immaculate at Mornese, the Salesian Constitutions, the rules of the Sisters of St Anne (founded by Marquis Tancredi and Marchioness Giulia di Barolo). However, the religious profile that emerges is unmistakable: all-embracing and sober, permeated by intense apostolic energy, a marked educational charity, humanism which is unmistakably Salesian and a truly feminine and affectionate spiritual touch - as can easily be seen, for example, in the intense and beautiful Chapter XIII, dedicated to the Essential virtues proposed for study by the novices and for practice by the professed.*

### **225. First draft of the rules of the Salesian Congregation (1858/1859)**

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales [1858]-1875*. Critical texts by Francesco Motto. (= Istituto Storico Salesiano – Fonti, Serie prima, 1).

Roma, LAS 1982, pp. 58-172.

#### *Congregation of St Francis de Sales*

At all times it has been the special concern of the ministers of the church to promote, to the best of their power, the spiritual welfare of the young. The good or evil moral condition of society will depend on whether young people receive a good or a bad education. Our Divine Saviour himself has shown us the truth of this by his deeds. For in fulfilling his divine mission on earth, with a love of predilection he invited children to come close to him: “*Sinite parvulos venire ad me*” [Mk 10:14]. The Supreme Pontiffs, following in the footsteps of the Eternal Pontiff, our Divine Saviour, whose vicars on earth they are, have at all times promoted the good education of the young, by the spoken and written word and consequently they have favoured and supported those institutes that are dedicated to this area of the sacred ministry.

At the present time, however, this need is felt with far greater urgency. Parental neglect, the abusive power of the press, and the proselytising efforts of heretics, demand that we unite in fighting for the Lord’s cause, under the

banner of the faith. Our efforts must aim at safeguarding the faith and the moral life of that category of young people whose eternal salvation is more at risk precisely because of their poverty. This is the specific purpose of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, first established in Turin in 1841.

### *Origin of this Congregation*

As far back as the year 1841, Fr John Bosco, working in association with other priests, began to gather together in suitable premises, the most abandoned young people from the city of Turin, in order to entertain them with games and at the same time break the bread of the Divine Word to them. Everything he did was done with the consent of the ecclesiastical authority. God blessed these humble beginnings, and the number of young people that attended grew so large that in the year 1844 His Grace Archbishop [Louis] Fransoni gave permission to dedicate a building for use as a kind of church, granting at the same time faculties to hold there such services as are necessary for the observance of Sundays and holidays and for the instruction of the young people who attended in ever increasing numbers.

There the Archbishop came on several occasions to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation. Likewise, in the year 1846 he permitted *the young people who attended this institution* to be admitted to [first] Holy Communion and to fulfil their Easter duty there. He also permitted [priests] to sing Holy Mass [celebrate solemn Mass, as in parish churches] and to hold triduum and novenas as the occasion demanded. This was the practice at the Oratory named after St. Francis de Sales up to the year 1847. Meanwhile the number of youngsters was rising steadily, and the church then in use could no longer accommodate them. Thus it was that, in that year, again with the permission of the ecclesiastical authority, a second oratory, under the patronage of St Aloysius Gonzaga, having the same purpose as the first, was established in another part of the city

And as with time the premises at these two institutions also proved inadequate, in the year 1849 a third oratory, under the patronage of the Holy Guardian Angel, was established in yet another part of the city.

By then the political climate had deteriorated to the point that [the Catholic] religion faced the gravest difficulties and dangers. In this situation, the ecclesiastical superior most graciously approved the regulations of these oratories, and appointed Fr Bosco their Director-in-Chief, granting to him *all the faculties that would be needed or might be helpful for the task.*

Bishops in many parts have adopted the very same regulations and have made an effort to introduce these festive oratories into their dioceses. But, an urgent need arose in connection with the care of the [youngsters in these] oratories. Numerous young people somewhat more advanced in age, could not receive proper [religious] instruction merely by attending the Sunday catechism. This made it necessary to open day and evening classes, with catechetical instruction [especially for them]. Furthermore, many of these youngsters found themselves in a situation of dire poverty and neglect. Hence they were received into a home [set up for them]. By this means they were removed from dangers, they received proper religious instruction, and they were started on a trade.

This is still the practice at present, especially in Turin, in the home attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, in which the youngsters given shelter number about two hundred. This is likewise the practice in Genoa, in the Work for Little Artisans, so called, where Fr Francis Montebruno is director and where the youngsters given shelter are forty in number. This is also the practice in the city of Alessandria, where the work is for the duration entrusted to the care of [our] Cleric Angelo Savio, and where the youngsters given shelter are 30.

When, in addition to the youngsters that gather in the festive oratories, one considers those that attend day and evening school, and those that are given shelter, one realises how the Lord's harvest has increased. Hence in order to maintain unity in spirit and discipline, on which the success of oratory work depends, as far back as 1844 a number of priests banded together to form a kind of congregation, while helping one another by mutual example and instruction.

They did not bind themselves by any formal vow; they merely made a simple promise to devote themselves solely to such work as would, in their superior's judgement, redound to the glory of God and to the benefit of their souls. They regarded Fr John Bosco as their superior. And although no vows were made, nevertheless the rules that are here presented were [already] observed in practice. Fifteen people at present profess these rules: 5 priests, 8 clerics, and 2 laymen.

*Purpose of this Congregation*

1. It is the purpose of this society to gather together members, priests, clerics and laymen too, for the purpose of aspiring to perfection through the imitation of the virtues of our Divine Saviour, inasmuch as that is possible.

2. Jesus Christ began to do and to teach; likewise shall the members begin by perfecting themselves through the practice of interior and exterior virtues and through the acquisition of knowledge; and then shall they go to work for the benefit of their neighbour.

3. The first exercise of charity shall be to gather together poor and abandoned young people in order to instruct them in the holy Catholic religion, especially on Sundays and holy days, as is presently done in this city of Turin in the three oratories of St Francis de Sales, of St Aloysius Gonzaga and of the holy Guardian Angel.

4. Furthermore, some young people are found that are so abandoned that unless they are given shelter every care would be expended on them in vain; to this end, as far as possible, houses of shelter shall be opened in which, with the means which Divine Providence will provide, lodging, food and clothing shall be supplied to them. Then, while they are instructed in the truths of the faith, they shall also be started on some trade or work, as is presently done in the house attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales in this city.

5. The need to uphold the Catholic religion also among adults of the lower classes is keenly felt, especially in rural settlements—hence the members shall endeavour to give retreats, spread good books, using all the means that charity

will prompt, so that, both through the spoken and the written word, a barrier may be erected against impiety and heresy, which in so many ways attempt to make inroads among simple and uneducated people. At present this is done by giving occasional spiritual retreats and by the publication of the *Catholic Readings*.

### *Form of the Congregation*

1. All the members lead the common life bound only by fraternal charity and by the simple vows, which bind them [together] so that they form one heart and one soul, in order to love and serve God.

2. No one on entering the congregation, even after making his vows, shall forfeit his civil right; therefore he retains possession of his goods, the power of succession and of receiving inheritances, legacies and gifts.

3. For as long as one remains in the congregation, however, the fruit of these goods shall be given over either to the congregation or to relatives or to some other person.

4. Clerics and priests, even after making their vows, retain possession of their patrimonies or simple benefices; but they may neither administer them nor, specifically, enjoy the fruits thereof.

5. The administration of patrimonies, benefices and of anything whatever that is brought into the Congregation or that is in the possession of an individual member pertains to the Superior of the house. He shall, administer them personally or through others, and receive their annual fruits for as long as that member remains in the Congregation.

6. Every priest will also hand over the stipend for the Mass to the superior; the others - clerics or laymen - will give him any monies that might be given them in any way whatsoever, so it can be used for the common good.

7. Likewise whoever wishes to draw up a will [for the benefit of] the Congregation can leave the good he owns to whomsoever he chooses.

8. Whoever dies intestate shall be succeeded by his rightful heir(s).

9. The vows bind the individual for as long as he remains in the Congregation. Those who either leave of their own free will or are dismissed from the Congregation in consequence of a prudent decision by the superiors, are by that very fact regarded as released from their vows.

10. Let each one endeavour to persevere in his vocation until death. Should anyone, however, leave the Congregation he shall not be entitled to claim any compensation for the time he has remained therein nor to take with him any goods except those that the Superior of the house will judge to be appropriate.

11. If it should happen that a new House is to be established elsewhere, an agreement regarding matters spiritual and temporal should be reached with the bishop of the diocese in which the prospective House is to be opened.

12. The members who are assigned to open a new House shall not be less than two in number, and of these at least one shall be a priest. Each House shall be independently responsible for the administration of its own goods, but always within the limits laid down by the Superior.

13. It is the Superior's prerogative to admit candidates to the novitiate, to accept novices for profession or to dismiss them, as he may think best in the Lord. But he shall not dismiss anyone from the house without first consulting the Superiors [of the community] to which [the individual] belongs.

14. The obligations which each member takes upon himself by the profession of vows do not bind under pain of sin, except when the natural, divine or ecclesiastical law may be violated, or when [the matter is] expressly commanded by the Superior under [the vow of] holy obedience.

### *The vow of obedience*

1. The prophet David would beseech God that He would give him light to do His holy will. Our Divine Redeemer, moreover, has assured us that He came not to do His own will, but that of His heavenly Father. It is in order that we may be sure of doing the holy will of God that we make the vow of obedience.

2. This vow binds us not to apply ourselves except to those things which each one's superior judges to be conducive to the greater glory of God and the welfare of our own soul.

3. In particular, it extends to observance of the rules contained in the draft regulations for the house: as have been practised for many years in the house attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales.

4. The virtue of obedience gives us the assurance that we are doing God's will. As the Saviour says, "Whoever listens to you, listens to Me; and whoever rejects you rejects Me."

5. Let each one then look on his superior as a father, and obey him unreservedly, promptly, cheerfully, and humbly.

6. Let no one be anxious to ask for any particular thing or to refuse it. But when one thinks that a particular thing is harmful or necessary, let him respectfully mention the fact to his superior and accept his decision with resignation as from the Lord.

7. Let everyone place great confidence in his superior and let no secret of the heart be kept from him. Let him openly manifest his conscience to him whenever he should be asked or he himself feels a need to do so.

8. Let everyone obey without any sort of resistance, either in deed, or in word, or in heart. The more repugnant the thing commanded is to him who does it, the greater will be his merit before God for having obeyed.

9. No one may send out mail without the permission of his superior, or of his superior's delegate. Likewise, incoming letters will be handed over to the superior who may read them if he so judges fit.

### *The vow of poverty*

1. The essence of the vow of poverty [as practised] in our congregation lies in leading the common life regarding food and clothing, and in not keeping anything under lock and key without the superior's special permission.



2. It is part of this vow [that the members should strive] to keep the[ir] rooms in the simplest possible style, seeking to adorn the heart with virtue, and not to ornament either the[ir] person or the walls of their rooms.

3. Let no one, either in the House or out of it, keep any money in his possession or deposited with others, for any reason whatsoever.

4. When a member needs to travel, or the superior sends him to open or run a house or go out for ministry, the Superior shall provide whatever is necessary.

5. To lend, receive or dispose of those things which belong to oneself or to the house, it is forbidden to do these things not only with outsiders, but also with people in the house without the permission of the superiors.

6. Offerings given to members must be handed in to the Superior who will give it to the procurator of the house to be placed in the coffers of the Congregation.

### *The vow of chastity*

1. Whoever deals with abandoned young people must certainly try to enrich himself with every virtue. But the angelic virtue, the virtue so dear to the Son of God, the virtue of chastity, must be cultivated to an outstanding degree.

2. Whoever is unsure of preserving this virtue in deed, word, thoughts, should not join this Congregation because he would be exposed to risks at every step. Words and even nonchalant glances [are] understood badly by boys who have already been the victim of human passions.

3. Therefore the greatest caution [must be had] in speaking with or dealing with boys of almost any age or circumstance.

4. Avoid conversations with individuals of the other sex and lay people wherever you foresee that this virtue would be at risk.

5. No one should visit the home of acquaintances without the express permission of the superior who will always appoint a companion [to go with him].

6. Effective ways of guarding this virtue are the exact practice of the advice of one's confessor, modesty and mortification of all the bodily senses, frequent visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, frequent brief prayers to Mary, St Francis de Sales, St Aloysius Gonzaga, who are the principal protectors of this Congregation.

### *Internal Government of the Congregation*

1. The Congregation will be governed by a Chapter made up of a Rector, Prefect, Bursar, Spiritual Director or Catechist and two Councillors.

2. The Rector holds office for life; it is up to him to accept postulants or otherwise. He assigns each one his tasks be they spiritual or temporal.

3. The Rector will appoint a Vicar from amongst the individuals of the Congregation and will designate him by name and surname on a sheet of sealed paper, keeping it secret and under lock and key. On the envelope he shall write: temporary Rector.

4. The Vicar will take the place of the Rector at his death until his successor is definitively elected.

5. For one to be elected Rector he must have spent at least six years in the Congregation, and have completed his thirtieth year of age. He will have been exemplary in the mind of all the members. Should he have all the other gifts to an outstanding degree the bishop [ordinary] can lower the age [limit] to 26 years.

6. The Rector will not be definitively elected until approved by the ecclesiastical superior.

7. The election of the successor to the deceased Rector will happen thus: eight days after the Rector's death the Prefect, Bursar, Spiritual Director and two councillors will meet with the Vicar and the two oldest members of the Congregation. If time and place permit the Rectors of all the other houses will also be invited. Having recited the *De profundis* in suffrage for the deceased Rector, and called on the assistance of the Holy Spirit with the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*, they will commence the voting. Whoever gains two thirds of the votes will be the new Rector.

### *The other superiors*

1. The roles of the other superiors of the house will be given out by the Rector in accordance with the draft regulations for the boys who are given shelter.

2. The Spiritual Director, however, will take special care of the novices and will take the greatest care to see that they learn and practise the spirit of charity and zeal which should animate one who wishes to dedicate his entire life to the welfare of abandoned youth.

3. It is also the special task of the [Spiritual] Director to watch over the conduct of the Rector with the strict obligation of advising him if he should neglect to observe the rules of the Congregation.

4. But it is also the special concern of the [Spiritual] Director to watch over the moral conduct of all the members.

5. The Prefect, Bursar and Spiritual Director will be elected by majority vote of the superiors. The two councillors will be chosen by the Rector alone.

6. When a member is sent to run a house he has the authority of the Director, but his authority is limited to the house of which he is the Director. On the death of the Rector he too is invited to cast his vote in the election of the future Rector.

7. Each of the superiors with the exception of the Rector, will be in office for three years and can be re-elected.

### *Admissions*

1. Once someone who wishes to enter the Congregation has made his request, the Spiritual Director will collect the necessary information which he will pass on to the Rector.

2. The Rector will then present him or otherwise for admission as he thinks best in the Lord. But when he is proposed to the Chapter he will only be accepted if he obtains a simple majority of votes.

3. The trial period for being admitted to vows will be one year. No one can take vows unless he has completed his sixteenth year.

4. The vows will be renewed twice. They will be taken for three years on each occasion. After six years each one is free to continue for a further three years or to make them in perpetuity, meaning he obliges himself to fulfil his vows for the rest of his life.

## **226. Rules or Constitutions of the Society of St Francis De Sales (1874/1875)**

Critical ed. in G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales [1858]-1875...*, pp. 73-90<sup>42</sup>.

### *I. Purpose of the Society of St Francis de Sales*

1. The purpose of the Salesian Society is the Christian perfection of its members; every kind of work of charity, spiritual and corporal, toward young people, especially poor [young people]; and also the education of young seminarians. It is composed of priests, clerical students and laymen.

2. Jesus Christ began to do and to teach; likewise shall the Salesian members also begin by perfecting themselves through the practice of every interior and exterior virtue, and through the acquisition of knowledge; and then shall they go to work for the benefit of their neighbour.

3. The first exercise of charity shall be that of gathering together poor and abandoned young people in order to instruct them in the holy Catholic religion, especially on Sundays and holy days.

4 Since it often happens that some young people are found that are so abandoned that, unless they are given shelter, every care in their case would

<sup>42</sup> This is the text translated from the Latin text approved by the Holy See 1874, published in 1875: [Giovanni BOSCO], *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales secondo il decreto di approvazione del 3 aprile 1874*. Torino, [Tipografia dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales] 1875 (OE XXVII, 53-99).

be without effect—for this reason, as far as possible, houses shall be opened in which, with the means that Divine Providence will provide, shelter, food and clothing are supplied to them. And while they are instructed in the truths of the Catholic faith, they shall also be started on some trade or work.

5. Moreover, since the dangers that young people who aspire to the ecclesiastical state have to face are many and grave, this society shall take the greatest care to cultivate the piety of those who show a special aptitude for study, and are commendable for [their] good conduct. In admitting young people for the purpose of studies, those who are the poorest [or, poorer] shall be accepted by preference, for the very reason that they could not pursue their studies elsewhere—provided they give some hope of a vocation to the ecclesiastical state.

6. The need to uphold the Catholic Religion also among the Christian people at large is keenly felt, especially in villages— hence the Salesian members shall zealously endeavour to give spiritual retreats [designed] to strengthen and direct in piety those who come to hear them out of a desire to change their lives.

7. Likewise they shall endeavour to spread good books among the people, making use of all the means that Christian charity inspires. Lastly, through the spoken and written word, they shall try to erect a barrier against irreligion and heresy, which in so many ways attempt to make inroads among simple and uneducated people. To this end should be directed the sermons occasionally preached to the people, as well as the triduums, the novenas and the spreading of good books.

## *II. Form of this Society*

1. All the members lead the common life bound only by the bond of fraternal charity and of simple vows, which binds them [together] so that they form one heart and one soul, in order to love and serve God by the virtue of obedience, poverty and holiness of life, and by a committed Christian way of living.

2. Clerics and Priests, even after making their vows, shall retain possession of their patrimonies or simple benefices; but they shall neither administer them nor enjoy the fruits thereof, except in accordance with the Rector's will.

3. The administration of patrimonies, benefices and of anything whatever that is brought into the Society pertains to the Superior General. He shall administer them either personally or through others; and for as long as the individual remains in the Congregation the same Superior shall receive their annual revenues.

4 Every priest is also bound to hand over the Mass stipends to the same general or local superior. Everyone then, priests, clerics or laymen will hand over all money and any gifts they may receive in any way.

5. Everyone is bound by his vows, whether triennial or perpetual. Nor can anyone be released from vows except through dispensation from the Supreme Pontiff or through dismissal from the Society by the Superior General.

6. Let each one persevere in his vocation until the end of his life. Let him call to mind daily those most weighty words of Our Lord and Saviour: "*Nemo mittens manum ad aratrum et respiciens retro aptus est regno Dei* [Lk 9:62]. No one who has put his hand to the plough and looks back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

7. Nevertheless, should anyone leave the Society he shall not be entitled to claim anything for himself for the time he has spent therein. He shall, however, recover his full right over the immovable, as also the movable, goods the ownership of which he had reserved to himself upon entering into the Congregation. But he shall not be entitled to claim any fruit, nor demand any account of their administration for the time he has remained in the Society.

8. One who brings money, furniture or any other thing into the Congregation with the intention of retaining ownership of it must hand a list of all these things to the superior, who once he has seen it, will give him a receipt. Should the member then want to take back items that have become worn through use, he will receive them in the state in which they are then found and will not be entitled to any recompense of any kind.

### *III. The vow of obedience*

1. The prophet David would earnestly beseech God that He would teach him to do His holy will. The Lord, our Saviour has assured us that He came down to earth not to do His own will, but that of His Father in heaven. This is the purpose of the vow of obedience, namely, that we may be all the more certain of doing the holy will of God.

2. Let each one be submissive to his superior and look to him in all things as to a loving father. Let him obey him unreservedly, promptly, cheerfully, and humbly, as the person who expresses the will of God himself in that command.

3. Let no one be anxious to ask for any particular thing or to refuse it. But when one knows that a particular thing is harmful or necessary, let him respectfully mention the fact to his Superior who will take care to see to [the member's] needs.

4. Hence it is good that the members frequently give an account of their external life to their higher superiors of the Congregation. Let each one with simplicity spontaneously manifest to his Superiors external faults against the constitutions as well as his progress in virtue, so that he may receive from them counsels and comfort, and, if needs be, appropriate admonitions.

5. Let everyone obey without any sort of resistance, either in deed, or in word, or in heart, lest he lose the merit of the virtue of obedience. The more repugnant the thing commanded is to him who does it, the greater will be his merit before God for having faithfully obeyed.

### *IV. The vow of poverty*

1. The vow of poverty of which we speak here has to do only with the administration of something, whatever it may be, and not with its possession; those, therefore, who have made the vows in this Society can retain the radical ownership of their goods, but the administration and the disposal and use of their revenues is absolutely forbidden to them. Moreover, before taking the vows, they must cede, even if only in a private form, the administration,

and the usufruct [revenues] and use thereof to anyone they wish, also to the Congregation, if they think they would like to do so. To this cession they may also attach the condition that it may be at any time revocable: but still the professed cannot in conscience use the right of revocation, without the consent of the Holy See. All the foregoing must likewise be observed with respect to those goods which the member may acquire by inheritance, after making his profession.

2. Nevertheless the members can freely dispose of the ownership, either by will-and-testament, or with the Rector Major's permission by some public act. In this latter case, the concession which they have made of the administration, usufruct and use, shall cease, unless it is their desire that the concession should, notwithstanding the cession of ownership, still continue in force for a further such length of time as they may be pleased to specify.

3. The professed, moreover, shall not be forbidden to perform, with the Rector Major's permission, all those acts in respect of property that the laws prescribe.

4 The professed are not allowed to appropriate or reserve to themselves anything that they have acquired either by their own industry or by the means that the Congregation offers; but everything must be contributed to the common benefit of the Congregation.

5. It is part of this vow [that the members should strive] to keep the[ir] rooms in the simplest possible style, seeking with all their might to adorn the heart with virtue, and not the[ir] person or the walls of their room.

6. Let no one, either in the house or out of it, keep any money in his possession or deposited with others, for any reason whatsoever.

7. Finally, let each one keep his heart detached from every earthly thing. Let him be content with what the Society provides, as regards food and clothing; and let him not keep in his possession anything whatsoever, without the superior's special permission.



### *V. The vow of chastity*

1. Whoever deals with abandoned youth must certainly make every effort to enrich himself with every virtue. But the virtue that must be cultivated most, which must always be kept before our eyes, the angelic virtue, the virtue dearest of all to the Son of God, is the virtue of chastity.

2. Whoever does not have the well-founded hope, with divine help, of preserving this virtue in words, works, thoughts, should not join this Congregation, because he would be exposed at every step to great danger.

3. Words, looks, including the most innocuous, are sometimes badly interpreted by the young who have already been victims of human passions. Therefore one must use the greatest caution in speaking and dealing with anything with young people of any age and circumstance.

4. Keep away from worldly gatherings where this virtue could be endangered, especially conversations with people of the other sex.

5. Let no one visit homes of friends or acquaintances without the consent of the superior, who, if he can, will always provide him with a companion.

6. Ways of diligently safeguarding this virtue are frequent Confession and Communion, exactly carrying out the advice of the confessor, fleeing idleness, mortification of the senses, frequent visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, frequent brief prayers to Mary most holy, St Joseph, St Francis de Sales, St Aloysius Gonzaga, who are the principal protectors of our Congregation.

### *VI. Religious government of the Society*

1. The members shall recognise in the supreme Pontiff their Arbiter and absolute Superior, to whom they shall be in everything, in every place and at every time, humbly and respectfully submissive. Nay more, every member shall apply himself with the greatest solicitude to uphold his authority and to promote the observance of the laws of the Catholic Church and its supreme Head, who is the Legislator and Vicar of Jesus Christ upon earth.

2. Every three years the Rector Major will give the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars a report on the Society, and this Report will deal with the number of Houses and members, observance of the Rule and whatever regards financial administration.

3. To deal with things of greater moment and to provide for the needs of the Society that times and places require, the General Chapter will ordinarily gather every three years (<sup>43</sup>).

4. When the General Chapter is thus gathered it may also propose additions to the Constitutions and changes it believes are opportune but in a way that conforms to the end and the reasons for which the rules were approved. Nonetheless these additions and changes, although approved by a majority of votes, will not oblige anyone until consent has first been obtained from the Holy See.

5. All the Acts of the General Chapter will be sent to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, so they may be approved.

6. The members will be subject to the bishop of the diocese where the house they belong to is, according to the prescriptions of the sacred canons, always subject to the Constitutions of the Society approved by the Holy See.

7. Every member will do everything he can to help the bishop of the diocese; and inasmuch as it is possible, he will defend ecclesiastical rights, promote the good of his Church, especially where it is a case of poor youth.

### *VII. Internal government of the Society*

1. In its internal government the entire Congregation depends on the Superior Chapter which is made up of a Rector, a Prefect, a Bursar, a Catechist or Spiritual Director and three Councillors.

<sup>43</sup> The General Chapter is made up of members of the Superior Chapter and Directors of individual Houses. Every director will gather his particular chapter and in it deal with matters that are judged to be most necessary to propose to a future General Chapter (note in the original text).

2. The Rector Major is the Superior of the whole Congregation; he can establish his abode in any House of the Congregation. Offices, individuals, moveable and immovable goods, spiritual and temporal things depend totally on him. Therefore it is up to the Rector to accept or not accept new members into the Congregation <sup>(44)</sup>, assign each one his duties, whether spiritual or temporal. He will do these things either himself or through others whom he delegates. But he cannot make any contract to buy or sell real estate without the consent of the Superior Chapter.

3. In selling goods of the Society, or contracting debts, all things will be observed that must be observed by law in accordance with the sacred canons and apostolic constitutions <sup>(45)</sup>.

4. No one, except the Superior Chapter and the Directors of Houses, can write or receive letters without the permission of the Superior or another member delegated by the Superior. But all members may send letters or other writings to the Holy See and to the Superior General without asking permission of the Superiors of the House to which they belong, and the Superiors may not read them.

5. The Rector Major will remain in office for twelve years and can be re-elected; but in this latter case he cannot govern the Society until he is reconfirmed in office by the Holy See.

6. At the death of the Rector, the Prefect shall take his place until a successor has been appointed. But for the time he is guiding the Society, he cannot make alterations regarding discipline or administration.

7. As soon as the Rector has died, the Prefect shall announce his death immediately to the Directors of all the Houses who shall immediately see that

<sup>44</sup> The Superior General can by his authority receive the aspirants and present them or not as he judges best in the Lord, so that a pupil may be admitted to the trial of the novitiate or to vows (note in the original text).

<sup>45</sup> The Salesian Society owns nothing as a moral entity, so except in the case where it is legally approved by some government, it would not be bound by this article. For the same reason each Salesian may exercise the civil rights of purchase, sale, etc., without recourse to the Holy See. This was the answer from the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, April 6, 1874 (note in original text).

suffrages prescribed in the Constitutions are offered for the deceased. Then he shall invite the Directors to come together to elect the new Rector.

8. If by chance it were to happen *quod Deus avertat* [God forbid] that the Rector is gravely negligent in his duties, the Prefect, or another from the Superior Chapter in agreement with the others, shall clearly admonish the Rector. If this is unavailing, let the Chapter inform the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars who may strip him of office<sup>46</sup>.

### *VIII. Election of the Rector Major*

1. In order that anyone may be elected Rector Major, it is requisite for him to have lived at least ten years in the Congregation, to have completed his thirty fifth year of age, and be distinguished by his exemplary life, prudence and ability in the management of the affairs of the Congregation, and finally, that he be perpetually professed.

2. There are two reasons why the Rector needs to be elected: either because he has completed twelve years in office, or because of the death of his predecessor.

3. If the election takes place because twelve years have passed, it will be done in this way: three months before his term of office finishes, the Rector will call the Superior Chapter together and will advise them that the end of his term is imminent: he will also advise the Directors of each House and the members, who in accordance with the Constitutions, are allowed to vote. While indicating the time his term in office comes to an end he will also establish the day for the election of his successor. At the same time he will ask for prayers to be said to obtain heavenly light, and he will inform everyone clearly and distinctly of the serious obligation of voting for the one they judge to be most suitable for promoting the glory of God and the good of souls in the Congregation. The election of the successor ought to be completed within fifteen days from the expiry of the Rector's term of office.

<sup>46</sup> This article, found in the Latin edition approved by the Holy See, Don Bosco left out of the Italian edition of 1875.

4. From the end of his term of office until the completion of the election of his successor, the Rector Major will continue to guide and administer the Society with the authority that the Prefect has upon the death of the Rector, until the Rector has been definitively constituted in office.

5. Those voting for the Rector Major will be the Superior Chapter and the Directors of individual Houses, accompanied by one perpetually professed member, elected by the perpetually professed members of that House they belong to. If for any reason someone is unable to vote, the election will still be lawfully and validly carried out by the others.

6. The election will take place in this way. Kneeling before the crucifix, they will invoke Divine help by reciting the hymn *Veni, Creator Spiritus* etc. after which the Prefect will explain to the confreres the reason for which they have been called together. Then all the professed present will write the name of the one they judge to be worthy on a ballot paper and will place it in an urn prepared for this purpose. Then three scrutineers for the voting and two secretaries will be elected by secret ballot. Whoever obtains an absolute majority of votes will be the new Rector or Superior General.

7. If the election is to be held because of the death of the Rector, then the following order will be followed. On the death of the Rector Major, the Prefect will give this news by letter to the Directors of individual Houses, so that as soon as possible they offer up all the suffrages prescribed by the Constitutions for the soul of the deceased. The election should take place no earlier than three months and no later than six months after the death of the Rector. For this purpose the Prefect will call together the Superior Chapter and with its consent will establish the appropriate day for gathering all those who should take part in the election. He will then advise them of what is said in article 3.

8. Votes will then be cast by those who enjoy the right of electing the Rector as in art. 5 of this Chapter.

9. The one who obtains an absolute majority of votes will be the Superior General to whom all confreres must show obedience.

10. When the election is complete, the Prefect will advise all the individual Houses, doing so in a way that news of the new Rector is quickly known by all members of the Society. This act signals that the Prefect ceases to exercise any authority as Superior General.

### *IX. The other Superiors*

1. The Prefect, Spiritual Director, the Bursar [*Economo*] and three Councillors spoken of above will be elected by the Rector and other members who because they have made perpetual vows can take part in the election of the Rector Major. To be elected it is requisite that they have lived at least five years in the Congregation, completed their thirty fifth year of age and have perpetual vows. In order that their office may not suffer disadvantage, they should ordinarily live in the same house as the Rector Major.

2. The Prefect, Spiritual Director, Bursar and three Councillors will remain in office for six years.

3. Their election will take place on the Feast of St Francis de Sales, at which time all Directors of individual Houses are usually called together. Three months before the Feast the Rector will indicate to all the Houses the day on which the election will be held.

4. Therefore all the Directors will gather the perpetually professed in their House and then with a member elected by them, will proceed to the future election.

5. On the established day the Superior Chapter with the Directors and members gathered with them, they will vote and publicly hold a scrutiny. Three scrutineers and two secretaries will be elected for this purpose. Whoever obtains the majority of votes will be the new member of the Superior Chapter. If the Director or member of some House, because of distance or other just cause has not been able to come for the election, the election will nevertheless be valid and complete <sup>(47)</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> In electing the Rector Major an absolute majority will be sought, that is, more than half of the votes in his favour. For the other members of the Chapter a relative majority is sufficient, namely in comparison to all those who obtain votes (note in the original text).

6. The offices proper to each member of the Superior Chapter will be assigned by the Rector according to need.

7. Nevertheless, the Spiritual Director will take special care of the novices. He, along with the master of novices, will take the greatest care to see that they learn and practise the spirit of charity and zeal which should animate one who wishes to dedicate his entire life to the good of souls.

8. It is also the duty of the Spiritual Director to respectfully admonish the Rector whenever he may notice in him any grave negligence in carrying out the Rules of the Congregation or in promoting their observance by others.

9. It is a special task of the Spiritual Director to point out to the Rector anything that may be of advantage to the spiritual good; and the Rector will endeavour to provide for it as he sees best in the Lord.

10. In the absence of the Rector the Prefect will take his place both in ordinary government of the Society and for all things he has been expressly put in charge of.

11. He will take account of income and expenditure, and will note any bequests and donations of any importance given to a House and destined for something in particular. The fruits of movable and immovable goods will be under the protection and responsibility of the Prefect.

12. The Prefect is the centre from which the administration of the entire Congregation must begin and to which it must refer. The Prefect is subject to the Rector, to whom he must render account of his management at least once a year.

13. The Bursar governs all the material needs of the Society. Entrusted to him therefore is buying, selling, building and similar. It is also the task of the Bursar to see that each house is given the things it needs.

14. The Councillors intervene in all deliberations regarding admission to the novitiate, admission to vows or sending some member of the Society away; if it is a case of opening a new House or choosing a Director of some House; contracts for real estate; buying and selling. In short, all things of

major importance to do with the overall smooth running of the Society. Decisions will be taken by secret ballot. If when noting the result of the secret ballot, which has the force of a decision, the majority is not in favour, the rector will prolong discussion.

15. One of the Councillors by delegation of the Rector will look after scholastic matters for the whole Society. The other two, according to need, will take the place of those in the Superior Chapter, who for illness or other reason cannot attend to their office.

16. Each of the superiors with the exception of the Rector, will be in office for six years and can be re-elected. If someone from the Superior Chapter ceases to hold office either because of death or for whatever other reason before the six years are up, the Rector Major will entrust his office to the one he judges best in the Lord; this one will remain in office only until the end of the six year period commenced by the member who left that office.

17. Should it be necessary, the Rector Major, with the consent of the Superior Chapter, will establish some Visitors who will be given the task of visiting a given number of Houses whenever this is required because of their number or distance. These Visitors will take the place of the Rector Major in the Houses and for the affairs entrusted to them.

#### *X. Each House in particular*

1. Whenever by particular favour of Divine Providence, a House is to be opened, first of all the Superior General will endeavour to obtain the consent of the bishop of the diocese in which the new House is to be opened.

2. He should proceed cautiously with this, so that in opening Houses or taking up administration of any kind, nothing is established or done contrary to law.

3. If the new House is a junior seminary or seminary for adult clerics, then besides dependence in matters of sacred ministry, there will also be complete dependence on the ecclesiastical superior in teaching. In the choice of teaching materials, books to be used, discipline and temporal administration, what the Rector Major has established with the ordinary of the place must be followed.



4. The Society may not take on the direction of seminaries without the express permission of the Holy See. This permission will be sought in each individual case.

5. For new Houses to be opened, the number of members should not be fewer than six. The superior for each one is chosen by the Superior Chapter and will take the name of Director. Every House can administer goods donated or brought into the Congregation, so they may serve that House in particular, but always within limits established by the Superior General.

6. The Rector Major will visit each House at least once a year, either in person or by means of a Visitor, to diligently examine if it is carrying out the duties imposed by the Rules of the Congregation and observe whether the administration of spiritual and temporal things is really according to their purpose, which is to promote the glory of God and the good of souls.

7. The Director for his part must in all things act in such a way as to be able at any point to give an account of his administration to God and to the Rector Major.

8. The first concern of the Rector will be to establish in any new House a Chapter corresponding to the number of members dwelling there.

9. The Superior Chapter and the Director of the new House will intervene in setting up this Chapter.

10. The first to be chosen will be the Catechist, then the Prefect, and if necessary also the Bursar; finally the Councillors according to the number of members dwelling in the House and the things that need to be done.

11. Whenever distance, times, places advise some exceptions in forming this Chapter or assigning its tasks the Rector has full authority to do so, however with the consent of the Superior Chapter.

12. The Director cannot buy, sell real estate, nor build new buildings, nor demolish those already built, nor carry out serious renovation without the consent of the Rector Major. In his administration he must take care of the spiritual, scholastic and material running; but in matters of greater moment it

would be prudent to call his Chapter together and not decide without having their consent.

13. The Catechist will look after spiritual matters of the House, both with regard to the members and others who do not belong to the Congregation and when needed will advise the Director of these matters.

14. The Prefect will take the place of the Director and his principal office will be to administer temporal things, take care of the coadjutors, carefully watch over the discipline of the pupils in accordance with the rules of each House and the consent of the Director. He must be prepared to render account of his management to the Director whenever he may ask him to.

15. The Bursar, whenever need requires it, will help the Prefect in his duties and especially in temporal affairs.

16. The Councillors will intervene in all deliberations of any importance, and will help the Director in scholastic matters and everything he assigns them to do.

17. Every year each Director must render account of his spiritual and material administration of the House to the Rector Major.

## *XI. Admissions*

1. Whenever someone makes a request to enter the Congregation they need testimonial letters or certificates in accordance with the decree of 25 January 1848, which begins *Romani Pontifices* etc. given by the Sacred Congregation for Regulars. As for the health of the postulant, it should be such that he can observe all the rules of the Society without exception. For laymen to be received into the Congregation, other than these other items, they need to know at least the basics of the Catholic Faith. The Rector Major will accept the postulant if he has obtained a majority of votes from the Superior Chapter.

2. To admit postulants or novices who wish to embrace the ecclesiastical state, should there be some irregularity, dispensation should first be sought from the Holy See.

3. After the second trial year the candidate will depend on the House Chapter in which he was placed by the Superiors. When the third trial year is complete, the member can be admitted to renewal of vows by the Superiors of the House, but with the consent of the Rector Major. If he has obtained the majority of votes, this news will be given to the Rector, who with the Superior Chapter will confirm the admission or otherwise, as he judges best in the Lord.

4. If the Chapter is not present, the Rector Major, whenever there is just reason, can accept into the Congregation and admit to vows or also dismiss from the Society in any House, those whom he judges best: but this can be done with the consent and presence of the House Chapter. In this case the Director of the House where admission or dismissal is taking place, will give the news to the Superior Chapter with appropriate indications, so that the member can be inscribed or cancelled from the Society's list.

5. With regard to admission of members and profession of simple vows all things will be observed that were prescribed by the decree of January 23, 1848. *Regulari disciplinae* of the Sacred Congregation for Regulars.

6. To be admitted for vows it is requisite that the first and second trial years have been completed. But no one may be admitted to vows unless he has completed his 16<sup>th</sup> year.

7. These vows will be made for three years. After the three years, and with the consent of the Chapter, each one will be given the faculty of renewing his vows for a further three years or making perpetual vows if he wishes to bind himself for life. Nevertheless no one may be admitted to holy orders, *titulo congregationis*, unless he has taken perpetual vows.

8. The Society, supported by Divine Providence, which has never been lacking for someone who believes in it, will see that each one has what he needs in health or in sickness. Nevertheless it is only bound to provide for those who have made temporary or perpetual vows.

### *XII. Study*

1. Clerics and all members who aspire to the ecclesiastical state, must spend two years attending seriously to the study of philosophy, and then for at least another four years to ecclesiastical subjects.

2. Their main study will be directed with every effort to the Bible, Church history, dogmatic, speculative and moral theology and also the books and treatises that speak of instructing youth in religious matters.

3. Our teacher will be St Thomas and all other well-respected authors of catechetical instruction and explanation of Catholic doctrine.

4. For the teaching of the philosophical and ecclesiastical sciences, teachers or members or outsiders will be chosen by preference who are best known for their probity of life, intelligence and learning.

5. Each member, to complete his studies, as well as the daily moral lectures, should work to put together a course of sermons and meditations, firstly for youth and then to fit the understanding of all the Christian faithful.

6. While members are attending to the studies prescribed by the Constitutions, they should not apply themselves too much to the works of charity proposed by the Salesian Society, unless out of necessity, since this would usually be of serious detriment to their studies.

### *XIII. Practices of piety*

1. The active life to which our society is mostly committed deprives its members of the opportunity of engaging in many practices in common. They shall accordingly endeavour to make up [for this lack] by mutual good example and by the perfect fulfilment of the general duties of a Christian.

2. Each member shall approach the sacrament of penance every week [administered] by confessors who are approved by the ordinary and who exercise that ministry toward the members with the Rector's permission. The priests shall celebrate holy Mass every day: Seminarians [*chierici*] and Coadjutors shall take care to assist at the Sacrifice daily, receive holy Communion on

Sundays and holy days and every Thursday. Personal composure, a clear, devout, distinct pronunciation of the words contained in the divine offices, modesty in speech, looks and gait both inside and outside the house, ought to be so outstanding in our members that particularly by these traits they are to be distinguished from others.

3. Every day each one, besides vocal prayers, shall devote no less than half-an-hour to mental prayer, unless one is prevented [from doing so] by the calls of the sacred ministry. In that case he shall make up for it by frequent ejaculatory prayers and by offering to God with greater fervour and love those labours that keep him from the prescribed exercises of piety.

4 Every day the third part of the Rosary of the Immaculate Mother of God shall be recited, and some time shall be devoted to spiritual reading.

5. Friday in every week shall be kept as a fast in honour of the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

6. On the last day of every month each one, leaving all temporal cares aside, shall recollect himself and shall make the exercise which is customarily made [to prepare] for a good death. He shall dispose all his affairs both spiritual and temporal as though he had to leave the world and set out on the way to eternity.

7. Every year, each one shall make a retreat for about ten, or at least six, days which will conclude with his annual confession. Before being received into the Society, and before taking vows, each one shall devote ten days to a retreat directed by spiritual masters [and shall make] a general confession.

8. When Divine Providence calls a member, whether he be a layman, cleric or priest, to eternal life, the Rector of the house in which the member lived will immediately see that ten Masses are celebrated in suffrage for his soul. Others then, who are not priests, will approach holy Communion at least once to this end.

9. Whenever the parents of a member die, priests in the house where that member lives will likewise celebrate ten Masses in suffrage for their souls. Those who are not priests will approach holy Communion.

10. On the death of the Rector Major all the priests of the Congregation shall celebrate Mass for him and all non-priest members will offer up the usual suffrages for two reasons: (1) out of gratitude for the pains and labours sustained in the government of the Society; (2) for his release from the pains of Purgatory of which we may have been the cause.

11. Every year after the Feast of St Francis de Sales all priests will celebrate Mass for deceased members. All the others will approach holy Communion and recite a third part of the Rosary of Our Lady with other prayers.

12. Each one will take special care: 1. not to cultivate any habits even in harmless things; 2. to keep their clothing, bed and cell clean and decent; and everyone will avoid any kind of silly affectation or ambition. Nothing adorns the religious better than holiness of life, making him an example to others in everything.

13. Each one will be prepared, when the need arises, to suffer heat, cold, thirst, hunger, fatigue, scorn whenever these redound to the greater glory of God, are spiritually useful to others and for the salvation of his own soul.

#### *XIV. The enrolled [ascritti] or novices*<sup>48</sup>

1. Everyone before being received into the Congregation must pass through three probationary trials. The first is that which has to precede the novitiate and is called the probation of the aspirants. The second is the novitiate itself, and the third is the period of the triennial vows.

2. It is considered sufficient for the first probation when the postulant has passed some length of time in one of our Houses, or has frequented our schools, and has distinguished himself in that time by his good conduct and ability.

3. When an adult moreover is desirous of being enrolled in our Society and has been admitted to the first probationary trial, he shall devote himself to some days of spiritual Retreat, and then he shall be employed for at least a few

<sup>48</sup> In the Italian edition printed in 1875 Don Bosco left out articles presented here in italics.

months in the various duties of the Congregation, so that in this way in some manner he may learn and practise the mode of life he is desirous of embracing.

*4. At the time of the first probationary period the master of novices and the other superiors must diligently observe the conduct of the aspirants, and refer to the Superior Chapter everything they think best in the Lord.*

*5. Since the principal purpose of our Society is to teach the young, especially if they are poor, knowledge (science) and religion and direct them amidst the dangers of the world on the way to salvation, everyone at the time of his first probationary period should be tried out in study and in everything belonging to the day and night classes, teaching youngsters catechism and lending a hand also in difficult cases.*

*6. Once he has satisfactorily completed his first probationary period and he has been accepted as a member in the Congregation, the master of novices will immediately begin work with the new novice and omit nothing that could contribute to observance of the Constitutions.*

*7. The Rector Major with the consent of the other superiors will determine in which Houses the probationary periods for aspirants and novices should be held; but these probationary Houses should never be established [without] the permission of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.*

*8. The place for the novitiate should be separate from that part of the House where the professed live, and have as many separate cells as there are novices; that is, a dormitory large enough to accommodate each one's bed. There should also be a cell or other suitable place for the master of novices.*

*9. The master of novices is chosen by the General Chapter from amongst those who have made perpetual vows. He must have completed his thirtieth year and have lived ten years in the Society. He will remain in office for six years and if he dies before the six years are up, the Rector major, with the consent of the Superior Chapter will substitute him with another until the next General Chapter.*

*10. The master of novices will endeavour to show himself amiable, gentle and of kindly disposition so that the novices may open their hearts to him in every*

*case that could see their progress in virtue. He will direct and instruct them on the general fulfilment of the Constitutions and especially in those that regard the vow of chastity, poverty and obedience. In the same way let him see that they fulfil and carry out, in the most exemplary manner, the practices of piety prescribed by our Constitutions. Each week he will hold a religious instruction or conference on matters referring to our Institute. At least once a month let him call the novices one by one, and lovingly exhort them to have confidence in him so that his salutary [advice] may be received to good effect.*

*11. In accepting novices everything will be observed that was said in the previous Chapter from article 1 to article 5.*

*12. When the second probationary period is over, that is, the novitiate year, the novices should not take up any of the duties proper to our Society, so they can apply themselves solely to profiting in virtue and perfecting themselves in the vocation to which they have been called by God. Nevertheless in their own House they can teach catechism on Sundays to boys in accord with the master's opinion and under his watchful eye<sup>49</sup>).*

*13. After a year of novitiate, if the novice shows that in everything he is solicitous for the greater glory of God and the good of the Congregation, and is exemplary in the practice of piety, the time of probation is considered finished. Alternatively he may defer for some months or even a year.*

4. Once the member has completed the novitiate and been accepted in the Congregation, with the opinion of the novice master the Superior Chapter can admit him to triennial vows. The practice of the triennial vows is the third probationary period.

<sup>49</sup> *Pius Papa IX benigne annuit tyrones, tempore secundae probationis, experimentum facere posse de iis, quae in prima probatione sunt adnotata, quoties ad maiorem Dei gloriam id conferre iudicabitur. Vivae vocis oraculo die 8 aprilis 1874* (Pope Pius IX granted that novices could be tried out in those offices which are noted for the first probationary period, whenever it deemed to be for the greater glory of God. Granted viva voce, on April 8, 1874); note included in the printed edition of the Latin text reviewed by Latinists Vincenzo Lanfranchi, Tommaso Vallauri and Barnabite Innocenzo Gobio, cf. *Regulae seu Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii. Juxta approbationis descretum die 3 aprilis 1874. Augustae Taurinorum, ex Officina Asceterii Salesiani, 1874, p. 45* (OE XXV, 455).



5. Over the space of three years while being bound by triennial vows, the member can be sent to any House of the Congregation, so long as studies can be pursued there. Over this time the Director of that House will take care of the new member, like the master of novices.

6. Over all this period of probation the master of novices or the Director of the House will endeavour to recommend and kindly inspire the new members to mortification of their outward senses and especially in sobriety. But prudence is needed in all this, to see that members are not weakened or that they are not overburdened and are thus unable to carry out the duties of our Congregation.

7. When these three probationary periods have been completed in a praiseworthy manner, if the member really wishes to remain in the Congregation with perpetual vows, he can be admitted to making them by the Superior Chapter.

#### *XV. The habit*

1. The habit which the members wear shall vary according to the custom of the country in which they fix their abode.

2. Priests shall wear the long cassock, unless necessity when travelling or any other just cause shall counsel otherwise.

3. The lay-brothers shall, as far as possible, be dressed in black. But everyone alike shall strive to avoid the new fashions of people in the world.

#### *Rite of profession for members of the Society of St Francis de Sales*

Before pronouncing the vows, each confrere will make ten days of retreat, directed especially to reflection on vocation and instruction on the vows he intends to profess, so that he may clearly know what should be according to the Lord. At the end of the retreat the Chapter will gather and if possible all the members of the House. The Rector, or another delegated by him, in cotta and stole will invite everyone to kneel. Then everyone will call on the light of the Holy Spirit, and alternatively sing the hymn *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, etc.

*V. Emitte Spiritum etc. / R. Et renovabis etc.*

*Oremus. Deus, qui corda fadelium ecc.*

The Litany of the Blessed Virgin follows, then:

*Ora pro nobis etc.*, and the *Oremus. Concede nos etc.*

Then in honour of St Francis de Sales, Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.

*V. Ora pro nobis, beate Francisce / R. Ut digni efficiamur etc.*

*Oremus Deus, qui ad animarum salutem etc.*

The novice will kneel between two professed and before the Rector or whoever takes his place, who will then ask the following questions in the singular, if there is one novice, or plural if there are more.

*Rector.* My son, what are you asking?

*Novice.* My Reverend Superior, I ask to profess the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales.

*R.* Do you know these Constitutions well and have you already put them into practice?

*N.* I think I know them sufficiently well and in accordance with the explanations which my Superiors have given me of them. I have done what I could to practise them in the time of my novitiate. Although I am aware of my weakness I hope, however, with God's help, to be able to practise them in the future with greater exactitude, and also with greater advantages to my soul.

*R.* Have you perfectly understood what is involved in professing the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales?

*N.* I think I have understood it. By professing the Salesian Constitutions I intend to promise God that I will aim at the sanctification of my soul, by renouncing the pleasures and vanities of the world, by fleeing from all deliberate sin, and by living in exemplary poverty, perfect chastity and humble obedience. I also know that by professing these Constitutions I must renounce all the conveniences and comforts of life and this only and solely for the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ to whom, I intend to consecrate my every word, my every work and my every thought for the rest of my life.

*R.* Are you then disposed to renounce the world and all it can promise and to profess by vow the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales?

*N.* Yes, Reverend Superior, I am ready and I do desire it with all my heart and I hope with the help of God' grace to be faithful to my promises.

*R.* Are they the triennial or perpetual vows you now propose to make?

*N.* *If making triennial vows he will respond:* Although I have a firm desire to pass the rest of my life in this Congregation, yet in conformity with what our Constitutions prescribe I now make the triennial vows only, full of confidence however, that after these, I shall be able to make them in perpetuity.

*If he is making perpetual vows, he will say:* As it is my firm desire to consecrate myself forever to God in the Congregation of St Francis de Sales, I intend now to make the perpetual vows, that is to say, to bind myself by vow to observe the Salesian Constitutions for the rest of my life.

*R.* May God bless this your good desire and grant you the grace to be able to persevere in it faithfully even to the end of life, even unto that time when Jesus Christ will give you an ample reward for all you have left or done for him.

Place yourself now in the presence of God and pronounce the prescribed form of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience in accordance with our Constitutions, which are to be for the future, the constant rule for your life.

### *Formula of the vows*

“In the name of the most Holy [and undivided] Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I N. N. place myself in the presence of the Almighty and Everlasting God, and unworthy though I am to appear in his sight, nevertheless relying on his great goodness and infinite mercy, and in the presence also of the most Blessed and Immaculate Virgin Mary, Help of Christians, and of St Francis de Sales and all the Saints of heaven, I make the vow of poverty, chastity and obedience to God and into your hands N.N. Superior of our Society, (or to you who take the place of the Superior of our Society) for three years (or—in

perpetuity in accordance with the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales.” *All answer:* Amen.

R. May God assist you with his holy grace to be faithful to this solemn promise even unto the end of life. Call frequently to mind the great reward which our Saviour promises to him who forsakes the world in order to follow him. He shall receive a hundredfold in the present life and an eternal recompense in the life to come. And if the observance of our Rules causes you at some time to suffer some pain, then call to mind the words of St Paul where he says that the sufferings of this present life are but for a moment whilst the joys of the life to come are eternal; and he that suffers together with Jesus Christ upon earth shall, together with Jesus Christ, be one day crowned with glory in heaven.

Then the new member will write his name in the Register by completing the following.

“I the undersigned, have read and understood the rules of the Society of St Francis de Sales and I promise to observe them constantly in accordance with the formula of vows I have just pronounced.”

Turin, etc., year etc. N.N.

Afterwards there will be the *Te Deum*, then if the Rector so judges, he will give a brief moral exhortation and will conclude with the Psalm *Laudate Dominum, omnes gentes* etc.

### *Conclusion*

For the tranquillity of souls, the Society declares that these Rules do not, of themselves, oblige under the pain of either mortal or venial sin. Wherefore if anyone, by transgressing them, is guilty before God, this proceeds not directly from the Rules themselves but either from the Commandments of God or of the Church, or from the vows, or finally, from the circumstances that may accompany the violation of the Rules, such as the bad example given, the contempt shown and the like.

## **227. Rules or Constitutions for the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1885)**

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (1872-1885)*. Critical texts by Sr. Cecilia Romero fma. (= Istituto Storico Salesiano – Fonti, Serie prima, 2). Roma, LAS 1983, pp. 287-335.

### *Chapter 1. Purpose of the Institute*

1. The object of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians is to seek their personal perfection, and to cooperate in the salvation of their neighbour especially by Christian education to the children of working class families.

2. The Institute will be composed of unmarried women who profess to live the common life in everything. They will make temporary vows of three years or also in perpetuity.

3. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will endeavour before anything else to exercise Christian virtues, then they will work for the good of their neighbour. It will be their special concern to take up the direction of schools, orphanages, infant schools, festive Oratories, and also to open work shops to help the poorest girls in the cities, villages and foreign missions. Where there is need they will also accept the direction of hospitals and other similar works of charity.

4. They can also open boarding schools preferably for young women of the lower class, whom they will teach those subjects and arts which conform to their state in life and demanded by their social situation. They will see it as their task to form them in piety, make them good Christians who are also able eventually to earn an honest living.

### *Chapter 2. Form of the Institute*

1. The Institute is immediately dependent on the Superior General of the Society of St Francis de Sales, to whom they will give the name Major Superior. In each House belonging to the Congregation he will be represented

by a priest with the name of particular Director and for the whole Institute by a member of the Salesian Superior Chapter, or another suitable priest, with the title of Director General of the Sisters. The Director General will take care of everything regarding the material, moral and spiritual smooth running of the Institute.

2. The Major Superior, in agreement with the Superior Chapter of the Sisters, after a Sister has completed her period of triennial vows once or twice in a praiseworthy manner, may also admit her to perpetual vows when he judges it to be of advantage to the Sister and the Institute. The Major Superior gives the religious habit and receives the vows himself or by means of another priest delegated by him.

3. The vows oblige so long as someone remains in the Congregation. If for any Sister for reasonable reason, or after the prudent judgement of her superiors, were to leave the Institute, she can be released from her vows by the Supreme Pontiff or the Major Superior. Otherwise let each one persevere in her vocation until death, always mindful of the serious words of our Divine Saviour: “No one who puts their hand to the plough, and looks back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

4. All the Houses of the Institute, in what concerns the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of religious worship, shall be subject to the jurisdiction of the bishop. The Sisters then of each House belonging to the Congregation will have a Salesian priest for their ordinary confessor, appointed by the Major Superior and approved for confessions in the diocese; in Houses belonging to others they will have the parish priest, or other priest appointed by the bishop for their confessor. Among the tasks of the particular Director is that of holding a conference for the Sisters two or more times a month, dealing with some topic of religious perfection, or explaining some points of the Rule.

5. The Sisters and the girls of the House who do not belong to the Salesian Congregation will be subject to the jurisdiction of the parish priest in matters that regard the parish and its rights.

6. The Sisters will retain their civil rights even after profession, but they cannot administer their goods except within the limits and manner indicated by the Major Superior.

7. The fruits of stable and movable goods brought into the Congregation must be yielded to the same.

8. The Institute will see that each Sister has what is needed for food, clothing and those things that may be needed for health, or in case of sickness.

9. Whoever dies intestate shall be succeeded by her rightful heir(s), in accordance with civil legislation.

10. Whenever a Sister leaves the Congregation, she cannot ask for any kind of remuneration for any office she has exercised for the time she remained there. She may however ask for real estate or other items that she had before entering the Institute, and will receive them in the state in which they are. She has no right to ask account of the Superiors for the fruits and administration of these items over the time she spent in religious life.

### *Chapter 3. The vow of chastity*

1. In order to practise works of charity to one's neighbour continually and to work fruitfully with the young an indefatigable study of all the virtues is needed and this in a more than ordinary fashion. But the vow of chastity, the angelic virtue, the virtue dear above all others to the Son of God should be cultivated in an eminent degree by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Firstly because the duty they have of instructing and guiding their neighbour in the way of salvation is like that of the holy Angels. It is therefore necessary that they should live with a pure heart and in the angelic state since virgins are called "angels of the earth". Secondly, because their vocation to be properly carried out demands a total detachment both internal and external from all that is not God. This is why they make a vow of chastity with which they consecrate themselves to Jesus Christ, resolved to preserve themselves in mind and heart as His pure and immaculate spouses.

2. In order to observe this vow they must practice a most vigilant guard over the senses which are the doors through which the enemy of souls enters. They must no longer live and breathe but for their heavenly Spouse alone, with all purity and holiness of spirit, of words, of deportment and of deeds, bearing in mind the words of Our Lord who says, “Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God.”

3. In order to preserve so great a treasure they shall call to mind the presence of God, turning to Him often with acts of lively faith, firm hope and ardent charity, fleeing from idleness and freely and voluntarily avoiding dangerous occasions of friendship of any kind other than for Jesus Christ. They will exercise interior and exterior mortification, the first, without limit and the second in the measure permitted by obedience.

4. Let the Sisters foster a special devotion to Mary Immaculate, to glorious Saint Joseph and to their Guardian Angels. If with deep humility they put into practice their Rules and all that this chapter suggests, trusting in Jesus Christ, they will one day go to sing the hymn to the Immaculate Lamb in heaven reserved by God for those to whom He has given the grace of living and dying in the state of virginity.

#### *Chapter 4. The vow of obedience*

1. The life of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, needing to be a continual burnt offering, would be lacking the best in this, if the sacrifice of one’s will were not part of it. This in fact is offered by the vow of obedience to the divine Majesty. Our Divine Redeemer, moreover, has assured us that He came not to do His own will, but that of His heavenly Father. It is in order that we may be sure of doing the holy will of God that the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians make the vow of obedience.

2. By the vow of obedience we are obliged to occupy ourselves only with what the Superior judges to be for the greater glory of God and the good of one’s own soul and the souls of others, according to the Rule of this Institute.

3. The Sisters should obey in the spirit of faith seeing God in their Superior. Their obedience should be trustful, expectant and full of hope, convinced



that what is ordained by obedience will redound to their greater spiritual advantage, and indeed when the thing commanded is repugnant the reward they receive from God will be greater, if they faithfully carry it out.

4. Let their obedience be prompt and cheerful and without delay, dispute or sadness, and without judging and criticising the reasons given for the command, be they clear or hidden.

5. Let no one be unduly anxious to ask for anything or to refuse. On perceiving that something is harmful or necessary let her mention the fact to the Superior who will provide what is required.

### *Chapter 5. The vow of poverty*

1. The observance of the vow of poverty in the Institute of Mary Help of Christians consists essentially in detachment from temporal goods. It is practised by observing the common life regarding food and clothing and keeping nothing for personal use without the permission of the Superior.

2. It is part of this vow to see that the rooms are very simple, with more emphasis given to decorating the heart with virtue than one's person or the walls of the room.

3. No one may use money in a spirit of ownership either in the Institute or outside, neither may she use it as a deposit for any reason whatsoever without the express permission of the Superior.

4. Whatever is brought as a gift to the Sisters will be delivered to the superior, who will dispose of it as she thinks best, without being obliged to give an account of her arrangements. The Sisters will not give gifts to any people outside and even amongst themselves without express permission. They will also not be allowed to borrow, or exchange anything, except with the consent of the superior.

5. Where needed let each be prepared to suffer heat, cold, thirst, hunger, fatigue and contempt, if this redounds to the greater glory of God, the spiritual advantage of others, and to the salvation of her own soul.

6. To encourage the observance of voluntary poverty the Sisters reflect that this virtue makes them true followers of the Divine Saviour, who being rich became poor and to leave us a great example espoused poverty and remained poor from birth to death.

#### *Chapter 6. Internal government of the Institute*

1. The Institute of Mary Help of Christians is governed and directed by a Superior Chapter made up of a Superior General, a Vicar, a Bursar and two Assistants, depending on the Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation.

2. The Superior Chapter will be presided over by the Major Superior, or by the Director General, or by the local Director delegated for this purpose. The Superior Chapter will meet when there is a need to open a new House or establishment, or for any other business concerning the general interests of the Institute. When it is a question of admission to clothing or profession the mistress of novices will also intervene.

3. The Sisters will never open a House or take up direction of some institution, kindergarten, school and the like, before the Major Superior has dealt with the bishop and is in full agreement with him regarding ecclesiastical authority.

4. The Superior General [for the Sisters] will have full direction over the Institute, under the Major Superior. It is up to her to determine the duties of the Sisters, according to need, and to move superiors from one House to another after hearing the opinion of her superiors. In cases of buying and selling real estate, demolishing buildings or undertaking new constructions she should first have an understanding with the Director General, and obtain the consent of the Major Superior.

Once a year, and any time it is requested, she should also render a general account to the Major Superior on the moral, physical and material state of the Institute, and if she should have monies beyond what is strictly needed she should hand them over to him to be used as he judges best for the greater glory of God.

5. The Vicar will take the place of the Superior General and will note income and expenditure of the entire Congregation; she will look after legacies, wills and how to handle them, donations regarding the Houses of the Institute and will keep a register of them. The administration of movable and immovable goods and their fruits is also entrusted to her care and responsibility. She will however depend on the Superior General, to whom she should give account of her management every quarter.

6. The Vicar is also entrusted with the task of secretly admonishing the Superior General but will not warn her unless there are serious reasons and not before having prayed and consulted God about it, in order to know what to say, how to say it, the place and time for it to be of most advantage. The Superior herself from time to time will ask her if she has observations to make, to more easily provide her with the opportunity of offering this charitable service.

7. The Bursar will take care of everything regarding material matters of the Houses. Repairs to buildings, new buildings, purchases, sales, wholesale supplies of clothing, food, furnishings and everything relating to management of these, are especially entrusted to the Bursar, in dependence on the Superior General.

8. The first assistant will keep the correspondence between the Superior Chapter and all the Houses of the Institute, and also with outsiders, but after being appointed by the Superior General. She will keep account of decrees, letters and all written material referring to ecclesiastical, municipal and civil authorities.

9. The second assistant will be entrusted with everything regarding schools and teaching in the various Houses of the Institute.

#### *Chapter 7. Election of the Superior General, Vicar, Bursar and the two Assistants*

1. The Superior General and other offices will have a six year term of office and can be re-elected.

2. The elections can be held over two occasions in accordance with the opinion of the Major Superior, but if there is no impediment they will take place on the octave of the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, or on the occasion of a General Chapter.

3. Three months prior, the Superior General will advise all the Houses of the expiry of her term and that of her other officials. At the same time the Major Superior will ask for prayers to be said to obtain heavenly light, and he will inform everyone who will take part in the new elections of the obligation of voting for the one they judge to be most suitable for governing the Institute and best suited to work for the glory of God and the good of souls in the Congregation.

4. The election of the Superior General, as far as possible, should not be delayed more than fifteen days from the expiry of her term of office. During this time the Superior General will act as Vicar in everything referring to direction and administration of the Institute.

5. The Superior Chapter and the superiors of each House will intervene in electing the Superior General. If for any reason someone is unable to vote, the election will still be valid. The election will be presided over by the Major Superior, or by the Director General, accompanied by two assistant priests.

6. Since the election of a good Mother General usually brings great good to the Institute and for the glory of God, so as to facilitate the best choice, the Major Superior, just before the election, may also propose a short-list of Sisters who seem to him to be more suited for the office of Superior General.

7. This election will take place in the following way: A crucifix will be placed on a small altar or table, and two candles lit. The Major Superior or his delegate will intone the *Veni Creator*, followed by the *Oremus Deus qui corda* etc. Then following a brief address, voters will write the name on a form of the one they intend to elect, and folding this form they will go in order to place it in the appropriately prepared urn. Strict secrecy will be maintained in everything, so that no one will know the voting for one or the other, before or after the vote. Whoever obtains an absolute majority of votes will be elected

as Superior General. Absolute majority means that more than half the ballot papers placed in the ballot box are in favour.

8. The Major Superior, by his authority, will confirm that the election has been completed.

9. If the election does not succeed in the first round of voting, it can be repeated on the same day or the following day. When the election has not succeeded after the second round of voting, because voting is too scattered, the Major Superior has the faculty of choosing as Superior the Sister he judges most suited to the task.

10. The election of the Vicar, Bursar and two Assistants will be carried out the same way, in different rounds, but the election will be valid with a relative majority of votes, meaning the one elected will be the one who gains more votes than any other. Their election will also be approved and confirmed by the Major Superior.

11. The Superior General whose term has expired, unless she was deposed, if not elected as Vicar or Bursar, will have full right to be first assistant for the six year period without any need to be elected.

12. The scrutiny for the ballots will be done by two assistants and the president, who will see that the ballot papers are burned in the presence of the Chapter which is voting.

13. When the election is complete and confirmed, the *Te Deum* will be sung, and the Director General in the name of the Major Superior will advise all the Houses.

14. A Sister, to be elected Superior General, Vicar, Bursar or Assistant should: 1. Be 35 years of age and 10 of profession, but if needs be the Major Superior either before or after the election may alter these conditions; 2. Have always been exemplary; 3. Be gifted with prudence, charity and zeal for regular observance; 4. Be perpetually professed.

15. Although one may assume that a humble Daughter of Mary Help of Christians would not be led by the ambition to use intrigues and scheming to

gain promotion, nevertheless to prevent such a case we declare that notoriously ambitious Sisters are deemed to be ineligible—they are inept and unworthy.

16. In the case where any member of the Superior Chapter must cease office before the six years are up, the Superior General with the consent of the Major Superior, will choose a substitute as she thinks best in the Lord. This person will remain in office only until the end of the six year period already begun by the one who preceded her.

17. Whenever the death of the Superior General occurs during the six year period, or she has to relinquish office for some reason, the election of a new superior will take place in the manner described above; with the exception that in order to avoid further disturbance the Major Superior may choose her by his own authority. In both cases the one chosen will remain in office until the completion of the six year period already begun, when there will be new elections for the Superior Chapter.

18. During the vacancy the Vicar will govern the Institute until the election of the new superior.

19. When the new superior is to be elected by the General Chapter, the Vicar will advise all the Houses and in agreement with the Major Superior will choose the appropriate time for the election.

20. The Superior General will visit each House at least once a year. Where because of distance or number of Houses she cannot do this in person she will choose, with the consent of her superiors, some visitors to whom she will give the task of doing this in her stead. The Visitors will take the place of the Superior General for matters and affairs entrusted to them.

### *Chapter 8. Election of superiors of individual houses and their respective Chapters*

1. There will be a superior [*direttrice*] in every House of the Institute, to whom the Sisters assigned there will give their obedience.

2. The Superior Chapter of the Sisters, with the approval and confirmation of the Major Superior, will choose the superior for each House and its Chapter

in proportion to the number of Sisters living there. After the superior the first to be chosen will be the vicar and assistants according to need. The new superior will also work with the Superior Chapter for these.

3. The superior can administer goods brought into the Congregation and donated for a particular House, but always within the limits fixed by the Superior General, or by the local Director, if the Sisters are working at a Salesian Institute. She cannot buy or sell real estate or put up new buildings, nor carry out renovations without the consent of her superiors. In her administration she must take care of all the moral, material and scholastic running, if there are schools, and for more important matters will call together her Chapter and will make no decisions without hearing their opinion. Every year she will give an exact account of her administration to the Superior General.

4. The vicar takes the place of the superior when she is absent, and her task will also be to administer temporal things. Therefore she will keep a vigilant eye on everything regarding domestic economy. She will see that nothing is lacking, nothing is wasted or damaged and will see to all the necessary provisions for the House. If the House is annexed to a Salesian College or some other Institute she will also consult with the appropriate person regarding norms for expenditures. The vicar should render account of her management to the superior as often as she is asked to.

5. The assistants will be part of all important decision-making, and will help the superior in scholastic and domestic matters, and in everything that is assigned to them.

### *Chapter 9. The Novice Mistress*

1. The Novice Mistress will be chosen and constituted by the Superior General after hearing the opinion of her Chapter and with the consent of the Major Superior.

2. The Novice Mistress needs to be a Sister of proven virtue and prudence. She should have full and clear understanding of the holy Rule and be known for her spirit of piety, humility and patience under all odds. She should be at

least 30 years old and 5 of profession. Her term in office will depend on the arrangements of her superiors.

3. The Novice Mistress will endeavour to show herself amiable and full of kindness, so that the daughters will open their hearts to her in everything that could help their progress in virtue. She will direct and instruct them in the observance of the Constitutions, especially in what regards the vow of chastity, poverty and obedience. In every case she will be their model in fulfilling all the prescriptions of the Rule. She is also encouraged to inspire a spirit of mortification in the novices, but to use great discretion in external mortification in order not to weaken them to the point where they cannot carry out the duties of the Institute.

4. She will watch over the imperfections of the novices and will often turn to God asking his enlightenment to discern the defects which are natural and those which are wilful: the former kind she will put up with and lead them to useful reform, while the latter she will correct, lessen and eliminate with prudent discretion and charity.

5. Saint Teresa wanted her Sisters to be cheerful, sincere and open. Therefore the Novice Mistress will see that her novices are the same, because Sisters of this kind are the best suited to inspiring the girls and people in the world to respect and love piety and religion.

6. Finally she should not forget that the spirit of the Institute is a spirit of charity and kindness, a spirit of abnegation and sacrifice, and therefore she will endeavour to inform and encourage the novices with this spirit so that once professed they will be able instruments for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

7. What has been said of the Novice Mistress also applies to the assistant or one looking after the postulants. Especially for the early days of probation she will be their consolation and comfort; then later she should see if they have a true vocation to the religious state and if they have the physical and moral qualities required by the rules.



### *Chapter 10. General Chapter*

1. Every six years and possibly whenever the Superior Chapter has to be elected, there will be a General Chapter. Taking part in this will be the Major Superior or Director General with two priest assistants, the Superior Chapter and superiors of each House, if distance and other circumstances allow.

2. The General Chapter will deal with matters of common interest for the Congregation and can also modify articles of the Constitutions, but in accordance with the spirit of the Institute.

3. If the Major Superior has not personally taken part in the General Chapter, all the acts will be given him to examine them and will not oblige until he has given his approval.

### *Chapter 11. Terms of admission*

1. Girls who wish to be aggregated to the Institute of Mary Help of Christians will put their request to the Major Superior or the Superior General, who either him or herself or through a Sister appointed for this purpose, will find out the necessary information about their circumstances, conduct, abilities, etc., and if they have the required qualities, will admit them to the postulancy.

2. Personal conditions: Legitimate birth, excellent morals, good character, sincere inclination to the virtues proper to the Institute, testimonial of good conduct and testimonial of good repute of the postulant's family, from the parish priest; healthy body, including the absence of every physical defect and inborn sickness; certificate of vaccination or whether she has suffered from smallpox, aged between 15 and 30 years and has not previously been a member of another Religious Congregation.

3. The postulants will pay a fee of 30 francs per month for their time of probation in preparation for the novitiate. This probationary period will last at least 6 months. They will bring with them a sufficient outfit, in accordance with the note that will be provided. Since the Sisters retain their civil rights, they will bring with them the same dowry that would be expected in the

family. This dowry however will be no less than a thousand lire. The Superior General with the consent of her superior can modify this article when she believes it to be for the greater glory of God.

4. Should a daughter leave or die during this time of probation the dowry and her outfit will be returned to her family, though her residential fee, and expense for sickness and funeral will be up to her family.

5. If a novice leaves or dies, her outfit will be returned to her family in the state in which it is, provided however that 15 lire per month is subtracted for the time spent in the novitiate.

6. The dowry and outfit will go in its entirety to the Institute if the Sister leaves or dies once professed.

### *Chapter 12. Clothing and profession*

1. The girl accepted as a postulant should spend no less than 6 months exercising the virtues proper to the Institute, learning the spirit and becoming accustomed to everything that could help her with the tasks, ways of teaching and teaching catechism.

2. When this time of probation is over, the Superior General will ask the Major Superior the faculty for giving her the vocation exam by the Director or other person appointed. They will then proceed to a vote by the House Chapter where the postulant is living and if she gains a majority of votes, an exact report of this will be given to the Superior Chapter, which will decide on admitting her for clothing in the religious habit with the prescribed ceremonies. In the case where the postulant is not admitted to clothing, her family will be advised and she will be sent back to them.

3. After clothing there will be two years of novitiate. A month before this period concludes the conduct and attitude of the novice will again be examined and if she obtains the majority of votes in the scrutiny she will be admitted to holy profession, in accordance with the prescribed formula. The day of the profession will be put in the appropriate register along with the

signature of the professed and two Sisters who are witnesses. If she should not be approved she will return to her family unless the Chapter decides to extend her probation for a further 6 months after which a definitive and final decision will be made.

4. Clothing will be preceded by some days of retreat and profession by the normal retreat.

5. A book will be kept in every House of the Institute, in which will be written the age, provenance, name and surname of the Sisters there, and their parents.

6. For serious moral and behaviour reasons novices may be sent away from the Institute by the Superior General and the professed Sisters by the Superior Chapter with the consent of the Major Superior who by that act will release her from her vows.

*Chapter 13. The principal virtues recommended for novices to study and for the professed to practise*

1. Patient and zealous charity, not only with children, but also with young girls and any other person, with the purpose of doing the greatest good possible for souls.

2. Simplicity and modesty; inward and outward spirit of mortification; strict observance of poverty.

3. Obedience of will and judgement, willingly, and without comment accepting advice and corrections and the duties entrusted to her.

4. The spirit of prayer with which the Sisters carry out their practices of piety will keep them in God's presence and surrendered to his sweet Providence.

5. These virtues must be well-proven and deep-rooted in the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians since they must combine the active and contemplative life in equal measure, copying Martha and [Mary] Magdalene, the life of the apostles and the angels.

*Chapter 14. Arrangement of the various hours of the day*

1. Since the occupations of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are many and varied, great solicitude is required to carry them all out exactly and in an orderly way. Therefore it will be very helpful to arrange an accurate distribution of the hours of the day.

2. From the 1st April to the end of August rising will be at 5; from the 1st September to end of March, at 5.30. Half an hour will be allowed for dressing, making the bed, washing etc. At the sound of the bell the Sisters will meet in their chapel for community prayer according to the set formula. This will be followed by half an hour's meditation for which the subject will be read aloud. They will then assist at holy Mass. The time that follows until lunch time will be occupied in work imposed by obedience, except for half an hour for breakfast.

3. A quarter of an hour before midday they will go to the church or private oratory to make the particular examen of conscience and say the Angelus, after which they will go to the refectory for lunch. There will be reading throughout the meal from some spiritual book which is instructive and also raises the spirit. On principal Solemnities the superior may dispense from part or all of the reading.

4. The usual prayers will be said before and after meals. After dinner there will be about an hour's recreation. During this the Sisters will relate to one another with sisterly affection, animating one another in the divine service and rejoicing to see themselves in God's house away from the danger of offending Him. To uplift both spirit and body, honest and innocent games are not forbidden. No one should be absent from recreation without permission. When this is over they will go to the chapel for a brief visit to the Blessed Sacrament, after which they will diligently continue with their tasks.

5. At a quarter past four they will have fifteen minutes of spiritual reading in common, after which half an hour of moderate recreation is granted. About half an hour before supper they will go to the chapel and say the rosary.

6. There will be reading during supper as at lunchtime. After recreation they will go to the chapel, say the prayers in common, and having read some topic for meditation the following morning, they will go to rest in silence.

### *Chapter 15. Enclosure*

Although it is not possible for the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians to observe strict enclosure on account of the works of charity, they should observe the following rules:

1. People from outside should only be introduced into those parts of the House set aside for them or, when there is need in the rooms used by the boarders. In all other areas occupied by the Sisters, and especially in the dormitories, no other individuals are permitted to enter, except when duty or need require it or when, in an extraordinary case, the superior allows an exception. The doctor, director and closest family members may come to the infirmary when someone is sick, but always accompanied by a Sister.

2. After the bell rings for the *Hail Mary* in the evening, no outsiders may be admitted to the House, except in the case of a daughter being gravely ill.

3. The Sisters shall not leave the House for walks or visits, or for duty without the permission of the Superior who will provide them with a Sister or a pious lay woman as a companion.

4. Except when travelling or for a work of charity, the Sisters will not leave the House after the bell has rung for the evening *Hail Mary*.

5. They should not stop in the street to talk to anyone whosoever, apart from a grave necessity which is justifiable in the eyes of those who see it.

6. They should never take food in the houses of lay people or even of their relatives unless on a journey or when there is serious need.

7. If Sisters have to pass the night away from their own convent in the course of a journey and there are Sisters of the same Institute in the place they should choose to stay with the Sisters rather than with friends and relatives. The Sisters who are the hosts should receive the travellers with sisterly joy and kindness and accept no payment for expenses.

8. The Sisters will not frequent the houses of parish priests or other priests or render services to them. Neither shall they stay for dinner or take part with them in recreational or devotional gatherings. Of course visits which respect and recognition demand are not forbidden, especially to benefactors of the Institute.

9. The Sisters' rooms will be entirely separate from other rooms such that no one can enter or leave except by the door that leads outside.

10. Where the Sisters work in colleges or seminaries they must only have communication through the turntable [*ruota*] for meals, clothes, linen, sacred vestments, etc.

11. In every House there will be a parlour, where the superior needs to confer with the director and people outside; but this must not be used at night without grave need, nor ever with the door locked.

12. Without the permission of the superior no Sister, not even in the parlour, can confer with any person alone, except with the bishop, the Major Superior or with the Director General.

13. Conversations should be brief, about essential or useful matters, and always marked by reserve and seriousness as if one were speaking to God.

14. The superior should watch carefully over the selection and comportment of Sisters who have some engagement with people outside, as for example for the school, festive oratory and workshops, the kitchen, laundry, etc.

15. In every House the Sisters will have their own chapel for practices of piety. Where this cannot happen, they will assist at sacred functions in the community church where they work, but in a separate area, or in the parish church in an appropriate and convenient area.

16. The superior will see that the Sisters do not go to confession at night time. Where it should be necessary, she will see that the place is lit so that no problems arise.

### *Chapter 16. Silence*

1. As silence greatly promotes the observance of regular life, so in a religious house where it is observed, spiritual fervour, recollection, solid piety and union with God is maintained. Therefore it is strongly recommended that the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians observe it exactly.

2. Silence in the Institute is of two kinds: rigorous and moderate. Rigorous silence begins with the bell for prayers in the evening and lasts until morning after holy Mass. This silence requires not only that one does not speak but that one avoid too much walking around, or any other noise that might disturb the recollection of the community.

3. Moderate silence covers the rest of the day, outside of recreation times mentioned in Chapter 14. Of course people can speak softly to one another when there is need or duty, such as in directing work, going on errands, doing things around the house, or other affairs requested from people outside.

4. This silence can be broken for half an hour in the workshops, after 10 in the morning, speaking moderately, or even singing hymns. The same can be done, including outside the workshops, from 4.30 to 5 in the afternoon.

5. Without real necessity, no one should stop to talk in the dormitories, corridors or on the stairs.

6. In particular cases where for reasons of duty, silence cannot be observed as above, it is up to the superior to establish a freer and more suitable time for this.

7. Let everyone take advantage of the opportunity for silence, to be more united with God, often thinking of him and being moved to affectionate aspirations.

### *Chapter 17. Particular practices of piety*

1. Each day the Sisters will commemorate the Seven Sorrows of Mary, on seven occasions, and at the end of each they will recite a *Hail Mary* with the prayer that they shall also often repeat in the course of the day: Eternal

Father, we offer you etc. Then from Vespers on Holy Saturday until Sunday *in Albis* [What used to be called Low Sunday, First Sunday after Easter] and throughout the octave of the Feast of Mary's Assumption into Heaven they will recite the Seven Joys of Mary, one for each occasion.

2. In the quarter of an hour assigned for spiritual reading they will use books that the Superiors will indicate. Recommended above all are: *The Imitation Of Christ*, *the Holy Nun and the Practice Of Loving Jesus Christ* by St Alphonsus, Doctor of the Church; the *Introduction to the Devout Life* by St Francis de Sales adapted for youth, the Rodriguez and lives of the saints who dedicated themselves to the education of the young. But for no reason, either greater perfection, study or instruction should the Sisters provide or read books that have not first been examined or allowed by the superiors.

3. On Sundays and holy days of obligation, the Sisters will say the Office of the Blessed Virgin, unless taking part in parish functions, or assisting at some sodality. The office of the Blessed Virgin should be said with great devotion, slowly, in unison and observing the asterisk for pauses.

4. They will go to confession every week. If in this space of time a Sister wanted to confess, or speak to the confessor about her soul, and is able to do so, she will be free to do so, but sooner or later will inform the superior, who will refrain from asking why. In the accusing themselves of their faults they strive to omit unnecessary circumstances. Let them be brief and say their sins with simplicity and humility in the same way as if they were making these accusations to Jesus Christ. Let them show their confessor great respect and confidence, as befits those who are destined by God to be father, teacher and guide of their souls. But let them never speak of these things amongst themselves, and much less so about the confessor.

5. On the first Sunday or the first Thursday of the month there will be a day of spiritual retreat, where, leaving temporal affairs aside as much as possible each will be recollected, make the exercise of a happy death, arranging her spiritual and temporal affairs as if about to leave the world for eternal life. Some reading will be done suitable to need or where possible the superior will ask the director to give a sermon or conference on some topic.



6. Every 6 months the Sisters will have an extraordinary confessor, appointed by the Major Superior and approved for confessions in the diocese. Outside of this time, should someone have need, she will ask her superior who will make it easy for her to do so.

7. Ordinarily Holy Communion will be approached on Sundays and holy days of obligation, Thursday and Saturday of each week, the anniversaries of clothing and profession. But anyone may approach the altar every day with permission of her confessor.

8. If for any reason a Sister chooses not to take communion the superior is not obliged to ask why but will speak to her in a nice way; if the Sister abstains for over a week, and if necessary she will provide for her spiritual need.

9. Particular devotion and solemnity will be shown for the Feast of St Joseph, St Francis de Sales and St Teresa of Jesus who are the particular patrons of the Institute.

10. The principal Feast of the Institute are the Solemnities of the Immaculate Conception and Mary Help of Christians, preceded by the novena. The Sisters will prepare for these with sentiments of great piety, approaching the sacraments and thanking the Lord and the Blessed Virgin for having granted them the grace of a religious vocation.

11. There is no rule that prescribes abstinence and particular fasting for the Sisters in addition to those commanded by the Holy Church. In any of these they may not follow their own will but obey the confessor and the superior. Likewise they will not engage in bodily penances without first asking due permission.

12. However they should endeavour to comply with the laudable habit of fasting every Saturday in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary. If during the course of the week there is fasting commanded by the Church, or Saturday falls on a public holiday, they are dispensed from this fasting rule.

### *Chapter 18. General rules*

1. All the Sisters, from their various Houses, should come once a year to the Central House, or if they are a long distance away, to the House on which they depend, to make their retreat. If the work they have does not make it possible for them to come together for the retreat, there will be two or three separate possibilities, as judged by the Superior. At the end of the retreat the professed Sisters will renew in common and before the Blessed Sacrament the vows they made on the day of their profession.

2. Letters to the Sisters, or that they wrote to others, will be opened and read where the superior judges this to be good. She then may pass them on or keep them.

3. However they have permission to write, without requesting it, to the Supreme Pontiff, the Major Superior and Superior General and likewise to receive answers to these letters without them being opened.

4. When they are visited by family members or other people, these will be taken to the parlour accompanied by a Sister who is assigned by the Superior. On other occasions for essential visits it is recommended that the Sisters exercise great prudence and Christian modesty and superiors should take all the necessary cautions to avoid everything untoward. Since the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians have many things to do, and when it is not a case of matters of importance, these people should not be allowed to visit more than once a month.

5. Let the Sisters love one another in the Lord but be careful about relationships amongst themselves or with anyone in terms of particular friendships which take us away from perfect love of God and end up being a plague in the community.

6. No one is allowed to give commissions, not to school children or family or anyone, except with a prior understanding of the superior, to whom any correspondence should be referred.

7. Each Sister should regard herself as less than all the others, thus no one will be lacking in humility nor will she refuse even the most humble tasks

in the house as assigned her by the superior according to her abilities and according to what she prudently judges to be good in the Lord.

8. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will always be happy with their Sisters, laughing, joking etc., always, however, as it would seem the angels do amongst themselves; but whenever people of the other sex are present they will deport themselves seriously and with dignity. When out on the street they will walk with great composure and modesty, never staring at people or things they come across, but nevertheless greeting people who greet them, or ecclesiastics who are nearby, with a nod of the head.

9. In the house and outside they will always speak humbly, not maintaining their own point of view, avoiding especially any harsh or biting words, words of reproach, vanity regarding themselves or the good things the Lord has deigned to do for them. All their activities in private and in common will be done solely for God. They will never speak about status, age, wealth, if they had any of this in the world. They will never raise their voice when speaking with someone, even during recreation.

10. They will always speak respectfully of the ministers of God. And when someone has some observation to make in this regard, she will confide it only to her superiors. They will do similarly when speaking of their own superior and religious of other congregations, as well as of Sisters who have left the Institute.

11. When in the presence of people of the other sex, their speech will be serious. Should they be people superior to them, ecclesiastics for example, they will give due respect to their status. If they are lay people, then decorum and good example are required. All their efforts will be to show, in their dealings and whole demeanour, who they need to be, that is, brides of Jesus Christ Crucified and daughters of Mary.

12. In church they will stand in a composed manner, erect, will make a full genuflection when passing in front of the altar of the Blessed Sacrament. The professed Sisters will have the crucifix visible, hung around their neck, and the novices will have the medal of Mary Help of Christians.

13. Each one will look after her own health; so when a Sister does not feel well, without hiding or exaggerating her illness she will advise the superior so that she can provide for her need. While ill she will obey the infirmarian and doctor or surgeon so they may look after her body as they judge best before God. She will endeavour to show patience and resignation to the will of God, enduring the hardships inseparable from poverty and always keeping an imperturbable peace of mind in the hands of the Lord, who is a loving Father, both when preserving her health or when afflicted with sickness and pain. To do the best for their spirit, those who are confined to bed will be given Holy Communion once or twice a week where the nature of the illness and the place permit this.

14. The Sisters will strive always to keep closely united by the bond of mutual charity, for it would be a deplorable thing if those who have committed themselves to imitate Jesus Christ should neglect to observe the commandment most recommended by him to the point where he called it his precept. Hence besides mutual forbearance and impartial affection it is prescribed that should any Sister fail in charity towards another she must apologise as soon as she has become sufficiently calm or at least before retiring to rest and that the one offended should immediately offer her cordial forgiveness.

15. That charity be more perfect, let each one prefer the convenience of her Sisters to her own and let all on every occasion help and encourage one another by acts of kindness and holy friendship and let them never yield to any feeling of jealousy. As for the way the Sisters treat each other they will use the familiar form of address and to the superiors of the Institute and their own superior, the more formal address.

16. The Sisters should desire and do all the good they can for their neighbour, always striving to help and serve Our Lord Jesus Christ in the person of His poor, especially by assisting, serving, consoling Sisters who are ill or afflicted and promising spiritual good for the girls in the town or village where they live. They will be careful not to ask or permit girls from outside the school, workshops or festive oratories to speak to them about worldly amusements, or less pleasant activities or practices.

17. They should consider themselves fortunate when they can do something good for someone, but be very careful never to offend anyone by what they write, or with less than courteous words. When they cannot do a favour asked, they should use cordial words showing how sorry they are that they have to refuse. Likewise, especially in conversations with people outside the Institute and anyone inferior to them they should find an opportunity to talk about God, or religious matters, or some virtue or uplifting deed. By acting thus each one in her own little way can be salt and light for her neighbour and deserve the praise that the Church gives to St Catherine of Siena, that no one ever left her without improvement.

18. Keeping their heart open to the superiors will help much in advancing in religious perfection, since they are the ones who are destined by God to direct her in the way of virtue. Therefore all the Sisters will have great confidence in the superior and their own superior, regarding her as an affectionate mother, and she should show herself to be truly so. They will turn to her in their doubts, express their sorrows to her, explain their needs and difficulties.

19. They will do similarly with the Major Superior and whoever represents him, especially for manifestations and any time they are appropriately asked, convinced that the superiors desire only to help them love God and become saints.

20. Therefore once a month and even more often, if needed, the Sisters of each house will manifest their external activity to their superior with all simplicity and sincerity, and receive advice and counsel from her in order to succeed well in the practice of mortification and the observance of the holy rules of the Institute. Internal matters are excluded from these manifestations as well as external matters when these are matter for confession.

21. All the Sisters will be present at the conference that the superior will give each Sunday to instruct them in their duties, as also to correct defects that could diminish fervour and observance in the community.

22. Each will take the greatest care with the practices of piety, from the observance of which comes that inner fervour which moves us to unite

ourselves in everything with Jesus Christ our divine exemplar and spouse of faithful souls.

23. The charity then which keeps the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians united during life, should not cease after their death. So when a Sister is called to eternal life, the holy Mass *de requie* will be celebrated and the Sisters of the House where the deceased came from will go to Communion and say the complete rosary. The body will be dressed in her religious habit and accompanied with decorum to burial, following local custom for each town.

24. If the deceased Sister was professed, or was the superior, besides the *de requie* Mass, 5 others will be applied in suffrage for her soul. Every year on the day after the feast of Mary Help of Christians Mass will be said or sung in the Mother House and all the Sisters will offer their Communion in memory of the deceased Sisters. This will also be done at the end of each Retreat.

25. On the occasion of the death of the Major Superior, Director General and the Superior General, besides the above suffrages a Requiem Mass will be celebrated in all churches belonging to the Institute.

26. May the abundant peace and mercy of God come down upon all who follow these rules.

### III. CIRCULAR LETTERS TO SALESIANS AND THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

*Don Bosco's Circular letters to the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are small masterpieces of spirituality. The Saint expresses in them a vigorous view of consecrated life: by the vows we give ourselves completely to the Lord, ready to follow him through tribulations until death, courageously facing up to fatigue and difficulty in order to win souls for God. Seen this way the Salesian and the Salesian Sister are encouraged to remain firm in their vocation; to flee worldly spirit; to practise obedience and poverty magnanimously; to cultivate union with God and confidence in their Superiors; to know how to put up with all kinds of inconvenience serenely to "save souls"; to faithfully observe the rules.*

*Here we include just a selection of circulars which more explicitly show evidence of themes on spiritual life.*

*Particularly expressive is the letter to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians of 24 May 1886 (no. 237), in which Don Bosco writes: "I have asked for the grace that you always be kept faithful to your holy vocation, that you be religious who love perfection and holiness; that by practising Christian and religious virtues, and edifying and exemplary life you may honour Jesus Christ your heavenly Spouse, and honour Mary your most loving Mother". Then he lists the qualities of the Salesian Sister: exact obedience, mastery of her own shortcomings, heart turned to God alone; no regrets about the world's goods, joy in practising poverty and enduring hardships, to "follow Jesus Christ who humbled himself on earth, was crowned with thorns and nailed to a cross, so you can then be with him, exalted in heaven, clothed in glory amidst the splendour of the angels and saints"; of good physique, good-natured, a "truly cheerful spirit"; desiring to become holy through ordinary works of good example and encouragement to the young; desiring to "become adept instruments of God's glory by carrying out the tasks and fulfilling the occupations that are proper to the institute." <sup>50</sup>*

<sup>50</sup> *Cronistoria*. by Giselda Capetti, Vol. V. *Ultimi anni sotto lo sguardo del Fondatore (1885-1888)*. Roma, Istituto FMA 1978, pp. 93-94.

## 228. The first purpose of our Society is the sanctification of its members

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 385-387<sup>51</sup>.

Turin, 9 June 1867, Pentecost Sunday

Perhaps our Society will be definitively approved very soon and therefore I need to speak with my beloved sons more frequently. Since I cannot always do this in person I will try to do it at least through a letter. I will begin then by saying something about the general purpose of the Society and then we will move on to speaking once again of the particular observances of this same Society.

The first purpose of our Society is the sanctification of its members. Therefore each one on entering will strip himself of every other thought, every other concern. Whoever enters to enjoy a calm untroubled life, have comfort and pursue studies, be freed from his parents' commands or be exempt from obedience to some superior, would have a twisted purpose and his would no longer be that *Sequere me* of the Saviour's, since he would be following his own temporal interests and not the good of souls.

The apostles were praised by the Saviour and were promised an eternal kingdom not because they abandoned the world, but because by abandoning it they showed themselves ready to follow him along the way of tribulation, as in fact happened, consuming their life with fatigue, penance and suffering, and eventually suffering martyrdom for the faith.

Nor is it a good reason for one to enter or remain in the Society believing he is essential to it. Let each one have this firmly etched on his mind and in his heart, beginning from the General Superior down to the least of the members. No one is essential to the Society. God alone is its head, its absolutely essential master. Therefore its members must turn to their head, their true master, the one who will reward them, to God, and let each one join the Society out of love for him. Out of love for him let him work, obey, abandon whatever he possesses in the world in order to be able to say at the end of our life to the

<sup>51</sup> This is Don Bosco's first letter to the Salesians.



Saviour whom we have chosen as our model: *“ecce nos reliquimus [omnia] et secuti sumus te, quid ergo dabis nobis?”*

So while we say that everyone ought to enter the Society led only by his desire to serve God with greater perfection and to do good for himself, that means doing what is truly good for himself, for his spiritual and eternal good. Whoever seeks an easy and comfortable life does not enter our Society for a good purpose. Our basis for this are the words of the Saviour who says: “Whoever wants to be my disciple, let him sell what he owns in the world, give it to the poor and follow me.” But where do we go, where do we follow him if he did not even have a place to lay his head? Whoever wishes to be my disciple, says the Lord, follows me in prayer, penance, and especially by denying himself, accepting the cross of daily tribulations and following me: *“abneget semetipsum, tollat crucem suam quotidie, et sequatur me”* [Lk 9:23]. But how far does he follow him? Until death, and if necessary, even death on a cross.

That is what someone does in our Society who wears himself out in sacred ministry, teaching or other priestly activity, until death, even a violent one in prison, in exile, by the sword, water, fire; until the point where having suffered or died with Jesus Christ on earth he can rejoice with him in Heaven.

This seems to me to be the meaning of those words of St Paul who tells all Christians: *“Qui vult gaudere cum Christo oportet pati cum Christo.”*

Once a member has entered with these good dispositions he must show that he is without pretence and accept with pleasure any task that might be entrusted to him. Teaching, study, work, preaching, confession, in church, outside church, the humblest tasks have to be taken up happily and willingly because God does not look at the task but at the intention of the one doing it. So all duties are equally noble because equally worthy of merit in God’s eyes.

My dear sons, put trust in your Superiors; they have to render a strict account to God for their works, therefore they study your abilities, your tendencies and they make arrangements that are compatible with your strength, but always in a way that can redound to the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls.

If only our confreres were to enter the Society with these dispositions our houses would certainly become a true earthly paradise! Peace and harmony would reign amongst individuals in every family and charity would be the everyday clothing of the one who commands; obedience and respect would precede the steps, works and even the thoughts of the Superiors. Yes, we would have a family of brothers gathered around their father to promote the glory of God on earth, to then go one day to love him and praise him in the immense glory of the blessed in Heaven.

May God reward all your efforts with blessings, and may the grace of the Lord sanctify your actions and help you to persevere in doing good. Amen.

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

## **229. Unity of spirit and unity of administration**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 529-531.

[Turin, end of April 1868]

To my beloved sons and confreres of the Society of St Francis de Sales.

The month of May that we usually dedicate to Mary is about to begin and I wish to profit from this occasion to speak to my dear sons and confreres and put some things before them that I could not do in the Conference of St Francis de Sales.

I am convinced that you all have the firm desire of persevering in the Society and so acting with all your strength to win souls for God and firstly saving your own. To succeed in this great endeavour as a general basis we must have the general concern of putting the rules of the Society into practice, because our Constitutions would be of no help to anyone if they were like a dead letter just to be left lying on the desk. If we want our Society to go ahead with the Lord's blessing it is essential that every article of the Constitutions is a norm for our activity. Nevertheless there are some practical and very effective matters for achieving the purpose proposed and amongst them I note unity of spirit and unity of administration.

By unity of spirit I mean the firm, constant decision to want or not want those things that the Superior considers to redound to the greater glory of God. This decision should never waver however serious the obstacles that oppose spiritual and eternal good, according to the teaching of St Paul: "*Caritas omnia suffert, omnia sustinet*" [1 Cor 13:7]. This decision leads the confrere to being punctual in his duties not just because of the command given him, but for the glory of God it is his intention to promote. This is where his readiness comes from to put the established time in for meditation, prayer, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, examination of conscience, spiritual reading. It is true that the Rule prescribes these things, but unless there is a supernatural motive for observing them, our rules are forgotten.

What contributes powerfully to preserving this unity of spirit is making frequent use of the holy Sacraments. Let priests do whatever they can to celebrate holy Mass regularly and devoutly; those who are not priests should try to go to Communion as often as possible. But the fundamental issue lies in frequent Confession. Let everyone try to observe what the Rule prescribes in this regard. Then, special confidence is necessary with the Superior of the House in which each one lives. The great defect is this: many people seek to misrepresent the dispositions of the Superior, or judge them to be of little importance, and meanwhile they waver in their observance of the Rule, damaging themselves, causing annoyance to the Superiors, and omitting or at least neglecting things that would have powerfully contributed to the good of souls. So let each one strip himself of his own will and renounce thinking of his own good; seek only what redounds to the greater glory of God and then go ahead.

The following difficulty then arises: in practice we encounter cases where it seems better to do differently from what was commanded. That is not true. The best thing is always to be obedient, never changing the spirit of the Rule as interpreted by the respective Superior. Henceforth, let each one try his best to interpret, practise, recommend the observance of the Rule amongst his confreres; and do for his neighbour everything the superior judges to be for the greater glory of God and the good of souls. I regard this conclusion to be the fundamental basis of a Religious Society.

Unity of administration must go with unity of spirit. A religious proposes to put into practice the Saviour's saying: it means renouncing what he has or could have in the world in the hope of a better recompense in Heaven. Father, mother, brothers, sisters, house, all kinds of things, all offered for the love of God. Except that even if the soul is united with the body it still needs the material means for being nurtured, covered and to act. Therefore while he renounces all he had, he tries to join a Society in which he can provide for the necessities of life without having to worry about temporal administration. So how should a Society arrange matters to deal with temporal things? The rules of the Society provide for all; so by practising the Rule every need is satisfied. One garment, a slice of bread are enough for a religious. When there is need for more, he indicates this to the superior and it will be provided. But this is where everyone's efforts have to focus. Whoever can procure some advantage for the Society should do so, but never make himself the focus. Efforts should be made to see that there is a single purse, just as there should be a single will. Whoever seeks to sell, buy, change or keep money for his own use ... whoever does that is like a farmer who is throwing wheat away and tossing it amongst the husks while the threshers are threshing it<sup>52</sup>. In regard to this I must urge you never to keep money under the false pretext of it being useful for the Society. What is most useful for the Society is observance of the Rule.

Clothes, your room, its furniture should be far from being amongst the finest. The religious must be ready at any moment to leave his cell and appear before his Creator without anything that might accuse him once he has left it and without giving the Judge any reason to reproach him.

Let everything proceed then, guided by obedience, but humbly and confidently. Nothing should be hidden from the Superior, nothing. Let each one be as open as a child is to his father, with complete sincerity. This way the Superior himself will be able to know the state of his confreres, provide for their needs and take the decisions which will make it easier to observe the Rule and that will be of advantage to the whole Society.

<sup>52</sup> *Volva*, the word Don Bosco uses here means chaff, husks, the outside covering of wheat in old Piedmontese, cf. V. DI SANT'ALBINO, *Gran dizionario piemontese-italiano*, Torino, Unione Tipografica Editrice 1859, p. 146.

One could say many things about this. That can be done in another letter, through appropriate conferences and especially in the next retreat at Trofarello, if God in his great mercy preserves us, as I hope he will. This will help us next September to bring all this together.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always and grant us the spirit of fervour and the precious gift of perseverance in the Society. Amen.

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

### **230. Confidence between superiors and confreres**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 125-126.

Solemnity of Our Lady's Assumption 1869

My beloved sons,

Divine Providence has seen that our Pious Society has been definitively approved by the Holy See and while in humility of heart we thank the Lord for his goodness, we must act with all solicitude to correspond to the purpose that we had when entering the Congregation and see that all who professed the Rule keep exact observance of it.

Amongst the articles [in the Rule] is one regarding the confidence that should exist between superiors and inferiors. Each one, it says in Chap. 5 art. 6, must place the fullest confidence in his superior and not keep any secret of his heart from him.

This article is of the greatest importance and it is observed that the dealings of the superior with his subject are of great advantage so that this way people can explain their needs in all freedom and ask for appropriate advice, while the superior himself will be able to understand the state of his confreres, provide for their needs and make the decisions that will help the observance of the rules and benefit the entire Society.

It seems that this is precisely what the Holy Spirit meant when he says: "*Vae soli, quia cum ceciderit non habet sublevantem se*" (Qo 4:10). "Woe to

the one who is alone since he has no one to raise him up when he falls.” And then he adds: “whereas in religion, if anyone has the misfortune to fall or is in danger of falling he is sustained by another and in a certain way his fall is arrested. *Si unus ceciderit, ab altero fulcietur.*” (*ibid.*). This way, says St Thomas, the religious achieves his purpose and is advised in the risks he faces; in case he falls, he is helped to rise up again. *“Iuvatur a sociis ad resurgendum.”*

So that we can bring this advantage to our Society we have thought it well to establish certain things that we could call the practical consequences of the above-mentioned article:

1. Every month there will be two conferences given one of which will be reading and giving a simple explanation of the rules of the Congregation. The other conference will be on some moral subject, but in a practical way and adapted to the people who are being spoken to.

2. Once a month each member should present himself to the Director of the House he belongs to and speak to him about what he judges to be of advantage to the good of his soul, and if he has any doubt concerning the observance of the rules let him talk about that, asking for the most appropriate advice for his spiritual and temporal benefit.

For his part the Director, with due charity, will give some time to listening to everything; indeed he will endeavour to question each member separately with regard to his bodily health, the duties he has, his religious observance, the studies or work he has to attend to.

Finally he will endeavour to encourage him, help him with his work and advise him so that he is able to have the peace of heart and tranquil conscience which ought be the principal purpose of everyone who is part of this Pious Society.

3. Ordinarily the Director of each individual House will give an exact account to the Rector Major each month on the moral state and the health of the confreres as well as some indication of the material progress of the house entrusted to him. There is a small exception here in the case of the Mother House.

Those who make up the Chapter and any priests who ask for it can present themselves to the Rector Major to talk about issues.

This giving an account of oneself to one's superior is a general practice in all religious houses and is of great benefit, and I hope it will be likewise amongst us especially for achieving the peace of heart and tranquillity of conscience that is so essential.

Many things need to be said in this regard. This will be done through letters, appropriate conferences and especially in the upcoming Retreat at Trofarello, if God in his great mercy preserves us, as I hope he will, and help all of us to be gathered there next September.

So courage my dear sons! We have a great enterprise in hand. Many souls await us for their salvation; amongst these souls, our own has to be first; then those of the other members and the souls of any of the Christian faithful to whom we can be of some benefit. With God with us, let us try to correspond with the heavenly favours granted us and that we hope will be abundantly granted in the future.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always and grant us the spirit of fervour and the precious gift of perseverance in the Society. *Amen.*

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

P.S. This letter will be read to members who have come together, with any observations the Director should judge to be appropriate.

### **231. Austerity of life**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 113-115.

[Turin], 4 June 1873

To the beloved sons of St Francis de Sales living in ...

Experience, my beloved sons, is a great teacher. But if we learn from it what can be of common or private advantage to families, it will certainly be

of much greater use in religious families where there should not be any other aim than to know what is right in order to practise it, and know what is wrong in order to flee from it.

This is why I judge that it would be good to point out certain things observed in the recently conducted visits to our houses and this for the advantage of the members in particular and in general for the Congregation. Some of these concern material matters, others morality and discipline. They will offer content for three different letters.

The material running of our houses must for the moment be the objective of our concerns, because the acquisition, construction, reconstruction and setting up of new houses have been the reason for very heavy expenditure: increase then in any kind of foodstuffs results in the monthly expenditure being much higher than income. We must therefore think seriously about economy and study what practical things we can gain any savings from.

I note briefly for you:

1. This year no building should be undertaken unless it is strictly necessary. Only reconstruction that you regard as essential should be completed. In these cases see what is necessary and how much it would cost approximately and then send this on beforehand to the Superior Chapter.

2. Do not undertake journeys unless for our needs and as much as possible avoid commitments, undertakings or chores that would mean expenditure or wasting time. Where there are things that can pay for themselves or where others can pay for them, you should prudently take advantage of these.

3. A reminder that observance of articles 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, of Chapter 4 of our rules should be given practical explanation by the Rectors; if needs be they can take them up in detail or defer to the Superior to do this. These articles are the basis of religious life and lead by their very nature to detachment from earthly things, from people and from oneself, and they see that our common efforts are directed to fulfilment of our duties, and to the greater benefit of the Congregation.



4. Limit the purchase of books, clothes, hosiery, linen, furnishings and other objects for use; for decorum's sake, repair things that you already have.

5. Also some economy can be introduced where foodstuffs are concerned; look after things that can be kept: buy things wholesale, be parsimonious where costly things are concerned, like meat and wine; regularity and quality of condiments; see that bread, meals, wine, lamps, wood are not wasted; invite people to the house only out of strict need and with these invitations never forget that we live from Providence, that we have no income and that the spirit of poverty must inform whatever is ours. These are also points to be kept in mind.

6. Work in with other Houses to help with purchasing and in managing those kinds of things that can be found at lower prices in their respective towns.

Recommend savings where possible to do so, but it is my intention that nothing is omitted which could contribute to preserving bodily health or to maintaining morality both amongst the beloved sons of the Congregation and the pupils whom Divine Providence entrusts to our care.

I hope shortly to be able to write to you about other no less important matters.

Meanwhile let every Rector read and explain what I have explained here; let him speak with the Prefect of the house about it, and after some weeks see what has been done and what you judge can still be done to achieve the purpose.

In general then I am very happy with the morality, health and knowledge being spread in our Houses. Let us give thanks to God, the Creator and giver of everything that is good, for this. To him be glory and honour forever and ever. *Amen.*

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ always be with us and may Heaven bless and sustain all our works.

Pray for me. With fatherly affection and in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary I remain,

Your most affectionate brother and friend,

Fr John Bosco

### **232. Giving good example and promoting moral behaviour**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 177-180.

Rome, 4 February 1874

To my Salesian sons at the House in Turin,

While I am dealing with matters to do with the Congregation in the Eternal City, a city consecrated by the blood of the two princes of the apostles, Peter and Paul, and after having prayed at Mass, invoked the light of the Holy Spirit, and asked a special blessing from the supreme leader of the Church, I am writing a letter concerning one of the most important topics: the way to promote and preserve morality amongst the boys who Divine Providence has been pleased to entrust to us.

In order not to deal with this issue too summarily I believe it would be good to divide it into two parts:

1. The need for morality amongst the Salesians.
2. Ways of spreading it and preserving it amongst our pupils.

We could therefore establish as an unvarying principle that morality among boys depends on who trains them, assists them, directs them. Whoever has nothing can give nothing, the proverb tells us. An empty sack can give no grain, nor can you put good wine in a flask full of dregs.

Hence before setting ourselves up as the teachers for others it is essential for us to be in possession of what we wish to teach others. The divine master's words are clear: He says, "You are the light of the world", and this light, or good example, must shine from you over all people, so that seeing all of your good works they may also in a certain way be drawn to you to follow you and thus glorify our common Father in Heaven.

St Jerome says it would be a poor doctor who wanted to cure others if he could not cure himself. He would certainly receive the response of the Gospel: "*Medice, cura te ipsum*" [Lk 4:23].

Therefore if we want to promote morality and virtue in our pupils, we ourselves must possess it, practise it and see that it is resplendent in our works, our language, and never expect that our dependants should exercise an act of virtue that we ourselves have neglected.

In fact how can we expect our pupils to be exemplary and religious if they see us negligent in matters of the church, in getting up in the morning, in meditation, going to confession, communion or celebrating holy Mass? How could a director, or teacher or assistant expect obedience if they exempt themselves for frivolous reasons from their obligations or even more so, leave the house without permission and get involved in things that have nothing to do with their duties?

How can we get others to be charitable, patient, respectful, if the one in charge is angry with them, strikes them, complains about the superiors, criticises the timetable and arrangements at table and whoever looks after them? We are certainly all in agreement that we should say to him: "*Medice, cura te ipsum.*"

Not long ago a young lad who was reprimanded for reading a bad book replied in all simplicity: I did not believe I was doing anything wrong reading a book that I have often seen my teacher reading. Another time someone was asked why he had written a letter complaining about how the house was run. He replied that he had only written words he had heard on many occasions from the assistant.

So then, my dear sons, if we want to foster good behaviour in our Houses, we have to teach through good example. Suggesting something good to others while we are doing the contrary is like someone in the dark of night wanting to shine a light with a spent lamp; or wanting to draw wine from an empty cask.

Indeed it seems to me we can compare this with someone who wants to flavour food with poisonous substances; so in similar guise not only would he not be promoting good behaviour, but giving occasion of doing evil, giving scandal. So we become miserable, besotted salt, ruined salt that serves no other purpose than to be thrown out as rubbish; “*Vos estis sal terrae,*” Christ says “*quod si sal evanuerit in quo salietur? Ad nihilum valet ultra nisi ut mittatur foras et conculcetur ab hominibus*” [Mt 5:13].

The public often laments immoral deeds that result from the ruining of good behaviour and horrible scandals. It is a great evil, a disaster; and I beg the Lord to act in such a way all our houses be closed before similar disgrace happens to us.

I certainly do not wish to hide from you that we live in calamitous times. The world today is like the Saviour described it: “*mundus in maligno positus est totus*” [1 Jn 5:19]. It wants to see everything, judge everything. Other than perverse judges who take on God’s role, it often exaggerates things, very often invents them to others’ loss. But if perchance it succeeds in basing its judgement on fact, imagine the racket, what a trumpeting of things!

Nevertheless if we impartially see the reason for these evils, we mostly discover that the salt was infatuated, the lamp was spent; meaning that the cessation of holiness in the one who was in charge gave cause for the disasters that took place amongst their dependants.

Oh chastity, chastity, you are a great virtue! Until you are resplendent amongst us, meaning so long as the sons of St Francis de Sales are marked by their aloofness from the world, modesty, temperance and everything we have promised God by vow, morality and holiness of behaviour will always have a glorious place amongst us, like a burning torch shining out in all the houses dependent on us.

If God gives me life I hope to be able to write to you again about certain strategies that it seems to me could help effectively in promoting and preserving good behaviour amongst our pupils.

Meanwhile, so what this friend of your soul is writing can bear some fruit, I beg you to see to what follows:

1. That there be three different conferences or better, three practical examinations in which things to be done and things to be avoided concerning the vow of poverty, chastity and obedience are read and explained. Then let everyone apply to himself the tenor of life described in these three chapters and see that he firmly corrects whatever is at fault in his words, deeds, in poverty, chastity and obedience.

2. The chapter dealing with practices of piety should also be read and then kneeling at the feet of the crucified Jesus, let us resolve, and I will do the same here while thinking of you, to do them all in an exemplary way at the cost of whatever sacrifice.

My dear sons, we find ourselves at a most important moment in our Congregation. Help me with your prayer, help me with your exact observance of the rules and God will see that our efforts are crowned with good success to the greater glory of God, the advantage of our souls and those of our pupils, who will ever be the glory of our Society.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us and preserve us all constantly on our way to Heaven. Amen.

Most affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

### **233. Keeping the memory of deceased confreres**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 381-382.

[Turin, January 1875]

To Salesian confreres,

1874, my beloved sons, was a very memorable one for us. His Holiness Pius IX currently reigning, after having granted us great favours on April 3, deigned then to definitively approve our humble Congregation. While of course this glorious event filled us all with true joy it was soon gravely

saddened by another series of events. In fact on the 13th of the same month God called Fr Provera to himself, then Fr Pestarino, and then cleric Ghione and Fr Giuseppe Cagliari and all this in the space of just four months.

We have lost four workers for the Gospel in these dear confreres, all perpetually professed, all who very much loved the Salesian Congregation, faithfully observed our Constitutions, and were truly zealous in working for the greater glory of God.

So it should not surprise us that these losses were felt so hard in our Society. But God who is so infinitely good and who knows what can be to our greatest benefit judged that they were already worthy of himself. One can say of them that they lived only a short time but worked as much as if they had lived a very long time: *Brevi vivens tempore, explevit tempora multa* [Ws 4:13]. And we have well-founded reason to believe that these confreres, ceasing to work amongst us here on earth, have become our protectors with God in Heaven.

We therefore believe it is appropriate to offer some indications on the life of each of them so their memory may be preserved amongst us.

What we do for them, with the Lord's help, we hope will be done for confreres already called to eternal life in times past and for those whom God will be pleased to call in the future. We do this for three reasons in particular:

1. Because other religious orders and ecclesiastical congregations usually do this.
2. So that those who lived amongst us and practised the same rules in exemplary fashion may be an encouragement to us to follow them in promoting what is good and fleeing from what is evil.
3. So that by preserving their names and their main actions we may more easily be reminded to lift up our prayers to God for the eternal repose of their souls, should they still not yet have been welcomed into the bosom of divine mercy.

We certainly must not serve the Lord so that the memory of our actions will be preserved amongst men, but so that our names, as the Saviour says,

may be written in the book of life. This notwithstanding, we must recognise that just as our bad works can cause scandal to others after our death, so can our good deeds be a source of edification.

Therefore while we are reading this brief collection of information concerning our confreres let us not cease to lift up our prayers to God for them and for all the confreres who have been called to the other life since the beginning of the Congregation.

Over this current year (1875) we should demonstrate our indelible gratitude by raising up constant supplication to the Divine Majesty for the holy Church and especially for the preservation of the precious days of our Supreme Pontiff, our outstanding benefactor, from whom we have so often been filled with spiritual and temporal benefits. He deigned to give definitive approval to our Constitutions, so we may be faithful in observing them; he has granted us many favours. Let us try to show ourselves worthy by using them for the greater glory of God and the good of souls.

May God bless you all my dear sons, and pray for me too. I am most affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

### **234. Ways of cultivating vocations and preserving the spirit of piety**

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 41-44.

Turin, 12 January 1876

My dear sons in Jesus Christ,

Having completed my visit to our Houses, I feel the need to spend some time with you, my dear sons, on matters that could be for the greater glory of God and to the advantage of our Congregation.

Before anything else I am happy to be able to reassure you that I have been very happy with the material and moral progress, both in what refers to internal administration and in our external social relationships. There is work being done, the Constitutions of the Society are observed, discipline is being

maintained, people are frequenting the holy Sacraments, the spirit of piety is being fostered and vocations cultivated amongst those with the good fortune to show signs of being called to the ecclesiastical state. Thanks be to God for all this. It is to his goodness and mercy that we owe the little good we are achieving amongst us.

I also have the consolation of sharing with you how our Society is growing day by day. The year just finished a number of new houses were opened; others will be opened this year, 1876. Personnel is growing in number and in approach, but as soon as someone becomes suitable to take up a responsibility, Divine Providence immediately presents an opportunity to put him to work.

What can we say of the requests to open houses in so many places? In many cities in Italy, France, England; in North, Central and South America and especially in the Empire of Brazil and in the Argentine Republic; in Algeria, Africa, Egypt, in Palestine, India, Japan, China, Australia there are millions and millions of reasonable beings still buried in the darkness of error, but from the brink of perdition they raise their voices and cry: "Lord, send us workers of the Gospel who can come and bring us the light of truth and point out the only way that can lead to salvation." A few of our confreres, as you well know, have already given ear to these moving voices and have left for the Argentine Republic, where they have gone amongst the savage tribes of Patagonia; but in all the letters written on their journey and from their places of mission the same voice resounds: "Send us workers." Amongst other things they note how the Archdiocese of Rio Janeiro, Brazil, has two million inhabitants with very few priests and just five seminarians in the seminary.

My dear sons, I am distressed when I reflect on the abundant harvest that presents itself at any time and anywhere, and that we have to leave unharvested because of lack of workers. However let us not lose courage, and for now apply ourselves seriously to work and with prayer and virtue prepare a new army for Jesus Christ. We will achieve this especially by cultivating religious vocations; and if needs be in time we will even offer ourselves for those sacrifices that God deigns to ask of us for our salvation and that of others. Meanwhile, in the desire to come to matters which will be helpful in cultivating religious



vocations and be effective for preserving the spirit of piety amongst Salesians and the boys entrusted to us, I am recommending some things that experience has taught me as being very necessary.

1. In every House, and especially in the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, let each one take great care to foster small groups such as the Altar Servers, Sodalities of the Blessed Sacrament, St Aloysius, Mary Help of Christians and the Immaculate Conception. Let no one be afraid of speaking about them, recommending them, encouraging them and pointing out their purpose, origin, and the indulgences and the other advantages that can be gained. I believe that these groups can be called the key to piety, preserver of morals, support of ecclesiastical and religious vocations.

2. Be careful of relationships, friendships or ordinary or particular conversations whether in writing, talking, through books or gifts of any kind. Taking someone's hand, caresses on the face, kisses, walking arm in arm or with your arms around someone else's neck are all strictly prohibited, not only amongst yourselves and yourselves and your pupils, I say, but including amongst the pupils themselves. Let's keep our thoughts firmly fixed on what St Jerome says: "affection for no one or equal affection for everyone."

3. Keep away from the world and its maxims. The root of sorrows and disorder are our relationships with the world we have abandoned and which wants to attract us back to it again. Many who seemed to be models of virtue while living in the religious house, once they went elsewhere, with family or friends, soon lost their good will and after returning to the Order could no longer recover [their former stance], and some have even gone as far as losing their vocation. Therefore never go back to the family except for serious reasons and when there are serious reasons never go without due permission and, as far as is possible, accompanied by a confrere chosen by the superior. Taking on commissions, recommendations, business affairs, buying or selling for others are things to be constantly avoided because they can be ruinous for vocations and morality.

4. In the evening after prayers, let each one retire immediately for rest. Stopping to take a walk, chat or finish work, is dangerous for spiritual and

also bodily health. I know that in some places, thanks be to God not in our houses, they were forced to lament painful abuses and when they sought the reason for them, they were found to be conversations begun or continued at the time we are talking about.

Punctuality in taking rest is tied in with getting up promptly in the mornings, something I equally insist on. Believe it, my dear sons, fatal experience tells us that spending longer in bed in the mornings without need for it was always found to be a very dangerous thing. On the other hand getting up promptly, as well as being the principle for having a good day, could also be called an ongoing good example for everyone. In this regard I could not fail to warmly recommend that Superiors act in such a way that everyone, especially Coadjutors and service personnel, are given time to be at holy Mass every morning, the opportunity to receive holy Communion frequently and go to the Sacrament of Penance regularly, according to our Constitutions.

This letter that I am addressing to everyone in general I would like you to consider also as written for each of you in particular, and that its every word be spoken, repeated a thousand times in everyone's hearing, so it will never be forgotten.

But I hope, out of the affection you have for me, and for the commitment you show to your duties, especially by putting into practice the advice of your father and spiritual friend, you will give me the great consolation of not only being faithful to these recommendations, but even more will interpret them in ways that can best contribute to the greater glory of God and of our Congregation.

And with such persuasion I ask God to bless you all and grant you good health and the precious gift of perseverance in doing good. And finally, pray for me. I remain yours always, in Jesus Christ our Lord,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

### 235. Strenna to confreres and boys

Critical ed. in E IV, p. 195.

Turin, 28 December 1882

Dear Director at the House in ...

We are at the end of the year and the beginning of a new one.

I encourage you to warmly thank everyone who has written to me and prayed for me over these days.

I am asking God to give everyone health and the grace of a happy life.

My strenna, then, is:

1. For the director. Charity and kindness with everyone.
2. For confreres of the Congregation. Exact observance of the vows by which we have consecrated ourselves to the Lord.
3. For all the youngsters. Frequent confession and devout communion.
4. Tell everyone from me that I recommend they tell me completely and separately what they want me to do to help them save their souls, which was and will be the object of all my concerns to the end of my life.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always remain with us.

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

### 236. We have put our hand to the plough: Be firm

Critical ed. in *Lettere circolari di DB*, pp. 20-22<sup>53</sup>.

Turin, 6 January 1884

My dear and beloved sons,

I experience great consolation every time I hear words of homage and affection from you, my dear sons and my good daughters. But the affectionate

<sup>53</sup> The same letter, with appropriate adjustments as needed, was sent to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, cf. *Cronistoria*. By Giselda Capetti. Vol. IV. *L'eredità di madre Mazzarello passa nelle mani di madre Daghero (1881-1884)*. Roma, Istituto FMA 1978, pp. 281-284.

expressions of Season's Greetings and Happy New Year which you have given me personally or by letter, reasonably demands a special thanks from me in answer to the filial affection you have shown me.

First of all let me tell you that I am very pleased with you, with your solicitude in every kind of work, even taking on heavy work in order to promote the greater glory of God in our houses and amongst the boys and girls Divine providence entrusts to us every day, so that we may lead them along the path of virtue and honour on the way to Heaven. You have thanked me in many ways and with different expressions for what I have done for you. You have offered yourselves to work courageously with me and to share the labours, the glory and honour on earth, in order to obtain the great reward that God has prepared for us all in Heaven. You also told me that you desire nothing except to know that which I think best for you and which you would carefully listen to and practise. I am also pleased with these precious words. As a father I simply reply that I thank you from the bottom of my heart, and that *the best thing you can do for me is to help me save your souls*<sup>54</sup>.

You know well, my beloved sons, that I have accepted you in the Congregation and that I have always taken great care of your spiritual well-being in order to assure your eternal salvation. Therefore if you help me in this great undertaking you do what my paternal heart expects from you. You can easily guess, then, the things you must practise in order to succeed in this great project. Observe the Rule, the Rule that holy Mother Church destined to be your guide, for the good of your soul and for the spiritual and temporal advantage of your pupils. We have read and studied this Rule, and now it forms the object of our promises and the vows with which we have consecrated ourselves to the Lord.

Therefore I recommend with all my heart that not one of you let words of regret escape you, or worse still, of sorrow for being consecrated to the Lord. This would be an act of deepest ingratitude. All that we have either in the spiritual or temporal order belongs to God. Therefore when we consecrate ourselves to him by our religious profession, we do nothing more than offer to God what he himself has so to say lent us, but which is his absolute property.

<sup>54</sup> The underlining is by Don Bosco.

Moreover by withdrawing from the observance of our vows, we commit theft against God, and before his eyes we take back, we despise, we profane that which we have offered him and which we have placed in his holy hands. Some of you may say: "But the observance of our Rule is burdensome. The observance of the Rule is burdensome to those who observe it unwillingly, to those who transgress it. But to the diligent, who love the good of their soul, this observance becomes, as the Divine Saviour says: "*Jugum meum suave est, et onus meum leve*" [Mt 11:30].

And then, my dear sons, do we wish to go to Heaven in a carriage? We became religious not to enjoy ourselves but to suffer and to earn merit for the next life. We consecrated ourselves to God not to command but to obey; not to attach ourselves to creatures but to practise charity towards our neighbour, moved solely by the love of God; not to live a comfortable life but to be poor with Jesus Christ, to suffer with Jesus Christ on earth, to be made worthy of his glory in Heaven.

Courage then, dear and beloved sons and daughters; we have put our hand to the plough - be firm; let no one of you turn back to admire the false and treacherous world. Let us go on. It will cost us fatigue, hunger, suffering, thirst and perhaps even death. We shall always answer: "If the greatness of the reward delights us, the fatigue we must bear to merit it should not dishearten us: *Si delectat magnitudo praemiorum, non deterreat certamen laborum.*"

There is one other thing I believe I should mention. Our confreres are writing to me from everywhere. I would be very happy to give everyone due answer. But that not being possible, I will try to send out letters more often; letters that, while they make it easier for me to open my heart, could also serve as an answer, even a guide for those who for holy reasons are living in distant lands and therefore cannot be around to hear the voice of the father who loves them so much in Jesus Christ.

The grace of Our Lord and the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary be always with you, and help you to persevere in the Divine service until the last moment of your life. Amen.

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

### **237. Attitudes and virtues of a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians**

Critical ed. in *Cronistoria*. By Giselda Capetti. Vol. 5. *Ultimi anni sotto lo sguardo del Fondatore (1885-1888)*. Roma, Istituto FMA 1978, pp. 91-94.

Turin, 24 May 1886

Most beloved Daughters in Jesus Christ,

While we are celebrating the most solemn Feast of Mary Help of Christians in Turin today, with an extraordinary gathering of people who have come from all parts as children to the feet of their most tender Mother, it is very consoling for me to turn my thoughts also to you and to the Institute that bears her name. Yes, I have also remembered the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians this morning at holy Mass, and I have prayed for them.

Among others I have asked the grace that you remain faithful to your holy vocation, that you should be religious with a love of perfection and holiness; that by the practice of the Christian and religious virtues, by an edifying and exemplary life, you should give honour to Jesus Christ your Heavenly Spouse and honour to Mary, most loving Mother. I hope that you have also prayed for me and that Mary Help of Christians will hear our prayers and obtain for us from God the grace of living in the holy fear of God, of saving our own soul and that of many others.

Meanwhile I announce to you that this year finishes the six year term since the election of the members of the Superior Chapter of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Therefore according to Chapter VII of the Constitutions, new elections will be held.

If it pleases God this will take place toward the middle of August on a day within the Octave of the Assumption of Our Blessed Lady into Heaven. For this reason I invite all the superiors who can, to be at the Mother House of Nizza Monferrato, where the elections will probably take place before the 15th of the appointed month.

Since the good of the whole Institute and the glory of God depends in large measure upon a good Chapter, and above all on a wise Superior General,

the Sisters eligible to vote need particular enlightenment in their choice and in giving their vote to those who are considered most capable for the important office.

Therefore it is necessary that Our Lord enlighten them and guide them to fulfil this duty according to his holy will, so that great advantage might come from it.

For this reason I recommend that from the day on which this letter is received, every Superior shall have recited or sung in common by the Sisters, the *Veni Creator* in the morning and in the evening the *Ave Maris Stella*.

I also exhort every Sister to add special prayers privately, particularly after holy Communion, and to make some acts of virtue or mortification to obtain all the help which is necessary for the superiors.

Besides prayers, the voters should reflect on the present needs of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. It seems to me that the Institute needs Sisters who, formed with the spirit of mortification and sacrifice, greatly desire to work and suffer for Jesus Christ and for the salvation of their neighbour. It needs Sisters who are well persuaded that exact obedience, without comment or complaint, is the way which they must walk with courage in order to reach perfection and holiness quickly. It needs Sisters who know how to master their affections, and how to keep their heart turned to God only, so as to be able to say with St Francis de Sales: "*If I knew that one fibre of my heart were not for God I would tear it out.*" It needs Sisters who regret neither the world nor its goods, nor the comforts which they have renounced; Sisters who regard it as glory to live in poverty and privation like their Divine Spouse, Jesus, who being rich, made himself poor in order to enrich souls by his grace and make them heirs of paradise; Sisters who have no other ambition on earth than to follow Jesus Christ, humiliated, crowned with thorns and nailed to a cross, in order to surround him exalted in glory among the splendours of the Angels and the Saints.

It needs Sisters of good physical constitution, of good disposition, of a cheerful spirit, desirous above all of becoming saints, not by extraordinary

means but by ordinary actions, so that they may be a means of stimulating and encouraging their neighbours and especially youth to the practice of Christian virtues. In short it needs Sisters who are and can make themselves fit instruments for the glory of God, discharging those offices and fulfilling those duties which are proper to the Institute.

Now, to have such Sisters, it is important to have Superiors at the head of the Institute who have sound judgement to test and discern the vocations of young girls before admitting them to Clothing and Profession. It is also important to have superiors who themselves possess and practise those virtues which they have to inculcate in their subjects. It is important that the superiors love all the Sisters impartially like their own sisters, like Daughters of Mary, like spouses of Jesus Christ. To a kind and patient charity, however, they must add that firmness of soul which in due time will prevent abuses and transgressions of the Constitutions without violence and, moreover, without human respect. Superiors should possess a prudent and discrete firmness of soul which, while preserving piety and regular observance, does not endanger the health of the Sisters.

Let each Superior reflect which of her Sisters possess these gifts more or less, and in due time vote for those who, before God and according to her own conscience, seem most suitable for the position they must occupy.

In the hope of being able to be present for the forthcoming General Chapter, I pray God to preserve you all in his holy grace and to grant that all may love him and faithfully serve him—superiors and subjects, the healthy and the sick, in whatever place or occupation obedience assigns you, so that when that day and the hour comes for Our Lord Jesus Christ to call you to eternity, you may be able to reply: “I am ready, O my God; let us go to the enjoyment of that happiness which you have prepared for me in your infinite mercy.”

Pray for me, and believe me in the Lord,

Yours very affectionately,

Fr John Bosco



#### IV. PERSONAL LETTERS TO SALESIANS AND DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

*These brief items of correspondence, written in familiar tone, contain simple advice on spiritual life. Don Bosco knew those he wrote to, their character, defects, the circumstances in which they worked. In a practical way he invited them to focus on concrete attitudes essential for nurturing their attachment to their Salesian vocation, constantly keeping their hearts leaning to God and charity.*

*The holy founder, writing to his Salesians, highlights the primacy of charity. He encourages zeal for souls and the good of their neighbour. He urges them to have confidence in their director and obey generously. In particular he emphasises the importance of temperance and sobriety of life, detachment from self and things. He recommends courage in adversity, mutual support, patience and kindness. He asks them to be exemplary, to observe the rules, have a spirit of piety and union with God. He encourages perseverance at the cost of any sacrifice.*

#### **238. To Cleric Giovanni Bonetti**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 591-592.

Sant' Ignazio, 20 July 1863

Bonetti my dear friend,

Don't be the least concerned about what you have written to me. The devil sees that you want to escape his clutches absolutely, so he is trying to trap you. Follow my advice and go ahead in all peace of mind. Meanwhile you can overcome sadness by singing this hymn from St Paul: "*Si delectat magnitudo praemiorum, non deterreat multitudo laborum. Non coronabitur nisi qui legitime certaverit* [2 Tim 2:5]. *Esto bonus miles Christi et ipse coronabit te*" [cf 2 Tim 2:3]. Or sing with St Francis of Assisi: "*So great the good I have in sight/ That every pain is my delight,/ Sorrow gives me great contentment, / Every trouble true enjoyment, / Every anguish thrills my heart.*"

Furthermore, pray for me and I will never cease praying for you too and will do everything I can to make you happy now and in eternity. Amen.

Yours most affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco.

### 239. To Cleric Costanzo Rinaudo

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 174.

Venezia, 14 October 1865

My dear Rinaudo,

You can and should look carefully at ways to inflame the hearts of all our confreres in the Society with the holy love of God, and do not stop until everyone is one heart and one soul in loving and serving the Lord with all our strength for all of our life. And certainly give them the example *verbo et opere*. God bless you. Pray for me, I am,

Yours affectionately in the Lord,

Fr John Bosco.

### 240. To Cleric Giulio Barberis

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 187-188.

Turin, 6 December 1865

My dear Giulio,

Here is the answer you asked for:

1. Have a '*gavasso*' for breakfast<sup>55</sup>, at lunch, according to your appetite; afternoon tea—nothing; at supper according to appetite but with temperance.

2. No fasts—only those of the Society.

3. Rest according to the house timetable; as soon as you wake up go quickly over some of your school work.

4. The essential study is for seminary classes; the rest is secondary. So give every effort to the first.

5. Do everything, suffer everything to win over souls for the Lord.

May God bless you, and please pray for,

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco.

<sup>55</sup> *Gavasso*: dialect term used to indicate a loaf of bread.

## **241. To Fr Giovanni Bonetti**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 616-617.

Turin, 30 December 1868

Dear Fr Bonetti,

Thanks for the New Year gift. It will help me marvellously to settle the liabilities of the House. Thanks also to Fr Provera.

Now let's move on to the strenna.

You and Fr Provera should talk about your defects without offending one another.

For the Society: save on trips and as much as possible do not go to relatives' homes. Rodriguez has excellent material on this.

For the boys: let them promote frequent communion and devotion to Our Lady in word and deed.

Three topics to preach on:

1. Avoid bad conversations and reading.
2. Avoid dissolute companions or those who give bad advice.
3. Avoid idleness and do everything that can contribute to preserving the holy virtue of modesty.

See everything, speak with everyone, and the Lord in his kindness will do the rest.

May all go well for you, and the whole family at Mirabello: Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr J. Bosco

P.S. The director of classes should promote the associations for the Italian library.

## 242. To Fr Domenico Belmonte

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 137-138.

Trofarello, 22 September 1869

My dear Fr Belmonte,

A man said to the Saviour: *“Domine, sequar te quocumque ieris, sed per mitte me primum ire et sepelire patrem meum. Iesus ait: Sequere me et dimitte mortuos sepelire mortuos.”* (Mt 8, 19). *“Tu vade, annuntia regnum Dei (Lc 9, 60). Alius ait: Domine, sequar te quocumque ieris, sed per mitte mihi renuntiare his, quae domi sunt. Ait ad illum Iesus: Nemo mittens manum etc.”* (*ibid.*)<sup>56</sup> Therefore write the letter, then pray. I will do the same. Now let’s move on to something else.

You added some words that demonstrate, or better, confirm the filial affection you have always felt for me, and that I have always strongly felt for you. I have always sought and endeavoured to offer you things that seemed to me to be in line with your character and would bring greater glory to God. With this in mind I would have been hesitant about entrusting you with the office of prefect at Mirabello. As you can see it is a huge step: today a simple subject, tomorrow superior and arbiter of an institute with almost 200 individuals in it! Nevertheless you will succeed:

1. By seeking God’s glory in whatever you do. Doing good for whoever you can but evil to nobody. Vigilance in everything.

2. Filial dependence on your Director, trying to support his ideas and helping him in his efforts. Many things will be beyond you, so some tasks will be reserved for the Rector.

3. Money will be kept with the Director, payments he will do or you can with his consent.

4. Try to reconcile the economy of the house with the contentment of those under you. Let everyone have what they need: but be fearless in opposing abuses and wastage.

<sup>56</sup> Don Bosco suggests to Fr Belmonte a way of answering relatives who are pressuring him to return to the family.

Something else I would advise you for peace of mind; send your brother to Turin. That will spare you worries and regrets. Let us put ourselves in the Lord's holy hands; he is with us, and let us say with St Paul: *Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat* [Phil 4:13].

May God bless you and your efforts; greet Fr Provera and all our other confreres, and believe that I remain,

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

### 243. To Cleric Pietro Guidazio

Critical ed. in E(m) III, p. 250.

Turin, 13 September 1870

My dear Guidazio,

You will always be restless and I would say unhappy until you put into practice the obedience you have promised and do not entirely abandon the direction given you by your superiors. Up till now the devil has cruelly tormented you and pushed you to do the opposite.

From your letter and discussions we have had there does not seem to be any reason to dispense you from vows. Should there be such I would have to write to the Holy See to whom this is reserved. But *coram Domino* I advise you to consider the *abneget semetipsum* [Mt 16:24] and be sure that *vir oboediens loquetur victorias* [Pr 21:28].

Believe my experience; the devil is trying to fool both of us; he has partly succeeded in your case; but he has completely failed with regard to my attitude to you.

Have full trust in me as I have always had in you; not words but deeds, effective willingness, humble, prompt unlimited obedience.

These are the things that will give you spiritual and temporal happiness and will bring me real consolation.

May God bless you and grant you the precious gift of perseverance in doing good. Pray for me. With fatherly affection I am,

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

#### **244. To Sr Maddalena Martini**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, p. 499.

[Turin, 8 August 1875]

My beloved daughter in Jesus Christ,

Your going to Mornese gave such a blow to the world that it has sent the enemy of our souls to disturb you. But listen to God's voice. He is calling you to save you with an easy and flat road, so put aside every suggestion to the contrary. Indeed, be happy with these disturbances and worries you are experiencing, because the way of the cross is the one that leads to God. If on the other hand you had been immediately happy and content, you would need to fear that the evil one was tricking you.

So consider the following:

1. We do not achieve glory without effort;
2. We are not alone, but Jesus is with us and St Paul says that with the help of Jesus we are all-powerful;
3. Whoever leaves home, family, friends and follows the Divine Master is assured of a treasure in Heaven that nobody can take away;
4. The great reward prepared in Heaven should encourage us to put up with any kind of pain on earth.

So take courage: Jesus is with us. When there are thorns, add them to the thorns in Jesus Christ's crown. I will pray to God for you at holy Mass. Pray for me. I am always, in Jesus Christ,

Your most humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

## 245. To Fr Domenico Tomatis

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 84-85.

Alassio, 7 March 1876

My dear Fr Tomatis,

I received your news and was very pleased you had a good journey and that you are willing to work. Continue.

A letter you wrote to Varazze has let me know that you are not completely in harmony with some of your confreres. This has made a bad impression, especially since it was read publicly.

Listen to me, dear Tomatis, a missionary must be ready to give his life for the greater glory of God; so should he not be able to put up with a bit of antipathy by a companion, even if his defects are quite noticeable? So listen to what St Paul says to you: *“Alter alterius onera portate, et sic adimplebitis legem Christi”* [Gal 6:2]. *“Charitas benigna est, patiens est, omnia suffert, omnia sperat, omnia sustinet”* [1 Cor 13:4-7]. *“Et si quis suorum et maxime domesticorum curam non habet, est infideli deterior.”* [1 Tm 5:8] etc.

So, dear friend, give me this great consolation, indeed this great pleasure, since it is Don Bosco who is asking you, that in the future Molinari will be your good friend, and if you cannot love him because he has some faults, love him for love of God, love him for love of me. You will do that, won't you? For the rest I am happy with you, and every morning at Holy mass I recommend your soul and your efforts to the Lord.

Don't forget the translation of the arithmetic, adding the weights and measures for the Argentine Republic.

Tell worthy Fr Ceccarelli that I have not been able to receive the catechism of the archdiocese and I would like to have it, the little one, to include the acts of faith in the *Companion of Youth* so it conforms to the ones in the diocese.

May God bless you, dear Fr Tomatis, and do not forget to pray for me. I will always be yours in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

## 246. To Fr Giulio Barberis

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 112-113.

Rome, Easter 1876

Dear Fr Barberis,

I am the bearer of good news and you are the first to receive it. Yesterday at 7 in the evening I had an audience with the Holy Father and was able to spend around an hour with him. He spoke much of the Congregation and our dear novices; then he read their letter from beginning to end. He asked if someone [name] had special qualities and if some had extraordinary virtues. I endeavoured to satisfy him. He was very satisfied and said that the fact that they are so many is a special kindness of the Lord.

Then he added these words: “They are new olives that have to be cultivated, but there is a need for these little plants to allow the farmer to prune the roots, cut off useless and harmful shoots. Remove the weeds and worms that could harm them. You understand me but you can explain it differently. These tender plants have to grow by themselves then produce fruit for their owner. Woe if the plant remains idle and produces no fruit: it will be useless for its owner.

May God bless these little plants. May God guide them and may they bear fruit for his greater glory.”

Then he took a pen and wrote in his own hand at the bottom of the letter: *Dominus vos benedicat* etc., as you see from the letter that came back to you that it was signed by the Holy Father.

In a special way greet Peloso, Schiapino, Tosello etc. I will write again at some other time.

May God bless everyone. I am, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

P.S. I received your letter and what you wrote is fine. It would be good if you could give the novices some outings.



## 247. To Fr Luigi Guanella (Saint)

Critical ed. in E(m) V, p. 342.

Turin, 10 April 1877

Dear Fr Luigi,

I have received your several letters and was very pleased with them.

I thank the Lord that in such a short time he has helped us do what has already been done and that I hope can be more in the future.

Since I have not been able to see and speak with you often, here I will offer you some rules that we usually give to the directors of our houses.

1. Keep an eye on the morality of the Salesians and the pupils entrusted to them. Try to call them in once a month for manifestation and see that everyone does the exercise for a happy death once a month.

2. *Age quod agis*. All business affairs are secondary; forget external things and see about perfecting things, affairs, individuals and helping them as much as possible in their problems and sicknesses.

3. Set up material administration in such a way that every House can run of its own accord, indeed if possible send some help to the mother house that has to support so many expenses to support the Congregation as a body.

4. Prepare sermons, write to them, help the Salesians in their studies, give them or indicate appropriate books.

5. Read, meditate, practise and see that others practise the rules of the Congregation.

Do what you can to follow up these friendly suggestions. Greet all our Salesians dearly in the Lord, Traversino, Depert, Liduani and Boassi.

Ask them all to pray for me. I am always, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

**248. To Salesian Brother [Coadjutor] Bartolomeo Scavini**

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 516-520.

Turin, 1 December 1877

My dear Scavini,

Word has come to me that you have been tempted to leave the Salesian Congregation. Do not do this. You are consecrated to God with perpetual vows; you are a Salesian missionary, you were amongst the first group to go to America; you are a great confidant of Don Bosco's, and you want to return to the world where there are so many dangers of perversion? I hope you will not take this serious step.

Write down the things that are bothering you and as a father I will give advice to my beloved son that will help make you happy now and in eternity.

May God bless you. Believe that I am always, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

**249. To Fr Luigi Guanella (Saint)**

ASC A1820305 *Photocopies of orig. aut.*; ed. in E III, pp. 311-312.

Rome, 8 March 1878

Dear Fr Luigi Guanella,

I have received your letters over time and they gave me great satisfaction. Before anything else we must thank the Lord with all our heart that in his infinite mercy he has restored the health of Mr Dupraz, and that now he can carry on with the hospice he had begun. I believe very much that the number of pupils will be large and you will gain results for the greater glory of God.

I also took no little consolation from knowing that the Salesians at Trinità are enjoying good health and are exemplary in their duties. *Deo gratias*. Let us be courageous in continuing with the task we have begun; God has helped

us and his help will not be lacking in the future. Let us simply endeavour to cooperate from our part.

With this in view I recommend to you and all our dear Salesians to pay attention to three things:

1. Great vigilance in observing each and every rule of ours and to make a day of recollection each month to examine the progress or backsliding in observing them.

2. Mutual charity in putting up with each other's defects, giving good advice, good counsel any time there is an opportunity. That should be practised especially in anything to do with the members' health, domestic economy and each one's duties of state.

3. Agree in common to give good example in external conduct and see that no lay people can complain about the way any confrere acts or speaks.

When calling them to the monthly manifestation, hold to this basics and insist until you see the practical results.

This year the Congregation is in financial straits, and we cannot depend, at least for now, on the help we have had from the Holy Father, so let each one try to be economical in things to do with our state, unless necessary for maintaining health. At any rate, maximum economy, but in case of sickness or whatever is needed for health do everything you can.

I would like you to communicate this letter to our confreres and tell them I love them all in Jesus Christ, and I pray for them. Tell them that Leo XIII loves them and sends them all his holy blessing.

I hope to be able to leave Rome within a few days. I recommend myself to everyone's prayers, especially Traversino who they tell me has become a real model of virtue. That's right, isn't it?

May God bless everyone and may the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always be with us. Amen.

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

## 250. To Fr Francis Bodrato

ASC A1880305 *Simple copies*; ed. in E III, pp. 323-324.

Turin, 31 December 1878

Dear Fr Francis Bodrato,

Over time I have received your letters and those of my dear sons resident in Buenos Aires. I will endeavour to answer with some words for each one. You can then distribute the letters you receive by giving them to some of our confreres or sisters.

Let us bless the Lord who favours us in such a clear way.

Of particular recall for you, see that you:

1. Make every sacrifice to preserve charity and unity amongst the confreres.
2. When you have to give corrections or particular advice never do so in public but always *inter te et ille solum* [Mt 18:15].
3. When you have given a correction, forget the fault and show good will to the one who failed.

This is the testament of your friend and father Don Bosco.

There will be more news from our dear confreres who are coming to offer their work to relieve you.

Give my greetings to our boys at the hospice, telling them I bless them and love them very much in the Lord.

May God bless you, your work. I am, completely in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

### 251. To Fr Taddeo Remotti

ASC A1900610 *Simple copies*; ed. in E III, p. 425.

Turin, 31 December 1878

My dear Fr Remotti Taddeo,

I am so happy with the straightforward way you have so often written to me. Continue to do so like this. But keep some advice that are my testament for you, as a basis:

1. Put up with others' defects even when they harm us.
2. Cover over others' faults, never ridicule someone when he might be offended.
3. Work, but work for love of Jesus; suffer everything but never be uncharitable. *Alter alterius onera portate et sic adimplebitis legem Christi* [Gal 6:2].

May God bless you, dear Fr Remotti; goodbye here on earth, if this is the divine will; for heaven has been prepared and may divine mercy grant it to us. Pray for me. I am now and will always be in Jesus Christ

Most affectionately,

Fr John Bosco

### 252. To Fr Domenico Tomatis

ASC A1740705 *Orig. aut.*; ed. in E III, pp. 524-525.

Alassio, 30 September 1879

My dear Fr Tomatis,

I have always been up to date with matters at San Nicolas College; it seems that you want to begin a new phase under your *dukedom!* That's good. We have placed much faith and hope in you. I note here some advice I always give directors so try to see their value.

1. Take great care of your health and that of your subjects; but do so in a

way that no one works too much or is idle.

2. Try to be better than the others in piety and observance of our rules, and see the others observe them, especially meditation, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, weekly confession, Mass well celebrated, and for those who are not priests, frequent Communion.

3. Be heroic in putting up with others' weaknesses.

4. Be very kind to the pupils, and give them much freedom and possibility of going to confession.

May God bless you, dear Tomatis, and with you may he bless all our other confreres and boys, my friend Ceccarelli who I must write to. May he grant you all health and the grace of a holy life. Warm greetings to everyone.

Pray for me. I will always be in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

### **253. To Salesian Coadjutor Carlo Audisio**

ASC A1600166 *Orig. aut.*; ed. in E IV, p. 12.

Turin, 31 January 1881

My dear Audisio,

An old friend of your soul sends you a greeting and recommends that you never forget your eternal salvation. Work, work, but for Heaven.

Exactness in practices of piety is everything. Obedience, then, is the key to all virtues.

May God bless you, my dear Audisio, may he preserve you in his holy grace. Pray for me. I will always be, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

### 254. To Cleric Luigi Calcagno

ASC A1700303 *Photocopies of orig. aut.*; ed. in E IV, p. 13.

Turin 31 January 1881

My dear Calcagno,

Are you always good, my dear Calcagno? I hope so. But never look back. Let us look to Heaven which awaits us. We have a great reward prepared for us there.

Work, win souls and save your own for me. Sobriety and obedience are everything for you.

Write to me often. May God bless you and keep you always in his holy grace. And pray for the one who is always, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

### 255. To Mother Caterina Daghero

ASC A1790401 *Photocopies of orig. aut.*; ed. in E IV, p. 75.

Nizza Monferrato, 12 August 1881

Reverend Mother Superior General,

Here are some more sweets to distribute to your daughters. Always practise kindness, with everyone; but always be ready to receive bitter things, or better, bitter mouthfuls when it so pleases God to send them your way.

May God bless you and give you virtue and courage to sanctify yourself and all the communities entrusted to you. Pray for me. I am, in Jesus Christ

Your humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **256. To Fr Nicola Fenoglio**

ASC A1890276 *Simple copies*; ed. in E IV, pp. 152-153.

Turin, 13 July 1882

My dear Fr Fenoglio,

I praise your desire to do and suffer something for the greater glory of God. But before coming to the work I would like us to talk about something personal for a moment. We will do this at the retreat at a time that suits you.

In the meantime try to exercise the virtue of charity, patience and kindness of St Francis de Sales.

Accept heat, cold, thirst unpleasant things as gifts from the Lord.

The rest can be when I share some thoughts about yourself with you.

May God bless you and help you to walk on the way to heaven. Pray to the Lord for me. I will be always in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

### **257. To Sister Eulalia Bosco**

ASC A1790226 *Photocopy of original.*; ed. in E IV, pp. 289-290.

Pinerolo, 20 August 1884

My good Eulalia,

I blessed the Lord when you made the decision to become a religious; now I thank him with all my heart that he preserved your good will to break definitively with the world and consecrate yourself totally to the good Jesus.

Make this offering willingly, and reflect on the recompense of a hundredfold in this present life and the true reward, the great reward of future life.

But, my good Eulalia, that is no joke; it is true. And remember the words of the father of Chantal when she found herself in a similar situation: "Whatever



you give to the Lord, never take it back again". Believe that religious life is a life of constant sacrifice and that God gives great recompense for every sacrifice. Only obedience, only observance of the Rule, only hope of a heavenly reward are a comfort in our mortal life.

I have always received your letters with pleasure. I have not answered because I lack the time.

May God bless you, Eulalia; may Mary be your guide, your comfort until Heaven. I hope we will still see each other again in this life; otherwise, goodbye: we will see each other and speak of God in a blessed life. Amen.

Please wish every blessing to Mother General and all the Sisters, novices and postulants of Mary Help of Christians.

I owe Mother an answer, and I will give it. Pray for me and for all our family. I am always, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate uncle,

Fr John Bosco

## V. FORMATION OF THE SALESIANS THROUGH CONFERENCES AND DREAM ACCOUNTS

*The years of foundation and consolidation of the Salesian Society and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are ones where Don Bosco's horizons expanded in an impressive manner. The priest of Valdocco, ever more aware of having received a divine mission, feels that he has been transported into a huge field of activity, given a charism that makes him father and founder of a movement of apostles, consecrated men and women who are destined to spread over space and time. His spiritual magisterium deepens, his proposals become more radical, all-embracing.*

*The texts included here are taken from notes made during Don Bosco's conferences. They are simply examples. As with the circular and personal letters, on these occasions too the saint emphasises what he considers to be characteristic aspects of Salesian consecrated life, with the freshness and liveliness typical of direct speech.*

*These addresses further confirm the total understanding Don Bosco has of consecration and the Salesian vocation, which ask for generous and determined commitment.*

*The reader can see that the dreams addressed to the Salesians (nos. 263-265), compared with those to the boys, along with their instructive and symbolic function, involve a more marked spiritual and charismatic purpose. In particular the dream of the ten diamonds (no. 265), which presents the icon of the ideal Salesian, showing what is specific to the Salesian spirit, "more than a feature or virtue, it is a range of attitudes, deep convictions and well tested methodological experiences which flow harmonically into the creation of an original and particular style of holiness and apostolate."<sup>57</sup>*

<sup>57</sup> Egidio VIGANÒ, *The profile of the Salesian in the dream of the Ten Diamonds*, in "Acts of the Superior Council" 62 (1981) no. 300, 27-28.

**258. You must act in such a way that others,  
mirroring themselves in you, can be built up**

ASC A0040601 *Cronaca 1858...*, ms by Giovanni Bonetti, pp. 17-19 (cf. MB VI, 68-70).

[October/November 1858]<sup>58</sup>

We can now say that our school year has begun, and therefore I would very much like to begin as we did last year by spending some time with you at least once a week. The best time we can find is this hour after prayers. I do not want to give you a sermon, but I only want to tell you, and I desire this with all my heart, I only want to recommend what was so often said by St Paul, indeed what God himself said to Moses when he came down from the mountain, that you be models, that you be true models for all the boys at the Oratory. You have to be like so many straight lines that all the other boys can follow along. Therefore you have to act in such a way that others, mirroring themselves in you, can be built up. You should try not only to help one another with advice but with deeds. What value would it be if you recommended to others to frequent the holy sacraments, if they saw that you went very rarely? If they see you go devoutly to the sacraments, if they see you devout and modest in church who knows then that by your example they may find somewhere to draw sustenance for their souls. If unfortunately a cleric were to engage in immodest talk, let slip some little word that someone interprets as against the beautiful virtue, alas, what damage, what a scandal! ...

People expect good results from us, people look at us and if they do not see some result, oh what a scandal for them! St Ambrose likens us to the moon. He says we must take so much care. The moon does not shine with its own light. It takes its light from the sun, uses it then gives it to the earth. We are the same. Of ourselves we have nothing, but we must take from almighty God, from the sun of justice, the divine word that enlightens the mind and after using it for ourselves then we must spread it for all men. They expect that we will lead them on the way that leads to heaven. Saint Augustine [says]: “Do

<sup>58</sup> This is a conference given to a restricted group of clerics at the Oratory to whom – the following year – he proposed that they become members of the Salesian Society.

you want to know what those robes the Romans wear mean? Do not believe that the toga a young man took on at 17 years of age only meant this but rather that under the toga was knowledge, virtue, in short all the good gifts that someone who wants to put on the toga must be adorned with. It is the same with us. Under these clothes we must have the virtues that such a divine habit deserves.”

When Joshua had to cross the Jordan, God asked him to follow the priests with the ark [of the Covenant]. When they arrived there with the ark on their shoulders, the waters of the Jordan opened up and the army passed through. That is what the priests did. Carrying the ark on their shoulders the waters divided; the upper and lower waters were like a high wall and left a path across the Jordan dry so all the army could cross to the other side of the Jordan. So must we do too. With the ark of the divine Covenant, with holy religion, good advice, nice words we must see that men pass from this world to eternity safe and sound. Onward then, and let’s do everything we can for the good of souls.

You have so many boys around you watching you carefully. Do everything in your power to direct them well and with good example, words, advice and charitable warnings. If you do that this year, although with a fewer number of clerics than other years, I will be very happy and the Lord can do no other than bless me, you, the whole House, continuing, as he has always done up till now, to help us by the power of his arm, blessing all our efforts. Amen.

### **259. After the first religious profession of the Salesians**

ASC A0040604 *Annali* III 1862, ms by Giovanni Bonetti, pp. 1-6 (cf. MB VII, 162-164)<sup>59</sup>.

[14 May 1862]

It is my intention that this vow you have just made does not impose any other obligation than observing what you have already observed up till now,

<sup>59</sup> Fr Bonetti introduces Don Bosco’s talk with these words: “A good number of us then took our vows, in accordance with the Rule. Since there were many of us we said the formula together, repeating it after Fr Rua. After that, Don Bosco addressed some words to us for our peace of mind, and to infuse in us greater courage for the future. Amongst other things he told us ...” (A0040604 *Annali* III 1862..., p. 1).

that is, the rules of the house. It is my great desire that none of you be caught up in any fear, or by some concern. If that is the case let each one come to me quickly and open up his heart, letting me know of his doubts and anxieties. I say this because it could be that the devil, seeing the good that you are doing by being in this Society, gives you some temptation, seeking to distance you from God's will. But if you quickly let me know I will be able to look at things, return your hearts to peace, and also release you from your vows if I see that this is God's will and for the good of souls.

Someone might say to me: "Did Don Bosco also make these vows?" Well, while you were making these vows to me, I was making them to the One on the Crucifix, for all of my life, offering myself in sacrifice to the Lord, ready for anything that is for his greater glory and the salvation of souls.

My dear friends we are in troubled times and it almost seems to be a presumption in these unfortunate times to be trying to put into place a new religious community, while the world and Hell are using all their powers to wipe out all those already on this earth. But that does not matter; I have not just probable but certain arguments that it is God's will that our Society begin and continue. Many efforts have been made to prevent it, but all in vain. Indeed some of those who have most obstinately opposed us have paid dearly for it. One distinguished person, who for various reasons I shall not name, maybe out of zeal, was strongly opposed to this Society. He was overcome by serious illness and a few days later left for eternity.

I would never be able to finish this evening if I were to tell you about all the special acts of protection we have received from Heaven since our Oratory began. All this helps us argue that God is with us and that we can go ahead in all our affairs with trust, knowing that we are doing his holy will.

But these are not the arguments that give me hope that all is well for this Society; there are other more important arguments, amongst them being the unique purpose we propose, which is the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. Who knows, but that the Lord may want to use our Society to accomplish much good in his Church? Twenty five or thirty years hence, if the Lord continues to help us as he has until now, our Society,

spread everywhere, could even go beyond a thousand members. Some of these preaching and instructing ordinary folk, others educating abandoned youth; some teaching, others writing and spreading good books; and everyone supporting the dignity of the Roman Pontiff and ministers of the Church. How much good can be done! Pius IX believes that everything is already sorted out: and here this evening things are in order, so let us fight with him on behalf of the Church, which is God's Church. Let us have courage, let us work with all our heart. God will reward us as a good paymaster. Eternity will be long enough for us to take a rest<sup>60</sup>.

### **260. Always keep in mind the purpose of the Congregation**

ASC A0250202 *Conferenza di D. Bosco – 12 January 1873*;

ms by another (cf. MB X, 1061-1063).

[12 January 1873]

I see with great pleasure that our Congregation is increasing every day.... But if it is my greatest desire that our Congregation should grow and increase the number of sons of the apostles, it is also my greatest desire that the members be zealous ministers, sons worthy of St Francis, just as the Jesuits are sons worthy of the courageous St Ignatius of Loyola. The whole world marvels at it and more than anyone else, the evildoers. Out of devilish hatred they would like to see this most holy seed crushed. Persecutions, the most horrendous events will not discourage these magnanimous individuals. They are split up in a way that one does not know about the other, and even though far from one another they perfectly fulfil the Rule given them by their first superior, just as it would be if they were in community. Wherever there is a Jesuit, I say, there is a model of virtue, an exemplar of holiness: there he preaches, hears confessions, proclaims the Word of God. Is there more? When evildoers think they have crushed them, that is precisely when they begin to increase in number; and it is then that the result in terms of souls is greater.

<sup>60</sup> Fr Bonetti concludes by noting: "We saw that this evening Don Bosco was happy beyond expression, did not want to leave us, assuring us he could have spent the whole night in conversation. He told us so many wonderful things especially about the beginnings of the Oratory. He told us of the tragic end of certain individuals who wanted to stop him from gathering boys etc." (A0040604 *Annali* III 1862..., p. 6).

So may it be for you, my sons, so think seriously about the state to which God is calling you; think and pray, and when entering this Congregation mirror in yourselves those magnanimous sons of Christ, and work as they do. Whether you have embraced the ecclesiastical state or remained a layman and whatever office you are given, always see to exact observance of the Rule. Whether you live here, at Lanzo, in one of the other houses, or in France, in Africa, in America, whether you are alone or with others, always keep in mind the purpose of this Congregation, the education of youth and our neighbour in general, in arts, sciences and religion; in a word, the salvation of souls. And if I should say what is currently going through my mind, I would describe a huge number of Oratories spread over the world, some in France, some in Spain, some in Africa, some in America and in so many other places where our confreres are working tirelessly in the vineyard of Jesus Christ.

Right now it is simply a thought I have, but it seems to me I could already assert it as an historical fact. But since the Holy Father, Pius IX, has urged us to take up only Italy as our field of work for now, since, as he says, it is extremely in need, we will put our forces to work here in Italy. However Heaven should dispose things, always remember the purpose of the Congregation you will join or have already joined. Let us encourage one another and work tirelessly together so that one day, in company with all the souls we have won for God, we will enjoy the beatific vision of God with them for all eternity.

### **261. Through our vows we are all completely consecrated to God**

ASC A0000409 *Prediche di don Bosco. Esercizi Lanzo 1876*, Quad. 20, ms by Giulio Barberis, pp. 14-19 (cf. MB XII, 451-454)<sup>61</sup>.

[Lanzo Torinese, 17 September 1876]

<sup>61</sup> This is a reflection Don Bosco gave after the profession of vows, at the end of the first of a series of retreats, in September 1876. Fr Barberis introduces Don Bosco's address with these words: "On September 17 it was the day for taking vows for those who had not yet done so and wished to do so. After some recreation after breakfast, at 9:30, we went into the church. Because it was Sunday a second Mass was said, and at the same time we sang the Office, then finished by reading the Rule. Meanwhile the *Veni Creator* was intoned and all those admitted to vows went into the sacristy; there were 20 for perpetuals and 15 for triennials .... When we had finished pronouncing the vows, Don Bosco, already seated on the chair, began a beautiful sermon, part of which I recall I reproduce here" (A0000409 *Prediche di don Bosco...*, p. 14).

When an army general sees all his ranks of soldiers, he is happy because he hopes he can more easily destroy his enemy with them, without any fear. So right now I am happy seeing the ranks of my sons increase, soldiers who want to fight the devil; soldiers who will help me destroy, as much as we can, his kingdom on earth and prepare a nice place for ourselves in Heaven.

Do you know what it means to make these holy vows? It means being put in the first ranks of the Divine Saviour's army and to go into battle under his command. But what I would like to say to you right now is this, that it is not enough to make vows, but we must make every effort to do what we have promised God to do by vow. Through our vows we are all completely consecrated to him; let us never take back what we have given him. We have consecrated our eyes to him: so let's leave aside useless and insignificant reading, vain or bad looks. We have all consecrated our ears to God: so let's not pause any longer to listen to people complaining and sowing discontent, no longer want pleasures or be found in conversations, gatherings where, even if there is no bad talk, it is all very worldly and secular just the same. We have consecrated our tongue to the Lord: so no more biting or rude words to our friends, answering superiors back, no more sowing discontent; no, now that we have consecrated it to him, let us not stain it any more; instead give it completely over to singing the divine praises, talking of good examples to encourage others to do good. We have consecrated our throat [appetite] to the Lord, so away with all kinds of immoderate delicacies in food; much abstemiousness with wine; never let our greedy appetite lead us to accept dinners, drinks or the like. These hands of ours have been especially consecrated to the Lord, so let them no longer remain idle; let them not regret doing work which seems to be filthy work, so long as everything is for the greater glory of God. All these feet are consecrated to God: what a field I am entering here! So let's not use these feet to return to the world which we have abandoned. Yes, I think I should stay with this idea for a moment to deal with it.

The Lord has given us a great grace by calling us to follow him: this world is too perverse and perverting. So let us follow the grace and not return to perversion. See, the Holy Spirit clearly tells us that the world is completely



set on evil: “*mundus in maligno positus est totus*” [1 Jn 5:19]. So let us see that our feet never turn back again to where we have escaped from. The principal hurdle, the biggest difficulty we find is our parents. But the Lord said that if they become a hurdle to our greater good we do not need to listen to them, nor heed them, he even goes to the point of telling us to hate them. So we need to really detach ourselves from them, since God has done us the great favour of calling us to follow him. Through our vows we have detached ourselves from them to bind ourselves especially to God, so why put ourselves back in danger of detaching ourselves from God by going to listen to their miseries, needs or desires?

I see that I have digressed somewhat from what I was talking about, that since we are especially consecrated to God we should give him our whole life, all our works, our entire selves. We have to really try hard so that the fact, our works, corresponds to this purpose. Believe me also that there has never been anybody who was discontent at the moment of death for being consecrated to God and for having spent his life in his holy service. There are countless numbers, instead, who at that point regret that they have not loved him and served him. They weep over their miseries but time has run out. Since the Lord in his great mercy has wanted to warn us in time and call us to himself, let us surrender to him and do things worthy of his call.

## 262. Patience, Hope, Obedience

ASC A0000409 *Prediche di don Bosco - Esercizi Lanzo 1876*, Quad. XX, ms by Giulio Barberis, pp. 1-11 (cf. MB XII, 454-460).

[Lanzo Torinese, 18 September 1876]

We are at the point of going our own way and each one will be going back to where the Lord has destined him to exercise his sacred ministry. What can I tell you at this moment that can serve as a watchword for each one to recall as fruit of this retreat wherever and whenever? There are three simple words that I believe are of the greatest importance possible right now. So it would be good to heed them with all the effort possible. Here they are: *Patience, Hope, Obedience*.

[1. *Patience*] - Firstly I would like to suggest much patience. The Holy Spirit himself admonishes us: “*Patientia vobis necessaria est*” [Heb 10:36]. he tells us somewhere in Holy Scripture. “*In patientia vestra,*” he says elsewhere, “*possidebitis animas vestras* [Lk 21:19]. *Patientia opus habet perfectum*” [Jas 1:4]. I do not intend here to speak of the patience required to put up with fatigue or extraordinary persecutions; nor of the patience needed to suffer martyrdom nor that which we need to practise when seriously ill. Patience is certainly necessary in these cases and to an heroic degree; but they are cases that rarely have to be put into practice, and God in these cases gives us extraordinary graces. The patience I intend speaking of is the patience needed to fulfil our duties well, the patience we need to practise all of our Rule, discharge our duties exactly. This is what I intend to speak to you about. Both superiors and inferiors need it, and it could be needed in a thousand instances, therefore we need to have it in abundance.

Someone will be overburdened with tasks and someone else wants to give him one more. He could be angry with the one who wants to do this, either because that person seems unaware of the other things he has to do or because he just believes he can do it. Patience is needed.

Or there could be someone else who wants to teach, but they ask him to assist; or there might be someone instead who wants to go to school but they ask him to teach, or he’d like to be in one place but they send him to another. Patience is needed in all these cases.

Or there is someone who believes the Superior has something against him, does not view him favourably, always gives him the worst jobs to do. Without patience he immediately begins to complain, show his discontent, and what will happen?

Or someone else has a job he does not like, or he can’t do well where he is; he feels like complaining a thousand times over about everything there and going who knows where to. Take this kind of response slowly: here patience is needed more than ever.

Or it will happen one day that someone says: “the Superior hates me”; it might be imagination more than anything else; but even so, is it legitimate to

complain, speak badly of him, show publicly how offended he is? No. This is why I was saying that we need to have patience as our inseparable companion.

And the Superior? How much patience is needed here! Because if he knows how to get others to practise it, the others can say: there's many of us, he is just one, and we are practising a bit of patience towards each one. The Superior though is alone and apart from all the others and has to be patient with everyone. So although he might be young, sometimes it is very tough work. Sometimes has to chew on things for a while a little out of regard for one or some other, either because they are not capable, or because he does not see good will and spontaneity in things, or even sees ill will. But is this good enough to cut off relations with someone regarding that matter and complain about everything? I know that there will be a thousand temptations to offer a harsh reproach or send someone away or something like that, but it is precisely here that much patience is needed or, to put it better, much charity with that condiment of St Francis de Sales added in: kindness, meekness.

The teacher, or an assistant could cut the matter off with a blow here, a kick there; but I maintain that although it might stop an occasional abuse, it never does good and never helps people love virtue or get something to sink in. Of course, let there always be true zeal. Try your best to do things well, yes. But always calmly, kindly, patiently.

Someone will say: "well said, but it costs something not to get angry when you see..." It costs. And I know it costs as well; but do you know where the word patience comes from? From [the Latin word] *patior, pateris, passus sum, pati*, which means: to suffer, put up with, endure. If it did not cost some effort it would no longer be patience. And it is precisely because it costs effort that I recommend it so much and that the Lord encourages it so much in the Holy Scriptures. I am also aware that it costs. I am sure you don't believe that it is the most enjoyable thing in the world to be 'nailed' to giving audiences or stuck at a table all evening to do what has to be done, letters and the like. I can assure you that many times I would like to get out for some fresh air and maybe I really need to; but patience is needed. If I didn't do these tasks many things wouldn't happen; so much good would be left undone; so much important business would be left stranded: therefore, patience.

Don't believe that it doesn't also cost me, that after having given someone a job to do, entrusted him with something important or delicate or urgent, and I find it not done or badly done, it doesn't cost me something to regain my calm. I assure you that sometimes my blood is boiling in my veins; I get pins and needles all over. So? Lose my patience? That won't get the job done; and the confrere will not be corrected by my anger. Calmly advise, set appropriate rules, encourage; and if there is a need to shout a bit, then do it, but think for a moment: what would St Francis de Sales do in this situation? I can assure you that if we act like this we will obtain what the Holy Spirit told us: "*In patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras*" [Lk 21:19].

And then? It also takes patience, constancy, perseverance to carry out our Rule. The day will come when you feel tired, bored or, let's say there will be a day when you don't want to make meditation, say the rosary, go to the sacraments, continue on with your boring assistance. This is the right moment to ask the Lord and the Blessed Virgin, constantly and perseveringly, for patience.

Look how much care a gardener takes to get a little plant to grow. You might say it is effort thrown away. But he knows that over time that little plant will give him so much back, so he does not worry about the effort and begins to work and sweat to prepare the ground: digging here, hoeing there, then manuring, weeding, then planting or putting in the seed. Then, as if this were not enough, how much effort he makes seeing that nobody tramples the ground that has been planted, or that birds or hens don't come and eat the seed. When he sees it sprout he looks at it with pleasure: "oh! It's sprouting, it's got two leaves, three ..." Then think of the grafting, how much care he takes looking for the best plant in the garden, cutting a branch, binding it, covering it, seeing that cold or wet don't destroy it. When the plant grows and begins to bend over, he immediately provides a support so it can grow straight, and if he is afraid that the stem or trunk is too weak, that wind or storms could flatten it, he puts a stake next to it, ties it and binds it so that it will not run that risk. So why, my good gardener, so much care for a plant? Because if there wasn't it would not give me fruit. It is good that it is done this way: if I want it to give me plenty of good fruit then I need to look after it in every way possible.

Unfortunately, note that despite this, often the graft fails, the plant is lost; but in the hope that it can be brought back to life, so much effort is made.

We too my dear sons, are gardeners, farmers in the Lord's vineyard. If we want our work to produce results, we have to show so much care for the plants we are cultivating. Unfortunately, despite our efforts and care, our grafts dry up and the plant goes bad; but if we really do make these efforts, most times the plant succeeds ... Even though there might not be success, the master of the vineyard recompenses us, for he is so good! Bear in mind then, getting upset is not worth it, nor giving in to impulse: continual patience is needed, constancy, perseverance, effort.

[2. Hope] - The farmer at least hopes to be paid, be recompensed. And us? Who will pay us? So I begin with the second point I want to talk to you about: hope. Yes, what supports patience must be the hope of reward. We work so that the hope of reward may smile so consolingly upon us. We are lucky that we have such a good master. Note how consoling these words are: "*Quia super pauca fuisti fidelis, super multa te constituam*" [Mt 25:21], because you were faithful in small things, I will put you in charge of greater things. We poor people know so little, have so little strength, ability. It does not matter, we are faithful in doing the little we can and the Lord will give us a great reward. When, as a teacher, you are tired and you would like to let your job go, careful! Be faithful in little things if you want the Lord to give you greater things. Or the Rector! He has advised, spoken, recommended ...; he is about to lose patience or just let everything go as it likes or get angry... Careful that you be faithful in little things, if you want to be in charge of greater things.

A point where we must practise so much patience still, looking to hope, is overcoming ourselves. I mean overcoming our habits, our bad inclinations, the temptations that constantly bother us. How much it costs to leave those habits behind, our very ordinary lukewarmness, weakness, carelessness with the little practices of obedience or piety. Here too we need constant patience, extraordinary tolerance, not allowing the devil to win and, day or night, awake or asleep, playing or working, always endeavouring to overcome our bad inclinations. This is what we call patience or being long-suffering. And

if we need to struggle so much to obtain victory, we will want to look to the great reward, the great prize prepared for us and we will not fail to win out. *“In patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras”* [Lk 21:19]. St Paul adds: *“Si vos delectat magnitudo praemiorum, non vos terreat magnitudo laborum.”*

I am not here to tell you how well our hope is founded. You know that it is our most merciful Lord that has made the promise, and for the little we are faithful in he has promised us much; he calls those who have observed his law ‘blessed’, because he knows how great the reward is. Elsewhere he tells us that even a glass of cold water given in his name will be compensated. Courage then: may hope sustain us when our courage fails us.

[3. *Obedience*] - Now, there is need for a virtue that includes these first two and keeps them together. This virtue is obedience. I will only say a few things, given that we have tackled obedience in Rodriguez at length in this retreat and that there have also been sermons on it. I really recommend that you practise patience in obeying and when this obedience does not come easily, when our thinking is far from being obedient, let us look up to Heaven, hold onto hope.

Well kept obedience is the life and soul of religious Congregations; it is what keeps them united. How much good can be done when many members depend absolutely on one, who by reason of his position has a broader view of things, can see clearly what needs to be done and tells someone: “stay here”, and he stays; do that, and he does it; “go there”, and immediately he sets out. Good is increased and it is a good that cannot be achieved unless there is absolute obedience.

What other great things obedience can bring! All your actions become more meritorious; I speak of manual activities. There might be someone who is good at little or nothing, but he puts himself under obedience and the Superior asks him to sweep or be the cook, and he can have the same merit as someone who is busy all day, labouring away in the pulpit or confessional or teaching. This great good comes to us through obedience. Let everyone be patient in the task he has, do it well as far as he can, and not give thought to anything else except that the Lord will welcome him and bless him.

I have one more idea I would very much like to recommend to you today. This thought ties the other three together. It consists in making the exercise for a happy death well each month; putting aside one day a month to leave aside, as much as is possible, all other occupations, to think about matters concerning our soul.

It will help to make comparisons month by month: did I improve this month? Or did I go back somehow? Then come to details: how was I in this virtue, that other one? And make a special review of matters to do with the vows and the practices of piety: How was I with regard to obedience? Did I make progress? - Did I carry out the assistance I was given well, for example? How did I do it? - Was I busy at school? - Regarding poverty, be it clothing, food, my cell: do I have something that is not really poor? Was I greedy? Did I complain when I lacked something? - Then come to chastity: have I given any room for bad thoughts? Have I detached myself still more from love of family? Did I practise mortification in eating, looking, etc.? - Then move on to practices of piety and note especially any lukewarmness, or if these practices were done without enthusiasm.

This examination should always be made, whether it be a long or a short one. Since some of you have occupations that do not allow you time apart any day of the month, they are legitimate occupations, but on that day let each one do what he can to follow up these indications and make particular resolutions.

Just one more little thought. When the young man asked the Lord what he had to do to be saved, he gave him the law and said: "*Fac hoc et vives* [Lk 10:28]. Do this and you will live." So I say to you: you have the Rule, it is the Lord who gave it to you; fulfil it and you will live. Let each one study it and at the same time study how to put it into practice. Let each one for his own part, superior, inferior, priest or coadjutor, try to put it into practice. How happy and consoled we will be at the moment of our death, for having practised it! We can be certain, as I was saying, that our hope will not be confounded. The Lord is faithful to his promises and he will give us whatever it is we hope for. Indeed, he is full of kindness and mercy. He will give us far more than we could imagine.

Let us have courage then. If we have to suffer something, put up with something to do everything the Lord asks of us, let us not pull back. He knows how to reward our every effort and will make us content now and in eternity, and will give us the reward that exceeds all expectation.

### 263. Humility, work and temperance

ASC A0000409 *Prediche D. Bosco. Esercizi Lanzo 1876*, Quad. XX, ms by Giulio Barberis, pp. 33-46 (cf. MB XII, 463-469)<sup>62</sup>.

28 September 1876

They say we should take no notice of dreams; and I must tell you truthfully that in most cases I am also of this opinion. However sometimes, though not telling us about the future they serve just the same in letting us know how to resolve intricate affairs and in showing us how to proceed prudently in certain matters. So they can be taken for what is good in them. Right now I would like to tell you about a dream that has preoccupied me throughout this retreat and tormented me especially last night. I will tell it to you as it happened only shortening things a bit here and there so as not to be too long, because it seems to me that it was full of many and serious lessons.

[Part I] - It seemed to me that we were all together, going from Lanzo to Turin. We were all in some kind of vehicle, but I couldn't say if we were on a train or an *omibus*, but we weren't walking. When we got to a certain point along the road, I don't recall where, the vehicle stopped. I got off to see what was wrong and found myself face to face with someone whom I cannot really describe: he looked both tall and short at the same time, fat and thin, and he also looked red and white; he walked on the ground but also in the air. I was dumbfounded and could make no sense of it, but plucked up courage and asked: "Who are you?" Without giving me an answer he said: "Come." I wanted to know who he was first of all, what he wanted, but again he said: "Come quickly; let's get the vehicles moving into this field."

<sup>62</sup> The concluding sermon (the "reminders") given at the end of the second lot of retreats at Lanzo Torinese, 20-28 September 1876.



The marvel was that he spoke loudly and softly at the same time and in many voices, and I was just left marvelling at it all. The field was very big, as far as you could see, all flat, not dug up but all flattened down like a farmyard. Not knowing what to say, and seeing him so resolute, we turned the vehicles around so that they entered that huge field and then we shouted out to everyone inside to get off. They all got off in very quick time and as soon as they had, the vehicles were seen to vanish, without our knowing where they had gone to.

“Now that we have got down,” I whispered to myself, “you will tell why you made us stop in this place.” He answered: “The reason is serious; it is to avoid a terrible danger.”

“Which danger?”

“Danger from a wild bull that will leave no one alive if he comes through: *Taurus rugiens quaerens quem devoret.*”

“Slow down, my friend, you are attributing to the bull what St Peter says about the lion in Holy Scripture: *Leo rugiens*” [1 Pet 5:8].

“That doesn’t matter: there it was *leo rugiens*, here it is *taurus rugiens.*”

“The fact is that you have to be very much on the alert. Call everyone to come around you. Then solemnly and urgently announce that they be careful, very careful, and as soon as they hear the bull bellowing, a loud and extraordinary bellowing, to immediately throw themselves on the ground and stay face down, faces pressed to the ground, until the bull has passed through. Woe to the one who does not listen to you, for whoever does not lie flat on the ground face down as I have said will be lost, because we read in the Holy Scriptures that the one who is humble will be exalted and the one who exalts himself will be humbled: *Qui se humiliat exaltabitur et qui se exaltat humiliabitur*” [Lk 14:11].

Then he said once more: “Quickly, quickly: the bull is about to come; shout, shout out loudly for them to get down.”

I was shouting and he was saying: “More, more, louder, shout, shout”. I was shouting so loud that I think I even frightened Fr Lemoyne who sleeps in the room next to me, but I couldn’t shout any louder.

Then immediately we heard the bellowing of the bull: “Careful, careful!... Line them all up straight next to each on both sides, with a space in the middle for the bull to run through.”

I’m shouting and giving these orders; in the blink of an eyelid they are all prostrate on the ground and we began to see the bull coming from way off, enraged.

Although most were lying face down, some wanted to stand up and watch the bull to see what it was and they were not lying down. Just a few of them. The individual said to me: “Now you will see what happens to them; you will see what they get for not lowering themselves.” I wanted to warn them again, shout at them, run to them. The other would not let me. I insisted that he let me go to them. He told me firmly: “Obedience is for you too, get down”. I was still not lying down when we heard this tremendous, fearful bellowing. The bull was already close to us; we were all shaking and asking: “What the... what the...” “Don’t be afraid: down on the ground!”. And he kept shouting: “*Qui se humiliat exaltabitur et qui se exaltat humiliabitur... qui se humiliat... qui se humiliat.*”

A strange thing that really made me wonder was this, that although my head was on the ground and I was completely prostrate with my eyes in the dust, nevertheless I could see everything that was happening around me very well. The bull had seven horns, almost in the shape of a circle: there were two in place of his nose; two in place of his eyes; two where the horns would ordinarily be and one above; but the marvellous thing was that these horns were so strong, flexible, bending in whichever direction, so that to strike or knock someone to the ground the bull didn’t have to run here or there; it just needed to move ahead without twisting and turning itself, to strike whoever it encountered. The horns at the nose were the longest and these caused surprising damage.

The bull was already very close; then the individual shouted: “watch the effect of humility.” And then suddenly, what a marvel it was! We all found ourselves lifted up in the air to a considerable height so it was impossible for the bull to reach us. The handful who had not got down were not lifted up. The bull came and tore them to pieces in an instant; not one was saved. We meanwhile, lifted up in the air, were terrified and said: “If we fall down we’re done for; poor us! What will become of us!” Meanwhile we could see the enraged bull trying to get to us. He was leaping up terribly trying to gore us, but he was not able to do any damage to us. So more enraged than ever, he made it clear he wanted to go and find some fellow bulls; almost as if he were saying: “well, we’ll help each other, we will climb up...”, and so *habens iram magnam* [Rev 12:12], he went off.

Then we found ourselves back on the ground and the person was shouting: “Face the south.” Then, without our understanding what was going on, the scene in front of us changed. Facing south we saw the Blessed Sacrament exposed: there were many candles lit on both sides and the field was no longer there, but we seemed to be in a huge, ornately decorated church. While we were all there in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, many enraged bulls arrived, all with horrible horns and terribly frightening in appearance. They came, but since we were in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, they could do no harm to us. Meanwhile we were saying the chaplet to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. After a while, I don’t know how long, we looked and the bulls were no longer there. Looking back towards the altar we found that the candles were extinguished, the Sacrament no longer exposed, the church had gone ... “But where are we?” We found ourselves in the field where we had first been.

You understand well enough that the bull is the enemy of our souls, the devil that is so enraged with us and constantly seeks to do us harm. The seven horns are the seven capital vices. What can free us from this bull’s horns, from the devil’s assaults, from not falling to vice, is principally humility, basis and foundation of the virtues.

[Part 2] - Meanwhile we were dumbfounded, amazed, looking at one another. No one was speaking, no one knew what to say. They were waiting for

Don Bosco to speak or for that individual to tell us something when, taking me aside, he said: "Come, I want you to see the triumph of the Congregation of St Francis de Sales. Climb up on this rock and you will see." It was a huge boulder in the middle of the boundless field so I climbed up on it. What an immense view confronted me! The field, that I could never have believed could be so large, looked to me as if it covered the entire earth. People of every colour, dress, nation were gathered there. I saw so many people that I did not know if the world could have that many. I began by looking at the ones in front as I looked at them: they were dressed like us Italians. I knew the ones in the front rows and there were so many Salesians there who were leading groups of boys and girls by the hand. Then there were others with other groups; then still more and more that I no longer knew and could not make out, but there was an indescribable number of them. Towards the south there were Sicilians, Africans and an endless crowd of people I didn't know. They were all being led by Salesians; those in the front rows I knew and then no more.

"Note", the person said to me. Then an endless crowd of other people appeared before me, dressed differently from us. They wore skins, kinds of mantles that looked almost like velvet, all in different colours. I turned to the four points of the compass. Amongst other things, to the east I saw women with feet so tiny that they struggled to remain standing and almost could not walk. What stood out was that everywhere I saw Salesians leading groups of boys and girls and with them a huge crowd of people. I always knew the ones in the first rows, then going on further, I did not know them any more, not even the missionaries. There are many things here that I cannot tell you at length because it would take too long.

Then the one who had led me and advised me up to this point about what I had to do, spoke again and said: "Look, Don Bosco; for now you will not understand everything I say, but pay attention: everything you have seen is all the harvest prepared for the Salesians. See how huge this harvest is! This huge field you find yourself in is the field in which the Salesians must work. The Salesians you see are the workers in the Lord's vineyard. Many are working and you know them. The horizon then broadened before your eyes with people that you do not yet know, and this means that not only in this century, but in

the next and in future centuries the Salesians will work in their field. But do you know on what condition what you see will happen? I will tell you: look, you need to print the Rule and on the first page, in large letters, remember, print the words that will be your coat of arms, your rallying cry, your badge. Note well: *Work and temperance will make the Salesian Congregation flourish*. You will explain these words; repeat them, insist on them. You will have a handbook printed that explains them and makes it well understood that work and temperance are the legacy you leave the Congregation and at the same time will also be its glory.”

I replied: “I will do this willingly enough; all this is according to our purpose and what I am already recommending every day and insisting on, every occasion I can.”

“Are you convinced then? Have you understood it well? This is the legacy you will leave them; and say clearly that while your sons follow this, they will have followers from the south, north, east and west. Now leave the Retreat and send them off to their destinations. These will follow the rules, then others will come”.

Then the vehicles appeared once again to take us on to Turin. I was looking and looking: they were omnibuses, but *sui generis*, strange as could be. We began to get on; but the omnibuses had no supports of any kind and I was afraid they would fall off, so I didn't want to let them leave. But the person said to me: “Go, go: they don't need support, they just need to carry out these words: *Sobrii estote et vigilate*” [1 Pet 5:8]. Whoever carries out these two things will not fall, even though there is no support and the carriage is running fast.

[Part 3] - They leave.

The carriage set off fast and I was with the individual. “Come,” he soon said to me, “Come, because I want to show you the most important part.” You have something to learn! So, do you see that large cart?”

“I can see it.”

“Do you know what it is?”

“I can’t see it well.”

“If you want to see it well, come up close. Do you see that poster there? Come up and look at it: there is an emblem on the poster, and that will tell you the rest.”

I came up and saw four very large nails painted on the poster. I turned to him saying:

“I don’t understand anything unless you explain it!”

“Don’t you see those four nails?” I looked carefully. “Those are the four nails that drilled into and tormented our Divine Saviour so much.”

“And by that you mean?”

“They are four nails that torment religious congregations. If you avoid these four nails, meaning, that your congregation is not tormented by them, you keep them far away, then things will go well, you will be saved.”

“But as I said before, What do these nails mean?”

“If you want to know better, have a closer look at the large carriage with the emblem on it. See, this carriage has four compartments, each corresponding to a nail.”

“But what do these compartments mean?”

“Observe that at each one’s entrance there is a poster with an inscription that explains everything.”

I observed the first compartment; I read the poster: *Quorum Deus venter est* [Phil 3:19].

“Now I begin to understand something.”

Then he replied:

“This is the first nail that torments and sends religious congregations to their ruin. It will also decimate you, unless you are careful. Fight against it well and you will see that things will prosper.”

“Now let’s come to the second compartment. Read the inscription for the second nail: *Quaerunt quae sua sunt non quae Iesu Christi* [Phil 2:21]. Here are the ones who seek their own comforts, ease and own interests or perhaps those of their family, and they do not seek the good of the Congregation which is the portion of Jesus Christ. Be careful, keep this scourge away and you will see the Congregation prosper.”

Third compartment. Observe the inscription for the third nail, it says: ‘*Aspidis lingua eorum*. A fatal nail for Congregations: complaining, gossip, those who seek to criticise rightly or wrongly.’”

Fourth compartment: ‘*Cubiculum otiositatis*. Here are the idle ones in large numbers; when idleness starts to enter, the community will be ruined; instead, as long as it keeps working hard, you will be in no danger.’”

“Now observe one more thing in this carriage, which very many take no notice of but I want you to give it very special attention. Do you see that closet that is not part of any compartment, but sticks out a little in all of them? Observe it well: it is like a half compartment or area.”

“I see, but there is only a heap of weeds, tall grass, some cut, tangled.”

“Good, good: this is what I want you to observe.”

“What can I draw from this?”

“Observe well the inscription that is almost hidden.”

I did observe it well and I saw written: *Latet anguis in herba*. “And what is that about?”

“Look, there are certain individuals who lie hidden; they say nothing but talk amongst themselves. Be careful: *latet anguis in herba*. They are a real scourge, real plagues in the Congregation. Bad as they are, if they could be uncovered, they could be corrected. But no, they remain hidden. We don’t notice them and meanwhile things get worse; the poison spreads in their heart and when they eventually become known there is no more time to repair the damage they have already wrought. So learn the things well that you need to keep far away from the Congregation. Keep what you have seen well in mind.

See that these things are explained and explained again at length. By doing so you can be at peace about your Congregation knowing that things will thrive, one day being better than the other.”

I asked him then, so I would not forget any of the the things he had told me, if I could have some time to write them down. “If you wish to try,” he answered, “then write them down; but I fear you have little time. Be careful.”

While he was saying this and I was getting ready to write, I thought I heard a strange noise, agitation all around me. It seemed that the ground below me was shaking. So I looked around to see if something else was happening again and I saw some young people, who had left just a bit earlier, running back to me terrified from everywhere, and then immediately the bellowing of the bull. It was the same bull following them. When the bull reappeared, I was so scared at the sight of it that I woke up.

I have told you this dream now, before you leave, convinced that in all truth it would be a worthy conclusion to the Retreat if we would decide to keep to our motto: *Work and Temperance*; if we all do our best to avoid the four large nails that destroy Congregations: the vice of greed; seeking an easy life; complaining and idleness; to which we should add that each one must be open, frank and confident with his superiors. This way we will do good for our souls and at the same time can also save those entrusted to our care by Divine Providence.

If we wanted to give a special reminder that can serve throughout this year, it would be: seek every way of preserving the queen of virtues, the virtue that safeguards all others; and if we have it, it will never be alone, in fact it will be accompanied by all the others; if we lose it, the others will either not be there at all or will soon be lost. Love this virtue, love it a lot and remember that to keep it you must work and pray: *Non eicitur nisi in jejunio et oratione* [Mt 17:20].

Yes, *prayer* and *mortification*. Especially mortification in looks, in rest, food and especially wine. Not seeking comforts for our bodies, indeed I would almost say mistreating them. No special treatment other than what is necessary; when health demands it, yes. Give the body what is strictly necessary and no



more; because, as St Paul used to say: “*Corpus hoc quod corrumpitur aggravat animam*” [Wis 9:15]. Yes! What did St Paul do? “*Castigo corpus meum et in servitatem redigo ut spiritui inserviat*” [1 Cor 9:27].

So I recommend here what I recommended at the end of the other Retreats: obedience, patience, hope. The other thing is the humility we need to have and inculcate in our young people and others, virtues that would ordinarily be called the foundation of Christian living and perfection.

### **264. Future matters for vocations**

Critical ed. in C. ROMERO, *I sogni di Don Bosco...*, pp. 51-57.

9 May 1879

A huge long battle between our boys and all kinds of other warriors, various kinds with strange weapons. At the end few survived.

Another more intense and horrible battle took place between gigantic monsters and well-armed, well-practised very tall men. They carried a very high, broad standard at the centre of which, written in gold, were these words: *Maria Auxilium Christianorum*. The battle was long and bloody. It was as if those following the standard were invulnerable and they remained masters of the huge plain. They were joined by the youngsters who had survived the previous battle and together they made up a kind of army, each with a crucifix in his right hand as a weapon, and in his left a small standard of Mary Help of Christians, modelled on the one above.

The new soldiers held many manoeuvres on that vast plain, then they split up and left, some to the West, others to the East, a few to the North, many to the South.

Once they had gone the same battles reoccurred, the same manoeuvres and same departures in the same directions.

I knew many of them from the earlier scuffles; the ones that followed were unknown to me but they let me know that they knew me and they asked me many questions.

Then a shower of bright flames came down; it looked like fire of many colours. There was thunder then the sky cleared and I found myself in a lovely garden. A man who looked like St Francis de Sales offered me a book, without saying anything. I asked him who he was. "Read the book", he answered. I opened the book but it was difficult to read. However I managed to identify these precise words:

*For the novices:* Obedience and diligence in everything. By their obedience they will deserve the Lord's blessings and the good will of men. By their diligence they will combat and conquer the snares of spiritual enemies.

*For the professed:* Jealously safeguard the virtue of chastity. Love the good name of the confreres and promote the dignity of the Congregation.

*For the Rectors:* Every care, every effort to observe the Rule and see that the Rule by which everyone is consecrated to God is observed.

*For the Superior:* Total offering of himself to see that he wins both himself and his subjects over to God.

Many other things were printed in the book, but I couldn't read them because the paper seemed as blue as the ink.

"Who are you?" I asked the man again as he stood there calmly looking at me.

"My name is known to all the good, and I have been sent to tell you some things about the future."

"What things?"

"Those written down and others you will ask me about."

"What should I do to promote vocations?"

"The Salesians will have many vocations through their exemplary conduct, by treating their pupils with the greatest charity and insisting on frequent Communion."

"What should be observed in accepting novices?"

“Exclude the lazy and the greedy.”

“And accepting for vows?”

“See that they have a guarantee of being chaste.”

“How do we best preserve a good spirit in our houses?”

“Write, visit, receive and deal with people kindly, and very often in the case of the first superiors.”

“How should we go about the missions?”

“Send individuals whose morality is secure; call back anyone who gives you cause for serious doubts; work at and cultivate indigenous vocations.”

“Is our Congregation going well?”

*“Qui iustus est, iustificetur adhuc [Rev 22:11]; Non progredi est regredi: Qui perseveraverit salvus erit” [Mt 24:13].*

“Will it expand much?”

“As long as the superiors do their part it will grow and no one will be able to stop it from spreading.”

“Will it last a long time?”

“The Congregation will last so long as its members love work and temperance. If one of these two pillars is missing your building will collapse around your superiors and inferiors and their followers.”

Just then four individuals appeared carrying a bier and walking towards me.

“What is this for?” I asked.

“For you.”

“Soon?”

“Don’t ask, just remember that you are mortal.”

“What do you want to signify by this coffin?”

“That you must practise in life what you want your sons to practise after you. This is the legacy, the testament you must leave your sons; but you must prepare it and leave it well accomplished and practised.”

“Will flowers or thorns dominate?”

“There will be many roses, many consolations but some very prickly thorns are imminent and they will bring much bitterness and sorrow. You need to pray a lot.”

“Should we go to Rome?”

“Yes, but slowly, with the greatest prudence and exquisite caution.”

“Is the end of my mortal life imminent?”

“Don’t worry about this. You have the Rule, books, do what you teach others to do. Be vigilant.”

I wanted to ask other questions, but there was a thunderstorm and lightning, and some men, or I should really say terrible monsters were rushing towards me to tear me to pieces. Just then everything went dark and I could see nothing. I thought I was dead and I began shouting out wildly. I awoke and found myself still alive. It was a quarter to five in the morning.

If there is something there that could be to your advantage, take it.

In everything, honour and glory to God forever and ever.

## 265. The ten diamonds

Critical ed. in C. ROMERO, *I sogni di Don Bosco...*, pp. 63-71<sup>63</sup>.

[San Benigno Canavese, 10-11 September 1881]

*Spiritus Sancti gratia illuminet sensus et corda nostra. Amen*

On the night of September 10 (1881), the day the holy Church consecrates to the holy name of Mary, the Salesians gathered at San Benigno Canavese were making their Retreat. On the night of the 10th, while I was sleeping, I

<sup>63</sup> Also called “the dream of San Benigno Canavese”; one of the most important texts for Salesian spirituality.

found myself in a large and splendidly ornate hall. I seemed to be walking up and down with the Rectors of our houses when a man appeared amongst us of such majestic mien that we could not keep our eyes fixed on him. He gazed at us, then without a word began to take a few paces ahead of us.

He wore an imposing mantle with a stole-like collar tied at the neck with a ribbon that hung down in front. On the stole was written in luminous characters: *Pia Salesianorum Societas anno 1881*, and on the ribbon: *Qualis esse debet*.

The august personage wore ten huge diamonds of extraordinary splendour which was what prevented us from fixing our gaze on him, except with out great effort.

Three of the diamonds were on his breast and on one was inscribed *Fides*, on another *Spes* and *Charitas* was inscribed on the one over his heart. The fourth diamond was on the right shoulder where *Labor* was inscribed; over the fifth on the left shoulder one could read *Temperantia*.

The other five diamonds adorned the back of the mantle and were arranged thus: one very large and brighter one was in the middle, like at the centre of a square, and it bore the inscription *Obedientia*. On the first on the right one could read *Votum Paupertatis*. On the second a little lower, *Praemium*. On the left higher up was inscribed *Votum Castitatis* with a dazzling splendour all of its own and looking at it attracted and held the attention like a magnet attracts metal. On the second on the left lower down was written *Ieiunium*. All four of these directed their rays of light towards the diamond at the centre.

*Explanation* - To avoid confusion it should be noted that each diamond had rays like flames small tongues of flame on which various texts could be read: *Faith* carried the words: *Sumite scutum fidei ut adversus insidias diaboli certare possitis*<sup>64</sup>. Another ray had: *Fides sine operibus mortua est*<sup>65</sup>. *Non auditores, sed factores legis regnum Dei possidebunt*<sup>66</sup>.

<sup>64</sup> Carry the shield of faith, in order to fight against the wiles of the devil (cf. Eph 6:16).

<sup>65</sup> Faith without works is dead (Ja 2:20).

<sup>66</sup> It is not listening to the Law of God but keeping it that will make people holy in the sight of God (cf. Rm 2:13).

On the rays of *Hope*: *Sperate in Domino, non in hominibus*<sup>67</sup>. *Semper vestra fixa sint corda ubi vera sunt gaudia*<sup>68</sup>.

On the rays of *Charity*: *Alter alterius onera portate si vultis adimplere legem meam*<sup>69</sup>. *Diligite et diligemini. Sed diligite animas vestras et vestrorum*<sup>70</sup>. *Devote divinum officium persolvatur; Missa attente celebretur; Sanctum Sanctorum peramanter visitetur*<sup>71</sup>.

On the word *Labour*: *Remedium concupiscentiae; Arma potens contra omnes insidias diaboli*<sup>72</sup>.

On *Temperance*: *Si lignum tollis, ignis extinguitur*<sup>73</sup>. *Pactum constitue cum oculis tuis, cum gula, cum somno, ne huiusmodi inimici depraedentur animas vestras*<sup>74</sup>. *Intemperantia et castitas non possunt simul cohabitare*<sup>75</sup>.

On the rays of *Obedience*: *Totius aedificii fundamentum, et sanctitatis compendium*<sup>76</sup>.

On the rays of *Poverty*: *Ipsorum est regnum coelorum*<sup>77</sup>. *Divitiae sunt spinae*<sup>78</sup>. *Paupertas non verbis, sed corde et opere conficitur*<sup>79</sup>. *Ipsa coeli ianuam aperiet et introibit*<sup>80</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> Hope in the Lord, not in men.

<sup>68</sup> May your hearts be constantly aimed at where true joy is. This is taken from the collect of the *Missale Romanum* (*Dom.* IV after Easter).

<sup>69</sup> You should carry each other's troubles and fulfil the law of Christ (cf. Gal 6:2).

<sup>70</sup> Love and you will be loved. But love your souls and those of your neighbour.

<sup>71</sup> Devoutly say the Liturgy of the Hours; celebrate Mass attentively; visit the Holy of Holies with much love.

<sup>72</sup> The remedy for concupiscent; powerful weapon against all the devils' snares.

<sup>73</sup> If you remove the wood the fire dies.

<sup>74</sup> Make a pact with your eyes, throat, sleep, so these enemies do not destroy your souls (cf. Job 31:1).

<sup>75</sup> Lack of temperance and chastity do not go together.

<sup>76</sup> Foundations of the building and compendium of holiness.

<sup>77</sup> Theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:3).

<sup>78</sup> Riches are the thorns.

<sup>79</sup> Poverty is not lived by words but with the heart and deeds.

<sup>80</sup> It will open the gates of heaven and let you in.

On the rays of *Chastity*: *Omnes virtutes veniunt pariter cum illa*<sup>81</sup>. *Qui mundo sunt corde, Dei arcana vident, et Deum ipsum videbunt*<sup>82</sup>.

On the rays of *Reward*: *Si delectat magnitudo praemiorum, non deterreat multitudo laborum*<sup>83</sup>. *Qui mecum patitur, mecum gaudebit*<sup>84</sup>. *Momentaneum est quod patimur in terra, aeternum est quod delectabit in coelo amicos meos*<sup>85</sup>.

On the rays of *Fasting*: *Arma potentissima adversus insidias inimici*<sup>86</sup>. *Omnium virtutum custos*<sup>87</sup>. *Omne genus daemoniorum per ipsum eicitur*<sup>88</sup>.

A large red-coloured ribbon hemmed the bottom of the cloak, and above this ribbon was inscribed: *Argumentum praedicationis, mane, meridie et vespere*<sup>89</sup>. *Colligite fragmenta virtutum et magnum sanctitatis aedificium vobis constituētis*<sup>90</sup>. *Vae vobis qui modica spernitis, paulatim decidetis*<sup>91</sup>.

Up till this moment some of the Rectors were standing, others kneeling; but all were astonished and no one spoke. At this point Fr Rua spoke excitedly — We need to take notes lest we forget. He looked for a pen but couldn't find one; he pulled out his wallet, searched it but there was no pencil. I will remember, said Fr Durando. I want to take notes, added Fr Fagnano, and began to write with the stem of a rose. We were all looking and we could understand what he was writing. When Fr Fagnano stopped writing, Fr Costamagna continued to dictate: *Charity understands all things, sustains all things, conquers all things; let us preach this in word and deed.*

<sup>81</sup> All virtues come with it (cf. Wis 7:11).

<sup>82</sup> Happy the pure in heart, they shall see God (cf. Mt 5:8).

<sup>83</sup> If you are drawn by the magnificence of the reward, have no fear of effort.

<sup>84</sup> Whoever suffers with me will rejoice.

<sup>85</sup> The troubles which are soon over, though they weigh little, train us for the carrying of a weight of glory which is out of all proportion to them. (cf. 2 Cor 4:17).

<sup>86</sup> Powerful weapon against the snares of the devil.

<sup>87</sup> Guardian of all virtues.

<sup>88</sup> All kinds of temptations can be got rid of with this (cf. Mt 17:20).

<sup>89</sup> Topic for preaching morning, noon and evening.

<sup>90</sup> See to the details of virtues and you will build a grand edifice of holiness.

<sup>91</sup> He who despises trifles will sink down little by little (cf. Sir. 19:1).

While Fr Fagnano was writing, we all found ourselves in pitch dark. “Quiet,” said Fr Ghivarello, “let us kneel down and pray and the light will return.” Fr Lasagna began the *Veni Creator*, then the *De Profundis*, *Maria Auxilium Christianorum* etc. to which we responded. When we said *Ora pro nobis*, a light reappeared, surrounding a placard on which we could read: *Pia Salesianorum Societas qualis esse periclitatur anno salutis 1900*<sup>92</sup>.

A moment later the light became brighter so that we could see and recognise one another. In the midst of this brightness the personage we had seen before appeared again but looking distressed like someone on the verge of tears. His mantles had become faded, moth-eaten, in tatters. In place of the diamonds there were gaping holes caused by moths and other insects.

“*Respicite*,” he told us, “*et intelligite*”<sup>93</sup>. I saw that the ten diamonds had become grubs that were hungrily eating up the garment.

Therefore the diamond *Fides* had been replaced by: *somnus et accidia*<sup>94</sup>.

For *Spes* there was *risus et scurrilitas*<sup>95</sup>.

For *Charitas*: *Negligentia in divinis perficiendis*<sup>96</sup>. *Amant et quaerunt quae sua sunt, non quae Iesu Christi*<sup>97</sup>.

For *Temperantia*: *Gula et quorum Deus venter est*<sup>98</sup>.

For *Labor*: *Somnus, furtum et otiositas*<sup>99</sup>.

*In place of Obedientia* there was nothing but a large, deep hole and nothing written.

For *Castitas*: *Concupiscentia oculorum et superbia vitae*<sup>100</sup>.

<sup>92</sup> The pious Salesian Society as it risks being in 1900.

<sup>93</sup> Look and learn.

<sup>94</sup> Sleep and sloth.

<sup>95</sup> Laughter and scurrilous words.

<sup>96</sup> Negligence in sacred celebrations.

<sup>97</sup> All the rest seem more interested in themselves than in Jesus Christ (Phil 2:21).

<sup>98</sup> Greed; they make foods into their god (Phil 3:19).

<sup>99</sup> Sleep, theft, idleness.

<sup>100</sup> Concupiscentia of the eyes and pride of life (1 Jn 2:16).



For *Poverty* there was: *Lectum, habitus, potus et pecunia*<sup>101</sup>.

For *Praemium*: *Pars nostra erunt quae sunt super terram*<sup>102</sup>.

For *Ieiunium* there was a hole but nothing written.

We were all terrified at the sight. Fr Lasagna fainted, Fr Cagliero went as white as a sheet and leaning against a chair cried out: “Is it possible that things have come to this?” Fr Lazzerio and Fr Guidazio were holding onto each other to stop from falling. Fr Francesia, Count Cays, Fr Barberis and Fr Leveratto were kneeling, rosaries in hand and praying.

Then we heard a sombre voice: “*Quomodo mutatus est color optimus*<sup>103</sup>.”

But in the darkness something remarkable occurred. We suddenly found ourselves enveloped in darkness, in the midst of which appeared a bright light in human form. We could not look at it, but we could see that it was a handsome young man dressed in a white cloak woven through with gold and silver thread. It was hemmed all around with very bright diamonds. He was of imposing and charming mien and he came towards us and addressed us with these exact words:

*“Servi et instrumenta Dei Omnipotentis, attendite et intelligite. Confortamini et estote robusti. Quod vidistis et audistis est coelestis admonitio quae nunc vobis et fratribus vestris facta est; animadvertite et intelligite sermonem. Iacula praevisa minus feriunt, et praeveniri possunt. Quot sunt verba signata, tot sint argumenta praedicationis. Indesinenter praedicate opportune et importune. Sed quae praedicatis, constanter facite, adeo ut opera vestra sint velut lux quae sicuti tuta traditio ad fratres et filios vestros pertranseat de generatione in generationem. Attendite et intelligite: – Estote oculati in tironibus acceptandis; fortes in colendis; prudentes in admittendis. Omnes probate; sed tantum quod bonum est tenete. Leves et mobiles dimittite. Attendite et intelligite: – Meditatio matutina et vespertina sit indesinenter de observantia Constitutionum. Si id feceritis numquam vobis deficiet Omnipotentis auxilium. Spectaculum facti eritis mundo et angelis et tunc gloria vestra erit gloria Dei. Qui videbunt saeculum hoc exiens et alterum*

<sup>101</sup> Rest, clothing, drink and money.

<sup>102</sup> Our earnings are earthly goods.

<sup>103</sup> Oh how the old gold has tarnished (Lam 4:1).

*incipiens, ipsi dicent de vobis: – A Domino factum est istud et est mirabile in oculis nostris. Tunc omnes fratres vestri et filii vestri una voce cantabunt: – Non nobis, Domine, non nobis; sed nomini tuo da gloriam*<sup>104</sup>.

These last words were sung, and to the voice of the one speaking were added a multitude of other voices so melodious and resonant that we were left benumbed, and to prevent ourselves from swooning, we joined in the singing. As soon as the singing finished it all went dark. Then I awoke, and I am telling you that it was daylight.

*Reminder* – This dream lasted almost the entire night and in the morning I was completely worn out. Nevertheless for fear of forgetting I got up quickly and took some notes that served to remind me of what I have spoken of on this day of the presentation of Mary in the Temple.

It was not possible to recall everything. Amongst many other things I could detect with certainty that the Lord shows us great mercy. Our Society is blessed by Heaven, but he wants us to do our part. The threatened evils will be prevented if we preach on the virtues and vices noted there: if we practise what we preach, we shall be able to hand on to our confreres a practical tradition of what we have done and shall do.

I was able to see that there are many thorns imminent, many efforts, but they will be followed by many great consolations. Around 1890 there will be great fear; around 1895 there will be a great triumph. *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis.*

<sup>104</sup> Servants and instrument of almighty God, listen and understand. Have courage and be strong. What you have seen and heard is a warning from heaven, sent to you and your brothers now. Pay attention and understand well what it is saying to you. Blows that are foreseen do less damage and can be prevented. The words indicated are topics for preaching. Preach tirelessly, in season and out of season. But practise what you preach, so that your works are like light which, radiating in the form of safe tradition, shines on your brothers and sons from generation to generation. Listen well and understand: — Be careful in accepting novices, strong in cultivating them, prudent in admitting them [to profession]. Test them all but keep only the best. Send the light and fickle ones away. Listen well and understand: — Meditation morning and evening should constantly be on observance of the Constitutions. If you do this the help of the Almighty will never be lacking. You will be a spectacle for the world and the angels and then your glory will be the glory of God. Those who see the end of this century and the beginning of the next will tell you: — this is the work of the Lord and it is admirable in our eyes. Then all your brothers and sons will sing: “Not to us O Lord, not to us, but to your name be glory.”

SECTION THREE

**GUIDELINES FOR A COHERENT AND ACTIVE  
CHRISTIANITY**

**Presentation**

*This third section comprises a choice of texts addressed to the people, committed Catholics, lay and clerical Salesian Cooperators. Don Bosco insists on the spirit that should animate the good Christian who is in the world, active in charity, coherent and consistent in faith.*

*Nineteenth century Catholicism, in every social class, had a marked spiritual and practical fervour to it along with a keen sense of vocation in the Church and in society urging one to evangelical witness, militancy and works of charity. In fertile ground such as this, keen pastoral, educational and social initiatives sprang up; lay associations, new kinds of male and female consecrated life emerged, along with any number of missionary and apostolic enterprises. A strong sense of ecclesial cohesion and shared responsibility animated these generous Catholics inspired by a zealous, enterprising, creative and well-formed clergy dedicated to their mission.*

*Don Bosco's works benefited broadly from such a climate. Generous clergy and lay people, attracted by the saint's charity, generously lent a hand from the earliest days of the Oratory, without ever abandoning him and to the point of becoming an integral and strategic part of his family. Their awareness of their Christian vocation made them desirous of a more ardent interior life and to cooperate regularly in the Salesian mission.*

*Don Bosco never ceased nurturing this yearning for educational and apostolic charity, not only by animating and organising their cooperation but also by looking after them spiritually. The texts here show his commitment to promoting a holistic, devout and active view of Christian life: God's merciful and tender, unlimited love deserved the response of lively faith and ardent charity in imitation of Jesus Christ. Christians are urged to a more aware and cultivated interior life sustained by the grace of the sacraments, united to God in prayer "through holy thoughts and*

*devout sentiments*<sup>105</sup>, detached from the allurements of the world and aiming for holiness in the exercise of virtue. They are encouraged to trust in Providence, witness to the Gospel in their daily life, “exercising their charity by working for the salvation of souls” and helping one another “mutually in doing good and keeping evil at bay.”<sup>106</sup>

*This view also emerges in correspondence and advice given to friends, lay people and priests. According to Don Bosco the Catholic is called to be a leaven in society and in the warp and woof of daily life, a witness to his or her own faith, carrying out works of charity. They are to be generous and fearless in offering themselves, promoting piety, working for the Christian education of the young, spreading good press, looking after vocations, supporting missionary activity.*

*This section has three parts.*

*In the first part (Spiritual resources of the Christian) there are six of Don Bosco’s texts by way of example, aimed at the spiritual formation of the lay Catholic (nos. 266-271), simple essays on a broad formative and instructional involvement with the people. The best examples are to be found in certain of the saint’s publications: the Key of Paradise (1856), the Month of May (1858), the Catholic Companion (1868).*

*The second part has two of Don Bosco’s conferences (nos. 272 and 273) illustrating the Salesian Cooperator’s vocation and the key role entrusted to it for the development of Salesian work.*

*The third part contains twelve examples of letters (nos. 274-285) to friends, benefactors and Cooperators dealing with advice and topics on spiritual life.*

<sup>105</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Il cattolico provveduto per le pratiche di pietà con analoghe istruzioni secondo il bisogno dei tempi*. Torino, Tip. dell’Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1868, p. 1 (OE XIX, 9).

<sup>106</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Cooperatori salesiani, ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume ed alla civile società*. San Pier d’Arena, Tipografia e Libreria di S. Vincenzo de’ Paoli 1877, pp. 4 and 27 (OE XXVIII, 342 and 365).

## 1. SPIRITUAL RESOURCES OF THE CHRISTIAN

*All the means of salvation are to be found in the Church, where holiness and charity flourish. Don Bosco constantly invites adults and young people to cooperate with the action of grace, hope and charity, generously offering themselves through constant prayer, and by frequenting the sacraments but especially by imitating Jesus Christ in a virtuous life of charitable works.*

### 266. Faith, hope and charity

Critical ed. in [Giovanni BOSCO], *Il cattolico provveduto per le pratiche di pietà con analoghe istruzioni secondo il bisogno dei tempi*. Torino, Tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1868, pp. 87-91 (OE XIX, 95-99)<sup>107</sup>.

St Paul the Apostle says that without faith it is impossible to please God: “*sine fide impossibile est placere Deo*” [Heb 11:6]. Let us then always keep the flame of faith alive in our hearts. We need faith to enlighten us throughout our lives. Faith must be the food that sustains us in spiritual life as Holy Scripture tells us: “*iustus ex fide vivit*”, the just man lives by faith. So that the faith we received from God at holy Baptism may not diminish in our hearts we should often stir it up. To do this we should often make acts of faith, protest with all our heart that we firmly believe the main truths of the Catholic religion and all that God wishes us to be taught by means of the Church. We do this by reciting the words of the act of faith.

But, dear Christian, faith is not enough for our eternal salvation, because we also need the virtue of hope by which we abandon ourselves into God's hands, like a child in the arms of its tender mother. We need to obtain many favours from God and usually God does not grant them unless we hope for them. How many sins we have committed! We therefore need God to show us mercy and forgive us. We constantly need the help of God's grace to live as holy people on this earth. Now, God wants to grant this mercy, this forgiveness, this help from his grace but only to those who hope for it. God has prepared a sea of delights for us in the next life but nobody will be there

<sup>107</sup> Don Bosco wrote this small work with Fr John Bonetti's help.

to enjoy that unless they have the virtue of hope. And for this we must make frequent acts of this virtue, reviving in our hearts a great trust in everything we will obtain from God's goodness through the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ. To reawaken and keep this virtue alive in us let us devoutly recite the words of the act of hope.

Of all the virtues, then, charity is the greatest and the most excellent. The others could not obtain eternal salvation without it. But in what does this virtue of charity consist? It consists in loving God above all other things and our neighbour as ourselves for love of him. Love for God then, and for our neighbour must always be a flame burning in our heart. We must primarily love God with all our heart because He is a most perfect spirit, a being of infinite goodness, our highest good. We must also love Him because He has filled our lives with countless benefits. He created us out of nothing. He saw that we were born into the Catholic religion which is the only one that can lead us to the gates of salvation. Although we have offended Him so many times, He did not strike us dead as He could have done and as He has done for others who did not repent after sinning. Out of love for us He came down to earth from Heaven amidst sinners. He suffered a most terrible death for us. Out of an excess of love He left us the holy Eucharist as our food. And finally, He has prepared a wonderful place for us in Heaven for all eternity. And who, considering these cases of God's love for us, would not feel his heart burning with love for God?

But we must also love our neighbour as ourselves. Everyone in the world is our brother, children of the same father, who is God. They all have a right to be loved by us. Jesus Christ made a direct command of this, saying "*hoc est praeceptum meum ut diligatis invicem* [Jn 15:12], This is my commandment, that you love one another." We must not only love our friends but also our enemies. Our Divine Saviour gave us the example by forgiving and praying for those who crucified him. May the flame of this charity be always alight in us. This is why we make frequent acts of this virtue by reciting the words of the act of charity.

## 267. Jesus Christ, every Christian's model

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *La chiave del paradiso in mano al cattolico che pratica i doveri di buon cristiano*. Torino, Tip. Paravia e Comp. 1856, pp. 20-23 (OE VIII, 20-23).

One day the Lord said to Moses: "Remember to carry out my orders well and do everything according to the pattern I showed you on the mountain." God says the same to Christians. Jesus Christ is the pattern or model to be copied by every Christian. Nobody can boast of belonging to Jesus Christ unless he makes the effort to imitate him. So in the life and actions of the Christians we should find the life and actions of Jesus Christ himself.

The Christian should pray, since Jesus prayed humbly, confidently in recollection upon the mountain.

The Christian should be accessible as was Jesus Christ to the poor, the ignorant, the children. He should not be proud, pretentious, arrogant. He should be all things to all people in order to win everyone over to Christ.

The Christian should take care of his neighbour since Jesus Christ took care of his followers. Therefore his dealings should be edifying, charitable, serious, kind and simple.

The Christian should be humble as was Jesus Christ, who knelt to wash his disciples' feet including Judas, even though he knew he would betray him. The true Christian considers himself less than others and servant of all.

The Christian should obey as Jesus Christ obeyed, be submissive as he was to Mary and St Joseph. He obeyed his heavenly Father until death, death on the cross. The true Christian obeys his parents, his employers, his superiors because he recognises God himself in them; they stand in for God.

In eating and drinking the true Christian should be as Jesus Christ was at the wedding feast of Cana in Galilee, and at Bethany, meaning sober, temperate, attentive to others' needs and more concerned with spiritual nourishment than with dishes that nourish the body.

The good Christian should be with his friends in the same way Jesus Christ was with St John and St Lazarus. He should love them in the Lord and out of

love for God; he should warmly confide in them the secrets of his heart, and if they should fall into evil he should make every effort to have them return to the state of grace.

The true Christian should be resigned in suffering privations and poverty as Jesus Christ suffered them, since he did not even have a place to lay down his head. He should know how to put up with contradictions and calumny as Jesus Christ tolerated them from the Scribes and Pharisees, leaving it to God to justify him. He should know how to put up with insults and slights, as Jesus did when they struck him, spat in his face and insulted him in a thousand ways in the Praetorium.

The true Christian should be ready to put up with sufferings of the spirit, as Jesus Christ did when he was betrayed by one of his own, denied by another and abandoned by them all.

The true Christian must be ready to patiently accept any persecution, any illness, even death, as Jesus Christ did. Crowned with painful thorns, his body lacerated from blows, his feet and hands pierced by nails, he consigned his soul peacefully into his Father's hands in heaven.

The true Christian should be able to say with the Apostle St Paul: "It is not I who live, but Jesus Christ who lives in me." Whoever follows Jesus Christ according to the pattern described here, can be certain of being glorified with Christ in Heaven one day and reigning with him in eternity.

### **268. Prayer**

Critical ed. in [G. BOSCO], *Il cattolico provveduto...*, pp. 1-3, 7-13 (OE XIX, 9-11. 15-21).

Prayer means lifting up our hearts to God and engaging with him through holy thoughts and devout sentiments. Therefore every thought about God and every glance towards him is prayer when joined with pious sentiments. Whoever thinks of the Lord and his infinite perfection and feels a sense of joy, veneration, love, admiration, is praying. Whoever considers the great benefits received from his Creator, Father, the One who has preserved him, and feels a sense of gratitude, is praying. Whoever, amidst dangers to his innocence and



virtue, is aware of his own weakness and asks God to help him, is praying. And finally whoever is contrite of heart and turns to God, remembering that he has insulted his Father, offended his Judge and lost his greatest good, and then begs pardon and promises to amend his behaviour, is praying.

Therefore it is so easy to pray. In any place or at any moment, each one can lift up his heart to God by means of pious sentiments. Exquisite and especially refined language is not needed, just simple thoughts accompanied by devout inner feelings. Prayer that consists only of thoughts, for example a quiet admiration of divine greatness and omnipotence, is an inward prayer or meditation or contemplation. If it is externalised by words it is called vocal prayer.

One or other of these ways of praying should be dear to the Christian who loves God. A good child willingly thinks of his father and lets the affections of his heart flow freely. So how then could a Christian not willingly think of God, his most loving Father, and of Jesus Christ his merciful Redeemer, without showing outward signs of reverence, recognition, love and dear confidence, praying to him for help and grace? ...

For the prayer of the Christian to be fully acceptable to God and infallibly obtain its effect, certain conditions are needed:

1. Whoever prays must be in the state of sanctifying grace, meaning he must not have any mortal sin on his conscience that has not been cancelled through sacramental confession or through contrition. Because, as Scripture tells us, "The Lord is far from the wicked man, but hears the prayer of the just." (Pr 15:29). Despite that, whoever is in the state of mortal sin, if he at least has the desire to correct himself and prays with the intention of honouring God, although he has no right to be heard because he is not in God's friendship, nevertheless his prayer is highly useful and through the infinite divine goodness will not fail to obtain graces.

2. One should pray inspired by keen faith, *because without faith it is impossible to please God* (Heb 11:6) and where faith is lacking one does not pray in a heartfelt manner, and does not give honour to the goodness, wisdom and omnipotence of God as he demands of us.

3. One should pray with humility and feel both the need of grace and one's total lack of any merit or entitlement to receiving what is asked for, because *God opposes the proud and gives generously to the humble* (Jas 4:6).

4. The Christian must also reserve a certain order regarding the things asked for in prayer. "*Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on his righteousness, and all these other things will be given you as well.*" (Mt 6:33), Jesus Christ tells us. Therefore we must first seek spiritual goods like forgiveness for sinners, enlightenment to know the divine will and our errors, strength, an increase and perseverance in virtue. After that we can also ask for temporal goods, health, the means for managing our life, heavenly blessings on our occupations, our affairs, our farms and our families, and that misfortunes, pains and afflictions may be kept far from us. This is what the fourth request in the *Our Father* teaches us as well as the example of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Olives. But the request must be made on condition that it is God's will and will not harm our souls. "*Father, let it be as you, not I, would have it.*" (Mt 26:39).

5. One needs to pray in the name of Jesus Christ, aware that no grace can be obtained from God except through the merits of our Divine Redeemer.

6. One needs to pray with the enlightened hope of being listened to. Whoever prays doubting that he will be heard is insulting God who assures us that we will be heard so long as we pray with a keen faith, that is with the firm hope that he will hear us and fulfil our request. So when we ask a favour of him, let us abandon ourselves to him as a child abandons himself into the hands of his dear mother, certain that she will help him. Prayer of this kind is all-powerful, and it has never been heard in this world, nor will it be heard, that one who has recourse to God in trust will not be satisfied.

Our Divine Saviour reassures us thus: "If you have faith, anything you ask for in prayer you will receive." The Apostle St James warns the Christian to pray without hesitating and doubting, if he wants to obtain what he asks for.

7. Our prayers should be united with the prayer and merits of our Blessed Lady, the angels and the saints in heaven, the souls in purgatory and all the just on earth.

8. Finally, one needs to persevere in prayer according to what Jesus Christ recommends to us. He says: “*You need to pray always, without ceasing*” and if we ask him how long we have to keep praying, he answers: “Until the end of your life.”

Many Christians think their prayers are useless either because they do not immediately see their effect or because they do not gain the specific graces they were asking for. But we need to know that God responds to our prayers in the way and at the time he sees it most opportune and convenient for the sanctification of our souls and the progress of his kingdom, without letting us know this way or this time. When we are in the other world we will clearly see that not one word of our prayers ever went without its effect. In fact any time our prayers lack result, the fault is ours for not praying with the correct attitude.

To conclude this brief instruction, note that one cannot pray well without preparation. Before praying, prepare your soul and do not be like the man who tempts God (Sir 18:23). Reflect on what an honour it is to come before the Lord, King of heaven and earth, and reflect too on what you want to ask God; choose the kind of prayer adapted to your circumstances and needs; put yourself in God’s presence and see that the words you say by memory or read from a book come from the heart. In this way you will pray in spirit and in truth.

Although you can pray devoutly in any position, it would still be good to choose one which gives the best outward signs of your inward faith and devotion. This is how we see the Divine Saviour, the Apostle Paul, the publican, Mary Magdalene, Moses, Solomon, Daniel, Micah praying, with hands joined, kneeling, looking up to Heaven as a sign of faith or to the earth in humility. When praying in church we must have an especially devout and respectful attitude, both out of respect for the Blessed Sacrament on the altar, where Jesus Christ is present, and to not give bad example to others whom we should edify through our outward approach.

## 269. The holy sacraments

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata ad uso del popolo*. Torino, Tip. Paravia e Compagnia 1858, pp. 55-60 (OE X, 349-354).

1. The more we think about our holy Catholic Religion the more we see its beauty, grandeur and the more we see the goodness, wisdom and mercy of God who is its founder. This appears so outstandingly in the holy sacraments. It is a truth of Faith that there are seven sacraments, no more nor less; they were instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ while he was in this world. These sacraments are: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Orders and Matrimony. These sacraments are also sensible signs established by God to give our souls the graces necessary for our salvation, meaning the seven sacraments are like seven channels by which heavenly favours are communicated from the divinity to humanity.

2. By means of Baptism we are welcomed into the bosom of holy Mother Church, cease to be slaves of the devil, become in fact children of God and therefore heirs to heaven. In Confirmation we receive the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and become perfect Christians. In the Eucharist Jesus gives us his Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity under the species of consecrated bread and wine. This is the divine power's greatest miracle. By an act of immense love for us, God found a way to give our souls spiritual food in the right proportion, giving us his very divinity. In Penance the sins we committed after Baptism are forgiven. In Extreme Unction or the holy oils, God came to help the sick and by means of holy anointing gives us the graces necessary to cancel our sins, giving us the strength to patiently bear our illness, die a good death when God decides to call us into eternity, and also to give us bodily health if this would be good for the salvation of our soul. In the sacrament of Orders or Ordination God gives his sacred ministers the graces needed to acquire the degree of holiness they need. Also to be able to guide and instruct faithful Christians in the truths of the Faith, fleeing vice and practising virtue. Finally, Matrimony is the sacrament that gives spouses the grace to live in peace and charity between themselves and to bring their children up in the Faith when God in his infinite mercy decides to grant them.

3. So, good Christian, here in brief are the means that Jesus Christ has instituted for our salvation. He gained great benefits for us through his incarnation, but all these benefits are communicated through his holy sacraments. In the meantime if you are not careful to make use of these means of salvation according to the state you find yourself in, you will not participate in the great mystery of redemption and therefore cannot save your soul. Pause for a while and consider how you have corresponded to these great signs of divine love. If your conscience accuses you of some sin try to apply the remedy as soon as possible especially by preparing yourself to make a good confession and a good communion.

*Example* - In the lives of the Fathers we read one fact that demonstrates how much piety helps us in our spiritual and temporal interests. Two cobblers were living in the city of Alexandria in Egypt; one had a large family, but while working to support it he also very much looked after matters of the soul, following the advice of Christ who said: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his justice, and God will provide the rest." He attended church regularly, that is he went willingly to listen to God's Word, and was frequent with confession and communion and other exercises of Christian piety. It seemed that God increased his temporal goods. The other did the opposite, meaning he was concerned about temporal matters, not worrying about attending church and looking after his soul. His business affairs also went to ruin and although he was alone, without a family and worked more than his friend, nonetheless he struggled to earn enough to keep himself. Looking at his neighbour who seemed to be maintaining his family with less effort, he began wondering and felt envious of him. One day he could not resist saying to him: "How is it with all this - I work much more than you and still I don't earn enough to keep myself while you work less and can look after yourself and your family?" At this question, wanting to get his friend to go to church, he answered thus: "You know, my brother, that I go to a certain place where there is money, and that's why I am rich. If you would come with me I will call you each day and we can go half and half in whatever we find." "Gladly," the other said and went with him to church every day. God was pleased with this and he soon became rich and well off. Then his friend said to him: "Now you see,

my brother, how much good it has done to you going to church! You know that you find God's grace here, the best treasure in the world, and as you have experienced yourself, if one cares about God, then God cares about him. So continue as you have started, go to church and God will not fail you." Christians often seek their fortune in a sinful way, living as enemies of God, not going to church, not praying, not going to the sacraments, not keeping Sundays holy and meanwhile they want God to make them prosper and make them happy. Fools! Do they not know that sin is what makes people miserable and unhappy? "*Miseros facit peccatum.*" (Pr 14).

*Prayer:* Jesus, Lord who redeemed us / the sacraments lead me to heaven.  
// Virgin mother of love, / kindle the flame of faith in me.

### 270. Confession

Critical ed. in G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 124-129 (OE X, 418-422).

1. We have a wonderful sign of God's mercy towards sinners in the Sacrament of Confession. If God had said that he would forgive our sins only through Baptism and would no longer forgive those committed after we have received this Sacrament, how many Christians would certainly go to perdition! But knowing our great misery, God established another sacrament with which sins committed after Baptism are remitted. This is the Sacrament of Confession. This is how the Gospel speaks: "Eight days after his Resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples and said to them: peace be with you. As the heavenly Father sent me, so I am sending you, with the faculty given me by my heavenly Father that whatever you judge to be for the salvation of souls, I give to you. Then the Saviour breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained.'" Everyone understands that the words 'retain' or 'not retain' mean giving or not giving absolution. This is the great faculty given by God to his Apostles and their successors in the administration of the holy Sacraments. From these words of the Saviour comes an obligation for the sacred ministers to hear confessions, and at the same time there is an equal obligation for the Christian to confess his sins so that we may know

when to give or not to give absolution, what advice to suggest to make up for the evil done, in short to give all the fatherly advice judged necessary to make reparation for the evils of one's past life and no longer commit them in the future.

2. Nor was confession only practised at a certain time or in a certain place. As soon as the Apostles began preaching the Gospel, they began to practise the Sacrament of Penance. We read that when St Paul was preaching in Ephesus, many of the faithful who had already embraced the faith came to the feet of the Apostles and confessed their sins. "*Confitentes et annunciantes actus suos*" [Acts 19:18]. From the time of the Apostles until now the practice of this great Sacrament has always been observed. The Church has always condemned as heretics those who had the foolhardiness to deny this truth. Nor has it ever advised anyone that they can be dispensed of the need for it. Rich and poor, servants and masters, kings, monarchs, emperors, priests, bishops, the supreme pontiffs themselves, all must kneel at the feet of a sacred minister to obtain pardon for the sins they have committed after baptism. But alas! How many Christians so rarely or so badly profit from this Sacrament! There are those who come without examining themselves, others who confess nonchalantly without sorrow or good resolutions, and others who keep silent about important things in Confession or do not fulfil the obligations imposed by the confessor. These are taking the most holy and useful of things and using it for their own ruin. St Teresa had a fearful vision about this. She saw souls falling into hell like snow falling on the mountains. Terrified by such a revelation, she asked Jesus Christ for an explanation and received the answer that they were lost because of the bad confessions they had made in life.

3. Courage, O Christians, and let us profit from this Sacrament of mercy, but let us profit from it with the appropriate dispositions. First we make a diligent examination of our faults, and then we confess them all, what we are certain of, what we are doubtful about as we know it, but with great sorrow for having committed them. And let us promise never to commit them again in future. But especially, let the results of our confessions be seen through the improvement in our life. God tells us in the Gospel that we shall know the goodness of the tree from its fruits, and so from the improvement in our

lives the value or otherwise of our confessions will be seen: “*ex fructibus eorum cognoscetis eos*” [Mt 7:20].

*Example* - A young man from Montmirail in France had lived as a good Christian until he was fifteen, when he had the misfortune to fall in with bad companions. Improper conversations, reading bad books left him wallowing in the depths of lack of belief and loose living. His parents tried to guide him to better things, but unable to succeed, they went to church on the evening of the Immaculate Conception (December 8, 1839) and recommended him to the prayers of the members of the Sacred Heart of Mary Sodality. On that very same evening, the young man returned home, and without saying anything, which was not usual for him, he went to bed. He wasn't thinking about Mary, he was thinking about himself. On December 10, almost beside himself, he called on his father and said: “Father, I am unhappy and suffering so much. I have neither eaten nor slept for thirty six hours. I am like an angry lion and know neither what to say nor what to do; I have to go and see the priest.” He left, went to the parish priest, and his conscience all filled with remorse, he begged him to hear his confession. “Please,” he begged the priest, “hear my confession immediately. I cannot live in this state any longer.” The parish priest encouraged him, comforted him and then soon heard his sorrowful confession. When he had received absolution, he immediately felt his heart filled with such consolation that he could not keep it to himself. As soon as he arrived home he explained to his father the grace he had received and the heavenly peace he was experiencing. What he still felt so bad about was seeing those whom he had drawn into sin through his scandal. Filled with Christian courage, and with no further care about what his old friends might say, he told them what had happened to him, the consolation he felt after his confession and what he could to get them to do the same. So to put things in a few words this new result of Mary's mercy did as the penitent David did when he tried to win over souls for God to make reparation for the scandal he had given. “*Docebo iniquos vias tuas*” [Ps 51:13].

*Brief prayer:* Obtain for me from God, Mother of love / real sorrow for my sins.



## 271. Holy communion

Critical ed. in G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 139-144 (OE X, 433-438).

1. Do you understand, Christian, what it means to go to Holy Communion? It means approaching the table of the angels to receive the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, given as food for our souls under the species of consecrated bread and wine. At Mass, when the priest says the words of consecration over the bread and wine, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The words our Divine saviour used when he instituted this Sacrament are: “This is my body, this is my blood”, “*hoc est corpus meum, hic est calix sanguinis mei*” [Lk 22:19-20]. These are the very words the priest uses in Jesus’ name in the sacrifice of the holy Mass. Therefore when we go to communion we receive Jesus Christ himself in his Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, that is, true God and true Man, alive in heaven as he is. It is not an image of him, a representation like in a statue or crucifix, but it is Jesus Christ himself as he was born of the Immaculate Virgin Mary and as he died for us on the cross. Jesus Christ himself assures us of this real presence of himself in the Eucharist when he said: “This is my body, given up for you”, “*corpus, quod pro vobis tradetur*” [Jn 6:51]. “This is the living bread come down from Heaven”, “*hic est panis vivus, qui de caelo descendit.*” “The bread that I will give is my flesh. The drink that I give is my true blood. Whoever does not eat of this body nor drink of this blood, has no life within him.”

2. Having instituted this Sacrament for the good of our souls, Jesus wants us to approach him often. Here are the words he invites us with: “Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest, *venite ad me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos*” [Mt 11:28]. Elsewhere he tells the Hebrews: “Your fathers ate the manna in the desert and died; but the one who eats the food that the manna represented, the food that I give, the food that is my body and blood, he will never die. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I in him; my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.” Who could oppose these loving invitations from the Divine Saviour? To respond to these invitations Christians in early times went daily to listen to God’s word and went to communion each day. It is in

this Sacrament that the martyrs found their strength, virgins their fervour, the saints their courage. And how often do we approach this heavenly food? If we examine what Jesus Christ wanted and our own need we should go to communion very often. Since manna was the daily bodily food for the Hebrews all the time they were in the desert, until they reached the promised land, so Holy Communion should be our comfort, our daily food amidst the dangers of this world to lead us to the promised land of Paradise. St Augustine says thus: “If we ask God for bread for our bodies every day, why do we not try to feed ourselves daily with spiritual bread through holy Communion?” Saint Philip Neri encouraged Christians to go to confession each week and go to communion more often according to the advice of their confessor. And finally, holy Church manifests its keen desire for frequent communion at the Council of Trent where it says: “It would be a most desirable thing for each Christian faithful to be in such a state of conscience as to be able to go to Holy Communion each time he attends Mass.” Pope Clement XIII granted the following favour to encourage Christians to go frequently to confession and communion: “Christian faithful who have the praiseworthy habit of going to Confession weekly can gain a plenary indulgence whenever they go to Holy Communion.”

3. Someone might say: “I am too much of a sinner.” If you are a sinner, try to return to grace through the Sacrament of Confession and then go to Holy Communion and you will have much help. Another might say: “I go to communion rarely so I can be more fervent.” He is fooling himself. Things done rarely are mostly done badly. If your needs in other things are great, then so must you seek frequent help for your souls. Some might add: “I am spiritually sick and do not dare go to communion often.” Jesus Christ answers: *“those who are well have no need of a doctor”*, so those who have greater woes, those are the ones who should go more often to see the doctor. So courage, Christian, if you want to do something more glorious for God, the most pleasing thing for all the saints in heaven, the most effective for overcoming temptations, the most certain thing to do to persevere in doing good, is certainly Holy Communion.

*Example* - a young lad called Dominic Savio, out of a keen desire to please Mary, prayed to her daily but every Saturday he went to Holy Communion in her honour. He called her his dearest mother. In 1856 he celebrated Mary's month with such fervour that his friends were all edified. Every day he asked Mary to take him from the world rather than he should lose the virtue of purity. On the final day he asked for just one grace: to be able to make a good Communion before dying. The holy Virgin heard his prayer. Nine months later (9 March 1857) he died at fifteen years of age after receiving holy Viaticum with great tenderness and devotion. In the moments between receiving Viaticum and his death, he kept repeating: "O Mary, you listened to me, I am so rich. I ask nothing else of you than that you help me in these final moments of my life and accompany me from this life into eternity." Almost as soon as he had said these words, his soul flew to heaven certainly, accompanied by Mary to whom he was so devoted in life.

*Brief prayer:* I adore you at every moment, / living Bread from heaven, / great Sacrament.

## II. COOPERATORS IN THE SALESIAN MISSION

*The first text (no. 272) included here is an extract from a long conference which Don Bosco gave at the opening of the Patronage de St Pierre in Nice, on 12 March 1877. After summing up the events which led to the founding of the first Salesian House in France, thanks to the involvement of a group of lay people belonging to the St Vincent de Paul Society, supported by Bishop Pietro Sola, the saint said that the work was only set up because of the fruitful cooperation between the Salesians and the Cooperators. Then, pointing out the principal purpose of the Institution (“the good of humanity and the salvation of souls”), he concluded with the reflection that we offer here, focused entirely on practical charity, works of mercy, essential features of true Christian discipleship and on the eternal reward that comes from it (cf. Mt 25:34-35).*

*The second document (no. 273) is a transcription of the first conference Don Bosco gave the Cooperators in Turin, on 16 May 1878. The text is important because the founder, going back over thirty five years of history of the Oratory, shows the decisive role cooperation played (understood in its broadest sense) in realising the providential works which could not have been set up without the substantial contribution of a group of generous collaborators, benefactors and Cooperators. From the moment he settled in the poor house at Valdocco, directed to “troublesome boys” in the area, until Salesian work expanded worldwide, “with the help of many people, Cooperators, we could do things that someone alone could never have done.” Now that Divine Providence had broadened the horizons of the the Salesian mission, the function of the Cooperators was more decisive than ever: without them, Don Bosco said, the Salesians “could not exercise their zeal” since “individuals are not enough, we need means” and these are entrusted to Salesian cooperation. The vibrant concluding appeal defines the vocation of the Salesian Family in a complete way: “Do you want to do something good? Educate the young. Do you want to do something holy? Educate the young. Do you want to do something very holy? Educate the young. Do you want to do something divine? Educate the young. Indeed this is the most divine of things.”*

## 272. Charity to the poor and the little ones

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Inaugurazione del Patronato di S. Pierre in Nice. Scopo del medesimo ... con appendice sul sistema preventivo della educazione della gioventù*. Torino, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1877, pp. 34-40 (OE XXVIII, 412-418).

[12 March 1877]

God is infinitely rich and is infinitely generous. Since he is infinitely rich he can give us immense recompense for anything done out of love for him; as a Father who is infinitely generous he repays everything we do out of love for him with good and abundant measure. The Gospel says that you will not give a glass of cold water to one of the least of mine, in my name, without having a reward.

Almsgiving, God tells us in the Book of Tobit, frees us from death, purges our soul of sin, and brings us mercy in God's sight and leads us to eternal life. "*Elemosina est quae a morte liberat: purgat peccata, facit invenire misericordiam et vitam aeternam.*" [Tob 12:9].

Amongst the great rewards there is also this, that the Divine Saviour regards as done to himself any act of charity done to some poor unfortunate. If we saw the Divine Saviour walking begging in our squares, or knocking on the doors of our houses, would there be a Christian who would not generously offer him every last penny in his purse? The Saviour is also represented in the person of the poor, the most abandoned. Everything you do even for the most despicable, he says, you do for me. So it is no longer poor children who are asking for charity but Jesus in the person of these poor children.

What can we say then of the exceptional recompense that God reserves for that most important and difficult moment when our fate will be decided with a life of eternal bliss or eternal unhappiness? When we, gentlemen, present ourselves before the judgement seat of the Supreme Judge to give account of our actions in life the first thing he will lovingly remind us of will not be the houses we built, the savings we made, the glory we gained or the wealth we procured; of those things not a word, but he will only say: "Come, O blessed of my Heavenly Father, come and possess the Kingdom that has been

prepared for you. I was hungry, and you gave me bread in the person of the poor; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was naked and you clothed me; I was out on the street and you gave me shelter. *Tunc dicet rex his qui a dextris eius erunt: Venite, benedicti Patris mei, possidete paratum vobis regnum a constitutione mundi. Esurivi enim et dedistis mihi manducare; sitiivi et dedistis mihi bibere; hospes eram et collegistis me; nudus et cooperuistis me.*” (Mt 25, 34-35).

These and other words are what the Divine Judge will say since they are written in the Gospel, and then he will give you his blessing and lead you to possess eternal life.

But God the Father of kindness, knowing that our spirit is willing but our flesh is very weak, wants our charity to be rewarded a hundredfold even in this life. How many ways, gentlemen, does God give us a hundredfold for our good works? A hundredfold are the special graces of living and dying well, the fertility of our fields, peace and harmony in our families, good results for our temporal affairs, the health of our relatives and friends, the preservation and good upbringing of our children. The reward of Christian charity is the pleasure each one has in his heart for doing good works. Is it not a great consolation when one reflects that with a small item of almsgiving one contributes to preventing people from being a danger to civil society and helping them become people who are of some advantage to themselves, their neighbours, to Religion? People who are on the brink of becoming the scourge of the authorities, people who break public laws and end up living off other people’s sweat, in prison, but instead you make them able to honour their dignity as human beings, take up work and through their work earn honest sustenance, and this to the honour of the country they live in as well as the families they belong to?

Beyond all these recompenses that God grants in the present life and in the future one, there is one yet that those who have received charity will give to their benefactors. Yes, gentlemen, we do not want you to miss out on the recompense that is completely in our power to give. All the priests, clerics, all the young people who live in and are educated in the houses of the Salesian Congregation, and more especially those of the Patronage de Saint-Pierre raise

their minds in prayer morning and evening for their benefactors. Morning and evening, those you have been charitable towards will invoke divine blessings on you, your families, your relatives and friends, with appropriate prayers. They will ask God to keep peace and harmony in your families, grant you stable health and a happy life, keep misfortune far from you in spiritual and temporal things and add to all this perseverance in doing good, and for as long as it has pleased God to give you life, at the end crown your life with a holy death. If then, gentlemen, in the course of your mortal life you will have the good fortune to meet one another in the streets in the city or in any other place, oh yes, then we will joyfully recall the benefits received and we will respectfully doff our caps as an indelible sign of gratitude on earth, while the merciful God will assure you of a just reward in Heaven. “*Centuplum accipietis et vitam aeternam possidebitis.*” [Mt 19,29].

### **273. “Do you want to do something divine? Educate the young”**

ASC A0000205 *Cronachetta*, Quad. V, 1877-1878, ms by Giulio Barberis, pp. 48-61<sup>108</sup>.

16 May 1878

I do not know, worthy Cooperators—I do not know if I should first thank you or invite you to thank the Lord together for having brought us into this compact body and put us in the position of being able to do great good, and for having brought us here together this evening for the first conference for Salesian Cooperators in Turin.

But before coming to anything else, I want to tell you a little bit of the history of what the Salesian Cooperators here in Turin have already done and what their task is at this time. So listen.

Thirty five years ago, the area presently occupied by this church served as a place for gathering young people at risk. They came here to fight and curse. There were two houses nearby which gave great offence to the Lord: one was a tavern where drunkards and all kinds of bad people came, the other, right

<sup>108</sup> This is the first conference Don Bosco gave to the Salesian Cooperators in Turin; he gave it on the afternoon of May 16, 1878, in Valdocco, in the church of St Francis de Sales (cf. MB XIII, 624-630).

here where the pulpit now stands and extending off to my left, was a house of ill-repute and immorality. Then a poor priest arrived and rented two rooms in this very house at an exaggerated price. The priest was accompanied by his mother. Their aim was to see if they could do some good for the people in the vicinity. All the assets they had were a hand-basket they carried, with a number of items in it. Well then, this priest saw young people coming here to get into mischief, and he was able to approach them and the Lord saw that what he said was listened to and understood. He immediately saw the need for a chapel for divine worship. Starting from the epistle side of this high altar and going off to the right as you look, there was a shed that served as an outhouse. He was able to get hold of it and having nothing else, adapted it as a church. These problematic youngsters, little by little were attracted to and came to church, and their number soon grew so much that it was filled, and in the little square where this church is now, we taught catechism, since the church couldn't hold them all.

Now this priest was alone, though he had the very zealous priest Fr Borel, who had done so much good in Turin, come to help. But working as he was in the prisons, helping those condemned to death, in work at the Cottolengo with the Marchioness Barolo, the Refuge and other things, he could only be there for a while since his life lay elsewhere. The Lord provided for what was lacking and gradually various worthy members of the clergy joined the poor priest, some hearing confessions, some preaching, others teaching catechism, lending a hand. And that is how the work of the Oratory was supported by these worthy members of the clergy. But this was not enough. Given the growing need also for Sunday and evening schools, a handful of priests was not enough. Then various gentlemen also began to lend a hand. It was Divine Providence that sent them and through them good work was multiplying. These first Salesian Cooperators, priests and lay people, were not concerned about discomfort and effort, but seeing the good that was done and how many rough boys set out on the path to virtue, they sacrificed themselves. I saw many of them leave their comforts and come not only every Sunday, but even every day in Lent, even at very inconvenient times for them, but the best time for the boys, and they came and helped the work of the Oratory.



Meanwhile time passed and there was an even more felt need to help these children, including materially. Some had their pants and jacket in tatters and hanging off them, even at the expense of their modesty; some had no change of clothing, just the torn shirt on their back. This was when the kindness and usefulness of the Cooperators began to shine out. I would now like, to the glory of these good people from Turin, to tell you how many of them, even though their families were hard up, saw no shame in taking those jackets and pants and patching them with their own hands; they took the torn shirts, which had maybe never seen water before, they themselves took them, I say, and washed them, patched them up to give them back to the boys again. The boys were attracted by this Christian charity and stayed on at the Oratory and persevered in the practice of virtue. Many of these worthy people then sent clothing, money, food and whatever else they could. Some of them are here at the moment listening to me and many others have already been called by the Lord to receive the reward for their labours and charitable works.

So this is how, with the help of many people, Cooperators, men and women, things could be achieved that each one separately could never have done. With such powerful help of priests, men and women, what happened then? Thousands of boys came for religious instruction to the very same place where earlier they had learned to curse; they came to learn virtue in this very place that had been the focus of immorality. We were able to open Sunday and evening schools and the poorest and most neglected of the boys were taken in, and in 1852 the little square became this church and the house became a hospice for poor boys. All this is your work, my worthy Cooperators.

They continued to help and others were added to their number every day. We were able to open another two Oratories in two other parts of the city, one in Vanchiglia called the Guardian Angel which, after the parish church of St Julia was built, moved next to the parish; the other, called St Aloysius, was opened at Porta Nuova. The church of St John the Evangelist is being built next to this.

But these deeply felt needs in Turin were beginning to be felt in other cities and towns too and given the constant help of the Cooperators, they were able

to establish a rule and then expand beyond Turin. It was necessary for the great lack of clergy felt throughout Piedmont and beyond to be compensated for by the Cooperators. How could they do that? The Catholic religion does not look to just a place, city, town; it is universal and wherever it wants good to be done and wherever the need is greater, there the religion asks for greater efforts. So a House was opened at Mirabello, then another at Lanzo, then more and more elsewhere. There is now a hundred or more that have been opened, counting Churches and Houses and more than 25 thousand boarding or day boys receiving religious instruction in our Houses. Who does all this? One priest? No! Two, ten, fifty? Not even that. They would not have achieved so much. There were so many Cooperators who banded together to help these few priests in every town and city. Yes, it was them, but not only them. Ah yes! We need to recognise God's hand. He wanted so much good work to come out of nothing. Yes, it is Divine Providence that sent so many means to save so many souls. If it hadn't been the Lord who wanted this, I would say that it would have been impossible for anyone to have done so much. But the need was real and great and the Lord sends great help for great needs. And these needs are growing greater and more demanding by the day. Will the Lord abandon us?

This is what I tell you. It is a firm reality that the needs are growing by the day. Oh if you could only see how many requests from all over the world are answered because we can open houses for poor and abandoned youth. If you only knew how many places feel a need which in times past only seemed to be obvious in the big cities. You would be astonished. And how much the mission need is growing now. Note that it is no longer a case of life being challenged amongst the savages by the dangers of martyrdom or great suffering. Now they themselves are beginning to appreciate their miserable state and want to be educated. It is they themselves, I say, who are reaching out to us, asking us to go and civilise them, teach them the religion without which they acknowledge their life is unhappy. These requests for missions are coming from everywhere. From India, China, Santo Domingo, Brazil, the Argentine Republic, heart-rending requests are coming, such that if while talking to you now I were able to say I had two thousand missionaries, I would immediately know where to

send them, and would be sure of the results they would bring. So even in the missions good has been done through the work of the Oratories and we hope that with the support and help of the Cooperators this good work can be increased a thousand times for the greater glory of God.

Then there is another work done by these Oratories, a work that I don't want publicised, but it would be good for you to know about it. This is the work of looking for boys with good will and giving them the means to become priests. The number of the Lord's ministers, as you see, is decreasing daily by frightening proportions. So we have looked for boys everywhere that give real signs of hope, we have brought them together, got them to study and now, with the Lord's blessings on this work, hundreds and hundreds of priests have come from our Houses. Do you want me to secretly tell you how many clerics we had last year? Listen. From all of our Houses in Italy, France, Uruguay and the Argentine Republic last year we had 300 clerics. Most of these go back to their dioceses but just to tell you of one, look at the Casale diocese: out of 42 clerics in the seminary, 34 came from our Houses. Others become religious, others go to the missions or stay with us and help us with everything they can. So do you see where your alms, your help and charity goes?

Another and no small effort is to shore up against the heresy that threatens to invade our cities and towns. It is devastating Catholic countries and spreading further as freedom spreads in the world of politics; because when in the name of freedom we give open slather to evil to operate, and we put restrictions on the work of the good, there will always be sad consequences. So we sought to challenge heresy and impiety with books well adapted to this purpose, and with much effort and at great expense we printed them and disseminated them amongst the Catholic people. But the books don't achieve everything. We saw the need, like a sentry keeping watch in places where there is greatest danger, to place a squad of soldiers at least to paralyse evil, and so near the Protestant church, since 1847 we have opened the Oratory of St Aloysius, and now after so much research and effort we have managed to start building the church of St. John the Evangelist. Construction is under way.

At S. Pier d’Arena heresy was also threatening and here we built a hospice. In Nice, right next to the Protestant church, we built the Patronage of St Peter. Heresy had already made extraordinary inroads at La Spezia. Here we made every effort and now there are some appropriate schools. I don’t want to talk about everything along these lines but I want to tell you what happened at Ventimiglia. Here, given the increase in the population, a valley known as Valle Crosia filled up with homes. The number of inhabitants grew to a hundred, then to a thousand. Since they were all new homes, nobody thought of a church or they were unable to build one. The Protestants, seeing how convenient this was, built a nice centre or large building there which served as a hospice and school, and also a church. Given that there were no other schools, the inhabitants of the valley were attracted to them and many started attending their church. The bishop did not know what to do; building a church, setting it up as a parish are things that the private individual can no longer do these days. We were called on and we willingly began work. We did not have the means, but Providence helped us, and since we could not do anything else we rented a house, adjusted the ground floor a bit, made an altar and then we had a church. In the rooms off to the right and on the first floor we opened two classrooms for boys. In the rooms on the left of this little church we called in the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians and they opened classes for girls. What a change! The festive oratory attracted big and small alike, and all the people living around could attend Mass. The boys’ classrooms filled up immediately; those for the girls as well. Things then took such a turn that now the Protestant schools are absolutely closed because there is nobody, not a single boy or girl, attending them. Many who had started going to the Protestant church, able to come to the Sacraments for Easter, abandoned the place that had become a centre of heresy in Liguria.

All these various works would be impossible for one person alone. We need to have Cooperators. Their subsidies for example help us go out there and set up the early stages. Then the Cooperators come and set up in the place itself and things make progress. Without the work of the Cooperators, the Salesians would be stranded and unable to exercise their zeal. It is true that we

always encounter many difficulties in achieving these works but the Lord sees that they can always be overcome.

This year, then, the difficulties have multiplied; just the same we see that the Lord's hand is always supporting us. Our incomparable benefactor, Pius IX, died this year; it was Pius IX who approved the Cooperators, Association and enriched it with so many wonderful indulgences; it was Pius IX who wanted to be enrolled as the first Salesian Cooperator; it was Pius IX who never missed a good occasion to benefit us. He died, but the Lord saw that his successor was Leo XIII. I presented myself to him and spoke to him of the Salesian Cooperators. I asked him to allow his august name, like the name of his predecessor of happy memory, to appear amongst the Salesian Cooperators. And once he was well informed of their spirit, he added: "I do not intend to be only a Salesian Cooperator, but an *operator*. Should not the Pope be the first to contribute to works of charity?" So this is how, when we had lost a father, the Lord saw that we would have another no less kind than the first. This very year a number of worthy people have died who have been of great help to the Oratory but the Lord saw that others took their place and the charity of the faithful has not left us lacking what we need.

So now, here is what has to be the more direct purpose of the Salesian Cooperators; this is what they need to take up. They need to continue the works begun, the ones I have spoken of. Indeed these works need to increase a hundredfold. We need people and means for this. We sacrifice our people: every day the Lord sends us personnel who are ready for any kind of sacrifice, even giving their lives for the salvation of souls. People are not enough - we need the means. And this is your task, worthy Cooperators. I give you the task of finding the material means; see that they are not lacking. Note well how great the Lord's grace is. He puts the means in your hands for cooperating in the salvation of souls. Ah yes, the salvation of many souls is in your hands. We have seen, from what I have told you, that the salvation of so many souls results from the cooperation of good people.

So now it is time for me to thank you. But what thanks can I give? I cannot do it. If I were to thank you for your good works it would be too little a

recompense. So I will leave the Lord to thank you for it. Yes, I have said many times that he considers what is done for our neighbour as done to himself. and it is also certain that charity which is not strictly corporal but which also has a spiritual aim, has even greater merit. I could say that it not only has a greater value, but a divine one. The Fathers agreed with what St Dionysius said: “*Divinorum divinissimum est cooperari Deo in salutem animarum.*” And explaining this passage with St Augustine, we may say that this divine work is an absolute pledge of one’s own predestination: “*Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti.*”

Do you want to do something good? Educate the young. Do you want to do something holy? Educate the young. Do you want to do something very holy? Educate the young. Do you want to do something divine? Educate the young. Amongst divine things, this is the most divine.

Oh! If you are part of all this good I have been hinting at you can be sure of saving your own soul. So I leave him to give you special thanks. Just know that in the church of Mary Help of Christians morning and evening, and I could say all day, there are special prayers for you, that the Lord may be able to thank you with the words that he will say to you on that decisive day of judgement. “*Euge, serve bone et fidelis...*” [Mt 25:23]. Make sacrifices, but keep in mind that Jesus Christ sacrificed himself far more and that we will never ever get even near to the sacrifice he made for us. Those who make the effort to imitate him in making sacrifices to save souls can have the peace of mind that *animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti* is no exaggeration and that they will certainly be crowned with the *intra in gaudium Domini tui* [Mt 25:23] that I so earnestly desire and pray for all of you.

### 3. SPIRITUAL ADVICE FOR FRIENDS, COOPERATORS AND BENEFACTORS

*Don Bosco's correspondence with the Cooperators and friends, lay and clerical, always contains detailed and substantial spiritual suggestions aimed at proposing a way of interior life along with devotion and spiritual fervour, the practice of virtue, charity, loving and faithful fulfilment of the duties of one's state in life.*

*Our saint's Salesian inspiration emerges from these letters, in harmony with the teachings of St Francis de Sales in the Introduction to the Devout Life and letters of spiritual direction.*

*There are twelve items of correspondence here which document the range of Don Bosco's relationships and the concrete nature of his spiritual 'school'.*

#### 274. A lay person seeking perfection

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 525-526.

Turin, 24 September 1862

Dear Sir,

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always be with us.

It is some time since I received the two letters you were kind enough to send me, but I did not answer because I was uncertain of where you were staying.

I am including the red ticket [for the lottery], indeed two, so you can win two prizes. The tickets I sent were not so much just for you to sell off but something you could have to help poor Don Bosco give bread to his poor boys with.

Going back over things in your first letter, I very much admire your heart's desire to blindly follow the advice of a poor priest like me. It is something difficult for both of us, but let us try.

“What do I need to do to lead a life,” you asked “detached from the world and that binds my heart to the Lord in such a way that I may constantly love virtue?”

R. Good will assisted by God’s grace will produce this marvellous effect. But to succeed you must try to know and taste the beauty of virtue and the joy that someone who loves God experiences.

Then consider the emptiness of worldly things. They cannot give us the least consolation. Put all your journeys together, what you have seen, enjoyed, read and observed. Compare all this with the joy a man experiences after approaching the holy Sacraments, and he will see that the first is nothing, while the second is everything.

Once we have established this base then we come to the practice. You told me: “1. Mass and meditation each morning. 2. After midday a little bit of spiritual reading. 3. A sermon and benediction every Sunday. 4”. ... “Slow down”, you say, “a little at a time”. You are right; begin putting into practice what I write in passing and if you keep up with me, I hope with the Lord’s help to be able to lead you to the third heaven.

When you come to Turin we can discuss some bigger projects. Meanwhile do not forget to pray for me. I warmly wish you everything good from the Lord. I am,

Your friend and servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **275. To a religious woman**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 276.

Turin, 22 July 1866

My good lady,

Lukewarmness, when it is not backed by our will, is totally devoid of guilt. In fact I believe that this lukewarmness, which takes the name of dryness of spirit, can be worthy of merit in the Lord’s eyes. Nevertheless it takes matches



to get some sparks going and I find these in brief prayers or a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, kissing a medal or crucifix. But more than any other thing the thought that occasional tribulations, pains and spiritual dryness are also sweet-smelling roses for eternity.

I will not fail to recommend you to the Lord at Mass and, while recommending myself and my poor boys to the charity of your prayers, I have the honour of sincerely and gratefully professing myself to be,

Your humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

### 276. To Marquis Ignazio Pallavicini

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 423-424.

September 1867

Your Excellency,

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us. Amen.

Here I am speaking with Your Excellency as I would with my brother. What I wrote to you in August was neither a threat nor a passing whim; it was something loving and preventive. That said, you should consider three things: *yourself – your household – your own affairs.*

*Self.* Take a look at resolutions made in Confession and not kept; advice given to avoid evil and do what is good, but forgotten. The great defect of not being sorry for sins committed. This can be remedied through meditation and an examen of conscience in the evening or at some other more appropriate time. Right now God wants you to be more patient in your dealings, especially in the family; more confidence in the Lord's kindness; more peacefulness of spirit, and never ever be afraid of death surprising you by night or at some other unexpected moment. Make an effort to practise the virtue of humility and trust in the Lord and fear nothing. For the future, go to Confession and Communion in such a way that you become a model for everyone who knows you.

*Your household.* See that your dependants fulfil and have the time to fulfil their religious duties, and arrange things in their regard in such a way that in death and after death they will have reason to bless their master. In the family, charity and kindness with everyone; but never miss an occasion to give advice or counsel that can help as a rule in life and as good example.

*Your affairs.* A lot needs to be written about this. On Monday I need to go to Alessandria and there I will make a visit to Mombaruzzo, where I hope to write or speak to you more calmly. What God especially wants of you is for you to foster veneration of the Blessed Sacrament and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary as much as you can.

May God help you to take the road to Heaven. Amen.

I gratefully profess myself to be Your Excellency's,

Humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

### 277. To Cesare Callori

Critical ed. in E(m) II p. 426.

Turin 6 September 1867

Dear Mr Cesare,

This time it is not Cesare but Don Bosco confessing his guilt.

I have been off here, running around there and meanwhile I have not done my duty by sending you the book our Cesare offered to translate for our *Catholic Readings*.

Now let's fix a few things up within the family. One pamphlet for you, the other for Gloria; and since I have been late in sending it, thus you will adjust or better still make up for the time lost with special diligence and solicitude to get the work done.

How impertinent Don Bosco can be when giving orders! It is lucky he is dealing with kind and obedient people, otherwise you would leave me singing and carrying my cross.

But while blaming myself I would like to ask you, rather, recommend two things for you about which we have already spoken.

As you divide up your time try to go to confession every fortnight or at least once a month. Do not let a day go by without a bit of spiritual reading... But enough, let's not turn this into a sermon. Well then, let's conclude.

Many greetings to mother and father and all your good family. Give me some good advice. I wish you every heavenly blessing and I am, with heartfelt gratitude,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **278. To the mother of a family**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 133-134.

11 September 1869

I received your enormous sum of fr. 10,000 from Sr Filomena's hand. You offer this out of charity in honour of Mary Help of Christians to be used for various and serious needs of this new building. I was not able to stop and speak with Sister except in passing and so I could not give her my grateful thanks to bring back to you. Now while I am fulfilling this duty of gratitude I assure you I will continue to pray our common special prayers every day for you at the altar of Mary Help of Christians and I hope that the grace you ask of Her will be granted without delay.

You tell me that it has not been granted so far; you tell me that it is a problem in the family, one that I do not know about, but here is something positive I can tell you: continue to pray and resign yourself to the divine will. This problem will soon come to an end. Some things that look like thorns

now, God will change into flowers. A glance at the crucifix and a *fiat voluntas tua*, is what God wants from you.

Meanwhile accept this advice: family sores have to be medicated, not amputated. Gloss over what annoys you, speak with everyone and advise them in all charity, and firmly. This is the remedy that will heal everything. Pardon me for taking this liberty: I would give lessons to Minerva, I would even give her sympathy.

Tomorrow (12<sup>th</sup>) I will celebrate Mass and my boys will go to Communion for your intentions. May God bless you and all your family and grant you all a long and happy life with the precious gift of final perseverance.

I am gratefully yours and profess myself,

Your humble servant,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **279. To a suffering woman**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 211-212.

Turin, 28 May 1870

My dear lady,

I was honoured to receive your letter and it gave me true pleasure.

I see from it that your heart has been torn apart by the loss of your beloved husband, but has now become more calm and given way to being resigned to the divine will which, whether we want it or not, we need to submit to. Do not fear that your husband's affection for you will be diminished in the next life, indeed it will be perfected very much more. Have faith; see him in a much better position than when he was amongst us. The best thing you can do for him is to offer your every worry to God for the repose of his soul.

Now give me some freedom to say something. It is of our faith that we enjoy an infinitely better life in heaven than on earth. So why be so sorrowful

if your husband has gone to take possession of it? It is of our faith that death for us Christians is not separation, but a deferral of the moment when we see one another again. So when someone goes before us—patience; he goes to prepare our place.

It is also of our faith that at any moment through works of piety and charity you can do good for the souls of the deceased: so why not rejoice in your heart if God has given you the chance to survive? Then, helping children, comforting your *bon père*, practising your religion, spreading good books, giving good advice to someone who needs it: are these not all things that must bring the Lord's blessing on the years he still gives you?

There are still other motives that for now I judge best not to say.

So, let us adore God in everything, in consolations and afflictions and let us be sure that He is a good Father and will not permit us to be afflicted beyond our strength. He is all-powerful and therefore can lift us up when he wants.

Meanwhile I have always recommended you and your family to the Lord at holy Mass and I will continue to do the same, as well as in the prayers that we say together at Mary's altar.

May God bless you and your efforts; pray for me. I profess that I am,  
Your humble servant,

Fr J. Bosco

### **280. To a committed Catholic**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 227-228.

Turin, 13 July 1870

Dear Sir,

May God be blessed in everything. Do not be worried because you cannot do much. Before God, the one who does his will in little things does much. So take the inconveniences you are subjected to as coming from the Lord's holy hand, do the little you can and be at peace about everything.

In these times we feel the serious need to promote good press. It is a vast field, but each one doing what he can, can achieve a lot.

I will not fail to pray for you and your friends. I revere them so much in the Lord. Pray for me too. With real affection I profess myself to be,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

**281. To a priest friend**

Critical ed. in E(m) V, p. 142.

Rome, 8 May 1876

My dear Fr Perino,

I am so happy about your promotion to parish priest of Piedicavallo.

You will have a much wider field to win souls for God. The basis of a successful parish is taking care of the children, being with the sick, loving the elderly.

For you: frequent confession, some meditation each day, exercise for a happy death once a month.

For Don Bosco: spreading the *Catholic Readings* and coming to lunch at the Oratory every time you come to Turin. The rest we can speak about when we meet.

May God bless you, your efforts, your future parish and pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

## 282. To a priest who is tempted

ASC A1780133 *Orig. aut. recently found, Fassio*. Critical ed. in E III, pp. 271-272.

Rome, 12 [January] 1878

My dear Fr . . . .

God has allowed you to have a great trial, but you will have a great victory. Prayer will overcome everything. Work, temperance especially in the evenings, do not lie down for a rest during the day, never more than seven hours in bed, these are all very useful things.

*Principiis obsta*; as soon as you are tempted, start working if it is daytime; start praying if it is night time; do not stop praying until you are overcome by sleep. Put these suggestions into practice; I will pray for you at holy Mass, God will do the rest. Courage, dear Fr . . .; seal your heart, hope in the Lord and go ahead without being worried.

Pray for me. I will always be, in Jesus Christ,  
Your affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

## 283. To Right Rev. Edoardo Rosaz, Bishop of Susa (blessed)

Critical in E III, pp. 293-294.

Rome, 7 February 1878

Dear and Reverend Bishop<sup>109</sup>,

I received news from Turin then from your dear letter, of how the great Pontiff Pius IX thought of you in fatherly terms and appointed you as Bishop of Susa. I was not a little amazed, because I know how humble you are and how you must take up a new approach *verbo et opere*. But I soon blessed the

<sup>109</sup> Arch. Edoardo Giuseppe Rosaz (1830-1903), founder of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters (1874) for the education of poor and orphaned girls, was appointed bishop of Susa in the consistory on December 31, 1877.

Lord, because I was and I am convinced that the Church has gained a bishop according to God's heart and that you will do much good for the diocese of Susa.

I am very happy about it and with all my heart I offer you all the houses of our Congregation for whatever service they can render you or the diocese that Divine Providence has entrusted to you.

I do not pretend to lecture you, but I believe that you will soon win over everyone's heart if:

1. You take special care of the sick, the elderly and poor children.
2. Go slow in making any changes to personnel already put in place by your predecessor.
3. Do what you can to win the esteem and affection of some who held or still hold high positions in the diocese; those who feel they were overlooked while your Lordship was chosen.
4. When taking strong measures against anyone amongst the clergy, you go slowly and as much as is possible listen to the one accused. For the rest I hope that in March we can speak personally.

Today, around three thirty, the Supreme and incomparable star of the Church, Pius IX, has died. Newspapers will give you the details. Rome is in consternation and I believe the whole world as well. Within a very short time he will certainly be on the altars.

I believe that your Lordship will always allow me to write with the confidence of earlier times; I pray to God that he will enlighten you and keep you in good health. I recommend myself to the charity of your prayers and with the greatest veneration I profess myself to be,

Your Lordship's affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco



### **284. To a scrupulous woman**

ASC A1780410 *Let. orig. recently found, Armelonghi*. Critical in E III, pp. 388-389.

Turin, 26 September 1878

Esteemed friend in Jesus Christ,

With regard to your conscience, consider:

1. Never going back over past confessions.
2. Thoughts, desires and internal things are never subject for confession.
3. Confess only deeds, conversations that the confessor could judge blameworthy and nothing else.
4. Blind obedience to your confessor.

Be tranquil of conscience and pray for me. I remain always, in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **285. To a discouraged parish priest**

ASC A1940605 *Copies of orig. Ed.* in E III, p. 399.

Turin, 25 October 1878

Dear Fr,

I received your good letter and the 18 Francs enclosed. Thank you. May God reward you. It is manna that falls to help us in our difficulties.

Be at peace. Do not talk of leaving your parish.

There is work to do? I will die working, *sicut bonus miles Christi* [2 Tim 2:3].

I am not very good at this? *Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat* [Phil 4:13].

There are thorns? When the thorns have become flowers the angels will weave a crown for you in Heaven.

Times are difficult? They always were, but God's help was never lacking.  
*Christus heri et hodie.*

Are you asking for advice? Here it is then: take special care of the children, the elderly and the sick and you will become master of everyone's hearts. For the rest, when you come to pay me a visit we will speak at length.

Fr John Bosco

SECTION FOUR  
THE MARIAN DIMENSION  
OF SALESIAN SPIRITUALITY

**Presentation**

*Don Bosco, a tireless apostle of Marian devotion, emphasised the role of the Blessed Virgin for salvation of the individual in the Companion of Youth: she is the mediatrix of graces, defence against the assaults of evil, support in living a Christian life and on the way to holiness. These are things he draws from St Alphonsus Liguori: true devotion expressed through a life of virtue above all guarantees the most powerful patronage one could have in life and in death.*

*The issues are taken up in the booklet The Month of May (1858)<sup>110</sup>, where the saint frames popular and youthful Marian devotion explicitly within a context aimed at serious and fervent ethical and spiritual commitment, linking Marian devotion and eternal salvation to this.*

*Ten years later (1868), at the opening of the church of Mary Help of Christians he drew up a work called The Marvels of the Mother of God Invoked Under the Title of Help of Christians<sup>111</sup>. Particularly evident in this is how he frames Marian devotion within an ecclesial perspective, since Don Bosco's view of things is opening up to this more and more. It is this that guides his missionary and education concerns. Via a number of meditations on the Gospels, the saint also develops other aspects of the spiritual life: Mary is a model of union with God, service of neighbour, practical attention to our brothers' needs, and her universal motherhood.*

*After the sanctuary at Valdocco was consecrated, Don Bosco became a tireless apostle of devotion to the Help of Christians: help of the Church in battles throughout history, inspiration and powerful support of Salesian work, maternal and beneficial presence in the lives of those who trust in her.*

<sup>110</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata ad uso del popolo*. Torino, Tip. Paravia e Compagnia 1858 (OE X, 295-486).

<sup>111</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Maraviglie della madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice*. Torino, Tip. Dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1868 (OE XX, 192-376).

*The Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians (founded in 1869 and today known as ADMA or the Mary Help of Christians Association), aimed at “promoting devotion to the Mother of God and veneration of the august Sacrament of the Eucharist”<sup>112</sup>, certainly responds to the religious sensitivity of the time, but it expresses in an excellent way Don Bosco’s efforts to encourage trusting Mary and encourages everyone to imitate her “beautiful virtues”.*

*Given the worldwide spread of Salesian work the cult of the Help of Christians was propagated everywhere, inseparable from Don Bosco and his mission.*

*This section, which is a simple selection from a vast amount of material, includes seven meditations (nos. 286-291 and 293), some prayers for ADMA (no. 292) and a “goodnight” to the boys on the efficacy of turning to the Help of Christians (no. 294).*

## **286. Reasons for being devoted to Mary**

Critical ed. in G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 12-18 (OE X, 306-312).

Come with me, O Christian, and consider the countless reasons we all have to be devoted to Mary. I will begin by indicating the three principal ones and they are as follows: Mary is the holiest of all creatures, Mary is the Mother of God, Mary is our mother.

1. Throughout the Old Testament Mary is called beautiful and without stain. She is compared to the resplendent sun, to the moon in the fullness of its light, to the brightest stars, to a garden full of the most delightful flowers, to a sealed fountain from which fresh waters flow, to a humble dove, to the purest lily. In the Gospel the Angel Gabriel calls her “*full of grace*”, “*Ave, gratia plena*”: full of grace, or created and formed in grace, meaning that Mary from the first moment of her existence was without original and actual sin and remained that way until her final breath. Full of grace and therefore with not even the least defect in her purest heart. There was no virtue that was not

<sup>112</sup> Cf. doc. no. 41: *Request to Pius IX for indulgences, promoting the setting up of the Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians.*

practised to the most sublime degree by Mary. The Catholic Church expresses this holiness of Mary by defining that she was always free from sin and invites us to call on her with the following precious words: “*Regina sine labe originali concepta, ora pro nobis*”, “Queen conceived without original sin, pray for us who have recourse to you.”

2. Mary was free from every stain of original and actual sin. She was adorned with every virtue we can possibly imagine. God had filled her with grace more than any other creature—all these prerogatives meant she was chosen from amongst all women to be raised to the dignity of Mother of God. This is the announcement the Angel made and St Elizabeth repeated it when the Blessed Virgin visited her. This is the greeting faithful Christians offer every day when they say: “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us.” Human intellect pales before the glorious name of Mother of God, therefore we bow our heads in deep veneration and limit ourselves to saying that no creature has been raised to a more sublime dignity, no creature could achieve that degree of glory, and as a consequence no creature can be as powerful with God as Mary can.

3. But if the title Mother of God is a glorious one for Mary, it is a very consoling and useful one for those who call themselves her children. Since she was mother of Jesus, true God and true Man, she became our mother. Jesus Christ in his great mercy wanted to call us his brothers and by this name he made us adopted sons of Mary. The Gospel confirms what we are saying. The Divine Saviour was on the Cross and suffered pains and terrible agony. His holy mother and the apostle St John were standing at the foot of the cross in deep distress. When Jesus opened his eyes, perhaps for the last time he opened them in his mortal life, he saw his beloved disciple and his dear mother. He opened his dying lips: “Woman,” he said to Mary, “[in John] behold your son.” Then he said to John: “Behold [Mary] your mother.” “*Mulier, ecce filius tuus; ecce mater tua.*” [Jn 19:26-27]. The Fathers unanimously recognise the Divine Saviour’s will in this event, that before leaving the world he wanted to give us Mary as our loving mother and so we are all her sons. Mary is also our mother because she regenerates us through Jesus Christ in grace. Therefore since Eve is called mother of the living, so Mary is mother of all the faithful by

grace (Riccardo da San Lorenzo). St William the Abbott had this to say about it: “Mary is mother of the head, so is also mother of the members and we are the members”, “*Nos sumus membra Christi.*” By giving birth to Jesus Mary also regenerated us spiritually. Therefore Mary is rightly called mother by everyone and as such deserves honour (William the Abbott, *Cant.* 4).

Here then, O Christian, is the one I am proposing for your veneration during this month. She is the holiest of all creatures, Mother of God, our mother, powerful and merciful mother who ardently wants to fill us with heavenly favours. She says, “I live in the highest heavens to fill those who are devoted to me with grace and blessings”, “*ut ditem diligentes me,*” etc. “*thesauros eorum repleam.*” [Prov 8,21].

So courage then you who are devoted to Mary. See that you celebrate our mother, the mother of Jesus. When we celebrate our temporal mother’s feast day we enjoy bringing relatives and friends together and offer her a bouquet of flowers with them along with expressions of affection. The month of May is our true mother’s feast day, our heavenly protector’s feast day. So let us do it joyfully. The most beautiful bouquet we can offer is one made of the virtues she gave us such outstanding example of. Let us resolve today to pray morning and evening with all the affections of our heart to the one whom we like to call our mother. Let us pray that she intercedes for us for some special grace from her son Jesus. Let us pray for the grace we know we have greatest need of.

*Example* - To encourage us to fervently solemnise the month of May in honour of Mary we could look at the example of the Oriental army when it got to Constantinople. Far from home, without churches and even sacred ministers, those christian soldiers carried from their homes their devotion to and confidence in Mary. Here is a report from a magazine published on June 7, 1855: “The month of May was celebrated in some hospitals with pious and regular solemnity which is an honour to the Oriental army. There is no doubt that heaven’s blessings rained down upon many souls touched by the grace poured out on the entire army and they will be crowned by victory in the war. Before those places came into our power they were mosques, that is churches dedicated to Mahommet. This year the praises of the Queen of Heaven have

begun to resound in them. An altar was erected to Mary and was decorated with a taste that shows how each regiment has its artists. You can see columns there as if sculptured by magic. Marble artefacts in the likeness of the finest marble. Paper and coloured decorations are the work of people convalescing who devote their time to things that serve to enhance the decorum of devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Each house organised its own choir. All the musicians and the best of the harmonic society were vying to take part. Some composed hymns which everyone is happily singing in honour of Mary. In the evening when the hymn singing and the Litany of Our Lady was over the chaplain or other one sent offered an appropriate instruction for the day, keenly listened to by the huge number of devotees that had gathered. The room was often not large enough to hold them all. Even the wounded were brought there half an hour earlier so they could be sure of a place. For them this is the most wonderful moment in the day.” Here then, O Christian, is how we too can celebrate this month and show Mary a sign of our tender devotion. In the cities, in the countryside, at home, alone or in choirs and in military regiments too, homage and devotion can be rendered to the Queen of Saints.

*Brief prayer:* Merciful Virgin, / here is my heart // inflame it / with your holy love.

*Prayer* - Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly to thee. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me.

### **287. Mary our protector in our present life**

Critical ed. in G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 169-175 (OE X, 463-469).

1. In the midst of the world we are as though on a stormy sea, as if in exile, in a vale of tears. Mary is Star of the Sea, our comfort in exile, the light pointing the way to heaven while she dries our tears. Our tender mother does this by obtaining for us constant spiritual and temporal aid. We cannot go to any city or town where there is not a monument to the graces that Mary has

obtained for those who are devoted to her. Leaving aside the many famous sanctuaries of Christendom where testimonies of graces received hang by the thousands from the walls, I would point simply to the Consolata which we are lucky to have here in Turin. Enter those sacred walls, dear reader, with the faith of the good Christian and look at the signs of gratitude shown to Mary for benefits received. In one place you see a sick person given up by the doctors restored to health. In another, the grace received by someone freed from fever; in yet another place someone healed of gangrene. Here is a grace received by someone freed from the hands of assassins through Mary's intercession, while there is another one from someone saved from being crushed under a falling rock, someone else saved from floods or given peace of mind. Then if you look at the small square in front of the sanctuary, you see a monument the city of Turin erected to Mary in 1835 when freed from the deadly cholera which was afflicting nearby towns.

2. The favours indicated are only about temporal needs, so what can we say of the spiritual graces that Mary has obtained and does obtain for her devotees? We would have to write huge volumes to list the spiritual graces that her devotees have received and receive every day by the hand of this great benefactress of the human race. How many virgins owe the preservation of their state to her protection! How many of the afflicted have been comforted! How many passions have been overcome! How many martyrs have been strengthened! How many snares of the devil have been overcome! Saint Bernard, after listing a range of favours Mary obtained for her devotees every day, finishes by saying that everything good that comes from God, comes through Mary: "*Totum nos Deus habere voluit per Mariam.*"

3. Nor is she only the Help of Christians, but also the support of the Universal Church. All the titles we give her recall some favour; all the solemnities celebrated in the Church had their origin in some great miracle, from some extraordinary grace Mary obtained on behalf of the Church. How many confused heretics, how many heresies rooted out, to the point that the Church expresses her gratitude by saying to Mary: "*Tu sola, o gran Vergine, fosti colei, che sradicasti tutte le eresie: Cunctas haereses sola interemisti in universo mundo.*"



*Examples* - We will refer to some examples that confirm the great favours Mary obtains for her devotees. Let us begin with the *Ave Maria*. The angelic greeting, *Ave Maria* is made up of words said by the Angel to the Blessed Virgin and the ones St Elizabeth added when Mary went to visit her. The 'holy Mary' was added by the Church in the 5th century. During this century a heretic called Nestorius lived in Constantinople. He was a man filled with pride. He added to his impiety by publicly denying the Blessed Virgin the august name of Mother of God. This was a heresy that aimed at knocking down all the principles of our holy Religion. The people of Constantinople trembled with indignation at such blasphemy, and to clarify the truth petitions were sent to the Supreme Pontiff called Celestine at the time, begging him to repair the scandal. In the year 431 the Pontiff called a General Council together in Ephesus, a city in Asia Minor on the banks of the Archipelago. Bishops from all across the Catholic world came to this Council. St Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, presided in the Pope's name. All the people from morning to evening stood at the doors of the church where the bishops were meeting. Then the doors opened and St Cyril appeared at the head of 200 or more bishops and they heard him pronounce the condemnation of the wicked Nestorius. Word of jubilation resounded in every corner of the city. The following words were heard in the mouths of everyone: "Mary's enemy has been vanquished! Long live Mary! Long live the great, the excellent, the glorious Mother of God." It was then that the Church added those other words to the *Ave Maria*: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners. Amen. The other words, "now and at the hour of our death", were introduced by the Church in later times. The solemn declaration of the Council of Ephesus, the august title of Mother of God given to Mary, was then confirmed by other Councils, until the Church instituted the Feast of the Motherhood of Mary celebrated every year on the second Sunday of October. Nestorius, who dared rebel against the Church and blaspheme against the great Mother of God, was severely punished in this life too.

Another example. At the time of St Gregory the Great a great pestilence was affecting many parts of Europe and especially Rome. To bring this scourge to an end Saint Gregory called on the protection of the great Mother of God.

Amongst the public works of penance he ordered a solemn procession to the miraculous image of Mary venerated in the basilica of Liberius, today known as St Mary Major. Little by little as the procession took place the contagious disease disappeared from the streets, until they reached the place where there was Hadrian's tomb (and this is why it is now called Castel Sant'Angelo), where an angel appeared in human form above it. He placed his bloody sword in its scabbard as a sign that God's wrath had subsided and that through the intercession of Mary the terrible scourge was to cease. At the same time the choirs of angels were heard singing the hymn: "*Regina coeli laetare alleluia.*" The holy pontiff added two more verses to this hymn with its prayer and from that time it began to be used by the faithful to honour the Virgin during the Easter season, a time of joy at the Saviour's Resurrection. Benedict XIV granted the same Indulgences as for the *Angelus Domini* to the faithful who say it during Easter time. Saying the *Angelus* is a very ancient usage in the Church. Since we do not know the precise hour of the Annunciation, whether it was morning or evening, the early faithful greeted her on both occasions with the *Ave Maria*. From that came the custom of ringing the bells on those two occasions, to remind Christians of this pious habit. We believe this was introduced by Pope Urban II in 1088. He ordered this to encourage Christians to return to Mary by praying to her in the morning for her protection in the war that was raging at the time between Christians and Turks, and in the evening to beg her for peace and harmony between Christian Princes. Gregory IX in 1221 also added the ringing of bells at midday. The Pontiffs enriched this devotional exercise with many indulgences. Benedict XIII in 1724 granted an indulgence of 100 days every time it was said and a plenary indulgence for whoever said it for an entire month, so long as one day during the month they went to confession and communion.

*Brief prayer:* O Mary our advocate, / dispenser of every grace, // messenger of salvation / to both the just and the sinner. // From heaven, merciful mother, / cast your eye on those devoted to you, // hear our prayers, / O great Mother of Our Lord.

### **288. A way of ensuring Mary's protection**

Critical ed. in G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 179-183 (OE X, 473-477).

1. Now that we have finished Mary's month, I consider it good to conclude it by giving you some useful reminders to ensure the protection of this great mother of ours in life and in death. Since Mary is our mother, she must certainly abhor the outrages committed against her Son, Jesus. Therefore whoever wants to enjoy her patronage in life and in death must abstain from sin. Our hope would be in vain if we believed we enjoyed Mary's protection, while offending her Son Jesus whom she loves above everything else. We must not only avoid offending Jesus, but with every effort of our heart meditate on the divine mysteries of his passion, and follow him in penance. Mary herself one day told St Brigid: "My daughter, if you want to do something very pleasing to me, love my Son Jesus with all your heart." Mary is the refuge of sinners, therefore we must also take holy advice, act with solicitude, prayer, good books and in other ways lead souls to Jesus and increase Mary's children. Jesus has nothing closer to his heart than the salvation of souls. Therefore Mary, who loves her son tenderly, can receive no more pleasing gift than that which wins over another soul. We should also try to offer her a victory over some passion of ours. So if someone who is choleric by nature and often shows impatience, or bursts into curses and blasphemies, or has contracted the habit of speaking badly and with little respect for religious matters, that person should restrain his tongue as a pleasing gift to the Virgin. So in a few words, each one should try to avoid what is bad and do what is good out of love for Mary.

2. Amongst the many good things we can do for Mary are to prepare to celebrate her solemnities devoutly with triduum, novenas, octaves as you would normally do or as is done in public churches and also private homes. St Elizabeth Queen of Portugal on Saturdays and on all the vigils leading up to the Feast of the Virgin, fasted on bread and water. Some others used to go to confession and communion every Sunday and Feast Day, as did St Aloysius Gonzaga, St Stanislaus Kostka and others. Others give alms to beggars and give them in suffrage for the souls who were most devoted to Mary when alive.

There are also some devotees of Mary who often attend Mass in her honour with the intention of thanking the Holy Trinity who raised Mary to the most beautiful throne in heaven. Others revere her with special devotion to the Saints who were her closest relatives, like St Joseph her most holy Spouse, Saint Joachim and Saint Anne her most fortunate parents.

3. There are also special devotional practices that are like tongues of fire that make this compassionate Mother burn with love for us. For example the *Angelus* in the morning, at midday and in the evening, the rosary every day or at least on Sundays, attending Vespers, practices of piety on Saturday in honour of her Immaculate Heart. But I recommend that every evening before going to bed you say the following three times: *Dear Mother Mary ever Virgin, help me to save my soul.* Then let us always remember that being devoted to Mary is one of the most secure means of reaching eternal life. She herself assures us of this by saying: “Those who are devoted to me will have eternal life”, “*Qui elucidant me, vitam aeternam habebunt.*” [Sir. 24:31].

*Example* - I recommend that you never let a Saturday pass without doing something in Mary’s honour. From the earliest times of the Church Christians used to practise some devotion to the Virgin on Saturdays. Saturday means rest day and was chosen to refer to rest or the abode the Divine Word chose to make of Mary’s most pure womb. One of the warmest propagators of the cult of Mary on Saturdays was Saint Ildephonsus, the archbishop of Toledo. He had written some hymns in praise of the Mother of Mercy and on the following Saturday heard the angels singing them in church with the Blessed Virgin herself amongst them. After this the Saturday practice spread rapidly throughout Europe. From the tenth century abstinence from meat was practised on that day in Mary’s honour. Soon after, the Mass and Office for that day were written. Both the Mass and the Office were approved by Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont in 1095. We should never let go any Saturday without practising some act of virtue in honour of Mary, and go to Holy Communion if we can or at least let’s hear a Mass for the repose of the souls in purgatory.

*Brief prayer:* Oh if I could see you one day / all loving hearts would languish / for such a beautiful queen and at hearing / her name praised everywhere. / / And so on earth / it may resound everywhere with sweet harmony, / long live, long live Mary forever, / long live God who loved her so.

### **289. Mary shows her zeal and power with her son at the wedding in Cana**

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Maraviglie della madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice*. Torino, Tip. Dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1868, pp. 31-37 (OE XX, 223-229).

In St John's Gospel we find a fact that clearly shows Mary's power and zeal in coming quickly to our aid. We are referring to what St John the Evangelist tells us in Chapter 2.

*At Cana in Galilee there was a wedding and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. Since they were running out of wine, his mother said to Jesus: "They have no more wine." And Jesus said to her: "Woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars of the kind the Jews use for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to them: "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them to the brim. Then Jesus told them: "Now draw from these and take it to the master of the banquet." And they did so. As soon as he had tasted the water changed into wine, the master of the banquet, who did not realise where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew, called the bridegroom aside and said: "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper one after the guests have had too much to drink, but you have saved the best till now." What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*

Here St John Chrysostom asks: "Why did Mary wait for this occasion at the wedding feast at Cana to invite Jesus to do miracles yet did not ask him before?" He answers that Mary did so out of a spirit of submission to

Divine Providence. Jesus had lived a hidden life for thirty years. And Mary, who preserved within all that Jesus did, “*conservabat haec omnia conferens in corde suo*”, as St Luke tells us (Chapter 2, v. 19), venerated Jesus’ humiliation in respectful silence. Then when she noted that Jesus had begun his public life, that St John in the desert had already begun to speak about Jesus in his preaching and that Jesus already had some disciples, then with the movement of grace, and in the same spirit of union with Jesus with which she had respected his remaining hidden for thirty years, she put her request to ask him to perform a miracle and show himself to men.

Saint Bernard saw Mary’s great delicacy in the words “*vinum non habent, they have no wine.*” Hers was not a lengthy request to Jesus as Lord, nor did she command him as to a son; all she did was proclaim the need, the lack of wine. With hearts that are kind and tending to help, grace does not need to be wrested from them through tricks and violence; it is enough to suggest the occasion (St Bernard, *Serm. 4 in Cant.*).

The angelic doctor, St Thomas, admires in this brief prayer Mary’s tenderness and mercy. Inasmuch as it is proper to mercy to consider other’s needs its own, and since the word ‘merciful’ [*misericordia*] means a heart made for the miserable, to lift up the miserable, he quotes St Paul’s words to the Corinthians: “*Quis infirmatur et ego non infirmor?*” [2 Cor 11:29]. “Who is weak and I do not feel weak?” Now since Mary was full of mercy, she wanted to provide for the needs of the guests and the Gospel says: “They have no wine”, Jesus’ mother told him. So St Bernard encourages us to have recourse to Mary because if she had so much compassion for the shame those poor people would feel and provided for them although they had not asked, how much more pity will she have on us if we call on her with faith? (St Bernard, *Serm. 2 Dominicae II Epif.*).

Saint Thomas again praises Mary’s concern and diligence in not waiting for the wine to completely run out so the guests would notice and it would disgrace their hosts. As soon as the need became imminent she came to their aid just at the right moment, according to Ps 9: “*Adiutor in opportunitatibus, in tribulatione.*” [Ps. 9:10].

Mary's kindness to us as demonstrated in this fact shines out mainly in what she did after her divine son answered her. After hearing Jesus' words a less confident, less courageous soul than Mary would have desisted from hoping further. Mary instead was not disturbed in any way and turned to those serving the tables to say to them: "Do what he tells you." "*Quodcumque dixerit vobis, facite.*" (Jn 2:5). It was as if she said: "Although you might seem to be saying no, you will do it just the same." (Bede).

The learned P. Silveira lists a large number of virtues that shine out in these words of Mary's. The Virgin (this writer says) gave a shining example of faith, despite hearing her son's hard response: "What has this to do with me?" but she did not hesitate. When faith is perfect it does not hesitate before any kind of adversity. She taught trust: for although she heard words from her son that seemed to be in the negative, indeed as the Venerable Bede quoted above says, the Virgin could well believe that Christ had refused her request, just the same she went ahead against hope, trusting in her son's mercy. She taught love for God, getting him to manifest his glory through a miracle. She taught obedience while persuading the servants to obey God not in just one or another thing, but in everything without distinction; "*quodcumque dixerit*" [Jn 2:5], "whatever he tells you." She also gave an example of modesty by not profiting from the occasion to glory in her role as mother of such a son, since she did not say: "Whatever my son will tell you" but left it in the simple third person. She also inspired reverence for God by not pronouncing the holy name of Jesus. "I have never discovered" this author says "in the Scriptures that the Blessed Virgin said this holy name because of the great veneration she had for it." She gave an example of promptness in that she did not exhort them to listen to him but to do what he said. And finally she taught prudence with mercy, since she told the servants to do *whatever he told them*, so that when they understood Jesus' command to fill the water jars, they did not think it was silly: it was just the right amount to mercifully and prudently prevent others falling into difficulty. (P. Silveira, tom. 2, lib. 4, quest. 21).

## 290. Mary chosen as Help of Christians on Calvary by the dying Jesus

Critical ed. in G. BOSCO, *Maraviglie della madre di Dio...*, pp. 37-42  
(OE XX, 229-234).

We find the most splendid proof that Mary is the Help of Christians on Mount Calvary. While Jesus was hanging in agony on the cross, Mary overcame her natural weakness and helped him with unheard of strength. It seemed that there was nothing more left for Jesus to do to show how much he loved us. But his affection for us meant he found one more gift that would seal all the other benefits. From up on the cross he turned his dying gaze to his mother, the one treasure of his on earth still left. "Woman," Jesus said to Mary, "behold your son", then he said to John the disciple: "Behold your mother." "From that time on," the Evangelist concludes, "the disciple took her into his home."

The Fathers recognise three great truths in these words: 1. That John succeeded Jesus as Mary's son in everything; 2. That everything about Mary's motherhood for Jesus was now applied to her new son John; 3. That in the person of John Jesus meant to include all of humankind.

By her loving cooperation in the ministry of the Redemption Mary, says St Bernardine of Siena, "truly generated the life of grace for us on Calvary." In the order of salvation we are all born from Mary's sorrows as from the love of the Eternal Father and her son's sufferings. In those precious moments Mary became strictly our mother.

The circumstances which accompanied this solemn act of Jesus on Calvary confirm what we are saying. The words Jesus chose are generic and appealing, observed P. Silveira, but they are enough to let us know that here we are dealing with a universal mystery which includes not just one man but all those to whom we can apply the title of beloved disciple of Jesus. Since the Lord's words are a broad and solemn declaration that Jesus' mother has become the mother of all Christians: "*Ioannes est nomen particulare, discipulus commune ut denotetur quod Maria omnibus detur in matrem.*"



Jesus on the cross was not a simple victim of the Jews' malice, but a universal bridge acting on behalf of all humankind. So in the same way he asked forgiveness for those who crucified him he obtained it for all sinners; by opening paradise to the good thief he opened it to all penitents. Just as the crucifiers on Calvary, according to St Paul's forceful expression, represented all sinners and the good thief all true penitents, so St John represents all true disciples of Jesus, the Christians, the Catholic Church. As St Augustine said, Mary became the true Eve, mother of all who are spiritually alive, *Mater viventium*; or as St Ambrose states, "Mother of all believers, *Mater omnium credentium*."

Mary, by becoming our mother on Mount Calvary, not only had the title Help of Christians, but acquired that role, that magisterium, that duty. So we have a sacred right to call on Mary's help. This right has been consecrated by Jesus' word and guaranteed by Mary's motherly tenderness. Now that Mary had interpreted the intention of Jesus Christ on the cross in this sense and that he made her mother and help of all Christians, her conduct from then on proves it. We know from those who have written about her life how much zeal she has shown throughout the ages for the salvation of the world and for the increase and glory of the holy Church. She guided and counselled the apostles and disciples, encouraged them to keep the faith, preserve grace and make it effective. From the Acts of the Apostles we know how she attended the religious gatherings of the early faithful in Jerusalem, since the divine mysteries were never celebrated without her taking part. When Jesus went up to Heaven she followed him with the disciples to the Mount of Olives, the place of the Ascension. When the Holy Spirit came down on the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, she was there in the upper room with them. Thus St Luke tells us after naming the disciples gathered in the upper room one by one: "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus."

Moreover the apostles and disciples and all the Christians living at that time in Jerusalem and surroundings, came to Mary to be advised and guided.

### 291. The title “help”

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Associazione de' devoti di Maria Ausiliatrice canonicamente eretta nella chiesa a lei dedicata in Torino. Con ragguaglio storico su questo titolo*. Torino, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1869, pp. 5-9 (OE XXI, 343-347).

The title ‘*Auxilium*’ (Help), attributed to the august mother of our Saviour, is not something new. In the Holy Books themselves, Mary is called the Queen who stands at her divine Son’s right hand side, dressed in gold and surrounded by beauty. “*Adstitit regina a dextris tuis in vestitu deaurato, circumdata varietate.*” (Ps 45:10). This mantle is arrayed with gold, according to the spirit of the Church, as well as gems and diamonds, or the titles with which we usually call on Mary. So when we call the Blessed Virgin *Help of Christians*, it is but a special title, one that is appropriate for her, like a diamond on her gilded clothing. Mary was greeted this way, *Help of humankind*, from the earliest times in the world when Adam, falling into sin, was promised a liberator to be born of a woman, and whose immaculate feet would squash the head of the insidious serpent.

In fact this great woman is symbolised by the tree of life to be found in the earthly paradise, by Noah’s Ark, which saved those who adored the true God from the flood, by Jacob’s ladder, which reached up to Heaven, by Moses’ bush, burning but not burning up, and which alludes to Mary who remained a Virgin after giving birth, by the Ark of the Covenant, by the Tower of David, defence against every assault, by the rose of Jericho, by the sealed fountain, by the well-cultivated garden looked after by Solomon. She is found in the aqueduct of blessing, in Gideon’s fleece. Elsewhere she is called Star of Jacob, as beautiful as the moon, shining like the sun, iris of peace, pupil of God’s eye, the dawn of consolation, virgin and mother and parent of her Lord. These symbols and expressions which the Church applies to Mary, make God’s providential design clear. He wanted to make her known before his birth as the first amongst all creatures, most excellent protectress, help and support, even the one who would repair the evils to which the human race succumbed.

In the New Testament she is not only called help of mankind in general, through symbols and prophecies but the help, support and defence of

Christians. No longer symbolic expressions and figures; everything is the fulfilment and realisation of the past. Mary is greeted by the Archangel Gabriel who calls her full of grace; God beholds the great humility of Mary and raises her up to the dignity of being mother of the Eternal Word. Jesus, great God, becomes Mary's child. He is born of her, raised, helped grow up, and the Eternal Word made flesh submits in complete obedience to his august mother. At her request Jesus worked his first miracles in Cana in Galilee; on Calvary she became mother of all Christians. The Apostles had her as guide and teacher in virtue. They gathered to pray with her in the Upper Room; they waited there with her in prayer and finally received the Holy Spirit. Her last words were to the Apostles and then she flew gloriously to heaven.

From her high throne of glory she gazes down with motherly affection, saying: "*Ego in altissimis habito, ut ditem diligentes me et thesauros eorum repleam* [Prov 8:21]. On my high throne of glory I enrich those who love me and fill their treasuries with heavenly favours." Since her Assumption into heaven the constant, uninterrupted flow of Christians to Mary began and it was never heard, St Bernard says, that one who had recourse to this most blessed Virgin, was never heard. Here is the reason why every century, each year, each day and we could say, each moment is marked in history by some great favour granted to someone who called on her with trust. Here is the reason why each kingdom, every city, country, family has a church, a chapel, an altar, a statue, a picture, or some sign recalling the universal veneration for Mary and which at the same time reminds one of the many graces granted to those who have recourse to her for the necessities of life.

## **292. Prayers appropriate for the spirit of the Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians**

Critical ed. in G. BOSCO, *Associazione de' devoti di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, pp. 55-59  
(OE XXI, 393-397).

Virgin Mary, Queen of Heaven and earth, in whom, after God, I place all my trust, I throw myself humbly at your feet as the least of your servants, to consecrate myself to your service in this Pious Association erected under

your protection, and I promise with all my heart to practise everything the Rules prescribe with the greatest possible devotion, so that through the merits of Jesus Christ your beloved son and through your powerful intercession all members may be preserved from all spiritual and bodily harm in their lives; may the Lord be blessed in all their activities and may they finally obtain the grace of dying the death of the just. Since only the desire to please you is what has led me to embrace this devout association, I humbly implore you, holy Virgin, to number me amongst your children and obtain for me the grace of corresponding, through good behaviour and holy deeds, with the sublime nature of your servant.

O glorious Virgin Mary deign, from your exalted throne, to look down on me with a kindly eye always open to one who is consecrated to your service; and since today I am writing my name in the book of this pious Association, deign to engrave it also on your maternal heart; ask your Divine Son to be pleased to list me amongst those names written in the book of life. Amen.

*Act of a child who wishes to take the Virgin Mary as mother*

My Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, only Son of God and the Virgin Mary, I thank you and adore you as my beginning and my end. I implore you to renew for me that mysterious loving testament you gave on the cross, giving your especially beloved St John the quality and title of son of your mother Mary. Say these words to me too: *Woman, behold your son*. Give me the grace of being able to belong to her as her son and to have her as a mother throughout my mortal existence on this earth.

Most Blessed Virgin Mary, my principal advocate and mediatrix, I N. N. a poor sinner, the most unworthy and weak of your servants, humbly prostrate before you, entrusted to your goodness and mercy, and encouraged by a keen desire to imitate your beautiful virtues, I choose you today as my mother, and I ask you to receive me amongst the fortunate number of your beloved children. I give you all of myself entirely and irrevocably. Receive this offering gracefully; be pleased with the trust with which I abandon myself into your arms. Give me your motherly protection throughout my life and especially at

the hour of my death, so that my soul, free from bodily ties, may pass from this vale of tears to enjoy eternal glory with you in the kingdom of Heaven. Amen.

*Prayer of His Holiness Pius IX*

Lord, all-powerful God, who permits evil to draw good from it, hear our humble prayers with which we ask you that we may remain faithful amidst so many assaults and persevere faithfully until death. Give us the strength, through the mediation of Mary most holy, to always be united with your most holy will.

**293. Mary our help in life's needs**

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Nove giorni consacrati alla augusta Madre del Salvatore sotto al titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice*. Torino, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Francesco di Sales 1870, pp. 7-14 (OE XXII, 259-266).

1. A good mother is always a real treasure and great comfort for her family. So Mary our compassionate mother will certainly be a source of grace and blessings for Christian families throughout the world. We live as though on a stormy sea, as if in exile, in a vale of tears. Mary is the Star of the Sea, our comfort in our exile, the light pointing the way to heaven, and so our life, our sweetness and our hope: *vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra*. She does this by obtaining for us constant spiritual and temporal aid. St Jerome says: "Mary has a heart so compassionate and tender for human beings that there has never been anyone who has been as afflicted by their own sorrows as has been Mary by the sorrows of others." (*Epist. ad Eustoc.*). As soon as she notices a need she quickly brings help. So as soon as Mary learned from the Archangel that Zaccharia's family and especially Elizabeth needed help, she went to her in haste, making a trip through rugged mountains of about seventy miles: "*abiit in montana cum festinatione.*" (Lk 1:39). When she arrived Mary served her as a humble handmaid for three months and did not leave her until she had no more need of help. She did the same at Cana in Galilee. When Mary found herself invited to the wedding, with Jesus and other distinguished

individuals, in the midst of the feast she saw that they were lacking wine. With her maternal gaze she noticed that the newly married couple were in difficulties and were already feeling ashamed. Mary was moved when she saw this and without even being asked she began to think about how to help them. As St Bernardine of Siena reflected, she immediately took on the role of helper: “*officium piae auxiliatricis assumpsit non rogata*” (Saint Alphonsus Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*). “My son,” she whispered to Jesus “they have no wine.” Mary said these words with such expression that she made it known she wanted a miracle on behalf of her devotees and she gained it and consoled them (Jn 2:3).

2. Mary’s tender concern did not lessen when she was taken up by the angels into heaven; in fact it increased. Oh! Yes, she still remembers that on Mount Calvary Jesus made her our mother. “*Mulier, ecce filius tuus*”, and then to the beloved disciple: “*Ecce mater tua*” (Jn 19:26-27). At that moment Jesus so touched her heart and filled it with so much tenderness for us that the human mind cannot grasp it. If we were to combine all the love that mothers have for their children the fullness of affection these mothers have would not equal the love that Mary alone bears for each one of us. What a dear thought, what sweet comfort that we have a mother in heaven who is so tender and loving! This is the reason, devout Christian, why we do not read that over the centuries Mary failed to help Christians in any need. “Oh! no” St Augustine and St Bernard exclaim in one voice, it has never been heard of in the world that someone in need who had recourse to Mary in trust was abandoned (Saint Alphonsus, *Novena of Meditations*). Turn the pages of holy books and stories, go through every part of the Christian world, question peoples, kingdoms, cities, villages, families and ask them if it had ever happened to them that Mary had failed to come to the aid of her needy children. And to your question all will respond in harmony: “*No, never.*” In order to better convince yourself of this truth, enter, good reader, some sanctuary dedicated to Mary and you will no longer delay in being convinced that she is the *Help of Christians* in life’s needs. Look at the signs of her kindness and power hung from the sacred walls. Here you see a sick person given up by the doctors but

for whom Mary, instead, brought health. Over there you see someone who had a fever, another with dropsy, a third with gangrene—all freed. You can read others who by her intercession escaped from the hands of assassins or from flood, fire or landslide etc. When you come out you cannot but exclaim: “O Mary, how powerful and good you are, how true it is that you bring help to whoever calls on you in life’s need.”

3. If Mary comes to our help in temporal needs, she takes far greater care in coming to our spiritual needs. We would have to write huge volumes to list all the great benefits Mary has done for those devoted to her. Saint Bernard expresses this truth by saying: “God wanted every good thing to come through Mary”, “*totum nos habere voluit per Mariam*”, and St Bernardine of Siena adds: “All the graces we receive from God are dispensed through Mary and to whom and when Mary wishes.” (Saint Alphonsus, *Glories of Mary*). How many virgins owe their virginal purity to her protection! How many young people the victory over their passions! How many fathers and mothers the eternal salvation of their children! We could say that in the new law there is no Saint who does not recognise his or her holiness as not coming from Mary’s intercession. History tells us that the most outstanding of them were also the ones most devoted to Mary. Nor is Mary only the help of Christians in particular but the support of the Universal Church. By Mary’s help the apostles, martyrs, the primitive Church overcame its persecutors. By her help idolatry was eradicated. By her help the banner of the cross has fluttered and triumphed (St Cyril of Alexandria, *Homil. cont. Nest.*; Octava Nativitatis B. V.). It is through her that barbarians have been vanquished, heretics left in confusion, heresies rooted out. Rightly did St John Chrysostom call Mary the decorum, glory, steadfastness of the Church: “*Ecclesiae nostrae decus, gloria et firmamentum.*” (*Serm. apud Metaph.*, die 5 Nativitatis B. V. in Off.). Therefore good reader, let us say with St Bernard: “In dangers, in distress, in doubt, think of Mary, call upon Mary. Let Mary never leave your lips, never depart from your heart.” “*In periculis, in angustiis, Mariam cogita, Mariam invoca; non recedat ab ore, non recedat a corde.*” (*Hom. 2 super Missus est*).

## 294. The effectiveness of turning to Mary Help of Christians

ASC A000303 *Conferenze*, Quad. III, 1877-1878, ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 4-10<sup>113</sup>.

Sunday 20 May 1877

We are approaching Pentecost and the Novena to Our Lady Help of Christians. These are days for obtaining graces from Mary, not just once but many times a day, whether you come here to ask for them and be given them, or whether they are reports we receive from afar about the marvellous graces obtained from Mary our Help.

The Church lets us know about this power and kindness of Mary's with the Psalm that begins: "*Si caeli quaeris ianuas, Mariae nomen invoca*", if you seek the gates of heaven, call on Mary's name. If it is enough to call on Mary's name to enter heaven, we need to say she is powerful. And elsewhere the Church presents her like an army in battle array. And although the literal sense of the words mean enemies outside the Church, the Church's spirit understands them also in terms of our particular enemies.

So I recommend, inasmuch as I know and can, that you keep Mary's name engraved on your heart and that you always call on her this way: "*Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro me.*" It is not a long prayer, but a very effective one, you will see. When you want to obtain some spiritual grace, and by spiritual grace we can mean freedom from temptations, afflictions of spirit, lack of fervour, etc., if one of you wants to be free from temptation or acquire some great virtue, he only needs to call on Mary. These and other spiritual graces are the ones mostly obtained and they are the unknown ones but they do great good for souls. And most of you here, without naming them, confess that if you have been freed from some temptation it is through Mary Help of Christians.

And so many to whom I have recommended this short prayer, *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis*, have confessed how they have felt its effects. And of the hundreds or thousands or more who are or have been here, from the city or beyond, and whom I have recommended to tell me if this

<sup>113</sup> A goodnight for the boys at the Oratory.



prayer was fulfilled or not, up until now nobody has said that it wasn't. One did tell me that his prayer wasn't heard, but after questioning him, he said he intended to pray but hadn't done so. So it is not the Virgin who wouldn't listen but the one who did not want to be listened to. Prayer has to be regular, persevering, with faith and the intention that it be fulfilled.

I would like you to try this out and that you also get your parents and friends to try it out, telling them by letter or on the next Feast of Mary Help of Christians, coming here, or else Don Bosco can tell them that if they have some spiritual grace to obtain, pray this way: *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis*; and if the prayer is not fulfilled, they can do me the favour of letting me know. And if I come to know that someone has not obtained a spiritual grace from Mary as asked for, I will immediately write a letter to St. Bernard telling him that he made a mistake when he said: "Remember O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided." But you can be certain that I will never have to write a letter to St. Bernard. You are laughing at this idea of a letter to St. Bernard. Do we not know where to find St. Bernard? "It's a problem for the postman", Fr Rua was heard to say. Oh, but we have a much better, faster way of writing to the saints than carriages, steam trains, telegraph. Because the telegraph, although it is almost instantaneous, takes time just the same; but while I am talking to you, in my thoughts I go up, beyond the stars, before the throne of St Bernard. Never fear, he will receive our letters immediately, even if the postman is late. So try it and if you are not heard we won't have any difficulty in sending a letter to St Bernard.

For the end of this novena, which we are making now, I want you to engrave these words on your heart: *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro me*, and say them in any danger, any temptation, any need and always; and also ask Mary Help of Christians for the grace to be able to call on her in your need. And I promise you the devil will be bankrupt. You know what it means to say that the devil will be bankrupt? It means he will have no more power over us and will need to back off. Meanwhile I recommend you all to the Lord and to the Help of Christians to bless you and protect you. Good night.

SECTION FIVE  
ZEAL FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS  
DON BOSCO'S MODELS

**Presentation**

*Efforts to reform society along Christian lines, undertaken in the Turin diocese after the fall of Napoleon's Empire, in addition to taking up systematic parish catechesis once more, fostering popular missions, the Forty Hours and retreats for all kinds of groups, focused above all on reform of the clergy, beginning with more careful selection of candidates for the priesthood and diligent care in their preparation. With this in mind diocesan authorities first reorganised the seminary in the capital (1819), strengthening disciplinary and spiritual aspects, and encouraged the initiatives of Fr Luigi Guala, approving the Rule for the Pastoral Institute [Convitto ecclesiastico] (1821), then extended the seminary at Bra (1824-1825), and finally set up a new seminary in Chieri (1829) in the old house which belonged to the Oratorians (St Philip Neri's priests), putting trusted formators in charge<sup>114</sup>. The model of formation espoused by the archbishop, the Camaldolese Colombano Chiaveroti (1754-1831), drew its inspiration from priestly ideals belonging to post-Tridentine Catholic tradition, with a strong emphasis on apostolic charity and pastoral sacrifice (the priest had to be a "victima charitatis")<sup>115</sup>. Meanwhile groups of generous clergy, supporting his reform efforts, made themselves available for preaching to the people, the ministry of confessions and spiritual direction, along with some orders and congregations that had been set up once more after the suppression in the French era.*

*This effort at formation gradually showed results. Beginning from the 1840s a band of young priests, well prepared and motivated, entered the parishes and*

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Aldo GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società. Aspetti della Restaurazione religiosa a Torino*. Roma, LAS 1993, pp. 177-213.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 245-254, 277-288.

*charitable institutes in the diocese, and contributed effectively to the spiritual renewal of society and the revival of religious practice amongst the population. New apostolic frontiers opened up. New pastoral, educational and welfare institutions came into being.*

*Don Bosco, who grew up over these years, drank in the spiritual and apostolic fervour of the settings where he was formed. Reference models were the holy pastors of the Catholic Reformation—St Philip Neri, St Charles Borromeo, St Francis de Sales and St Vincent de Paul—especially their ardent apostolic energy and practical charity.*

*Joseph Cafasso, collaborator and successor of Guala at the Pastoral Institute, stood out for his extraordinary talent as a spiritual guide of priests and a teacher of moral theology. He was a much appreciated spiritual director, a zealous preacher, tireless and enlightened confessor, and apostle of charity at the prisons and with the very poor, and by the example of his priestly life, the charisms he was gifted with and the zeal of his charity, he played a decisive role in the spiritual and pastoral regeneration of Piedmontese clergy and laity. He died, utterly worn out from his efforts, at 49 years of age. Don Bosco had him as a teacher and guide, a model of encouragement. It was he who directed him and encouraged him in his ministry to poor and abandoned boys. It was from him that Don Bosco drew lessons for his spiritual life, along with the passion for salvation of souls, tireless charity, zealous faith, pastoral courage.*

*In this fifth section we include two splendid sermons of Don Bosco's, one on Fr Cafasso (no. 295), the other on St Philip Neri (no. 296), from which emerges the spiritual importance of their choices and the apostolic energy they gave to Salesian work, of these reference models who were so radical and ardent in their dedication.*

## 295. Funeral eulogy for Fr Joseph Cafasso

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Cafasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri*. Torino, Tip. G. B. Paravia e Comp. 1860, pp. 9-45  
(OE XII, 359-395)<sup>116</sup>.

### 1. Opening

I do not know, dear boys and respected gentlemen, I do not know if this morning's topic should be considered sorrowful or consoling. Certainly if we think of the loss of a benefactor for poor humankind in the death of Fr Cafasso we have serious reasons for sorrow and weeping as if we were struck by a terrible tragedy. A tragedy for good people, a misfortune for the poor, a disaster for the clergy, and a public calamity for Religion.

But if we judge this loss from the perspective of faith we have good reason to turn our distress into consolation, for although we have lost a man who did so much good on earth, we have the firm faith of having acquired a protector with God in heaven.

In fact if we cast an eye over Fr Cafasso's life, his innocent habits, his zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, his faith, hope, charity, humility and penitence, we have to conclude that with so many virtues he has been given a great reward and that by dying all he has done is to leave this mortal life with all its miseries to fly to the possession of heavenly bliss.

Moreover, according to St Paul, mortal man's virtues are imperfect and not worthy of comparison with heavenly ones. Therefore if Fr Cafasso's charity was

<sup>116</sup> This was held on July 10, 1860 in the church of St Francis de Sales, at the end of the funeral Mass celebrated seventeen days after Cafasso's death (G. BOSCO, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Cafasso...*, p. 3). Cleric Domenico Ruffino (1840-1865) wrote in his diary: "10 July. The funeral mass for Fr Cafasso by the boys at the Oratory was held. They wanted to offer their holy communions. ... At 6 ½ a sung Mass prepared and celebrated by Fr Borel began; Don Bosco said the funeral oration afterwards, in fact he read them otherwise his emotions would not have allowed him to continue. Despite this he wept copiously and what he said and his entire sermon fascinated his listeners who saw him conclude in tears. But he promised he would write up his life at length." (ASC A0120201 *Cronaca dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales N. 1, 1860*, ms by Domenico Ruffino, p. 23).

great on earth, how much more will it be now that we believe he is in heaven? So if he benefited us just as one person here on earth, in heaven he will benefit us as ten, a hundred, a thousand. How lucky were they who benefited from Fr Cafasso's charity when he was on earth, but how much luckier are those who now recognise him as their protector with God in heaven.

So we can be convinced of what I am saying, I would ask you to give me your compassionate attention while I explain the principal activities in the life of this wonderful man. I say I will explain only the principal activities, because most of them are yet unknown, and over time we will gather them up so we can offer a glorious collection for history purposes. I will limit myself only to the things I have seen or heard. And for the sake of brevity in a sermon like this I must even leave some of these out, also because many of them would cause me to become too emotional and leave me unable to talk about them. However, given the brevity of this sermon and keeping only to the things mostly known to those who knew him, I think they will be enough to persuade us that Father Joseph Cafasso lived a holy life, followed by a holy death.

These are the first two thoughts that first came to mind as I recalled our late dear friend and these two thoughts are the matters I will deal with here. Meanwhile, while recalling the virtuous actions and the precious death of Father Cafasso, let me say that he was a master of how to live well and a model for all those who wish to have a holy death.

## *2. Father Cafasso's boyhood*

It happens to many young boys that because they fall in with bad companions, or because of the neglect of parents or even by their own character they are often unfaithful to a good upbringing from an early age. They become the unfortunate prey of vice, thus losing the inestimable treasure of their innocence before having known the value of it, and become slaves of Satan without even being able to enjoy the delights of the children of God. This was not the case for Fr Cafasso. He was born in January 1811 in Castelnuovo d'Asti of an upright farming family. The young Cafasso's docile nature, obedience, reserve, love for study and piety, meant that he soon became the object of much pleasure for his parents and teachers.

The characteristic feature of his youthful age was his reserve and the irrepressible urge to do good for his neighbour. It was the happiest day for him when he could give good advice, or do something good and prevent something bad from happening. By the age of ten he was already a little apostle at home. He was often seen leaving the house to go in search of his companions, relatives and friends. Big and small, young and old were invited home then he would get them to kneel down and say a brief prayer. Then he would get up on a chair which became his pulpit and he would give a sermon from it, repeating what he had heard in church or telling them edifying stories. He was small of stature and his body was almost completely in his voice. Anyone who looked at his angelic face, his mouth from which came words and speeches far superior to his age, was filled with wonder, exclaiming with the same words those who looked at the young St John the Baptist: “Whatever will become of this child?” “*Quis putas puer iste erit?*” [Lk 1:66].

So you people from Castelnuovo, astonished at hearing the child Cafasso, were asking what would become of him, and at that time you did not know, but now I am able to satisfy you. That boy would be a model of virtue in class, someone his teachers would offer as an example of diligence to his classmates. He would be the very image of devotion, and would guide so many troublesome people on the way of virtue, confirm so many good people on the way to doing good. He would be the father of the poor, the delight of parents. He was the one who in such a short time achieved such a degree of virtue that he knew no other path than the one that led to the church and the classroom. He would be the one who after having spent fifteen years in study and virtue resolved to give himself entirely to God in the ecclesiastical state, working solely for the glory of God. He would be the one who one day would become a teacher for the clergy and would provide many worthy ministers for the Church and gain many souls for heaven.

### *3. Fr Cafasso's clerical life*

Brevity here obliges me to omit many facts so I can quickly come to the fortunate moment when I personally met him for the first time. It was in 1827

in Murialdo, a hamlet of Castelnuovo d'Asti, which was celebrating the Motherhood of Mary which was the principal solemnity for the inhabitants. Everyone was busy getting things ready at home or in the church, while others were spectators or taking part in games or different amusements.

I saw just one person standing apart from all these events and it was a cleric, slight in stature, bright-eyed, personable, with an angelic face. He was leaning against the door of the church. I was fascinated by his appearance and although I was only twelve, I nevertheless felt the urge to speak to him, so I approached him and said to him: "Father, do you want to see some of the shows that are part of our festivities? I will be very happy to take you wherever you want to go."

He made a gracious sign for me to come closer and he began asking me how old I was, if I was studying, if I had already made my first communion, how often I went to confession, whether I was attending catechism and the like. I was captivated by his edifying way of speaking and replied willingly to each question. Then almost by way of thanking him for his kindness, I repeated my offer to accompany him as he visited some of the shows.

"My dear friend," he replied "the functions in church are performances for priests; the better they are celebrated, the more pleasing these performances are for us. Our novelties are the practice of religion, always new and therefore to be attended diligently. I am simply waiting for the church to open."

I was encouraged to continue talking to him and added: "What you say is true but there is a time for everything; a time for going to church and a time for recreation."

He began laughing and concluded with these memorable words which were like the plan of action for his entire life: "Whoever embraces the ecclesiastical state sells himself to the Lord. And whatever is happening in the world, the only thing he should have at heart is what is for the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls."

I was amazed and wanted to know the name of this cleric whose words and behaviour manifested the spirit of the Lord in such a way. I came to know

that he was a seminarian, Joseph Cafasso in his 1st year of theology, and I had often heard him spoken of as a paragon of virtue.

If I ever have time to give a detailed account of the outstanding virtues he showed in his time as a cleric, either when he was in his village, or when he was in the seminary at Chieri, how many interesting and edifying details I would be telling you! Let me just say that his charity towards his companions, his submissiveness to his superiors, his patience in bearing with the faults of others, his effort never to offend anyone, the pleasant way he dealt with, advised, encouraged his companions, his indifference to whatever was served at table, his resignation to the ups and downs of the seasons, his readiness to teach catechism to children, his uplifting demeanour everywhere, his concern for study and things to do with piety are the qualities that adorned Fr Cafasso's life as a cleric. He practised these gifts in a heroic way and his companions, family and friends commonly said that it seemed that Cafasso the cleric was not affected by original sin.

Having got this far again I am forced to omit a long series of edifying deeds that cleric Cafasso did so I can have time to speak of his priestly life.

#### *4. Fr Cafasso's public priestly life*

But who are you, I ask myself, to pretend that you can speak about the marvellous deeds of this hero? Do you not know that the most beautiful actions are those that are only known to God? And do you not know that the most learned writers would need to write huge volumes to speak worthily of things that are known to the world? I know all this and I assure you that I feel like the boy who goes into a garden in order to make a bouquet of flowers and finds such beautiful and varied kinds of flowers in every part of it that he is confused and does not know where to start. It is the same with me when I speak of Fr Cafasso's priestly virtues. I do not know where to start and what should follow what. So I shall just bring together a few of the virtues that stood out most resplendently in his priestly public life and in his private and mortified existence. Let us begin with his public life.



His zeal, his ease in expounding the Word of God, the success of his sermons meant he was sought out everywhere to give triduums, novenas, retreats and missions to the people of various towns. He courageously tried to be everything for everyone to win everyone over to Jesus Christ. But after a few years he could no longer stand up to such serious and continuous efforts and had to limit himself to preaching to the clergy, who seemed to be that portion of human society which Divine Providence had entrusted to him in a special way. Who could enumerate here the great good he did through his retreats, the public and private conferences he gave, the books he distributed, financial help he gave to priests of poor means so they could complete their studies and so worthily exercise their sacred ministry?

The concern he had for poor boys belonged especially to Fr Cafasso's public life. He instructed them in the truths of the faith, provided them with clothes that enabled them to go to church decently dressed and helped them find work with an upright employer. For others he paid the cost of their schooling or gave them bread until they could earn their own through their own efforts. He began practising this burning spirit of charity when he was still a layman and continued when he became a cleric. He redoubled his zeal and it stood out resplendently when he became a priest. Fr Cafasso was the first catechist at our Oratory and was its constant promoter and benefactor in life and remains so after his death.

Also belonging to Fr Cafasso's public life are entire days spent in the prisons preaching, comforting, catechising the unfortunate detainees and hearing their confessions. Here I do not know if it is his courage or his charity that is worthy of the most praise. Or should we say that his burning charity inspired his heroic courage. Of the many deeds of which I was a witness, I choose the following; listen to it because it is interesting.

To prepare the prisoners to celebrate a Feast of Our Lady, he had spent an entire week instructing and encouraging the prisoners in a large room where there were around forty five of the worst ones. Almost all of them had promised to go to confession on the vigil of the solemnity. But when the day came, no one wanted to be the first to start. He renewed his invitation, reminded them

briefly of what he had told them the previous days, and reminded them of the promise they had given him. But maybe because of human respect, or the snares of the devil or some other vain pretext, no one wanted to go to confession. So what was he to do?

Fr Cafasso's inventive charity knew what to do. Smiling, he approached the one who seemed to be the biggest, strongest, most robust of the prisoners. Without saying a word, he took hold of the man's thick, long beard in his small hands. First he thought that Fr Cafasso was having fun with him, so in a polite way, as much as you could expect from someone of the kind he said: "You can take everything I have but leave me my beard."

"I am not going to let you go until you go to confession."

"But I'm not going to go."

"Well then, I'm not going to let go."

"But ... I don't want to go to confession."

"Say what you like, you are not going to escape and I'm not going to let go until you confess."

"I am not ready."

"I will get you ready."

Of course, if the prisoner had wanted to, he could have broken free from Fr Cafasso's hands with the slightest push, but either out of respect for his person or as the result of God's grace, the fact is that the prisoner gave up and allowed Fr Cafasso to take him off to a corner of the dormitory. The venerable priest sat down on a pallet and prepared his friend for confession. How did it happen? To be brief, the man became emotional and between tears and sighs, as soon as he could he ended up by confessing his sins.

Then a wonderful miracle took place. The one who began by cursing and refusing to go to confession then went to the other inmates and told them he had never felt so happy in his life. He acted and spoke in such a way that they all went to make their confession.

This fact, which I choose from thousands of such, whether you want to call it a miracle of God's grace or say it was a miracle of Fr Cafasso's charity it shows us how the hand of the Lord intervened (<sup>117</sup>).

The rest of the public life of Fr Cafasso can be told by many priests and lay people, rich and poor who are in debt to him, for their knowledge, the means of achieving it, or for the happiness they find in their family, for the trade they are working at, for the bread they eat (<sup>118</sup>).

Many who were sick and were comforted by him can tell their story, or the dying he assisted, the long line of penitents of every age and circumstance who on any day or at any time found in him a pious, learned and prudent spiritual director.

The story can also be told by so many unfortunate people sentenced to death who in their despair would not hear of religion. But they were assisted

<sup>117</sup> It would be good to note here that on that day Fr Cafasso heard confessions late into the night, and since the prison gates and exits were closed, he was on the point of having to sleep there with the prisoners. But at a certain hour of the night the policemen and wardens armed with rifles, pistols and sabres came, and they started doing their usual rounds, holding tapers at the ends of some long iron rods. They were checking here and there looking for any cracks appearing on the walls or the floor, and to see if there were any plots or other disorders among the inmates. When they saw someone they did not know they began shouting: "Who goes there?" And without waiting for an answer they surrounded him and threatened him, asking him what he was doing, what he was thinking of doing there, who he was, where he wanted to go. Fr Cafasso wanted to speak but it wasn't possible because the guards were shouting: "Stop, stop!" And "Tell us who you are". "I am Fr Cafasso." "Fr Cafasso...! How come ... at this hour ... why didn't you leave on time? We can't let you out without reporting this to the director of prisons." "That doesn't worry me. You can report to whoever you want to, but be careful because when nightfall comes you were supposed to come round and see who did not belong here and let them leave. This was your duty and it is your fault for not doing it." Then they all fell silent and taking the good Fr Cafasso they begged him not to talk about what had happened. They opened the door and to ingratiate themselves further, they accompanied him down to his house (note in the original text).

<sup>118</sup> I know of many people who because of their poor circumstances or major difficulties in the family could not take up any career. Some of those are now parish priests, assistant priests, school teachers. Some are notaries, lawyers, doctors, pharmacists, legal advisers. Others work in the country, own shops, are businessmen, and while in Fr Cafasso they lament the loss of a tender father, they give glory to truth by saying: "Fr Cafasso was our benefactor, he helped us to clothe ourselves, pay our rent, sit for our exams. He advised us, recommended us, supported us spiritually and bodily. To him we owe our honour, study, employment, the bread we eat (note in the original text).

and, I would say, won over by the irresistible charity of Fr Cafasso and died in the most consoling fashion, leaving us with the moral certainty of their eternal salvation.

Oh! If heaven were to tell the story of the public life of Fr Cafasso there would be, I believe, thousands and thousands of souls who would loudly say: “If we are saved, if we enjoy the glory of heaven, we are debtors to the charity, zeal and efforts of Fr Cafasso. He saved us from danger, guided us on the way of virtue. He pulled us back from the brink of hell and sent us to heaven.”

### *5. Fr Cafasso's private priestly life*

Let's pause from speaking about Fr Cafasso's public life to speak for a moment about his private life. By private life I mean especially the virtues he practised in familiar occupations, the things that mostly seem worthless in the world's eyes, but are perhaps the most meritorious before God. And here there is a wide range of edifying deeds, shining virtues presented for our consideration! How many mortifications, penances, abstinences, prayers, fasts took place between the walls of his dwelling. Every moment he had free from his sacred ministry was employed in lengthy sessions for listening to people, that you could say were without limits. He was always ready to receive, console, advise, hear confession in his room. Sometimes he was so tired he could not make his voice heard and not infrequently he had to deal with rude people who understood nothing or were not satisfied with anything. However, he was always calm, his words kind, without ever allowing a word, or action showing any sign of impatience.

If only the walls of that room could speak, how many virtues, how many acts of kindness, patience, suffering they would give glorious testimony to! Always affable, kindly, he never let anyone leave without consoling them with spiritual or temporal comforts, or at least without having first suggested something to them of maximum profit for their soul. The multitude of people wanting to talk to him meant he had to be quick. So without getting lost in compliments or ceremony he came straight to the point and with surprising ease understood at the least inkling what they wanted to say and gave a

prompt, frank and complete response. But it was with humility, respect and with such rapidity that a respected individual had only this to say about Fr Cafasso: "His interest in human beings was charity and nothing else."

He knew and preached that every moment of time was a treasure, so he benefited from every moment and opportunity to do good. Going up or down stairs, coming or going from visits to the sick or prisoners he was mostly accompanied by someone talking about matters to do with the sacred ministry or giving words of comfort to someone whom he would not have been able to speak with otherwise.

He had some recreation after meals, and this was the time for Fr Cafasso to give some wonderful lessons. Here his students absorbed his beautiful way of being in company as if sucking milk. He showed how to deal with the world without being a slave to the world and how to become true priests with the necessary virtues to train ministers to be able to give to Caesar what is Caesar's, to God what is God's.

But nothing was more wonderful in Fr Cafasso's private life than his exact observance of the rules of the Pastoral Institute of St Francis. As superior he could have dispensed himself of many things, whether because of his poor health, or because of the seriousness and sheer number of tasks which were weighing on him. But he had fixed in his mind that the most effective command of a superior is good example, and being better than his subjects in the performance of their duties. Therefore, in the smallest things, the practices of piety, being there for conferences, at meditation, mealtimes, he was like a machine that the sound of the bell brought almost instantly to the fulfilment of that particular duty.

I recall one day when he needed water and someone brought him a glass. He had it in his hand when the bell sounded for rosary. He did not hesitate but put it down and went immediately to the practices of piety. "Drink it," I told him "and you can still be in time for prayer." He answered me: "Would you prefer a glass of water to such a precious prayer as the rosary we say in honour of Mary Most Holy?"

### *6. Fr Cafasso's life of mortification*

Part of Fr Cafasso's private life was his secret but constant mortification. Here we see the great art he employed in becoming a saint. There is solid basis for saying he used a hair shirt, put objects in his bed to make it uncomfortable, and did other serious penances. I shall leave these things aside for now. But I will tell you what I and others knew and saw. However tired he was he never leaned on his elbows or anything else to rest. He never crossed his legs and at table never said: "I prefer this or not that", since he ate everything. Since a young age he had set aside certain days for special acts of mortification. Saturday was a strict fast for Mary. But while I am saying he fasted on Saturday, I am saying that every week, every month, the whole year was a strict and fearful fast. Firstly he reduced the number of meals and finally only ate once a day, and his meal was soup and a small second course. Some who saw such prolonged austerity chided him respectfully indicating the damage he would do to his health. "Have some respect for yourself," they told him "and if you do not want to do it out of love for yourself, then do so out of love for others." He smiled and answered: "I am even healthier by doing it this way." But as he noted his strength failing more and more each day he then said: "O paradise! Paradise! What strength and health you give to those who would enter there!" If he was numb with cold, suffocating in the heat, covered in sweat he never sought comfort, and no one ever heard a word of complaint or pain.

At any time of the year he would spend many hours listening to the confessions of the faithful and often went into the confessional at six in the morning and came out at twelve. Staying still so long even when the cold was so bad meant that when he left to go to the sacristy he could not walk straight and had to lean from bench to bench in order not to fall and sometimes in the middle of the church he was forced to kneel or sit. Seeing that everyone felt sorry for him and some wanted to buy a small foot warmer for him at their own expense, for him to rest his feet on and so recover a bit from the harshness of the season. For fear that he would not allow it if someone were to mention it beforehand, the sacristan bought the item and without its owner knowing brought it to the confessional before he got there. When he saw that object of affluence, as he called it, he pushed it aside with his foot to a corner of the

confessional and later ordered that it not be returned there saying: "These things are useless, they give the idea of too much respect for a priest who does not need it."

He said various other things, but neither in this nor in any other circumstance was it possible to get him to temper his desire for penance that certainly contributed to consuming his precious life so much.

He was adverse to any kind of entertainment. In the thirty two years I knew him I never saw him playing cards, tarot cards, chess, billiards or other game. If he was occasionally invited to join in he would say, "I have very different things to amuse myself with. When there is nothing else pressing, I will play."

"When is that likely to be?"

"When we are in heaven."

Other than the regular mortification of his bodily feelings, he was the sworn enemy of any kind of habit, no matter how harmless. "The only habit we should have is doing good", he used to say. "Our body is insatiable. The more we give it the more it wants, the less we give it the less it wants."

So he was never in the habit of taking tobacco or sweets or special drinks, except under doctor's orders. While studying at college, in the seminary he did not want to take coffee or fruit at breakfast or for a snack.

He had already been at the Pastoral Institute for ten years, was prefect of the conference, yet his breakfast still consisted of a few slices of dry bread. In view of all his hard work, one day I told him to take something more suited to his delicate constitution. "Unfortunately," he said smiling, "the time will come when I will need to give into the body in some way but I don't want to satisfy it until I find I can do no other."

Just a few years later he was forced by obedience to temper such a rigid lifestyle. But despite his weak constitution and dubious health, he never wanted to get into the habit of eating certain foods, and in fact kept decreasing the amounts until, as I have already said, he came down to just one meal a

day of soup and a second course. Although subject to many ills he did not want to lengthen his ordinary sleep regime which was a scarce five hours a night. In the cold of winter, even when he suffered stomach pains, headache or toothache which made it hard for him to even be on his feet, before four in the morning he was already kneeling at prayer, meditating or carrying out some task.

This tenor of life—hard working, penitent, a life of prayer and charity, hardship and self-denial he practised until death which came to him just when we needed him most, at a time we least expected but which he had calmly awaited. His entire life had been in preparation for it.

Ah time! Why do you fly so fast and force me to remain silent about so many things I would still like to say? Although my talk has been rather long already, I hope you can still be patient for a moment to listen to the story of Fr Cafasso's final hours. I will do this after a short break.

### *7. His holy death*

Let's draw a curtain over the events that certainly contributed to depriving us of such a dear, helpful and precious individual. Let us just say that so pure and holy a life so similar to that of the Saviour also had to be met with ingratitude by the world which did not know him; a world for the benefit of which he had spent all he had, his health and his life. In all of this we adore the decree of Divine Providence.

It is a truth of Faith that at the moment of death a man reaps what he has sown throughout life: *quae seminaverit homo, haec et metet* [Gal 6:8]. Since Fr Cafasso had lived a life full of good and holy works, his death too had to be good and holy. He had a familiar saying and he used to often repeat it especially in moral conferences: "Fortunate is the priest who has consumed his life for the good of souls, and more fortunate still is the one who dies working for the glory of God. He will certainly have a great reward from the supreme master for whom he works."

We can now use those same words to say: "How fortunate you are, Fr Cafasso, since your entire life was consumed by working for the glory of God



and the salvation of souls. You are very fortunate because your life ended while you were in the midst of the labours of the sacred ministry.”

We have good reason to believe that God had given him a special revelation of the day and hour of his death, and he gave clear signs of that to those of us who in recent days had the good fortune to speak with him. He would usually settle affairs each day as if he were at the vigil of his death. Before going to bed each evening he would arrange things in the house as if that night were to be the last of his life. The three days before his illness he spent almost all in his room, the door closed. He settled everything that had to do with the smooth running of the Institute. He gave timely orders to family members, answered some letters, put all his written material in order. He made sure every piece of paper was in its proper place, added a few items to his will then made the exercise for a happy death which he would always do once a month without fail.

Meanwhile the morning of Monday June 11 this year arrived and what did Fr Cafasso do? Everything had been fixed up, and all was in readiness for his trip to eternity. He was walking around his room waiting for the Lord's voice to say to him: “Come.” How did it happen? Thinking of his condition, he believed he could still spend a little time on behalf of souls. Cheerfully, but with effort, he left his room to go to the confessional and spent some hours there hearing the confessions of the faithful, people he had guided on the way to heaven with his singular learning, prudence and piety. But it was noticed that his way of hearing confessions was not the same as usual. He recommended them all to detach their hearts from earthly things, love God their Creator with all their strength and ask him to take us soon from the worries of life and give us beautiful paradise. “Oh paradise, paradise,” he told one penitent, “why are you not sought out and desired by all? Why do you still delay, why, why ...?” But he was only one man and while the zeal for winning souls for God continued in his great soul his strength had failed him. He had to leave the confessional where over some twenty five years he had been the faithful dispenser of heavenly favours for so many souls. He had to now leave this confessional and would never return.

He slowly went back to his room. Before lying down on the bed he knelt down and said these memorable words which he had with him in writing: “The sorrow that I feel, Lord, for not having loved you, and the great desire that I have to love you more, make this life exceedingly dull and heavy. I beg you to shorten my days on earth and release me from purgatory in the afterlife so I can quickly go to enjoy heaven ...” He could say no more and to prevent himself from fainting he lay down on the bed around eleven in the morning.

The illness was a lung infection and bleeding in the stomach. The doctors did what they could but all in vain. For some days it seemed there was some improvement, but in reality, as he said, the moment for him to fly to heaven was fast approaching.

From the first day of his illness he spoke frankly saying he would not recover and that he wanted to go to heaven.

If someone asked him if he was feeling better, if he had slept well, he always answered: “As God wills.” He recommended himself to everyone’s prayers. One day he told me to see that special prayers were said in our house by the boys. “We have already done that,” I told him “and we will continue to pray. But I told the boys you would come one day and given them Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.” “That’s ok,” he said, “go and pray and tell the boys I will bless them all from paradise.”

When I asked if he had something he wanted to put in writing, some memory, or leave some task for someone, he looked at me smiling and said: “Just imagine if I had left it to this late hour to adjust my affairs. Everything has been done for this world and now all that remains is to fix up things with God. In his great mercy he soon wants to take me to paradise.”

One particular thing was noted by everyone and this was how he welcomed everyone who came to his bedside with the usual kindness but a few minutes later would suggest they go. He did not want anyone to spend more time with him than was strictly needed. So sometimes after leaving him I stood for a moment just outside the door to his room. I saw him join his hands, kiss the crucifix then kiss it again, then looking to heaven he would pray unceasingly but in a most familiar way.

That convinced me that he wanted to be alone so he could speak with God more freely. One day when I was alone with him I plucked up courage to tell him that I thought it would be better for him to have someone by his bedside, both to help him with the things he frequently needed, and also to receive some words of comfort. “No,” he quickly answered, “no.” Then raising his eyes to heaven he said in a strong voice: “Don’t you know that every word said by a man is a word stolen from the Lord?”

Even when the illness threatened his life and he was in agony he loved to be alone. He was not even happy when someone suggested brief prayers for him to say, almost as though these were interrupting the ordinary colloquy which he was certainly having with God. But he asked everyone to pray for him and recommend him to the protection of the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph. One person of some authority who used to visit Fr Cafasso during his lifetime, visited him more frequently during his illness and after seeing how he acted, how much he said and did, offered this frank opinion: “Fr Cafasso has no need of our suggestions. He is in direct communion with God and spends time in familiar conversation with the Mother of our Saviour, his Guardian Angel and St Joseph.”

I could tell you many things about his admirable patience in putting up with his illness, the things he said to his friends, the many blessings he gave especially to those living with him. Also about the edifying way he received the last sacraments; but these things make me too emotional and maybe I would not be able to control myself while talking about them.

I will tell you only that if we compare the illness and death of Fr Cafasso with that of Saint Charles Borromeo, Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Philip Neri and other great Saints, it seems to me that we could say it was equally precious in God’s eyes. And how could it be otherwise? If he led a holy life why should he not also die a holy death?

He was greatly devoted to Mary and constantly promoted devotion to our heavenly Mother. Every day and we could say every moment, he did something or said a brief prayer in her honour. Saturday was all for Mary. He spent it by fasting rigorously; anything he asked her on that day was promptly

granted. Many times he had expressed the desire to die on a Saturday. Often during life he said this and he left it in writing: “How wonderful it would be to die for love of Mary. To die calling on Mary’s name. To die on a day dedicated to Mary. To die at a time that was most glorious for Mary. To expire in Mary’s arms. To leave for paradise with Mary. To enjoy eternity close to Mary.”

O fortunate soul you are! All your desires were satisfied: it was the 13th day of your illness; it was Saturday, Mary’s day and you had received the sacred Body of Jesus shortly beforehand. Then Jesus called to give you the paradise you so much desired, and for which you had spent your entire life. May Mary your Mother, to whom you were so devoted in life, now assist you and lead you with her to heaven. Our Fr Cafasso smiled ... and breathed his last ... His soul was with Jesus and Mary and flew to heavenly bliss.

We have every reason to hope that after a death so precious in God’s eyes Fr Cafasso’s soul would not even have felt the pains of purgatory and would have flown immediately to heaven. For this reason, instead of inviting you to pray for him, I suggest rather that you have recourse to his heavenly intercession. But since God is so holy and pure that he finds some stain even in the angels themselves, we fulfil a duty of gratitude and friendship by offering God our prayers, communions, alms, works of charity in suffrage for our beloved benefactor’s soul. And if such works are no longer necessary to free him from the pains of purgatory, they will serve as suffrage for other souls there for whose relief he worked so much in life and for whom he so often asked us to pray.

Courage, good listeners, just one more moment. Amongst Fr Cafasso’s final words were the following and they are truly worth remembering forever: “When I have gone to my grave,” he said “I want and I ask the Lord to wipe out my memory on earth, so that no one should ever need to think of me again except for the faithful, who in their charity would, I hope, want to pray for my soul. I accept as a penance for my sins everything the world might want to say against me after death.”

Dear Fr Cafasso, this prayer of yours will not be heard; you wished to humiliate yourself so that your glory would go to the grave with you. But God wants otherwise. God wants your great humility to be exalted and for you to be crowned with glory in heaven. Your memory is the memory of the just that lasts forever. *In memoria aeterna erit iustus* [Ps 111:7].

Your memory will endure amongst priests because you were their model in holiness of life and their teacher in the knowledge of the Lord. Your memory will endure amongst the poor who weep over your death as the death of a tender father. It will endure amongst those who doubt for you gave them holy and salutary advice. It will endure amongst the afflicted to whom you brought consolation in so many ways. It will endure amongst those who were in agony and you brought them comfort. It will endure in the prisons where you helped so many unfortunates. It will endure amongst so many condemned to death for your charity which sent them to heaven. It will endure amongst your friends, and your friends are all those who knew you. It will endure amongst all who respect the great benefactors of humankind as you were throughout your mortal life. And finally it will endure amongst us because the love you showed us on earth assures us that you will be our protector with God now that you are glorious in heaven.

So live eternally with God great and faithful soul. Your time of suffering is past; no more pain, no more affliction, no more illness, no more displeasure, no more death, no more. God is your reward; you are in Him and with Him and with Him you enjoy everything that is good, in heaven. Mary, the heavenly mother you so much loved and made loved on earth, now she wants you with her to give you due reward for the filial affection you showed her. But in your glory please cast a compassionate eye on us who have been left poor and orphaned by your departure. Intercede for us and see that by living according to the advice you gave us, by following your shining example of virtue you left us, we too one day may come into possession of the glory that with Jesus and Mary, with all the Saints in heaven you are enjoying forever and ever. Amen.

## 296. Panegyric in honour of St Philip Neri

ASC A2250704, original ms by don Bosco<sup>119</sup> (cf. MB IX, 213-221).

### *[I. Opening]*

Although the virtues and actions of the saints are all directed to the same end, which is the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls, there are different ways of achieving the sublime degree of holiness which God called them to. The reason seems to be this: in the wonderful dispensation of God's gifts and different ways and diverse paths he calls us to himself so that all the various virtues contributing to adorn and beautify our holy religion cover, so to speak, the holy Church with the mantle of variety that the face appear in the eyes of the heavenly bridegroom as a queen seated on the throne of glory and majesty. In fact, we admire the fervour of many individuals who are either distrustful of themselves in time of persecution or fear shipwreck in the world and abandoned home, relatives, friends, and anything they owned to go into barren and barely habitable deserts. Others, who were also courageous soldiers of the King of Heaven, faced every danger and disregarding sword, fire and death itself joyfully offered their lives, confessing Jesus Christ and sealing with their own blood the truths they so greatly proclaimed. Then there were groups driven by the desire to save souls who went to distant lands, while many others added splendour after splendour to the Church of Jesus Christ among us by study, preaching, and reserve, and practising other virtues. Then there were some made after God's heart who covered such a range of virtues, knowledge, courage and heroic actions which make it so very clear that God is wonderful in his saints: *Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis* (Ps 66:36). Every era of the Church has been glorified by some hero of the Faith. Amongst others in the sixteenth century there was St Philip Neri, whose virtues are the object of this respectable gathering and of our poor discourse.

But what could I possibly say about a saint whose actions collected only in a summary form take up huge volumes? Actions which alone are enough

<sup>119</sup> The panegyric for St Philip Neri was given by Don Bosco to priests in the diocese of Alba (Cuneo), at the invitation of its bishop, bishop Eugenio Galletti in May 1868 (cf. MB II, 46-48).

to give a perfect model of virtue to the simple Christian, the fervent monk, the most hard working clergyman? For these reasons I do not intend to widely expound all the actions and all the virtues of Philip, because you, better than I, have already read, meditated on and imitated them. I will simply give you a hint of what it is like the cornerstone around which are built so to speak, all the other virtues; his zeal for the salvation of souls! This is the zeal recommended by the divine Saviour when he said: "I came to bring fire to the earth and how I wish it were already kindled, *Ignem veni mittere in terram et quid volo nisi ut accendatur?*" (Lk 12:49). Zeal that made the Apostle Paul exclaim that "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh, *Optabam ego ipse anathema esse a Christo pro fratribus meis*" (Rm 9:3).

But gentlemen, I have never put myself in such a critical position! I who could really be your pupil and am pretending now to be your teacher? It is true, and just to escape the accusation of being reckless I ask you first to kindly put up with me if the little I offer does not match your expectations. However, I hope in the Lord's grace and the protection of our saint.

### [III. Philip in Rome]

As an introduction to the topic, listen to this interesting episode. It is about a young man just about twenty years of age who was moved by desire for the glory of God, and abandoned his parents. He was the only son and he renounced the substantial wealth of his father and of a rich uncle who wanted him to be the sole heir. Unbeknownst to anyone, without any means whatsoever, and depending only on Divine Providence he left Florence and went to Rome. Now look at him: he was taken in charitably by a fellow citizen (Caccia Galeotto). And there he was standing in one corner of the courtyard of the house, looking towards the city and caught up in deep thought. Let us go up to him and ask him.

"Young man, who are you and what are you so anxiously looking at?"

"I am a poor young foreigner. I am looking at this great city and one thought occupies my mind, but I fear that it is folly, and recklessness."

“What’s that?”

“Consecrating myself to the good of so many souls, so many poor boys who for want of religious instruction are on the road to perdition.”

“Do you have any learning?”

“I have hardly done primary school.”

“Do you have material means?”

“Nothing: I only have the load of bread that my master charitably gives me every day.”

“Do you have churches, houses?”

“All I have is a low, narrow room kindly given me to use. My wardrobe is a simple rope stretched from one wall, and from which I hang my clothes and all my gear.”

“How, then, without a name, no learning, no means and no place, can you undertake so huge an enterprise?”

“That is true: it is precisely this lack of means and merit that are occupying my thoughts. God of course, who has given me the courage, God who raised up Abraham’s children from the stones, this same God is the one who ...”

This poor young man, gentlemen, is Philip Neri who was thinking of reforming the Christians in Rome. He was looking at the city but alas! How does he see it! He sees that it has been the slave of foreigners for many years; he sees it horribly tormented by pestilence, misery; sees it after being besieged for three months, fought, conquered, plundered and destroyed, we can say. This city is the field where young Philip would harvest such abundant fruit. Let us see how he tackled the work.

With the usual aid of Divine Providence, he resumed his course of studies, did philosophy, theology, and following the advice of his director devoted himself to God in the priestly state. His ordination redoubled his zeal for the glory of God. Philip, by becoming a priest, agreed with St Ambrose that by zeal one acquires the faith and by zeal man is led to the possession of justice. “*Zelo fides acquiritur, zelo iustitia possidetur*” (sanctus Ambrosius, in *Ps. 118*).



Philip was convinced that no sacrifice was more pleasing to God than zeal for the salvation of souls. “*Nullum Deo gratius sacrificum offerri potest quam zelus animarum.*” (Greg. M. in *Ezech.*). Moved by these thoughts it seemed to him that crowds of Christians especially poor boys, were crying out against him in the words of the prophet: “*Parvuli petierunt panem, et non erat qui frangerit eis.*” (Lam 4:4). But when he was able to go to the public workshops, enter hospitals and prisons and saw people of every age and every condition given to fighting, cursing, theft and living enslaved by sin; when he began to think how many reviled God their Creator almost without knowing it, and did not observe the divine law because they were ignorant of it, then he remembered the sighs of Hosea (4:1-2), who says that because people do not know the things of eternal salvation the greatest, the most abominable crimes have flooded the earth. But how embittered was his innocent heart when he realised that most of those poor souls were lost only because they were not educated in the truths of the Faith. This people, he exclaimed with Isaiah, had no knowledge of the things of salvation, “Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth beyond measure. The nobility of Jerusalem and her multitude go down, her throng and all who exult in her”, “*Quia populus meus non habuit scientiam, propterea infernus aperuit os suum absque ullo termino; et descendunt fortes eius, et populus eius, et sublimes gloriosisque eius ad eum.*” (Is 5:13-14).

At the sight of the ever-increasing evils Philip followed the example of the Divine Saviour who had nothing in the world when he began his preaching except the great fire of divine charity which prompted him to come down from heaven to earth; or the example of the apostles who were devoid of any human means when they were sent to preach the gospel to the nations of the earth all miserably engulfed in idolatry, in all kinds of vice or, according to the Bible: “were buried in darkness and in the shadow of death.” Philip became all things to all men in the streets, squares, public workshops. He entered public and private establishments and with his polite, kind, pleasant manner suggestive of his charity towards his neighbour, he began to talk about virtue and religion to those who did not want to know about either. Imagine

the things that were being said about him! Some said he was stupid, others ignorant, others said he was drunk, and there was no lack of those who said he was mad.

Courageous Philip let them all say what they wanted; indeed the world's blame is assured for anyone who works for the glory of God, because what the world says is wisdom is foolishness for God. So he fearlessly continued his holy enterprise. And who can ever resist that terrible two-edged sword which is the Word of God? Or a priest who corresponds to the holiness of his ministry?

In a short time people of every age and condition, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, clergy and laity, from the highest class to apprentices, the scavengers, the ships boys, the youngest and the oldest bricklayers began to admire the zeal of the servant of God. They went to listen to him, knowledge of the Faith made its way into their hearts. Contempt became admiration, admiration became respect. So in Philip we see none other than the true friend of the people, a zealous minister of Jesus Christ won everyone over, conquered everything to the extent that it all fell fortunate victim to the charity of this new apostle. Rome changed; everyone wanted to be Philip's friend, they all praised Philip, spoke of Philip, wanted to see Philip. It was from this that wonderful conversions eventuated, sensational gains of so many obstinate sinners of which the author of the Saint's life speaks at length (see Bacci)<sup>120</sup>.

### *[III. Philip as the apostle of youth]*

But God had sent Philip especially for the youth, therefore he addressed his special concerns to them.

He looked at human kind as a great field to be cultivated. If good grain is sown in time it will have an abundant harvest; but if the sowing is out of season, all you get is straw and husks<sup>121</sup>. He also knew that in this mystical

<sup>120</sup> Pietro Giacomo BACCI, *Vita di S. Filippo Neri fondatore della congr. dell'Oratorio*. Monza, Tipografia dell'Istituto dei Paolini 1851.

<sup>121</sup> DB uses an archaic term to indicate the shell of grain, chaff: things of little value, of no importance.

field there is a great hidden treasure, meaning the souls of so many young people most of them innocent and often corrupted without their knowing it. This treasure, Philip said in his heart, is totally entrusted to the priests and their salvation or damnation depends mostly on them.

Philip did not ignore that fact that it is up to the parents to look after their children; and up to employers to look after their workers, but when these cannot or are not able to or do not want to, should these souls be allowed to go to perdition? Especially since the priest's lips should be the guardian of knowledge and people have the right to seek from his mouth and not from someone else's?

One thing at first sight seemed to discourage Philip in educating poor boys, and it was their fickleness and the effects of this in doing bad things or worse. But he recovered from his panic and fear by considering that many were persevering in good, that repeat offenders were not overwhelming in number and that they themselves with patience, love and with the grace of the Lord, for the most part ended up on the right track and therefore the Word of God was a seed which sooner or later produced the longed-for fruit.

So following the example of the Saviour who taught his people every day: "*erat quotidie docens in templo*" (Lk 19:47), and was careful to call the wildest ones to himself, he went around everywhere saying: "Come to me, boys, and I will show you how to become rich but with real wealth that will never fail. I will teach you the holy fear of God, *Venite, filii, audite me: timorem Domini docebo vos.*" (Ps 33:11). These words, accompanied by his great charity and a life that was a compendium of all virtue, meant that crowds of boys flocked to the Saint from all over. He would speak to one and to another: he taught literature to the student, smithing to the blacksmith, made a master builder out of the carpenter, a real barber out of the barber, a master mason out of the bricklayer, a master cobbler of the cobbler. By being all things to all men he won over everyone for Jesus Christ. As a result those youngsters, enticed by his charitable ways, his edifying discourses, allowed themselves to be taken where Philip wanted. This happened to the unheard of extent that in the streets, squares, churches, the sacristy, his very room, at table and during prayer time

he was preceded or followed by youngsters who hung from his every word, listened to the examples he recounted, the principles of the catechism he was explaining.

And then? Listen. That mob of unruly and ignorant boys little by little were instructed in the catechism, asked to approach the sacraments of confession and communion. They sought to hear Mass, listen to sermons and gradually ceased swearing, lack of obedience and finally abandoned their vices, improved their morals. Thousands of hapless children who were already beating the path of disgrace and who might have ended their lives in prison or in shackles, to their eternal loss, were returned to their families because of Philip's zeal as docile, obedient, good Christians, on the way to heaven. Oh holy catholic Religion! Oh wonders of God's Word! What wonders do you not work through the minister who knows and performs the duties of his calling!

Someone will say: "Philip performed these wonders because he was a saint." I would put it differently: "Philip performed these wonders because he was a priest who corresponded to the spirit of his vocation." I believe that if we are animated by the spirit of zeal, confidence in God, we could imitate this saint as well and certainly get great results in gaining souls. Who among us cannot muster some children, give them a little catechism at home or in church, and if needs be also in some corner of a square or a street and instruct them in the Faith, and encourage them to go to confession. and when they need it, hear their confession? Could we not say with St Philip: "Boys, come to confession every week and go to communion following the advice of your confessor?" How come dissolute boys who like eating, drinking and playing can turn to matters of church and piety?

Philip found this secret. Listen. By imitating the kindness and meekness of the Saviour, Philip led them to be good, caressed them, gave some a sweet, others a medal, a holy picture, a book or similar. For the wilder and more ignorant ones who were unable to enjoy these sublime expressions of fatherly kindness, he prepared something more suited to them. As soon as he could get them around him he immediately began telling them interesting stories, invited them to sing, play, put on plays, jump, use games equipment of all kinds.

Finally the most reluctant, the most frivolous were as it were dragged into the recreation area by musical instruments, bowls, stilts, quoits, with offerings of fruit and small school lunches, breakfasts, snacks. Any expense, said Philip, any effort, disturbance, sacrifice is slight when it is a case of winning souls for God. So Phillip's room had almost become a shop, a place for public performances, but at the same time a holy house of prayer and place of sanctification. So Rome saw a man without titles, means or authority, armed only with charity combat fraud, deceit, licentiousness and every sort of vice, and overcome everything and everyone so that many whom the public called wolves became meek lambs. These serious efforts, these noises and disturbances which perhaps for us seem to be bearable for just a few minutes were the work and the delight of St Philip over more than sixty years, during his whole priestly life until extreme old age, until such time as God called him to enjoy the fruit of so many and such prolonged labours.

*[IV. A plea: we must save souls]*

Respectable gentlemen, is there something in this faithful servant that we can imitate? There certainly is. Each of us in his situation is educated enough, rich enough to imitate him if not in everything, at least in part. Let us not be deceived by the vain pretext that we sometimes happen to hear: "*It is not my problem, let the one who has to think about it do it.*" When they told Philip that since he did not have to take care of souls he did not need to do that work he replied: "Did my good Jesus have any obligation to shed his Blood for me? He died on the cross to save souls so should I as a minister refuse to put up with a little bother, some effort to correspond to that?"

Reverend gentlemen, let's get to work. Souls are in danger and we have to save them. We are obliged even as simple Christians whom God has commanded to look after our neighbour: "*Unicuique Deus mandavit de proximo suo*" (Sir 17:12). We are obliged since these are the souls of our brothers. We are all children of the same heavenly Father. We also should feel motivated to work in an exceptional way to save souls, because this is the holiest of holy actions: "*Divinarum divinissimum est cooperari Deo in salutem animarum.*" (The Areopagite). But what should absolutely urge us to fulfil

this task zealously is the strict account that we as ministers of Jesus Christ, will have to render to the Divine Judgement for the souls entrusted to us. Ah that great and terrible account that parents, employers, directors and all priests in general must render to Jesus Christ our Judge for all the souls entrusted to us! That supreme moment will come for all Christians, but let us not deceive ourselves, it will also come for us priests. As soon as we have been freed from the bonds of the body and stand before the divine judge we will see clearly what were the obligations of our state and what has been our negligence. Before our eyes will appear the immense glory of God prepared for his faithful and we will see the souls ... Yes so many souls that were to go there to enjoy and because of our negligence in instructing them in the Faith, were lost!

Gentlemen, what will we say to our Divine Saviour when he tells us that to save souls he left the right hand of the Father to come down to earth; “*erat quotidie docens in templo.*” [Lk 19:47]: that he paid no attention to the labours, the sweat, the hardships, humiliations, contradictions, to the distress, sufferings of all kinds, and finally that he shed the last drop of his blood to save souls? What can we answer if we enjoyed quiet rest and perhaps hobbies and perhaps worse?

What a terrible position it would be for a priest when he appears before the divine judge who tells him: “Look down on the world: how many souls walk the way of iniquity and take the road to perdition. They are there because of you; you did nothing to get them to hear the voice of duty, you did not seek them out, you did not save them. Others have gone from sin to sin by walking in ignorance and now they are cast into hell. Oh! See how many they are. These souls are crying out for vengeance against you. And now, unfaithful servant, *serve nequam*, render account for this. Render account for the precious treasure I entrusted to you, the treasure that cost me my passion, my blood, my death. Give me your souls for the soul of the one who was lost through your fault: *Erit anima tua pro anima illius.*”

But no, my good Jesus, we hope in your grace and your infinite mercy that this reprimand will never be ours. We are deeply convinced of the great duty that binds us to educate souls, so that they are not lost through our fault. So

for the future, for all the days of our mortal life, we will take the greatest care to ensure that no soul has to be lost through our fault. Will we have to bear toil, hardship, poverty, sorrow, persecution and even death? We will gladly do so because of the shining example you gave us. But you, O God of goodness and mercy, infuse into our hearts the true priestly zeal and see that we are consistent followers of the Saint whom we choose today as our model, and when the great day comes when we present ourselves to your divine tribunal to be judged may we not hear blame and reproach but a word of comfort and consolation.

And you, O glorious St Philip, deign to intercede for me, your unworthy devotee, intercede for all of these zealous priests who had the goodness to listen to me and see that at the end of our life we can all hear those consoling words: You saved a soul, you have saved your own: *Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti.*

## SECTION SIX

### SPIRITUAL TESTAMENT

#### Presentation

*The sixth part contains most of what, in Salesian tradition, is known as the “Spiritual Testament”. It is a handwritten notebook entitled Memories from 1841 to 1884-5-6 by Fr John Bosco to his Salesian sons<sup>122</sup>, where the saint, on different occasions, especially in the final years of his life, wrote exhortations and reminders for his disciples, friends, benefactors and Cooperators.*

*In the early pages of the notebook are resolutions which Don Bosco wrote down for his priestly ordination (5 June 1841) and during the retreat in summer 1842 (no. 298): this is a rare and interesting document of the initial steps the young priest took before choosing his definite field of action.*

*Seven texts follow of notable significance (nos. 299-305), where we can catch an overall view of the vocation and mission of the Salesian, together with an indication of the prospects deemed relevant for a dynamic fidelity: the determination to stand firm in one’s vocation until death; the importance of the exact observance of the Constitutions; avoiding triumphalism in the knowledge that every success is a gift from God; the link between the Salesian mission and Marian devotion, with a commitment to cultivate and spread this devotion; the care of vocations, forming young people to the desire “to consecrate themselves to the Lord in their youth” and detachment from the world and its allurements; the mission of the Salesian Rector as model and soul of the community with a primarily formative function; seeing to fraternal charity; avoiding “comfort” and “ease” as they are lethal dangers to the survival of the Congregation; attention to the privileged “children who are poorest, most at risk in society”; the wise administration of Houses and goods; the primacy of working for the salvation of souls; the sense of gratitude to benefactors, the “Cooperators and collaborators without whose charity we could do nothing, but with whose collaboration the Salesian work will be secure in history.”*

<sup>122</sup> Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 a’ suoi figliuoli Salesiani*. By Francesco Motto, in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 391-438.



**297. Resolution of the young Don Bosco  
on the occasion of the retreat**

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 a' suoi figliuoli Salesiani*.

By Francesco Motto, in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 399-401.

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

Priestly ordination was conferred by Luigi Fransoni our archbishop, in his church on 5 June that year.

The first Mass was celebrated at St Francis of Assisi assisted by my well known benefactor and director Fr Joseph Cafasso from Castelnuovo d'Asti on 6 June Trinity Sunday.

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

*Resolutions*

1. Never go for walks unless seriously necessary: visit the sick etc.
2. Use time well.
3. Suffer, act and accept humiliations in everything and always if it is a case of saving souls.
4. The charity and kindness of St Francis de Sales will guide me in everything.
5. I will always be happy with the food that is put in front of me unless it is harmful to my health.
6. I will water down my wine and drink it only as a remedy: meaning only when and as much as is needed for my health.

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

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

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

These memoirs were written in 1841.

#### *1842 - Breviary and confession*

I will try to say the Breviary devoutly and preferably in church so that it becomes a visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

I will approach the Sacrament of Penance each week and will try to put into practice the resolutions I make in confession each time.

When I am asked to hear the confessions of the faithful, if there is a need I will interrupt the Office and also shorten preparation and thanksgiving at Mass so I can exercise this sacred ministry.

### **298. Adieu, my dear and beloved sons in Jesus Christ**

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6...*,  
in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 410-411.

Before leaving this world for eternity, I wish to fulfil a duty towards you and so satisfy an ardent desire of my heart.

First of all, I thank you with the most ardent affection of my soul for the obedience you have given me and for all you have done to sustain and propagate our Congregation. I leave you here on earth, but only for a short time. I hope the infinite mercy of God will enable us all to meet one day in Heaven. There I await you.

Do not grieve over my death. This is a debt we must all pay; but afterwards, every fatigue sustained for the love of our Master, the good Jesus, will be greatly rewarded. Instead of weeping, make firm and efficacious resolutions to remain staunch in your vocation until death.

Watch, so that neither the love of the world, nor the affection of parents, nor the desire of a more agreeable life induce you to make the great mistake of profaning the sacred vows, and so transgress the religious profession by which you are consecrated to God. Let none take back that which we have given to God.

If you have loved me in the past, continue to love me in the future by the exact observance of our Constitutions. Your first Rector is dead. But our true Superior, Jesus Christ, will never die. He will always be our Master, our guide, our model. But remember that he, in his own time, will also be our judge and the one who rewards our faithfulness in His service.

Your Rector is dead. But there will be another elected, who will have care of you and of your eternal salvation. Listen to him, love him, obey him, pray for him as you have done for me.

Adieu, dear children, adieu. I wait for you in Heaven. There we shall speak of God, of Mary, the Mother and support of our Congregation; there we shall bless eternally this our Congregation, the observance of whose rules will have powerfully and efficaciously contributed to our salvation. *“Sit nomen Domini benedictum ex hoc nunc et usque in saeculum. In te Domine speravi, non confundar in aeternum.”*

### 299. Special advice for everyone

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6...*,  
in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 414-415.

1. I warmly recommend that all my sons be careful in never saying or asserting, in speech or writing, that Don Bosco obtained graces from God or performed miracles in some way or other. He would be committing a damaging error. Although the good God has been generous in my regard, nevertheless I have never pretended to know or perform supernatural things. I

have done none other than pray and asked other good souls to ask for graces. I have always found the prayers and communions of our youngsters to be effective. The God of mercy and his Holy Mother came to our help in our needs. This was especially true whenever it was a case of providing for our poor and abandoned boys, and even more so when their souls were in danger.

2. The Blessed Virgin Mary will certainly continue to protect our Congregation and Salesian works if we continue to trust her and continue to foster her cult. Her feasts and more so her solemnities, novenas, triduums, the month dedicated to her, should be warmly fostered in public and in private; with flyers, books, medals, holy pictures, by publishing or simply telling of graces and blessings that our heavenly benefactress grants to suffering humanity at every moment.

3. Two sources of grace for us are: recommending every occasion we can and in good time that our young pupils approach the sacraments or perform some work of piety in honour of Mary. Hearing Holy Mass devoutly, visiting Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, frequent sacramental or at least spiritual communion are highly pleasing to Mary and a powerful means for obtaining special graces.

### **300. Aspirants to the Salesian Vocation**

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6...*,  
in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 418-419.

By aspirants here we mean those young men who want to form themselves in a Christian lifestyle that will then make them worthy in time to embrace the Salesian Congregation either as clerics or as coadjutor confreres.

Particular care should be shown these boys. But only the ones who have an intention to become Salesians or who at least are not contrary to the possibility should this be God's will, should be listed amongst these.

They should be given a conference at least twice a month. These conferences should deal with what a young man should do or should avoid to become a good Christian. The *Companion of Youth* offers the main topics for such talks.

However do not talk to them about our Rule or about the vows, or of leaving home or their families; these are matters that will enter their hearts without making them a topic for discussion.

Keep this great principle firmly: one needs to give oneself to God sooner or later, and God calls the one who consecrates himself to the Lord in his youth blessed. “*Beatus homo cum portaverit iugum ab adolescentia sua*” [Lam 3:27]. The world then, with all its flattery, parents, friends, home, needs to be abandoned and left entirely and forever sooner or later, either through love or per force.

### **301. The Rector of a house with his confreres**

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6...*,  
in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 426-428.

The Rector must be a model of patience, charity with the confreres who depend on him, and therefore:

1. Assist them, help them, instruct them on how to fulfil their duties but never with hard or offensive words.

2. Let them see that you have great confidence in them; treat matters concerning them kindly. Never reproaches or strong words in the presence of others. But try to do this always in *camera caritatis*, meaning gently, strictly in private.

3. When the reasons for such reproaches or advice are public, it may be necessary to advise publicly, but either in church or in special conferences never make personal allusions. Advice, reproaches or allusions made publicly are offensive and do not bring about change.

4. Never forget the monthly rendicono [talk with the Rector] as far as possible. On that occasion let each Rector be the friend, brother, father of his dependants. Give everyone the time and liberty to offer their reflections, express their needs and their intentions. For his part, then, let him open his heart to everyone without being the cause of rancour for anyone; he should not recall past faults unless to offer fatherly advice, or to charitably remind someone who is negligent of his duty.

5. Act in such a way as to never deal with matters that belong to confession, unless the confreres asks for this. In such cases never make resolutions that have to be translated in *foro esterno* without some understanding with the member concerned.

6. The Rector is most often the ordinary confessor of the confreres. But let him prudently give ample freedom to whoever wishes to confess to another. It should however be understood that such particular confessors are to be known and approved by the superior according to our Rule.

7. Since then whoever seeks exceptional confessors is showing little confidence in the Rector, he, the Rector, should be alert and draw particular attention to observance of other rules and not entrust that confrere with certain tasks that might seem beyond his physical or moral strength.

N.B. What I say here in fact is other than what refers to the extraordinary confessor which the Superior, Rector, Provincial organises for an appropriate occasion.

8. In general then the Rector of a house shall deal with his confreres often and with much familiarity, insisting on the need for uniform observance of the Constitutions, and as much as possible recalling even the very words they use.

9. In cases of illness observe what the rules prescribe and what the Chapter deliberations have established.

10. Easily forget personal offences and annoyances and through kindness and regard try to overcome or better correct the negligent, those lacking in trust or suspicious. *Vince in bono malum* [Rm 12:21].

### **302. Basic recommendations for all Salesians and Salesian Sisters**

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6...*,  
in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 435-436.

Love poverty if you wish to keep the Congregation in a good financial state.

Let no one be able to say: "These furnishings do not suggest poverty; the poor do not eat or dress or have rooms like this. Whoever gives cause for

remarks of this kind brings disaster upon our Congregation which must be able to pride itself on its vow of poverty. Woe to us if those from whom we seek alms are able to say that we live an easier life than they do. This should always be practised rigorously when we find ourselves in a good state of health, while in cases of illness we do everything that our Rule permits.

Remember that it will always be a red-letter day when you are able to win over an enemy or make a friend by charity.

Never let the sun set on your anger, nor recall offences already forgiven, or pain caused, or a fault already forgotten. Let us always say from our heart: "*Dimitte nobis debita nostra sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris*", [Mt 6:12] but with complete and absolute readiness to forget everything that has offended us in the past. Let us love everyone with fraternal love.

Let these things be observed in an exemplary way by those who exercise some authority over others.

### 303. The future

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6...*,  
in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 437-438.

Divine Providence has prepared a happy future for our Congregation and its glory will endure as long as the rules are faithfully observed.

When the desire for ease and comfort grows amongst us, our pious Society will have run its course.

The world will always welcome us as long as all our concern is for the under-developed peoples, for poor children for those members of society most at risk. This is our real wealth which no one will envy and no one will take from us.

Do not found Houses if you do not have the necessary personnel to administer them.

Do not have too many Houses near to each other. There are fewer risks if the houses are far from one another.

Once a foreign mission has begun, let it continue with energy and sacrifice. Our efforts should be always to establish schools and seek some vocations for the ecclesiastical state, or some Sisters from amongst the girls.

Time will lead us to establish our missions in China and precisely in Peking [Beijing]. But let us never forget that we exist for poor and abandoned boys. Amongst those who know little or nothing of the true God you will see taking place wonders formerly thought incredible but which almighty God will make manifest to the world.

Let us not keep any property other than the dwelling places we need.

When we lack the financial means for some religious enterprise, it should be suspended but let the works already begun be continued as soon as our finances, sacrifices permit.

When it happens that a Salesian yields up his life whilst working for souls, you can say that the Congregation has registered a great triumph and that on it will descend in abundance the blessings of Heaven.

### **304. A final greeting to benefactors and cooperators**

Critical ed. in *Lettere circolari di DB*, pp. 46-49.

My good benefactors,

I feel that the end of my life is approaching, and the day on which I must pay the common tribute to death and descend into the grave is well nigh. Before leaving this world for eternity, I wish to fulfil a duty towards you and so satisfy an ardent desire of my heart.

The debt I must repay is one of gratitude for all you have done to help me educate so many poor youngsters in a Christian way, putting them on the way to virtue and work, so they could be the consolation of their families, useful to themselves and to civil society and especially so they might save their souls and so be happy in eternity.

Without your charity I would have been able to do little or nothing; with your charity instead, we have cooperated with God's grace, dried many a tear and saved many a soul. With your charity we have founded any number of



colleges ([boarding schools] and hospices where thousands of orphans are and have remained, rescued from abandonment, taken out of danger of irreligion and immorality, and by means of a good education, study and learning a trade or art, been made good Christians and solid citizens.

With your charity we have established missions at the ends of the earth, in Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, and sent hundreds of Workers for the Gospel to extend and cultivate the Lord's vineyard.

With your charity we have set up printing presses in various cities and towns, published millions of copies of books and broadsheets amongst the people in defence of the truth, to encourage piety and support morality.

Again with your charity we have built many chapels and churches in which, for centuries to come until the end of the world God's praises and the praises of the Virgin Mary will be sung, and many souls be saved.

Convinced that, after God, all this and so many other good things were achieved through the effective help of your charity, I feel the need to thank you and so before closing my final days I thank you with the most profound gratitude and from the depths of my heart.

But if you have helped me with so much kindness and perseverance, now I ask you to continue to help my successor after my death. The works I have begun with your support no longer need me, but they continue to need you and all those who, like you, love to foster good on this earth. I entrust and recommend them all to you then.

For your encouragement and comfort I leave it to my successor to see that in the common and private prayers that are said and will be said in Salesian houses, our benefactors will always be included, and that there is always the intention that God may grant a hundredfold for their charity in the present life, through health and harmony in the family, prosperity on their farms and in their affairs and freedom from every disgrace, keeping these far from them.

I also note for your encouragement and comfort that the most effective work for obtaining pardon for sins and being sure of eternal life is charity given to little children: *Uni ex minimis*, to a little abandoned one, as our Divine Master Jesus assures us. I note how in these times where we feel so much

the lack of material means for education and educating poor and abandoned youngsters in the faith and good morals, the holy Virgin herself becomes their protector; therefore she obtains for their benefactors many spiritual graces and even extraordinary temporal ones.

I myself and with me all the Salesians are witness to the fact that many of our benefactors who were earlier down on their luck, became much more well-to-do after they began to lavish charity on our orphans.

In view of this and taught by the experience of not a few of them, who one way or another told me this more than once in these or similar words: I do not want you to thank me when I offer charity to your poor boys; I should be thanking you for asking me. Since I began helping your orphans my own welfare has tripled. Another gentleman, *Commendatore* Antonio Cotta, who often came to bring alms, said: the more money I bring for these works the more my business progresses. It is a fact that the Lord gives me in this life a hundredfold for what I give out of love for him. He was an outstanding benefactor of ours until he was 86, when God called him to eternal life to enjoy the reward of his kindness.

Although tired and worn out I will never cease speaking about you and recommending you to my boys, whom I am about to abandon; even I have to call it quits and lay down my pen.

Adieu, my dear benefactors, Cooperators, adieu.

I have not got to know many of you personally in this life, but that does not matter: in the other world we will all come to know each other and in eternity we will rejoice together for the good that with God's grace we have done on this earth, especially on behalf of poor youth.

If, after my death, the divine mercy, through the merits of Jesus Christ and the protection of Mary Help of Christians, finds me worthy of being received into Paradise, I will always pray for you, pray for your families, your dear ones, that one day they may all come to praise the Creator's majesty in eternity, and drink of his divine delights to the full, sing his infinite mercies, Amen.

Always your most obedient servant,

Fr John Bosco.

PART FOUR

**WRITINGS OF A BIOGRAPHICAL AND  
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NATURE**

*By*

**Aldo GIRAUDO**



## INTRODUCTION

*Amongst Don Bosco's most significant writings, that is those which best provide us with his thinking and practice, and most effectively express his sensitivity as a priest, we need to include his edifying biographies and the Memoirs of the Oratory.*

*Readings of a historical and hagiographical kind during his years at the seminary and the Pastoral Institute [Convitto] had familiarised him with the literary models and styles of classical hagiography, aimed at touching the heart to edify and encourage emulation. We find this for example—in a simplified way which is consistent with the real life situation of his boys—in his adaptation of the Six Sundays in honour of St Aloysius Gonzaga which he included in the Companion of Youth<sup>1</sup>.*

*He confirmed his formation praxis in the effectiveness of the accounts of the boys' lives, to the point where he thought it appropriate to recommend them as a characteristic feature of his catechising at the Oratory: "Five minutes before catechism finished, at the sound of the bell, we would give some brief example drawn from Bible History, or Church History, or clearly and in a popular way explain some apologetic item, or moral parable which highlighted the ugliness of some vice or the beauty of some virtue in particular."<sup>2</sup>*

*Already his first book—a moral profile of his friend Louis Comollo<sup>3</sup>—had this intention, as he declared explicitly in the preface when addressing himself to the seminarians in Chieri: "Since the example of virtuous actions is worth much more than any elegant discourse, it would not be unreasonable for me to offer you a historical indication on the life of someone who has lived in the same place, and under the same discipline as you do. He could serve as a true model for you to be*

<sup>1</sup> See above no. 184, pp. 695-731.

<sup>2</sup> [Giovanni BOSCO], *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per gli Esterni*. Torino, Tipografia Salesiana 1877, p. 16 (OE XXIX, 46); see above no. 180, p. 592.

<sup>3</sup> [Giovanni BOSCO], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo morto nel seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù*. Scritti da un suo collega. Torino, Tipografia Speirani e Ferrero 1844 (OE I, 1-84).

worthy of the sublime goal you aspire to, and one day be excellent Levites in the Lord's vineyard."<sup>4</sup>

*This tendency to give an educational and spiritual relevance to the old Latin adage "verba movent, exempla trahunt", needs to be borne in mind as a key for interpreting much of his publishing production of a historical, hagiographical and biographical and edifying background.*

*In this final part we include some particularly expressive works which along with their edifying and educational character also include the value of practical testimony—and in great part this is also autobiographical—to the educative and pastoral model employed at the Oratory. To a certain extent they are living images of life at Valdocco, the moral and spiritual world of the boys Don Bosco formed, especially amongst the student group<sup>5</sup>.*

*The first section is a collection of the "Lives" of Don Bosco's three pupils—Dominic Savio, Michael Magone and Francis Besucco—(nos. 306-308), in Don Bosco's final version, preceded by the second edition of the Historical sketch of the life of Louis Comollo (no. 305): this is a document of considerable relevance for understanding the level of educative and spiritual awareness achieved by the saintly educator at the end of his first decade of pastoral activity.*

*In the second section we include the Memoirs of the Oratory (no. 309), his most original and personal writing, written between 1873 and 1875 at a decisive historical moment for future developments of Salesian work. He reflects there on the journey he has traversed, interpreting it in providential and charismatic terms, so he could leave his "dear Salesian sons", through this narrative tool, a spiritual and educational testament to serve as "a norm for overcoming future difficulties by learning lessons from the past" and "to make it known how God has always guided everything at every moment."*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3 (OE I, 3).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani...*, I, p. 555.

SECTION ONE  
EXEMPLARY BIOGRAPHIES

**Presentation**

*The biographical profiles of Louis Comollo (in the 1854 edition), Dominic Savio, Michael Magone and Francis Besucco are among the spiritual and pedagogical documents which are most representative of Don Bosco's outlook. From these stories comes a horizon of meaning, a way of thinking and acting thoroughly rooted in his cultural context. At the same time however, beyond historical contingencies, they highlight a range of elements which better illustrate the characteristic features of the saint's spiritual pedagogy.*

*The primary beneficiaries of these edifying lives were boys of the mid-nineteenth century and their educators, but the narrative tool – which Don Bosco was a master at – allows the attentive reader to discover a deeper discourse in them on the experience of their main characters and the settings they lived in, on a complete educational humanism and the fascinating culture of the spirit which frames all this.*

*In the first place we have the life of Louis Comollo (no. 305), in its second edition (January 1854). It is a document of important spiritual relevance. The saint had recently set up at Valdocco a residence for students who were interested in the priesthood, so he took another look at the Sketch of the life of a friend, published ten years earlier, to offer the boys a substantial example of a well-rounded Christian life in accordance with his own perspectives. The basic text and structure are identical to the first edition (1844), but numerous additions— shown here in italics—mark a relevant shift of emphasis. Now Don Bosco is not only concerned with commemorating a deceased companion and offering him for imitation by seminarians, but he wants to illustrate a proposal of spiritual life which he considers suited to the new generations. If we look at the editions and emphases we see an awareness that has matured over a decade of educational and pastoral experience, and this allows him to highlight precise spiritual dynamics and point to interior processes that go beyond simply registering words and deeds. We find all the religious topics that are dear to him, already seen in the Companion of Youth,*

*but framed in real life now. In this regard the recommendation Don Bosco added at the foot of the Regulations for the Immaculate Conception Sodality is relevant (1856). The Regulations were written by Joseph Bongiovanni, Dominic Savio and friends: "Before accepting anyone get them to read the Life of Louis Comollo." <sup>6</sup> It is this edition he is referring to.*

*Regarding St Aloysius Gonzaga, the young Comollo was able to be a more eloquent and stimulating model: perfect imitator of the saint in the way he gave himself totally to God and in the ascetic and virtuous life, but within a historic, cultural and social context which was closer to that of his young readers. The publication of the Life of Dominic Savio (1859) would put Comollo in the shade, but it would also demonstrate the impact the biography had on the teenage saint.*

*The second source in this section is the Life of Dominic Savio (no. 306), in the final edition which Don Bosco (1878) saw to personally. Here we note the consolidation and precise detail of formation processes at the Oratory, "the advent and proposal of a living model of youthful spirituality par excellence, embodied in the earthly life and biography" of the young pupil <sup>7</sup>. Dominic expresses "in reality a complete adolescent Christian holiness", and Don Bosco makes this explicit by making it readily available for others who were "determined and ardent". The difference compared to Comollo, is that this one is also largely the story of Don Bosco as formator and spiritual guide, "mirroring the spirituality he practised and taught", an illustration of his unmistakable way of acting as the priest educator, spiritual guide, "in accordance with a mentality shaped by his priestly, theological formation and experience." <sup>8</sup>*

*But the life of Savio, and even more so the attractive and interesting one of Michael Magone (no. 307)—the third text in this section—also effectively illustrate the lively and intense formative climate at Valdocco, so "saturated with frank humanity and intense spirituality." <sup>9</sup>*

<sup>6</sup> See above no. 207, p. 799.

<sup>7</sup> P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani...*, I, p. 301.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 327-328.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.



*In Savio's spiritual life, the author recognises, along with the merits of family education, "the work that Divine grace had already produced at such a tender age"<sup>10</sup>, thanks to the boy's extraordinary receptivity. But in Michael Magone's spiritual adventure he unequivocally highlights the effectiveness of his own educational method. The moral and spiritual transformation of this teenager and his rapid progress appear, in fact, to be mostly the result of his work as educator and spiritual guide, the result of the formation strategy he employed and the fervent youthful community at Valdocco where the "General" from Carmagnola had been taken in.*

*As for the Life of Francis Besucco, The Shepherd Boy from the Alps, we include only the second part (no. 308), since the first fourteen chapters are almost completely taken from a long testimonial letter sent by the parish priest of Argentera. Don Bosco intervenes only from chapter 15 onwards, but very effectively, to the point where Alberto Caviglia considers this text to be a valuable "document made up of the saint's spiritual and moral pedagogy ... inasmuch as the author, more than in any other book of the kind, comes to the theory, and expresses his ideas with the clear intention of teaching them." At the time of its publication (1864), in fact the saint was "at the end of his pedagogical self-formation, with ideas by now formulated in definitive terms."<sup>11</sup> It is here that we find the formula "cheerfulness, study, piety" expressed, and then fully illustrated chapter by chapter. This is considered the most complete and synthetic expression of Don Bosco's spiritual pedagogy. But it is also the text that best makes the Saint's spiritual intentions explicit, since, "with the episodic series of devotions, he illustrates the first principle, which is to have the taste for and spirit of prayer" and shows it as it takes shape. Up to the "highest and most intense degree, which is continuous prayer, when the attitude of the heart is such that prayer never ceases" and the habit of praying*

<sup>10</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales con appendice sulle grazie ottenute per sua intercessione*. Ed. 5. Torino, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1878, p. 28 (n. 306, p. 1039)

<sup>11</sup> Alberto CAVIGLIA, "La vita di Besucco Francesco scritta da don Bosco", in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di don Bosco*. Vol. VI. Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale 1965, p. 16.

becomes “a kind of gravitation of the mind towards God, which comes from love and practising the divine presence.”<sup>12</sup>

Along with the question of union with God we have the explicit Salesian idea of mortification of the senses, “which is not to be added to life but must come out of life itself, as it is the life which is lived which has to be mortified”; life that Don Bosco “considers as being austere and poor and limited, made up of work and temperance.”<sup>13</sup> Don Bosco teaches us that there is no need to go looking for mortification outside the concrete nature of our lives, but it consists simply in guarding the senses and accepting with patience, fortitude and love everything that for us is difficult about the common duties and the daily situations of life: the heaviness of work, the limits imposed by our circumstances, the rough edges of people around us, exhausting work, small humiliations, health problems.

### 305. Life of Louis Comollo

Printed ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Cenni sulla vita del giovane Luigi Comollo morto nel seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue rare virtù*. Torino, Tipografia P. De-Agostini 1854.

*To the reader*<sup>14</sup>

Since the example of virtuous actions is worth much more than any elegant discourse, it would not be unreasonable to offer an account of the life of a young man who in a short period of time practised *such beautiful virtues that he could be proposed as a model for any faithful Christian who looks to the salvation of his own soul. There is nothing extraordinary here, but everything is done with outstanding perfection so that we could apply to young Comollo the words of Holy Scripture: “Qui timet Deum nihil negligit”*<sup>15</sup>; “whoever fears God neglects nothing that can contribute to making progress in the ways of the Lord.”

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 200-201.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>14</sup> In italics are the important facts added in by Don Bosco in 1854 compared with the first edition text from (1844).

<sup>15</sup> Cited from the Vulgate (Qo. 7:19); cf. Qo 7:18.

*Here we find many deeds and just a few reflections, leaving each one to apply whatever seems appropriate to his own state. Everything you read here was almost always something passed on in writing at the time of his death, and already published in<sup>16</sup>. I take great consolation in being able to promise you assuredly of the truth of what I write. They are all public matters that I have heard or seen personally or have come to know from others of whose faith I would have no doubts.*

*So, Christian reader, read on gladly and if you stop to meditate on something along the way, you certainly will have something to savour, and something to gain for a truly virtuous tenor of life. And if, while you are perusing what I have written, you should feel encouraged to pursue one of the virtues highlighted here, give glory to God to whom alone I dedicate these pages. I pray that you will gain every benefit.*

### *Chapter 1 – Louis Comollo’s childhood*

Louis Comollo was born on April 7, 1817 in the fertile countryside and town of Cinzano<sup>17</sup> in the hamlet of Prà. His parents were Carlo and Giovanna Comollo, *both farmers by occupation*. Although their circumstances were not easy they had other fine things, much better than precious wealth, such as virtue and fear of the Lord. Louis grew up as a naturally good soul, compliant, docile and gentle of heart, and when he had reached the age of reason the first seeds of virtue and devotion were seen to be taking root in him. They then continued to grow wonderfully towards perfection throughout the course of his life. From the time he had learned to pronounce the holy names of Jesus and Mary, from then on he kept them as the object of tenderness and reverence. He never showed aversion to or slackness in prayer, something common in children; in fact the longer the prayer time, the more content and happy he was. *And it often happened that when he had finished saying his usual*

<sup>16</sup> [Giovanni BOSCO], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo morto nel seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù*. Scritti da un collega. Torino, Tipografia Speirani e Ferrero 1844 (OE I, 1-84). This is the first book published (anonymously) by Don Bosco.

<sup>17</sup> Cinzano is an agricultural region of the province and diocese of Turin, 28 kms away the Capital; in 1839 it had 660 inhabitants.

*prayers he would tell his mother: "Mother, one more Our Father in suffrage for the poor souls in Purgatory."*

He easily learned to read and write *and since charity had already sprung deep roots in his tender heart, he made good use of his early education for his own spiritual advantage.* On weekends and feast days, while others of his age were heading out to play, he would gather a few around him and read to them or explain what little he knew, or tell them a story of some edifying nature. This won the respect and admiration of his peers such that when he was around, nobody dared use indecent or questionable language. If something like that happened inadvertently, they would soon warn one another: "Quiet, or Louis will hear you." On his arrival, any even slightly 'off' conversation would immediately be curbed. If he heard any talk that was unbecoming or disparaging of religious matters he would say, in his admirably pleasant way: "Don't talk like that, words like that don't sound good in the mouth of a young Christian."

As his circumstances required of him, he used to take the cows out to pasture, but always kept away from people of the other sex and took some good books with him to read alone or with others. With this tenor of life, while he edified his companions, he was the admiration of good people who were amazed at such virtue in a boy of that age.

One father said:

"I had a son and I just didn't know what to do with him: I had treated him kindly but firmly, but all in vain. The idea came to me to send him to Louis, and maybe he could succeed in making him more obedient so he would no longer be reason for me thinking so badly of him. My little rascal at first was reluctant to go with someone who had little in common with his view of things but soon, enticed by what he saw of Louis, he became a friend and companion in virtue to the point that he still now shows the moderation and goodness he absorbed from that kind soul.

He was outstanding in his obedience to his parents. He was ready and attentive to whatever his parents asked of him, and was anxious to carry out

any indication of theirs, making every effort even to see what they would want in advance. When drought, hail storms or loss of animals befell them and his parents were affected by it, Louis was the one who comforted them and urged them to see whatever happened as coming from the Lord. "We need this," he would say; "whenever the Lord's hand touches us, he always treats us with kindness; it is a sign that he remembers us and wants us too to remember him."

He would never leave his parents without their express permission. He was always very careful about that. Once he went to visit some relatives, which he had permission to do for a brief time. Attracted by his kind manner and edifying speech, they would not let him go in time. He felt so regretful about it that he went away to cry in private when he saw that he would have to disobey, and as soon as he got home he asked forgiveness for the disobedience that, despite himself, he had committed.

He kept away from others sometimes, but to withdraw to some quiet corner of the house to pray, or meditate. "I often saw him eat in a hurry," one person who had grown up with him told me, "quickly do all his assigned tasks and while others were taking time for some recreation, he would look for a pretext to leave and go off to some furrow amongst the vines, if he was out in the countryside, or in the hay shed if he was at home, and there he would pray aloud, or read devout books and learn to tell edifying stories that he would retell his friends." It is true that even amongst the least of us God knows how to lead the simple and unlearned and guide them towards the sublime paths of holiness.

Real features of devotion and great tenderness in religious matters were tied strictly to these wonderful signs of virtue. This became evident after he made his first Confession. He made a careful examination of conscience, and then went off to present himself to the confessor before whom he became emotional, given his reverence for the sacrament. He felt apprehension over his faults (if indeed he had committed any), and felt so sorry for his sins that he broke down in copious tears and needed to be comforted in order to begin and then continue with his Confession.

He made his first Communion to the similar edification of those around him. From then on he became so fond of the Sacraments of Confession and Communion that approaching them gave him the greatest of consolation; he never let an opportunity go by to benefit from them. *In this regard he once told a close friend and confidant: "Confession and Communion were my support throughout all the perilous years of my youth."*

But however frequently he allowed himself the opportunity for Communion, just the same, when he was not able to satisfy his fervent love for Jesus, he found ways to do this through spiritual communion. When he became a cleric and found himself at the Seminary he was often heard to say: "It was because of the important work of St Alphonse with the title: '*Visits to the Blessed Sacrament*', that I learned how to make a spiritual communion, which I can say has been my comfort through many dangers when I was a lay person."

Frequent visits to the Church were added to spiritual and sacramental communion. He felt so embraced by the presence of Jesus that often he would spend entire hours there, pouring out his fervent and tender feelings of affection.

*But someone will be wondering and saying: how come a young lad could learn such exceptional virtue at such a tender age? I can offer a quick answer. His uncle was Joseph Comollo<sup>18</sup>, of happy memory, the provost of Cinzano, a truly good soul, who thought of nothing else but the good of the souls entrusted to his care. He loved his nephew, who also loved him tenderly. So it was that Louis, directed by such a prudent and devout director in spiritual and temporal matters, began to emulate those virtues little by little as he grew in years. He was often sent to the church to do things his Uncle gave him to do, and he often went there himself under the pretext of having things to do, but he never left there without spending a while with Jesus and recommending himself to his dear mother Mary. There was no solemn occasion, catechism or sermon, or benediction or other function taking*

<sup>18</sup> Fr Giuseppe Comollo (1768-1843).

*place at church that he did not attend, happily and contentedly offering whatever service he was able to.*

Comollo's nature was so alien to the childish mischief normal to his age. He put up with whatever happened to him so calmly, was friendly and pleasant with his peers, modest and respectful with whoever was his superior, obedient in all things, devout, ready to lend any service which the Church allowed him to and which was compatible with his age, and did everything in such a way that it seemed to predict that the Lord had destined him to a state of greater perfection. Convinced of the great importance he should give to choice of state, he had more than once put the question to his uncle the Provost, in whom he confided every secret of his heart, and he had received an answer inasmuch as he could understand it, that God was calling him to the ecclesiastical state. He was very happy about that since it was also his very keen desire. His uncle, seeing his nephew so keen, and so promising, wanted to encourage him in his holy resolutions. So one day he called him to come and see him: "So you are firmly bent on becoming a priest?" he asked him. "It is precisely this that I want and nothing else," he answered "because priests are people who open heaven to others, so I hope I can also open heaven to myself."

So he was sent to grammar school, the middle school classes at Caselle near Ciriè. And refining even more the virtues which had made him well known as a model of Christian living, there too he was admired by all who had occasion to meet him. Already as a small child he used to make little offerings to Our Lady by abstaining from some food or fruit that would accompany his main meal: "This I should give to Mary" he would say. He went still further in Caselle; as well as offering a fast each week for Mary, he would often, under some pretext, abstain from the best food. It would be enough for there to be something which he particularly liked for him not to choose it, and he always did this out of love for Mary.

*Such tenor of life effectively contributed to his progress in his studies and in devotion, because it is a long-proven fact that a sober, moderate disposition in the young, especially in students is especially beneficial to health of mind and body.*

*Chapter 2 – He goes to Chieri to study*

At the beginning of the school year 1835, *when I was attending school in Chieri, I found myself on one occasion at a boarding house where they were talking about the good qualities of some of the students.* “I was told,” the person running the house began “that a very holy student should be coming to such-and-such a place.” I laughed, considering the matter to be a joke. “But it’s true,” he added “he would be the nephew of the Provost in Cinzano, a young man of remarkable virtue.”

I did not take much notice of it, except that one particular fact made me remember it. It was just a few days ago that I had seen a student (without knowing his name) who showed such poise, such modesty as he went on his way, was so pleasant and courteous with whomsoever he spoke, that I really was wonderfully taken up by it all. This wonderment grew when I observed the way he carried out his duties so precisely, and how he always turned up exactly on time at school. As soon as he got there he would take his assigned place and not move, unless there was something he had to do, unless his duties meant he had to. It was the usual custom for the students to pass their time while coming to school joking, playing around, even doing dangerous somersaults and *sometimes wrong things*. This modest young man was also invited to get involved in these things; but he always excused himself saying that he wasn’t the practical type, he didn’t have the skills. Nevertheless one day one of his schoolmates came up to him and wagging a finger at him, told him to take part in the rather wild games they used to engage in at school. “No, my good friend,” he replied kindly, “I’m not very good at that, I’d end up making a fool of myself.” The cheeky friend, when he saw that he wasn’t interested, insolently and quite unacceptably whacked him across the face. I was appalled to see this, and given that the one who did it was not as strong nor as old as the one he had assaulted, I expected that he would give back as good as he had got. But the attack turned entirely in another direction: he turned to the one who had hit him and seemed happy just to say: “If doing this makes you happy, then go in peace, knowing I’m ok with that.” This made me recall what I’d heard said, that there was a saintly lad coming to our school, and when I asked what his name was and where he came from I knew then that he



was Louis Comollo, whom I had heard spoken about in such a praiseworthy manner at the boarding house.

*From such a good heart, such well-controlled conduct it is easy to suggest* how Comollo went with studies and diligence, I could think of no better way to express this than with the words of this good teacher of his (and my teacher too). He wrote to me in these words (<sup>19</sup>):

“Although the character and nature of this fine young man Comollo might well be already well known to you since he was a fellow student, so you would have seen him close up, just the same I most gladly send you this letter with the opinion that I had already formed then when I had him as a student for two years from 1835 to 1836 in Humanities and Rhetoric at the School in Chieri. He was a talented young man with a most pleasant disposition. He worked diligently at his studies, was always so attentive to everything, and was so scrupulous and watchful of every detail concerning his duties that I cannot recall a single instance of having to scold him for something he might not have done properly. I never saw him get into arguments with other friends; instead he would answer injury or insult patiently and pleasantly. He could be proposed as a model for any young person because of his conduct, obedience, pliability; so I wished him all the very best when I heard that he was entering an ecclesiastical career. I saw him as destined to comfort his venerable uncle, the worthy Provost of Cinzano, in his old age, who loved him dearly and had sown such rare and remarkable virtues in his heart. So I was very sad to hear of Louis’ death, and my only comfort was the thought that by his virtuous life he had achieved ahead of time and in such a short time what he might have done over a long ecclesiastical career. Perhaps God wanted to call him to Himself through his untimely death because God looked beyond his age to all the good that he had done and the merit deserved, and we must accept the divine will.

You have asked me to speak of what I observed that was remarkable in him; but what else could I say that is more remarkable than his even-temper,

<sup>19</sup> “Comollo’s teacher was Fr Giovanni Bosco [1812-1889] from Chieri, now professor of philosophy at the Military academy in Turin.” (note in the original text).

his steadfastness at such a young and normally fickle age? From the first day that he came to my school until the end of the two years he was always the same—always good and always intent on practising virtue, piety, diligence ...” These were his teacher’s words.

And outside of school these wonderful gifts were equally put into practice. The man running the boarding house said. “I came to see in young Comollo all the virtues proper not just to his age, but to someone who was long practised in them. He was always happy and even-tempered, unperturbed by whatever was going on, and he was never looking out for what might be particularly of his own taste. He was always happy with whatever was on hand; one never heard him say: this has no taste, or it’s too hot, or very cold; one never heard him say anything that was less than honest or intemperate. He spoke willingly of spiritual matters, and if someone spoke badly of religion, he demanded that they speak about sacred ministers with the greatest reverence and respect. He was very fond of solitude and never went out *without express permission*, always giving the time, place and reasons as to why he would be absent. For all the time he lived here, he was a great encouragement for others to live in a virtuous way, and the others were sorry when he had to change abode to put on the clerical habit and go and live in the Seminary, thus depriving us of an exceptional model of virtue.”

I could also say the same, since on various occasions when I spoke with him, or we worked together, I never heard him complain about things at the time, or about the seasons, or that he had too much work to do or too much study; in fact whenever he had some free time, he would hurry off to see a friend to help him with a problem, or talk about things to do with study or devotion.

He was no less zealous about religious observances and vigilance in everything to do with devotion. This is what the spiritual director of the schools had to write. He would certainly have come to know him very well <sup>(20)</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> “The spiritual director at the school in Chieri at the time was Fr Francis Calosso, [1807-1888], Canon and Prior of the college of clerics, completely dedicated to zealous and devout work” (note in the original text).

“You have asked me to say something about this young man whose memory is very dear to me, so I am very happy to respond. Young Louis Comollo is not one of those people about whom I need to speak vaguely, nor will I be exaggerating in giving the most praiseworthy testimony. You already know that he belonged to a very special class of students, of the kind given to devotion and study, but Comollo stood out and shone amongst these. I am sorry to say that the Prefect of the schools, Professor Rubiola<sup>21</sup>, has died, since he would have been able to say many wonderful things about his studies, his excellent conduct including his conduct outside of school hours. As for me, other than assuring you that I never had reason to scold him for any fault, no matter how slight, I can also assure you that he was keenly present at our meetings, very self-assured, always listened attentively to the Word, was very devout in attending Mass and other sacred ceremonies, frequented the Sacraments of Confession and Communion regularly, and was truly diligent in every pious duty, exemplary in every act of virtue. I would willingly have been able to offer him as a shining and exceptional model of virtue to the other students. As for his behaviour in class, the Rhetoric year was a demanding one and only the most outstanding students in study and devotion were granted access to it. We wanted then as we want now, young students of character and habits like Louis Comollo had. His name reminded one of St Aloysius and he emulated many of his virtues in what he did. There’s no other student that I would more willingly give testimony about than this one; I could speak of everything that is good in a young man. *Raptus est, ne malitia mutaret intellectum eius* [Wis 4:11]. I hope he prays for me now in heaven.” These were the words of his spiritual director.

*From all these reports each one can easily understand how Comollo’s behaviour was made up of lots of little virtues, but done in such a way that he was universally admired for outstanding virtue.* And here I add some things that I noted particularly about his external behaviour. As soon as the exercises of piety, held at weekends in the congregation chapel, were over, most of the students

<sup>21</sup> It should read: Raviola. Prof. Fr Vincenzo Raviola (1768-1838); before 1802 he was a Friar Minor at the monastery of Our Lady of Peace in Chieri.

would go for a walk or some other form of relaxation. But Comollo, *who preferred fewer such pastimes*, would immediately go off for Catechism classes for youngsters held at the church of the Jesuit fathers and as with all other religious functions, he was a devout participant at these classes. *It could have been the result of his good nature, or it could have been the result of virtue*, but it seemed that he had none of that anxious curiosity which youngsters normally have when they come from the villages into the city and want to see and hear everything around them. Coming to and going from school he was recollected and modest, never dilly-dallied here or there either physically or in looks, other than to offer due respect to Superiors, churches, or some wayside shrine or other statue of the Blessed Virgin. It never happened that he would pass such by without uncovering his head as a sign of veneration. Often when walking with him I saw him tip his cap without knowing the reason why; but looking around I would then notice some picture of the Madonna on some wall or other.

Our Rhetoric year was about to finish when I asked him about some of the interesting features or monuments in the city, and he told me that in fact he was not well-informed about these, as if he were just a visitor. *“How come,” I said to him “that so many people come from far away to see all the exceptional things about Chieri and you live here and never think to go and see them?” “Ah my good friend,” he said jokingly “whatever is not going to help me tomorrow I don’t run around looking for today.” I suspect that he meant that if all these special things could contribute to his eternal welfare, which tomorrow was all about, he would not have neglected them.*

The more Comollo was far from temporal occupations and things of interest, the more he was well informed and instructed on things pertaining to the Church. If there was a Forty Hours devotion or other public religious function he would know about it and, if he had the time, would take part. He had a timetable for prayer, spiritual reading, visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and he observed it scrupulously. Circumstances had it that for a few months I went to the Cathedral precisely at the time that Louis went there to spend time with Jesus. So I would be happy to describe what he was like there. He would take up a place near the altar if he could, kneel down, join

his hands, bow his head slightly, cast his eyes down and would stay absolutely still; he would be insensitive to any voice or sound. It would often happen that when I had finished my duties, I wanted to invite him to come home with me. So I would nod my head or, coming a bit closer, would cough, to get him to move; he would always stay the same until I actually came up and touched him. Then, as if woken up from sleep, he would move and although a little unwillingly, would accept my invitation. He willingly served Mass even on school days; but on holidays it would be normal for him to serve as many as four or five.

Although he was so focused on things of the spirit, you would never see him with clouded face or sad but always happy, always content, and with his pleasant way of speaking he made everyone he spoke with happy. He used often say that he liked the words of the Prophet David: “*Servite Domino in laetitia, Serve the Lord in holy cheerfulness.*”<sup>22</sup> He liked to talk about history, poetry, the difficulties of Latin or Italian, but humbly, amiably enough such that while offering his opinion he always deferred to others.

He had a special friend, a confidant with whom he would speak of spiritual matters. He gained great consolation when dealing with and speaking of such topics. He considered that Jesus showed immense love by giving himself to us as food in Holy Communion. When he spoke of the Blessed Virgin, one saw him full of great tenderness, and after telling or hearing tell of some grace of healing for the body, at the end he would blush or break down in tears exclaiming: “If Mary is so good to our miserable body, how much more will she do something for the soul of whoever calls on her. *Oh! If everyone was truly devoted to Mary, what happiness there would be in the world.*”

Such was the esteem he had for religious matters that not only did he suffer when someone spoke disparagingly of them but he could not remain indifferent. It happened to me once that I spoke jokingly using the words of Holy Scripture, and I was reminded of the fact immediately. He told me not to joke about the Lord’s words.

<sup>22</sup> Ps. 99:2.

When someone wanted to start talking about them, he would jump in saying that either they speak well of them or not at all, because they were ministers of God. This is how Louis prepared himself to receive the clerical habit, speaking of it always with great veneration and joy. “Could it be possible” he used say “that I, a miserable cowherd, could become a priest, a pastor of souls? I don’t feel inclined to do anything else: the confessor tells me this, my own desire tells me, only my sins tell me otherwise. I will go and sit for the exam and the results will judge what is the divine will concerning my vocation.” He often asked some of his close friends to pray for him that the Lord would enlighten him and let him know if he was called to the ecclesiastical state or not. And so it was that with the esteem of his classmates, the love of his superiors, and honoured and considered by everyone as a model of every virtue, he finished his year of Rhetoric in 1836.

### *Chapter 3 - Clerical clothing day and goes to seminary in Chieri*

*Comollo’s preparation for his clerical clothing day could certainly serve as a norm for young students wanting to make a choice of state of life, and especially for those who aspire to the ecclesiastical state. The vocation or call to the priestly state must come from God, therefore a young man should not take account of what relatives with their temporal interests might say, or what vainglory and the desire for earthly comforts might suggest. Do you want to be sure of your vocation? First of all choose a good confessor, and open your heart to him and inasmuch as it is possible, never change confessor. When for some reasonable motive you might have to change, at the time you are making your choice of a state of life open your conscience to him and ask him for his opinion, and then regard it as certain and follow the Lord’s voice; because he says in the Gospel: “Qui vos audit, me audit”<sup>23</sup>, that is, whoever listens to the voice of his spiritual director, listens to God’s voice; this is with regard to the moral qualities which are essential, indeed absolutely necessary for a young man wanting to embrace the ecclesiastical state.*

As far as study is concerned, and it is very necessary, submit to the judgement of your examiners and recognise the will of God in your exams.

<sup>23</sup> Lk 10:16.

This is what Comollo did when he found himself in a similar situation in life. Having presented for the exam and obtained a favourable result he then prepared himself for his clothing day as a cleric with keen sentiments of fervour and devotion. I would not know how to clearly express all the feelings of tenderness that he experienced in that situation. He prayed and asked others to pray for him, fasted, often broke down in tears, spent a lot of time in church so that when the day arrived for his feast (as he called the day he received the clerical habit) he made a general confession and received Communion with great fervour. He was as happy as if he had received the most honourable job in the world. He was caught up in a spirit of devotion and religious sentiment, recollected and modest. He seemed like an angel, dressed as he was in the ecclesiastical habit that he so much longed for and respected<sup>24</sup>. That day was always a memorable one for him and he used to say that his heart was completely changed: from a pensive and gloomy type he became amiable and cheerful, and every time he thought back to that day his heart was overwhelmed with fondness and joy.

Meanwhile the opening day of the Seminary had arrived. He would duly take up residence and stand out not so much for extraordinary virtues, but for accomplished ones. *Having arrived at the Seminary he was soon convinced that the place alone was not sufficient to take in knowledge and virtue, but detailed observance of the rules was necessary and the exact fulfilment of one's duties. The greatest concern for his duties of study and devotion, a burning desire for mortification were the thoughts that occupied Comollo during his Seminary days. So that he would never forget, he had written on a piece of paper kept in a book or an exercise book which he would use every day: "Whoever does a little does a lot by doing what he must do; but he who does a lot does nothing if he is doing what he shouldn't be doing."*

He had read how Saint Alphonsus made a vow never to waste time. This was cause for his highest admiration and he sought to imitate him in it in every way possible. So from the very moment he first entered the Seminary he applied himself with such diligence to study and devotion that he benefited

<sup>24</sup> The Clothing took place on October 21, 1836.

from whatever occasion, whatever means would keep him busy all the time. When the bell went he immediately interrupted what he was doing to answer God's voice (which was what he called the sound of the bell), calling him to his duty. I noticed more than once that even if the bell rang just once, it was impossible for him to continue what he had in his hands; he became confused and didn't know what to do. The virtue of obedience was so firmly rooted in him.

I won't speak of the superiors, for whom his obedience *was prompt and cheerful* without ever asking why he was being asked to do something. But the college assistants, and his equals received the same attention and ready obedience to any order or advice, as well as his superiors. When the bell went for study he was there most punctually, and applied himself in such a recollected way that any noise, chatter, or frivolous behaviour from anyone else went as if he did not notice it. He did not move unless there was another bell. One day it happened that a classmate, passing behind him, knocked his coat to the floor. He was content to make a simple remark about it being better if he looked where he was going next time. His classmate, *forgetting that he too was a cleric, and forgetting that charity demands we put up with the faults of others and not insult them*, got angry and raised his voice using offensive and threatening words. So Comollo, taking no notice of the insults thrown at him, settled himself again at his desk and continued to study calmly as if nothing had happened or been said.

In recreation, in groups, when going out for a walk he liked to always talk about academic matters, and in fact at study time he used to mentally prepare a series of things that he didn't fully understand so that he could soon raise them with a classmate in free time, someone he had special confidence in and who could explain them. He knew how to liven up conversations with various items of useful research and with anecdotes, but constantly observed his praiseworthy trait of good manners, keeping quiet when someone else was talking. And often enough he would stop halfway through a word to make room for someone else to speak.



He greatly abhorred the spirit of criticism or complaints about others; he spoke of his superiors but always reverently and respectfully; he spoke of his friends but always charitably and with moderation; he spoke about the timetable, the constitutions and rules of the Seminary, meals, but always expressing satisfaction and contentment. He did this in such a way that I could in all honesty say that in the two and a half years that I was at the Seminary I never heard him once offer a word that was against the principle he had firmly established in his mind: *speak well of others or not at all*. When he was forced to offer his opinion on someone else he always tried to interpret them in the best sense, saying that he had learned from his uncle that if an action had a hundred possibilities, ninety-nine of which were bad, one ought to take the one that was good and judge things favourably. On the other hand speaking of himself he remained quiet about anything that might redound to his benefit without ever speaking about things that would give him importance or honour.

*One of his friends, full of wonder at seeing a young cleric adorned with so many virtues, told him one day: "Comollo, you are a saint." Without comment on these words of praise, he took two sticks of bread which we Piedmontese call grissini, and placing them on his head like two horns, answered jokingly: "Here's your saint."*

Those little 'flowers' of devotion that we had seen him adorned with amongst the clods, in the fields, in his studies, far from withering with the years, flowered in all their charm and perfection. *It was wonderful to see how Comollo, given the bell for prayer or other sacred function, immediately ran there with the greatest diligence and kneeling or sitting up straight, in edifying recollection, he carried out his religious practices; one never saw the least reluctance in him about going to chapel or any other place to be there for his religious duties. In the morning at the first sound of the bell he got straight out of bed and adjusting whatever he needed to was there in church a quarter of an hour before everyone else to ready himself for prayer.*

Every time the seminarians attended solemn functions in church they no longer recited the Rosary there, but Comollo never left that devotion aside, so once the public functions were over he would, with another friend, withdraw

to the chapel to 'pay his debt' as he used say, to his good Mother by reciting the most holy Rosary. On holidays and especially over the Christmas holiday period, or Carnival, and the Easter solemnities, he would, even more than once a day, draw apart from common entertainments and recite the penitential psalms, or the Office of the dead, or of the Blessed Virgin in suffrage for the souls in Purgatory.

He loved Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and as well as frequent visits or spiritual communion, he took advantage of any occasion for sacramental communion to the great edification of those who were nearby. He would fast for a day in honour of Mary most holy before receiving Communion. After Confession he did not want to speak about anything except the greatness, goodness and love of Jesus whom he was going to receive the following day. When it was time for him to approach the sacred table I saw him taken up with the most lofty and devout thoughts. With full composure, walking slowly and deliberately with his eyes cast down, and at times trembling with emotion, he would approach the Holy of Holies. When he had returned quickly to his place he seemed beside himself, deeply moved and fully taken up in devotion. He prayed, but his prayer was interrupted by sobs, groans and tears; he could not quieten his rapture of affectionate piety until Mass was over and the morning hymn began. He was often warned to curb his external show of emotion since it might offend others: "I feel so full of affection and so happy of heart" he told me "that if I can't express it I feel I will suffocate." "On the day I go to Communion," he said at other times "I feel so full of joy and goodness that I cannot understand or explain it." From this anyone can see clearly that Comollo was well advanced on the way of perfection. Those movements of love of God, of gentleness, of contentment in spiritual matters are the result of his keen faith, his burning charity which was deeply rooted in his heart and constantly guided him in his actions.

The exemplary mortification of all his external senses went hand in hand with his inner devotion. He was modest in the use of his eyes when there was often an outing to gardens or villas, so that he saw little of the remarkable things around him which all the others used to admire. He never let his eyes wander but would carry on a conversation with a friend in Latin taking

no notice of anything else that was happening around him. It sometimes happened that on return from an outing he would be asked if he had seen his father, since they had passed nearby and if he had greeted him. He would answer that he hadn't seen him. He was often visited by some of his cousins in Chieri, but he found this a real cross, having to talk to people of the opposite sex. So as soon as they had said what they wanted to and needed to, he would encourage them kindly to visit him as little as possible, then would quickly take his leave. He was sometimes asked if his relatives (those he treated with such reserve) were little or big, or particularly pretty, and he would reply that they looked tall in the shade but he knew nothing else about them since he had never ever looked at them fully in the face. What a wonderful example and worthy to be emulated by youth especially those who aspire to or find themselves in the ecclesiastical state!

*The simplest and most indifferent of activities became a way for him to exercise virtue.* He had a habit of crossing his legs and resting his elbow on the table when at the table or in the study hall or in school. Out of love for virtue he wanted to correct this too, and to succeed he asked a friend to tell him as soon as he did it and even to give him a small penance every time he saw him take up that position. This is where his exterior composure in church came from; from the study hall, in school or in the refectory he edified and charmed anyone who saw him.

Mortification in food was something he practised daily: ordinarily the more he felt the need to take something (breakfast), that's when he would stay away. He was extremely frugal at table: he drank little wine and what he did drink was watered down. Sometimes he did not eat the main course or drink wine but was content to eat bread dipped in water, using the specious pretext that it was better for his health, but in reality it was his spirit of mortification. In fact, when he was told that this way of eating would be bad for his head or his stomach, he replied: "For me it's enough that it doesn't harm my soul." Every Saturday he fasted out of love for the Blessed Virgin; and on other vigils in Lent even before he was obliged to fast, he fasted so severely and took food in so small quantities that a friend he sat near at table said on a number of occasions that Comollo wanted to commit suicide! These were the main

external acts of penance that I noticed, from which one can imagine what he practised in his heart, and how Comollo's soul was constantly taken up in affectionate love for God, active charity towards his neighbour and a burning desire to suffer for love of Jesus Christ.

"The life Comollo led in the seminary," one of his superiors said<sup>25</sup> "always gave the idea that he was holy and excellent, always exact in his duties be it study or piety, exemplary in his moral conduct so that his entire approach showed up the most docile, obedient, respectful and religious character."

He liked talking, so if anyone felt a bit down, speaking with him brought some consolation. He was so modest, edifying in word and in dealing with people that even the most indiscreet individuals were obliged to recognise in him a mirror of modesty and virtue. One of his companions used to say that Comollo for him was a constant sermon; he was like honey that sweetened hearts, including the most bizarre types. Another said several times that he wanted to do everything possible to become a saint and to succeed he had decided to copy Comollo; and although he saw himself way behind such a model of virtue he was, just the same, very happy with the little he had been able to emulate.

As far as his behaviour during the holidays was concerned, it was the same as in the Seminary. He went very regularly to the Sacraments, frequented sacred functions, was punctual in teaching Catechism to the youngsters at church (he did this even from the time he was still dressed in lay attire), and also those whom he met along the way each time.

This is how he described his timetable in a letter he wrote to a friend. "I have already spent some two months on holidays which, even though it has been very hot, have been very good for my health. I have already studied what was left over from logic and ethics, which I had left aside during the year. I would willingly take up reading Giuseppe Flavio's *Church History* as you suggested<sup>26</sup>, but I have already started reading the history of heresies, so

<sup>25</sup> "Fr [Innocenzo] Arduino da Carignano [1806-1880], then professor of theology and now canon provost and vicar forane in Giaveno" (note in the original text).

<sup>26</sup> Giuseppe Flavio (37-100), *Antichità giudaiche*; narration of the history of the Hebrew people from the origin till A.D. 66.

I won't have time. I hope I can do it another year. As for the rest my room is a little piece of earthly paradise; I go in and do exercises, laugh, study, sing, and the only thing missing is you to joke with. At table. at recreation, going for a walk I always enjoy the company of my dear uncle who, despite his age is always happy and gracious and every time he tells me something better than the one before, all of which makes me very content. I am waiting for the moment we agreed on, be happy; and if you think well of me then pray to the Lord for me etc."

He was extremely fond of anything regarding the ecclesiastical ministry and was very happy when he could be busy about those things, a clear sign that the Lord was calling him to the state that he aspired to. His uncle the Provost, in order to nurture such fertile soil and encourage his nephew's inclinations, gave him the task of giving a sermon in honour of Mary most holy. He wrote about this task in another letter addressed to the usual friend.

"I have to tell you about something that makes me happy on the one hand but has left me a bit worried on the other. My uncle has given me the job of preaching on the glorious Assumption of the Virgin Mary. My heart is full of joy and excitement at being able to speak of my dear Mother. But on the other hand, knowing my own inadequacy I can clearly see how I am far from being able to worthily thread her praises together. Be that as it may, with her support, which I must speak of, I am ready to obey; I have already written it out and studied it a bit; on Monday I will come to you and you can listen to me give it and make observations which I will find very acceptable, regarding gestures and content. Recommend me to my Angel Guardian for the trip ... See you."

I still have this sermon with me which, although he used various quotes from creditable sources, is no less written by himself, and one notes expressions of those keen sentiments with which his heart burned regarding the great Mother of God. And he was a great success in delivering it. "Just as I was about to stand before the people," he wrote "my strength and my voice failed me, and my knees were knocking together. But Mary quickly put her hand on me and I became vigorous and strong; I started and then continued without the least hesitation. Mary did this, not I. Praise to her."

A few months later when I was in Cinzano, I asked what people were saying about the cleric Comollo and the sermon he had given. Everyone answered full of praise for him. His uncle said he saw God's work in his nephew. It was a sermon delivered by a saint, someone said. "Oh," another exclaimed "he seemed like he was an angel in the pulpit, so modest and so clear in his argument." Others spoke of the wonderful manner in which he preached. And then they repeated some of the ideas and even the very words which were still fixed in their memory.

Without doubt a farmer of such good will would have done great good in the Lord's vineyard. Such were his uncle's expectations, such was the hope his parents had, and such was the desire of his townsfolk, superiors, and friends. But God saw that he was pretty much ready for heaven. And so the evils of the world might not affect his intellect, he wanted to recompense his good will and call him to enjoy the fruits of the merits already acquired and the merits he earnestly still wanted to acquire.

#### *Chapter 4 – Circumstances preceding his illness*

It is not my intention to talk about matters I consider to be supernatural; I intend only to speak of facts that happened, leaving everyone free to judge as they see best.

*In the autumn holidays of 1838 I went to Cinzano to arrange for some matters pertaining to the coming school year. One nice day I went walking with Comollo up a hill where we could look down on the vast expanse of fields, meadows and vineyards. "See, Louis," I began to say "how poor the harvest is this year! Poor farmers! So much work and almost all of it in vain!"*

*"It is the hand of the Lord," he replied "weighing on us. Believe me, our sinfulness is the reason. In the coming year I hope the Lord will give us more abundant results."*

*"I hope so too, and good for those who can enjoy them."*

*"But let's keep going and leave these melancholy thoughts aside. We'll be patient this year, but next year we will have a more abundant harvest and make better wine."*

*"You will be drinking it."*

*"Maybe you intend to keep drinking your usual water."*

*"I hope to be drinking a better wine."*

*"What do you mean by that."*

*"Forget it, forget it ... the Lord knows what he is doing."*

*"That's not what I asked. I asked what you meant by the words: 'I hope to be drinking a better wine.' Would you like to be going to heaven, perhaps?"*

*"Although I only expect to be able to get to heaven after death purely through the Lord's mercy, just the same for some time now I have had a strong desire to taste the ambrosia of the Blessed and the feeling that my days are numbered."*

*Comollo said this with a smile on his face at a time when he was in the best of health and was getting ready to go back to the Seminary.*

*He said almost the same once when he came to Turin.* At the end of the holidays he went to the Capital and spent a few days at the home of someone who was a good judge of things<sup>27</sup>, and I quote the following words of his: "We were very much edified by the modesty of good Louis; Courteous, pleasant, simple, he inspired devotion in every thing he did, but especially when he prayed, he seemed like another St Aloysius. It was our great wish that he would spend some more days with us, but he really wanted to go. As he was leaving I said: 'Goodbye, perhaps we will not see each other again.' 'No, no,' he replied 'we will not see each other again.' 'It wasn't you I was thinking of when I spoke that way,' I replied 'but because of my advanced age I would like, indeed I hope, that you will come to celebrate one of your first Masses.' 'Well then,' he replied, frankly and resolutely: 'I will not be saying a first Mass; you will still be here in the coming year, but I will not be. So pray to the Lord for me. Goodbye.' These last words, said so frankly by someone so beloved, left us quite moved and we found ourselves often asking if good Louis had some inkling of his death. So when we heard the sad news of his death we said, full of admiration, that he knew all too well."

<sup>27</sup> "The home of Mr Fassone, administrative officer at the Royal Park de' tabacchi" (note in the original text).

I lend much credence to this story since I have checked it out with other people and noted the same ideas and words.

When these holidays were over and he was heading back to the Seminary, he reached a spot from which he could look back over his home town. While he paused, he looked out over the countryside and with unusual seriousness said to his father: “I cannot take my gaze off Cinzano”, and when asked what he saw, or if he was sorry he was going back to the seminary, he said: “Not only am I not sorry, but I want to get to that peaceful place as soon as possible; what I am looking at is our dear Cinzano that I am looking at for the last time.” When he was asked again if he was not feeling well, if he wanted to return home, he said: “Nothing, it’s nothing; I’m fine, let’s move on happily, the Lord is waiting for us.” “These words,” his father says “we have often repeated in the family, and every time I go past that spot, even now, I find it hard not to burst into tears.” This detail was reported to me and others before Comollo’s death.

Despite these forebodings concerning the end of his mortal life, ones that Comollo had uttered on more than one occasion, in his usual calm way and with his customary imperturbability and even-temper he got back to his studies again and continued to be exemplary in his practices of piety. At the half yearly exam he won (as he had done the previous year) a prize of seventy lire which was usually awarded each year to the one who stood out most for studies and devotion. *Although he showed the same care in carrying out all his duties, the same cheerfulness and conviviality in discussions and at recreation, nevertheless I had noticed something mysterious about his behaviour, I’m not sure what. He seemed even more attentive in prayer and all the other exercises of piety.* He always wanted to talk about the Tonkin Martyrs<sup>28</sup>: “These are real pastors of the Lord Jesus Christ’s sheep,” he said “since they gave their lives to save the lost sheep. How much glory will be reserved for them in heaven.” At other times he exclaimed: “Oh, if I could at least, as I am about to depart this world, hear the Lord’s consoling words—*euge, servei bone*; come faithful servant!”

<sup>28</sup> These are the martyrs Andrew Dung-Lac (decapitated in 1839) and companions. In Comollo’s time the persecution was still happening. The martyrs of Tonkin (Vietnam) canonised in 1988 were 117 in number (96 Vietnamese, 11 Spaniards and 10 French).



He spoke about paradise in joyful rapture; and one of the most beautiful things he used say was this: “When I am alone or unoccupied or when I can’t sleep at night then I go for the most beautiful walks. I imagine that I am on a high mountain and from its peak I can see all the beauties of nature. I contemplate the sea, the land, towns, cities, and all the magnificent things about them; I exalt when I see the peaceful sky, I admire the firmament where all the scattering of stars form the most wonderful spectacle. Then to all this I add the idea of beautiful music, that with voice and sound seems to echo through the mountains and valleys. My mind takes delight in my imagination, I turn around, lift up my eyes and there I am before the City of God. I see it from the outside, then I come closer and can penetrate within; just imagine all the innumerable things I then see up close.”

Continuing on his ‘walk’ he would then talk about all the interesting and edifying things that he would inspect closely during these sessions in Paradise.

It was in this year, too, that he discovered the secret of praying at length without distraction. “Do you want to know,” he told me, “how I begin to pray? It is a very material image that will make you laugh. I close my eyes, and in my thoughts I am carried into a large hall whose ceiling is held up by many columns that are most exquisitely decorated, and towards the back of the hall a huge throne rises up above which I imagine God is in all his majesty; then around him all the choirs of the Blessed. I prostrate myself before this and then with all the respect I can muster, I begin to pray.” Following what the spiritual teachers say, this demonstrates how much Comollo’s mind was detached from sensible things and how much control he could exercise in gathering up all his faculties of mind when he wanted to.

In this same year, while he was hearing Mass during weekdays, he would read meditations on hell by P. Pinamonti<sup>29</sup>, and I heard him often comment on this: “During this year I have been reading meditations on hell in the chapel. I had already read them and I read them again, and even though

<sup>29</sup> *L'inferno aperto al cristiano perché non v'entri, ovvero considerazioni delle pene infernali proposte a meditarci per evitarle* (1693). Giovanni Pietro Pinamonti (1632-1703) Jesuit, preacher, confessor and spiritual director.

the contents are sad and frightening, I want to keep on reading since while considering the intensity of those torments while I am still alive, I might not have to experience them in real terms after death.”

During Lent (1839), and with keen devotion, he also made his retreat. After this, he said that he did not have long to wait in this world and that the greatest favour the Lord could grant a Christian was that of making a retreat. “It is the greatest of graces,” he told his friends rapturously “that God can give a Christian, to give him time to arrange matters of soul in full awareness, at his leisure, and with the support of all kinds of favourable circumstances such as meditation, instructions, readings, good example. Oh! How good you are to us, Lord. How ungrateful is the one who does not make use of all this goodness from God.”

#### *Chapter 5 – Becomes ill and dies*

*While I attempt to tell about matters regarding Comollo’s final illness and death, I consider it good to repeat that what I say here is what was written down during his illness and immediately after his death: things that were read and re-read by his superiors at the Seminary and by friends who were eyewitnesses, before it was all sent to the press. They all say that there is nothing here that does not conform to the truth.*

It is also good to note that an innocent soul adorned with so many virtues as was Comollo’s, tells us that there is nobody who does not dread the approaching hour of death. He too experienced great apprehension. Ah, if good souls are so afraid to present themselves before the divine Judge and render account of their actions, *what will happen, O readers, what will happen to someone who gives no thought to anything but the pleasures of life! What a terrible moment that will be for the sinful person!*

It was the morning of March 25, 1839, the Feast of the Annunciation, when I met Comollo in the corridors as I was going to the chapel. He was waiting for me. I asked him if he had slept well and he replied frankly that he was all done in. I was very surprised, given that the day before we had walked a good bit together and I had left him in perfect health. I asked him why he had

spoken thus. He replied: "I feel cold throughout all my body, my head aches and my stomach seems blocked; but my bodily ills don't hurt all that much, what terrifies me (this he said in trembling voice) is that I must present myself before God's grand judgement." I encouraged him not to be so anxious, even though these were serious matters, but rather remote for him and he still had time to prepare himself. We went into the chapel. He heard Mass after which he suddenly became very weak and had to immediately go to bed. Once the functions were over in the chapel, I went to visit him in the dormitory. As soon as he saw me amongst those standing around, he made a sign for me to come closer, as if he had something of great importance to show me, and then he began saying: "You were telling me that it was something remote and that I still had time to prepare myself before going, but that's not the case; I am certain that I must appear before God soon; I have little time left to get myself ready; need I say it more clearly? We will be saying goodbye." Nevertheless I encouraged him not to worry and not to make himself anxious with ideas of the kind. "I am not worried, and I am not anxious," he interrupted, and then said "I am only thinking that I must go before this great judgement, judgement which has no appeal, and this makes me feel agitated." I was much affected by these words; so I was constantly asking if there was any news about him and every time I visited him he repeated the same things: "The time to present myself to divine judgement is at hand; we must say goodbye." During his illness he would have said this not once but more than fifteen times. And from the first day of his illness he told others the same when they went to visit him. He also said that his illness would be misunderstood by the doctors, that operations and medicines were to no avail; and this in fact was the case. These matters which at first I attributed to mere fear of divine judgement, when I saw that little by little things were happening as he had said, I spoke about them with some friends and with our Spiritual Director. At first he did not take much notice but then he was very surprised when he began to see the effects<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> "The Spiritual Director at the seminary in Chieri at the time was Fr Giuseppe Mottura [1798-1876], now canon of the famous college at Giaveno." (note in the original text).

Meanwhile Comollo was still in bed and feverish on the Monday; Tuesday and Wednesday he got up but seemed sad and melancholy, all taken up with the thoughts of divine judgement. On Wednesday evening he went to bed sick again and never got up again. On the Thursday, Friday and Saturday of that week (Holy Week), he was bled three times, took various medicines, broke into copious sweats, but there was no improvement. On the Saturday evening, Easter Vigil, I went to visit him: "Since we must leave one another and soon I must present myself before the judgement seat," he said to me "I would dearly like you to stay beside me tonight." Since I had spoken to the Director, who immediately knew some of the symptoms that the illness was getting worse, gave me permission to spend the night at his bedside. It was March 30, just before the solemn day of Easter. Around eight o'clock the fever became very strong; at a quarter past eight he began to go into convulsions and lost his senses. At first he cried out at length as if he were terrified by some frightening object or some grim spectre. From then until half past eight he came back to his senses somewhat and looking at those standing around he cried out in a loud voice: "Oh, judgement." Then he began writhing with such strength that five or six of us around him could hardly keep him in the bed.

This went on for a good three hours after which he returned fully to his senses. He spent a long time then looking pensive as if caught up in serious reflection, then discarding all that atmosphere of mournfulness and terror that he had shown for the last few days concerning divine judgement, he began to look peaceful and calm. He spoke, laughed, answered questions and we thought that he had almost returned to his regular condition of health again. He was asked why the sudden change given that he was so melancholic earlier and now so happy and amiable. He seemed a bit embarrassed to answer that question; then, with his eyes darting here and there as if nobody would hear him he began to speak in a whisper to someone near him: "Up until now I dreaded dying for fear of divine judgement; this terrified me utterly; but now I am at peace and have no fear of what is to come for the following reasons which I will tell you about in friendly confidence. While I was extremely agitated out of fear of divine judgement, I seemed suddenly to be transported into a wide, deep valley where the power of the wild currents and a strong wind sapped

all the strength of anyone who was there. In the middle of this valley was a great abyss like a huge deep furnace, with flames flaring up from it. Every now and then I saw souls, some of whom I recognised, fall into it and then huge bouts of fire and smoke went up into the heavens. At this frightening scene I cried out for fear of falling into that frightful chasm. So I turned back to flee and there was a countless number of monsters all of horrible and different shapes trying to hurl me into that abyss ... I cried out more loudly and even more terrified, without knowing what I was doing and I made the Sign of the Cross. When I did that all the monsters sought to bow their heads but unable to do so they began squirming in agony and drawing away from me somewhat. Still I was unable to flee and get away from that accursed place; then I saw a multitude of armed men like strong warriors coming to my aid. They vigorously attacked the monsters, some of whom were torn apart, others were lying on the ground while others still hurriedly took flight. Freed from danger I began walking through that broad valley on foot until I reached the foot of a tall mountain which could only be climbed by a staircase. But the stairs were full of fat serpents ready to devour anyone who tried to climb up. But there was no other way and I did not dare to go forward, fearing that I would be devoured by the serpents. I was beaten by weariness and anxiety, without any more strength left in me, when a lady whom I consider to have been the Mother of us all, dressed in great magnificence, took me by the hand and made me stand up straight, saying: 'Come with me. You have worked in my honour and called upon me many times, therefore it is right that now I take pity on you. The Communion in my honour deserve that you escape from the danger that the enemy of souls has put you in.' Meanwhile she signalled that I should follow her up the stairs. As she put her feet on the steps, all the serpents turned their deadly heads away and did not look at us until we were quite a distance from them. When we had reached the top of the staircase I found myself in a delightful garden where I saw things that I could never have imagined existed. These things filled my heart and made me feel at peace so that instead of fearing death I wanted it to come quickly so I could join the angels in heaven and sing the praises of my Lord." These were his words.

Whatever you might want to say about this story, the fact was that however great was his fear of appearing before God, he then demonstrated his desire that this moment should come immediately. There was no more melancholy or sadness on his face. He was all smiles and happily wanted to sing psalms, hymns or spiritual praises. Although Comollo's state of health apparently seemed to have improved, nevertheless when dawn came I judged it to be a good thing for him to receive the Sacraments given that it was the Easter Sunday Solemnity. "Willingly," he replied "and since they say that the Lord rose from the tomb about this hour (it was four thirty in the morning) I would like him to rise in my heart with the abundance of his grace. There is nothing that bothers my conscience, but just the same given the situation I am in, I would like to speak to my confessor for a moment before receiving Holy Communion."<sup>31</sup> Here is something worthy of note: a young man of our time, in the bloom of life, convinced that he must soon present himself before the divine judgement, says frankly that there is not the least thing to reproach his conscience ... that he is at peace. You might say that it was his well-regulated life, his pure heart and pure soul.

*Good reader, may this be an encouragement to me and to you from now on to settle matters concerning our soul so that at the final moment of our lives we can also say: I have nothing that weighs on my conscience. May God grant us this.*

His Communion was a truly edifying and wonderful spectacle. When he had finished his Confession and prepared himself to receive Holy Viaticum, the Director, who was the minister, followed by the seminarians, entered the infirmary; as soon as he appeared the patient, deeply moved, his face bloomed, his appearance changed, and in holy rapture he cried out: "Oh what a beautiful sight. So wonderful to see. Look how the sun is shining! Look at the crown made by the stars! Look how many are prostrate in adoration and do not dare to lift their heads! Oh! Let me go and kneel with them and adore that sun like I've never seen it before." While he was saying this he tried to get

<sup>31</sup> "Comollo's regular confessor was Fr (Francesco) Bagnasacco, canon of happy memory in the honourable college of canons in Chieri. In his two years at school and in the two and a half at the Seminary, he had always gone to the same confessor." (note in the original text).

up and made strong efforts to approach the Blessed Sacrament. I made every effort to hold him down in bed; I was crying tears of affection and wonder; I did not know what to say nor how to answer him. And he struggled all the more to approach the Holy Viaticum; he was not satisfied until he had received it. After Communion, all focused on his affectionate thoughts of Jesus, he remained unmoving for a while then, *breaking into raptures of joy once again, cried*, “Oh! Marvel of love! Who am I to be made worthy of such a precious treasure! Oh! The Angels in heaven exult, but I have more reason to be happy since He whom the prostrate Angels respectfully see revealed in heaven, is now held within me to look after: ‘*Quem coeli capere non possunt, meo gremio conféro; magnificavit Deus facere nobiscum et facti sumus laetantes*’: the Lord has done wonders for me, and I am filled with heavenly joy and divine consolation.” These and many other similar brief prayers he continued to pronounce for a good period of time. Finally he lowered his voice, called me to him and then asked me not to speak to him about anything else other than spiritual matters, saying that these final moments were too precious, that there was not much life left in him, and that he had to spend all the time glorifying God; therefore he would answer no other questions other than something to do with these matters.

In fact all that time when he was writhing and convulsing and being asked about temporal matters, he was raving; but when asked about spiritual matters his answers were more lucid.

Given that his condition was getting worse, his relatives sought opinions from various good doctors who proposed remedies and did various things: in other words they did what doctors do and what surgeons could suggest but all without effect, verifying in every way what Comollo had already predicted.

Meanwhile the patient, looking very weak and drifting off to sleep, was left to rest awhile. The seminarians went off to the sacred functions at the Cathedral. After a short sleep he awoke and finding himself alone with just his usual friend he began to speak thus and I offer it here word for word. “Here we are my dear friend, we are just about at the moment when we must leave one another for some time. We thought we would comfort one another

through life's vicissitudes, help one another, advise one another in everything that would be of benefit to our eternal salvation. But it was not written thus in the holy and ever adorable will of the Lord. You have always helped me in spiritual matters, in gaining knowledge and in temporal matters too, and now I thank you. God will reward you. But before leaving one another, listen to some reminders from your friend. Friendship is important not only to do what your friend asks while he is alive, but to do the same as we promised one another after death. Therefore the agreement that we made, our many promises to pray for one another to be saved, I want that to extend not just as far as the death of one of us, but of both of us; as long as you spend your days down here, promise and swear to pray for me." Although hearing these words from my friend I felt like weeping, I held back my tears and promised to do as he wanted. He went on. "So this is what I can say concerning yourself: you do not know if your days on earth will be short or long; but however uncertain may be the hour of death, it will certainly come; therefore do things so that your entire life is a preparation for death, for judgement ... Men only think of death occasionally, they believe that this hour will come even though they don't want it to, but they do not ready themselves, so when the moment arrives they are agitated and afraid, greatly embarrassed in finding themselves needing to sort out matters of their soul. Whoever dies amidst such confusion must be very afraid of eternal perdition. Happy those who spend their days doing holy and devout works and find themselves ready for that moment. If you are called by the Lord to become a guide for other souls, always nurture this idea of death, judgement, respect for the church, because one sees even important people who have little reverence for God's house; it sometimes happens that simple people, simple servants have holier attitudes while the minister of the Sanctuary goes around without reflecting that he is in the house of the living God!

"Since for all the time that we struggle in this vale of tears we have no other more powerful advocate than Mary most holy, you must therefore profess a special devotion to her. Oh! If people could be persuaded of the happiness that comes at the hour of death from devotion to Mary, everyone would be competing to find new ways to give her special honour. It will be her, with her



son in her arms, who will be our defence against the enemy of our soul at the final hour. Even though all of hell might be arrayed against us, with Mary in our defence, victory will be ours. Look at the lives of those who recite some prayer to Mary, or offer some simple mortification, and then believe they are protected by her, while they lead a shameless life. Instead of this kind of devotion it would be better not to be devout at all, because if they act like this, it is pure hypocrisy to think they will be favoured in their evil designs and even more so, if it were possible, given approval for their dissolute lives. May you always be truly a devotee of Mary by imitating her virtues, and you will experience the sweet effects of her goodness and love.

“Add to this frequenting the sacraments of Confession and Communion which are the two tools or two weapons with which you will overcome the assaults of our common enemy, and all the shoals in this stormy sea of the world. *Try to have a steady confessor: open your heart to him, obey him and you will have a secure guide in him for the way that leads to heaven, But Alas... so many go to confession without any results: confessions and sins, sins and confessions, but no change. So remember that the sacrament of Penance is supported by sorrow and good resolutions, and where one of these essentials is missing all our confessions become sacrilegious.*

“Finally, be careful with whom you deal, speak and where you go. I am not speaking of people of the opposite sex or other lay people, who are evidently a danger for us and whom we should avoid; I am speaking of our very companions, clerics and even seminarians. Some of them are bad, others are not so bad but not very good, while others still are truly good. The first group you must absolutely avoid, and deal with the second group when you have to, without developing any particular familiarity; it is the last group you must spend time with and draw both spiritual and temporal benefit from. It is true that they are few, but precisely for this reason you need to exercise the greatest caution looking for them, and then when you find them, spend time with them. Form spiritual friendships with them and draw much profit from this. With the good ones you will be good. With the bad ones you will be bad.

“I have one thing still to ask of you and I ask you this kindly. When you go out for a walk and you pass by my grave you will hear our classmates say: ‘our classmate Comollo is buried here.’ Suggest prudently to each of them that they say a *Pater* and a *Requiem* for me. This way I can be freed from the pains of Purgatory. There are many other things I would like to say to you, but my illness is getting worse and weighs on me, so recommend me to our friends’ prayers, pray for me to the Lord, and we will see each other again when he wishes that to happen.”

Sentiments like these expressed from the depths of his heart draw a true picture of his soul. These thoughts about eternal maxims, frequenting the Sacraments, tender devotion for the Blessed Virgin, fleeing dangerous companions, seeking out those from whom to draw some benefit for one’s studies, devotion, were the scope of all his activity.

On the evening of Easter day he was attacked by an even stronger bout of fever, with painful convulsions to the point where it was very difficult to talk to him. *But our holy Catholic religion makes such an impression on the heart of good souls that it was of great help to Comollo to calm him down.* Despite losing consciousness, or agitated by the violence of his illness, as soon as someone said: “Comollo, who are you suffering for?” He would immediately smile and become amiable, “For the crucified Jesus.”

Without a single complaint about his severe pain he spent the night and almost all the following day in this state. Meanwhile he was visited by his parents whom he barely recognised but he recommended to them that they be resigned to the divine will. These words were like barbs which stung the heart of his sorrowing mother who so loved such a loving son, and who so loved her. “Louis,” she said, holding back her tears “do you feel a little better? Take courage, your uncle the Provost is praying for you and has others doing so as well.”

“Yes, my dear mother, I do feel a little better, but from here on I hope to feel even better. This is the time for courage; let’s hope in the Lord. Greet my uncle, continue to pray for me, I will await him in heaven. Do not cry mother, this is what God wants. Courage, courage.”

From time to time he began to sing in an extraordinary voice and kept this up in such a way that you would have thought he was in good health. He sang the *Miserere*, the Litany of Our Lady, the *Ave Maris Stella*, spiritual hymns. But since the singing wore him out completely and worsened his illness, we suggested some prayers to him; so he stopped singing and recited what we suggested to him.

At seven in the evening of the 1st April, things began to get worse and the Spiritual Director considered it wise to administer the Holy Oils. He had hardly begun the sacred function when the patient seemed to appear to be perfectly recovered, answered whenever he needed to, to the point where the priest commented that while a few minutes ago he seemed to be in agony he was now able to assist correctly and respond to all the prayers and responses which are part of this rite. The same thing happened at eleven thirty when the Rector, seeing a cold sweat break out over his pallid face, gave him the papal blessing<sup>32</sup>.

Once he had received all the comforts of our holy Catholic religion, he seemed no longer to be a sick patient, but someone lying in bed to take a rest; he was fully aware, his soul at peace; he was happy and did nothing else but say brief prayers to the Crucified Jesus, Mary most holy, the Saints. The Rector said that he did not need others to recommend his soul; he was doing this sufficiently for himself. An hour after midnight on April 2, he asked one of those around him how much time there was still; he told him: "Still half an hour." "There is more" the patient added. "Yes," he replied believing that he was raving "still half an hour and then we start the tutoring." "Ah my good friend," he replied smiling, "what a great tutoring! There is more than tutoring." When a friend asked him to remember him in Paradise, he replied: "I will remember all of you, but especially those who help me escape from Purgatory." At half past one, although his face was as serene as usual, he seemed to be very weak and unable to breathe. Rallying a little soon after and gathering what strength he had left, with halting voice, eyes raised to heaven, he broke into this prayer:

<sup>32</sup> "The Rector of the Seminary was Fr Sebastian Mottura [1795-1876], Canon, Archpriest of the Chieri College of Canons." (note in the original text).

“Holy Virgin, kind mother, dear mother of my beloved Jesus, of all creatures you alone were worthy to bear him in your immaculate womb. Through the love with which you gave him suck, held him on your arms, suffered with him in his poverty, saw him ill-treated, spat upon, flogged and finally die suffering terribly on the cross; through all of this obtain for me the grace of courage, keen faith, firm hope, ardent charity, sincere sorrow for my sins; and to all the favours that you have granted me throughout my life add the grace that I might die a holy death. Yes, dear and merciful Mother, assist me at this moment when I am about to present my soul to divine judgement; you yourself can present me in the arms of your divine Son; if you promise me this here I am with ardent and frank spirit, dependent on your clemency and goodness and I present my soul through your hands to the Supreme Majesty from whom I hope to receive mercy.”

These were the exact words he said so emphatically and penetratingly that everyone around him was deeply moved to the point of tears.

When he had finished this fervent prayer he seemed suddenly overcome by a mortal lethargy. To keep him with us I asked him if he knew at what age St. Aloysius had died and he answered, “St Aloysius was twenty three and I am dying when I’ve not yet turned twenty two.” Seeing that his pulse was failing, I thought about getting close to him right at the moment that he was about to abandon this world and his friends; so I thought of saying something to him that come to mind in similar circumstances. He was all attention to what was being said to him, his face and lips smiling, maintaining his peacefulness, eyes fixed on the Crucifix which he held tightly between his hands joined on his breast, and he made every effort to repeat every word suggested to him. For about ten minutes before he expired, he called each of those standing around him by name, and said, “If you want something for eternity, I ... goodbye.” These were his last (spoken) words. Because his lips and tongue had stiffened he was unable to vocalise the brief prayers we whispered to him, but he mouthed them with his lips. There were also two Deacons present who read him the *Proficiscere*. When that was finished and as they were recommending his soul to the Holy Virgin and to the Angels to offer him to the Most High, just as they were saying the holy names of Jesus and Mary, his beautiful soul

quietly left his body and flew, as we devoutly hope, to its rest in the Lord's peace. His happy release took place at two after midnight, before the first rays of dawn on April 2, 1839. In another five days he would have turned 22. Thus was the death of the youthful cleric Louis Comollo, he was able to plant the seeds of virtue in his heart through the most ordinary of occupations, nurture them amidst all the world's illusions, perfect them in two and a half years as a cleric, then bring them all to maturity through his painful illness. And while everybody counted himself fortunate to have had him either as a model, or to be guided by his advice, or as a loyal friend, he left us all in the world in order to go to heaven and protect us from there.

It would seem, at first, that such a good Christian soul as was our Comollo would have nothing to fear of divine judgement. But if we observe things well, this is the ordinary behaviour of God's elect. When they consider that they must present themselves before the rigorous divine seat of judgement, they are filled with fear; but God comes to their aid in his own time and instead of the fear of a sinner, which continues in agitation, remorse and desperation, the fear of the just changes to courage, confidence and resignation and produces the most wonderful happiness in the soul. This is really the point where God has the just savour the hundredfold of their good works as the Gospel promises. The bitterness of death is sweetened by tranquillity of soul, contentment and inner joy which restores faith, confirms hope and inflames charity. Evil loses its violence and there is the advance sense of the enjoyment of the goodness that God is about to share with them for all eternity. This should be sufficient encouragement to lead us through the travails of life and to help us to put up with them with resignation and govern all our actions according to the divine precepts.

### *Chapter 6 – His Funeral*

Once daylight came and word spread of Comollo's death, the entire Seminary was in a state of great consternation. One said: "Comollo is already in paradise praying for us"; while another said: "How well he predicted his death." And another: "He lived as a just man and died as a saint"; while yet another: "If as a human judgement we can say that a soul departing this world

flies to heaven, we can certainly say that about Comollo.” So each person competed with the other to find something especially relevant to him. One did his best to get his crucifix, others to have some of his holy pictures. Others considered themselves fortunate if they could have one of his books. There was one even who, not able to get hold of anything else, took his collar as a way of preserving the memory of such a beloved and venerated colleague.

The Rector of the Seminary, also very much moved by the special circumstances that had accompanied his death, and unhappy at the thought that his body would be brought to the town cemetery, went to Turin to ask the civil and Church authorities for permission to bury him in the church of St Philip adjacent to the Seminary itself<sup>33</sup>. The professor for the morning conference, Fr Prialis, began school at the usual hour, but when it came time for him to speak, seeing the sadness written across the faces of all his listeners, also became emotional, and left the hall sobbing and in tears, without the strength to continue his conference<sup>34</sup>.

The other professor also came to class in the afternoon but instead of his usual talk offered a eulogy on Comollo’s death wherein he expressed the sorrow that everyone felt at the loss of such a beloved companion. He also indicated that each one should take heart in the hope that given such an edifying life and wonderful death, he would now have a protector in heaven. He urged everyone to take him as a model of propriety and virtuous clerical behaviour. He described his death in various ways: the death of a just person, a death which was special in the eyes of the Lord, and concluded by recommending that we cherish this moment as a dear memory and try to imitate him in virtue.

<sup>33</sup> The Rector’s request has still been preserved: “The deceased, cleric Peter Aloysius Comollo of Cinzano, died at the archiepiscopal seminary in Chieri. The undersigned, wanting to bury him in the catacombs of the Church of the said seminary known as St Philip’s, has recourse to your Royal Majesty, humbly requesting that he grant permission not only for this one but for others whose death might occur in the future.” (State archives, Turin, *Grande Cancelleria* m. 128/345 *Sepulture e trasporti di cadaveri*, 1839).

<sup>34</sup> He was Fr Lorenzo Enrico Prialis (1803-1868).

On the morning of April 3, with all the Seminarists present, along with the superiors, the Parish Priest (Canon) and the other Canons and clergy, the body was carried in through the streets of Chieri and after a lengthy procession during which funeral hymns and prayers were sung, was brought to the Church of St Philip. The bier was placed in the church accompanied by the funeral music and the Director presided at the sung Mass *with the body present*. After Mass the coffin was laid in a prepared grave close to the communion rails, almost as if Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, to whom he had turned with such love and with whom he had conversed so willingly, also wanted him close to him in death.

Seven days later there was a solemn funeral Mass again celebrated with all pomp and circumstance, lights and decorations. These were the final honours bestowed on him by his fellow clerics who, despite their sorrow spared nothing to celebrate such a dear friend.

#### *Chapter 7 – Consequences of his death*

It is an undeniable truth that the memory of good souls does not finish with their death but that their example is passed on to the benefit of posterity. An illness and death accompanied by such signs of lively faith and sentiments of virtue and devotion reawakened in many Seminarists the desire to imitate Comollo. Not a few, therefore, began to follow the advice he gave them whilst still alive, and others followed his example and virtue such that some who earlier had not demonstrated much the vocation they aspired to, used his death to make firm resolutions to become models of virtue.

“It was at the time of Comollo’s death,” one of his friends said “that I decided to lead the life of a good cleric and become a holy ecclesiastic; and although my determination might thus far have not had great effect, just the same my commitment will continue, indeed I will redouble my efforts each day.” Comollo’s virtue did not just produce these first good resolutions, but they have continued even until today. The Rector of the Seminary a short time ago assured me that “the change of behaviour in our Seminarists on Comollo’s death has continued until today.”

*But we have not spoken so much, amongst all these details, of the virtue of modesty that was precisely the characteristic feature of Comollo. Such good outward behaviour, such exact conduct, such edifying composure, mortification made with all the senses but especially the eyes, leads us to say that he possesses such a virtue to an eminent degree. And I do not believe I am exaggerating when I say and maintain the view that he took the beautiful stole of baptismal innocence into the next life. I argue this not just from his scrupulous reserve in dealing with or speaking with the opposite sex but more so from certain theological subjects that he could not understand at all, and from the questions he would ask, that demonstrated his simplicity and purity. My view was confirmed by what his spiritual director revealed when, after a long talk with him concerning Comollo, he concluded that he saw in him an angelic behaviour as he fervently and devoutly tried to imitate St Aloysius. In fact whenever he spoke about this Saint (other than the fact that he said a special prayer to him morning and evening), he always spoke in tones of rapture and joy. He glorified in the fact that he bore the same name. "Ah," he would say "my name is Aloysius! Maybe I could be Aloysius in fact, one day." It follows that if he did his best to emulate St Aloysius' virtues, he would certainly have emulated what is that Saint's special characteristic: his innocence and purity of behaviour.*

It seems appropriate for me here to observe that the reason why Comollo's death made such a great impression was the two appearances he made after his death. One of these was witnessed by the entire dormitory. It may also be appropriate to speak of certain heavenly favours obtained through the intercession of Comollo. Although I have a precise recall of all these things, I consider it best for now to omit them<sup>35</sup>, happy to conclude this account with three facts to which I add the character and dignity of the people who attest to them, which for me lends credence to the facts.

The first regards someone who was freed from serious temptation. She was someone very much involved in God's service but had been tempted for a long time, now by one thing then by another but she had always succeeded in overcoming the temptation. One day the temptation was so strong that it seemed she would succumb and the more she tried to distance herself from

<sup>35</sup> One of these "apparitions" is narrated in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 2nd decade, Chap. 6 (cf. no. 309).



her sinful imagination the more it went wild. She was unable to pray - her prayer was arid, dry; but turning her gaze to the table she saw something on it that had belonged to Comollo and it reminded her pleasantly of him. "I began to cry out," the same person says, "You are in Paradise, O virtuous Louis, so if you can intercede with the Lord, ask him to free me from this terrible predicament. Then something wonderful happened. I had hardly uttered these words and was about to say something else when this unwanted temptation ceased and I found myself at peace. From then on I have never neglected to invoke that young angel in all my needs, and I was always answered."

The other fact I write just as the person, who was an eyewitness, put it to me. "One morning I was called to go quickly to recommend the soul of a friend to the Lord. He was in his last agony. Having arrived there, I found things just as they had been described to me. Deprived of his senses and unable to reason, his eyes were watery, his lips stiffened, and he was bathed in a cold sweat. It seemed his blood had ceased to flow and one would have said that he would breathe his last breath within a few minutes. I spoke to him several times but he did not respond. Not knowing what else to do, I broke down in tears; in that predicament I suddenly thought of the cleric Comollo and all the wonderful virtues of his I had heard about. To vent my pain I thought of calling on him. "Come on," I said, "If you can do something with the Lord, pray to him to raise up this poor soul and free him from the anguish of death." As soon as I had said this the dying man suddenly dropped the end of the sheet which was clenched between his teeth, shook himself, and then began to speak almost as if he had not been ill. His improvement was such that after eight days he was fully recovered from his illness, although he needed several months more of convalescence, and he was able to resume his previous work."

*The final fact I consider should be provided just as the person who received the heavenly favour wrote it. He declares that he recognises it as coming from the Lord through Comollo's intercession. He is Mr Giovanni Battista Paccotti, geometrician and landowner in Cinzano, eyewitness to the admirable virtues which Comollo practised in this town. Here is the content of his report.*

*Cinzano, 16 September 1847.*

Very Reverend Sir,

*Following up on the promise made last autumn to Your Reverence, where I said I would write down the facts that happened before and after the death of the cleric Comollo, I am now fulfilling that task, although late, by informing you of a fact that happened to me in 1845, again in 1846 and then again last August in this current year, 1847.*

*I was troubled by an acute illness which at a certain time of the year turned much nastier. In October and November of 1845 I had a particularly violent attack. It had reached the point that despite all the suggestions of the medical profession and especially those of the celebrated Mr Cavalieri, Professors Ribì and Gallo, as well as others of equal merit, it got much worse and intolerable, and was declared to be without remedy.*

*On the night of the said month, November 1845, as I said, lying in bed as usual and almost exhausted, I thought more seriously than ever before of the sad situation I had been reduced to and to what lay ahead; as I dozed until morning came and after a difficult night, I don't know if I awoke or just thought I had but the fact is that I heard something saying to me: "why not ask Louis Comollo who could help you in this critical situation?" I believed I was truly awake. Giving serious reflection to these words and since I believed that the behaviour of this very worthy cleric was irreproachable, indeed an example to everyone, I resolved to invoke him, saying: "If you are amongst the Blessed, Louis, ask the Lord to heal me and I will inform Don Bosco about it so that along with other details about you, he can include this to redound to your glory." I was a little calmer after I had said this and then the following day I found myself almost free of an illness that I felt I would succumb to or I would at the very least become a burden and inconvenience to the family.*

*Meanwhile, when I had fully recovered my health, amongst business matters, and my profession as a measurer, I completely forgot to do what I had promised cleric Louis Comollo I would do. But the following year, that is in autumn 1846, the illness returned suddenly and more strongly; that is when I remembered the obligation I had taken on. In fact, renewing the same promise that I have just described to Your Reverence, and freed as before, I was overcome by feelings of*

*affection. But since Your Reverence had in a certain way obliged me to make a genuine account of what had happened to me and I, having accepted that, had not done it, the illness assailed me a third time just a few days later. It got more serious by the day and I became of the opinion that this derived from the fact that I had not fulfilled the obligation I had taken on. And indeed, having renewed my promise by saying that if I felt better today I would write to Your Reverence without further delay and fully explain what had happened to me, yet a third time I was granted a notable improvement I can say that I am almost certainly healed of an illness that the medical profession almost certainly would not be able to free me from.*

*And since I fully recognise that my recovery is due to the intercession of the cleric Louis Comollo, I hasten to ask Your reverence to publish this true and sincere fact that has happened to me for the greater glory of God and so that in the future respect and veneration for this model of virtue, Louis Comollo, may grow more amongst others and especially amongst those who had the good fortune to know him while he was alive.*

*Herewith what I can and must confirm by this act with which I have the honour ... etc.*

*Your Reverence's,*

*Most devoted and humble servant*

*Pacotti Giovanni Battista*

From what has been written thus far each one can easily understand how Comollo's virtues, although not extraordinary, are nevertheless singular and accomplished such that I can propose him as an example for anyone be he lay or religious; certainly, whoever follows Comollo will become a virtuous young man, an exemplary cleric, a true and worthy minister of the Sanctuary.

*However, while we admire Comollo's virtuous actions I would like us to fix our thoughts on the divine Religion which forms such wonderful models of virtue. Someone who belongs to the Catholic Religion alone has the Saints and other people outstanding in virtue; only in this Religion is there an abundance of means to comfort one in all of life's needs; she instructs and guides one through adolescence*

*along the way of truth; she comforts one with the Sacraments, with the word of life into adulthood; she doubles her care during illness leaving aside nothing that could contribute to one's spiritual and eternal benefit, as well as temporal benefit. She alone comforts one at the hour of death, in death or after death.*

*O Catholic, holy, divine Religion! How great are the good things you procure for the one who practises you, hopes in you and confides in you! How fortunate are those who are in your bosom and practice your precepts!*

*Meanwhile, good reader, while we admire the virtuous actions of the heroes of Catholicism, let us even more keenly give thanks to God who through his goodness has created us and kept us in the holy catholic religion. And as a pledge of our gratitude, let us show that we are zealously observant of the precepts of this divine Religion of ours. Let us never cease to implore God's mercy with all our heart, so that he may preserve us in this religion until the last moments of our life.*

*So, dear reader, we will also be very happy, and when our soul abandons earthly things to present itself for the first time to the Supreme and Divine Majesty, we can be certain that we too will hear the sweet invitation proclaimed by Jesus Christ in the Gospel: "Come, O faithful servant, come, you were faithful to me in life, now come and be crowned with glory in heaven where you will enjoy for eternity the joy of the Lord: intra in gaudium Domini tui."<sup>36</sup>*

*May the Lord God grant this grace to the one who writes, to you who are reading, and to all faithful Christians. Amen.*

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Mt 25:21-23.

### 306. Life of the young Dominic Savio, pupil at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales

Printed Ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales con appendice sulle grazie ottenute per sua intercessione*. Ed. 5. Torino, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1878<sup>37</sup>.

*My Dear Boys,*

You yourselves have often asked me to write you something about Dominic Savio, and having done what I could to satisfy your earnest wishes, here then is his life briefly and simply written. I know you will like it.

There have been two difficulties in particular in writing this life for you. The first one is the comments that come from writing about things many people still living have witnessed. I think I have got around this by only writing about the things which you or I saw ourselves, and almost all of which have been written and noted in your own hand.

The second one is that, since Dominic lived here for three years, I have had to speak about myself in different ways since they were things in which I also had a part. I have tried to overcome this by treating things in as historical a way as possible, writing about the truth of the facts, without reference to individuals. If, however, in spite of this I seem to refer to myself unduly, consider it to be the result of the the great affection I have for our deceased friend and for you all; this lets me talk freely to you and keep no secrets from you.

You might ask me why it is I have written Dominic's life and not that of some of the other boys who had such a reputation for virtue and whom you were so fond of—Gabriel Fascio, Louis Rua, John Massaglia come quickly

<sup>37</sup> The fifth edition, the last that Don Bosco saw to, is considered the definitive one (cf. Alberto CAVIGLIA, "Savio Domenico e Don Bosco. Studio", in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco nuovamente pubblicati e riveduti secondo le edizioni originali e manoscritti superstiti*. Vol. IV. Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale 1943, p. xv). Of the earlier editions (1859; 1860; 1861; 1866), only the first is published in OE XI, 150-292. we draw on text and notes from: Giovanni BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, in ID., *Vite di giovani. Le biografie di Domenico Savio, Michele Magone e Francesco Besucco*. Introduction and historical notes by Aldo Giraud. Rome, LAS 2012, pp. 37-109.

to mind, apart from many others. It is quite true that the goodness of these boys would make their lives very well worth writing, but Dominic stood out even above these. But if God gives me the health and grace, I have in mind to collect information about these other virtuous friends of yours and satisfy both yours and my wish to read about them and imitate them in whatever is compatible with your state in life.

In this fifth edition, I have added various items of information that I hope will also make it interesting for those who have already read what was in the earlier printed editions.

In the meantime, reading about Dominic's life, say to yourselves what the great St Augustine said in similar circumstances: "*Si ille, cur non ego?*" That is, if a boy of my age, just like me in every way, who had to meet the same temptations as I have to or worse, could follow Christ with such courage and wholeheartedness, why should I not do the same? Remember that true religion does not mean simply saying things, but doing them. If you read something that you admire, don't content yourself with saying "This is great. I like this" but rather: "*I want to do the things I have read about others. They make me wonder.*"

May God give you and all those who read this little book the grace to benefit from it. May the Blessed Virgin whom Dominic loved so much, grant that we may be of one heart and soul in loving our Creator who alone is worthy of being loved above all things, and faithfully served every day of our life.

### *Chapter 1 – Home – This boy's character – His early virtuous life*

The parents of this young lad whose life we are undertaking to write were Savio Charles Savio and his wife Brigid<sup>38</sup>, poor but upright citizens of

<sup>38</sup> Carlo Baldassarre Savio (1815-1891); in 1871 he came to live at the Oratory in Valdocco. Brigida Rosa Gaiato (1820-1871). They married on 1st March 1840 and had 10 children: Domenico Carlo (who lived but a few days: 3-18 Nov. 1840); our Dominic (1842-1857); Carlo (15-16 Feb. 1844); Remondina (1845-1913); Maria (1847-1859); Giovanni (1850-1894); Guglielmo (1853-1865); Caterina (1856-1915); Teresa (1859-1933); Luigia (1863-1864); cf. Michele MOLINERIS, *Nuova vita di Domenico Savio. Quello che le biografie di san Domenico Savio non dicono*. Colle Don Bosco, Ist. Sal. "Bernardi Semeria" 1974, p. 24.

Castelnuovo d'Asti<sup>39</sup>, a town about ten miles from Turin. In 1841, finding themselves in dire straits without work, they went to live in Riva<sup>40</sup>, a town two miles from Chieri, where the husband began working as a blacksmith, a trade he had already practised as a young man. While they were living there, God blessed their marriage and gave them a son who would be their consolation. He was born on April 2, 1842. When they brought him to be reborn in the waters of baptism, they gave him the name Dominic<sup>41</sup>, which although not important in itself it would just the same be a name the boy would give much thought to, as we shall see.

When Dominic was two, to make things easier for the family, his parents decided to return to their home town and went to Morialdo to live, a hamlet of Castelnuovo d'Asti.

The good parents' only concern was to give their boy a Christian upbringing. Up till now he had given them much pleasure. Dominic was naturally good, with a heart which was easily given to piety. He learned his morning and night prayers readily and could already say them by himself when he was only four

<sup>39</sup> "In olden days it was called Castelnuovo di Rivalbae because it depended on Counts Biandrate who were landed gentry in this town. Around 1300 it was conquered by Asti and so was from then known as Castelnuovo d'Asti. At the time it was populated with hard-working people who were very active in business, which they carried out in various cities throughout Europe. It was the hometown for many famous men. The famous Giovanni Argentero, known as the great doctor in that century, was born in Castelnuovo d'Asti in 1513. He wrote many works of great erudition. He was very pious and devoted to the great Mother of God, and in her honour he built the chapel of the B. V. of the people in the parish church of St Augustine in Turin. He was buried in the cathedral church and given an honourable inscription on his tomb, still visible. This town saw many other famous people. Recently there was Fr Joseph Cafasso, a man of great piety, theological learning and love for the sick, prisoners, those condemned to be hanged and unfortunate people of all kinds. Born in 1811 he died in 1860." (note in the original text).

<sup>40</sup> "Known as Riva di Chieri to distinguish it from other towns with the same name. It is four kilometres from Chieri. Emperor Federico in 1164 appointed Count Biandrate to have dominion over Riva di Chieri. It was then given to Asti. In the sixteenth century it came under the control of the House of Savoy – Monsignor Agostino della Chiesa, and Bonino in their *Medical Biography* speak at length of many famous personages who were born there" (note in the original text).

<sup>41</sup> He was born at nine in the morning, and baptised the same day, "at five in the evening" and given the names Domenico Giuseppe (in honour of his grandparents).

years old. He was constantly beside his mother, eager to help her in every way. If he did go off sometimes, it was only to go into some corner of the house and try to say some prayers.

“From his earliest years,” said his parents, “when children find it very difficult to keep still, and are always wanting to touch and pull things about, Dominic was not only obedient and ready to do anything we asked but was also always trying to do whatever made us happy.”

It was interesting and at the same time pleasing how he greeted his father when he saw him coming home after his day’s work. Dominic would run to meet him, take his hand, or jump up into his arms, “dear dad,” he would say “how tired you must be. True? You work so hard for me and I’m not always good, in fact I cause trouble. I pray to God to give you health and to make me good.” And with that he would offer him a chair or stool to sit on, would keep him company and do a thousand little things for him. This was real comfort for me in my work,” the father said, “and I was impatient to get home and kiss my Dominic who had won over my heart completely.”

His love did not stop at his parents; his love of God was older than his years. He wanted to say his prayers and never had to be reminded, much less driven, to say them at night and before and after meals. The *Angelus* too. Rather, it was he who reminded others, should they happen to forget.

One day, distracted by something unusual, his parents sat down to the meal without saying grace. Dominic immediately said: “Dad, we have not said our grace yet”, and began to make the Sign of the Cross and say the prayer.” On another occasion there was a visitor in the house who was asked to stay for dinner. When the meal was put on the table, the man sat down and began eating without making the Sign of the Cross or saying any prayer. Dominic did not presume to correct the visitor, but left the table and stayed away until the visitor had gone. When asked by his parents why he had acted in this very unusual way, he said, “I did not like to be at table with one who eats just like animals do.”



*Chapter 2 – His conduct at Morialdo – Beautiful signs of virtue –  
He attends the village school*

In this chapter there are facts which some might find difficult to believe if the one who states them were not to get rid of our doubts. I am drawing from a note that the chaplain of the hamlet<sup>42</sup> was courteous enough to write up for me concerning his dear pupil.

“Soon after I came to Morialdo, I would often see a small boy about five years old coming into the church with his mother. I was very struck with the serenity of his face and his unaffected piety, and was not surprised that others noticed the same. If, when he came to church in the morning it was locked, you would see something very interesting. He would quietly kneel down and say his prayers, instead of beginning to play about in some way or other as boys of his age would do. It did not matter if the ground was muddy or the snow was thick on it, he knelt down just the same. Curious to know who he was, I made inquiries and found out that he was the son of the blacksmith, Charles Savio.

If ever I met him on the road he would wave while still some distance away and his face would light up with a smile. At school he made rapid progress not simply because he was clever, but also because he tried very hard. Some of the boys he had to mix with were rather rowdy and far from good, but I never saw him quarrelling. If they did try to involve him in some disturbance, he would patiently hold on and at the first opportunity quietly slip away. If they wanted him to join with them robbing orchards, damaging property, making fun of old people or suchlike, he not only refused, but stated quite convincingly why he thought it was wrong to do so.

This spirit of piety did not drop off as he grew older. He was only five years old when he learned to serve Mass and he always did so with great attention. He tried to be at Mass every day, and if there was someone else serving he would hear Mass, otherwise he would serve in a most edifying way. Since he

<sup>42</sup> “The chaplain at the hamlet then was Fr Giovanni Zucca [1818-1878] from Moriondo; he now lives in his home town.” (note in the original text).

was so young and also small in size<sup>43</sup>, he could not carry the missal across; it was interesting so see him approach the altar anxiously, stand on tip-toe, extend his arms as far as he could and make every effort to reach the missal stand. If the priest saying Mass wanted to please him, on no account should he change the missal over himself, but pull the stand right to the edge where Dominic could get hold of it and carry it triumphantly to the other side.

He used to go regularly and frequently to confession, and since he already knew how to distinguish heavenly bread from the earthly kind, he was allowed to make his First Communion. Communion was something he did with great devotion. Seeing how grace was working in his soul so marvellously, I often thought to myself, ‘What promise there is here for the future; may God open up the way for him to reach the heights he is capable of attaining.’” (*These are the words of the Chaplain from Morialdo*).

### *Chapter 3 – Admitted to first communion - Preparation – Recollection and memories of the day*

Nothing stood in the way of Dominic’s being allowed to make his First Communion. He knew the basic catechism by heart, and understood very well what the Holy Eucharist was. He had also a great desire to receive Jesus into his heart. There was only one difficulty, his age. At that time boys and girls did not normally make their First Communion until they were eleven or twelve years old. Dominic was only seven. To look at him, he seemed even younger, and so the parish priest hesitated to put him forward. He sought advice from some of the other priests and they, knowing Dominic’s precocious knowledge, the instruction he had received and his keen desire, said that he need not hesitate. The way was now clear and Dominic was told that he could receive the food of the Angels for the first time.

It is not easy to describe the joy which filled him at this news. He ran home trembling with excitement and joy to tell his mother. Much of his time was

<sup>43</sup> Dominic’s height at the time of his death according to Prof. Francesco Volante who did the recognition of the body, “would be around 1.50 metres” (cf. ASC A4920119 letter of Francesco Volante to Fedele Giraudi, 18 February 1950).

given to praying and reading; he spent a lot of time in church before and after mass and it seemed as though his soul was dwelling with the angels in heaven. The evening before he went to his mother and said: "Mother, tomorrow I am receiving Jesus in Holy Communion for the first time; forgive me for anything I have done to displease you in the past: I promise you I am going to be a much better boy in every way. I will be attentive at school, obedient, docile, respectful to whoever tells me what to do." Having said this, he burst into tears. His mother, who had only received consolation from him, was also emotional and found it difficult to hold back her tears, but she consoled him saying: "It's ok dear Dominic, everything is forgiven. Ask God to always keep you good, and also pray for me and your father."

Dominic was up early next morning, dressed himself in his best clothes and hurried off to church. It was not yet open so he knelt down on the steps, as was his custom, and tried to pray until the other children arrived and the church was opened. Between Confessions, preparation, thanksgiving and sermon, the service lasted five hours. Dominic went into church first and was the last to leave. All that time he scarcely knew if he was in heaven or on earth.

It was a wonderful and never-to-be-forgotten day for him; it was a renewal of his life for God, a life that can be taken as an example by anyone. If one got him to talk about his First Communion several years later, his face lit up with joy and happiness as he said: "That was the happiest and most wonderful day of my life." He made some promises on that day which he preserved carefully in a little book, and often re-read them. He let me have this little book to look at and I give them here in their original simplicity. They were as follows: "Promises made by me, Dominic Savio, when I made my First Communion in 1849 at seven years of age: 1. I will go often to Confession and I will go to Holy Communion as often as I am allowed by my confessor. 2. I will try to keep Sundays and holy days holy. 3. My friends will be Jesus and Mary. 4. Death, but not sin."

These promises, which he often went over, were the guiding light of his life until he died.

If among those who read this book there are any who have yet to make their First Communion, I would urge them strongly to take Dominic as their model. But I also recommend to parents, teachers and all those who are responsible for the young, to give the greatest importance to this religious act. Be assured that the First Communion very well made is a solid moral foundation for the rest of the child's life. It will certainly be an extraordinary thing to find anyone who has made this great act with real devotion and care and has afterwards not lived a good and virtuous life. On the other hand there are thousands of young people who have gone astray and who are the despair of their parents and those responsible for them; I would not hesitate to say that the trouble began with the little or no real preparation for the First Communion. It is better to delay making it, or not to make it at all, than to make it badly.

*Chapter 4 – School at Castelnuovo d’Asti – An edifying episode – A wise response to bad advice*

It was clearly high time for Dominic to go to another school as he had gone as far as he could in the little village school. Both his parents and himself desired this very much but how could this happen without financial means. They could only turn to God, the supreme master of everything, and who would see to all that was needed to follow the career to which he was calling him. “If only I were a bird,” Dominic would say sometimes “I would fly morning and evening to Castelnuovo, and so I would be able to carry on with my lessons.”

His keen desire finally overcame all difficulties, and it was decided that he should go to the county school, although this was about three miles away. Dominic cheerfully walked the six miles there and back every day. The varieties of weather, the very hot sun in summer, mud, rain, storms and fierce winds at other times of the year, never got him down or stopped him from going to school, although he was barely ten years old when he started. He was obedient to his parents, which helped him to look after his health and to put up with any discomforts. A local farmer used sometimes to see Dominic on the road,

and one afternoon when the sun was beating down mercilessly he approached the boy and started talking:

“Aren’t you afraid to be on your own on this lonely road?”

“But I am not alone: my guardian angel is with me all the way.”

“But don’t you get fed up in this heat having to go backwards and forwards four times a day?”

“No, I am doing it for a Master who pays well.”

“Oh, and who is that?”

“God the Creator, who rewards even a cup of water given for his sake.”

This same individual recounted this episode to some friends and finished by saying: “A young lad of such tender age who nurtures thoughts of this kind, will certainly make a name for himself in whatever career he undertakes.”

Some of his school companions were not very good, and he ran the serious risk of doing wrong.

In the heat of summer many boys usually went swimming in the ditches, streams, water pools and the like. Bathing has its physical dangers and, not infrequently, the death by drowning of young people and adults has to be lamented. It can also have its dangers for the soul in certain circumstances, when boys are stripped together in public places. How many youngsters deplore their loss of innocence saying that the reason was they went swimming with boys of that kind in those accursed places!

Some of Savio’s classmates were in the habit of going there. He did not want to go there but they wanted him to go with them and succeeded in inducing him to go on one occasion. But when he saw how bad it was, he was deeply grieved and it was never possible to induce him to go again, and in fact he often regretted the risk he placed both soul and body in. But two of the worst boys tried again and they said to him:

“Dominic, are you coming to play?”

“What are you going to play?”

“We’re going swimming.”

“I’m not going. I’m not a good swimmer and I am afraid of drowning.”

“Come on it’s good fun. If you go swimming you don’t feel the heat any more, you have a good appetite and it’s very healthy.”

“But I’m afraid of drowning.”

“Don’t be afraid. We’ll teach you and you can follow what we do. Soon you will be swimming like a fish, and leaping about like the rest of us.”

“But isn’t it wrong to go to such dangerous places to swim?”

“Not at all. If so many go, how can it be wrong?”

“Just because everyone does it doesn’t mean it is not sinful.”

“If you don’t want to dive into the water, start by watching the others.”

“Still, I feel uneasy about it and don’t know what to say.”

“Come on, take our word for it, there’s nothing wrong and we’ll look after you.”

“Before doing what you tell me I want to ask my mother’s permission. If she says yes I’ll come, otherwise no.”

“Don’t be stupid—don’t say anything to your Mum. She won’t let you go, and she will also tell our parents and we will be in for a good hiding.”

“Well if my mother won’t let me go, it’s a sign that it’s not a good thing and so I won’t go. In any case if you want the truth I’ll tell you. I went once before, but never again; simply because it is easy to get drowned there, but more still because from what I saw last time it is also easy to offend God; so don’t talk to me any more about swimming. In any case if your parents don’t want you to go, you know you should not go. God punishes children who disobey their parents.”

This is how Dominic answered the harmful suggestions of his companions and in doing so avoided a grave danger through which, if he had allowed himself to go, he might well have lost his innocence, the loss of which leads on to so many sad consequences.

*Chapter 5 – His behaviour at school in Castelnuovo d’Asti –  
His teacher’s words*

From his experiences at this school Dominic learned how to get on properly with the other boys. If he saw one who did his best, was obedient, tried hard at his lessons, he made him his friend. Those who were always giving trouble, making no effort to learn, ready with bad talk and such like, he avoided like the plague. Those who were in between he tried to help, if he could, in whatever way was possible; but he never made them his close friends.

Dominic’s life at the school at Castelnuovo can be a model and an inspiration for any boy who wants to get on with learning and in piety. In this regard I am copying here the good report given by his teacher, Fr Alessandro Allora<sup>44</sup>, still the district head teacher for this school. It is as follows:

“I am very glad to write what I know about Dominic Savio, who in a very short time won my admiration, since I loved him with the tenderness of a father. I am happy to respond to this invitation because I have a keen, clear and complete memory of his study, conduct and virtue.

I cannot say very much about his piety and devotion as he was excused from taking part in the school religious services, on account of his living so far away. Had he taken part he would have stood out for these.

He completed his first elementary in Morialdo and so this good lad gained admission to my school for 2<sup>nd</sup> elementary on June 21, 1852, the day that students dedicate to St Aloysius, Patron of youth. He was not very strong physically, but he had a very pleasant appearance and was very well mannered. He was always cheerful and good tempered and never imposed himself on anyone. He was like this both in school and beyond, in church and everywhere. Whenever the teacher would see him, think about him or speak to him, he left a very good impression. This is one of the best compensations for the hard work of a teacher, and made up for some of the others who never bothered or showed interest, no matter what was done for them. He lived up to his name [Savio=wise] not only in his lessons, but in everything he did and said, his

<sup>44</sup> Alessandro Giuseppe Allora (1819-1885).

study and his piety. Right from the first moment he came to my school and until the end of the school year, and for the four months of the following year he made extraordinary progress in his studies. He quickly got to the top of his class and remained there getting high marks in all subjects. This was not simply because he was clever but because he worked very hard and came to have a great love for his lessons. It was also because his studies were not simply for himself but because of his great love for study and virtue.

Also worthy of special admiration was his diligence in fulfilling even the smallest detail as a Christian student and his admirable consistency in attending school. As weak as he was he seemed always in good health walking 4 kilometres between coming and going to school every day—and doing that four times a day. He did all this with wonderful peace of soul and even-temper even in the bad winter months in cold, rain or snow. This had to at least be recognised by his teacher for its difficulty and for the rare merit of it. In the course of the same year, 1852-53, he became ill; parents then changed their abode, so it was to my great regret that I could not continue teaching such a dear pupil. I had great and wonderful hopes for him but was increasingly afraid that he would not be able to continue his studies either because of poor health or lack of finances.

It was a great joy for me when I heard later that he had been accepted at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. I knew that the way was now open for him to nurture his special intellect and his outstanding piety.” (*These are his teacher’s words*).

#### *Chapter 6— School in Mondonio <sup>(45)</sup> - He puts up with a great injustice*

It seems that Divine Providence wanted to help Dominic to realise that this world is a place of exile where we have no resting place, it may be, on the other hand, that it was God’s design that he should be known in as many

<sup>45</sup> “Mondonio, or Mondomio, or Mondone is a small village of around 400 inhabitants two miles from Castelnuovo d’Asti. It is easy to get to Castelnuovo from there by a tunnel through a nearby hill. Some records of this town go back as far as 1034. It came under the House of Savoy through the treaty of Cherasco in 1631” (note in the original text).



places as possible, so that his goodness and strong virtue might be a source of inspiration to all who saw him.

Towards the end of 1852 his parents left Murialdo and set up house in Mondonio, a village near Castelnuovo. Here Dominic continued the same way of life and I need to repeat what other teachers had said about him earlier. His teacher, Father Cugliero<sup>46</sup>, who had him as a student, offers a similar report, though I have been selective in order not to repeat myself too much.

“I can truthfully say that in twenty years of teaching boys I have never had one to equal Dominic. He was only a boy in age but he had the sense and judgement of a fully mature man. He was very diligent and applied himself to his lessons, and his good-naturedness and readiness to help won him the affection both of his companions and teachers. I could not help marvelling at the way he could fix his attention in church, and I often said to myself “This is certainly an innocent boy, whose heart and affections are already in heaven.”

The following is an incident among others recounted by his teacher: “One day, an incident of so serious a nature took place at the school such that expulsion was the obvious punishment for those responsible. The culprits realised this and sought to save themselves by coming to me and laying all the blame on Dominic. I could not imagine that the boy had done anything so stupid, but his accusers were so insistent and emphatic about it that I believed them. I was very annoyed and went to the classroom. I left the boys in no doubt as to what I thought about the whole affair, and then I turned to Dominic and minced no words in telling him off, saying that he deserved to be expelled and that he would have been, had it not been the first time he had done such a thing, and that he should make sure it would be the last time. Dominic did not say a word, but stood there with his head bowed, accepting humbly all that was said to him.

God, however, protects the innocent, and next day it came out who the real culprits were. Somewhat ashamed of all the abuse I had heaped on his

<sup>46</sup> “Fr Giuseppe Cugliero [1808-1880], was chaplain for some years at Pino di Chieri, and after an exemplary life went to sleep in the Lord in the same town.” (note in the original text).

head, I took him aside and asked him: ‘Why did you not tell me you were not responsible?’ He replied: ‘I knew that these boys had already been up to so much mischief that this would certainly earn them expulsion, and I thought I would try to save them, as I probably would not be expelled, seeing that it was my very first time ... also, I remembered that Jesus had been blamed unjustly and had not said anything, and I thought I should do the same’.

No more was said, but all admired Dominic’s patience, which was able to return good for evil and was even ready to accept serious punishment to save those who had told such lies about him.” (*Fr Cugliero*).

*Chapter 7 – I first get to know him – Interesting episodes to do with this*

What follows in the succeeding pages can be given with more detail, because I shall be dealing with things which happened before my own eyes and also in the presence of many boys who can bear testimony to their truth. This period begins in 1854 when Father Cugliero, already mentioned, came to see me about one of his pupils whose intellect and piety deserved special consideration. “You may have in your house,” he said, “boys equally good and clever, but there are none who are better than him. Give him a chance and you will find you have another St. Aloysius.” It was arranged that Dominic should come to see me when next I visited the Becchi. It was my custom to spend a few days there each year with some of my boys round about the time of the Feast of the Most Holy Rosary.

It was early on the morning of the first Monday of October<sup>47</sup> that I saw a boy coming towards me with his father. His serene expression, and charming but respectful manner captured my gaze.

“Who are you and where do you come from?” I asked him.

“I am Dominic Savio. Father Cugliero has spoken to you about me and I have come with my father from Mondonio.”

<sup>47</sup> Monday October 2, 1854.

I took him aside and asked him about himself and his studies. We found common ground immediately and a relationship of trust and mutual confidence sprang up spontaneously.

I recognised in him a soul where the Holy Spirit reigned supreme, and I marvelled at the way grace had already worked in his young heart and mind.

We talked together for quite a time and, as I was going to call his father over, Dominic said to me: “Well, what do you think? Will you take me to Turin to study?”

“Well, I think there is good material in you.”

“Good material for what?”

“To make a beautiful garment for Our Blessed Lord.”

“Wonderful! I am the cloth and you are the tailor. You will work on me to make something beautiful for the Lord.”

“I wonder if you are strong enough for a long course of studies?”

“Don’t worry, Our Blessed Lord has helped me so far and I am sure he will continue to do so.”

“And what are you going to do when you finish studying Latin?”

“I should love to be a priest, if that were God’s will.”

“Very good. And now let’s try a little intelligence test. Take this little book, go over this page (it was a copy of the *Catholic Readings*), learn it by heart and tomorrow come back and both explain it to me and recite it by heart.”

I then left him free to go and play with the other boys while I had a talk with his father. No more than eight minutes had gone by when suddenly Dominic appeared, smiling, by my side and said: “If you wish I will repeat my lesson now.” I took the book and, to my surprise, he not only recited the page by heart but explained simply and clearly the meaning, showing that he understood it very well.

”Splendid,” I said “you have been quick and so shall I. I will take you to Turin, and from this moment I consider you one of my chosen sons. From now onwards, often ask God to help us both to do God’s holy will in all things.”

Not knowing how better to express his happiness and his gratitude he took my hand and kissed it several times and then said: “I hope always to act in such a way that you will never have reason to complain of me.”

*Chapter 8 – He comes to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales – His early attitude*

It is characteristic of youth to change suddenly. Not infrequently does it happen that what is wonderful today is far from being so tomorrow. At one time a boy can show great promise and soon after he can act in a way that would show the exact opposite. And if one is not careful, a career that began with the highest hopes can end with disappointment and sorrow to all concerned. It was not so with Dominic. All the virtues which had begun to grow at different stages of his life now continued their growth in a wonderful way, without any of them impeding the others.

As soon as he arrived at the Oratory, he came immediately to my room in order to put himself, as he used say, completely in my hands. Almost immediately his gaze fell on the wall where a piece of cardboard displayed a saying in large letters, which I often used: *Da mihi animas caetera tolle*. He looked at them attentively and I helped him to translate them as follows: *Give me souls, and take away everything else*. He thought for a moment and then said: “I understand; here you do business not with money, but with souls; I hope that my soul will have its share in this business.”

For a time his life was quite ordinary. He studied very hard and was very faithful in carrying out the rules of the House. He applied himself well to his studies and did all his duties zealously. He always listened to sermons with great joy, as he was already convinced that the word of God was a sure guide along the road to heaven. Every idea he heard in a sermon was an essential reminder for him which he never forget.

Every talk, catechism lesson, sermon, no matter how long seemed to be a delight for him. If there was anything he did not understand, he never hesitated to ask for further explanations. This was the root and source of his exemplary life and steady progress in virtue which could hardly have been surpassed.

In order to make sure that he understood the rules and discipline of the school well, he went to one of the teachers and asked him to help and advise him how best to be faithful to them and to correct him if he neglected any of his duties. His relations with his companions showed the same wisdom. He refused to have anything to do with those who were rowdy, disobedient and who showed little respect for the things of God. If there was an exemplary, studious and diligent pupil praised by his teacher he soon became a close friend of Dominic's.

December 8th, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, was drawing near. It was the director's custom to say a little word of encouragement and exhortation to the boys so as to prepare them to keep the feast in a way worthy of Mary Most Holy. He insisted especially that they should ask Mary for the grace they had greatest need of.

That year, 1854, the whole Catholic world was in a state of excitement because of the approaching definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception at Rome. At the Oratory we did our very best to keep the feast with fitting solemnity and devotion.

Savio was among those who had a great desire to keep the feast very well. He wrote out nine deeds to be done in honour of Our Lady and drew out one by lot each day. He prepared himself well, and made a general confession so that his soul might be as pleasing as possible to Mary Most Holy.

On the eve of the feast he went to Our Lady's altar and, on the advice of his Confessor, renewed the promises he had made at his First Communion, and then he repeated many times: "Mary, I give you my heart, please keep it always as your own. Jesus and Mary, always be my friends. Please, please, rather let me die, than that I should ever offend you seriously."

So he took Mary as the guide for his spiritual life, and with such effective results that I began from that time to note down the different incidents or facts of his life, so that I should not forget them.

I have thought it better in what follows to group together the various facts according to their relationship with each other, and not just to give them in chronological order as they happened. This will make for greater clarity and understanding. Accordingly I will divide the remainder into as many chapters as there are matters to be treated of, beginning with his classical studies which were the chief reason for his coming to this House in Valdocco.

*Chapter 9 – Grammar year – Interesting incidents – Behaviour in class –  
He stops a fight – He avoids danger*

Dominic had begun his grammar year at Mondonio and, with the progress he made by his hard work and more than ordinary intelligence, he was very soon moved to the fourth class or, as we say today, second year Latin grammar.<sup>48</sup> Here he came under the care of the devout and kindly Joseph Bonzanino<sup>49</sup> because secondary classes had not yet been set up at the Oratory like we have them now. I have to speak of his behaviour and example even here along the same lines as earlier teachers have done. I will just pick a few things from this year and two in particular which were noted by others who knew him and admired him for them. Prof. Bonzanino said on a number of occasions that he could not remember having had a better pupil than Savio one who was more attentive, better behaved, more respectful. He was a real model in everything. His clothes were poor, but he was always neat and clean and his manners and bearing were easily equal to those of boys who came from richer and nobler families, a good number of whom went to this school.

<sup>48</sup> He should have said *seconda ginnasiale* (or second year of secondary); with the Casati legislation (1859) the curriculum of classical studies, earlier divided into 3 classes of *latinità inferiore* (sixth, fifth, fourth), 3 classes of *latinità superiore* (third or grammar, humanities, rhetoric) and two years of philosophy (physics and logic), became two: *ginnasio* (5 classes) and *liceo* (3 classes).

<sup>49</sup> Carlo Giuseppe Bonzanino (died 1888) had a private school for 20 pupils at home. He became a Salesian Cooperator.

They liked spending time with Dominic not only for his learning and piety but also for his civil and pleasant way of treating them. Whenever there was a boy who was a bit scatterbrained and talkative the teacher would put him beside Dominic, and his influence and example would lead the boy to better behaviour and application.

It was during the course of this year that an incident took place which shows clearly the heroic stuff of which Dominic was made, something hard to believe in a young man at his age. Two of the boys fell out very badly. It began by them insulting one another's families. They became so angry with each other that they determined not only to have a fight but to have a stone fight. Dominic got to hear of it, but he wondered how he could manage to stop the duel, as the boys were both older and much stronger than he was. He tried to reason with them and persuade them to give up and become friends again. They refused. He wrote a letter to each of them. He threatened to report them, and thereby got it stopped, but this only increased their anger and determination to have it out at all costs. Dominic was very worried both on account of the serious injury which was likely to happen and also for the serious offence against God. Dominic had no idea what to do but divine inspiration led him to act thus: he waited for them after school and since he was able to speak with both parties he said: "Since you are determined to see your wretched argument through to the end, I want you to agree to just one condition." "We agree," they said "as long as you don't stop our challenge." "He's a rascal," one of them said of the other, while the other one said he could never be at peace with his opponent until he had bashed his head in. Savio was quite scared by this fighting talk but was determined to stop worse things happening, so he controlled himself and said: "The condition I want to impose will not stop you from facing up to each other."

"What's the condition?"

"I'd simply like to indicate the place where you can start throwing stones at each other."

"You're trying to trick us or stop us."

"I will be with you and I won't try to trick you. Don't worry."

“Maybe you’re going to call someone.”

“I should, but I won’t. Let’s go. I’ll be with you. Just give me your word.”

They promised and immediately set off for the Cittadella fields past Porta Susa<sup>50</sup>.

Dominic had his work cut out stopping them from coming to blows as they went to the spot.

Once they had got there, Savio did something certainly nobody would have thought of. He let them take up positions opposite one another. They already had stones in their hands, five each, when Dominic spoke to them as follows: “Before you start I want you to fulfil your promise”, and having said that he took out the small crucifix hanging around his neck and, holding it high, said, “I want each of you to look at this crucifix and throw the first stone at me, saying clearly these words: ‘Jesus Christ who was innocent died forgiving his enemies<sup>51</sup>; I, a sinner, am going to offend him by this deliberate act of revenge.’”

Then he ran to the angriest boy and, kneeling before him said: “Throw the first stone at me: throw it strongly at my head.” The boy, who wasn’t expecting anything like this, began to tremble and said, “No, no, I have nothing against you, and would be only too willing to defend you against anyone else if they attacked you.”

When Dominic heard that he went to the other and said the same things. This boy too was upset and trembling he said that he was his friend and would not do anything bad to him.

Then Dominic rose to his feet and standing between them with his crucifix and a stern look on his face said: “How is it that you are ready to tackle even serious danger to defend me, just a poor creature, but you are not ready to forgive an insult that happened at school to save your own soul? Your soul cost

<sup>50</sup> “These fields are now all built over and the site of the altercation corresponds to the place where the parish church of Saint Barbara now stands.” (note in the original text). Saint Barbara’s church was opened on April 18, 1869.

<sup>51</sup> Cf Lk 23:4.



the Saviour's blood, and yet you are ready to lose it through this sin?" He fell silent at that point, holding the crucifix up high above his head.

The boys gave in at the sight of such courage and kindness. "At that moment I was shaken to the depths and began to shiver all over. I felt thoroughly ashamed that a boy like Dominic had had to go so far to make me see sense. I had no difficulty in forgiving my companion and I asked Dominic to take me to some understanding priest to whom I could make a good confession and do better in the future. He agreed and a few days later I went with my opponent and we made our confession. After we had made friends again I was reconciled with the Lord whom I would certainly have seriously offended through hatred and desire for revenge."

This example is well worth imitating by any Christian lad if he were to see some similar attempt at revenge or be offended or hurt by others.

Dominic never mentioned anything about this incident and nothing would have been known of the part he played in it if the boys concerned had not related all that happened to their companions.

For boys from the country not very used to the excitement and varied activity of the town, going backwards and forwards to school from the Oratory had its dangers and difficulties. Dominic used it as an opportunity to do something virtuous. He carried out implicitly whatever was laid down by his superiors, and made the journey without letting his eyes roam everywhere or his ears listen to things that were far from good. If he saw someone stopping, running, jumping, throwing stones or going to places that were not allowed he would immediately leave those sorts of boys behind. One day he was invited to go on a walk without permission, and on another was invited to play truant and have fun, but he always refused. "The best way for me to have fun," he told them, "is to do my duty and if you were true friends you would be advising me to do that exactly and not do other things." Nevertheless he was nearly caught out one day when the group he was with decided to play truant and spend the day at the fair which had come to the town. Dominic had agreed and had started off with them, when he suddenly realised what it was he was doing, and refused to go any further. He called them back and told

them: “I am going to school. If we stay away we are displeasing God and also our superiors. I am sorry I agreed to do wrong, and I hope this is the last time you will try to persuade me to follow you in doing wrong. If it is not, we will not be friends any more.”

Dominic won the other boys over and they all went to school, and there was no more trouble in the future. At the end of the year his hard work won him promotion to a higher class, but, when the new school year began,, the third year of grammar, it was decided to let him study privately at the Oratory, as he seemed to be failing in health. In this way it was felt he could be better looked after with proper rest, study and recreation.

The humanities year or 1st rhetoric he seemed a little better and was sent to Fr Picco Matteo<sup>52</sup>. His classes were considered to be among the best in Turin, and Dominic was admitted free, because of the good things this good priest already heard said of him.

There are many edifying things said or done by Savio during this next year at school and the one to follow, and we will continue to tell you about them bit by bit as we outline the deeds connected with them.

### *Chapter 10 – His decision to become a saint*

Now that we have given an indication of his studies we will speak of his great decision to become a saint.

When he had been about six months at the Oratory, Savio heard a talk about an easy way to become a saint. The preacher made three points which made a huge impact on Dominic: it is God’s will that each one should become a saint; it is easy to become a saint; there is a great reward waiting in heaven for those who try to become saint. This talk was like a spark that set off into a consuming blaze the love of God in his heart. For some days he said nothing, going about very quietly without his usual joyful spirit. His companions noticed this, and I did also. My first thought was that he was not feeling well, and I asked him was there something wrong. “No”, he said “it is something

<sup>52</sup> Matteo Picco (1810-1880); he ran a private school at home.

good.” “What do you mean?” “I mean that I must become a saint. I never saw before that it was both possible and easy. Now that I see it, I can have no peace inside until I really begin to do so. Please will you show me how I should go about it?”

I praised Dominic’s good desires but urged him not to let himself get too worked up, because in that state it is not easy to know what God wants. I said to him that for the moment he should regain his customary cheerfulness, persevere in his regular life of study and piety, and especially not neglect being with his companions in games and recreation.

I said to him one day I would like to make him a present of something that would please him, and that I would leave the choice completely to him. His prompt and immediate reply was: “I want you to help me to become a saint. I want to give up everything to Jesus and for always. If I am not trying to be a saint, I am doing nothing at all. God wants me to be a saint so I have to be one.”

On another occasion the Rector wanted to show his affection for the boys and make them a little present, so he said that they could ask for whatever they wished and, if it were possible, he would give it to them. The requests were to be written down, and it can be imagined that there were some strange and bizarre requests made by some of the boys. Dominic took a piece of paper and wrote these words: “I ask one thing only, that you help me to save my soul and make me a saint.”

Another day explanations were being given about the meaning of words. “What does Dominic mean?” he asked. The reply was: “Belonging to God.” “There you are,” he said, “you see how right I am in asking you to make me a saint. Even my name says that I belong to God, so I must at all costs become one. I can’t be happy if I do not.”

This ‘bee in his bonnet’ that Dominic had about becoming a saint, did not spring from the fact that he was not living a saintly life but from the fact that he wanted to go the whole way, including severe penances and long hours in prayer, and his Rector would not allow these on any account, because they were not compatible with his age or health or duties.

*Chapter 11 – His zeal for the salvation of souls*

The first advice Dominic was given to help him become a saint was to set out to win souls for God, because there is no holier work in this life than to work for the good of souls for whom Jesus Christ shed the last drop of his blood. Dominic grasped this completely and often was heard to say: “How happy I would be if only I could win all my companions for God!” He never let any occasion slip for giving a friendly word of advice or of quietly recalling anyone to duty who said or did anything contrary to God’s law.

What really shook him, affecting him even physically, was hearing any form of blasphemy or God’s name being taken in vain. If, going through the streets, he happened to hear anything of the kind, he bowed his head in sorrow and reparation, saying fervently to himself: “Praised be Jesus Christ.”

One day when they were walking through the town a companion noticed him taking off his cap and murmuring something to himself: “What are you doing? What did you say?” he asked. “Did you not hear that carter, cursing and swearing? If I thought it would have done any good I would have spoken to the man, but as he is in a temper I am afraid it would only make things worse. So I was trying to make a little act of reparation by taking my cap off and saying: ‘Praised be Jesus Christ.’”

His companion admired Dominic’s behaviour and courage, and to this day never tires of inspiring others by telling them about it.

One day on his way back from school he heard an elderly man utter a horrible blasphemy. He trembled when he heard it and said his short prayer. Then, on a sudden, he went to the man and with great respect and politeness asked him if he could tell him the way to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. The man was completely taken by the boy’s charm and politeness, and said very affably: “I am very sorry, I am afraid I have no idea.”

“Oh,” said Dominic “I wonder, since you can’t do that, could you do me another favour?”

“Certainly, certainly. What is it?”

Dominic then went very close to the man, and speaking softly into his ear he said,

“Do you think that, when you are in a temper, you could say something else instead of blasphemies about God?”

The man was both astonished and full of admiration for the boy, and said: “Well said, you are quite right. I see that I have a very bad habit and I promise you I will try to overcome it.”

Another day, near the gates of the school, he came across two boys of about nine years old, quarrelling. While doing so, one of them used the Holy Name of Jesus in a curse against the other. Dominic felt justly indignant but, restraining himself, he separated the two boys and got them to make peace. Then he said to the one who had sworn: “Come with me. I’ve something special for you.” The boy agreed because of his nice approach and Dominic took him by the hand and led him into church in front of the altar, then got him to kneel beside him while he told him: “Tell Jesus you are sorry for having taken his Holy Name in vain.” As the boy did not know the act of contrition, he said it with him. Then he said: “In reparation say after me: ‘Praised be Jesus Christ. May his holy and adorable name be always praised.’”

Among the lives of the saints his preference was for those who stood out for their work for souls. He spoke readily of those on the missions who endure so much to save souls. He had no money to send them, but he prayed for them every day and never failed to offer his Holy Communion once a week.

Several times I heard him say: “How many souls there are in England waiting for our help. If only I were strong enough and good enough, I would go there immediately and by preaching and example try to win them all for our Blessed Lord.”

He also often remarked to his friends what little zeal there was among many to instruct children in the truths of faith. “As soon as I am a seminarian, I will go to Mondonio and get the children together so that I can teach them their catechism, tell them stories and encourage them to become saints. How many young people may perhaps lose their souls, for want of instruction and encouragement.”

These were not only words. He used to teach catechism at the Oratory. And he would coach individual boys privately at any time they wanted, gladly giving up his recreation for this purpose. He was always happy if he could speak to them of spiritual things and lead them to an understanding of the importance of saving their soul.

One day a light-headed companion made fun of him for telling a good story to a group of boys in recreation. "Why do you bother telling stories like those?" he asked. "Why do I bother?" replied Dominic. "I bother because we are all brothers and we should all help each other in the most important thing of all, the saving of our souls, which cost the blood of Jesus. I bother because God himself has urged us to do this and because I know also that, if I can succeed in saving one soul, I will make sure of saving my own."

This concern for others was not simply a term-time one. During the holidays when he was at home he kept up his good work. Any little gifts he got, or prizes that he won during the term time, were set aside carefully so that he could use them during the holidays. He would also make the rounds of his superiors before he went home, to ask them if they had any little things to spare, which he might take home with him, "to make my companions happy." Very soon after he got home he would be in touch with many boys, big and small and his own age, and they liked being with him. He would give out his presents at the right moment to encourage them to pay attention to his questions on the catechism or about their duties.

With the ascendancy he gained over them he could get boys to go with him to Mass, to Sunday school and other practices of piety.

I am assured that he devoted not a little time to instructing one of his friends. "If you succeed in making the Sign of the Cross really well," he used to say "I will give you a medal and I will recommend you to a priest who will give you a good book. But I want it done properly, saying the words with your mouth, your right hand starting at the forehead, then to your chest, then to the left and right shoulders and finishing up with your hands joined, saying *Amen*." He had a great desire to see the sign of the cross well made, and was

never shy to make it well in front of others, so as to encourage them to do likewise.

As well as making sure he carried out every minute little task of his, he took two little boys living nearby under his special care, teaching them to read and write and to learn their catechism. He would say morning and night prayers with them and take them to church, show them how to bless themselves properly with holy water, and how to behave well while there. Time that he might have legitimately spent in walks and various pastimes was spent in helping others, by word or by any other means possible. He made a point of making a visit to the Blessed Sacrament every day, and it was a great joy for him when he managed to get someone to come with him. It may be safely said that he never let slip any occasion of helping anyone or of speaking a word which could do good to a soul.

*Chapter 12— Various episodes and his way of dealing with his friends*

The thought of winning souls to God never left him. He was the life of the games at recreation, but whatever he did or said was for either his own good or for the good of others. He did not monopolise the conversation or keep butting in but if silence came he was always ready with something interesting, a difficulty which had cropped up in class or an interesting story. The others were always glad to be with him. If someone started grumbling or criticising, he would raise a laugh over something else and so distract them and dispel any word of criticism or anything that might be an offence against God.

His cheerful smile and spirit of zest made him popular also with those who were not too fond of religious things. They were always glad to be in his company and whenever he gently chided them it was taken in good part.

On one occasion a companion wanted Dominic to go with him to a fancy-dress event. Dominic would not go, and said to the boy. “Would you really like to be what you are going to dress up as—two horns, a big nose and a clown’s costume?” “Of course not”, replied the other. “Well, why make yourself look like something you would not want to be and in addition deface the nice face that God has given you?”

Another time a stranger came into the playground. He soon had a group around him which quickly became a crowd as the laughter of the boys at his stories attracted more and more. As soon as he had a crowd he changed his tune and was soon trying to poison the minds of the boys with all sorts of horrors, including making fun of holy things and persons. Some of the boys who did not like all this filth but did not dare oppose him, were happy to move away. A good number were silly enough to stay and listen to him. Meanwhile Savio happened to come along. As he grasped what was going on he overcame any human respect, and immediately turned to his friends: "Come on, let's get away from this unfortunate man who wants to ruin us." The boys were obedient when they heard such a kind and virtuous friend and they all left the man who was the devil's envoy himself. The man found himself completely alone, so he left and was never seen again.

On another occasion some wanted to go swimming. This can be dangerous anywhere, but much more so around Turin where apart from the danger of immoral behaviour, there is so much deep and fast-moving water that often boys' lives are lost. Dominic heard about it and tried to make them forget it by occupying their time with him in an interesting way. But when he saw that their minds were made up he spoke out boldly:

"Don't go, it's better not to."

"But we are not doing any harm."

"You are being disobedient, you are putting yourselves in danger and running the risk of getting drowned and you say you are not doing any harm?"

"Yes, but this heat is terrible."

"Maybe, but it is not as hot as another place I know, and what will you do if you end up there?"

Moved by Dominic's attitude they changed their minds and also did not dodge the evening service in church as they had intended to.

Some of the boys had formed a little group pledged to try to lead the not so good to better things. Dominic was one of its most earnest members and



used to use various things given him - an apple, orange, crucifix, little book - to help him in this work. He would appear in the playground holding up whatever he had, and crying out: "Who wants it, who wants it?" There were many cries of "I do" and there would be a concerted rush.

"Just a moment," he would say "I will give it to the one who answers this catechism question best." He would confine himself to the least good boys, and as long as they made a shot at it the prize was theirs.

Others he won over in other ways: he would go and get them and invite them to go for walks with him, give them little talks if needs be, play with them. He was sometimes seen carrying a large stick on his shoulders like Hercules with his club, playing a game called *rana* (frog), commonly called *cirimella*, showing them that he absolutely loved playing that game<sup>53</sup>. At a certain point he would pause and say: "Do you want to come to confession on Saturday?" The other boy, because Saturday seemed a long way off, and because he was anxious to get on with the game, or just to please Dominic, would say: "Oh, all right." Dominic did not say any more, but in the succeeding days he kept his quarry in view, and when Saturday came, would go with him to church, make his own Confession first of all, and if necessary ask the priest to go out of his way to help the boy coming in after him. He would then stay in church with the boy and they would make their thanksgiving together. These incidents were by no means uncommon and were a great source of joy and consolation to Dominic. They were of great benefit to his companions and boys who were insensible to sermons and exhortations in church would often yield to his gentle but persistent persuasion.

It also happened sometimes that a boy did not keep his promise and at Confession time on Saturday, Dominic would look for him in vain. When next he ran into him, he said, good-humouredly: "Hey, you rascal, you led me up the garden path properly!" "Well, I wasn't ready. I didn't feel like it." "My poor friend," Dominic would reply "it was the devil who was tempting

<sup>53</sup> *Cirimella*: the game consisted in hitting the tip of a wooden cylinder a foot long with sharp and blunt ends, with a bat, making it lift into the air then striking it again on the fly and throwing it as far as possible.

you and you fell for it completely. I can see that you are not in the mood for it now, but I promise you, if you take the plunge and go to Confession, you will be much happier than you have been for a long time.” In most cases, after the boy had taken Dominic’s advice, he would come to him smiling and full of happiness: “What you said was quite true. I am very happy and I have made up my mind to go to Confession regularly in the future.”

In any community of boys of any size there are always some who are left on their own by their companions. This can be because they are rough in their ways, labouring under some disability, difficult to get on with. What they need is to experience real friendship, and as this is what they normally do not find, they suffer accordingly.

Dominic made it his business to be their friend. He would play with them during recreation, willingly talk to them, so that when they were ready to do something wrong and he suggested otherwise, they would listen, because they realised it was a friend who spoke to them, who wanted only what was best for them.

So it was when boys were sick, Dominic was always asked for: those who were discouraged and in trouble would go to him and pour their troubles into his ear. Thus the way was opened to him to do good to those around him at all times and to increase in merit before God.

### *Chapter 13 – His spirit of prayer – Devotion to the Mother of God – Mary’s month*

Among the gifts with which God had enriched Dominic was fervour in prayer. As a result of his efforts he got so accustomed to talk with God, that no matter where he was, or what noise was going on round about him, he could briefly recollect himself, sending his heart soaring to God.

When he was praying with others, he seemed to be quite angelic. There was no fidgeting and continually changing position; he knelt there motionless, his face radiant, head slightly bowed, eyes lowered. Just to see him this way was to see another St Aloysius. In 1854 Count Cays became President of Honour

of the Sodality of St Aloysius which was established in the school. On the occasion of his first visit to take part in the church services, he noticed a boy obviously praying with great devotion and attention and he was so struck that he afterwards asked who he was; he was told that it was Dominic Savio.

He used to try to spend a part of his free time in reading a good book, or in making a visit to the church. He would normally have some other boys with him and they would pray together in suffrage for the souls in purgatory or in honour of Our Lady.

There was no limit to his devotion to the Mother of God. Every day he made some little act of mortification in her honour. He never let himself gaze or stare at a girl, and when walking through the streets, did not let his eyes roam about. Sometimes he would walk past a public show that his other friends couldn't take their eyes off and even forget where they were. If Savio was asked if he liked the show he would answer that he never even saw it. When on one occasion he was asked what he thought about something which he had not even noticed, one of his companions burst out impatiently: "What is the use of having eyes, if you don't use them to look at what is going on around you?" Dominic replied: "Instead of using my eyes on useless things, I should like to keep them to gaze on the beauty of Mary Most Holy, when, by God's mercy, I shall be in heaven."

He had a very special devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Every time he went to church he would pay a visit to her altar, and kneeling there before her, beg her to keep his heart free from all impurity. "O Mary, I want to be your son always. Please let me die rather than that I should ever sin against modesty."

Every Friday he would get some of his friends together and take them to church with him where they would say together the prayer of the Seven Sorrows of Mary or the Litany<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. "Prayer to Our Lady of Sorrows", in *The Companion of Youth* (cf. no. 184, pp. 749-751).

He was not only very devoted to Mary but loved bringing someone else to Mary's feet to honour her and ask her help. One winter Saturday he asked one of his companions to make a visit to Our Lady and they would say the Vespers of Our Lady's Office together. The boy objected that his hands were cold; so Dominic took off his own gloves and gave them to him. Another time in similar circumstances he gave the other boy his coat and made him put it on so he would come with him to the church and pray. Who could not be filled with admiration at such acts of generosity?

But it was in the month of May that his devotion to Mary reached its peak. He arranged with a group of his friends to do some special deed in her honour every day. He got together a collection of interesting stories and facts about Our Lady and willingly told them to others in order to inspire them with devotion to her. He urged his companions during recreation to frequent Confession and Communion every day, showing great recollection and devotion.

An interesting episode lets us see his great love of devotion to Mary. The boys in his dormitory had decided to put up in their dormitory a little altar for Our Lady. They had a meeting to decide what each one should give, and Dominic, who was enthusiastic about the project, found that he had no money to pay his share. He was at a loss wondering what to do and then an idea struck him. He hurried off and got a very nice book that had been given him as a prize, and brought it back to his companions telling them to raffle it and so get money that way.

Others were inspired by his generosity and produced little treasures of their own; a very successful raffle was held and with the proceeds all the required materials were brought.

The boys worked hard to get the altar ready but in order to finish it in time it was necessary that some of them stay up late the night before the feast. "I would gladly spend the night working" Dominic said. But because he had recently been ill, his friends told him he needed to go to bed. He was very disappointed, but accepted the decision as an act of obedience. He did not want to give in and only went to bed out of obedience. "At any rate," he

said to one of his companions, “come and wake me up as soon as you have finished; I want to be one of the first to see our altar in honour of Mary Most Holy.”

*Chapter 14 – He goes frequently to the Sacraments of Confession and Communion*

He is proof of the experience that the greatest helps and aids to development in time of youth are the sacraments of Confession and Communion. Give me a boy who receives these sacraments regularly and well, he will develop in time of youth, reach great maturity and go on to old age, if God spares him, exemplifying a way of life which is an inspiration to all who know him. Would that all our young people could grasp this and try to carry it out; and that all those concerned with their upbringing and education could grasp it likewise, in order to help in its fulfilment in the young.

Before coming to live at the Oratory Dominic used to go to Confession and Communion once a month as was usual. After he came here he started going more frequently. One day he heard a talk in church which recommended three things. Go often to Confession: go often to Communion: choose a priest as confessor that you can easily talk to and open your heart to and don't change to another priest unless there is real need for it. Dominic grasped these counsels immediately and completely.

He chose a priest as confessor and went regularly to him all the time he was here. So that the priest might know him completely and thereby be better able to help him, he made a General Confession to him. He began by going to Confession and Communion every fortnight and then every week. His confessor seeing what great progress he had made spiritually, suggested receiving the Holy Eucharist three times a week and at the end of the year suggested to him to go every day.

For a time he was troubled with scruples and wanted to go to Confession every three or four days and even more often, but his spiritual director would not allow this, and kept him at weekly Confession.

Dominic had the most complete confidence in his spiritual guide and would speak to him with the greatest simplicity about his soul and matters of conscience also outside the confessional. Someone advised him to go to another priest sometimes, but he would not hear of it. He replied. “The confessor is the doctor of the soul. People do not go about chasing one doctor after another unless they have lost confidence in their own doctor or their case is pretty desperate. I have full confidence in my confessor who is so kind and helpful to me and I don’t think I have any trouble that he cannot cure.” Nevertheless his confessor did suggest that occasionally, e.g. at the time of retreat, he should go to another priest and Dominic did so without any hesitation.

Dominic was very pleased with this state of affairs. He said: “If I have any problem I take it to my confessor and he solves it for me according to what God wants. Jesus has said that the voice of the priest is the voice of God. If I have some particular need I go to Holy Communion in which I receive the body, blood, soul and divinity *quod pro nobis traditum est*. What more do I need to make me happy? Nothing in the wide world. Only one thing remains—one day to see him whom we can only see with the eye of faith here below revealed in heaven.”

Filled with this spirit, Dominic’s days were full of happiness. This was the source of that wonderful cheerful spirit which was the soul of all his actions. It should not be imagined that he went about in a dream half the time or that he did not realise what sort of life it was necessary to live, if one went to daily Communion. He was fully alive to everything and his conduct was irreproachable. I have asked his companions to tell me of anything wrong they found in him or any good quality which he did not show evidence of, during the three years he lived amongst us and all have agreed that there never was anything that they needed to correct in him, or anything they could suggest for him to do that he was not already doing.

His preparation for Holy Communion was most thorough. Before going to bed the previous evening, he said a special prayer to prepare himself, which always ended as follows: “Blessed and praised every moment be the most holy

and divine sacrament.” In the morning he carried on his preparation, but his thanksgiving was liable to have no end to it. If he were not reminded he would forget about breakfast, recreation and even morning school, so caught up was he in prayer or rather, in contemplation of the divine goodness who wonderfully and mysteriously passes on to mankind the treasures of his infinite mercy.

It was really a joy for him to be able to pass some time before the Blessed Sacrament, something he did invariably at least once a day and as often as he could he would get others to come with him. There was a little group of prayers<sup>55</sup> in reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the many sins of mankind—heretics, unbelievers and bad Christians—which he was very fond of saying when making such visits.

In order to make his Holy Communion as fruitful as possible and to encourage himself to renewed fervour every day, he made a plan for his Communions as follows:

*Sunday:* In honour of the Most Blessed Trinity .

*Monday:* For all those who have been kind to me and done me good .

*Tuesday:* In honour of my guardian angel and St. Dominic.

*Wednesday:* To Our Lady of Sorrows for the conversion of sinners.

*Thursday:* For the Holy Souls.

*Friday:* In honour of the Passion of Jesus.

*Saturday:* In honour of Mary Most Holy, and to obtain her protection in life and in death.

He took part with great joy in any ceremonies connected with the Blessed Sacrament. If when out in the town he met the Viaticum being taken to the sick, he knelt down no matter where he was and if he were free he would reverently accompany the little procession to its destination.

<sup>55</sup> “This prayer is printed in many books amongst which *The Companion of Youth*, on page. 105” (note in the original text). Cf. no. 184, pp. 747-748.

One day when such a little procession with the Viaticum was passing by, it was raining and the ground was very muddy. Dominic knelt down without any hesitation. His companion said that in such circumstances it was not necessary, God did not expect you to dirty your clothes like that. Dominic replied quite simply: "Everything belongs to God including our clothes and so everything must do him honour. I would not only kneel down in the mud when He passes by, but I would throw myself into a furnace if by so doing I would gain a spark of that love which moved him to give us this wonderful sacrament."

On a similar occasion a soldier was standing near him but made no effort to kneel down. Not daring to ask him to do so, he took out his handkerchief and spread it on the muddy ground in front of him. The soldier looked a bit startled but took the hint and went down on his knees there on the road, not on the handkerchief.

On the Feast of *Corpus Christi* he was sent with some of his companions to take part in the procession of the Blessed Sacrament being held in the parish. Dressed in cassock and surplice, Dominic was overjoyed. No other present could have given him more joy.

### *Chapter 15 – Penances*

Dominic's youth, his far from robust health and his innocent life would certainly have dispensed him from any sort of penance; but he knew and understood that only with the greatest difficulty can a boy keep himself intact without some penance, and so the path of mortification seemed to him to be strewn with roses. By penance and mortification I do not mean patience in meeting the unpleasant things of daily life, nor do I mean the self-control and sacrifice necessary to be able to pray at all times and in all places; such things were part and parcel of his ordinary way of living.

I am referring only to penances which affected him physically. He decided in honour of Our Blessed Lady to fast every Saturday on bread and water; his confessor forbade him to do this. He started off fasting for Lent, but after a week his Rector heard about it and stopped it. He wanted at least to go



without breakfast, but this was not allowed him either. The reason of course was that his superiors did not want his health to be ruined. What was he to do then?

Dominic was not daunted; he took to afflicting his body in other ways. He put pebbles or bits of wood under his sheet so that he would be uncomfortable in bed. He got hold of a very rough shirt, very irritating to the skin and wore it. These penances were also forbidden him. He tried again. When summer passed into autumn and winter he did not add any blankets to the very thin covering which was sufficient in the hot summer. In the bitter cold of January this was all he had. His Rector came to see him once when he was sick in bed. When he got to the bed he saw Dominic lying there shivering violently and he realised that there was only thin summer covering over him. "What on earth are you up to?" he asked him. "Do you want to die of cold?" "No," he replied "I will hardly die of cold, but Jesus in the stable of Bethlehem was much worse off than this."

He was then forbidden absolutely to undertake any kind of penance whatsoever without express permission. Dominic accepted this obedience, but one day I came across him looking somewhat sad, saying: "You've got me in a real bind. Our Blessed Lord says that if I don't do penance I will not get to heaven. I am forbidden to do any penance; what chance then have I of heaven?"

"The penance Jesus wants from you is complete obedience; obey and that's enough."

"Can't I do some other penance?"

"Yes, you can allow yourself the penance of being patient with others and the unpleasant things of life; to accept equally the heat and the cold and the rain; to be cheerful when tired and not feeling so well and whatever God wants to give you."

"But," said Dominic "these things come to you whether you like it or not."

"Precisely," I replied "offer them willingly to God; there is nothing that will please him more, and you will be doing real penance."

Thus reassured, Dominic was very happy and completely at peace.

*Chapter 16 – Mortification of all his external senses*

Whoever looked at Savio's outward composure would have found him so natural that he would have said he was made this way by the Lord. But anyone who knew him closely, or was involved in his upbringing, can tell you that it was his super human efforts helped by God's grace.

His eyes were very alert and it was no little effort for him to keep them more to himself. He told a friend more than once, "At first when I gave myself a rule to control my eyes I found it hard and I often had a severe headache." The reserve he managed over what he looked at was such that anyone who knew him cannot ever remember him giving a single glance that would exceed even the strictest limits of modesty. "The eyes," he used to say "are like two windows." Anything that wants to can come through those windows. We can let an angel come through those windows or a devil with his horns; either one or the other will be master of our hearts."

One day it happened that a young man from outside the House unadvisedly brought a newspaper with him with obscene and irreligious pictures in it. A crowd of boys gathered around him to look at the pictures that would have disgusted even Turks or pagans. Savio came too, thinking from a distance that they might be some religious pictures.

But when he got closer he pretended to be surprised then almost laughing he took the page and tore it into pieces. His friends were amazed and looked at each other without saying a word.

Then he said: "Poor us! The Lord gave us eyes to contemplate the beauty of the things he created and you are using them to look at such filth invented by human malice which will damn our souls? Have you forgotten what we've heard preached so often? The Saviour tells us that even an evil glance is enough to stain our souls; and here you are feeding your eyes on things of this kind?"

"No," one said "we were looking at the pictures so we could laugh at them."

"Ah yes, laugh, and meanwhile you are preparing to go to hell laughing ... but will you still be laughing if you go there?"

Another one said, "But we don't think those pictures are so bad."

"Worse still. Not seeing much harm in gazing at smut like this is a sign that your eyes are already accustomed to looking at it, and these habits do not excuse you from harm, but make you more guilty. O Job, Job! You were older, you were a saint, you were burdened with a disease which had you lying on a dunghill, but you made a covenant with your eyes not to give them any freedom around immodest things!"

At these words they all fell silent and nobody dared reprimand him or make any other kind of observation.

Along with modesty of the eyes he was also very reserved in speech. When anyone was speaking, whether it be right or wrong he kept quiet and often stopped mid-speech to give room for others to speak. His teachers and superiors all agree in saying that they never had any reasons to chide him for a word out of place in study, the classroom or in church or while he was doing any of his homework or other duties. Even when someone had been unkind to him he was able to keep his tongue and temper under control.

One day he told off a friend who had a bad attitude. Instead of accepting the reprimand gratefully the boy attacked him. He accused him of all kinds of things then began punching and kicking him. Savio could have followed up his words with deeds since he was older and stronger. But the only response he gave was a Christian one. He went red in the face but restraining his anger he simply said: "I forgive you; you did wrong; please don't treat others like this."

What can we say about mortification of other bodily senses? Let me just indicate a few things.

In winter time he suffered from chilblains on the hands. But although he felt pain he was never heard to offer any indication or word of complaint. Rather, it seemed that he took pleasure in it. "The bigger the chilblains," he said, "the better it is for my health", wanting to indicate the health of the soul. Many of his companions assert that in the bitterly cold winter he used to go to school at a slower pace and that the desire to suffer and do penance in everything gave him that opportunity. "Several times I saw him," says a friend

“in the coldest winter cutting his skin with needles and pen nibs so that these lacerations would become sores and make him more like his Divine Master.”

In a community of boys you meet those who are not content with anything. Some complain about religious functions, someone else about discipline, or sleep, or the meals; they find something to complain about in everything. These are a real cross for their superiors because one unhappy boy spreads his unhappiness to the others, sometimes causing a real problem in the community. Savio's behaviour was the complete opposite. You never heard a word of complaint from his lips about summer heat or winter cold. Whether the weather was good or bad he was always happy. Whatever was on the table he was satisfied with. He even had the admirable ability to mortify himself there. When the others complained about something being overcooked or not enough, or with too much or too little salt, he would say he was happy, saying it was just to his taste.

It was his routine practice to remain in the refectory after the others had left, picking up the crumbs of bread on the table or the floor and eating them as if they were a tasty morsel. To some who showed surprise he would hide the fact he was doing penance by saying: “We don't eat bread rolls whole and if they are in crumbs that's work already done for the teeth”. Any left-over soup or second course or other kinds of food he would collect and eat. This wasn't out of greed because he often also gave it to other boys. When he was asked why he was so concerned about left-overs that others wouldn't bother with, he answered: “Whatever we have in the world is a precious gift from God; but of all his gifts, after his grace, the greatest is the food that keeps us alive. So even a little bit of this gift is worthy of our gratitude and it is certainly worth being scrupulously collected.”

Cleaning shoes, brushing his friends' clothes, doing menial tasks for the sick, sweeping and other kinds of work were like an enjoyable pastime for him. “Let everyone do what he can,” he used to say. “I am unable to do big things but what I can do I would like to do for the greater glory of God. I hope God in his infinite goodness is happy to accept my miserable offerings.”

Eating things he didn't like, avoiding things he would have liked; custody of the eyes even in unimportant things; staying around even when there was a bad smell; denying his will; being perfectly resigned in putting up with everything that hurt body or spirit were acts of virtue which Dominic carried out daily, we could say every moment of his life.

There are many things of this kind that I won't mention but they all demonstrate Dominic's great spirit of penance, charity and mortification of the senses, and at the same time they show how active was his virtue in being able to benefit from any opportunity big or small, even the littlest things to sanctify himself and grow in merit in God's eyes.

### *Chapter 17 – The Immaculate Conception Sodality*

The whole of Dominic's life can be said to be an act of love for Mary most holy. He never let slip any occasion of pleasing and honouring her. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception was solemnly defined in 1854. Dominic had a very great desire to leave behind him at the school some lasting reminder of this great event. He said: "I would like very much to do something in honour of my Mother Mary; but I will have to do it quickly, as I do not think I have much time left."

Spurred on by his present desire to help his companions, he asked some of those whom he knew well and relied upon to join him in forming the Sodality of Mary Immaculate. The aim was to obtain the special protection of the Mother of God in life, and especially at the hour of death. Dominic proposed two means to this end: to honour, and to bring others to honour, Mary by different means, and to encourage frequent Communion. In agreement with his friends and after much careful thought, he drew up a set of rules. On June 8th, nine months before he died, he went with his friends before the altar of Our Lady and they read it over together. I give these rules here so that they may be an inspiration and guide to others. Here is how it went:

"We, Dominic Savio, etc. (the names of the others follow), after receiving the sacraments of Confession and Communion, this day, June 8, give ourselves completely to Mary Immaculate and promise to work unceasingly for her and

with her: to help ourselves to do this and to maintain our love for her we, here before her altar, solemnly promise, in agreement with our spiritual director, to follow in Louis Comollo's footsteps to the best of our ability. Here we bind ourselves as follows: ...<sup>56</sup>

*Chapter 18 – His special friends – His relationship with Camillo Gavio*

Everybody was friendly with Dominic. Those who could not understand him completely, at least respected him for his good qualities. He could get on well with everyone. He was so confirmed in the things of God that he was asked on occasion to associate with boys who were far from good, so that he might try to win them over to God. To do this he made use of free time, different kinds of games, conversation, using them all in different ways for the spiritual advantage of those concerned. His best friends, however, were the other boys in the Sodality of Mary Immaculate. With these he had regular meetings, and they would gather together also for acts of devotion. These meetings had the permission of the Rector, but they were presided over and carried through by the boys themselves. In the meetings they decided how best to help an active participation in the novenas and solemn feasts, how to maintain and increase love for the Blessed Sacrament and frequent Communion; how to help boys who easily got into trouble and were going astray and each boy was assigned to someone who made him his special *client*, someone he protected and used every means suggested by Christian charity to set him on the path to virtue. Dominic was the soul of the meeting, its guide and mentor.

There is much I could say about many of the boys who took part in those meetings, but as most of them are still alive, it is better I should not. I will mention two only who are already dead: Camillo Gavio of Tortona, and John Massaglia of Marmorito<sup>57</sup>. Camillo Gavio was only two months with us but it was long enough to leave a wonderful memory of himself.

<sup>56</sup> At this point Don Bosco offers, with some variations, the *Regulations for the Immaculate Conception Sodality* from the original manuscript which can be found at no. 207.

<sup>57</sup> Both died before the Immaculate Conception Sodality was founded (9 June 1856): Gavio died on December 29, 1855 and Massaglia on May 20, 1856.

His outstanding character and the great promise he showed in painting and sculpture encouraged his town council to send him to Turin, so that he might have a real chance of developing his talents. He had been very ill not long before and was not yet fully recovered; also it was his first time away from home, and among so many boys whom he did not know, it was little wonder that he was somewhat downcast and stood sadly watching the others playing their game with great zest. Dominic saw him and immediately went over to talk to him and make friends. The following dialogue took place. Dominic began:

“Hello, don’t you know anyone yet?”

“No, but I am enjoying watching the others playing.”

“What is your name?”

“Camillo Gavio, and I come from Tortona.”

“How old are you?”

“Fifteen.”

“You are looking sad; have you not been well?”

“Yes, I have been very ill with some sort of heart trouble and I am not yet fully better.”

“You would like to be completely better soon, wouldn’t you?”

“No, not absolutely. I only want to do God’s will.”

These last words made Dominic realise that Gavio was a boy of more than ordinary piety, and his heart warmed to him. With renewed interest he went on:

“Anyone who only wants God’s will has a real desire to become a saint, do you want to become a saint?”

“Oh yes; I want that more than anything else.”

“That’s great; you can be one of our special group, if you like, and share completely what we do together to help us to live for Jesus and Mary.”

“Yes, I would like to do that; but what have I got to do?”

“I will tell you in a few words. For us here it means making holiness consist in being happy. We hate and detest sin as something that robs us of God’s grace and makes us very unhappy inside; we try to be very faithful to all our duties and to be foremost in taking an active part in all exercises of piety. Try taking for your own special motto: *Servite Domino in laetitia* - Serve the Lord in gladness.”

These few words were like a ray of sunshine in the gloom, and greatly comforted the boy. From that day he became a close friend of Dominic and followed him faithfully in the path which he trod. However, his illness flared up again after two months and despite every care he grew steadily worse and in a few days he died. He received the last sacraments with great reverence and joy and gave up his soul to God on December 30, 1856<sup>58</sup>.

Dominic visited him regularly while he was ill and as the end drew near wanted to spend the night at his bedside. This he was not allowed to do. As soon as he heard that death had come, he went to his bedside and with tears in his eyes said:

“Goodbye Camillo; I am sure you have gone straight to heaven—get a place ready for me there also. I will always be your friend as long as I live. I will pray for the repose of your soul.”

Afterwards he got the boys of the Sodality of Mary Immaculate together and they all went to pray beside the body. They also said many other prayers for him and received Holy Communion in reparation for his soul. Dominic himself did this a number of times.

He said to his friends several times: “Do not let us forget the soul of our friend. Please God he is already in heaven, but we must carry on praying for him. All that we do for him God will get done for us in due course, when our own time comes.”

<sup>58</sup> He should have written: December 29, 1855.



*Chapter 19 – His relationship with John Massaglia*

Dominic’s relationship with John Massaglia was more intimate and maintained over a longer period of time. He was from Marmorito, a village not far from Mondonio.

They both came to the Oratory at the same time, they were from neighbouring villages, both wanted to become priests, and they had a common desire to become saints.

Dominic said to his friend one day, “Don’t let us stop at saying we want to be priests, but let us get busy trying to grow in the virtues that are needed by a priest.”

“Quite true,” the other replied, “but if we do all we can, God in his goodness will give us the great grace of becoming Ministers of Jesus Christ.”

At Easter time there was the annual retreat; this they made with great fervour. When it was over, Dominic said to John:

“Let us be friends in the best way possible, anxious for the welfare of each other’s soul. We could be that if we were to correct each other in whatever way might be needed. So will you tell me whenever you notice me doing anything I should not, or if you see there is some good I can do and I am not doing, please point it out.”

“Very gladly, although you don’t really need anything like that. It’s me that needs it, as I am older and exposed to greater temptations. So will you do that for me?”

“Let’s cut out the compliments and be really serious about helping each other.”

From that moment Dominic and John became true friends. Their friendship was lasting because it was founded on their life for God, striving earnestly together to help each other to resist evil and do good.

After the examinations at the end of the school year, the boys used to go home for the holidays. Some boys for a variety of reasons used to ask to remain

at the school during the holiday period. Dominic and John were among these. I knew that their parents were very anxious to have them at home and I also thought it would do them a lot of good to go home for a while since neither of them was very strong, so I suggested: "Why not go home for some days of holidays?" Instead of replying they both began to laugh. "What are you laughing at?" Dominic replied: "We know that our parents would be very glad to have us at home, but we know also that while the bird in the cage loses its liberty, still it is safe from the claws of the vulture; outside the cage he may fly where he likes but also at any moment he can fall a victim to the evil bird of prey."

In spite of this, I judged it advisable for them both to go home for some time and they went without hesitation in a spirit of obedience, remaining just the time that I suggested.

If I were to write about the good example and virtues of John Massaglia I should be largely repeating what I have already written about Dominic, whose faithful follower he was, as long as he lived. He enjoyed good health and showed great promise in his studies. When he had finished his humanities, he passed with distinction the exam prior to receiving the clerical habit. But he was not able to wear the cassock for long that he had looked forward so eagerly to having. After a few months he became unwell, but not thinking much of it, he did not want to interrupt his studies. His parents were worried, however, and took him home, so that he might have a good rest away from his books. But, he did not improve and after some weeks Dominic received the following letter:

Dear friend,

I thought I should only be a few days at home, so I did not bring any books or notes home with me. However, my sickness is going on and on, and I am wondering how it will all end up. The doctor says I am getting better; my own private opinion is that I am getting worse. We shall see who is right!

I am lonely, dear Dominic, so far away from you and the others; there are not the same opportunities here for all the spiritual things we had at school. I comfort myself with the memory of the days we helped each other to prepare well for Holy Communion. I am sure we are still united in spirit.

Would you go to my desk in the study and get the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis which you will find there and some notes which are lying beside it? Please parcel them up and send them to me. I am tired of doing nothing, but the doctor won't let me study. I sometimes walk up and down my room thinking, "Shall I ever get better? Shall I ever rejoin my companions at school? Is this my last illness"? God alone knows the answers. I think I am quite ready to do his holy will, whatever it may be.

Send me any advice you think will help me. Let me know how you are getting on and remember me in your prayers, especially when you receive Holy Communion. Let our friendship be sealed in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and if we are not destined to be united long in this life, please God we shall be together for ever in heaven.

Tell all the boys I was asking for them and remember me especially to those of the Sodality of Mary Immaculate. God be with you.

Your affectionate friend,

John Massaglia

Dominic sent John what he had asked him to get from his desk and together with it he sent the following letter:

My dear Massaglia.

You don't know how pleased I was to get your letter - at least it let me know that you were still alive. As no news had come since you left, we did not know quite, whether to say the "Glory be to the Father" or the "Out of the depths" for you. I am sending what you asked me to. I should like to say that Thomas à Kempis is a good friend, but he is dead. He needs to be made to come alive

by your own efforts to understand what he says. Think it over, and see how it can be carried out in your own life.

You sigh for the wonderful chances we have here for spiritual things; so did I when I was at Mondonio. I tried to make up for them by a daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament and when going I tried to get as many others to come with me as possible.

Besides the *Imitation* I read *The Treasure Hidden in the Holy Mass* by St. Leonard<sup>59</sup>. If you feel like it, read that also. You say you don't know if you will ever come back to the Oratory. To tell you the truth I have a feeling that I am coming quickly to the end of my own life. At any rate we can pray for each other so that both of us may die happily in God's grace. The one who goes to heaven first can prepare a place for the other and when he arrives stretch out a helping hand to pull him in!

May God keep us always in his holy grace and help us to become saints, but quickly because there is little time left. All your friends look forward to your coming back and send their very best wishes. With theirs I send you my own best wishes and prayers.

Always with fraternal love and affection I declare myself,

Your loving friend

Dominic Savio

John Massaglia's illness at first seemed of little consequence. Several times he seemed completely recovered only to relapse again, and then suddenly he was at death's door.

"There was time to give him the Last Sacraments and he received them with the greatest devotion. He died the death of the just man who leaves this

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Leonardo DA PORTO MAURIZIO, *Il tesoro nascosto, ovvero pregi ed eccellenze della S. Messa, con un modo pratico e divoto per ascoltarla con frutto*. Torino, Giacinto Marietti 1840.

world to go straight to heaven” said Fr Valfrè, his spiritual father during the holidays <sup>(60)</sup>.

Dominic grieved deeply at the loss of his friend and although he accepted it completely as God’s will, he was in tears for several days. It was the first time that I had seen that wonderful face of his sad and tear-stained. His only comfort was to pray for his friend and get others to do likewise. He could be heard to say sometimes: “Dear John, you are dead, and I hope you are already with Camillo in heaven; when shall I be with you in that happy place?”

He never forgot John Massaglia in his prayers right up to the time of his own death. He never assisted at Holy Mass or at any exercise in church without remembering him before God. Dominic’s sensitive heart suffered greatly from this loss and even his health was affected.

#### *Chapter 20 – Special graces and particular details*

There is nothing extraordinary in what I have written about so far, although we might call Dominic’s exemplary and innocent life, and his extraordinary spirit of penance extraordinary. The liveliness of his faith, his constant hope, his tireless zeal in doing good and helping others might also be called extraordinary. This went on until his last breath. Here I would like to tell you about some special graces and uncommon facts. I am conscious that these may give rise to some doubt in those who read about them. I should like to state categorically that anything recounted here which seems paralleled by

<sup>60</sup> “Fr Carlo Valfrè was born in Villafranca in Piedmont on July 23, 1813. He was truly exemplary and successful in his studies; following his vocation he embraced the ecclesiastical state. With apostolic zeal he worked several years in the sacred ministry until he was judged worthy of the parish of Marmorito. He was indefatigable in the performance of his duties. Instructing poor children; caring for the sick; helping poor people were the characteristic qualities of his zeal. For his kindness, charity and selflessness he could be proposed as a model for any priest who has to look after souls. When his parish duties allowed he went elsewhere also to give retreats, triduums, novenas and the like. The Lord blessed his labours which were always crowned with abundant results. But when we most needed him God found him ready for heaven. After a short illness, with the death of the righteous, he went to a life of bliss at the beautiful age of 47 on February 12, 1861. This loss deprived the Church of a worthy minister, took from Marmorito a pastor who rightly was called the father of the people, but we are all not a little comforted in the hope that we have found a benefactor with God in heaven.” (note in the original text).

incidents in the Scriptures or the lives of the saints, was seen with my own eyes and that the accounts written of them are written with a scrupulous concern for the truth. I leave each one free to form his own opinions.

On a number of occasions when I have been in church when Dominic was making his thanksgiving after Holy Communion, or visiting the Blessed Sacrament exposed, I have seen him obviously quite oblivious to what was going on around him; he would continue in this state without noticing the time unless he was reminded it was time for something else. One day he was missing from breakfast, morning lessons, the midday meal and no one knew where he was, he was not in the study room, not even in bed! The matter was referred to the Rector, who suspected what might be the case, that he would be in the church. He went to the Church and there in the little chapel behind the high altar he saw Dominic standing motionless like a statue. One foot was on top of the other, one hand resting on the reading lectern; his other hand was on his breast and his gaze was fixed immovably on the tabernacle. His lips were not moving. He called him but there was no response. He shook him, and he looked around at him saying: "Oh, is Mass already over?" "Look," said his director, showing him his watch, "it is two o'clock." He asked pardon very contritely for having been absent without permission, and the director sent him to get some dinner, saying to him: "If anyone asks you where you have been, say you were doing something for me." He said this so that he might be spared the curious questions of his companions.

Another time, as I was going out of the sacristy after finishing my thanksgiving, I heard a voice which seemed to be engaged in argument. It came from the little chapel behind the high altar and when I went there I saw Dominic. He was speaking and then stopping as though waiting for someone else's reply. Among other things I heard quite clearly these words:

"Yes, my God, I have already said it and I say it again: I love you and I wish to go on loving you till my last breath. If you see that I am going to offend you, let me die: I much prefer to die than to offend you by sin."

I asked him sometimes what went on at these times and he replied with great simplicity: "It is silly of me; I get a distraction and lose the thread of

my prayers and then I see such wonderful things that the hours pass by like minutes.”

One day he came into my room saying: “Come quickly! There is some good work to be done.” “Where do you want to take me?” I asked him. “Come quickly! Come quickly” he said. I hesitated, but on his renewed insistence, went with him: similar instances had happened before. We left the house and silently he led me through one street after another for quite a distance. Finally we arrived at a block of flats and he led me up to the third floor. “Here you are. This is where you are wanted”, he said as he rang the bell and immediately went away.

The door was opened: “Oh come in, come in quickly before it is too late. My husband lapsed from the church and became a Protestant: now he is dying and begging for a priest so he can die a good Catholic.”

I entered and there saw the dying man, overcome with anxiety to set his conscience in order. Speedily I set matters right with a good Confession, and as I was just finishing, the local priest from St Augustine’s parish arrived with the holy oils. As he was in the act of administering the last anointing the man died.

One day I asked Dominic how he could have known that there was a dying man there. He looked at me somewhat sadly and burst into tears. I did not question him any further.

The innocence of his life, his love of God and great desire for the things of God so developed Dominic’s mind that he came to be habitually united with God. Sometimes he would stop playing a game and withdrawing from his companions walk by himself. When asked why he did this he replied: “These distractions come to me suddenly, and sometimes I seem to see heaven open above me and I have to go away from my companions so that I do not say things which could only seem ridiculous to them.”

One day during playtime the conversation turned to the great reward God has prepared in heaven for those who preserve their innocence. Among other things it was said that those who have kept their innocence are the nearest in

heaven to the person of our Divine Saviour and that they sing a special hymn reserved to them for all eternity. This was enough to send Dominic's spirit soaring towards God; he stood still completely motionless and then fell as though dead into the arms of his companions.

These moments of rapture would happen sometimes during study time and even in the street on his way to and from school.

He often spoke of the Holy Father and how much he would like to see him before he died. Several times he said that he had something very important to tell him. I asked him what this very important thing was.

"If I could speak to the Holy Father, I would say that in spite of his many worries and cares he should not cease to give his special attention to England; God is preparing a great triumph for the faith in that country."

"What makes you say that?"

"I will tell you, but please don't tell anyone else, as I don't want them to laugh at me. If you go to Rome perhaps you will tell Pius IX about it. One morning as I was making my thanksgiving after Communion, a very strong distraction took hold of me. I thought I saw a great plain full of people enveloped in thick fog. They were walking about like people who had lost their way and did not know which way to turn. Someone near me said: 'This is England.' I was just going to ask some questions, when I saw Pope Pius IX just like I have seen him in pictures. He was robed magnificently and carried in his hand a torch alive with flames. As he walked slowly towards that immense gathering of people, the leaping flames from the torch dispelled the fog, and the people stood in the splendour of the noonday sun. 'That torch', said the one beside me, 'is the Catholic Faith, which is going to light up England.'"

When I went to Rome in 1858, I told Pius IX about this, and he listened to it with great joy and pleasure and said to me: "What you say strengthens me in my determination to do everything possible for England, already the object of my care and solicitude. The message you give me, if no more, is at least the advice of a privileged soul."



There are many other similar incidents, but I do not give them here. I have, however, written them down and leave it to others to publish them when it will be for God's greater glory.

*Chapter 21 – His thoughts about dying and his preparation for a holy death*

Those who have read what I have written so far about Dominic will easily realise that his life was a continual preparation for death. For Dominic the Sodality of Mary Immaculate was a sure means of securing the protection of Our Lady at the hour of his death, which many now felt could not be far off. I cannot say whether he had some revelation from God of the day and circumstances of his death or whether it was just a presentiment. He certainly spoke about his death long before it happened, and so clearly that he could not have described it more accurately after it did happen.

In view of his state of health everything was done to put a brake on his life of study and piety. However, by reason of his constitution, various physical weaknesses and the ardour of his spirit, each day saw his strength decreasing. He was aware of this himself and sometimes he would say: "I must hurry up or I will be overtaken by night, while I am on the way." By this he meant that he had not much longer to live and that he must do as much good as he could before death caught up with him.

It is the custom in this House for the boys to make the exercise for a Happy Death each month<sup>61</sup>. Part of this exercise consists in making a Confession and Communion as though they were to be the last. Pope Pius IX in his goodness has enriched this exercise with many indulgences. Dominic used to make it with great earnestness. It is the custom at the end of the exercise to say one Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be to the Father for 'the one amongst us who will be the first to die.' One day he said smiling: "It should not be for the one amongst us who will be the first to die, but for Dominic Savio who will be the first to die amongst us." He said this many times.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. no. 184, pp. 761-762.

At the end of April he went to his Rector to ask him how he might keep Our Lady's month in the best way possible.

He was told to fulfil all his duties as well as he could for Our Lady, to tell some story or fact about her every day and act in such a way that he could go to Holy Communion worthily every day.

"I will do that faithfully: what grace shall I ask for?"

"Ask our Lady to obtain from God health and the grace to become a saint."

"Yes, may she do this and also be with me when I am dying and lead me to heaven."

In fact he showed so much fervour during that month that he seemed like an angel in human clothes. If he wrote something it was about Mary, or if he was studying, singing, going to class, it was all done in her honour. He always had his story about her ready each day and would tell it sometimes to one group of boys, sometimes to another. One boy said to him one day: "But if you do everything this year what will be left for next year?" "Let me do what I can this year; if I am here next year I'll let you know what my plans are."

In order to do everything possible for his health, I called in several doctors to consult together. All were taken by his brightness, his cheerfulness and his quick and ready replies. One of them, a very eminent physician, Doctor Vallauri by name, now of happy memory, said to me with admiration: "What a wonderful boy!"

"What is the underlying trouble which is steadily sapping his strength?" I asked him.

"There is no basic disease: but given his delicate constitution, the keenness of his mind and the intensity of the spirit continually at work in him are gradually wearing him away."

"What is the best remedy?"

"To my mind the best remedy would be to let him go to heaven: he seems to me to be very ready for it. The only thing which is likely to preserve his

life is to take him away from all study and keep him busy with manual work proportionate to his strength.”

*Chapter 22 – His care for the sick – He leaves the Oratory – What he said on that occasion*

Dominic’s ill health was not such as to confine him to bed. He passed his time between some classes, some study and little jobs about the house. It gave him great joy to help in the school infirmary when there were any of his companions sick there. He said sometimes:

“I don’t get any merit for working in the sick room or visiting the sick , because it is something I like doing very much.”

While attending to their physical needs he would also with due prudence suggest things for their spiritual benefit. “Our bodies are not made to last for ever; it is understandable that they gradually wear out until finally death comes. Think how wonderful it will be when our souls, freed from hindrances of the body, fly straight to God to begin an eternity of happiness and joy!”

It happened one day that a boy refused to take his medicine because of its bitter taste. Dominic said to him. “Medicines also come from God who has made them so that we can get better and stronger. When we take them we are doing what God wants us to do and if they do not taste very nice we get all the more merit. However unpleasant they are, it is nothing to what Jesus suffered on the cross for us.” These observations of Dominic’s were said so unaffectedly and with such sincerity that they always won the boys over.

Dominic’s health was steadily deteriorating but he did not want to go home: he wanted at all costs to try to keep up his studies and his life for God at the school. A few months previously I had sent him home, but a few days afterwards he turned up at the Oratory again. I have to confess that the unwillingness was on both sides. I wanted to keep Dominic with me at all costs. My affection and esteem for him were those of a father for his special favourite son. But I felt that the doctor’s recommendation should be carried out and this especially so as he had recently developed a bad cough. I wrote to Mr Savio and Dominic’s departure was fixed for March 1, 1857.

He accepted this decision and offered it as a sacrifice to God. “Why are you so unwilling to go home?” I asked him. “You should be glad to be going to your parents.” “I want to end my days here at the Oratory” he said.

“All right; when you get better at home then you can come back.”

“No. no, I shall never come back.”

The evening before his departure, he could hardly be persuaded to leave my side—there was always a new question to be answered. Amongst other things he asked: “What is the best thing a sick person can do to gain merit before God?”

“Frequently to renew the offering of his sufferings to God.”

“What else can he do?”

“Offer his life to Jesus.”

“Can I be certain that my sins are forgiven?”

“I assure you in God’s name that all your sins have been forgiven.”

“Can I be certain of being saved?”

“Yes, through the mercy of God which shall never be lacking for you, you can be certain of being saved.”

“If the devil comes to tempt me what shall I say to him?”

“Tell him that you have sold your soul to Jesus and he has paid for it with his Precious Blood. If the devil continues to worry you, ask him what he has ever done for your soul, and remind him that Jesus shed his blood so that you might be free from his power.”

“When I am in heaven, shall I be able to see my companions here at the Oratory and my family at home?”

“Yes, you will see everything from heaven—what is happening here, at home and lots of other things besides.”

“Shall I be able to visit you here?”

“Yes, if it is according to God’s will and for his greater glory.”

From these and many other questions which he put to me it was easy to see that Dominic was already standing on the threshold of eternity, wondering greatly about the joys it had in store for him.

*Chapter 23 – He says goodbye to his friends*

The morning of his departure Dominic made the Exercise of a Happy Death with his companions. He showed such devotion in his Confession and Holy Communion. It is quite impossible for me to try to describe it.

“I must make this exercise very well,” he said, “because it will be indeed my preparation for death. If I were to die on the journey, I should already have received the Holy Viaticum.”

He spent the rest of the morning putting his things in order: he packed his trunk with the care of one who is doing something for the last time. Then he went round saying goodbye to his companions, saying a little word of encouragement to one or trying to spur another on to greater efforts.

He owed a few pence to one of his companions and he took care to settle this little debt so that, as he said, his accounts would be all right with our Blessed Lord. He had a farewell meeting with the members of the Sodality of Mary and with great earnestness he exhorted them to persevere in keeping the promises they had made to Mary Immaculate, and to put no limit to their confidence in her.

About to depart, he came to me and spoke exactly as follows:

“You will have nothing of this body of mine (this carcase or skeleton) so I have to take it with me to Mondonio. You would only have been troubled with me for a little time longer ... but God’s holy will be done. If you go to Rome, don’t forget the message for the Holy Father about England. Please pray for me that I may die a holy death: and goodbye till we meet again in heaven.”

He kept a firm hold of my hand and when we got to the door he said to his friends who were waiting to wave goodbye to him:

“Goodbye, everyone, goodbye! You are all my friends, pray for me and we will all meet again once more where we will not be separated ever again.”

He had moved off a few paces when he turned and came back to me: “Would you give me a keepsake to remember you by?”

“Certainly, with all my heart, what would you like, a nice book?”

“No, something better still.”

“What, money for your journey?”

“Yes, that’s it, money for my journey to heaven. You told us that you had got from the Holy Father some plenary indulgences at the hour of death that you could give to people. Will you give one to me?”

“Yes, my son, I will put your name on the list as soon as you have gone.”

Then he went off; he had been three years with us. It had been a time of great joy for him, and a great edification for his companions and superiors. Now he had gone never to return.

There was general surprise at his solemn farewell. It was known that his health was far from good, but as he generally managed to keep out of bed, his illness was never considered to be very serious. In addition as he was always bright and cheerful, no one guessed that he was suffering so much anguish of body and spirit. And so it was that although everyone was a bit shaken by the finality of his farewell, there was a general expectancy that he would soon be back again.

But it was not to be so: he was ripe for heaven. What he had done for God and the saving of souls in his few short years of life was as though he had lived to an advanced age. God wanted to take him to himself in the flower of his youth, also to free him from the perils and dangers in which even the best of souls can be shipwrecked.

*Chapter 24 – Progress of his illness – Last confession, and receives viaticum  
– Some edifying facts*

It was two o'clock on the afternoon of March 1 when Dominic left Turin. He had a pleasant journey, and the change of air and being with his parents seemed to be doing him good. The first four days at home, he went about as usual, but his lack of appetite and his increasing cough, made his parents send him to the doctor. He was quite alarmed when he examined Dominic and immediately sent him to bed.

The doctor diagnosed inflammation and had recourse to bleeding.

Knowing how young people are afraid at the sight of blood, he told Dominic not to be afraid and to turn his head the other way, and he would not see anything. The boy smiled and said: "What is this compared with the piercing of Jesus' hands and feet with the nails?" He then quite calmly watched the doctor at work, and showed no alarm at the sight of his blood streaming out. This was done several times and there seemed to be an improvement. The doctor felt quite certain there was, and Dominic's parents were quite reassured. Dominic, however, thought differently and being quite convinced that it was better to receive the sacraments too early rather than too late, he said to his father when the doctor had gone: "Dad, let us give the heavenly doctor a chance: I would like to go to Confession and receive Holy Communion."

To please him his parents sent for the parish priest, although they felt it was unnecessary, as he was apparently getting better. The parish priest came and heard his confession<sup>62</sup>, and then to satisfy him brought the Holy Viaticum. It can easily be imagined with what devotion and love Dominic received communion. Every time he went to the sacraments he seemed like St Aloysius. Now that he considered this would really be the last communion of his life, who could express the fervour, the tender affection this innocent heart had for his beloved Jesus?

He called to mind the promises he had made at his first Holy Communion. He often said: "Yes, yes; Jesus and Mary, you are my greatest friends, now and

<sup>62</sup> Fr Domenico Grassi (1804-1860).

for always. A thousand times, death rather than sin.” When he had finished his thanksgiving he said peacefully: “Now I am happy; I have a long journey to eternity but with Jesus by my side I fear nothing. How I wish I could say it to the whole world, when Jesus is with us there is no fear of anything—not even of death itself.”

His patience had been exemplary throughout all of life’s little difficulties but in his final illness he was a true model of holiness. He made great efforts to do everything by himself. “As much as I can,” he said “I want to be the least trouble for my dear parents. They have put up with many inconveniences for me; the least I can do is recompense them in some way!” Unpleasant medicines he took without any sign that they were unpleasant, and he submitted to being bled ten times without showing any sign of resentment.

After four days of illness the doctor congratulated Dominic and told his parents: “Let us thank Divine Providence. We are at a good stage. The illness has been overcome and all we need to do now is wait for a good convalescence.” His parents were overjoyed to hear this, but Dominic smiled and said: “The world has been overcome, it only remains to make a good appearance before God.” He then asked that he might receive the last anointing. His parents agreed to please him though neither they nor the parish priest could see in Dominic’s serene and joyful face any sign of death. In fact from the happiness in his voice one could only judge he was improving. Dominic, though, either moved by devotion or inspired by the divine voice speaking to his heart, was counting the days and the hours almost arithmetically and wanted to devote every moment to preparing himself for death. Before being anointed Dominic said these words aloud: “Oh Lord, forgive me my sins. I love you and I wish to love you for all eternity! Let this sacrament wipe out all the sins I have ever committed by my eyes, my ears, my lips and my feet: may my soul and body be made holy by the merits of your Sacred Passion. Amen.”

He then made all the responses in a strong clear voice, like the voice of one who is in perfect health.

It was March 9, his fourth day in bed, his last on earth. He was very weak now on account of his sufferings and ten bleedings and other remedies, so



he was given the papal blessing. He said the *Confiteor* himself and made the necessary responses. He was filled with consolation when he was told that with this blessing of the Holy Father he received a plenary indulgence.

“*Deo gratias,*” he whispered, “*semper Deo gratias.*” Then fixing his eyes on the crucifix he murmured this little verse which he knew by heart: “O Jesus, my liberty I give completely to you: My body with all its powers I give completely to you. Everything I have is yours, O God, And I abandon myself completely To your holy will.”

### *Chapter 25 – His final moments and his wonderful death*

It is a truth of faith that at the hour of death we gather the results of what we have done during life. *Quae seminaverit homo, haec et metet*<sup>63</sup>. If during his life he has worked for God at his last moments he will be wonderfully consoled. It does sometimes happen nevertheless that good people are very afraid at the approach of death, in spite of the fact that they have led holy lives. This is part of God’s providence which wishes to purify these souls of the results of their weaknesses in life, and so prepare them for a more glorious crown in heaven. It was not like that with Dominic. I believe that God willed to give him that hundredfold which he reserves for his chosen souls before they enter the glory of heaven. Without any doubt, his such strong faith, his spirit of prayer and penance, his never having offended God grievously, his work for the saving of souls, had all merited for him peace and joy at the hour of death.

And so as death came to him he looked at it serenely and unafraid. Normally the body suffers considerable desolation and distress at the great stress of the soul separating itself from the body; but with Dominic it was not so—he fell asleep rather than die.

It was the evening of March 9, 1857; he had received all the helps that the Church has for us at the approach of death. Anyone who just heard him talking quietly and saw the peace and serenity on his face could only have

<sup>63</sup> Gal 6:7.

thought that he was having a quiet rest in bed. If you add to this his complete mastery over himself and his happy spirit, it is little wonder that nobody imagined that his end was near.

About an hour and a half before he died the parish priest came to visit him and was quite amazed to hear the brief prayers with which he so calmly and constantly recommended his soul to God. All the phrases expressed his great desire to go quickly to heaven. “What can I suggest to recommend the soul in this case?” the parish priest asked. After saying some prayers with him the parish priest was about to leave when Savio called him back saying: “Father, before going, leave me a parting thought to keep with me.” “Really I don’t know what to suggest.” “Something that will strengthen and comfort me.” “All right; try to keep in mind the Passion of Our Saviour.” “*Deo gratias*,” replied Dominic “May the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always in my mind and heart and on my lips. Jesus, Mary and Joseph help me now when I am dying; Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I die at peace with you.” After that he fell asleep for half an hour. When he woke up he looked round him and said to his parents: “Dad, here we are.”

“Here I am son, what do you want?”

“Dad, it is time; get my *Companion of Youth* <sup>(64)</sup> and read the prayers for a happy death for me.”

At these words his mother burst into tears and hurried from the room. His father’s eyes filled with tears, but choking back his sobs, he got the book and read the prayers. As he went through them Dominic answered clearly and said every word himself at the end of each one: “Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me ...” When his father reached the final part which runs: “When for the first time my soul will see the wonderful majesty of God, do not drive it away, but take it to heaven to sing your praises for all eternity ...” he said, “Yes, Dad—that is what I want so much, to sing the praises of Jesus for all eternity!”

<sup>64</sup> “He was indicating a book addressed entirely to young people, with the title: *The Companion of Youth in fulfilling their duties, for the exercises of Christian piety, for reciting the Office of the Blessed Virgin, Vespers throughout the year, etc.*” (note in the original text).

He dropped off to sleep again, but it was like he was reflecting on things of great importance. He awoke after a short while. Then in a clear voice he said: “Goodbye, Dad, goodbye ... what was it the parish priest suggested to me ... I don’t seem to remember ... Oh, what wonderful things I see ...” And so saying, with a beautiful smile on his face, and his hands joined on his breast he gave up his soul to God without any struggle<sup>65</sup>.

Return, pure soul, to your Creator; heaven is open to you, the angels and saints are waiting for you. Jesus, whom you loved so much, calls you with sweet words: “Come, good and faithful servant, you have fought the good fight and gained the victory; enter into the joy of your God: *intra in gaudium Domini tui.*”

*Chapter 26 – Announcement of his death – His teacher Fr Picco’s words to his pupils*

When Dominic’s father heard him say these last words and saw his head bending forward as though in sleep, he really thought he had fallen asleep again. He waited a few moments and then suddenly filled with apprehension he called to the boy and as he looked again he saw that he was dead. It can easily be realised how great was the sorrow of Dominic’s parents at the death of their wonderful son whose innocent life and appealing ways had spread such happiness in their home!

At the Oratory we were anxiously waiting for news of how he was getting on, when a letter came from his father which began as follows:

“With my heart full of grief I send you this sad news. Dominic, my dear son and your child in God, like a white lily, like Aloysius Gonzaga, gave his soul to God on March 9 after having received with the greatest devotion the Last Sacraments and the Papal Blessing.”

His companions were stunned by the news and some wept at the loss of a great friend who never failed them when in need; others were sad at realising

<sup>65</sup> He died at 11 p.m. on Monday March 9, 1857; the burial was held on Wednesday 11 (cf. ASC A4920159 *Estratto dell’atto di morte*).

that they would no longer be helped by his constant inspiration. Others got together to pray for the repose of his soul; but the majority said: "He was a saint, he is already in heaven." Some began immediately to pray to him and there was great competition to try to get hold of something which had belonged to him.

When Father Picco, head of the school where Dominic went for special classes, heard the news, he was profoundly moved and gave the sad news to his boys in the following terms:

"Only a short time ago I was speaking to you of the uncertainty of life and how death does not spare even your years. As an example I pointed to someone two or so years ago who had gone to this same school, sat here amongst you and listened to me, full of life and vigour and who a few days later passed from this life, his parents and his friends<sup>66</sup>. When I said that to you I was very far from imagining that one of those listening to me would very soon testify to the truth of my words. It is with great sorrow that I tell you that your companion Dominic Savio, so exemplary in his life, died a few days ago. You will remember how he was racked with a painful cough during his last days at the school, and it was no surprise to any of us that he had to stay away from school. He went home on the advice of his doctors to be better looked after but already foretelling his death as he had told some of you. But the illness was advanced and continued, and after just four days he gave up his innocent soul to his Creator.

"Yesterday I read the letter describing his death, which his father wrote to Don Bosco. He had no other words to describe him than to call him another St Aloysius Gonzaga both for the holiness of his life and the beautiful resignation of his death. I am very sorry that he was not long at our school and that his state of health prevented me from knowing him better and dealing with him in a large school like this. I will leave it to the superiors to speak to you about his holiness, his fervour, devotion and piety. I will leave it to his friends and companions who were around him daily to speak of his modest

<sup>66</sup> "Leone Cocchis student in 2nd rhetoric, a young man with much promise, died on March 25 1855 at 15 years of age." (note in the original text).

behaviour, his conversations. I will leave it to his parents to tell you about his obedience, respect, his docile nature. And what can I say myself that you would not already know?

“I shall never forget he used to come to school with such recollection, how eagerly and attentively he used to listen to what I said, do his duty. I would be so happy if each of you decided to follow his holy example.

“Before he was old enough or had done sufficient study to come to our school, he was enrolled at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. I often had occasion to speak with the Rector of the Oratory and had heard him talk of one of his students who was amongst the best students and the most virtuous boys in the House. Such was his zeal for study, the rapid progress he made in his early studies that in brief I was anxious to have him enrolled amongst my own students and had great hopes for this. Before he came here I heard some of my own students speak of him as a model as much in study as in virtue. In my frequent visits to the Oratory I noted his good character which you all know of, and he looked so innocent that you couldn't but love and admire him. And as for the fine hopes I had he did not disappoint me in this scholastic year. I appeal to you, my beloved young people, who have witnessed his recollection and application, not only when it was his duty to listen to me but equally at other times when many youngsters have no scruples about getting lost, even those who are diligent and well-behaved. I ask you, who have been his companions not only in school but in other ordinary ways, if you have ever seen him overlook any of his duties.

“I still see him coming to school with that special modest style he had, entering the classroom, taking his place not with the light-headedness of so many boys of his age, but following his lessons, taking notes, or doing some useful reading. And then classes would begin with him applying himself - I recall his angelic face as he hung on every word from me! It is no wonder that despite his young age and poor health he profited so much from his studies. The proof is that amongst so many boys, most somewhat ordinary in their efforts, even though he had an illness that would take him to the grave and was often absent as a result, he was always amongst the best in the

class. One thing struck me most of all and attracted my admiration. This was seeing how close he was to God as a young lad, how affectionate and fervent in his prayer. It is something we see in the better boys, even where there is a natural liveliness and distraction common to your age, where there is very little reflection given to prayers they have to say and little heart given to the effort. For most of them there is little in it except lips and voice. If there is such habitual distraction in youth even in prayers said in the silence and peace of the church, or quietly in their room, in daily prayer, so, boys, know how this can happen even more so for the brief prayers we say usually before and after class. It was here that he showed such piety and union of his soul with God. How many times I saw him with his face fixed on heaven, the heaven that would soon be his place of abode, recollecting his thoughts and offering them to the Lord and his Blessed Mother. He did so with the kind of affection that our prayers should really have. These thoughts, my beloved boys, were the thoughts that enlivened his fulfilment of his duties. They made everything he did and said holy. They directed his entire life to the glory of God. Blessed are the boys who take their inspiration from this! They will be happy in this life and the next, they will make their parents who have brought them up just as happy, their teachers who have taught them, and everyone who did something with and for them.

“Beloved boys, life is a precious gift that God has given us so we can gain merit for heaven. That’s how it will be if everything we do is to offer ourselves to the supreme Giver like Dominic did. What can we say of a young man who spends his entire life forgetful of the purpose for which God has created him, has never found a moment to think of his Creator, never had a place in his heart to lift up a prayer to God? What can we say of the boy who does everything possible to distance himself from these sorts of things or smothers or fights against them? Think about the holy life and the holy death of your beloved friend and his happy lot, something we can be sure he now enjoys. Examine yourselves and see what is lacking for you to be like him and how you would be if, like him, you found yourself before the Judgement Seat of God who asks you for a strict account of every little failing. Set your life beside Dominic’s and whatever difference you find between his and yours, take him

as your example, imitate him in his Christian virtues, prepare your soul to be like his, pure and clean in God's eyes, so that at the sudden call, which will not fail to come sooner or later, and we all have to hear it, we can answer with joyful mien, a smile on our lips as your angelic companion did. Just listen to me once more as I conclude these words. If I see any of you better in fulfilling your duties or better at your prayers, I will attribute it to the effects and example of our Dominic and will see it as a grace from above coming from his prayers and from his being amongst you as his companions and me as the teacher."

Thus we have the testimony of Fr Picco to the boys, expressing his deep sorrow and sense of loss at the news of the death of his beloved pupil Dominic Savio.

*Chapter 27 – Emulating Savio's virtues – Many pray to him for heavenly favours and are heard – A reminder for everyone*

It will not come as a surprise to those who have read what I have written about Dominic that God soon deigned to favour him with special gifts, making his virtues stand out in many ways. While he was alive, many were careful to follow his advice, his example and imitate his virtues. Many were also moved by his outstanding conduct, holiness of life, his innocence and his habits and prayed to him. There are stories of many graces obtained by young Savio's prayers while he was still alive. After his death confidence in his intercession and veneration grew rapidly.

As soon as news came of his death a few of his friends were already calling him a saint. They met to recite the Litany for the Dead but instead of saying "Pray for him" that is, "Holy Mary pray for the repose of his soul", they said "Pray for us: Holy Mary, pray for us." "Because," they said, "by now Savio is enjoying the glory of Paradise and no longer needs our prayers."

Others added: "If Dominic has not gone straight to heaven or is not there by this time who on earth is going to manage it?" From then on many of his friends and companions made him a model. They had admired his virtue in life and tried to make him a model for good works. They began to pray to him as a heavenly protector.

No day passed without favours being received for soul and body, not only in the school but also by people outside. I saw a young lad suffering from severe toothache who recovered from it. He prayed to Savio his friend with a short prayer and was immediately recovered. Many prayed to him to be freed from fever and were heard. I witnessed one who immediately obtained the grace of being freed from a raging fever<sup>67</sup>. I have received many accounts and testimonies from a great variety of people. Although the character and authority of these witnesses are worthy of trust whichever way you look at it, just the same, since they are still alive I think it better to leave them out for now and be content to refer to just one special grace concerning a seminarian who had known Dominic personally. It was 1858 and he became very ill and what with being in the hospital for a long period of treatment and having to rest after it, he was not able to take the examination at the end of the school year. He thought he would at least manage it in the autumn for the Feast of All Saints and so avoid the loss of a school year, but when he returned to Turin and started to study again his illness returned with renewed force. "It was getting close to the exams, and my health was in a deplorable state. Stomach aches and headaches robbed any chance of sitting for my exam which was of the greatest importance to me. I turned to my beloved friend Dominic and begged him to help me. I made a novena in Dominic's honour. Amongst the prayers I set myself to do was this one: Dear friend, you were my schoolmate, to my consolation and in my good fortune, for more than a year. You worked

<sup>67</sup> "Such veneration and confidence in young Savio grew largely from an event told by Dominic's father, who is ready to confirm what he says in any place and in the presence of anyone. He puts it this way: "The loss of my son," he says "was a source of deep sorrow for me and was further stirred by the desire to know what had happened to him in the next life. God wanted to give me consolation. About a month after Dominic's death, one night after I had been unable to sleep, I thought I saw the ceiling of the room spring wide open and there, surrounded by a bright light, Dominic appeared, smiling and happy but majestic and striking. I was beside myself at such a sight and cried out to Dominic: 'How are you? Where are you? Are you already in heaven?' 'Yes, yes father,' he answered 'I really am in heaven.' 'Well,' I replied, 'if God has been so good as to let you enjoy the happiness of heaven, pray for your brothers and sisters so they may be with you one day.' 'Yes father,' he answered 'I will ask God on their behalf that they may be able to enjoy the immense happiness of heaven with me one day.' 'And pray for me, for your mother too,' I said 'so that we may be saved and be together with you one day in heaven.' 'Yes, yes, I will pray for that.' And having said that he disappeared and the room returned to darkness as before."



at your studies with me in our class so you know how much I need to pass this exam. Ask the Lord for me, I beg you, for sufficient health so I may prepare myself.”

By the fifth day of the novena my health improved remarkably and I was able to resume studying. With extraordinary ease, I was able to make up for lost time and very successfully pass the necessary examination. The great improvement in my health has continued for more than a year. I acknowledge this grace obtained from God through the intercession of my friend, my companion in life, my help and my comfort.”

With this fact I bring this life of Dominic Savio to an end, reserving an occasion to print other facts by way of an appendix<sup>68</sup>, so they can give greater glory to God and be of greater advantage to souls. For now, good reader, so that you will benefit from what has been written about this virtuous young man I would like to make the conclusion a very practical one for me, for you and for anyone who should read this book. We should be moved to follow young Savio in whatever good ways are compatible with our state in life. In his poor situation he still lived a very happy, virtuous and innocent life, crowned by a holy death. Let’s imitate him in his way of life and we will have a chance to be like him also in his wonderful death.

Let us not fail, too, to imitate Savio in his frequenting the Sacrament of Confession. This gave him support in his regular practice of virtue and it was a firm guide which brought him to life’s end so gloriously. We should go frequently and with the right attitude to draw from this source of salvation in our life. Whenever we go we should not fail to consider past confessions to assure ourselves that they were well made, and if not we should remedy this. It seems to me that through these sacraments received well and often we can live happily in the midst of the sorrows and trials of this life, and like Dominic, when our time comes, see death approach with peace and joy in our hearts. How happy we will be then to meet Jesus Our Saviour who will judge us according to his mercy, and in his goodness lead us to an eternity of happiness. Amen.

<sup>68</sup> We are leaving out the appendix on *Graces obtained from God through the intercession of Dominic Savio*.

### **307. Historical sketch of young Michael Magone a pupil at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales**

Printed ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales*. Seconda edizione accresciuta. Torino, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1866<sup>69</sup>.

*Dear boys*

One of you who was anxiously awaiting the life of Dominic Savio to be published was Michael Magone. All the time he was collecting things that were said about this model of Christian life; he was trying his very hardest to imitate him, anxious that everything that was being said be written down, as he wanted to model his life on him. He only had time to read a few pages of this life before the Lord brought his mortal life to an end to enjoy, as we most ardently believe, the peace of the just in the company of the friend he had made up his mind to imitate.

The singular, or better, the exciting life of your companion Michael aroused in you a desire to see it in print. You pestered me to do it. Therefore, motivated by these requests and by the affection that I had for our mutual friend, as well as by the hope that this small work would be both pleasing and helpful to your souls, I made up my mind to write down what I knew about him and have it printed in a booklet.

In the life of Dominic Savio you saw innate virtue cultivated to a point of heroism right throughout his life. In Magone's life we have a lad who, left to his own devices was in danger of treading the sad road of evil but fortunately the Lord invited him to follow Him. Michael listened to this loving call and constantly corresponding with divine grace reached such maturity as to be

<sup>69</sup> This second edition, with various corrections and significant additions compared with the first one in 1861 (OE XIII, 155-250), is considered to be the definitive one (cf. Alberto CAVIGLIA, *Il "Magone Michele" una classica esperienza educativa. Studio*, in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco*. Vol. V. Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale 1965, pp. 131-132). We have taken the text and notes from: Giovanni BOSCO, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, in *ID., Vite di giovani...*, pp. 111-157.

admired by all who knew him, thus demonstrating how marvellous are the effects of God's grace on those who make use of it.

You will find here many things you can admire and imitate. You will also come upon certain acts of virtue, expressions that seem beyond a fourteen-year-old boy. But just because they are uncommon I felt that they merited being written down. Every reader, anyway, is aware of the truth of these incidents. I do nothing more than write down what happened under the gaze of a whole crowd of living individuals who can be questioned about the authenticity of what I have written.

In this fifth edition I have added a few facts that were not known to me when I wrote the first. There are other facts that are better explained due to special circumstances regarding them that I was able to draw on later from sources I am certain about.

May Divine Providence, which instructs human beings by the lives of old sinners as well as young saints, grant us all the grace to find ourselves prepared at that last moment, the moment upon which depends a happy or unhappy eternity. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be our help in life and at our death and keep us safely on the road that leads to heaven. Amen.

### *Chapter 1 – An interesting encounter*

One evening in autumn<sup>70</sup> I was returning from Sommariva del Bosco<sup>71</sup>, and had reached Carmagnola where I had an hour's wait for my train to Turin<sup>72</sup>. It was already seven o'clock, the weather was cold and the whole place was shrouded in a heavy fog, turning into a misty rain. This made the whole place so dark that a person could not be recognised a few feet away. The dull glow of the light on the station lit up with a pale glow a very limited area. All the rest was in darkness. Only a gang of boys drew the attention of everyone as they romped around and deafened the spectators with their racket. The words

<sup>70</sup> This encounter happened in the first fortnight of October 1857.

<sup>71</sup> Sommariva del Bosco: farming community 40 km from Turin.

<sup>72</sup> Carmagnola: city about 30 km from the capital; in those years it had around 12,894 inhabitants.

“*Wait! Catch him! Run! Grab this! Stop that one*” kept travellers’ thought busy. But in the midst of all this shouting one voice stood out and dominated all the rest. It was the voice of a leader whose commands demanded respect and obedience. I felt that I wanted to get to know this lad who obviously was able to gain ascendancy over this unruly mob. I waited until everyone was crowded around him and then with a couple of quick steps I stepped in amongst them. They all fled as if terrified - only one remained and he stood in front of me, his hands on his hips and, with an imperious air, began to speak:

“Who are you, breaking up our game like this?”

“I’m a friend.”

“And what do you want of us?”

“If you are agreeable, I’d like to play with you and your friends.”

“But who are you? I don’t know you.”

“I repeat! I’m a friend. I want to join you and your friends in the game you are playing. But who are you?”

“Me? I’m ...” he said in a serious voice, “I’m Michael Magone<sup>73</sup>, the general in charge of this game.”

Whilst he was saying this, the other boys, who had fled in panic, surrounded him once more. After saying a few words to some of them, I once more addressed myself to Magone:

“My dear Magone, how old are you?”

“Thirteen.”

“Have you made your first confession?”

“Oh, yes” he replied with a smile.

“And your First Communion?”

<sup>73</sup> In the baptism register the name is: Michele Giovanni Magone, son of John and Joanna Maria Stella, tailor by profession, born on September 19, 1845, at 1 in the morning, baptized on the same day at 7 in the evening. The father had passed away before the birth of the son.

“Yes.”

“And have you learned some sort of a trade?”

“Yes, I have learned the art of doing nothing?”

“Up until now, what have you done?”

“I’ve gone to school.”

“How far?”

“I’ve done third elementary.”

“And have you still got a father?”

“No, my father’s dead.”

“And your mother?”

“Yes, my mother is still alive and does work for others. She does what she can to earn bread for me and my brothers who do nothing but drive her to desperation.”

“And what do you intend to do with yourself in the future?”

“I want to do something but I don’t know what.”

This frankness of speech, combined with a certain air of wisdom and logic, made me realise in what great danger this lad would be if he continued in this abandoned state. On the other hand, I realised that if his lively nature and evident leadership qualities were to be cultivated he would do great things. I took up the conversation once more:

“My dear Magone, would you like to leave this kind of life and learn a trade or even take up some studies?”

“I would certainly like that,” he replied “because this sort of life does not appeal to me—some of my friends are already in prison and I fear that I will follow, but what can I do? My father is dead, my mother is poor, so who can help me?”

“This evening say a fervent prayer to our Father in heaven; pray with all your heart, trust in Him and He will look after me, after you, after everyone.”

At that moment the station bell rang and I had to leave. “Take this,” I said “take this medal and go to the assistant priest, Fr Ariccio<sup>74</sup> tomorrow; tomorrow. Tell him that the priest who gave it to you wants to know something about you.” He accepted the medal respectfully. “But what is your name? What town do you come from? Does Fr Ariccio know you.” These and other questions Magone put to me, but I could not give him an answer because the train was already in the station and I had to depart for Turin.

*Chapter 2 – His earlier life and his arrival at the oratory of St Francis de Sales*

Not being able to learn the name of the priest he had been talking to made Magone very curious and he could not wait until the next day but went straight away to Fr Ariccio and told him what had happened. The assistant priest understood everything and the following day he wrote me a letter in which he gave me details of our little “General’s” life.

“Young Michael Magone is a poor lad who has no father. His mother is so busy providing bread for the family that she cannot look after him and so he spends his time on the street with all the local hooligans. He is of above-average intelligence, but his liveliness and unruly behaviour have caused him to be suspended more than once from his school. All the same he did fairly well in third elementary. As far as behaviour is concerned I feel he has a good and simple heart but he is hard to manage. At school and in the catechism classes he is forever a disturbing element. When he’s away all is peaceful and when he leaves all breathe a sigh of relief. His age, poverty, nature and intelligence make him very worthy of charity. He was born on September 19, 1845.”

On the basis of this information I decided to enrol him amongst the boys at this house, either as a student or in the trade section. As soon as he had received his letter of acceptance, our friend was impatient to come to Turin. He dreamed of all the delights of this earthly paradise and how great it would

<sup>74</sup> Francesco Alberto Ariccio (1819-1884).

be to live in the Capital City. A few days later I saw him<sup>75</sup>. “Here I am” he said, running to meet me. “Here I am—I’m that Michael Magone you met at the Carmagnola railway station.”

“I know. I know. And have you come along willingly?”

“Yes, I’m not lacking in good will.”

“If you have good will, make sure you don’t turn this place upside down then.”

“Don’t worry, I have not come to cause you any trouble. I haven’t behaved all that well in the past but I don’t want it to be like that in the future. Two of my friends are already in prison and I ...”

“It’s ok. Just tell me if you’d prefer to study or take up a trade.”

“I’m prepared to do whatever you wish but, if the choice is left to me, I would prefer to study.”

“And if I put you to study, what do you intend to do when you are finished?”

“If a ruffian . . .” he said, bowing his head and laughing.

“Carry on—*if a ruffian* ..”

“If a ruffian like me could become good enough to be a priest, I would most willingly become one.”

“We’ll see then what a ruffian can do. I will put you to study; whether or not you will become a priest will depend on your progress in your studies, your conduct and the signs that will point out whether you have a vocation or not.”

“If good will is all that is needed I can assure you that I will succeed and will never do anything to displease you.”

<sup>75</sup> He arrived at the Oratory in Valdocco on October 17, 1857 (cf. ASC E720 *Censimento dal 1847 al 1869*, p. 10).

First of all he was assigned a companion who acted as his ‘Guardian Angel’. It is the custom of this House that whenever we take in a boy whose behaviour is suspect or we don’t know much about him he is entrusted to an older boy in the house, whose is of proven conduct, to assist him, correct him as needed until he can settle in with his other companions without risk of any kind. Without Magone realising it, this lad, in the most practical and charitable way, never let him out of his sight. He was in the same class and study as well as in recreation. He played and joked with him. But whenever the need arose he said: “Don’t speak that way because it’s not right, don’t say that word or call upon the name of the Lord in vain.” And, for his part, even though he showed his impatience from time to time, Michael responded: “Good, you did the right thing to warn me; you are a good friend to have. If in the past I had had such a friend I would not have formed these bad habits which I now find so hard to break.”

In the first few days the only things he really enjoyed were the recreations. To sing, to yell out, to run, jump, play around were the things which most appealed to his lively nature. When, however, a companion said to him: “Magone, the bell has rung to go to class”, or to Church, to prayers or the like, he gave a longing glance at the games and then went off to wherever duty was calling him without any further objection.

But it was great to see him when the bell rang to signal the end of some duty and recreation lay ahead! He appeared as if he were shot out of a cannon! He simply flew to all parts of the yard. Whenever a game required bodily agility he was its leading light. The game that we call *Barrarotta* was his favourite and he was very good at it<sup>76</sup>. So by mixing in recreation with his other school tasks he found his new lifestyle very much to his liking.

### *Chapter 3 – Difficulties and a reformed boy*

Michael had been at the Oratory for a month now and his many occupations helped the time to pass quickly. He was happy provided he was only jumping

<sup>76</sup> *Barrarotta*: game based on fast reflexes, fast running and group strategies.



around and enjoying himself without reflecting that true happiness must have its origin in peace of heart and tranquillity of conscience. All of a sudden he began to lose that mad desire to play! He became very pensive and began to take no part in the games unless he was expressly invited. The 'Guardian angel' noticed this and took the occasion one day of saying to him:

"My dear Magone, for some days now I have noticed your face has lost its happy smile; are you sick or something?"

"No, no my health is very good."

"Then why are you looking so sad and downcast?"

"I am sad because I see my friends taking part in all the practices of piety. To see them so happy whilst praying, going to Confession and Communion makes me feel very sad."

"I don't understand how the devotion of others should be the reason for your sadness."

"The reason is easy to understand: my friends, who are already good, practise their religion and become better still whilst I am a 'no-hoper' and can't take part and this is the cause of great remorse and uneasiness."

"What a silly kid you are! If your friends' happiness makes you envious, why don't you follow their example? If you have something on your conscience, why don't you get rid of it?"

"Get rid of it! That's very easy to say! But if you were in my shoes, you'd even say that...", and with that, throwing his cap down in anger and frustration he fled into the sacristy.

His friend followed him, and when he caught up with him he said: "My dear Magone, why are you running away from me? Tell me what's bothering you. Who knows I might even be able to suggest a way to get over it."

"You're right, but I'm in such a mess."

"Whatever mess you're in, you have a way to get out of it."

“But how can I find peace when it seems there’s a thousand devils in me?”

“Don’t worry.. Go to your confessor, open up your heart to him and he will give you all the advice you need. When we have something on our conscience that’s what we do. That’s why we are always happy.”

“That’s O.K. but ...” Michael broke down and started sobbing. Several days went by and he grew more despondent. He no longer enjoyed his games. He no longer laughed and smiled. Many times when his companions were enjoying the recreation he retreated to some corner to think, reflect and to cry. I was keeping a close watch on him so one day I called him and the following conversation took place.

“My dear Magone, I want you to do me a favour and I will not take ‘no’ for an answer.”

“What is it? I am ready to do anything you ask.”

“I want you to give me your heart for a while and tell me what is causing you to be so sad these days.”

“It’s true—I have been sad . . . but I am desperate and I don’t know what to do.”

Having said this he broke down crying. I let him cry for a little while then, jokingly, I said: “Come on now! Are you the same ‘General Micky’, the leader of the Carmagnola gang? What a fine general you are! You are not even able to tell me, in a few words, what is weighing on your soul.”

“I’d like to but I don’t know how to begin—I don’t know how to express myself.”

“Just say one word and I’ll say the rest.”

“I have a mixed-up conscience.”

“That’s enough—I understand everything. You had only to say that for me to say the rest. I don’t want to enter into matters of conscience just for the moment. I’ll just tell you what to do to put everything right. So listen: if your

conscience bothers you regarding the past, simply make a good confession, relating what you have done wrong since your last confession. If out of fear or for any other reason you did not confess something or if you feel your confessions lacked some necessary conditions, then go back to your last good confession and confess what is lying heavy on your conscience.”

“Here’s where the difficulty is. How can I remember all that has happened over the past years?”

“That’s easy to put right. Just tell your confessor that there is something in the past that is troubling you and he will take up things from there and put certain questions to you which you will only have to answer yes or no to, and how many times you committed that sin.”

#### *Chapter 4 – He makes his confession and begins to frequent the sacraments*

Michael spent that day examining his conscience. So great was his desire to put things right that he did not want to go to bed before he made his confession. “The Lord” he said, “has waited for me so long and may not be prepared to wait until tomorrow. So if I can go to confession this evening, I should not put it off: it is time to make a definite break with the devil.” He made his confession with great feeling and many times broke down crying. Before leaving he said to his confessor: “Do you think all my sins have been forgiven? If I were to die tonight would I be saved?”

“Go in peace,” was the answer “the Lord in His great mercy has waited until now for you to make a good confession so I am sure He has pardoned all your sins and if, in His adorable plan, called you to Himself tonight you are absolutely certain of your eternal salvation.”

He was very moved by these words and blurted out: “Oh, how happy I am.” Then, sobbing once more, he went to bed. It was to be a night of excitement and emotion. Later on he was to speak to his friends about all the thoughts that went through his mind that night. “It is difficult to put into words all that I felt that unforgettable night. I hardly slept at all. In some little

time I dozed off but soon my imagination made me see hell open before me, populated with hosts of devils. I drove that thought away as I reflected that all my sins had been forgiven. Then I saw a whole host of angels who showed me paradise, saying to me: ‘See what happiness lies in store for you so long as you keep your resolutions!’

About halfway through the night I was so overcome by emotion that I had to get up, kneel by my bed and say over and over again: Oh, how wretched are those who fall into sin! But how much more unhappy are those who live in sin. I believe that if they could only experience for even a single minute the great consolation that being in the state of grace brings they would all go to confession to placate the anger of God, to remove remorse of conscience and to experience peace of heart. Oh, sin, sin! What a terrible curse you are to those who allow your entry into their hearts. If I ever have the misfortune to commit even the smallest sin again I am determined to go to confession immediately.”

In this way Magone expressed his remorse for having offended God as well as his firm resolution to be faithful in His service in the future. He began to frequent the sacraments of Confession and Communion and began to find great joy in those practices of piety he previously found boring. He also found confession so pleasing that I had to ask him to go less frequently lest he become a victim of scruples. This is a real danger to young people when they make up their minds to serve the Lord with all their hearts. This wreaks great havoc since the devil uses this means to disturb the mind and the heart and so make the practice of religion burdensome. It often causes those who have already made great strides in virtue to retrace their steps.

The most powerful means to avoid this disaster is to abandon oneself to complete obedience of one’s confessor. When he says something is bad, let us do everything to avoid it. If he assures us that such and such a thing is not evil, then let us follow his advice and go ahead in peace. In summary, obedience to the confessor is the most effective means to be free of scruples and to persevere in God’s grace.

*Chapter 5 – A word to young people*

The uneasiness and the worries of young Magone on the one hand and the frank and resolute way he went about putting his soul in order on the other, gives me an opportunity, beloved young people, to suggest some things that I believe would be useful for your souls. Receive them as a sign of affection from a friend who so ardently desires your eternal salvation.

In the first place I recommend that you do whatever you can not to fall into sin, but if unfortunately you should commit sin, never allow yourself to be convinced by the devil to be silent about it in confession. Always remember that the confessor has power from God to remit every kind of sin, any number of sins. The more serious the sins confessed, the happier his heart will be because he knows quite well that the mercy of God by which your sin will be pardoned will be manifested all the more and that the infinite merits of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ by which He will wash away the sins from your soul will the more be applied.

My dear young people, remember that the confessor is a father who ardently desires to help you as much as possible and who tries to keep every evil far from you. Do not be afraid that a confessor will think less of you because you reveal to him serious faults you have committed nor should you be afraid that he will speak of these faults to others. A confessor cannot make use of any information he has received in the confessional no matter what it costs him. Even if he had to pay for it with his life he could not divulge even non-important things he has heard as a confessor. I can even assure you that the more open and sincere you are with him, the greater his confidence in you will become and the more likely will he be in a position to give you the best advice possible for the welfare of your soul.

I have stressed these matters lest the devil tempt you to keep back some sin when you go to confession. I assure you, my dear young friends, that as I pen these lines my hand begins to tremble as I think of that great number of Christians who are eternally lost because they either did not confess their sins or were insincere in confession! If anyone of you, going back over your lives,

discover that you deliberately kept back a sin or if you have any doubts about the validity of past confessions, I say to you immediately, friend, for the love of Jesus Christ, and for His Blood shed for the salvation of souls, I beg you to put your conscience in order the very next time you go to confession, putting all in order as if you were at death's door. If you do not know how to explain yourself, just tell your confessor that there is something in your past life that is worrying you. The confessor will understand. Follow the advice he gives you and you will be certain that everything is in order.

Go to your confessor regularly, pray for him, follow his directions. When you have chosen a confessor who is able to understand and help you, do not go to another unless you have solid reasons for doing so. Until you have a regular confessor in whom you can put all your trust, you will always lack a friend for your soul. Trust in the prayers of your confessor who prays every day in his Mass for his penitents that God may grant you the grace to make good confessions and persevere in doing good; also pray for him.

You can change your confessor without scruple if he goes elsewhere and it would be most inconvenient to go regularly to him or if he is sick or, on the occasion of some great solemnity, there are great numbers wishing to go to him. Likewise if you have something on your conscience which you do not want to divulge to your ordinary confessor change your confessor a thousand times rather than commit a sacrilege.

If what I have written is read by someone who is destined by divine providence to hear the confessions of the young I would like, among countless other things, humbly and respectfully to suggest the following:

1. Lovingly receive every class of penitents but especially the young. Help them to open their hearts and insist that they come to confession frequently. This is the most secure means of keeping them away from sin. Make use of every means to see that they put into practice the advice given them to avoid sin in the future. Correct them with kindness; never scold them because if you shout at them today they will not come to confession tomorrow or, if they do, they will not speak of those matters which upset you.

2. When you have gained their confidence, prudently find out whether all their confessions in the past were well made. I say this because famous, experienced authors in both the field of morals and ascetics, and especially a famous author who warrants belief, agree in stating that the first confessions are often null or, at least, defective because of the lack of instruction or the wilful omission of matters for confession. Invite the penitent to ponder the state of his conscience well from when he was seven up until he was ten or twelve. At this age he is already aware of certain serious sins but makes little of them or does not know how to confess them. The confessor whilst he must be most prudent and reserved must not avoid asking questions in the area of the holy virtue of modesty.

I would like to say much more about this topic but I will not as I do not want to appear an expert in those fields where I am simply a poor and humble learner. Here I have only said those things in the Lord that I felt would be useful for the souls of the young to whom I am determined to consecrate every moment of that life which the Lord leaves me here on earth. Now let us return to young Magone.

### *Chapter 6 – His exemplary concern for the practices of piety*

In addition to the frequent reception of Confession and Communion, Michael added a lively faith, an exemplary concern and an edifying attitude for all the practices of piety. In recreation he was like an unbridled horse. At first he was ill at ease in church but soon controlled himself so as to become a model for any fervent Christian. He prepared himself well for Confession<sup>77</sup>. Whilst waiting he allowed others to go in ahead of him; as he waited till the confessor was free, he was recollected and patient. Sometimes he was seen to wait four, even five hours in recollection, still, on his knees on the bare floor, waiting for the chance to go to confession. One of his friends wanted to imitate him, but after two hours he fainted and decided never again to imitate his friend in that kind of penance. This would seem almost unbelievable for someone of such a tender age if the one who is writing about it had not been

<sup>77</sup> Cf. no. 184, p. 741.

an eyewitness to the facts. He took delight in speaking of the edifying way in which Dominic Savio went to the sacraments and tried his hardest to imitate him.

When he first came to the Oratory he barely tolerated going into church. After several months he found religious functions very comforting no matter how long they lasted. He used to say that what we do in church we do for the Lord and what we do for the Lord never goes unrewarded. One day the bell had already gone for a church function when a friend urged him to finish off the game. "Yes," he answered "provided you pay me the same wages as the Lord will." The boy fell silent at those words and went with him to fulfil his religious duty.

Another friend said to him one day:

"Don't you get fed up with functions in the church when they are long?"

"Oh" he replied, "You are just like I was some time back; you don't know what's good for you. Don't you know that the church is the Lord's House? The more we go to church here, the greater chance we will have to be with Him in the eternal triumph of paradise. As well as that, if practice makes perfect in temporal things, why can't this happen with spiritual things? By remaining in the material house of the Lord in this world we acquire the right to stay with Him one day in heaven."

After the customary thanksgiving after Confession or Communion or after the sacred functions he remained a long time before the Blessed Sacrament or before the Blessed Virgin to recite some special prayers. He was so attentive, recollected and composed that he seemed insensible to all external activity. Sometimes his companions, going out of church or passing him, gave him a bump; often they stood on his toes and even hit him. But he carried on with his prayers or meditation as if nothing had happened.

He had great esteem for all kinds of devotional items. A medal, a little crucifix, a holy picture, were all objects of great veneration for him. At any time when he discovered that Communion was being distributed, or some



hymn was being sung inside or outside of church, he immediately broke off his recreation and joined in with the singing or the practice of piety.

He had a great love for singing and had a very fine voice which he cultivated. In a short time he was proficient enough to take an active part in solemn and public functions. He assured me, and I leave it in writing, that he did not want to open his lips to utter a word if that was not for the greater glory of God. “Unfortunately,” he said to me “this tongue of mine has not always performed in the past as it should have done; at least it is in my power to right that for the future!” He left his resolutions written down on a page, one of which was: “O my God, make this tongue of mine shrivel up between my teeth rather than to utter a word displeasing you.”

In 1858 he took part in the Christmas Novena which took place during a retreat in this capital. One evening his companions were singing his praises for the part he had played in the day’s function. He became embarrassed and went off on his own. When someone asked him why he acted like that, he started crying and said: “I have laboured in vain because I enjoyed myself so much when I was singing and lost half of the merit; now this praise has made me lose the other half; all that’s left now for me is that I am tired.”

### *Chapter 7 – Punctuality with duties*

Michael’s fiery nature, his vivid imagination, his heart full of affections naturally made him a lively lad and, at first sight, distracted. By constant effort he learned self-control. As we have already said, he was completely at home during recreation. In a few moments after beginning a game all corners of the courtyard echoed to the sound of his feet. There was no game in which he did not excel. But once the bell went for study, classes, rest, meals, church functions, he at once broke off what he was doing and ran to fulfil his duty. It was marvellous to see him who, a few minutes before, had been the soul and inspiration of recreation suddenly being the first to arrive, almost machine-like, wherever duty called him.

As regards his scholastic duties I feel it could be useful to quote the assessment made by his Latin teacher Fr John Francesia.

“I most willingly and publicly testify to the virtues of my dear student Michael Magone. He was in my class all the scholastic year of 1857 and for a part of 1858-59. As far as I remember there is nothing extraordinary to note in his first year. He conducted himself well. By his application and diligence he did two years of Latin in one so that, at the end of the year, he was able to go into Third Year High School. This is enough to show that his progress was out of the ordinary. I do not remember ever having scolded him because of his behaviour. He was very quiet in class despite his natural liveliness which he gave full vent to in the playground. He made friends of the better elements and tried to copy their example. In 1858-59 I had a very fine class who were determined not to waste a minute of time and were most anxious to make progress in their studies. Michael Magone stood out. Among other things I was amazed by the change in him both physically and morally. He became more and more serious and thoughtful. I believe that this change was brought about by his determination to grow in piety and he could really be put forward as an example of virtue to others. I can still see you there in front of me, my dearly lamented pupil, in that attitude of rapt attention to me, your teacher whilst I was, at the same time, a great admirer of your virtue! He really gave the impression that he had completely put off the old Adam. In seeing him so attentive to his duties, so unusual for a boy of his age, I could not help applying to him those words of Dante, *Under these fair locks lay hid an old mind*<sup>78</sup>.

I recall how, one day, to test how well he was paying attention and how much he was absorbing, I asked my dear student to scan some lines I had just dictated to him. “I’m *not very good at it*,” Michael modestly replied. “Well then, let’s hear your *‘not very good’*”, I said. He did it so well that I could not restrain in joining in the spontaneous applause of the class! From then on that ‘I’m *not very good at it*’ became a catch phrase in the school to indicate a student outstanding for his diligence and attention.” These were his teacher’s words.

<sup>78</sup> He should have said: Petrarch (1304-1374); it is a verse from Sonnet 213 of the *Canzoniere*.

He was an example to all in the way he fulfilled his duties. The Superior of the House had often said that every moment of time is a treasure. Therefore, he used to say, "if I waste a moment I am throwing away a treasure." Motivated by this thought he did not let a minute go by without doing all that his strength permitted. I have here before me his marks for conduct and diligence for all the time he was with us. In the first weeks he had only 'fair', then they changed to 'good', then 'very good'. After three months they became 'excellent' and that is how they stayed for the rest of the time he was in this House.

In preparation for the Easter of 1858 he made his Retreat to the great edification of his companions and to the consolation of his heart. He wanted to make a general confession and then to write down some resolutions to guide him for the rest of his life. Among them was a proposal to make a vow to never waste a moment of time. He was not given permission to do this. "At least go ahead" his director answered "so long as this promise is not a vow." He then got a notebook in which he wrote down the days of the week: "With the help of the Lord and under the protection of Mary most holy I want to spend: Sunday excellently; Monday excellently; Tuesday etc."

Every morning his first act was to look up this notebook which he read through several times a day and each time he renewed his promise. If he did happen to make some minor slip he punished himself with some sort of penance such as to miss out on some game, to abstain from something he really liked, to say a special prayer and the like.

This notebook was found by his companions after his death and they were very much edified by the holy efforts he employed to advance in virtue. He wanted to do all things excellently. Therefore when the signal was given to do something, he broke off his recreation or cut short his conversation and even put down his pen leaving a line unfinished to promptly go wherever duty was calling him. He often said that it was a good thing to finish off what he had in hand but he got little satisfaction out of doing it and he was often disturbed about it. He said he found the greater satisfaction in performing his duties as indicated by his superiors or by the bell."

Exactness in performing his duties did not prevent him from showing all those signs of courtesy which good manners and charity require. Therefore he was quick to write letters for those who asked him; to clean the clothes of others; to help carry water; to make beds; to sweep; to serve at table; to give up a game, to teach catechism or singing; to explain difficulties in various school subjects to weaker students—these were all things which he did most willingly as the occasion arose.

### *Chapter 8 – His devotion to the Virgin Mary*

It must be said that devotion to the Blessed Virgin is the support of every faithful Christian. This is especially true for young people. This is how the Holy Spirit speaks of her: “*Si quis est parvulus, veniat ad me.*”<sup>79</sup> Magone was aware of this important truth, which was revealed to him in a providential fashion. One day he received a holy picture of the Blessed Virgin at the bottom of which was written: “*Venite, filii, audite me, timorem Domini docebo vos*” meaning: “Come, children, listen to me and I will teach you the fear of the Lord.”<sup>80</sup> He began to consider this invitation seriously and wrote a letter to his Rector in which he stated that the Blessed Virgin had made her voice known to him and called upon him to be good and that she herself had taught him how to fear, love and serve God.

He began to perform certain practices in honour of her whom he invoked as his heavenly Mother, his divine teacher, his most loving shepherdess. Among the main ways in which he manifested his filial devotion was to go to Communion every Sunday for the soul in purgatory who was most devoted to Mary whilst on earth.

He most willingly forgave anyone who offended him, as an act of devotion in honour of Mary. Cold, heat, nuisances, tiredness, thirst, and similar inconveniences due to climate were for him so many ways he could utilise by joyfully offering them up to God through his heavenly and loving mother, Mary.

<sup>79</sup> If you are a child, come to me (Pr 9:4) (cf. no. 184, p. 697-698).

<sup>80</sup> Ps 34:12.

Before settling down to study, to writing, he took out from one of his books a holy picture of Mary on which was written: “*Virgo parens studiis semper adesto meis*, Virgin Mother, always help me in my studies.”

He recommended himself to her at the beginning of everything he did. He used to say that whenever he found any difficulties in his studies, he had recourse to his divine Teacher and she explained everything to him. One day a boy congratulated him for the good marks he got for one of his assignments. “You should not rejoice with me,” he replied, “but with Mary who helps me and brings to my mind many things of which I was ignorant before.”

To always have present before him some object that would remind him of Mary’s patronage in his ordinary occupations, he wrote, wherever he could: *Sedes sapientiae, ora pro me*: Mary, Seat of Wisdom: pray for me. This was written on all his books, on the covers of his exercise books, on his desk, on his seat and on any other surface that could be written on and you could read: *Sedes sapientiae, ora pro me*.

In May 1858 he decided to do everything possible to honour Mary. Throughout that month he practised mortification of the eyes, tongue and all the other senses. He wanted to deprive himself of part of his recreation, to fast, spend whole nights in prayer, but he was forbidden to do these things because they were not compatible with his age.

Towards the end of that month he presented himself to his director and said: “If you think it is a good idea, I would like to do something beautiful in honour of the great Mother of God. I know that St Aloysius Gonzaga was very pleasing to Mary because he consecrated to her the virtue of chastity<sup>81</sup>. I would like to make her this gift also and I would also like to take a vow to become a priest and be chaste forever.” The director told him he was too young to make such important vows. “Yet,” he broke in “I have a strong urging to give myself totally to Mary; and if I consecrate myself to her she will help me to keep that promise.” “Do this,” suggested his director “instead of taking a vow just make a simple promise to embrace the ecclesiastical state if,

<sup>81</sup> Cf. no. 184, p. 724.

at the end of your classical studies, it seems that there are evident signs calling you to do this. Instead of a vow of chastity, simply make a promise to the Lord that you will in the future, take every precaution not to do anything or say anything, even jokingly, that would be contrary to this virtue. Every day call upon Mary with some special prayer to help you keep this promise.”

He was happy with this proposal and joyfully promised to do all he could to put it into practice.

*Chapter 9 – His concern and what he did to preserve the virtue of purity*

Besides the practices already mentioned he had received some suggestions to which he gave the greatest importance and which he used to call the fathers, guardians and even policemen of the virtue of purity. We have evidence of this in a reply given by him in a letter written by one of his companions towards the end of the above mentioned month of Mary. This letter had been written to Michael asking him to suggest some practices which would help in the preservation of that queen of virtues, purity.

The friend passed the letter on to me and I quote as follows: “To give you a complete answer I would have liked to speak with you personally rather than write to you. I will merely pass on the advice given to me by my director on how to preserve the most precious of all virtues. One day he gave me a little note on which was written: “Read and put into practice.” I opened it and this is what it said: “*Five recommendations that St. Philip Neri gave to young people to help them preserve the virtue of purity*: Flee bad companions. Do not pamper the body. Flee idleness. Frequent prayer. Go to the sacraments often, especially confession.” He often enlarged upon these five hints and I will explain them as I heard them from his lips. He said to me:

“1. Place yourself with total confidence under the protection of Mary. Confide in Her, trust in Her. It has never been the case in the whole world that someone had recourse to Her and was not satisfied. She will be your defence against the assaults aimed at your soul by the devil.

2. When you realise you are being tempted, make yourself busy immediately. Idleness and modesty cannot coexist. Therefore, by combating idleness, you will at the same time combat temptations against this virtue.

3. Often kiss a medal, or the crucifix, make the Sign of the Cross with keen faith saying: *Jesus, Mary and Joseph, help me to save my soul.* These are the three names which are most terrible and formidable to the devil.

4. If the temptation continues, turn to Mary with the prayer proposed by Holy Mother the Church: *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners.*

5. Besides not pampering the body, and custody of the senses, especially the eyes, be on your guard against bad literature. Even if you feel there is no danger for you in reading these things, put such literature down immediately. On the contrary, read good books and, amongst these, prefer those that speak of the glories of Mary and the Blessed Sacrament.

6. Flee from bad companions, instead choose good companions, namely those who are praised by your superiors for their good conduct. Speak willingly with these, play with them but especially try to imitate them in their carrying out of their duties and especially the practices of piety.

7. Go to Confession and Communion as often as your confessor suggests and, if what you have to do allows it, visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament often.”

These were the seven counsels that Magone in his letter calls “the seven policemen given to us by Mary to act as guardians of the holy virtue of purity.” To have some particular inspiration for each day, he practised one of these counsels, adding something in honour of Mary. Thus his first counsel was joined to a consideration of the first joy which Mary enjoyed in heaven and this was for each Sunday. The second of Mary’s joys was for Monday and so on<sup>82</sup>. Throughout the following week, Michael meditated upon the Sorrows of Mary so that the advice indicated in the 1st item was done on Sunday in honour of the 1st sorrow of Mary, and so on for the rest<sup>83</sup>.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. “The Seven Joys of Mary in Heaven” (no. 184, pp. 751-752).

<sup>83</sup> Cf. “The Seven Sorrows of Mary” (no. 184, pp. 749-751).

Perhaps some will say these sort of practices are trivial. But it has been my experience that the splendour of virtue can be obscured and even lost by the slightest whiff of temptation, so if anything, no matter how small, can help to preserve virtue, then it is to be treasured. For this reason I most heartily recommend simple things that do not frighten or tire people, especially young people. Fasts, long prayer and similar harsh practices are either put aside or endured with reluctance and difficulty. Let us keep to easy things but let us persevere in them. This was the path that led Michael to an outstanding degree of holiness.

#### *Chapter 10 – Exquisite charity shown to others*

In addition to his lively faith, his fervour and his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Michael was outstanding for the charity he showed to others. He knew that the exercise of this virtue was the most efficacious means to grow in the love of God. He practised this virtue on every occasion offered him, even if it be a very minor one. He enjoyed recreation to such a degree that he did not know whether he was in heaven or on earth. But if he happened to notice that a companion wanted to play the game he was involved in, he immediately gave way and got involved in something else. More than once I saw him withdraw from a ball game or some other game to make place for someone else; or get down off his stilts, give them to someone else and help him get balanced on them to make the game more enjoyable and to see that his friend did not have a fall.

If he saw a friend in trouble, he went up to him immediately to see if he could help in any way, or to tell him a story to make him forget his hurt or worries. If he came to know the reason for the trouble, he tried to give some counsel or advice or to mediate for him with a Superior or to find someone who could help.

Whenever he could he explained a problem to a companion, got him a drink, made his bed—anything to help. He found great delight in all this. One winter's day he noticed a boy standing out of recreation because he had chilblains—he also discovered he could not carry out his duties for the same



reason. Michael wrote out his assignment for him; he helped him to dress, made his bed and even gave him his own gloves to keep out the cold. What more could a lad of his age do? Because of his fiery nature, he easily lost his temper but it was enough to say to him: "Magone, what are you doing? Is this the way a Christian gets even?" This was enough to cool him down, even to humiliate him so he often went to apologise to his companion immediately, beg pardon for any scandal he may have given.

But if in his first months at the Oratory he had to be corrected quite often for his outbursts of bad temper, soon, with his goodwill, he conquered himself and even became a peacemaker among his own companions. However, if some argument arose he put himself, small as he was, between the litigants and even used force to calm them down. "We are rational beings," he used to say "and must act as such and not solve our arguments by means of brute force." At other times he used to comment: "If the Lord were to use force every time we offended Him, we could all be exterminated very soon. Therefore, if Almighty God, when offended, uses mercy in pardoning the offender, why do we miserable creatures not use our reason and tolerate displeasures and even insults without seeking revenge?" He said to others: "We are all sons of God, therefore we are all brothers; he who takes revenge on his companion ceases to be a son of God, and by his outburst of temper becomes a brother of Satan."

He willingly taught catechism; he willingly made himself available to serve the sick and earnestly asked to spend the night with them if their sickness was serious. A friend, moved by the many kindnesses he had done for him, said to him: "What can I do for you, dear Magone, to repay you for all the trouble I am giving you?" "Nothing else but a single offering of your sickness in penance for my sins" was the reply.

One of his friends was always in trouble. He was handed over to Michael to see what could be done to bring him to his senses. Michael set to work on him. He started by getting to know him and befriending him. He played with him in recreation; he gave him little presents; he passed on to him little notes on which were written pieces of advice and so got to know him very closely but did not speak about religion with him. Seizing the opportunity of the feast of St Michael, Magone approached him:

“In three days time we have the feast of St Michael; I want you to give me a present.”

“Of course, but I am sorry you did not speak about it before as you have caught me unprepared.”

“I wanted to speak to you about it because I want to choose the gift.”

“Yes—go ahead. I am ready to do what I can to please you.”

“Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“If it costs you quite a bit, will you still do it?”

“Yes, I promise you I will do it just the same.”

“I want you on the feast of St Michael to give me the present of the gift of a good Confession and to prepare yourself for a fervent Holy Communion.”

Considering the situation and because of his promises his companion did not dare to refuse this request; he surrendered and the three days previous to the feast he was occupied in practices of piety. Magone used all his best efforts to prepare his friend for this spiritual feast, and on the day itself both went to Confession and Communion to the satisfaction of the Superiors and to the edification of their companions.

Michael spent a happy day with his friend and, as evening came, he said to him: “We have had a beautiful feast, I’m very happy and you have really given me great pleasure. Now tell me: Aren’t you pleased with what we’ve done?”

“Yes, I am extremely pleased and, more so, because you have prepared me for it. I thank you for the invitation you gave me. Now if you have some good advice for me, I would welcome it.”

“For sometime now, my friend, your conduct has left much to be required. Your way of living has displeased your Superiors, hurt your parents, cheated yourself, deprived you of peace of heart and then ... one day you will have to give an account to God for all the time you have wasted. So, from now on you must flee from idleness, be as happy as you like provided you do not neglect your duties.”

The companion he had half converted was now fully converted. He became Michael's close friend, began to imitate him in carrying out his duties fully and eventually by his diligence and morality he became the consolation of all who had anything to do with him.

I thought I would give this episode some importance and develop it in a detailed fashion because it emphasises Michael's character and also because I would like to report in full what his companion himself told me.

### *Chapter 11 – Facts and sayings from Magone*

What we have recounted so far deals with easy and simple things that anyone could imitate. Now I want to relate certain facts and sayings that are to be admired because they are agreeable and pleasing but not necessarily easy to follow. However they are useful to underline the goodness of heart and religious courage of this young lad. Here are some among many which I have witnessed.

One day he was talking with his companions when some of them introduced topics that a young well-educated Christian should avoid. Magone only listened to a few words—he then put his fingers in his mouth and gave such a loud whistle that it almost split open the brains of the bystanders. “What are you doing?” said one of the lads, “Are you mad?” Magone said nothing and gave a whistle even louder than the first. “Where are your good manners?” yelled another. “Is that the way to act?” Magone then replied: “It's you who are mad, talking like that, so why can't I be mad too, to stop such talk? If you want to break the rules of good manners by introducing talk that is not fitting for a Christian, why can't I do the same to stop it.” Those words, one of his companions assured me, were a wonderful sermon to them all. “We looked at each other; no-one dared to carry on with the talk which consisted of a lot of grumbling. From then on every time we noticed Michael in our company we chose our words well for fear we would have our heads split open by his whistle!”

Accompanying his Superior one day in Turin they came upon a hooligan taking the Holy Name of God in vain. Hearing those words Michael seemed

to go crazy; without thinking about the place or the danger, with two jumps he flew at the blasphemer and gave him two punches whilst saying: "Is this the way to treat the name of the Lord?" But the hooligan was taller than he was and, without thinking and urged on by the shouts of his companions and by the blood running freely from his nose, he flew at Magone angrily. There followed kicks, blows, punches that did not give either time to draw breath. Fortunately, the Superior ran to the scene and, putting himself between the two belligerents, managed with a great deal of difficulty to re-establish the peace to the satisfaction of both parties. When Michael was master of himself once again, he realised his lack of prudence in correcting that silly fellow like that. He repented of his action and gave an assurance that he would be more cautious in the future and limit himself to giving friendly advice.

On another occasion some lads were discussing the eternity of the pains of hell and one of them said facetiously: "I'll do my best not to go there, but if I do ... patience" Michael pretended he had not heard the remark but he quietly left the group, found a box of matches and then returned. Lighting a match he put it under the hand of the lad who made the remark. "Ouch!" was the startled cry. "That hurts, are you crazy?" "I am not crazy," Michael answered "but I was just trying to test your patience; considering that you reckon you could bear with patience the pains of Hell, you should not be unduly upset by a burning match, the pain of which only lasts for a minute." Everyone burst out laughing, but the burnt companion had to admit: "Hell must be an awful place to go to."

Other companions wanted him, one morning, to go with them to make their confessions to a confessor who would not know them, and they offered a hundred excuses for doing so. He refused, saying that he did not want to go anywhere without the Superior's permission. He also added he was not a bandit, afraid of being recognised by the police, feeling he had to go to places and persons unknown for fear of being recognised. "I have my own confessor and I confess all my sins to him without fear, big or small. The mania for going to confession elsewhere must be due to the fact that you do not love your confessor or you have very serious sins to confess. At any rate, it's wrong to leave the House without permission. If you really have a serious reason to

change your confessor you should make use of the extraordinary confessor who comes along to hear the confessions of all the Oratory boys on feast days.”

For all the time he was with us he only went home for his holidays once. He would not go again although I advised him to and his mother and relatives were affectionately expecting him. He was often asked the reason for this but his only reply was a smile. Finally one day he gave the reason to someone he trusted. “I went once” he said “to spend some days of the holidays at home but, unless I am forced to do so, I will not do that again.”

“Why?” asked his friend.

“Because at home there are still the dangers that were there previously. The places, the amusements, the friends tempt me to live as I did previously and this I do not want to do.”

“You should go with good intentions, determined to put into practice all the pieces of advice our Superiors give us.”

“Good intentions are like a fog that disappears bit by bit as you live away from the Oratory; the advice helps for the first few days and then companions help you to forget all about it.”

“Then, according to you, no-one should go home for the holidays, not even to see one’s relatives.”

“No, according to me, only those who feel they are strong enough to resist temptations should go. I do not feel strong enough to do that. I strongly believe that if our companions could see inside themselves many would be discouraged from going home because they go with the wings of an angel and return with two horns on their heads like so many devils.”

From time to time Michael had a visit from an old friend whom he tried to win over to a life of virtue. This friend used to argue that this was not necessary since he knew a person who had not gone to church for a long time yet was doing very well, was thriving and prosperous looking. Michael took his friend by the arm and brought him over to a carter who was unloading building materials in the courtyard and said: “See that big mule? He is prosperous

looking, big and fat, yet he has never been to Confession and never goes to church. Would you like to become like this animal who has neither soul nor reason. His only concern is to work for his owner and then fertilise the fields after his death.” His friend was silent and never again offered such frivolous motives for not carrying out his religious duties.

I will pass over many other anecdotes; these are enough to make his goodness of heart better known as well as his great hatred for sin which often led him to excesses when, in his zeal, he tried to prevent an offence against God.

### *Chapter 12 – Holidays at Castelnuovo d’Asti – Virtues on that occasion*

Seeing that Michael was most unwilling to spend his holidays at home, it was decided, in order to give him some relaxation after the pressure of his studies, to bring him with me to Murialdo, a district of Castelnuovo d’Asti, where the boys from the House often went to enjoy the countryside, especially those who had no relatives or place to go where they could spend the autumn season<sup>84</sup>. Taking into consideration his good conduct I asked him and several others, by way of a reward, to accompany me on the trip. Whilst we were walking together I had a chance to talk with this young lad and to discover that he had reached a degree of virtue much greater than I had ever imagined. Leaving aside the beautiful and edifying conversations he had with me on this occasion, I will limit myself to revealing several incidents that serve to let you know how advanced in virtue he was, especially as regards the virtue of gratitude.

Along the road we were caught by a sudden downpour of rain and reached Chieri like a bunch of drowned rats. We took refuge in the home of Chev.

<sup>84</sup> In those days, Don Bosco celebrated, with the youngsters, the feast of the Madonna of the Rosary; the event is reported in one of papers of Turin: “Feast of the Holy Rosary. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of this month about sixty youngsters of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, led by their good director Don Bosco, went to a place called the Becchi in Castelnuovo d’Asti to celebrate the feast of the Holy Rosary. The solemnity was edifying beyond measure as one saw those devout youngsters approaching the holy table together with many people who had come from the nearby places. The music for the solemn mass and for the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, played by the youngsters themselves, succeeded in being both devout and splendid.” (*L’Armonia*, 8 October 1858, p.4).

Marco Gonella<sup>85</sup>, a benefactor, who welcomed this little band from the Oratory every time they went to or returned from Castelnovo d'Asti. He dried our clothes and then prepared a feast which was worthy of a Lord on his part and met a corresponding appetite on the boys' part.

After a couple of hours rest we set out once more. For some time Michael lagged behind the group and one of his friends, thinking that perhaps he was tired, fell back with him. He found him quietly speaking to himself.

"Are you tired, Micky?" his friend asked. "Are your feet feeling the effects of this long walk?"

"Oh, no! I am not at all tired; I could walk to Milan."

"What were you saying to yourself just now as I came along?"

"I was saying the Rosary for the intentions of that kind gentleman who was so kind to us; I cannot repay him in any other way and so I am asking the Lord and the Blessed Virgin for many graces for his family that he might be repaid a hundredfold for all he did for us."

It is well here to mention in passing that Michael had the same grateful thought for even the smallest favour, but towards his benefactors he was most sensitive. I would be tiring the readers if I transcribed the many letters and notes he wrote me to express his gratitude for having accepted him into this House. I just say that he went nearly every day to make a visit to Jesus in the Blessed sacrament and that each morning he would say three 'Our Fathers, 'Hail Marys and 'Glory bes for anyone who had been his benefactor.

Not infrequently he took my hand affectionately and looking at me, eyes filled with tears, he would say: I don't know how to express my gratitude for the great charity you showed me by accepting me into the Oratory. I will try to repay you with my good behaviour and by praying to the Lord every day to bless you and your efforts." He often mentioned his teachers, those who had gained him admission into the Oratory or who had helped him in any way; he always spoke of them with respect and was never ashamed to mention his poverty on the one hand and his gratitude on the other. "I regret" he was

<sup>85</sup> Marco Gonella (1822-1886), banker.

often heard to say, “that I have not got the means of showing my gratitude as I should but I know full well what I owe to so many people and as long as I live I will continue to pray to the Lord that He will reward them for all they have done.”

He also expressed his gratitude when the parish priest of Castelnuovo invited our boys to his house for a meal<sup>86</sup>. That evening he said to me: “If you think it is a good idea, I would like to go to Communion tomorrow for the intentions of the parish priest who entertained us today”. I not only approved of the gesture but made it a point to recommend the same thing to all the boys, since we must always be grateful to our benefactors.

Whilst we were at Murialdo I noted another fine act of virtue which bears relating. One day our boys went for a walk in the nearby woods. Some went looking for mushrooms, whilst others searched for chestnuts and other nuts; others heaped up leaves or other things - in short, they were really enjoying themselves. Whilst they were busy Michael quietly slipped away and went back to the house. One lad saw him, however, and fearing that he might not be well, followed him. Michael, convinced that no-one had seen him, reached the house but, without saying a word to anyone, he went straight to the church<sup>87</sup>. The boy who followed him found him kneeling before the altar of the Blessed Sacrament wrapt in fervent prayer.

Questioned later why he had disappeared so suddenly from the company of the rest to pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, he replied with all simplicity: “I greatly fear that I might fall into sin again and so I go to beseech the dear Lord in the Blessed Sacrament that He will give me the help and the strength to persevere in His grace.”

Another striking incident occurred at the same time. One evening all the boys had gone to bed when I heard someone sighing and sobbing. I went

<sup>86</sup> The priest was Fr Antonio Pietro Michele Cinzano (1804-1870), parish priest of Castelnuovo from 1834. Every year he took in Don Bosco's boys after the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary (cf. Luigi DEAMBROGIO, *Le passeggiate autunnali di don Bosco per i colli monferrini*. Castelnuovo Don Bosco, Istituto Salesiano Bernardi Semeria 1975, pp. 112-113; 121-123).

<sup>87</sup> At the ground floor of the house of Joseph Bosco, the brother of the saint, there is a chapel dedicated to the Madonna of the Rosary, inaugurated on October 8, 1848.



quietly up to the window and I saw Michael in a corner of the threshing floor, looking up at the moon and crying his heart out. “What’s wrong, Michael?” I asked, “Aren’t you feeling well?”

He thought he was alone and that no-one could see him and he did not know what to say. I repeated my question, he replied with these exact words: “As I admire the moon I cannot help crying because it has for so many centuries regularly lit up the night without once disobeying the orders of its Creator. I, instead, who am so young and a rational creature who should have been faithful to the laws of God, have disobeyed Him so many times and have offended Him in a thousand ways.”

Having said this, Michael broke down once more. I comforted him with a few words, calmed him down and saw him back to sleep.

It is certainly a matter for admiration that a boy scarcely fourteen years old had already attained such wisdom and has such beautiful thoughts. But this is a fact and I could bring forward many other episodes that would show how young Michael was capable of reflections much superior to his age, especially in recognising in everything the hand of God and the obligation all creatures have of obeying their Creator.

### *Chapter 13 – His preparation for death*

After the holidays spent at Castelnuovo, Michael lived for only about three months longer. He was rather small but healthy and well-built. He was quite intelligent and had no trouble in mastering anything he took up. He had a great love for study and was making better than average progress. As regards his piety, he had reached a standard where I could honestly say that I would not know what to add or subtract in order to present him as a model for young people. He was lively by nature but he was pious, good, devoted and highly appreciative of the little acts of religion. He performed them joyfully, naturally and without scruples - because of his piety, his love for study and his affability he was loved and esteemed by all whilst, at the same time, because of his liveliness and gentle manners, he was the idol of the playground.

There is no doubt that it was our earnest wish that this model of Christian living would be spared to us until his ripe old age so that, whether he felt his calling was to be a priest or a layman, he would have done honour to his country and his faith. But God had decreed otherwise and wished to take this beautiful flower from the garden of the Church militant unto Himself and transplant it in the Church triumphant in Paradise. Michael, too, without realising it was preparing for his approaching death with an even better and more perfect way of life.

He made the novena for the feast of the Immaculate Conception with particular fervour. I want to put before you those things he proposed to himself for these days and they are as follows: "I, Michael Magone wish to make this Novena well and I promise: 1. To detach my heart from all earthly things so as to give it completely to Mary. 2. To make a general Confession in order to ensure a peaceful conscience at the hour of my death. 3. To skip breakfast every morning as a penance for my sins and to recite the Seven Joys of Mary to merit her assistance at the last hours of my life. 4. To go to Communion every day provided my confessor advises it. 5. To tell my companions an anecdote in honour of Mary each day. 6. To place this sheet at the feet of Our Lady's statue and, with this act, to consecrate myself completely to Her and, for the future, I wish to be entirely hers until the very last moments of my life."

All these resolutions were approved except the General Confession which he had made only a short time before. Instead of skipping his breakfast he was advised to say a prayer each day for the souls in Purgatory.

Magone's behaviour certainly gave rise to much amazement in those nine days of novena for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception - he showed extraordinary happiness, but this was always accompanied by efforts to tell good little stories to the others, or invite others to do the same. He gathered whichever friends he could to go and pray before the Blessed sacrament or the statue of Our Lady. During the novena he gave up sweets, fruits, other snacks. He gave away to some of the less devout boys any little books, holy pictures, medals, crucifixes or other items he had been given. He did this either to

reward them for their good behaviour during the novena or to encourage them to take part in the practices of piety he suggested to them.

With similar fervour and recollection he celebrated the novena and feast of Christmas. “I really want to make every effort to make this novena well,” he said as he began it “so that the Baby Jesus will come and be born in my soul with an abundance of His graces.”

On the eve of the last day of the year (1858), the Superior of the House urged all the boys to thank the Lord for all the favours granted to them over the past year. He encouraged them to promise strongly that they would pass the New Year in God’s grace because, he added, this may be the last one for one of you<sup>88</sup>. While saying this his hand was resting on the head of the lad nearest him and that was Magone. “I understand” Michael said with an air of surprise, “that it is I who should get things packed up to depart for eternity.” His words were greeted with laughter, but his companions remembered these words and Michael himself often recalled them. Notwithstanding this thought he did not lose his joviality and air of happiness and continued to perform his duties faithfully and well.

The last day of his life was really close at hand and God wanted to give him an even clearer warning of it. On Sunday, January 16, the members of the Sodality of the Blessed Sacrament to which Michael himself belonged got together for their usual Sunday meeting<sup>89</sup>. After the opening prayers and the usual reading and having discussed those matters that seemed most opportune,

<sup>88</sup> John Bonetti wrote this down in his diary (December 31 1858); Don Bosco had left some reminders for the new year: “For the clerics, exemplary behaviour, always reminding themselves they are the *lumen Christi*. For the students, go to the Eucharist as often as possible. For the workers ... Go regularly to the sacraments on Sundays. For everyone in general, good confessions: open your heart to the confessor, because if the devil can do what he can to make one keep silent in confession then the boy will be in an even worse state. So in all your confessions there needs to be sorrow, and a firm resolution. One thing we have, and we don’t realise how effective it is, is recourse to the Virgin Mary. Say and become familiar with those beautiful words of the Angel Gabriel: *Ave Maria*” (ASC A0040601 *Memoria di alcuni fatti 1858-1861*, ms by Giovanni Bonetti, p. 35).

<sup>89</sup> In a note in the original text he includes some of the main articles of the Sodality; you can read these in no. 208, pp. 799-800.

one of the members took the little box which contained little slips of paper on which were written maxims to be practised over the following week. This did the rounds and each boy picked one out at random. Michael plucked his out only to read: *At the judgement seat of God you will be on your own.* He read it and then, as if caught unaware, he said aloud to his companions, "I am sure that this is a message sent me by the Lord to warn me to hold myself in readiness." After this he went to his Superior and said with a little anxiety that he considered it as a warning from the Lord who was soon to summon him into His presence. His Superior urged him to keep himself in readiness not because of what was written on the slip of paper, but because of the advice that Jesus clearly gives in the Gospel where he urges us to be always ready.

"Then tell me" insisted Michael, "how much longer I have to live?"

"You will live as long as God wants you to."

"But will I live until the end of this year?" he begged again with a trembling voice.

"Courage, Michael, calm down. Our life is in the hands of God who is a good Father. He knows how long to preserve us. Besides, it is not necessary to know the hour of our death to go to heaven. It is sufficient to prepare for it with good works."

Then he grew sad: "If you don't want to tell, it is a sign that my end is near."

"That is not necessarily so but, even if it were, I am sure you would not be afraid of going to pay a visit to the Blessed Virgin in heaven."

"That's true! That's true." He became his old cheerful self and ran out to take part in the recreation.

He was as happy as ever on Monday, Tuesday and the morning of Wednesday. His health was good and he was punctual in all his duties. Only on the afternoon of Wednesday did he stand on the balcony watching the

games and taking no part. This was most unusual and surely a sign that he was not feeling well.

*Chapter 14 – His illness and accompanying circumstances*

On the evening of that day (Wednesday, January 19, 1859) he was asked what was the matter with him and he answered that there was nothing. He had an upset stomach which was nothing unusual for him. He was given some medicine and went to bed. He passed the night peacefully. He got up the following morning at the usual time with his companions, went to church and received Holy Communion for the dying which was his usual custom every Thursday. Later he went into the playground but he could take no part because he was feeling very tired and experienced difficulty in breathing. He was given some more medicine, the doctor was called but, finding nothing serious, advised him to keep on taking the same remedy. His mother was in Turin at this time and was told of his sickness. She came to see him and told us that he had suffered similar illnesses ever since he was quite young and the remedies we were giving him were the same as she had given.

He wanted to get up on the Friday to go to Holy Communion in honour of the Passion of Christ which he used to do every Friday to obtain the grace of a happy death. He was not allowed to do this as he seemed to have got worse. He had had problems with worms, so he was given some more medicine and something special to relieve his breathing. Up to this time, there were no signs that he was seriously ill. At about two in the afternoon matters suddenly changed for the worse. He was experiencing great difficulty in breathing and was beginning to cough and spit up blood. Asked how he felt, he replied that he was still feeling a certain heaviness in his stomach. However, I noticed that he was by now a very sick boy so the doctor was called for once more, to dispel doubt and make sure we were doing the right thing. At that moment his mother, in a true Christian spirit, asked him “Michael, while waiting for the doctor would it not be best to go to Confession?” “Yes, mum, yes! I only went to Confession yesterday and went to Holy Communion but if the sickness is serious I would like to go to Confession once again.”

He prepared himself for a few minutes and made his Confession. After that he calmly and smilingly addressed himself to me and his mother: “Who knows but this Confession will be for the Exercise for a Happy Death for the real thing!”

“What do you think? Would you like to get better or go to heaven?”

“The Lord knows what is best for me; I only want to do what pleases him.”

“If the Lord gave you the choice of getting better or going to heaven, what would you choose?”

“Who would be mad enough not to choose heaven?”

“So you would like to go there?”

“For sure I would! I would like to go there with all my heart. That’s what I have been asking the Lord for now for some time.”

“When would you like to go?”

“Right away if that is according to the Lord’s pleasure.”

“Right, let us say together: In everything, whether in life or in death, may the adorable will of God be done!”

Just at that moment the doctor arrived. He found that the sick boy’s condition was serious. “The case is very serious,” he confided. “The lad has a haemorrhage in the stomach, and I am doubtful whether we can stop it.” He did what he could. Blood letting, blistering, medicines—anything possible was done to stop the internal bleeding that at times hindered his breathing. All in vain. At nine o’clock that night (Friday, January 21) Michael asked to go to Communion once more before his death, “More so,” he said “because I couldn’t go this morning.” He was very anxious to receive Communion which he had been receiving now for some time with so much fervour. Before he received it he said to me and those around his bed: “I recommend myself to the prayers of my companions; may they pray that the sacramental Christ be my Viaticum, my companion for eternity.” He received the sacred Host, then made his thanksgiving helped by someone beside his bed.

After a quarter of an hour he stopped repeating the prayers that were suggested to him and, since he did not say anything we thought he had suddenly passed away. But after a few minutes he opened his eyes and in a seemingly joking way, said: “On that slip of paper last Sunday there was a mistake! It said ‘*At the judgement seat of God you will be on your own.*’ That’s not true. I shall not be alone. The Blessed Virgin will be there to help me so I have nothing to fear—I am ready to go at any time. Our Lady wants to be by my side at the judgement seat of God.”

### *Chapter 15 – His last moments and a beautiful death*

It was ten o’clock and Michael’s condition worsened. It seemed that he would not last the night. Therefore it was arranged that Fr Zattini<sup>90</sup>, a cleric and the young nurse should spend half the night with him, then Fr Alasonatti, the prefect of the House<sup>91</sup>, with another cleric and nurse would be there for the rest of the night until daylight. I did not think there was any immediate danger so I said to the patient: “Michael get a bit of rest. I am going to my room for a few moments and then I will return.”

“No, please don’t abandon me,” Michael begged.

“I’m only going to say some of my breviary and then I’ll come back.”

“Then come back as soon as you can.”

I gave instructions that I was to be called at the first sign of a worsening condition because I loved that young lad very tenderly and I wanted to be at his side in his last moments. I was no sooner in my room than I was called back to the sick-bed because it seemed that Michael had entered upon his death agony.

<sup>90</sup> Agostino Zattini, priest from Brescia, professor of philosophy, political refugee taken in by Don Bosco at the Oratory at the end of 1857.

<sup>91</sup> “This virtuous priest after a life fully spent in the sacred ministry and in various works of charity, died in Lanzo after a long illness on October 8, 1865. We are now completing a biography which we hope will give pleasure to his friends and anyone who would like to read it.” (note in the original text).

This was so. He was slipping away quickly so the Holy Oils were administered by Fr Zattini. Michael was still fully conscious.

He answered the various prayers of the ceremony for the administration of this august sacrament. At every anointing he added some special prayers of his own. I remember his words at the anointing of his lips: “O my God, if only you had struck me dumb before I had used my tongue to offend you, how many fewer offences there would have been! My God, pardon the sins of my tongue—I repent of them with all my heart.” At the anointing of the hands he added: “How many times have I not punched my companions with these hands! Pardon me, O God, and help my companions to be better than I am.”

The Anointing over, he was asked whether he would us to call his mother who had gone to take rest in a nearby room, also considering his condition was not serious.

“No” he replied, “it is better not to call her. Poor Mum! She loves me so much that witnessing my death would deeply disturb her. Poor Mum! When I’m in heaven I’ll pray much for her.”

He was urged not to excite himself and to prepare himself for the papal blessing, with a plenary indulgence. During his life he had always held religious practices in high esteem to which indulgences were attached and did his best to utilise them. Hence he was delighted to receive the Papal Blessing. He took part in all the prayers but wanted to recite the *Confiteor* himself. He pronounced every word with the greatest fervour, devotion and lively faith and the bystanders were moved to tears.

He then seemed to drowse off and so we did not disturb him but he soon awoke. His pulse indicated that death was fast approaching but his face was calm. He smiled, and was as fully conscious as a man in perfect health. This was not because he did not feel any pain because his internal bleeding caused suffocation—he was panting and was generally exhausted. But Michael had often asked God to allow him to do all his Purgatory on earth so that he could go straight to heaven. It was this thought that enabled him to suffer with joy and that very pain which normally brings sadness and distress produced in



him nothing but joy and pleasure. Therefore through a special grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Michael not only seemed insensible to pain but showed that he felt only consolation in putting up with these very sufferings. It was not necessary to suggest any prayers to him because he himself, from time to time, was making moving spontaneous prayers. It was 10:45 when he called my name and said to me: "This is it. Help me."

"Take it easy," I replied "I shall not abandon you until you are safe with the Lord in heaven. But if you are really convinced you are about to leave this world, don't you want to say a last good-bye to your mother?"

"No, Father. I don't want to hurt her."

"Then, won't you give me a message for her?"

"Yes, ask her to pardon me for all the suffering I caused her. Tell her that I am sorry. Tell her that I love her and that she should courageously continue her good work. Tell her that I die willingly and that I am leaving this world in the company of Jesus and Mary and that I will be waiting for her in heaven."

At these words, all those present began to sob. I controlled myself and, to fill those last moments with good thoughts, I kept on asking him questions.

"And what do you want to leave as a message for your companions?"

"Tell them to always make good confessions."

"Michael, tell me what thing of your past life gives you the greatest consolation at this moment?"

"What consoles me most at this moment is the little I have done to honour Mary. Yet, this is the greatest consolation. O Mary, O Mary, how happy are those at the hour of death who have been devoted to you!" "But," he continued "there is one thing that puzzles me. When my soul is separated from my body as I enter heaven, what must I do? To whom must I turn?"

"If Our Lady wants to accompany you, leave all that to Her. But before you leave for Paradise I would like to give you a commission."

“Go ahead, I’ll do all I can to obey you.”

“When you are in heaven and you see the Blessed Virgin, give her our humble and respectful good wishes, from me and from everyone in this House. Beg Her to give us all Her blessing, to take us all under Her powerful protection. Beg Her to make sure that none of us who are in this House at present or anyone that Providence will send us in the future will lose their soul.”

“I’ll do that willingly. Is there anything else?”

“Not for the present” I replied.

It seemed as if he wanted to have a sleep. He appeared quite calm although his weakening pulse signalled his imminent death. For this reason we began to recite the *Proficiscere*; towards the middle of the prayer he awoke as if from a deep sleep and, with a smile on his lips, said to me: “Within a short time now I will deliver your message. I’ll do my best to make a good job of it. Tell my companions I await them all in heaven.” He took the crucifix in his hands, kissed three times and then uttered his final words. “Jesus, Joseph and Mary, I place my soul in your hands.” He parted his lips as if to smile and gently fell back in death.

That blessed soul left this world to fly, as we ardently hope, to the bosom of God at 11 p.m. of January 21, 1859, barely fourteen years old. He suffered no agony. He was not agitated or in pain nor did he manifest any of the symptoms that naturally accompany the terrible separation of the soul from the body. I hardly know how to describe his death except by calling it a sleep of joy that bore away that soul from the sorrows of life to the joys of eternity.

The bystanders were more moved than saddened. Fr Zattini could no longer control his emotions and exclaimed: “O Death, you are not a punishment for innocent souls! For these you are the great benefactor who opens the doors to joys that will last for ever. Oh, why cannot I be in your place, Michael? At this moment your soul has been judged and the Blessed Virgin has already conducted you to the enjoyment of the great glory of heaven. Dear Magone, may you live happily for all eternity. Pray for us—we will fulfil our duties as friends by offering fervent prayers to God for the eternal repose of your soul.”

*Chapter 16 – His funeral; final thoughts; conclusion*

At daybreak Michael's good mother came into the room to see her son. Her sorrow was great when she learned that he was dead! That Christian woman just stood there for a moment without saying a word, or giving a sigh, then broke forth in these words: "Great God, you are the Master of all things ... Dear Michael, you are dead ... I'll always weep for you as a son I have lost but I will thank God who allowed you to die here with every help possible. Such a death is precious in the eyes of the Lord. Rest with God in peace, pray for your mother that loved you so dearly on this earth and will love you even more now that I believe that you are with the just in heaven. As long as I live, I will continue to pray for your soul and hope one day to join you in the homeland of the saints." Having said these words, she broke down sobbing and went to the church to find comfort in prayer.

The loss of such a companion caused great sadness to all the boys in the House and to all who knew him. He was well known for his physical and moral qualities and was most esteemed for the rare virtues that adorned his life. It can be said that his companions passed the following day in praying for the repose of his soul. They found comfort only in saying the Rosary, the Office of the Dead, going to Confession and Communion. All mourned him as a friend yet all consoled themselves by saying: At this moment Michael is already with Dominic Savio in heaven."

The feelings of his companions and of his teacher Fr Francesia are summed up in the following lines he penned: "On that day after Michael's death I went into class. It was a Saturday. Michael's seat was unoccupied so I told the class that we had lost a student on earth but perhaps heaven had gained another citizen. I nearly broke down as I said this. The boys were appalled and in the general silence only one thing was said and that was: "*He is dead.*" All the class broke into sobs. All loved him and who could not but love a lad adorned with so many virtues? The great reputation he had acquired was only realised after his death. Pages written by him were vied for. One of my distinguished colleagues thought himself very fortunate to have a notebook that belonged

to Michael<sup>92</sup>, and to have his name on a piece cut off from an examination paper of the previous year.

For my part, because of the virtues practised by him with so much perfection, I did not hesitate to invoke him in all my needs and I must confess he never once let me down. Please accept my sincerest thanks, dear friend, and I beg of you to keep on interceding for your old teacher before the throne of God. Instil into my heart a spark of your great humility, Michael! Pray for all your companions that they may meet with you one day in heaven.” (*His teacher’s words*).

In order to give an external sign of the great affection we had for our departed friend, he was given as solemn burial as was compatible with our humble circumstances. With lighted candles, funeral hymns and the brass band, we accompanied the body to the grave where, praying for the repose of his soul, we said our last fond farewell with the hope that we would one day be companions in a better life than this.

A month later we celebrated the Month’s Mind. The celebrated orator, Fr Zattini, preached Michael’s eulogy in moving words. I regret that there is no room in this little booklet for it to be reported in full. However, I want to quote the final part as a conclusion to this biography.

After having reminded us of the principal virtues that enriched his soul, he invited his sorrowing and moved audience not to forget him. He asked them to remember him often, to comfort him with their prayers and to follow the wonderful example he had given them. Finally, he concluded this way: “These examples and these words in death our friend Michael Magone of Carmagnola places before us. Today he is no more, death has caused him to vacate his seat here in church where he often came to pray—that prayer that he found so beautiful and which brought him so much peace. He is no more and, with his departure, teaches us that every star sets here below, every treasure consumed, every soul reclaimed. Thirty days ago we committed his

<sup>92</sup> In the first ed. (1861) he gives the name of this person: Giovanni Turchi (1838-1909), one of the clerics who stayed at Valdocco after the government took over the seminary in Turin. He gained his doctorate, and stayed at the Oratory (1861) teaching, then similarly in various private and public institutions.

mortal remains to the earth. If I had been present I would have followed the usual custom of the people of God and would have plucked a handful of grass by the graveside and thrown it in to the coffin whilst repeating in sad tones the words of the Son of Judah: "They will flower like the grass of the fields", from their bones will arise other dear young people who will remind us of you, will repeat their example and will multiply their virtues!

Therefore, a final farewell, O sweet, dear, faithful companion of ours, our good, brave Michael! Goodbye! You, the hope of your wonderful mother who shed tears over you more of piety than that of nature and blood ... You, the beautiful hope of an adopted father who received you in the name of God, who called you to this beautiful and blessed sanctuary where you learned so well and so quickly the love of God and esteem for virtue ... You, the friend of those who followed along with you, respectful to your Superiors, docile to your teachers, kindly to all! You dreamed of the priesthood ... even there you would have been a master and example of heavenly wisdom ... You have left a void, a wound in our hearts! But you have gone from us or, better, death has stolen you from our esteem and affection ... has death anything to teach us? Yes, to the fervent, to the less fervent and the sinners; the negligent, the sleepy, the lazy, the weak, the tepid, the cold. We pray you to let us know whether you are in the land of the living, in the place of joy; let us hear that you are at the fountain-head, in the sea of grace and your musical voice now with the heavenly choirs so pleasing to the ears of God! Give us your zeal, your love, your charity ... help us to live good, chaste, devout, virtuous lives ... may we die happy, peaceful, calm deaths, trusting in divine mercies. We beg you that death may not touch us with its torments as it respected you. *Non tangat nos tormentum mortis!* Pray for us with those angelic youths from this House who preceded you into God's presence: Camillo Gavio, Gabriel Fascio, Aloysius Rua, Dominic Savio, John Massaglia. Pray with them above all for the most beloved head of this House. We will always remember you in our prayers, we will never forget you until we have been granted the joy of reaching the stars. O, blessed be God who formed you, nourished you, supported you and took you to Himself. Blessed be He who takes away life - blessed be he who surrenders it."

### 308. The Young Shepherd Boy from the Alps, or the Life of Young Francis Besucco from Argentera

Printed ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d'Argentera*. Edizione seconda<sup>93</sup>. Torino, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1878.

*Dear boys,*

Just as I was about to write the life of one of your companions, Francis Besucco died unexpectedly and I decided that his life was the one to write. I feel that as well as pleasing both yourselves and those from his district back at home, my effort will be useful to you; hence I have researched Francis' life and written it up in an orderly fashion in this small booklet.

Some of you might question whether what I have written really happened and what were my sources.

Briefly this is how I went about it. For the years that Francis spent at home<sup>94</sup>, I collected information from the parish priest, the school teacher, his parents and his friends. You could almost say that I have simply rewritten and rearranged what they sent me. For the time he spent with us it was simply a matter of collecting the information from many witnesses; these testimonies were written and signed by the witnesses themselves.

It is true that some of the facts recorded will appear far-fetched, and that is one reason why I have been very careful in writing them down. If the facts were unimportant there would be no need to publish them. When you note this boy speaking with a knowledge normally superior to one of his age, you must remember that he showed great diligence in learning, that he was blessed with a good memory and that he was favoured by God in a special way. All

<sup>93</sup> This second edition is considered the definitive one (cf. Alberto CAVIGLIA, *Un documento inesplorato. La Vita di Besucco Francesco scritta da Don Bosco e il suo contenuto spirituale*, in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di don Bosco*. Vol. VI. Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale 1965, pp. 7-8). We take the text and notes from: Giovanni BOSCO, *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d'Argentera*, in ID., *Vite di giovani...*, pp. 191-231.

<sup>94</sup> Francis Besucco's home town is the alpine village of Argentera (1684 m. above sea level), in the province of Cuneo, 6 km from the border with France. In 1860 its population was 299 people.

of these facts contributed in no small degree to advance him well ahead of his years.

You will also have to take something into account about myself; possibly I have been over indulgent in writing about things which happened between the two of us; for this I ask your forbearance. Please look upon me as a father who is speaking about a son whom he loves tenderly; a father who gives his time to the one he loves and who speaks to his dear sons; he opens his heart to them to please them and to instruct them in the practice of virtue which Besucco was a model of. Read his life then, my dear boys, and if, as you read, you feel yourself moved to turn away from something wrong or to practice some virtue, render thanks to God the giver of all good things.

May the Lord bless us all and preserve us in His holy grace here on earth so that we can one day bless him forever in Heaven ...<sup>95</sup>

#### *Chapter 15 – Events and the trip to Turin*

Early next morning he said goodbye to his dear mother, his brothers and his sisters; they were crying, but although he felt the parting, he remained quite calm. He encouraged them all to have perfect resignation to the will of God. But when he recommended himself to their prayers so that he would always follow the voice of God who was calling him to His service, he burst into tears. His parish priest bade him farewell with these final words: “Go, my dear Francis, God who is taking you away from us is calling you to the Oratory where you will be able to sanctify your soul by emulating the virtues which opened Paradise to Dominic Savio and Michael Magone. During your last months with us you obtained your desire to go to the Oratory of St Francis of Sales from your reading of their lives and holy deaths.”<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> We only include the second part of Francis Besucco’s life here, the part written by Don Bosco. We are leaving out the first fourteen chapters since they are copied from a letter from the parish priest (ASC A2280701 *Vita del pio giovanetto Besucco Francesco* [gennaio 1864], ms. by Francesco Pepino, with original notes by Don Bosco, 22 pp.).

<sup>96</sup> Francis’ godfather was the parish priest of Argentera, Fr Francesco Pepino (1817-1899).

His father accompanied Francis to Turin; he took a small trunk with him: they left on August 1, 1863. As they left Argentera behind, his father asked Francis whether he was sorry to leave his home, his family and above all his mother. Francis' reply was always the same: "I am sure that I am doing God's will, and the further I get from home, the greater is my happiness." After answering, he continued with his prayers and his father attested that the journey from Argentera to Turin was for Francis almost one continuous prayer.

They reached Cuneo at about four in the morning of August 2. As they passed the Bishop's palace Francis asked: "Whose is that beautiful house?" "The Bishop's" came the reply. Francis signalled to his father that he wanted to stop for a moment. His father went on a little; when he turned around he saw Francis kneeling in front of the Bishop's gate. "What are you doing now?", he asked him. "I am praying to God for His Lordship that he also might help me to get enrolled in the Oratory at Turin and that in due time he might number me amongst his clerics and hence do something useful for me and for others."

When they arrived in Turin, his father pointed out the wonderful sights of the Capital. His father observed the symmetrical streets, the large squares, the tall majestic porticoes and the well-decorated arcades; he admired the height and the elegance of the buildings; he thought that he was in another world. "What do you think of it, Francis?" he asked the boy, full of wonder. "Doesn't it seem to you that we are already in Heaven?" Francis smiled and answered: "All these things mean little to me. I won't be happy until I have been accepted at the Oratory to which I have been sent."

Finally they reached the longed-for place and full of joy he exclaimed: "Now we are here." Then he said a short prayer to thank God and Our Lady for the successful journey they had made and for granting his wishes.

His father was moved to tears when leaving him, but Francis comforted him saying: "Don't worry about me, the Lord won't fail us; I shall pray to Him every day for all our family." Further moved his father asked him: "Do you need anything?" "Yes, dear dad, thank my Godfather for the care that he has taken of me; assure him that I shall never forget him and by my concentration



on study and my good conduct I shall make him quite pleased. Tell all those at home that I am very happy and that I have found my paradise.”

*Chapter 16 – Lifestyle at the Oratory – First discussion*

What I have written about Francis Besucco so far forms the first part of his life, I obtained my information from those who knew him and those who lived with him in his home environment. I am now going to write about the second part of his life; but I shall recount things I heard myself, saw with my own eyes or things I was told by the hundreds of boys who were his companions during the time he spent with us. I have been particularly helped by a long and detailed account prepared by Father Ruffino, teacher and director of classes at the House<sup>97</sup>. He had the time and the opportunity to witness and note down the many acts of virtue practised by Besucco.

For a long time Francis was very eager to come to this Oratory but when he actually arrived he was quite bewildered. More than 700 boys soon became his friends and companions in recreation, at table, in the dormitory, in church, in school and in the study-hall. It seemed impossible to him that so many boys could live together in the same house without turning everything upside down. He wanted to ask questions of them all, he wanted to know the reason and explanation for everything. Every bit of advice given by the Superiors and every inscription on the walls became for him the subject of reading, meditation and deep reflection.

It was the beginning of August 1863, and I had never seen him before. All I knew of him was what Archpriest Pepino had told me by letter. One day I was out with the boys at recreation when I saw a boy dressed like the mountain people; he was of medium build, a freckle-faced country boy. He stood there, eyes wide-open, watching the others play. When his eyes met mine, he smiled respectfully and came over to me.

“Who are you?” I asked him, smiling.

“I am Francis Besucco from Argentera.”

<sup>97</sup> Domenico Ruffino (1840-1865), ordained priest on May 30 that year.

“How old are you?”

“I’ll soon be fourteen.”

“Have you come to us to study, or to learn a trade?”

“I’m keen to study.”

“How far have you gone in school?”

“I finished elementary school back home.”

“Why do you want to continue going to school rather than learn a trade?”

“My greatest wish is to be a priest.”

“Whoever advised you in this?”

“I have always wanted it, and I have always prayed to the Lord for help to realise my aim.”

“Have you ever asked anyone for advice?”

“Yes, I spoke about it many times with my Godfather; yes, with my Godfather ...” He became emotional as he said this, and tears welled up in his eyes.

“Who is your Godfather?”

“My Godfather is the Parish priest, the Archpriest at Argentera. He is so good to me. He taught me my catechism, he taught me school subjects, he clothed me, he kept me. He is such a good man; after teaching me for two years he recommended me to you so that you would accept me at the Oratory.”

He began to cry again. His recognition of the benefits he had received and his affection for his benefactor gave me a good idea of his character and good-heartedness. Then I remembered the recommendations of his parish priest and of Lieutenant Eysautier<sup>98</sup> and I thought to myself: This boy, with proper education, will become a very good boy. Because experience shows that gratitude in young people is a good pointer to a successful future: on

<sup>98</sup> Giovanni Stefano Eysautier, originally from Argentera, friend of Fr Pepino’s, was a lieutenant in the King’s personal bodyguard.

the other hand those who easily forget the favours they have received and the attention given to them stay insensitive to advice and to religious training; they are therefore difficult to educate and their results are uncertain. So I said to Francis: "I am very pleased that you like your Godfather so much, but I don't want you to be worried. Love him in the Lord, pray for him, and, if you want to really please him, try to conduct yourself in such a manner that I can send him good reports about you; or, if he comes to Turin, he will be able to appreciate your progress and conduct. Meanwhile go and play with your companions." He wiped away his tears, smiled affectionately at me and then went to take part in the games with his companions.

### *Chapter 17 – Happiness*

In his humility Francis looked upon his companions as more virtuous than himself and he rated himself poorly when comparing his conduct with theirs. A few days later he again approached me with a rather perturbed look on his face.

"What's the matter, my dear Besucco?" I asked him.

"Here I am with so many real good companions; I'd like to be as good as they are but I don't know how to go about it. I need your help."

"I'll help you in every way I can. If you want to be good, practise three things only and all will go well."

"What are these three things?"

"They are: Cheerfulness, Study, Piety. This is the grand programme. Following it you will be able to live happily and do a lot of good for your soul."

"Cheerfulness ... cheerfulness—I am already too cheerful. If being cheerful is enough for me to be good, I'll go and play from morning to night. Will that be all right?"

"Not from morning to night, but only during the hours of recreation."

He took my advice too literally; convinced that he was doing something pleasing to God by playing, he became very impatient waiting for play time. He was not very good at some of the games, and often knocked into things or fell over. He wanted to walk on stilts, and had a tumble, he wanted to exercise on the parallel bars and fell head over heels. At bocce he either hit others on the legs with the ball or he spoilt the game for others. To sum up, his games always ended up by his falling over or some such mishap. One day a worried Francis limped up to me.

“What is it, Besucco?” I asked him.

“I’m bruised all over.” he answered.

“How did that happen?”

“I’m not very good at the games they play here; I’ve fallen on my head, I’ve hurt my legs and my arms; yesterday I collided with a companion and we both finished up with blood noses.”

“You poor boy! Use a bit of sense, take it easy.”

“But you told me that these recreations pleased God; and I want to do well in all the games with my companions.”

“You don’t quite understand; you must learn these games gradually and play them in accordance with your ability. They are meant to be a means of recreation and not of harm to the body.”

He then understood that recreation should be taken in moderation and directed to the relief of the spirit, otherwise it can cause bodily harm. He continued to be a willing participant in the games, but he was more careful. Also, if free time was somewhat prolonged, he would break off from a game and talk to a studious companion about the rules and discipline of the house or about some scholastic difficulty. Furthermore he learned the secret of doing some good to himself and to his companions in the recreations themselves, by giving some good advice or courteously warning others when an occasion presented itself, just as he used to do at home in a far more restricted setting. By spending part of his recreations in this way, in a short time Besucco became a model in study and in piety.

### Chapter 18 – Study and diligence

One day Besucco read these words on a placard in my room: *Every moment of time is a treasure.*

He was puzzled and he said: “I don’t understand what these words mean. How can we gain a treasure in every moment of time?”

“But it’s true. In every moment of time we can learn some scientific or religious fact, we can practice some virtue, we can make an act of the love of God; before the Lord there are so many treasures which will help us in time and in eternity.”

He made no further comment, but he wrote the words down on a piece of paper, and then said: “I understand.” He understood how precious time was and, recalling a recommendation of his parish priest, he added: “My Godfather also had told me that time is very precious and that we must occupy it well, beginning in our youth.”

After that he set about his various tasks with even greater application. To the glory of God I can say that, in all the time he spent in this house, there was never any need to encourage him or advise him in the carrying out of his duties.

It is a custom in this house to read out every Saturday marks the boys are given for their conduct and study during the previous week. Besucco’s marks were always the same, namely, excellent. When it was time to go to the study-hall, he went immediately without a moment’s hesitation. It was wonderful to see him so absorbed in his study and writing away like someone doing something really to his liking. He never left his place for any reason whatever; and no matter how long the study period lasted he never took his eyes off his text books or exercise books.

One of his greatest fears was that he would involuntarily break the rules; and, particularly in his first few days, he often asked if he could do this or that. For example, he once asked in all simplicity if he were allowed to write in the study hall, since he thought that they weren’t supposed to do anything else there except study. Another time he asked whether he was permitted to put his

books in order during study time. He asked the help of the Lord for proper use of his time. Once some companions saw him make the Sign of the Cross during study time; then raise his eyes to Heaven and pray. Afterwards they asked why he did that and he answered: "I often have difficulties in learning and so I ask the Lord to give me his help."

He had read in the life of Michael Magone that before study Michael always said: "*Maria, sedes sapientiae, ora pro me.* Mary, Seat of Wisdom, pray for me." He began to do this also. He wrote these words on his books, on his exercise books and on some strips of paper which he used as book-marks. Sometimes he wrote notes to his companions and either at the beginning or on a separate sheet of paper he wrote for them the same invocation to his heavenly mother as he used to call her. I read one of the letters he wrote to a companion. It stated: "You have asked me how I have been able to keep going in Second Year<sup>99</sup>, when had I been following the usual routine I would barely have made First Year. I answer frankly that this is a special blessing of the Lord, who has given me health and strength. Besides that I have discovered three secrets which I have used to great advantage. They are:

1. Never to waste a moment of time when it comes to duties in school or in the study hall.
2. On holidays or other days when recreation is lengthened I go to study after half an hour, or I discuss school matters with some companions who are further advanced in study than I am.
3. Every morning before going out of church I say an Our Father and a Hail Mary to St. Joseph. This is the means that has helped me advance in knowledge. From the time I began saying this Our Father I have always found it easier either to learn my lessons or to overcome the difficulties that I often meet in scholastic matters."

"Try it yourself," the letter concluded "and you'll certainly be happy with it."

<sup>99</sup> Second year of 'ginnasiale'.

We should not be surprised to read that, with such great diligence, he was able to make such rapid progress in school.

When he came to us he almost gave up hope of being able to cope with First Year, but after only two months he was already getting quite satisfactory marks in his class. In school he dwelt on every word spoken by his teacher who never had to reprimand him for inattention.

What has been said about Besucco's diligence in matters of study must also be said about all his other duties, even the smallest: he was exemplary in everything. He had been given the task of sweeping the dormitory. He won admiration for the exactitude with which he discharged this duty without giving the least sign that it was a burden to him.

When he was sick and could not get out of bed, he apologised to the assistant for not being able to do his usual task and he profusely thanked a companion who took his place.

Besucco came to the Oratory with a fixed purpose; in his life here he always had in view the point to which he was aiming, namely to dedicate himself completely to God in the priesthood. To this end he sought to make progress in knowledge and virtue. He was speaking with a companion one day about their studies and the reason why each of them had come to the house. Besucco gave his own reasons and then concluded: "To sum it all up my reason is to become a priest; with the help of the Lord I'll do everything possible to achieve this."

### *Chapter 19 – Confession*

You can say what you like about various systems of education, but I have not found any other firm basis for education than frequent confession and communion; and I believe that I am not exaggerating if I assert that morality is endangered when these two elements are missing. Besucco, as we have seen, was trained to approach these two sacraments frequently. When he arrived at the Oratory he grew in fervour in going to confession and communion.

At the beginning of the Novena for the Birthday of Mary Most Holy, he went to his director and said: "I would like to make this Novena well, and, amongst other things, I want to make a general Confession. When he had heard the reasons for this request the director replied that he did not see any reason for a general confession and he added: "You needn't worry, especially as you have made a general confession at other times to your parish priest." "Yes," he replied "I did so on the occasion of my First Communion and also at a Retreat in my parish, but, as I want to put my soul in your hands, I want to reveal to you everything that is on my conscience so that you can with greater surety give me the advice best adapted to help me save my soul."

The director agreed; he praised him for his decision to choose a regular confessor; he exhorted him to think well of his confessor, to pray for him, and to always lay open before him anything which troubled his conscience. Then he helped him prepare for the general confession he wanted to make. He performed this act with very great expressions of sorrow for his past and resolutions for the future even though, as anyone could judge from what was known of his life, he had never committed any fault which could be deemed a mortal sin. Once he had made a choice of Confessor he did not change him for the whole time that the Lord spared him to us.

He had full confidence in him, he consulted him even outside of confession, he prayed for him and he was very pleased every time he was able to get from him a piece of good advice for his rule of life.

One day he wrote a letter to a friend who had told him that he too would like to come to the Oratory. He recommended that he pray to the Lord for this grace and then he suggested some practices of piety to him, such as the Stations of the Cross; but above all he advised him to go to Confession every week and to go to Communion several times during this week.

Whilst I greatly praise Besucco in this matter, I recommend with all my heart, to all people, but especially to young people to choose a regular confessor in good time, never to change him, except for reasons of necessity. Let them avoid the mistake of some people, who change the confessor almost every time they go to confession, or, when they have to confess something of greater



importance, go to another confessor and then return to their regular confessor. When they act this way they are not committing any sin, but they will never have a sure guide who thoroughly knows the state of their conscience. They will meet the same fate that befalls a sick man who goes to a different doctor each time. The doctor will find it difficult to diagnose the illness, and hence will be uncertain as to what remedies to prescribe.

If by any chance this booklet should be read by anyone who is destined by Divine Providence to be engaged in the education of young people, I would strongly recommend three things to him. First, zealously encourage frequent Confession as a prop to the instability of young people and do everything to assist regularity at this Sacrament. Secondly let them insist on the great usefulness in choosing a regular confessor who is not to be changed without necessity, but let there be a supply of confessors so that everyone can choose him who seems best adapted to the needs of his own soul. But let them always bear in mind that if one changes confessor he does not do anything wrong and that it is better to change him a thousand times than to keep back any sin in confession.

Let them never fail to speak very often about the great secret of Confession. Let them explicitly teach that the Confessor is bound by a secret which is natural, ecclesiastical, divine and civil, and that he cannot for any reason at all, cost what it may, even death, reveal to others what he has heard in confession or make use of it for his own purposes; that, moreover, he cannot even think of things heard in this Sacrament; that the confessor is not greatly surprised nor does he lose his esteem and affection for people because of serious things heard in the confessional; on the contrary the penitent goes up in his eyes. A doctor is quite pleased when he finds out why his patient is seriously ill, because he can then apply the correct remedy; the confessor who is the doctor of the soul does the same thing. By absolution he cures in God's name all the ills of the soul. I am convinced that we shall obtain wonderful moral results among our boys if these things are recommended and explained; and the results will be the wonderful moral effect the Catholic religion has in the sacrament of penance.

### *Chapter 20 – Holy Communion*

The second prop for young people is Holy Communion. Fortunate are those boys who begin in good time to go to Communion frequently and with the right dispositions. Besucco had been taught to go to communion often and with fruit by his parents and by his parish priest. At home he used to go to Communion every week; then on Feast Days and even some times during the week. When he came to the Oratory he continued to go to Communion with the same frequency, then he went several times a week, and during novenas even every day.

Although his innocent soul and his very exemplary conduct made him worthy to receive Communion frequently, nevertheless he considered that he was not worthy of it. His apprehensions grew when a person who came to this house told Besucco that it was better to go less frequently so that he could make a longer preparation and receive Communion more fervently.

One day he went to his superior and told him all his worries. He tried to satisfy him, saying:

“Don’t you eat material bread for your body with great frequency?” the superior asked him.

“Yes, I do.”

“If we eat material bread so frequently for the body which is only meant to live for a short time on this earth, why should we not often, even every day, take spiritual bread for the soul, i.e. Holy Communion.” (*St. Augustine*).

“But anyone who eats less frequently has a better appetite.”

“Anyone who eats sparingly and goes for days without food either faints through weakness or dies of hunger, or when he does decide to eat he runs the risk of getting indigestion.”

“If that is the case, I’ll try to go more frequently to Holy Communion in the future, because I really know that it is a powerful means for making me good.”

“Go as frequently as your Confessor suggests.”

“He tells me to go every time that there is nothing disturbing my conscience.”

“Good; follow that advice. Meanwhile I want to tell you that Our Lord Jesus Christ invites us to eat His Body and drink His Blood every time that we are in spiritual need, and we live in continual need in this world. He goes so far as to say: ‘If you do not eat my body and drink my blood, you shall not have life in you!’ For this reason, at the time of the apostles the Christians were persevering in prayer and in feeding themselves with the Eucharistic Bread. In the first centuries all of those who went to hear Mass received Holy Communion. And anyone who heard Mass every day, also went to Communion every day. The Catholic Church at the Council of Trent recommended that Christians assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass as often as possible, and amongst others there are these beautiful words: ‘It is the wish of the Council that when the faithful go to Mass they go to Communion not only spiritually but also sacramentally so that the fruit which comes from this Most August Sacrifice may be found more copiously in them.’” (Sess. 22, c.6)

#### *Chapter 21—Reverence for the Blessed Sacrament*

Francis showed his great love for the Blessed Sacrament not only by going frequently to Communion, but whenever an occasion presented itself. At home he was always very pleased to accompany the priest carrying Holy Viaticum. Whenever he heard the bell he immediately asked his parents for permission to go out, and they willingly granted it; then he ran to the Church to offer his services in a manner befitting his age. He was always delighted to do whatever was required, such as, ring the hand bell, carry a lighted torch, carry the *ombrellino*, say the *Confiteor*, the *Miserere* or the *Te Deum*. At home he would willingly help companions who were younger or less instructed than he was to prepare to receive Communion worthily and afterwards to make the appropriate thanksgiving.

His fervour continued at the Oratory and, amongst other things, he formed the very commendable habit of making a short visit to the Blessed Sacrament every day. He was often seen with a priest or cleric when they were taking a group of boys to say some special prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament. It was also edifying to witness the way he managed to take a companion with him into Church. One day he invited a companion saying: "Come with me and we shall go and say an Our Father to Jesus, who is there all alone in the tabernacle." The companion who was completely absorbed in his game answered that he did not want to go. Besucco went in alone just the same. The companion felt sorry the next day for having refused the kind invitation of his virtuous companion and went up to him and said: "Yesterday you invited me to go into the Church with you and I refused; today I am inviting you to keep me company in doing what I didn't do yesterday." Besucco smiled and answered: "Don't worry about yesterday. I prayed for both of us. I said three Our Fathers for me and then three for you in front of the Blessed Sacrament. However, I shall go most willingly now and whenever you want to have me for company."

More than once I have had to go into the church after the evening meal to perform some duty whilst the boarders were happily engaged in a lively recreation in the yard. I did not have a lamp in my hands and I tripped over what seemed to be a sack of wheat. I was quite surprised to find out that I had bumped into Besucco who was kneeling in the dark behind the altar but quite near it. He was praying to his beloved Jesus asking for heavenly help to make himself better, or even to make him a saint. He would serve Mass very willingly. He took delight in preparing the altar, lighting the candles, taking out the cruets and in helping the priest to vest. Whenever someone else wanted to serve the Mass, he willingly gave way and then heard it with great recollection. Those who have observed him assisting at Mass or at Benediction in the evening are unanimous in asserting that it was impossible to look at him without being struck and edified by the fervour he showed in praying, and by his composure.

He was also very eager to read books and to sing hymns about the Blessed Sacrament. Among the many little prayers he recited throughout the day, his

favourite was: *Blessed and praised every moment be the most holy and divine Sacrament*<sup>100</sup>. “With this prayer” he would say, “I gain 100 days indulgence every time; and moreover every time I began saying it all the bad thoughts running through my mind disappear. This brief prayer is a hammer with which I am certain to break the horns of the devil whenever he comes to tempt me.”

### *Chapter 22 – Spirit of prayer*

It is so difficult to get boys to enjoy prayer. Their fickle age makes anything which requires serious mental attention seem nauseating and heavy. A boy is very fortunate if he has been trained in prayer and likes it. The fountain of divine blessings is always opened by prayer.

Besucco belonged to the number of these boys. The assistance given him by his parents from his earliest years, the care taken by his teacher and especially the help of his parish priest all produced the desired end in our Francis. He was not accustomed to meditate, but he recited many vocal prayers. He uttered the words clearly and distinctly and he pronounced them in such a way that he seemed to be speaking to Our Lord, or Our Lady or some saint to whom he was directing his prayers. He got up and dressed himself as soon as he was called in the morning, made his bed and then went straight to church or else he knelt down by his bedside to pray until the bell called him elsewhere. His punctuality in going to church meant that he could sit next to those companions or go to those places where he knew he would not be distracted. He was always upset whenever he saw anyone talking or acting in a dissipated manner. One day as soon as he left the Church he went looking for a boy who had misbehaved in this way. When he found him he told him what he had done and, having made him see he had done wrong, he urged him to be more recollected in church.

He had a special devotion towards Mary most holy. He was particularly fervent towards her during the novena in preparation for her birthday. Every evening the Rector used to propose some practice in his exercise book. This

<sup>100</sup> Don Bosco suggests saying this little prayer at the elevation of the host and at visits to the Blessed Sacrament (cf. no. 184, pp. 739 and 747).

way, he would say, I shall have a fine present to give to Our Lady at the end of the year. Throughout the day he repeated the practice and reminded his companions of it. He wanted to know the exact spot where Dominic Savio used to kneel to pray in front of Our Lady's Altar; he would go there to pray also. He used to say that he would dearly like to stay there from morning till evening to pray to Our Lady. "Because I seem to have Savio praying with me; he seems to answer my prayers, and his fervour instils itself into my heart." Generally he was the last to leave the church because he used always to stop for a short time in front of Our Lady's statue. This often caused him to miss breakfast. Those who noticed it were amazed that a strong, healthy boy of fourteen years would forget his bodily food in favour of the spiritual food of prayer.

Often, especially during holiday time, he went into the church with some of his companions to pray the seven joys of Mary, the seven sorrows of Mary, the litanies or the prayer to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. He never wanted to let others lead these prayers. On Friday whenever he could, he made or at least read the Stations of the Cross. This was one of his special practices of piety. "The way of the Cross," he used to say "is a spark of fire for me; it helps me to pray and it drives me to put up with anything for the love of God."

He loved praying so much, and he was so used to it that whenever he was on his own or had nothing to do, he would immediately say some prayers. He often began to pray during recreation, and at times involuntarily used little spontaneous prayers during his games. One day he saw his Superior, ran up to him, greeted him by name and then said to him: "*Holy Mary*". Another time he wanted to call out to a companion with whom he was playing and he shouted: "*Our Father*". Whilst these actions caused his companions to laugh at him, they also showed his love for prayer and his ability to recollect himself, to raise his mind to God. According to masters of the spiritual life this denotes a high degree of perfection which is rarely seen in people even far advanced in virtue.

After night prayers said in common every evening he went to the dormitory and knelt down on top of his trunk—not a very comfortable position—for

a quarter of an hour or even half an hour to pray. When he was told that this disturbed his companions who were already in bed, he shortened his prayers and made sure that he was in bed at the same time as his companions. However, as soon as he settled into bed, he joined his hands on his breast and prayed until he fell asleep. If he woke up during the night he immediately began to pray for the souls in purgatory and he experienced great displeasure if sleep overtook him before he finished his prayers. "I'm sorry," he told a companion "that I can't spend some time in bed without sleeping. I'm quite distressed. How much good I could do for the souls in Purgatory if I could pray as I want to."

In short, if we examine the spirit of prayer of this boy we can say that he literally followed the precept of Our Saviour who commanded us to pray always, because he passed his days and nights in continuous prayer.

### *Chapter 23 – His penances*

Boys generally get frightened when you speak to them of penance. But when the love of God takes possession of a heart, nothing in this world and no suffering distress it; on the other hand every affliction in this life is a source of consolation. Tender hearts believe that suffering brings great results, and that a glorious reward in heaven is reserved for those who suffer during life.

From the earliest years Besucco had a great desire to suffer. Here at the Oratory he redoubled his fervour for suffering. He went to his Superior one day and said:

"I am very worried: Our Lord says in the Gospel that you can only gain entrance to Paradise by innocence or by penance. I can't go there through innocence because I've already lost it. Therefore I have to go there through penance".

The Superior replied that he should accept as his penances diligence in study, attention in school, obedience to his superiors, putting up with the inconveniences of life such as heat, cold, wind, hunger, thirst.

"But," Besucco interjected "we must suffer these things as a matter of necessity."

“That’s right. But if you add suffering for the love of God to what you must suffer as a matter of necessity, it will become real penance, it will please the Lord, and it will bring merit to your soul.”

He quietened down for a time, but he always asked to be allowed to fast, to give up this or that at breakfast, to wear something uncomfortable under his clothing or to put things in his bed. These were always forbidden him. On the Vigil of All Saints Day he asked as a special favour to be allowed to fast on bread and water, but this was changed to abstinence at breakfast time. This pleased him greatly because, as he said he would be able, at least in something, to imitate the Saints in Paradise who saved their souls by walking the path of suffering.

It is not necessary to speak of the custody of the senses, especially of the eyes. Anyone who for any length of time had observed his very composure, his behaviour towards his companions, his modesty both inside the house and outside of it would not hesitate to affirm that he could be proposed as the perfect model of mortification and external behaviour of young people.

Although he was prohibited from performing corporal penances, he obtained permission for penances of another kind, namely doing the most humble tasks in the house. Some of the things he tackled with pleasure and great satisfaction were: running messages for his companions, carrying water, cleaning shoes, serving at table when he was allowed to, sweeping the refectory, sweeping the dormitory, carrying away the rubbish, carrying parcels and trunks, provided he was strong enough. These are all examples which could be imitated by certain young people who, when away from home, find it hard to lend a helping hand when they could do so. Sometimes there are young people who are ashamed to accompany their parents because they are not well dressed. It is as though being away from home changes their condition and makes them forget their duty of reverence, respect and obedience to their parents, and of charity towards everyone.

But these small mortifications contented Besucco for a short time only; he wanted bigger mortifications. Sometimes he was heard to complain that he had performed bigger penances at home and his health had never suffered.



His Superior always answered that real penances do not consist in what pleases us, but in what pleases the Lord and promotes his glory. “Be obedient,” added the Superior “and diligent in your duties, be kind and charitable towards your companions, put up with their defects, give them good advice and you will be doing something which pleases the Lord more than any other sacrifice.”

Taking literally to heart what he had been told about patiently putting up with cold, he did not clothe himself properly when winter came along. One day I saw him looking very pale and asked him if he were sick.

“No,” he answered “I’m quite all right.”

I took his hand and then realised that he was still in summer clothing even though we were within the novena for Christmas.

“Haven’t you any winter clothing?” I asked.

“Yes, it’s in my room.”

“Why aren’t you wearing it?”

“Ah ... for the reason you already know: put up with the cold of winter for the love of God.”

“Go and put it on immediately. See that you are well protected against the cold of winter. If you need anything ask for it and you’ll be given it straightaway.”

Despite all this, however, we could not prevent one behaviour which was possibly the beginning of the illness which carried him to the grave, but more about that later.

#### *Chapter 24 – Particular deeds and sayings*

There are some things Besucco said and did which have no direct relation to what we have already described, so they will now be recounted separately. I shall begin with his conversations. When speaking he was somewhat reserved, but jovial and witty. He would willingly talk about his experiences as a shepherd when he took sheep and goats out to pasture. He spoke of the

bushes, pastures, valleys, caves and storms in the mountains of Roburent and Drec as so many other wonders of the world.

He also had some proverbs which for him were undisputed truths. Whenever he wanted someone not to think too much of the things of the world, but rather to think of heavenly things he would say: *“It is very difficult for Heaven to open to anyone who looks at the earth like a goat.”*

One day a companion was speaking about religion and he let slip a few seriously mistaken points of view. Both because he was young and because he wasn't sufficiently well instructed, Besucco kept quiet but he was uneasy and annoyed. Later he gained courage and with a smile on his face he spoke to all those present: “Listen, some time ago I read in the dictionary the meaning of the word *“trade”* and amongst other things I noted this phrase: ‘Let everyone stick to his own trade’. My father said the same thing in different words: *Anyone who does what he doesn't know spoils what he does.*”

They all understood his meaning; the one who had spoken indiscreetly kept quiet whilst the others admired Besucco's shrewdness and prudence.

He was always happy with the arrangements of the superiors. He never complained about the timetable, the setting of the table, the organisation at school, and so on. He always found everything to his liking. When asked how it was that he was always happy with everything he replied:

“I am made of flesh and bones like the others, but I want to do everything for the glory of God; therefore everything that does not suit me will certainly be pleasing to God; hence I always have a good reason for being contented.”

One day he was with some boarders who had recently come to the house and who could not settle down to the new kind of life. He comforted them saying:

“If we joined the army, would we be able to determine our own timetable? Would we be able to go to bed and get up when we liked? Or would we be free to go for a walk?”

“No,” they answered “but a little bit of freedom ...”

“We are definitely free,” interrupted Francis “if we are doing the will of God and we only become real slaves when we fall into sin, because then we are the slaves of our greatest enemy, the devil.”

“But at home I was able to eat better and sleep more comfortably than here.” complained one of them.

“I grant that what you say is true, that is, that at home the food was better and the beds more comfortable, but I’m telling you that you were fostering two great enemies—gluttony and laziness. I’ll go further and tell you that we weren’t born just to sleep and eat as the goats and sheep do, but we have to work for the glory of God and flee idleness which is the father of all vices. Moreover, haven’t you heard what our Superior said.”

“I don’t remember.”

“Yesterday our Superior said, amongst other things, that boys remain here voluntarily and not by force. If anyone is unhappy, he concluded, let him tell me and I’ll try to satisfy him; anyone who doesn’t want to remain here is free to go, but if he does stay I don’t want him spreading discontent.”

“I would go elsewhere, but that would cost money and my parents can’t afford it”.

“All the more reason for you to be happy here; if you can’t pay you should show yourself more satisfied than others, because *you never look a gift horse in the mouth*. And so, my friends, we must be aware that we are in a house of Divine Providence; some pay a little, some pay nothing; and where could we get something else at this price?”

“What you say is true, but if we could have something better to eat ...”

“Since you’re dying for want of something better to eat, I’ll tell you how to get it; go and board elsewhere.”

“But I haven’t got the money to pay board.”

“Well then, keep quiet, and be content with the food they give you. Especially so since all our other companions are happy with it. If you really want me to speak my mind, my friends, I’ll tell you that strong young people such as we are should not give too much attention to the niceties of life. As

Christians we must do some penance if we want to go to heaven; we must mortify our tendency to gluttony in good time. Believe me, this is an easy way for us to obtain the blessings from the Lord and to gain some merit for Heaven.”

It was by these and other similar ways of speaking that he helped his companions and became a model to them of Christian politeness and charity.

Whilst we're on this point, he used to write proverbs and moral sayings on his exercise-books. He was also quite eloquent in his letters and I think it worthwhile to reproduce some of these, which were kindly given to me by those to whom they were written.

### *Chapter 25 – His letters*

These letters are a manifest sign of the goodness of heart and the sincere piety of our Besucco. It is a rare thing, even in older people, to find letters written without human respect and full of religious and moral sentiments. Yet this we should expect of every Christian. But it is indeed very rare to find young people doing this. I should like all of you, dear young readers of mine, to avoid the kind of letter which has nothing religious in it, a letter which could well be written by the pagans themselves. No, let us use this wonderful means to communicate our thoughts and our plans to those who are far away from us, but let us always distinguish between the Christian and the pagan in our correspondence; and let us never forget some moral thought. Hence I am including some of young Besucco's letters which I think will please my readers because of their simplicity and tenderness.

The first bears the date September 27, 1863, and was addressed to his Godfather, the Archpriest of Argentera. In it he informs him how happy he is at the Oratory and thanks him for sending him there.

This is the nature of the letter:

My dear Godfather,

Four days ago my companions went home for twenty days' holiday. I am very pleased to see them have a happy holiday, but I am better off than they

are because by staying here I have time to write this letter to you. I hope that you will be pleased with it. First of all I must tell you that I cannot find sufficient words to thank you for all the good you have done for me. Apart from the favours you have done me, especially that of teaching me in your home, you have also taught me so many things, both spiritual and temporal, that are of great help to me. But the greatest of these favours was to send me to this house where nothing is lacking for my soul or my body. I thank the Lord more and more that he has given me this great favour in preference to so many other boys. I ask him with all my heart to give me grace to correspond with so many signs of heavenly kindness. I am more than happy in this place, there is nothing that I want, my every wish is taken care of. I thank you and all the other benefactors for the things you have sent me. I had hoped last week for the consolation of seeing you here in Turin so that you could speak with my superiors about my conduct. Patience, the Lord wants to defer this consolation for me.

From your letter I learned that my dear ones at home cried when they heard my letter read out. Tell them that they have reason to rejoice and not to cry, because I am very happy. I thank you for the precious advice that you gave me, and I assure you that so far I have done all I could to put them into practice. Thank my sister for the Communion that she made especially for me; I'm sure that it has helped me with my studies. Although it seems impossible in such a short time I have been able to get into Second Year. Greet my parents for me and tell them to pray for me and not to be worried because I am in good health, have everything I need and in a word am very happy. Please excuse me for the delay in writing; over recent days I have had a lot to do preparing for the exams, which I did better in than I expected to. I really want to express my gratitude to you, but having no other way to do so, I will try to make recompense by asking the Lord to give you good health and happy days.

Give me your blessing, and consider me always as,

Your devoted godson,

Francis Besucco

Francis' father, a knife-grinder by trade, spent summer working in the fields and looking after the animals at Argentera, but in autumn he left and went to other districts to earn his and his family's bread, working with his trade. On October 26, Francis wrote him a letter in which, noting how happy he was to be in Turin, he expressed his tender filial affection in the following way:

My dearest father,

Time is coming, dear father, when you will have to set out through the countryside to provide what the family needs. I cannot possibly accompany you on your trip but I will be with you in my thoughts and prayers. I assure you that every day I ask the Lord to give you health and his holy grace.

My Godfather was here at the Oratory and that gave me great pleasure. Amongst other things he told me you were afraid I am going hungry; no, don't worry, I have bread in abundance, and if I were to put aside what I didn't need, you would be able to make a huge loaf out of it, as we say<sup>101</sup>. You just need to know that we eat four times a day and always as much as we want; there is soup for dinner, as well as a second course, and for supper, soup. Once we had wine each day but it has become so expensive that now we have it just on Sundays. So don't worry about me. I have nothing else I want since everything I want is given me.

There are two things which give me great pleasure, and these are that my Superiors are very happy with me and I with them. The other was the visit from the Archbishop of Sassari. He came to see the Rector; he visited the house, spent time talking to many of the boys, and I had the pleasure of kissing his hand and receiving his blessing.

Dear father, greet all the family for me and especially my dear mother. Give my news to my Godfather and keep thanking him for what he has done for me. Do well on your trip through the countryside and should you find a fixed place to stay somewhere let me know and I will quickly give you more news.

<sup>101</sup> This was a broth made of meat with bread, oil and cheese.

Pray for me,  
Your affectionate son always,

Francis.

From the time his Godfather came to visit him, he was very keen to get letters from him. There was one letter which satisfied this burning desire, in which the zealous priest gave him some advice for his spiritual and material well-being. Francis wrote back saying how happy he was; he thanked him and promised to put his advice into practice.

The letter, written on November 23, expressed the following sentiments:

My dear Godfather,

I received your letter on the 14th of this month. You can imagine what a consolation it gave me. I spent that whole day like a feast day. I read it and reread it many times and the more I did so the more courage I gained for my study and to be a better person. I know now what a great gift you gave me by sending me here to the Oratory. I cannot possibly express my heartfelt gratitude except by going to the church and praying for my benefactors and especially for you; and in order not to lose study time, I go during recreation. Perhaps I should slow down a little because as much as I find great contentment in study and prayer, I should be at recreation with the others because that's what our Superiors tell us to do as something that would be useful and necessary for our study and our health.

Now all classes have started up and from morning to evening, between school, study, singing practice, music, religious practices and relaxation I have no time left to think about myself.

I am happy to say that Lieutenant Eysautier often comes to visit; some days ago he brought me such a beautiful cloak that if you saw me in it you would think I was a little lord.

He recommended that I find a good companion and I did so immediately. This boy is better than me at studies and also more virtuous. As soon as we met we became firm friends. We speak of nothing else between us but study

and matters of piety. He also likes recreation but after we have run around for a while we start walking up and down discussing things to do with school. The Lord is helping me in noticeable ways; I am always going ahead with things here: of the ninety in my class there are only fifteen still ahead of me.

I am consoled to think my friends still remember me; tell them I love them very much and to be diligent in their study and piety. Thank you for the beautiful letter you wrote me and I will try to put into practice the advice contained in it. I have a burning desire to be good because I know that God has prepared a great reward for me and for those who love and serve him in this life.

Forgive me for taking time to write and if I have not put into practice the advice you have given me, my dear benefactor. I ask you to greet everyone at home for me, and since I cannot greet my father personally I do so in my heart, praying to God for him. May God's will, not mine, be done in everything.

Your devoted godson in the most lovable hearts of Jesus and Mary,

Francis.

Francis enclosed a letter with this one to his parish priest; it was addressed to his friend, a virtuous cousin named Anthony Beltrandi, also of Argentera.

The construction, the diction, the thoughts of the letter make it worthy of inclusion here as a model of letters that can be exchanged by two good young friends.

My dear friend Anthony,

My Godfather has given me good news of you. He tells me that you should take up study like I did. I can tell you that this is a very good idea and you will be very happy if you go on with it.

Since our good parish priest is prepared to teach you, try to repay him by diligence in the fulfilment of your duties. Throw yourself into the study but accompany it with prayer and devotion; this is the only way to succeed in this undertaking and to be truly satisfied. I am pleased to think that next year you will be my companion in this house.



There is just one little thought I want to leave you: obedience and submission to your parents and your parish priest. And I recommend that you give good example to your companions.

And I want to ask a favour of you. During this winter make the Stations of the Cross after the sacred functions as I used to do when I was home. Endeavour to promote this pious practice and you will be blessed by the Lord. Time is precious, try to use it well; if you have any free time, gather some boys together and get them to revise the Christian Doctrine lesson taught on the previous Sunday. This is a very good way of earning God's blessing. Tell my Godfather to give me some news about you when he writes to me, and in that way I shall be ever surer of your good will. Dear friend, what great suffering I endure when I think of the time that I have wasted and that I could have spent in study or in other good works.

I hope that you will take my letter in good part and if there is anything that displeases you, I ask your forgiveness. Do your very best to ensure that next year we shall be schoolmates here in Turin, if this is pleasing to the Lord.

Cheerio, dear Anthony, pray for me.

Your loving friend,

Francis Besucco.

### *Chapter 26 – Final letter – Thoughts for his mother*

The great piety of Francis is revealed in his letters in the previous Chapter. Every spoken or written word contributes to a network of delicate love and holy thought. It seems however that, as he gradually approached the end of his life, he became even more inflamed with God's love. Indeed, it seems from certain expressions that he had some forewarning. When his Godfather received his last letter he exclaimed: "My godson wants to leave me; God wants him for himself."

I refer to it here in its entirety as a true model for whoever wants to wish someone a Happy New Year in a Christian manner. It bears the date, December 28, 1863.

My beloved Godfather,

Any well brought up young lad would certainly commit a serious act of culpable ingratitude if he were not to write to his parents and benefactors at this time of the year to wish them every blessing and happiness. But what should I say to you my beloved and illustrious benefactor? From the day I was born you began to be good to me and look after my soul. My first learning about life, about piety, fear of God, I owe to you. If I have completed some years at school, if I have been able to fly from dangers to my soul, is all due to your advice and your care.

However can I recompense you for this then? Since I have no other way to do so, I will at least try to give you a sign of my continual gratitude by keeping in mind all the benefits I have received, and in these few days left to me I will try with all my strength to wish you copious blessings from Heaven, a good end to the current year and a good beginning to the new year.

There is an ancient proverb which says: Well begun is half done; so I too want to begin this new year well, begin it according to the Lord's will and continue it according to his will.

My studies are going well right now; my conduct in study, dormitory and in piety have always been *excellent*. I have had news that my father and brother are in good health. Give this news to those at home and I am sure they will be pleased about it. Tell them not to be worried about anything. I am well and lack nothing.

Could I ask you too to greet my good teacher Antonio Valorso, and tell him that I ask forgiveness for the times I was disobedient and the many times I upset him while I was at school there.

Finally, I renew my assurance that not a day will pass without my asking God to keep you healthy and give you a long life. My dear Godfather, I ask your forgiveness too for all the bother I have been; keep helping me with your advice. I have no other wish than to be good and to correct all my faults. May God's will and not mine always be done.

With great respect and affection,

I remain,

your devoted godchild,

Besucco Francesco

In the letter to his godfather he enclosed a note for his mother, the last one he wrote and which can be considered as his last testament or final words to his parents.

My beloved mother,

We are at the end of the year. God has helped us to live it well. Indeed, I can say that for me this year was a continual run of heavenly favours. While I wish you a good conclusion to the few days that remain, I ask the Lord to give you a good beginning to the new year and one which continues and is filled with all kinds of spiritual and temporal good things. May the Blessed Virgin Mary obtain for you from her Son a long life and happy days.

Today I received a letter from my father, from which I know that both he and my brother are in good health and this gives me great consolation. I am sending you here a note of some items they still need.

My dear mother, I was a lot of bother to you at home, and I still am. But I will try to make up for it through my good conduct and my prayers. I ask you to do whatever you can so my sister Maria can study, so that through this she can be better instructed in her religion.

Goodbye, my dear mother, goodbye. Let's offer the Lord our actions and our hearts and recommend the salvation of our souls especially to him. May the Lord's will always be done.

For my part, wish every good to all those at home, pray for me,

Your affectionate son,

Francis

From these last letters we see clearly that Besucco's heart seemed no longer of this world but of someone who though walking with feet on the earth

has his soul already with God whom he wants to constantly speak and write about.

As his fervour grew for religious things, so too did his keen desire to withdraw himself from the world. If I could, he often said, I would like to separate my soul from my body so that I could better understand what it means when we say we love God. “If it weren’t that I am not allowed,” he went so far as to say “I would like to abstain from all food so that I could enjoy at length the great pleasure experienced in suffering for the Lord. What great consolation the martyrs must have experienced in dying for the faith!”

In short, he exemplified by word and deed what St. Paul said: “I desire to be annihilated so as to be glorified with my Lord.”<sup>102</sup> God saw the great love that this little heart had for Him and to prevent the evil of the world from ruining him, He decided to call him to Himself; he allowed an inordinate love of penance to a certain extent to be responsible for it.

#### *Chapter 27 – A badly chosen penance and the beginning of his illness*

Francis had read in the life of Dominic Savio how once he had imprudently let the cold of winter set in without putting heavy blankets on his bed. Besucco decided to imitate him. He deemed that the order given to him to be warmly clothed applied only to the daytime, and that he was free to mortify himself in bed at night. He said nothing to anybody, took the woollen blankets issued to all the boys but, instead of putting them on his bed he folded them up and put them under his pillow. Things seemed to be all right until the early days of January, when one morning he was so benumbed with cold that he couldn’t get up with the others. The Superiors were told that Besucco stayed in bed because he was ill, and the infirmarian was sent to see him and find out what he needed. When he arrived, he asked what was the matter.

“Nothing at all” Francis replied.

“If it is nothing, then why did you stay in bed?”

“Well—I’m just a little off-colour.”

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Phil 1:23.

The infirmarian went to pull up his blankets and found that he was covered by only one summer blanket.

“Where are your winter blankets, Besucco?”

“Here under the pillow.”

“Why did you do this?”

“No special reason—when Jesus was on the cross he wasn’t covered any better than I am.”

It didn’t take long to realise that Besucco was quite ill and he was transferred immediately to the infirmary. The doctor was called at once, he thought at first that the illness was not serious and diagnosed it as a simple cold.

But on the following day he noticed that instead of going away, the illness was causing inflammatory congestion in the stomach, and that it had taken a turn for the worse. The usual remedies were applied—laxatives, emetics, blood-letting and doses of various medicines, but nothing seemed to work.

One day he was asked why he had been so careless as not to cover himself sufficiently in bed. He replied: “I am sorry that this has displeased my superiors, I hope however that the Lord will accept my little penance in satisfaction for my sins.”

“But what of the consequences of your imprudence?”

“I shall leave the consequences in the hands of the Lord. I am not interested in what the future holds out for my body provided everything turns out to the greater glory of God and to the advantage of my soul.”

### *Chapter 28 – Resigned to his illness – Edifying words*

His illness lasted for eight days; for him it was an exercise, for his companions an example, in patience and Christian resignation. The illness hampered his breathing and this led to severe, continual headaches; he had to submit to further painful surgical treatment; they tried several drastic remedies. But nothing they did was able to alleviate the illness and it served only to highlight his admirable patience. He never gave any sign of resentment nor

did he complain. If it was suggested that the medicine did not taste nice he would immediately reply: “If it tasted sweet, it would be more pleasant in my mouth, but it is only right that I should do some penance for my greediness in the past.” Another time I said to him: “You are suffering a lot, is that right?” “Yes, it is true that I am suffering a lot, but what is this compared to what I should suffer because of my sins? I should like to assure you, however, that I am quite happy; I had never thought that I would get so much pleasure from suffering for the love of the Lord.”

If anyone did something for him, he thanked him profusely, saying immediately: “May the Lord reward you for your kindness towards me.” Not sure as to how to express his gratitude to the infirmarian, he said to him more than once: “May the Lord reward you for me, and if I go to Heaven, I’ll pray with all my heart for you that the Lord will bless and help you.” One day the infirmarian asked him whether he was afraid of dying. “My dear infirmarian,” he replied “if the Lord wanted to take me to Paradise with him I should be very pleased to obey his call; however, I fear that I am not sufficiently prepared. But despite this I place hope in his infinite mercy and I recommend myself wholeheartedly to Mary Most Holy, to St. Aloysius Gonzaga and to Dominic Savio. I hope that with their protection, I shall have a happy death.”

On the fourth day of his illness, the doctor began to fear for the life of our Francis. Beginning to speak to him of this last moment, I said:

“My dear Francis, would you like to go to Heaven?”

“Can you imagine me not wanting to go to Heaven? But I have to earn it first.”

If you had a choice between being cured and going to Heaven, what would you choose?”

“These are two different things: to live for the Lord, or to die to go to the Lord<sup>103</sup>. The first pleases me, and the second pleases me even more. But who can assure me of Heaven after the many sins I have committed?”

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Phil 1:22-23.

“In making such a proposal to you, I took it for granted that you are sure of going to Heaven. But, if you are assuming that you might go elsewhere, I only wish that you would forget about it.”

“How then can I deserve Heaven?”

“You can lay claim to Heaven through the merits of the Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Will I go to Heaven then?”

“Most surely, but when the Lord wants it.”

He then looked at those present, rubbed his hands and joyfully exclaimed: “It’s a contract then: Heaven and nothing else; to Heaven and nowhere else. Don’t speak to me of anything else, only Heaven.”

“I am happy” I then told him, “that you show such a strong desire to go to Heaven, but I want you to be ready to do the holy will of God ...”

He interrupted what I was saying with: “Yes, yes, let the holy will of God be done in everything, both in Heaven and on earth.”

On the fifth day of the illness he asked to receive the Sacraments. He wanted to make a general Confession: this was denied him. There was no need for it as he had made one a few months previously. However, he was deeply moved as he prepared for that last confession with very great fervour. After confession he appeared to be very happy and he said to the person who was assisting him: “In the past I promised Our Lord a thousand times that I would not offend him any more, but I did not keep my word. I have renewed this promise today and I hope to be faithful right up to my death.”

That evening he was asked if he had any messages for any one.

“Yes” he told me, “tell everyone to pray that my time in purgatory may be short.”

“What would you like me to tell your companions on your behalf?”

“Tell them to avoid scandal, and to always make good confessions.”

“And to the clerics?”

“Tell the clerics to give the boys good example and good advice whenever it is needed.”

“And your Superiors?”

“Tell my superiors that I thank them for all their kindness towards me; tell them to keep working for the salvation of souls; and when I am in Heaven I shall pray to God for them.”

“And what have you to say to me?”

He was quite moved by these words, he looked at me straight in the eye and then replied: “I ask you to help me to save my soul.” For a long time I have been praying to the Lord that I may die in your arms. I ask you to carry out this work of charity and help me until the last moments of my life.”

I assured him I would not abandon him whether he recovered or remained ill, and even more so if he found himself at the point of death. He was very happy after that and wanted only to receive the Holy Viaticum.

*Chapter 29 – He receives viaticum – Other edifying words – A regret*

On the sixth day of his illness (January 8), he asked to go to Holy Communion. “How I would like to go to Communion with my companions in church” he said, “it is eight days since I last received my dear Jesus with them.” Whilst he was preparing to receive Communion he asked someone who was helping him the meaning of the word Viaticum.

“Viaticum,” came the reply “means help and a companion for the journey.”

“Oh, what wonderful help shall be mine, having with me the bread of Angels for the journey I am about to undertake.”

“Not only will you have this heavenly bread,” he was told “but you will have Jesus himself as your help and companion on the great journey you are preparing to make to eternity.”



“If Jesus is my friend and companion I have nothing to fear; on the other hand I have everything to hope for in his great mercy. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul.”

Then he made his preparation. He did not need help as he had his usual prayers which he recited one after the other. He received the Holy Host with those signs of piety which are better imagined than described.

After Communion he settled down to make his thanksgiving. When asked if he needed anything, he answered nothing other than: “Let us pray.” After a long thanksgiving he turned to those standing by and asked them not to speak of anything to him except Heaven.

During this time he was visited by the bursar of the House<sup>104</sup>, and this gave him great pleasure.

“Oh, Father Savio,” he said with a smile “this time I’m going to Heaven.”

“Courage now! Let us place both life and death in the hands of God; let us hope to go to Heaven but when God wants it.”

“Father Savio, please pardon me for all the trouble I’ve given you; pray for me, and when I’m in Heaven I’ll also pray to God for you.”

Some time later when I saw that he was reasonably at ease, I asked him if he had any messages for his parish priest. This seemed to disturb him, “My parish priest” he answered, “did a lot for me. He did his utmost to help me save my soul. Tell him that I have never forgotten his advice. I shall not have the pleasure of seeing him again in this world, but I hope to go to Heaven and I shall pray to the Blessed Virgin to help him keep all my companions on the right track and then one day I’ll be able to see him and all his parishioners in Heaven.” He was choking with emotion as he finished speaking.

After he had rested I asked him if he wanted to see his parents. “It is not possible for me to see them,” he answered “because they are too far away, they are poor and they can’t afford to come here. And also, my father is working

<sup>104</sup> This was Fr Angelo Savio (1835-1893).

away from home. Tell them that I die resigned, cheerful and happy. Tell them to pray for me. I hope to go to Heaven. I'll wait for them all there. To my mother ..." He could not go on.

Some hours later I asked him: "Have you by any chance a message for your mother?"

"Tell my mother that God has heard her prayer. Many times she told me: 'My dear Francis, I want you to live for a long time in this world but I would rather have you die a thousand times than see you become the enemy of God because of sin.' I hope that my sins have been forgiven and I hope I am the friend of God and that I shall soon go to enjoy Him for eternity. Bless my mother, O my God, give her courage to accept my death with resignation; give me the grace to see her and all the family in Heaven, where we shall enjoy your glory."

He wanted to go on talking, but I told him to be quiet and rest a while. He became worse on the evening of January 8 and it was decided to give him Extreme Unction. When asked if he wanted to receive this Sacrament he answered:

"Yes, with all my heart."

"Have you perhaps anything bothering your conscience?"

"Yes there is something that has been on my mind all my life, but I never imagined that it would give me so much sorrow at the point of death."

"What is it that is troubling you and causing remorse?"

"I have the deepest sorrow for not having loved God as much as he should have been loved in my life."

"Don't worry about that for in this world we can never love God to the extent that he deserves to be loved. We need only do our best; only in Heaven can we love him as he should be loved. There we shall see Him as He really is, we shall know him and enjoy his goodness, his glory and his love. How fortunate you are because shortly you're going to have this wonderful opportunity. But

now prepare to receive Extreme Unction, which is the sacrament that wipes away the stain of sin and also gives us bodily health if this is good for the soul.”

“I don’t want to discuss the health of the body any more,” he replied, “as for my sins, I ask forgiveness and I hope that they will be completely forgiven. I trust also that I shall obtain the remission of the punishment I must suffer for them in Purgatory.”

*Chapter 30 – He receives the holy oils – His spontaneous prayers on this occasion*

When everything had been prepared for the last sacrament that man receives in this mortal life, he wanted to say the *Confiteor* himself, along with the other prayers; and he said his own prayer at each anointing.

Father Alasonatti, Prefect of the house, was administering it to him. At the anointing of the eyes, our pious sick boy said: “O my God, pardon me for looking at things I should not have looked at and for reading things I should not have read”. At the ears: “O my God, pardon me for all that I have listened to that was contrary to your holy law. Please grant that while being closed for ever to the world they may be opened to hear your voice calling me to enjoy your glory.”

At the anointing of the nostrils: “Pardon me, O Lord, for all the satisfaction I have taken in smelling things.”

The mouth: “O my God, pardon me for my gluttony and for all the words which have offended you in one way or another. Grant that as soon as possible my tongue may sing your praises for all eternity.”

At this point, the Prefect was quite overcome with emotion and said: “What beautiful thoughts, how wonderful in a boy so young!” Continuing with the administration of the Sacrament he anointed the hands, saying: “By this holy anointing and by his most compassionate mercy, may God pardon you every sin committed by the sense of touch.” The sick boy continued: “O my great God, with the veil of your mercy and through the merits of the

wounds in your hands cover and wipe out all the sins I have committed by my actions throughout my life.”

The feet: “Pardon, O Lord, the sins that I have committed with these feet, either by going where I should not have gone or by not going where my duties summoned me. May your mercy pardon all the sins I may have committed by thought, word, deed or omission.”

He was told more than once that it was sufficient to say these spontaneous prayers silently in his heart and that God did not ask for the great effort he was making to pray aloud. He was silent for a few moments but then continued in the same tone of voice as before. At the finish he seemed so tired and his pulse was so weak that we thought that he was about to draw his last breath. Shortly afterwards he recovered slightly and, in the presence of many people, he addressed these words to the Superior: “I have prayed a lot to the Blessed Virgin so that I would die on a day dedicated to her and I hope I shall be heard. What else could I ask of the Lord?”

In answer to his question he was told: “Ask the Lord to grant you to do all your Purgatory in this world so that when you die your soul will go straight to Heaven.” “Oh, yes,” he immediately replied “I ask for this with all my heart. Please give me your blessing. I hope that the Lord will make me suffer in this world to the point that I have done all my purgatory and so, when my soul is separated from my body, it will fly straight to Heaven.”

It would seem that the Lord heard his prayer as he improved somewhat and his life was prolonged for about twenty-four hours.

### *Chapter 31 – A marvellous fact – Two visits – A beautiful death*

Saturday, 9th January, was the last day on earth for our dear Besucco. He had perfect use of his senses and his reason throughout the day. He wanted to pray all the time, but he was told not to as it tired him too much. “Well, at least,” he said “let someone near me do the praying and I shall repeat in my heart the words he says aloud.” Just to please him it was necessary to have someone by his bed praying continuously. Amongst those who visited him

that day there was a companion who was a bit troublesome. “How are you Besucco?” he asked. “My dear friend,” he replied “I am at the end of my life. Pray for me in these my last moments. But remember that one day you too will find yourself in a similar state. Oh, how happy you will be if you have been good! But, if you don’t change your way of life, how sorry you are going to be at the moment of death.” His companion began to cry and from that moment onwards thought more about his soul; today he is still one of the good boys.

At ten in the evening he was visited by Lieutenant Eysautier and his wife. The Lieutenant had had a hand in Francis’ admission to the Oratory and he had helped him considerably. Besucco was very happy to see them and he showed lively signs of gratitude. This courageous man was greatly edified when he saw the happiness in the boy’s face, also the signs of devotion which he demonstrated and the assistance he was getting, and he said:

“Dying like this is a real pleasure, and I would like to find myself in a similar state.” Then he turned to the dying boy and said: “Dear Francis, when you get to Heaven pray for me and for my wife ...” But he was overcome with emotion and could not continue; he departed after giving the sick boy a final wave of his hand.

About half past ten it seemed that Francis had only a few more minutes to live. He moved his hands from under the blankets and tried to lift them up. I took them and joined them together on top of the bed. He separated them and lifted them up again. He was smiling and his eyes were fixed as if gazing at something he liked. Thinking that perhaps he wanted a crucifix, I put one in his hands. He took it, kissed it, and put it on the bed, and straight away lifted up his arms again in an outburst of joy. His face appeared to be stronger and to have more colour in it than when he had been healthy. Its beauty and radiance was such that it eclipsed the infirmary lights. The ten bystanders were dumb-founded and their astonishment grew when the dying boy lifted his head a little and stretched out his hands as if to shake hands with someone he loved. Then in a joyful resonant voice he sang: *“Praise Mary, Oh you faithful tongues; let your harmony resound in the heavens.”*

Afterwards he made several efforts to lift himself up and devoutly stretching out his hands, he began to sing again: “*Oh Jesus, on fire with love, would that I had never offended you. Oh my dear good Jesus, I do not want to offend you any more.*” Without interruption he intoned the hymn: “*Pardon, dear Jesus, Mercy, my God, Before sinning again I want to die.*”

We all listened in stunned silence. Our eyes were riveted on Francis who seemed to have become an Angel with the Angels in Paradise. To break the tension the director said: “I believe that at this moment our Besucco is receiving some extraordinary grace from the Lord and his heavenly Mother, to whom he has been so devoted during his life. Perhaps she has come to take his soul to Heaven.”

Fr Alasonatti, the prefect, exclaimed: “No one should be afraid. This boy is in communication with God.” Besucco continued to sing, but his words were all truncated as if he were answering questions. I was only able to catch these phrases: “King of Heaven ... so beautiful ... I am a poor sinner ... I give you my heart ... Give me your love ... My dear good Lord ...” Then he fell back on the bed without a sign of life. But when he realised that no one was praying and no one was suggesting spontaneous prayers to him he immediately turned to me and said: “Help me. Let us pray. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, assist me in this my agony. Jesus, Mary and Joseph may I breathe forth my soul in peace with you.”

I suggested to him that he rest, but without paying any attention to me he continued: “Jesus in my mind, Jesus in my mouth, Jesus in my heart: Jesus and Mary I give you my soul.” It was eleven o’clock when he wanted to speak again, but he could say only two words: “The crucifix.” He asked to be blessed with the crucifix to gain the plenary indulgence at the moment of death, something he had often asked for and that I had promised him.

When he had given this blessing the Prefect began reading the *Depart, Christian soul* whilst the others prayed on their knees. At eleven fifteen Besucco looked intently at me, and tried to smile; then he raised his eyes heavenward indicating that he was departing. A few moments later his soul left his body and flew gloriously, as we fondly hope to enjoy heavenly glory in the company

of those who have served God by the innocence of their life in this world and who are now enjoying him and blessing him in Heaven.

*Chapter 32 – Suffrages and upset*

One cannot describe the grief and sorrow caused throughout the whole house by the loss of such a dear friend. Many prayers were said there and then around the bedside. Next morning the news spread amongst his companions, who gathered in the Church to find some comfort in their sorrow and also to pay a tribute to their dead friend. They prayed for the repose of his soul, if indeed he still had need of prayers. Many went to Communion for this purpose. The Rosary, the office, prayers in common, and in private, Communions, Mass, in short, all the practices of piety which took place in our Church on that Sunday were directed to God for the eternal repose of the soul of our good Francis.

Something rather unusual happened that day. His features became so handsome and his face took on such a healthy glow that in no way did he seem to be dead. As a matter of fact he had never seemed so extraordinarily good-looking even when he was in good health. His own companions far from displaying the morbid fear boys generally have for the dead were eager to go to see him and they all said that he really looked like an angel from Heaven. That is why in the portrait drawn after his death he looks better than when alive.

Then, those who spotted objects connected in some way or other with Besucco vied with one another to get them and to keep them as remembrances of him. It was commonly voiced about that he had gone straight to Heaven. Some said that he did not have any need of our prayers for he is already enjoying the glory of Heaven here and now.

“For sure,” added another boy “he is certainly enjoying the sight of God and praying for us.”

“I believe” stated a third boy “that Besucco already enjoys a throne of glory in Heaven and that he is invoking divine blessings on his companions and friends.”

On the following day, January 11, Mass was sung by his companions here in the Church at the Oratory. Many went to Communion as always for the greater glory of God, and also to pray for the eternal repose of the soul of Francis, if indeed he still had need of prayers. After the Mass the boys escorted the coffin to the parish church and then to the cemetery.

Francis was buried in grave number 147 in the fourth row on the western side.

### *Chapter 33 – Commotion in Argentera and Reverence for young Besucco*

The virtues which had shone forth in this young boy for the space of about fourteen years at Argentera appeared even more resplendent when he died and when news arrived of his holy death. Fr Francis Pepino sent me a moving account of what occurred there; it possesses something of the supernatural. I shall keep the full story for a more opportune time but I'll give a few excerpts here. "When news of the serious illness of Francis arrived there were public prayers with a sung Mass, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and prayers *for the sick*. The news of his death reached us on the evening of January 13 and it quickly spread. In less than an hour Francis was being presented by most of the parents as an example to their respective children. I cannot say enough about the sorrow of the parents and the benefactors of this dear boy, who always pleased everybody with his exemplary conduct and who never offended anyone. Mary, the younger sister of Francis, clearly told me of his death on January 10. She told me that at about midnight of the previous night, when she was in bed with her mother, she heard a loud noise in the upstairs room where Francis used to sleep. She clearly heard a handful of sand fall on the floor, and fearing that the noise would make her mother suspect that Francis was dead, she began speaking to her in a loud voice - something this girl did not usually do. Several other people, convinced of his holiness, prayed to him for favours and obtained what they sought." I don't want to discuss what I have just quoted; I intend only to be factual and to leave whatever inferences can be drawn from these facts to the judgement of my readers. Here are a few more excerpts from the source previously quoted: "During February a two year old boy was in danger of death. The parents considered the case



hopeless and turned to our Besucco, whose virtues were being proclaimed by everyone. They promised furthermore that if the boy were cured they would promote the practice of the Stations of the Cross in imitation of Francis. The boy recovered quickly and is now in perfect health. A few days ago I myself recommended to the prayers of our dear boy the father of a family who was seriously ill. At the same time I also recommended him to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to whose honour and glory this man had consecrated himself as a cantor. I am not giving the names of these people simply to save them from any undue criticism. The sick man showed immediate improvement and within a few days appeared perfectly cured.

Anna, Francis' oldest sister, was married in March. She was later troubled with an affliction which gave her no peace, day or night. In a moment of greater pain she called out: My dear little Francis, help me in my need, obtain some rest for me. No sooner said than done. From that night on she began to sleep peacefully and she has continued to do so.

Encouraged by the success of her prayer Anna again turned to Francis for help at a time when her life was in great danger, and again her every wish was granted.

Whilst, for the greater glory of God, I have collected accounts of what happened to others, I must not omit telling you that I used to recommend myself to the prayers of my godson when he was alive and I continued to do so with greater faith after his death. As a result of my faith I have obtained favours at different times."

### *Chapter 34 – Conclusion*

I have come to the end of the life of Francis Besucco. I would like to have said much more about this virtuous boy, but, since this could be the cause of certain criticism from those who do not recognise the wonders of the Lord in his servants, I shall await a more opportune time to publish them, if the divine goodness allows me to live long enough.

Meanwhile, my dear readers, before I finish writing, I would like both of us to come to a conclusion which will be to our mutual advantage. It is certain

that sooner or later death will come for both of us, and it is possible that it will come sooner than we think. It is equally certain that if we don't perform good works during our life we won't be able to reap their fruit at the point of death, nor can we expect any reward from God. Now since Divine Providence gives us time to prepare for this last moment, let us occupy this time in good works and so be assured that we shall collect the reward we merit at the appropriate time. We can expect to find people who will laugh at us because we practice our religion. Don't pay any attention to them. Whoever listens to them acts wrongly and betrays himself. If we want to be wise before the face of God, we must not be afraid of appearing stupid before the world, because Jesus Christ assures us that the wisdom of the world is foolishness in the eyes of God. Only the continuous practice of our religion can make us happy in time and in eternity. Anyone who does not work in summer has no right to enjoyment during winter, and anyone who does not practice virtue during his life cannot expect any reward after death.

I encourage you, Christian reader, I encourage you to perform good works whilst we have time; our sufferings are of short duration and what we shall enjoy lasts forever. I call down the divine blessings upon you, and in your turn please pray to the Lord God to have mercy on my soul, so that after having spoken about virtue, about the method of practising it, and about the great reward that God has prepared in the next life for those who practice it, I may not suffer the terrible misfortune of neglecting to do it myself with irreparable harm to my own salvation.

O Lord, help me, help me to persevere in the observance of your precepts during the days of my life so that we can one day go to Heaven to enjoy great happiness for ever and ever. Amen.

## SECTION TWO

### “MEMOIRS OF THE ORATORY”

#### Presentation

*Written over several occasions between 1873 and 1875, the manuscript of the Memoirs of the Oratory remained unpublished by Don Bosco's explicit will. However Fr John Bonetti drew on it abundantly for his History of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, (which found its way into English under a different title Don Bosco's Early Apostolate) published as a series in the Salesian Bulletin between 1879 and 1886. And Fr John Baptist Lemoyne included it in its entirety in the first volumes of the Biographical Memoirs, adding in other information and anecdotes drawn from other witnesses. The first complete edition of the Memoirs appeared in 1946. The decision to put the book in the public domain in its entirety was motivated by the universal dimension that the Saint has taken on, as Eugene Ceria wrote in the presentation: “Today Don Bosco has become part of history and also been listed among the saints.”<sup>105</sup>*

*The text—which is an original testimony of events and also a reflection interpreting a lifetime and a charismatic vocation—has been of major importance. There are certain events in it that have taken on the role of symbolic events in the Salesian mission and method, such as the dream at nine years of age and the description of the encounter with Bartholomew Garelli. Through his recounting of all this the author presents his own educational model embodied in the attitudes of key individuals such as Mama Margaret, Fr Calosso, the teachers at the schools in Chieri, Fr Cafasso and Fr Borel. The Memoirs of the Oratory have contributed in a special and determining way to building up and affirming an image of Don Bosco and his characteristic features: the tenacious and enterprising young man, the lively leader amongst his young friends, the dreamer called to an extraordinary mission, the friend of youthful yearnings, the affectionate father who looks after his boys and opens up a way for their formation, the apostle enlightened from on high, creative, tenacious and a fighter.*

<sup>105</sup> Giovanni BOSCO (san), *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*. Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale 1946, p. 4.

*But the document's interest goes further still, because in it Don Bosco shows that he is inspired "by the primary concern of defining the meaning of an overall educational experience" and formulating "a programme of action" for his disciples. "Before being a story of the past ... the Memoirs are the result of coherent reflection, ending up in a spirituality and pedagogy."<sup>106</sup> Thus the Memoirs become "a History of the Oratory which is more "theological" and pedagogical than real, perhaps the "theoretical" document which Don Bosco had long wanted to write."<sup>107</sup> This way it can be considered as 'Memoirs of the future' because Don Bosco uses it to show his intention of passing on his experience so it can become a "programme of life and action for those who would continue it."<sup>108</sup>*

*These purposes are explicitly suggested by the author in his introductory pages to guide the reading of the text in a specific direction: in recognition and interpretation of the past he links the birth of the oratory as an institution with his own spiritual journey. This is an experience of faith and openness to the movement of the Spirit which requires constant discernment. There is a range of attitudes, interior dispositions and choices posed as a charismatic norm for his disciples.*

*So reading this document, since it is in narrative form, would seem to be easy to interpret, but it requires a certain awareness if we are to understand the messages it is passing on. Right from the first lines Don Bosco's narrative strategy guides readers along well-defined paths. He suggests both the general key for interpreting it—a providential history led directly by God for the "salvation" of the young—and a series of other indications opening up two fundamental possibilities for interpretation: the dynamics of the spiritual life and the model of the pastor and educator.*

<sup>106</sup> Pietro BRAIDO, revision of Giovanni BOSCO (san), *Memorie*. Written in today's language. Leumann (Torino), Elle Di Ci 1985, in RSS 5 (1986) 169.

<sup>107</sup> Pietro BRAIDO, *L'esperienza pedagogica di don Bosco nel suo "divenire"*, in "Orientamenti Pedagogici" 36 (1989) 27.

<sup>108</sup> Pietro BRAIDO, "Memorie" *del futuro*, in RSS 11 (1992) 97.

### 309. "Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855"

Ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*.  
Saggio introduttivo e note storiche a cura di Aldo Giraud. Roma, LAS 2011, pp. 55-206<sup>109</sup>.

#### Memoirs of the Oratory from 1815 to 1835 written exclusively for Salesians

Many a time I have been urged to write my memoirs concerning the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales. Though I could not readily say no to the authority of the one who advised me to do this, I found it hard actually to set about the task because it meant too often speaking about myself. But now there has been added the command of a person of supreme authority, an authority that brooks no further delay. Therefore I am now putting into writing those confidential details that may somehow serve as a light or be of use to the work which Divine Providence has entrusted to the Society of Saint Francis de Sales. But I must say at the outset that I am writing these for my beloved Salesian sons; *I forbid that these things be made public during my lifetime or after my death.*

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

Should they come upon experiences related maybe with complacency or the appearance of vainglory, let them indulge me a little. A father delights in speaking of his exploits to his dear children. It is always to be hoped that

<sup>109</sup> This edition of the *Memoirs* is from the second edition of the critical text published by the Salesian Historical Institute (Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*. Introduction, notes and critical text by Antonio da Silva Ferreira. Roma, LAS 1992), but corrects it here and there after careful comparison with the original manuscripts.

the sons will draw from these adventures, small and great, some spiritual and temporal advantage.

I have chosen to divide my account into ten-year periods, because each decade saw a notable development of our work.

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

*Ten years of childhood – Father’s death – Family difficulties – Widowed mother*

I was born on the day dedicated to Mary Assumed into Heaven in 1815<sup>110</sup> in Morialdo, a hamlet of Castelnuovo d’Asti<sup>111</sup>. My mother’s name was Margaret Occhiena and she was from Capriglio. My father’s name was Francis<sup>112</sup>. They were farmers who made their living by hard work and thrifty use of what little they had. My good father, almost entirely by the sweat of his brow, supported my grandmother, in her seventies<sup>113</sup> and prey to frequent illnesses; three youngsters and a pair of farm helpers. Of the three children, the oldest was Anthony, born of his first wife<sup>114</sup>, the second was Joseph<sup>115</sup>, and the youngest was me, John.

<sup>110</sup> Parish register and civil documents show that the date of birth was August 16. The second name, Melchior, was in honour of his maternal grandfather, his godfather.

<sup>111</sup> Castelnuovo d’Asti (today Castelnuovo Don Bosco), a district in the province of Asti and diocese of Turin, had 3,000 inhabitants at the time, between the town itself and four outlying hamlets, Morialdo, Bardella, Nevissano and Ranello.

<sup>112</sup> Margaret Occhiena (1788-1856). Capriglio is a small town 9 km from Castelnuovo. Francesco Luigi Bosco (1784-1817), widowed (1811), married Margaret Occhiena on June 6, 1812.

<sup>113</sup> Margaret Zucca, mother of Francesco (1752-1826).

<sup>114</sup> Anthony Joseph Bosco (1808-1849), born of Francis’ first marriage with Margaret Cagliero (1784-1811).

<sup>115</sup> Joseph Aloysius Bosco (1813-1862).

I was not yet two years old when the merciful Lord hit us with a sad bereavement. My dearly loved father died unexpectedly. He was strong and healthy, still young and actively interested in promoting a good Christian upbringing for his offspring. One day he came home from work covered in sweat and imprudently went down into a cold cellar. That night he developed a high temperature, the first sign of a serious illness. Every effort to cure him proved vain. Within a few days he was at death's door. Strengthened by all the comforts of religion, he recommended to my mother confidence in God, then died, aged only thirty-four, on May 12, 1817<sup>116</sup>.

I do not know how I reacted on that sad occasion. One thing only do I remember, and it is my earliest memory. We were all going out from the room where he had died, and I insisted on staying behind. My grieving mother addressed me, "Come, John, come with me." "If papa's not coming, I don't want to come" I answered. "My poor son," my mother replied "come with me; you no longer have a father."

Having said this, she broke down and started crying as she took me by the hand and led me away. I began crying too because she was crying. At that age I could not really understand what a tragedy had fallen on us in our father's death.

This event threw the whole family into difficulty. Five people had to be supported. The crops failed that year because of a drought and that was our only source of income. The prices of foodstuffs soared. Wheat was as much as 25 francs an *emina*,<sup>117</sup> corn or maize 16 francs. Some people who lived at that time have assured me that beggars hesitated to ask for even a little bran to put in broth of chickpeas or beans for nourishment. People were found dead in the fields, their mouths stuffed with grass, with which they had tried to quell their ravenous hunger.

My mother often used to tell me that she fed the family until she exhausted all her food. She then gave money to a neighbour, Bernard Cavallo, to go

<sup>116</sup> Died May 11 1817.

<sup>117</sup> An ancient grain measure equivalent to around 23 litres.

looking for food to buy. That friend went round to various markets but was unable to buy anything, even at exorbitant prices. After two days he came in the evening bringing back nothing but the money he had been given. We were all in a panic. We had eaten practically nothing the whole day, and the night would have been difficult to face. My mother, not allowing herself to be discouraged, went round to the neighbours to try to borrow some food. She did not find anyone able to help. "My dying husband," she told us "said I must have confidence in God. Let's kneel then and pray." After a brief prayer she got up and said, "Drastic circumstances demand drastic means." Then she went to the stable and, helped by Mr Cavallo, she killed a calf. Part of that calf was immediately cooked and the worst of the family's hunger satisfied. In the days that followed, cereals bought at a very high price from more distant places enabled us to survive.

Anyone can imagine how much my mother worked and suffered in that disastrous year. The critical lack of wheat supplies was overcome by constant hard work, by continuous thrift, by attention to the smallest details and by occasional providential help. My mother often told me of these events, and my relatives and friends confirmed them.

When that terrible scarcity was over and matters at home had improved, a convenient arrangement was proposed to my mother. However she repeated again and again, "God gave me a husband and God has taken him away. With his death the Lord put three sons under my care. I would be a cruel mother to abandon them when they needed me most." On being told that her sons could be entrusted to a good guardian who would look after them well, she merely replied, "A guardian could only be their friend, but I am a mother to these sons of mine. All the gold in the world could never make me abandon them."

Her greatest care was given to instructing her sons in their religion, making them value obedience, and keeping them busy with tasks suited to their age. When I was still very small, she herself taught me to pray. As soon as I was old enough to join my brothers, she made me kneel with them morning and evening. We would all recite our prayers together, including the



rosary. I remember well how she herself prepared me for my first confession. She took me to church, made her own confession first, then presented me to the confessor. Afterwards, she helped me to make my thanksgiving. She continued to do this until I reached the age when she judged me able to use the sacrament well on my own.

I had reached my ninth year. My mother wanted to send me to school, but she felt very uneasy because of the distance. The distance to Castelnuovo from where we lived was more than three miles; my brother Anthony was opposed to my boarding there. A compromise was eventually agreed upon. During the winter season I would attend school at the nearby village of Capriglio. In this way I was able to learn the basic elements of reading and writing. My teacher was a devout priest called Joseph Delacqua<sup>118</sup>. He was very attentive to my needs, seeing to my instruction and even more to my Christian education. During the summer months I went along with what my brother wanted by working in the fields.

### *A dream*

It was at that age that I had a dream. All my life this remained deeply impressed on my mind. In this dream I seemed to be near my home in a fairly large yard. A crowd of children were playing there. Some were laughing, some were playing games, and quite a few were swearing. When I heard these evil words, I jumped immediately amongst them and tried to stop them by using my words and my fists. At that moment a dignified man appeared, a nobly dressed adult. He wore a white cloak, and his face shone so that I could not look directly at him. He called me by name, told me to take charge of these children, and added these words: "You will have to win these friends of yours not by blows but by gentleness and love. Start right away to teach them the ugliness of sin and the value of virtue."

Confused and frightened, I replied that I was a poor, ignorant child. I was unable to talk to those youngsters about religion. At that moment the kids

<sup>118</sup> Giuseppe Lacqua (1764-1847).

stopped their fighting, shouting, and swearing; they gathered round the man who was speaking:

Hardly knowing what I was saying, I asked, "Who are you, ordering me to do the impossible?" "Precisely because it seems impossible to you, you must make it possible through obedience and the acquisition of knowledge." "Where, by what means, can I acquire knowledge?" "I will give you a teacher. Under her guidance you can become wise. Without her, all wisdom is foolishness."

"But who are you that speak so?"

"I am the son of the woman whom your mother has taught you to greet three times a day."

"My mother tells me not to mix with people I don't know unless I have her permission. So tell me your name."

"Ask my mother what my name is." At that moment, I saw a lady of stately appearance standing beside him. She was wearing a mantle that sparkled all over as though covered with bright stars. Seeing from my questions and answers that I was more confused than ever, she beckoned me to approach her. She took me kindly by the hand and said, "Look." Glancing round, I realised that the youngsters had all apparently run away. A large number of goats, dogs, cats, bears, and other animals had taken their place. "This is the field of your work. Make yourself humble, strong, and energetic. And what you will see happening to these animals in a moment is what you must do for my children."

I looked round again, and where before I had seen wild animals, I now saw gentle lambs. They were all jumping and bleating as if to welcome that man and lady.

At that point, still dreaming, I began crying. I begged the lady to speak so that I could understand her, because I did not know what all this could mean. She then placed her hand on my head and said, "In good time you will understand everything."

With that, a noise woke me up and everything disappeared.

I was totally bewildered. My hands seemed to be sore from the blows I had given, and my face hurt from those I had received. The memory of the man and the lady, and the things said and heard, so occupied my mind that I could not get any more sleep that night. I wasted no time in the morning in telling all about my dream. I spoke first to my brothers, who laughed at the whole thing, and then to my mother and grandmother. Each one gave his own interpretation. My brother Joseph said, "You're going to become a keeper of goats, sheep, and other animals." My mother commented, "Who knows, but you may become a priest." Anthony merely grunted, "Perhaps you'll become a robber chief." But my grandmother, though she could not read or write, knew enough theology and made the final judgement, saying, "Pay no attention to dreams."

I agreed with my grandmother. However, I was unable to cast that dream out of my mind. The things I shall have to say later will give some meaning to all this. I kept quiet about these things, and my relatives paid little attention to them. But when I went to Rome in 1858 to speak to the Pope about the Salesian Congregation, he asked me to tell him everything that had even the suggestion of the supernatural about it. It was only then, for the first time, that I said anything about this dream which I had when I was nine or ten years old. The Pope ordered me to write out the dream in all its detail and to leave it as an encouragement to the sons of that Congregation whose formation was the reason for that visit to Rome<sup>119</sup>.

### **First decade 1825-1835**

#### *1. First entertainment for children – Sermons – Acrobat – Bird-nesting*

Many times you have asked me at what age I began to take an interest in children. When I was ten years old, I did what was possible at my age and

<sup>119</sup> Don Bosco visited Rome the first time in 1858 and was given several papal audiences. At a meeting on March 21, Pius IX had him tell "things that only had the appearance of the supernatural." (MB V, 882). On the same occasion Don Bosco presented the project of the foundation of the Salesian Society (cf. P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani...*, vol. I, pp. 378-390).

formed a kind of festive oratory. Take note. Though I was still pretty small, I was studying my companions' characters. When I looked closely at someone, I could usually gauge what he was thinking. This gift won me the love and esteem of the boys my own age, and I was thus in demand as judge or friend. For my own part, I tried always to help and never to hurt. So my companions were quite fond of me. I would take their side when quarrels broke out. Though I was not very big, I was strong and brave enough to stand up even to older companions. Whenever arguments, questions, or quarrels of any kind arose, I acted as arbiter, and everyone accepted my decisions with good grace.

But it was to hear my stories that they flocked round me. They loved them to the point of folly. I drew on many sources for my anecdotes-sermons, catechism lessons, and stories I had read in *The Kings of France*, *Wretched Guerino*, and in *Bertoldo, Bertoldino*<sup>120</sup>. When I appeared, my companions and even grown-ups would run to me in a crowd and clamour for a story from a fellow who scarcely understood what he had read. At times, along the road to Castelnuovo or in some field I would be surrounded by hundreds of people, anxious to hear what a poor child had to say. Apart from a good memory, I lacked any knowledge; but they seemed to think I was a great scholar in their midst. *Monoculus rex in regno caecorum*<sup>121</sup>.

In the wintertime, everyone wanted me in the stable to tell stories. All sorts of people used to gather to spend five or even six hours of their evenings listening, motionless, to selections from *The Kings of France*. The poor speaker used to stand on a bench so that all could hear and see. These occasions were described as "listening to a sermon" since we would always begin and end the storytelling with a sign of the cross and a Hail Mary. 1826.

When the weather was fine, especially on Sundays and feast days, a few strangers would come along to swell the ranks. Things were getting a bit more serious now. The entertainment now extended to tricks I had picked up from

<sup>120</sup> *Reali di Francia and Guerino Meschino*: French chivalric stories, put into Italian by Andrea Mangiabotti da Barberino (1370-1431). *Bertoldo e Bertoldino*: burlesque novels by Giulio Cesare Croce (1550-1609).

<sup>121</sup> In the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.

acrobats and magicians I had watched in the marketplaces and at fairs. I used to watch them closely to get the hang of the tricks, then go home and practise till I had mastered the skill. You can imagine all the falls and tumbles and bumps and crashes I was always having! But would you believe that by the time I was eleven I could juggle, do mid-air somersaults and the swallow trick, and walk on my hands. I could walk, jump, and even dance on the tightrope like a professional acrobat.

From the programme of one holiday in particular you can get an idea of our general routine.

At Becchi there was a field in which grew several trees. One of them, a *martinello* pear tree<sup>122</sup> that is still there, was very helpful to me then. I used to sling a rope from it to another tree some distance away. I had a table with a haversack on it, and on the ground a mat for the jumps. When I had everything set up and everyone was eager to marvel at my latest feats, I would invite them to recite the rosary and sing a hymn. Then standing on the chair, I preached to them or, better, repeated as much as I could remember from the explanation of the gospel I had heard in church that morning; or sometimes I recalled episodes from something I had heard or read. After the sermon there was a short prayer, and then the show began. At that point you would have seen, just as I am telling you, the preacher transformed into a professional acrobat. I did the swallow trick and somersaults, walked on my hands, tied the pouch around my waist, swallowed coins and then produced them from someone's nose. I multiplied balls and eggs, changed water into wine, killed and chopped up a chicken and then brought it back to life again so that it crowed better than before. These were part of my stock in trade. I walked the tightrope like an ordinary path, jumped and danced on it. and hung by one foot or one hand, sometimes by two. This went on for several hours. At the end of it I was tired. A short prayer brought proceedings to a close, and everyone went about his business.

Those who cursed or engaged in bad talk or refused to join in the prayers were not allowed to watch the show.

<sup>122</sup> Variety of pear (*Martin sec*) typical of Piedmont, with small fruit.

At this point you might ask me: Going to fairs and markets, watching magicians, getting props for my shows—all these took money; where did I get it? I had several ways. Any money that my mother or others gave me to buy some tidbit, little tips, gifts, all this I saved for this purpose. I was also quite clever at catching birds in cages, snares, and nets and with birdlime; I was very good at finding birds' nests. Whenever I had gathered enough of these, I knew where I could get a good price for them. Mushrooms, plants used for dyes,<sup>123</sup> heather<sup>124</sup> were all another source of money for me.

Now you might ask me, Did my mother mind my wasting my time playing magician? I assure you that my mother loved me dearly, and I had boundless trust in her. I would not take one step without her approval. She knew everything, saw everything, and let me do it. Indeed, if I needed something, she willingly came to my help. My companions and generally all the spectators gladly gave me what was necessary to provide them with those amusements.

## *2. First communion – Mission sermons – Fr Calosso – School at Morialdo*

One thing that gave me serious concern was the lack of a church or chapel where I could sing, pray with my friends. To hear a sermon or go to catechism, you needed to go about ten kilometres, there and back, either to Castelnuovo or the nearby town of Buttigliera<sup>125</sup>. This was the reason why they willingly came to listen to the acrobat's sermons.

I was eleven years old when I made my first holy communion<sup>126</sup>. I knew my catechism well. The minimum age for first communion was twelve years. Because we lived far from the parish church, the parish priest did not know us, and my mother had to do almost all the religious instruction. She did not want me to get any older before my admission to that great act of our religion,

<sup>123</sup> Erba tintoria, (*isatis tinctoria*), used for dyeing fabrics.

<sup>124</sup> Treppio. A variety of erica (*erica scoparia*) used for making small brooms or brushes.

<sup>125</sup> Buttigliera d'Asti: agricultural centre 2.5 km from Castelnuovo; in 1834 it had 2170 inhabitants.

<sup>126</sup> The function took place in the Easter period. John, who was 11 on August 16, 1826, was presumably admitted to Communion at Easter 1827.

so she took upon herself the task of preparing me as best as she could. She sent me to catechism class every day of Lent. I passed my examination, and the date was fixed. It was the day on which all the children were to make their Easter duty.

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

On the morning of my first communion, my mother did not permit me to speak to anyone. She accompanied me to the altar and together we made our preparation and thanksgiving. These were led by Father Sismondi<sup>127</sup>, the vicar forane, in a loud voice, alternating responses with everyone. It was my mother's wish for that day that I should refrain from manual work. Instead, she kept me occupied reading and praying.

Amongst the many things that my mother repeated to me many times was this: "My dear son, this is a great day for you. I am convinced that God has really taken possession of your heart. Now promise him to be good as long as you live. Go to communion frequently in the future, but beware of sacrilege. Always be frank in confession, be obedient always, go willingly to catechism and sermons. But for the love of God, avoid like the plague those who indulge in bad talk."

I treasured my mother's advice and tried to carry it out. I think that from that day on there was some improvement in my life, especially in matters of

<sup>127</sup> Giuseppe Sismondo (1771-1827) parish priest of Castelnuovo since 1812. Vicar forane: title given to a parish priest who coordinated the parishes in a vicariate (Today we might say a deanery). The Diocese of Turin at the time had 463,400 inhabitants; there were 242 parishes divided into 27 vicariates.

obedience and submission to others. It was not easy for me to be submissive because I liked to do things my way and follow my own childish whims rather than listen to those who gave me advice or told me what to do.

That year (1826)<sup>128</sup> there was a solemn mission in Buttigliera. It gave me a chance to hear several sermons, The preachers were well known and drew people from everywhere. I went with many others. We had an instruction and a meditation in the evening, after which we were free to return home.

On one of these April evenings, as I was making my way home amid the crowd, one of those who walked along with us was Fr Calosso of Chieri<sup>129</sup>, a very devout priest. Although he was old and bent, he made the long walk to hear the missioners. He was the chaplain of Murialdo. He noticed a capless, curly-headed lad amidst the others but walking in complete silence. He looked me over and then began to talk with me:

“Where are you from, my son? I gather you were at the mission?”

“Yes, Father, I went to hear the missioners’ sermons.”

“Now, what could you understand of it? I’m sure your mother could give you a better sermon, couldn’t she?”

“Yes, my mother does give me fine instructions. But I like to hear the missioners as well. And I think I understand them.”

“If you can remember anything from this evening’s sermons, I’ll give you two pence.”

“Just tell me whether you wish to hear the first sermon, or the second?”

“Just as you wish,” he said “as long as you tell me anything from it. Do you remember what the first sermon was about?”

<sup>128</sup> He should have said: 1829; Fr Calosso, whom we will speak of shortly, set up at Morialdo only in the first months of 1829. There were two jubilees celebrated those years: one called by Pope Leo XII for the holy year 1826, the other granted as an exception by Pope Pius VIII on June 12, 1829. Here Don Bosco confuses one with the other.

<sup>129</sup> Giovanni Melchiorre Felice Calosso (1760-1830), doctor of theology, was parish priest at Bruino (a town 25 km from Turin) between 1791 and 1813; he had to retire from there due to tensions with the important *Jacobins* in the town.



"It was about the necessity of giving oneself to God in good time and not putting off one's conversion."

"And what was in the sermon?" the venerable old man asked, somewhat surprised,

"Oh, I remember quite well. If you wish I will recite it all." Without further ado, I launched into the preamble and went on to the three points. The preacher stressed that it was risky to put off conversion because one could run out of time, or one might lack the grace or the will to make the change. There, amidst the crowd, he let me rattle on for half an hour. Then came a flurry of questions from Father Calosso: "What's your name?" "Who are your family?" "How much schooling have you had?"

"My name is John Bosco. My father died when I was very young. My mother is a widow with a family of five to support. I've learned to read, and to write a little."

"You haven't studied Donato<sup>130</sup> or Grammar?"

"I don't know what they are, Father."

"Would you like to study?"

"Oh, indeed I would."

"What's stopping you?"

"My brother Anthony."

"And why doesn't Anthony want you to study?"

"Because he never liked school himself. He says he doesn't want anyone else to waste time on books the way he did. But if I could only get to school, I would certainly study and not waste time."

"Why do you want to study?"

<sup>130</sup> "Donato" was the name of the text used in lower secondary (*latinitas*) classes (*Donato ossia rudimenti di lingua latina ed italiana*. Torino, Stamperia Reale 1815); "Grammar" was the text used in the upper classes. (*Nuovo metodo per apprendere agevolmente la lingua latina tratto dal francese . . . a uso delle scuole regie*. Torino, Stamperia Reale 1817, 2 vols.).

“I’d like to become a priest.”

“And why do you want to become a priest?”

“I’d like to attract my companions, talk to them, and teach them our religion. They’re not bad, but they become bad because they have no one to guide them.

These bold words impressed the holy priest. He never took his eyes off me while I was speaking. When our ways parted, he left me with these words: “Cheer up now. I’ll provide for you and your education. Come to see me on Sunday with your mother. We’ll arrange something.”

The following Sunday my mother and I went along to see him. He undertook to take me for one lesson a day. To keep Anthony happy I was to spend the rest of the day helping him in the fields. He was pleased enough with the scheme because my classes would not start till the autumn, when the rush of field work would be over.

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

It was then that I came to realise what it was to have a regular spiritual director. a faithful friend of one’s soul. I had not had one up till then. Amongst other things he forbade a penance I used to practise: he deemed it unsuited to my age and circumstances. He encouraged frequent confession and communion. He taught me how to make a short daily meditation, or more accurately, a spiritual reading. I spent all the time I could with him; I stayed with him on feast days. I went to serve his Mass during the week when I could.

From then on I began to savour the spiritual life; up to then I had acted in a purely mechanical way, not knowing the reasons.

In mid-September, I began a regular study of Italian grammar, and soon I was able to write fairly good compositions. At Christmas I went on to study Latin. By Easter I was attempting Italian-Latin and Latin-Italian translations. All this time I persevered with my usual acrobatics in the field, or in the barn during the winter. Everything my teacher said or did—his every word, I could say—provided edifying material for my audiences.

Just as I was patting myself on the back because everything was going so well, a new trial came; a heavy blow fell that shattered my hopes.

### 3. *Schoolwork and farmwork – Good and bad news – Fr Calosso's death*

During the winter, when there was no pressure of farm work, Anthony was reasonable enough about the time I gave to my books. When Spring came, however, and work was more pressing, he began to grumble that he was left to tackle all the chores while I was wasting my time and acting the gentleman. After some lively exchanges involving Anthony, my mother, and me, it was decided in the interest of family peace that I should go to school early in the morning and spend the rest of the day working in the fields. But how could I study? How could I manage the translations?

Take note. The walk to and from school afforded me some time to study. When I got home, I would take the hoe in one hand and my grammar the other, and along the way I would study "When *qui, quae quod* you'd render", until I reached the place of work<sup>131</sup>; then glancing longingly at the grammar, I would put it in a corner and begin hoeing, weeding, or gathering greens according to the need.

When there was a rest break, I went off on my own to study, a book in one hand, a hunk of bread in the other. I did the same thing on my way home. Written work had to be done in short periods snatched at mealtimes or in time borrowed from sleep.

<sup>131</sup> The beginning of a grammatical rule put into rhyme (but not in English!): "*Qui, quae, quod* qualora is put / after the antecedent, / but tied to it / only in number, and gender" (cf. *Nuovo metodo...*, vol. I, p. 484).

Despite all my work and good will, Anthony still was not happy. One day he announced very decisively, first to my mother and then to my brother, Joseph, that he could stand it no more. "I've had it up to here" he blustered. "I've had my fill of this grammar business. Look at me," he said "I've grown big and strong without ever setting eyes on such books." "That's nonsense." Carried away by blind rage, I retorted in a way I should not have: "Our donkey is bigger and stronger than you are, and he never went to school either. Do you want to be like him." This so angered him that only speed saved me from a volley of blows and smacks.

My mother was heartbroken, I was in tears myself, and the chaplain was upset too. In fact when that worthy minister of God got to know how matters stood in our family, he took me aside one day and said, "Johnny, you've put your faith in me, and I won't let you down. Leave that troublesome brother of yours and come and live in the presbytery. I'll be a loving father to you."

My mother was elated when I told her of this generous offer. In April I moved into, the priest's house, though I returned home to sleep.

No one can imagine how supremely happy I was. I idolised Fr Calosso, loved him as if he were my father, prayed for him, and tried to help him in every way I could. My greatest pleasure was to work for him. I would have died for him. I made more progress in one day with the good priest than I would have made in a week at home. That man of God lavished affection on me, and he would often say, "Don't worry about the future. As long as I'm alive I'll see that you want for nothing. And I'll make provision for you after my death."

Things were going unbelievably well for me. I could say my cup of happiness was full. There was nothing else I could wish for. Then a fresh disaster blighted all my hopes.

One morning in April 1828<sup>132</sup> Fr Calosso sent me home on an errand. I had only just made it to the house when a messenger dashed in at my heels.

<sup>132</sup> He should have said: November 1830; Fr Calosso died on 21 November 1830, as we see from parish registers.

He said I was to get back to Fr Calosso as fast as I could. He was very ill and wanted to see me. I did not run; I flew. I found my benefactor in bed suffering from a stroke and unable to speak. He recognised me and tried to talk but no words came. He gave me the key to his money and made signs that I was not to give it to anyone. After two days of suffering, Fr Calosso gave up his soul to God. His death shattered my dreams. I have always prayed for him, and as long as I live I shall remember my outstanding benefactor every day that dawns.

When Fr Calosso's heirs turned up, I handed over to them the key and everything else.

#### *4. Fr Cafasso – Doubts – Dividing the inheritance – School at Castelnuovo d'Asti – Music – The tailor*

That year Divine Providence brought a new benefactor into my life. He was Fr Joseph Cafasso from Castelnuovo d'Asti<sup>133</sup>.

It was the second Sunday of October, 1827, and the people of Murialdo were celebrating their patronal feast, the Motherhood of Mary. There was a great air of activity about the place; some were preparing the church, others engaged in family chores; some were playing games, others looking on.

One person I noticed was taking no part in the festivities. He was a slightly-built, bright-eyed cleric<sup>134</sup>, kindly and pure in appearance. He was leaning against the church door. Though I was only twelve years old, I was struck by his appearance and felt I would like to meet him. I went over and spoke to him: "Father," I said "would you care to see what's going on at our feast? I'd like to act as your guide."

He kindly beckoned me closer. He asked me how old I was, what studies I had done, if I had made my first communion, how often I went to confession, where I went to catechism, and so on. I was spellbound by his manner of

<sup>133</sup> Joseph Cafasso (1811-1860), later he would be Don Bosco's confessor and spiritual director.

<sup>134</sup> Joseph Cafasso took on the clerical cassock on July 1, 1827, at 16 years of age.

speaking and answered all his questions without hesitation. To show my gratitude for his friendliness, I once more offered to show him round the various entertainments and novelties.

“My dear friend,” he replied “the entertainments of a priest are church ceremonies. The more devoutly they are celebrated, the more pleasurable do they turn out for us. The new attractions are the practices of religion. These are ever new and therefore should be diligently attended. I’m only waiting for the church to open so I can go in.”

I plucked up my courage to add to the discussion. “But Father,” I suggested “though what you say is true, there’s a time for everything, a time to pray and a time to play.”

He smiled. But I have never forgotten his parting words, which were his plan of action for his whole life: “A cleric gives himself to the Lord. Nothing in the world must be more important to him than the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.”

I was struck with admiration and longed to know the name of the cleric whose words and bearing so breathed the spirit of the Lord. I learned that he was the seminarian Joseph Cafasso, a student in his first year of theology. I already knew him by reputation as a model of virtue<sup>135</sup>.

Fr Calosso’s death was a great loss to me. I wept inconsolably over my dead benefactor. I thought of him in my waking hours and dreamt of him when I was asleep. It affected me so badly that my mother feared for my health. She sent me for a while to my grandfather in Capriglio<sup>136</sup>.

At this time I had another dream. In it I was sorely reproached for having put my hope in men and not in our good heavenly Father. Meanwhile I thought a great deal about how to go ahead with my studies. I would see good priests working at their sacred ministry, but I could not strike up a close relationship with them.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. no. 295, pp. 1078-1080.

<sup>136</sup> Melchior Occhiena (1752-1844).

Often I would meet on the road our parish priest or his curate<sup>137</sup>. I would greet them at a distance and bow to them as they passed. In their distant and courteous manner, they would return my greeting and go on their way. Often, I used to cry and say to myself and even to others, "If I were a priest, I would act differently. I would approach the children, say some kind words to them, and give them good advice. How happy I would be if I could talk with my parish priest. I had this comforting experience with Fr Calosso. Shall I never have it again."

My mother, seeing how upset I was because of the obstacles in the way of my studies, and not having any hope of getting the consent of Anthony, who was now over twenty, thought about dividing our inheritance<sup>138</sup>. There were serious difficulties, however, since Joseph and I were minors. Division of the property would be a complicated and costly business. Nevertheless she went ahead. My grandmother had died some years previously, so our family now consisted of my mother, Joseph, who did not want to be separated from me<sup>139</sup>.

This division took a load off my mind and left me completely free to go ahead with my studies. However, it took some months to complete all the formalities of the law. It was around Christmas before I was able to enrol at the elementary school in Castelnuovo. It was 1828, and I was thirteen years old<sup>140</sup>.

Since I had done my studies privately and was starting a public school with a new teacher, these things were for me a disconcerting experience. Practically, I had to begin my Italian grammar all over before I could start studying Latin. For some time, I walked from home to school every day. But that was nearly impossible during the harsh winter; I had to make four trips back and forth, covering twelve and a half miles daily. I found lodgings with an upright man,

<sup>137</sup> Parish priest of Castelnuovo was Fr Bartolomeo Dassano (1796-1854). He had two curates: Fr Emanuele Virano (1789-1834) and Fr Nicolao Moglia (1755-1838).

<sup>138</sup> The inheritance was divided in 1830 when Anthony was 21.

<sup>139</sup> Margaret Zucca died February 11, 1826.

<sup>140</sup> He should have said: December 1830 (a couple of weeks after Fr Calosso's death); John was 15.

a tailor, John Roberto; he had a taste for singing, especially plain chant. Since I had a good voice, I took up music wholeheartedly. In a few months, I could go up to the choir loft and sing the solo parts. Eager to use my free time, I took up tailoring. Before long I was able to make buttonholes and hems and sew simple and double seams. Later I learned how to cut out underwear, waistcoats, trousers, and coats. I fancied myself already a master tailor.

In fact my landlord, seeing how I had taken to the trade, made me a good offer to get me to stay with him and carry on the business. I had other ambitions, however. I wanted to pursue my studies. While I tried my hand at a variety of jobs to keep myself busy, I never lost sight of my main objective.

That year some of my companions tried to tempt me into danger; they wanted to take me gambling during school time. When I said I had no money, they suggested stealing it from my landlord or even my mother. One of them, pressuring me, said, "My dear chap, it's time you woke up. You must learn to live in the world. Putting your head in a sack gets you nowhere. Just get the money and you can have the same fun as the rest of us."

I well remember what my reply was: "I fail to understand what you're getting at. Am I to believe you're urging me to play truant and steal? But in your daily prayers, don't you say, 'The seventh commandment, You shall not steal'? Anyone who steals is a thief, and thieves come to a bad end. Besides, my mother loves me dearly, and if I need money for lawful purposes she gives it to me. I've never done anything without her permission, and I have no intention of starting to disobey her now. If your pals are doing that, they're evil. And if they're not doing it but recommending it to others, they're scoundrels."

News of this episode got to the ears of my other companions, and no one else proposed to me anything wrong. My teacher heard of it as well and from then on was very kind to me. Even many relatives of well-to-do youngsters heard of it and urged their sons to associate with me. I was therefore in a position to choose my friends, who loved me and would listen to me like the boys of Murialdo.



Things were going well for me. But I was in for another upset. My teacher, Fr Virano, was made parish priest of Mondonio in the diocese of Asti<sup>141</sup>. In April 1830 our beloved teacher went to take up his appointment. The man who replaced him could not keep order. In fact he almost scattered to the wind all that Fr Virano had taught in the preceding months.

### 5. *Schools in Chieri – Kindness of teachers– The first four grades (grammar)*

After the loss of so much time, it was finally decided to send me to Chieri, where I could continue seriously with my schooling. That was in 1830<sup>142</sup>. One who is raised in the backwoods and has never seen anything beyond a few small country villages is easily impressed by any little novelty [to be found in a larger city]. I lodged with a woman from my own town, Lucy Matta, a widow with one son who was moving to the city to help him and keep all eye on him<sup>143</sup>. The first person I met was Fr Eustace Valimberti<sup>144</sup> of revered memory. He gave me a lot of good advice on how to keep out of trouble. He invited me to serve his Mass and thus he could always advise me well. He brought me to see the headmaster<sup>145</sup> in Chieri and introduced me to my other teachers. Up to now, my studies had been a little of everything and amounted almost to nothing. Accordingly, I was advised to enrol in the sixth class<sup>146</sup>, which today would correspond to the class preparatory to the first year of *ginnasio*.

<sup>141</sup> Emanuele Virano (1789-1834) curate and teacher; he looked after Mondonio in April 1831.

<sup>142</sup> He should have said: 1831. The school year began November 1 and ended on June 21.

<sup>143</sup> Lucy Pianta (1783-1851), widow of Giuseppe Matta (cf. Secondo CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri: 1831-1841. Dieci anni che valgono una vita*. Torino, Edizioni Acclaim 1988, p. 24).

<sup>144</sup> He was called Placido Michele Filippo Valimberti (1803-1848), chaplain at the church of St William (near Lucy Matta's house) and 5th grade teacher from 1830 to 1839.

<sup>145</sup> Dominican Pio Eusebio Sibilla (born 1770), professor of philosophy. The 'Prefect of schools' (official title), according to the *Regolamento*, had to be a member of the clergy. His job was to "keep good order in the classrooms and the congregation (Sunday meetings) and exact fulfilment of what was prescribed for professors and teachers, and students in the city" (cf. *Regie patenti colle quali S. M. approva l'annesso Regolamento per le scuole tanto comunali che pubbliche, e Regie*, in data 23 luglio 1822. Torino, Stamperia Reale 1822, pp. 32-34).

<sup>146</sup> The upper school consisted of 3 classes of *latinità inferiore* (*sixth; fifth; fourth*) and 3 classes of *latinità superiore* (*third or grammar, humanities; rhetoric*).

My teacher was Dr Pugnetti<sup>147</sup>, also of dear memory. He was very kind to me. He helped me in school, invited me to his home, and was very sympathetic to me because of my age and my goodwill. He went out of his way to help me as much as he could.

My age and my size made me look like a pillar amongst my little companions. I was anxious to get out of that situation. After two months of the sixth class, I was at its head. I took an examination and moved up to the fifth class. I went gladly to my new class because my classmates were more my size, and my teacher was the beloved Fr Valimberti. After two more months, I led the class again and, by exception, was allowed to take another examination and so was promoted to the fourth class, which is equivalent to the second year of *ginnasio*.

Here my teacher was Joseph Cima, a strict disciplinarian<sup>148</sup>. When he saw this student as big and stocky as himself coming into his class in midyear, he joked in front of the whole class, “He’s either a simpleton or a genius. What do you make of him?” Taken aback by that harsh introduction, I answered, “Something in-between. I’m just a poor young fellow who has the goodwill to do his work and get along in his studies.”

He was mollified by my reply and went on with unusual kindness, “If you have goodwill, you’re in good hands. I’ll see that you won’t be idle here. Don’t worry; if you have any problems, tell me promptly and I’ll sort them out for you.” I thanked him with all my heart.

After a couple of months in this class, something happened that gave rise to a good deal of comments about me. One day the teacher was explaining the life of Agesilaus in Cornelius Nepos. I did not have my book with me that day, and to cover my forgetfulness, I kept my *Donato* open in front of me. My companions noticed, and first one and then another began to laugh. Suddenly the whole classroom was in an uproar.

<sup>147</sup> Valeriano Giovanni Domenico Pugnetti (1807-1868).

<sup>148</sup> Vincenzo Giuseppe Cima (1810-1854), not a priest but a tonsured cleric.

"What's going on here?" shouted the teacher. "What's going on?" he shot at me, this time. Everyone was looking at me. He told me to construe the text and repeat his explanation. I got to my feet, still holding my *Donato*. From memory I repeated the text, construed it, and explained it. Instinctively my companions expressed their admiration and burst into applause. The teacher was angry beyond description. It was the first time, according to him, that he had failed to maintain discipline. He swung at me, but I saw it coming and ducked. Next he placed his hand on my *Donato* and demanded of my neighbours the reason for all the commotion. "Bosco had his *Donato* in front of him all the time," my companions explained "but he read and explained the lesson as if he had the Cornelius text."

The teacher took the *Donato* and insisted I go on for two sentences more. Then he said to me, "In tribute to your wonderful memory, I'll overlook your forgetfulness. You're blessed. Only see that your gift is put to good use."

At the end of that school year (1830-1831)<sup>149</sup> as a result of my high marks, I was promoted to the third class, equivalent to the third year of *ginnasio*.

#### 6. *My companions – Society for a good time – Christian duties*

All this time I had to use my own initiative to learn how to deal with my companions. I put them in three groups: the good, the indifferent, and the bad. As soon as I spotted the bad ones, I avoided them absolutely and always. The indifferent I associated with only when necessary, but I was always courteous with them. I made friends with the good ones, and then only when I was sure of them. As I knew few people in the town, I made it a rule to keep to myself. I sometimes had to discourage people I did not know too well. Some wanted to get me to a show, others into 'some gambling, and still others to go swimming<sup>150</sup>. And there were suggestions that I should steal fruit from the town gardens or country orchards.

<sup>149</sup> He should have said: 1831-1832.

<sup>150</sup> These activities were forbidden by school rules "without permission of the prefect of studies" (*Regie patenti...*, pp. 20-21, articles 42-43).

One companion was so bold as to suggest that I should steal a valuable object from my landlady so that we could buy some sweets. Gradually I got to know the undesirables and firmly avoided their company. Usually I had a counter to these suggestions. I used to tell them that my mother had asked my landlady to look after me, and out of love for my mother I did not want to go anywhere nor do anything without good Lucy's consent.

This firm obedience to the good woman led to a very happy and practical conclusion. With much pleasure, Lucy asked me to take charge of her only son,<sup>151</sup> a lively youth more interested in games than in school work. She depended on me to check his homework even though he was in the class above me.

I took him in hand as if he were my brother. I used little prizes as bribes to get to him. I played indoor games with him and helped him to be faithful to his religious duties. Little by little he became more tractable, obedient, and studious. After six months he had become so good and diligent that his teacher was satisfied and he won honours in class. His mother was so delighted that she refused to accept my monthly rent.

Since the companions who tried to coax me into their escapades were the most careless about everything, they began to come to me with the request that I do them the kindness of lending them my homework or dictating it to them. The teachers frowned on this. They said that it was a false kindness that only encouraged laziness, and they strictly forbade me to do it. I then resorted to less obvious ways of helping them, such as explaining problems to them and lending a helping hand to those who needed it. Thus I made everyone happy and won the goodwill and affection of my companions.

At first they came to play, then to listen to stories or to do their homework, and finally for no reason at all, just as the boys at Murialdo and Castelnuovo used to do. That these gatherings might have a name, we called ourselves the Society for a Good Time. There was a reason for the name, because everyone

<sup>151</sup> "Matta Giovanni Battista of Castelnuovo d'Asti, already mayor of his town for years, now a businessman at the drugstore in the same town" (note by Don Bosco on the original manuscript). Giovanni Battista Matta (1809-1878), mayor of Castelnuovo from 1863 to 1867.

was obliged to look for such books, discuss such subjects, or play such games as would contribute to the happiness of the members. Whatever would induce sadness was forbidden, especially things contrary to God's law. Those who swore, used God's name in vain, or indulged in bad talk were turned away from the club at once. So it was that I found myself the leader of a crowd of companions. Two basic rules were adopted: (1) Each member of the Society for a Good Time should avoid language and actions unbecoming a good Christian. (2) Exactness in the performance of scholastic and religious duties. All this helped my reputation, and in 1832 my companions respected me like the captain of a small army. I was much in demand for entertainments, for helping pupils privately, or for giving lessons or reviews at home. Thus Divine Providence enabled me to supply my own clothes, school necessities, and other things without having to disturb my family in any way.

### 7. *Good companions and practices of piety*

Amongst the members of our Society for a Good Time I discovered some who were truly exemplary. Worthy of mention are William Garigliano from Poirino and Paul Braje from Chieri<sup>152</sup>. They were always ready for some good recreation, but only after they had done their homework. Both were reserved and pious, and they gave me plenty of good advice. On feast days, after the practices of piety in common at the college<sup>153</sup>, we used to go along to St Anthony's Church, where the Jesuits gave marvellous catechetical instructions<sup>154</sup>, with plenty of stories that I still recall.

During the week, the Society for a Good Time used to meet at the home of one of the members to talk about religious matters. Anyone was welcome

<sup>152</sup> Guglielmo Garigliano (1819-1902) would go to the seminary with John and become a priest. Poirino: agricultural town 5 km from Chieri. Paolo Vittorio Braje (1820-1832) died that year from a lung infection.

<sup>153</sup> The *Regolamento* envisaged a spiritual director and chapel (called a *Congregation*) for each school, where students attended daily mass, and on Sundays (cf. *Regie patenti...*, p. 20, art. 37-40).

<sup>154</sup> *Praefectus catechismi* in St Anthony's church was Jesuit Isaja Carminati (1798-1851); in 1849 he was called to the Gregorian University to teach Church Law (cf. S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...*, pp. 50-52).

to come to these gatherings. Garigliano and Braje were amongst the most conscientious. We entertained ourselves with some pleasant recreation, with discussions on religious topics, spiritual reading, and prayer. We exchanged good advice, and if there were any personal corrections we felt we should hand out to each other, whether these were our own personal observations or criticisms we had heard others make, we did that. Without realising it, we were putting into practice the excellent adage, “*Blessed is he who has an advisor*”; and that saying of Pythagoras, “*If you have no friend to tell you your faults, pay an enemy to do it.*” Besides these friendly activities, we went to hear sermons and often went to confession and holy communion.

Here it is good to recall that in those days religion was a basic part of the educational system. A teacher faced instant dismissal should he make any statement unbecoming or irreligious. If this was the way teachers were treated; you can imagine how severely pupils were dealt with for any unruly conduct or scandal! We went to Holy Mass every morning; classes began with the devout praying of the *Actiones* and the *Ave Maria*; they ended with the *Agimus* and an *Ave Maria*.

On feast days all the pupils attended the college church. Before Mass we had spiritual reading, followed by the chanting of the Little Office of Our Lady. Then came Mass and the explanation of the gospel. In the evening we had a further catechetical instruction, vespers, and another sermon. Everyone was expected to approach the holy sacraments; to prevent the neglect of this important obligation, once a month the students had to present a card to prove that they had gone to confession. If one failed to do this, he was barred from end-of-year examinations, no matter how good he was at studies. This strict training produced marvellous results. Many years went by without any swearing or unbecoming words being heard. The pupils were as docile and respectful at school as they would have been at home. And it often happened that in very large classes everyone won promotion at the end of the year. This was the case with my own classmates in the third class, humanities, and rhetoric.

I had the great good fortune of choosing as my regular confessor Doctor Maloria, canon of the chapter in Chieri<sup>155</sup>. He always had a warm welcome for me. Indeed, he encouraged me to go to confession and communion more often, advice not too commonly given in those days, I do not remember that any of my teachers ever advised me along these lines. Those who went to confession and communion more than once a month were considered very virtuous; and many confessors would not permit it. Consequently, I have to thank my confessor if I was not led by companions into certain unfortunate pitfalls that inexperienced boys in large schools have to regret.

During these two years, I never forgot my friends at Murialdo. I kept in touch with them and sometimes went to visit them on Thursdays. During the autumn *holidays*, as soon as they got wind of my arrival they ran to meet me and always made a big fuss over me. A branch of the Society for a Good Time was started amongst them, too. Those whose good conduct throughout the year recommended them were enrolled. Bad conduct—especially swearing or evil talk—warranted expulsion from the club.

#### 8. *Humanities and rhetoric – Louis Comollo*

When we had finished the first courses of *ginnasio*, we had an inspection. The man who came to examine us on behalf of the School Reform Board<sup>156</sup> was a lawyer of outstanding merit, Prof. Fr Joseph Gazzani. He was very kind to me, and I have always retained grateful memories of him; we have maintained a close, friendly relationship ever since. This good priest is still living in Upper Moltedo near Oneglia, (more precisely, near Portomaurizio, which is a mile west of Oneglia on the Ligurian coast. The communes were united in 1923 as the city of Imperia. It is sixty miles southwest of Genoa where he was born.) Amongst his many charitable works, he endowed a scholarship at our college in Alassio for a boy desirous of studying for the priesthood.

<sup>155</sup> Giuseppe Maloria (1802-1857), canon of the Chapter at Chieri. He would be John Bosco's confessor during his seminary years too.

<sup>156</sup> Reform Board, ancient institution for higher studies.

Though the examinations were conducted strictly, all forty-five in our class were promoted to the next class, which corresponds to our fourth year of *ginnasio*. I myself nearly failed for giving a copy of my work to others. If I was let through, I am indebted to the protection of my revered teacher Fr Giusiana, a Dominican<sup>157</sup>, He set an extra paper for me, at which I did very well, and I was passed unanimously.

In those days there was a praiseworthy practice by which the town awarded a prize to at least one student in each grade, remitting the twelve-franc tuition (*minervale*)<sup>158</sup>. To win this prize one had to be approved unanimously in both studies and conduct. I was lucky enough to be excused from this fee every year.

That year I lost one of my dearest companions. Young Paul Braje, my dear, intimate friend, died on [July 10] [1832] after a long illness. He was a model of piety, resignation, and living faith. He thus went to join St Aloysius. He was mourned by the whole college, and all the students turned out for his funeral. For a long time afterwards, during their holidays they would receive holy communion and recite the Little Office of Our Lady or the rosary for the soul of their dead friend. To make up for this loss, however, God sent me another companion every bit as virtuous as Paul, and even more remarkable in his deeds. This was Louis Comollo, of whom I will have more to say in a moment<sup>159</sup>.

At the end of the humanities year, I did very well. On the strength of my results, my teachers, especially Doctor Peter Banaudi<sup>160</sup>, suggested I should ask to take the exam in philosophy, and, in fact, I was promoted. But as I enjoyed my study of literature, I thought it better to continue my programme normally and take the rhetoric course or fifth *ginnasio* in 1833-4<sup>161</sup>. It was

<sup>157</sup> Giacinto Giussiana (1774-1844).

<sup>158</sup> Minervale: school fee.

<sup>159</sup> Luigi Pietro Comollo (1817-1839).

<sup>160</sup> Pietro Banaudi (1802-1885), had a doctorate, professor of rhetoric in the 1833-1834 school year.

<sup>161</sup> He should have said: 1834-1835.



during that year that I met Comollo. The life of this precious friend has been told elsewhere, and those who want can read it there<sup>162</sup>. Here I mention only the incident that led to my noticing him amongst the humanities group,

There was a rumour in the top form that a saintly pupil was to join us that year<sup>163</sup>. He was said to be the nephew of the provost of Cinzano, an elderly priest with a reputation for sanctity. I was keen to get to know him, but I did not know his name. This is how we met: At that time it was already the practice [among the students] to play the dangerous game of *cavallina* while waiting to go in for classes. The giddy and less studious ones loved it, and generally they were the most skilful at it.

For several days they watched a reserved youngster of fifteen years who had just registered at the college take his seat and settle down to read or study, heedless of the din going on round him. A boorish fellow came up to him, grabbed his arm, and insisted that he join them at *cavallina*<sup>164</sup>.

"I don't know how," was the other's mortified and humble reply "I don't know how: I've never played these games before."

"You better join us," said the aggressor "or I'll kick and beat you till you do."

"You can treat me as you please, but I don't know what the game is, nor do I care to learn."

His crude and ill-natured fellow student grabbed his arm, shoved him, and gave him two slaps that were heard all over the room. That made my blood boil. But I held back for a moment to see if the boy under attack would give the offender what he had coming. He could easily have done so because he was

<sup>162</sup> [Giovanni BOSCO], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo morto nel seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù, scritti da un suo collega*. Torino, Tipografia Speirani e Ferrero 1844 (OE I, 1-84); Here in this volume we have the second edition (1854), cf. no. 305.

<sup>163</sup> Fr Giuseppe Comollo (1768-1843).

<sup>164</sup> *Cavallina*: popular game involving jumping over one another, onto the back of another boy until he falls to the ground.

older and stronger than the bully. You can imagine everyone's astonishment when the good youth, countenance red and almost livid, looked with pity at his malicious companion, and replied only, "Are you satisfied? Now go in peace; I've already forgiven you."

That heroic act made me want to know his name. It was, in fact, Louis Comollo, nephew of the provost of Cinzano, whose praises I had heard so often. From that moment on, he became my close friend, and I can say that from him I began to learn how to live as a Christian. I trusted him completely and he trusted me. We needed each other: I needed spiritual help; he needed a bodyguard. The shy and retiring Comollo never even tried to stand up to the vicious insults of our companions, whereas all of them—including those older and bigger than I—respected my mettle and my strength. That became evident one day when certain boys were bent on making fun of and beat up Comollo and another good-natured lad called Anthony Candelo. I wanted to intervene on their behalf, but the bullies gave me no heed. Another day when the harmless pair were being abused again, I shouted, "You'd better watch out. I'll deal with the next one who lays a finger on them."

A considerable number of the taller and bolder spirits ganged together to threaten me while Comollo got two smacks in the face. At that I forgot myself completely. Brute strength moved me, not reason. With no chair or stick within reach, I grabbed one of my fellow students by the shoulders and swung him round like a club to beat the others. I knocked down four of them; the rest took to their heels yelling for mercy. Then what? At that moment the teacher came into the room. Seeing arms and legs flying everywhere amidst an out-of-this-world uproar, he began to shout and to strike blows left and right. The storm was about to burst upon me when he learned the cause of the disturbance. He demanded a replay of the action, or at least a show of my strength. The teacher laughed, and so did all the pupils. Everyone was so amazed that I escaped the punishment I deserved.

Comollo had a different lesson to teach me. When we could speak between ourselves, he said to me, "John my friend, your strength frightens me. But, believe me, God didn't give you strength to massacre your companions. His

will is that we should love one another, forgive one another, and return good for evil."

I could only wonder at my companion's charity. I put myself entirely into his hands and let him guide me where and how he wished. By agreement with our friend Garigliano, we went together for confession, communion, meditation, spiritual reading, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and serving Holy Mass. Comollo knew how to organise us with such gentle courtesy and sweetness that we could not refuse him.

I remember one day when we were passing a church; I was so engaged in chattering with a companion that I forgot to raise my cap. He corrected me at once, but so graciously: "John my friend," he said "you're so lost in talking to men that you forget even the Lord's house."

### 9. *Waiter and bartender – Name day – A tragedy*

We pass on from school affairs to certain events by way of diversion.

I changed lodgings during my humanities year to be nearer my teacher, Fr Banaudi, and to help John Pianta<sup>165</sup>, a friend of the family, who came to Chieri that year to open a café. The lodging certainly had its dangers, but as I was moving in with exemplary Catholics and was continuing my friendship with good companions, I was able to make the change without fear of moral danger. When I finished my homework, I had a lot of spare time; I used to devote part of it to reading the Latin and Italian classics and the rest to making liquors and jams. Halfway through that year I was in a position to prepare coffee and chocolate; I knew the recipes for many kinds of sweets, drinks, ices, and various refreshments. My landlord began by giving me free lodging. Then, gauging the boost I could give to his business, he made me an attractive offer; he tried to induce me to give up my other concerns and work full time for him. But I was doing that work only for fun and relaxation; I had no intention of giving up my studies.

<sup>165</sup> Giovanni Pianta, brother of Lucy Matta; he stayed in Chieri only that year (cf. S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...*, p. 84).

Professor Banaudi was a model teacher. Without having recourse to corporal punishment, he succeeded in making all his pupils respect and love him. He loved them all as if they were his own sons, and they loved him like an affectionate father.

To show our appreciation, we planned a surprise for his feast day. We decided to write both poetic and prose pieces for the celebration and we had little presents which we thought he would especially like.

The event was a splendid success. Our teacher was pleased beyond words, and as a token of appreciation, he took us on a picnic in the country. It was a wonderful day; both teacher and pupils were of one spirit, and each of us strove for ways to express the joy in his heart.

As we made our way back to Chieri, our teacher met someone we did not know, and he had to go off with the man; we were left by ourselves on the road for a little while. At that point some of our companions from the upper classes came up to us and invited us to go swimming with them at a place called *Fontana Rossa*, about a mile from Chieri. I was against the idea, and so were some of my companions; but it was no use. A few came home with me while the others wanted to go swimming. It was a regrettable decision. A few hours after we got home, two of our picnic group ran in, breathless and frightened: "Oh, if you only knew what a terrible thing's happened" they gasped, "Philip N., who insisted so much that we go swimming, is dead!"<sup>166</sup>

"What?" we all exclaimed. "Philip was a good swimmer."

"Maybe he was" the excited messenger went on. "To encourage us to dive in with him, he jumped in full of confidence, but unaware of the dangerous whirlpools in the *Fontana Rossa*. We waited for him to surface, but he did not appear. We raised the alarm. When help arrived, the rescuers tried everything, even at risk to themselves. It was an hour and a half later before they recovered the body."

<sup>166</sup> Filippo Maurizio Camandona, died May 18, 1834 (cf. S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...*, p. 117).

The tragedy depressed all of us. There was no more talk of swimming that year nor the following one (1834)<sup>167</sup>. Some time ago I happened to meet a few of my old friends from those days. We recalled the drowning of our companion at the *Fontana Rossa* whirlpool with real regret.

### 10. *Jonah the Jewish boy*

While I was still a humanities student lodging at John Pianta's café, I got to know a Jewish youngster called Jonah<sup>168</sup>. He was about eighteen, was remarkably good looking, and had an exceptionally fine singing voice. He was a good billiards player too. We met at Elijah's bookstore, and he would always ask for me as soon as he came into the shop. I liked him a lot, and he was very attached to me. Every spare minute he had, he spent in my room; we sang together, played the piano, or read. He liked to hear the thousand little stories I used to tell. One day he got into a difficult quarrel which could have had sorry consequences for him. He came running to me for advice. "Jonah, my friend" I said to him, "if you were a Christian, I would advise you to go to confession. But in your case, that's not possible."

"But we Jews can go to confession, if we want to."

"Go to confession by all means, but your confessor is not obliged to secrecy. Neither can he forgive your sins or administer any sacraments."

"If you'll take me, I'll go to a priest."

"I could do that for you, but a lot of preparation is necessary."

"What sort of preparation."

"Confession takes away sins committed after baptism. If you wish to receive any of the other sacraments, you must receive baptism first."

"What must I do to be baptised?"

<sup>167</sup> He should have said: 1835.

<sup>168</sup> Jonah: pseudonym for Jacob Levi (1816-1870).

“You must be instructed in the Christian religion. You must believe in Jesus Christ, true God and true man. After that you can be baptised.”

“What good will baptism do me?”

“It wipes out original sin, and actual sins too. It opens the way to the other sacraments. Finally, it makes you a child of God and an heir to heaven.”

“We Jews cannot be saved?”

“No, my dear Jonah; since Jesus Christ came, the Jews cannot be saved unless they believe in him.”

“If it comes to my mother’s ears that I want to become a Christian, heaven help me.”

“Don’t be afraid; God is the master of all hearts. If he calls you to become a Christian, he will do it in such a way’ as to satisfy your mother, or provide in some way for the good of your soul.”

“You are such a good friend of mine; if you were in my place, what would you do?”

“I would begin to take instruction in the Christian religion. Anyway, God will show you what to do in the future. Take this little catechism and begin to study it. Pray that God will enlighten you, and he will help you to know the truth.”

From that day onward Jonah became attracted to the Christian faith. He used to come to the café and, after he played a game of billiards, he would come looking for me to discuss religion and the catechism. In a few months he had learned to make the sign of the cross, could say the *Pater*, the *Ave Maria*, and the *Credo*, and knew the other principal truths of the faith. He was very happy and became better every day in his speech and his actions.

Jonah had been left fatherless as a child. His mother Rachel had heard vague reports about Jonah’s intentions, but as yet she knew nothing certain. This is how the news broke: one day, while making Jonah’s bed she came across his catechism, which he had inadvertently left under his mattress.

She went screaming through the house, took the catechism to the rabbi, and suspecting what was afoot, rushed to the student Bosco's lodgings. She had often heard her son speak of him. Picture to yourselves ugliness itself, and you will have an idea of Jonah's mother. She was blind in one eye and deaf in both ears; she had a big nose, hardly any teeth, and a long, pointed chin; she was thick lipped, with a twisted mouth; her voice sounded like the squeal of a foal. The other Jews used to call her "Lilith the Witch" a name they use for the ugliest thing they can imagine.

I got a fright when I saw her. Before I had time to recover, she opened up on me: "I swear you've done wrong! Yes, you! You have ruined my Jonah. You've brought public disgrace on him. I don't know what will become of him. I'm afraid he'll end up a Christian, and you'll have been the cause of it.

I understood then who she was and of whom she was speaking; as calmly as I could, I explained that she ought to be happy about it and to thank me for doing him so much good.

"And what's the good of that? Is it a good thing for a person to deny his own " religion?"

"Calm down, my good woman," I said to her. "Listen, I didn't go looking for your son Jonah. We met in Elijah's bookshop. We became friends without any special reason. He's very fond of me, and I like him too. As his true friend, I want him to save his soul and to get to know our religion, because outside it no one can be saved. Good mother of Jonah, please note that I only gave your son a book and told him to study it. If he becomes a Christian, he does not abandon his Jewish religion; he perfects it."

"If Jonah should have the misfortune to become a Christian, he would have to abandon our prophets, because Christians do not believe in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, nor in Moses and the prophets." "We do believe in all the holy patriarchs and prophets of the Bible. Their writings, their sayings, and their prophecies are the foundation of the Christian faith." "If our rabbi were only here, he would know how to answer you. I know neither the *Mishnah* nor the *Gemara* (the two parts of the Talmud). But what is to become of my poor Jonah?"

So saying, she left. It would be too long to recount the many attacks that the mother, the rabbi, and Jonah's relatives made on me. Neither threats nor violence had any effect on that courageous young man; he withstood them all and continued to take instruction. Since he was no longer safe amongst his family, he had to leave home and live almost as a beggar. Many people came to his aid. And that all might be done with due prudence, I recommended my pupil to a learned priest who took a fatherly interest in him. When Jonah's religious instructions were completed, he was impatient to become a Christian. A solemnity<sup>169</sup> was arranged that set a good example for all the people of Chieri. Other Jews were impressed too, and later several others embraced Christianity.

Jonah's godparents were Charles and Octavia Bertinetti<sup>170</sup>, who provided what the neophyte needed. After becoming a Catholic, he was able to earn an honest livelihood by his own efforts. The newly-baptised's name was Aloysius.

### *11. Games – Conjuring tricks – Magic – Self-defence*

In the midst of my studies and other interests, such as singing, music, speech training, and dramatics, which I undertook wholeheartedly, I also learned a variety of new games: card tricks, tarots, marbles, quoits, walking on stilts, running and jumping, all of which I enjoyed and in which I was by no means mediocre, even if I was no champion. Some of these activities I had learned at Murialdo, others at Chieri. If in the fields of Murialdo I was only a beginner, that year I developed into something of a master. At that time, not much was known about these sports because they had not been much publicised; so in the popular estimate they were a source of wonder. What shall I say of these skills?

<sup>169</sup> The baptism was celebrated on August 10, 1834 (S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...*, p. 113).

<sup>170</sup> From the baptism register we learn that Ottavia Maria Bertinetti was the godmother; but instead the godfather was Giacinto Bolmida. The newly baptised, in honour of his godparents, chose the name Luigi Giacinto Ottavio Maria and surname Bolmida, since, being a minor, he was adopted by his godfather. (cf. S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...*, pp. 110-115).



I often gave performances both in public and in private. Since I had an exceptional memory, I knew by heart long passages from the classics, the poets particularly. I could quote at will from Dante, Petrarch, Tasso, Parini, Monti, and others as if they were my own. Likewise, I could thus improvise without any trouble. In those entertainments or concerts, sometimes I sang, sometimes I played an instrument, or sometimes I composed verses which were highly praised - though in reality they were nothing more than excerpts from various authors adapted for the occasion. That is why I have never given any of my compositions to anyone. Whatever I did write down, I have burned.

Conjuring was a source of wonder. People sat wide-eyed at the sight of an endless stream of balls coming out of a little box too small to hold even one, or eggs tumbling out of a little bag. But when they saw me producing balls from bystanders' noses, or heard me tell accurately how much money people had in their pockets, or when they watched me crush coins to dust between my fingers, or I caused all [the people in] the audience to take on a monstrous appearance or even to appear headless; they began to whisper that I was a sorcerer, that I had to be in league with the devil.

My landlord, Thomas Cumino, added to the credibility of this idea<sup>171</sup>. Thomas was a fervent Christian, and he loved a joke. I knew how to take advantage of his character, and I would say, his simplicity, to play all sorts of tricks on him. One day, for his feast day he had very carefully prepared chicken and jelly as a treat for his lodgers. But when he carried the dish to the table and uncovered it, out popped a live cock, flapping about and cackling in a thousand ways. Another time he had a pot of macaroni cooked and ready to serve, but at the last moment he found the pot full of dry bran. Sometimes when he filled the bottle with wine, he would find as he poured it out that it had turned to water. When he wanted a drink of water, he would find his glass full of wine instead. Sweets changed into pieces of bread, coins in his purse into pieces of rusty tin. A hat became a nightcap; nuts changed into pebbles right in the sack. These were everyday occurrences.

<sup>171</sup> Tommaso Cumino (1765-1840), tailor; Joseph Cafasso also was a student living with him (cf. S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...*, p. 121). John Bosco lived with Cumino in 1834-1835.

Good Thomas was nonplussed. “These things are not human” he would mutter to himself. “God does not waste time with such frivolities. It must be the work of the devil.” He did not dare mention these matters at home, so he sought advice from a nearby priest, Fr Bertinetti<sup>172</sup>. Suspecting “white magic” as the explanation of these tricks, he decided to refer the matter to the school superintendent, who was at that time a respected cleric, Canon Burzio, archpriest and parish priest of the cathedral<sup>173</sup>. The canon was a learned man, pious and prudent, and without speaking to others asked me *ad audiendum verbum*. When I arrived at his house, I found him saying his Office. Smiling at me, he made a sign, for me to wait. When he had finished, he asked me to follow him into his study. There he began to question me, very politely, but with a serious look: “My friend, so far I am quite pleased with your conduct and the progress you have made in your studies. Now, however, you are the subject of much talk. They tell me you are a mind reader, that you can guess how much money people have in their pockets, that you can make black seem white, that you can tell what is happening at a distance, and similar things. That makes people talk about you. In fact, some have gone farther and suspect you of being a sorcerer or even that the devil is at work here. Tell me now, who taught you this knowledge? Or where did you pick it up? Tell me everything in complete confidence. I assure you that I will not use it except for your own good.”

Keeping a straight face, I asked him for a few minutes to think over my reply. Then I asked him to tell me what time it was. He put his hand into his pocket, but his watch was not there. “If you haven’t got your watch,” I suggested “could you give me a five-soldi coin?” He checked all his pockets but could not find his purse. “You rascal,” he shouted angrily “either you are the devil’s servant, or he’s yours! You’ve already stolen my purse and my watch. I can’t keep quiet any longer; I must denounce you. Even now I don’t know what keeps me from giving you a good thrashing!” However, when he saw that I was smiling serenely, he got hold of himself and went on more calmly. “Now

<sup>172</sup> Luigi Bertinetti (1794-1848), priest, brother of Carlo Bertinetti mentioned earlier.

<sup>173</sup> Massimo Giuseppe Burzio (1777-1847), canon and archpriest of the Chapter. He was the highest church authority in Chieri; he was also delegate for the Reform Board looking after the city schools.

let's take this quietly. Explain these mysteries to me. How was it possible for my watch and my purse to vanish from my pocket unknown to me. Where are they?"

"Well, Father," I began respectfully "I'll explain in a few words. It's all a matter of sleight of hand, information, and preparation."

"What information could you have about my watch and purse?"

"I'll explain it all quickly. Just after I came in, you gave some alms to a beggar. You left your purse on a *priedieu*. Then you went into another room, leaving your watch on that side table. I hid them both; you thought you had them on your person, while they were really under this lampshade." So saying, I lifted the lampshade and recovered both objects that the devil was supposed to have taken away.

The good canon had a hearty laugh. He asked me to give him a demonstration of sleight of hand, and how to make things appear and disappear. He enjoyed it all and gave me a little gift. Finally, he told me, "Go and tell your friends that *ignorantia est magistra admirationis*." <sup>174</sup>

## 12. A race – A jump – Magic wand – Treetop

Now that I had been cleared of white magic in my amusements, I began to collect my companions round me again and to entertain them as before. Just at that time, there was a certain acrobat whom some folks praised to the skies. He had put on a public show, racing from one end of Chieri to the other in two and a half minutes, almost as fast as a speeding train.

Paying little attention to the consequences, one day I said that I would like to take on this braggart. An imprudent companion told the acrobat, so I found myself with a challenge on my hands: *schoolboy challenges professional runner!* The course chosen was a stretch of road known as the Porta Torinese<sup>175</sup>.

<sup>174</sup> Wonderment is the result of ignorance; taken broadly from the *Confessions* of St Augustine (lib. XIII, c. 21: "Ignorantia mater admirationis").

<sup>175</sup> Porta Torinese (or Vajro): ancient gate in the Chieri walls that opened towards Turin; it was knocked down in 1850 (cf. S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...*, p. 101).

There was a side bet of 20 francs. I did not have that kind of money, so some of my friends in the Society for a Good Time had to come to the rescue. The event attracted a big crowd. When the race began, my opponent got a lead on me. I soon caught up with him, however, passed him, and before we had reached the halfway mark he was so far behind that he dropped out.

“Well,” he said to me “I challenge you to a long jump, but this time I want to raise the wager to 40 francs, and more if you wish.” I took him on. He picked the place where we were to jump. The landing area was close to the parapet of a little bridge. He had the first jump and he landed so close to the wall that you could not jump any further. It looked like there was no way I could win. But my skill came to the rescue. I landed in his tracks, and putting my hands on the bridge wall, I vaulted not only the parapet itself but a ditch beyond it. There was a great cheer.

“I want to challenge you, yet again,” he said “to any test of skill you want to name.” I accepted, choosing the game called the magic wand. The wager this time was 80 francs. Taking the rod, I hung a hat on one end of it while I placed the other in the palm of my hand. Then, without using the other hand, I made the rod hop from the tip of my little finger to ring finger, middle finger, index finger, and thumb; then to the knuckles, elbow, shoulder, chin, lips, nose, forehead; and then, by the same route, back to the palm of my hand.

“No problem,” my rival remarked “this is my favourite event.” He took the same rod and, with consummate skill, he made the rod travel up to his lips; unfortunately for him, his long nose got in the way and the rod lost its balance. He had to grab at it to save it from falling.

Seeing his money vanish again, the poor fellow blurted out in a rage, “No humiliation could be worse than being beaten by a schoolboy. I have one hundred francs left. That much I’ll bet you I’ll get my feet nearer the top of that tree than you will.” He pointed to an elm tree beside the road. We accepted again, though we were sorry for him and half wished him to win; we did not want to ruin him.

He climbed the elm first. He got his feet so high that had he gone any farther, [the tree] would have broken and thrown him to the ground. Everyone said it was impossible to climb any higher. Now it was my turn. I climbed as high as I could without bending the tree. Then I grasped the trunk firmly in both hands, raised my body, and swung my feet up till they were about three feet above the spot that my rival had reached.

Who could ever describe the applause of the crowd, the joy of my companions, the anger of the acrobat, and my own pride at having defeated not just some fellow student but this swaggering braggart? He was absolutely devastated; however, we tried to comfort him. Moved to pity by the poor man's sadness, we said we would return his money on one condition: that he treat us to a dinner at Muretto<sup>176</sup>. He agreed gratefully. Twenty-two of us went, so many were my supporters. The meal cost 25 francs, so he got back 215 francs.

It had indeed been a Thursday of great joy. I was covered in glory for having beaten in skill a braggart. My companions were delighted too, for they could not have been better entertained than by a good laugh and a good dinner. The braggart himself was pleased because he had got back nearly all his money and enjoyed a good meal besides. As he took leave of us, he thanked us all, saying: "In handing back this money, you've saved me from ruin. You have my heartfelt gratitude. I'll always remember you gratefully, but I won't make any more bets with schoolboys."

### 13. *Classical studies*

You might be asking how I could afford to give so much time to these dissipations without neglecting my studies. I will not hide the fact that I could have studied harder. But remember that by paying attention at school I was able to learn as much as was necessary. In fact, in those days, I made no distinction between reading and studying, and I could easily recall material from books I had read or heard read. Moreover, my mother had trained me

<sup>176</sup> He should have said: Muletto. The inn was in Piazza d'Armi, today Piazza Cavour.

to get by on very little sleep, so I could read for two-thirds of the night at will, thus leaving the whole day free for activities of my own choice. I liked to devote some time to coaching and private lessons, and even though I often did this out of charity or friendship, others paid me.

At that time, there was in Chieri a Jewish bookseller called Elijah<sup>177</sup>. I had come to an understanding with him because of my interest in the Italian classics. For a *soldo* per volume I could borrow books, returning them as soon as they were read<sup>178</sup>. I read a volume a day from the Popular Library series<sup>179</sup>. In my fourth year of *ginnasio*<sup>180</sup> I spent much time reading the Italian authors. During the rhetoric year, I turned to the study of the Latin classics. I began to read Cornelius Nepos, Cicero, Sallust, Quintus Curtius, Livy, Tacitus, Ovid, Vergil, and Horace amongst others. I read them for pleasure, and enjoyed them as if I had understood everything. Only much later did I realise that I had not. After my ordination when I took on teaching these masterpieces to others, I quickly found how much concentration and preparation were necessary to penetrate their true meaning and beauty. My studies, extensive reading, and coaching of students took most of the day and a good part of the night. Often when it was time to get up in the morning, I was still reading Livy, which I had taken up the previous evening. This practice so ruined my health that for some years I seemed to have one foot in the grave. Consequently, I always advise others to do what they can and no more. The night is made for rest! Except in cases of necessity, after supper no one should apply himself to scientific things. A robust person might take it for a while, but it will always prove detrimental to his health.

<sup>177</sup> Elijah Foa, businessman dealing in fabrics, in a joint business with his brother-in-law's bookshop, Tobias Iona (cf. S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...*, p. 108).

<sup>178</sup> A *soldo* was worth 5 cents.

<sup>179</sup> *Biblioteca Popolare Morale e Religiosa* (Popular Library Series): collection of pocket books published weekly between 1828 and 1830 by Giuseppe Pomba (1795-1876), sold cheaply at 50 cents each.

<sup>180</sup> Fourth *ginnasio*: humanities class.

#### 14. Preparation – Choosing a state in life

So the end of the rhetoric year<sup>181</sup> approached, the time when students usually ponder their vocations. The dream I had had in Murialdo was deeply imprinted on my mind; in fact it had recurred several times more in ever clearer terms, so that if I wanted to put faith in it I would have to choose the priesthood towards which I actually felt inclined. But I did not want to believe dreams, and my own manner of life, certain habits of my heart, and the absolute lack of the virtues necessary to that state, filled me with doubts and made the decision very difficult.

Oh, if only I had had a guide to care for my vocation! What a great treasure he would have been for me; but I lacked that treasure. I had a good confessor who sought to make me a good Christian, but who never chose to get involved in the question of my vocation.

Thinking things over myself, after reading some books which dealt with the choice of a state in life, I decided to enter the Franciscan Order. If I become a secular priest, I told myself my vocation runs a great risk of shipwreck. I will embrace the priesthood, renounce the world, enter the cloister, and dedicate myself to study and meditation; thus in solitude I will be able to combat my passions, especially my pride, which had put down deep roots in my heart. So I applied to enter the Reformed Conventuals. I took the examination<sup>182</sup> and was accepted. All was ready for my entry into Chieri's Monastery of Peace<sup>183</sup>. A few days before I was due to enter, I had a very strange dream. I seemed to see a multitude of these friars, clad in threadbare habits, all dashing about helter-skelter. One of them came up to me and said: "You're looking for peace,

<sup>181</sup> Rhetoric: the last class in *latinità superiore*. John Bosco did this in 1834-1835. The problem of choice of state of life had already appeared earlier: the question of being admitted to the Franciscans, which he speaks of later, came up in March 1834.

<sup>182</sup> The exam was held on April 18, 1834 in the monastery of Our lady of the Angels in Turin; admissions were on the 28th of that month (cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica...*, I, p. 45n).

<sup>183</sup> It was the monastery of the Friars Minor (Observant) in Chieri, connected to the church of Our Lady of Peace.

but you won't find it here. See what goes on! God's preparing another place, another harvest for you."

I wanted to question this religious but a noise awakened me and I saw nothing more. I revealed everything to my confessor, but he did not want to hear of dreams or friars. "In this matter," he said "everyone must follow his own inclinations and not the advice of others."

Then something cropped up which made it impossible for me to carry out my intention. And since the obstacles were many and difficult, I decided to reveal it all to my friend Comollo. He advised me to make a novena. Meanwhile he would write to his uncle the provost. On the last day of my novena, I went to confession and communion with this incomparable friend. I attended one Mass and served another at the altar of Our Lady of Grace in the cathedral. Then we went home and found a letter from Fr Comollo which went something like this: "Having given careful consideration to what you wrote me, I advise your friend not to enter a monastery at this time. Let him don the clerical habit. As he goes on with his studies he will better understand what God wants him to do. He must not fear to lose his vocation because aloofness from the world and earnest piety will help him overcome every obstacle."

I followed this wise advice and applied myself seriously to those things which would help prepare me to take the clerical habit. I took the rhetoric examination and then I also took the entrance examination for the seminary in Chieri, in the very rooms of the house which Charles Bertinetti willed us at his death, in the rooms Canon Burzio rented. That year the exam was not held in Turin as was usual, because of the cholera which threatened our area<sup>184</sup>.

I would like to note something about the college at Chieri that certainly exemplifies the spirit of piety that flourished there. During my four years

<sup>184</sup> The cholera spread through Piedmont between spring and autumn 1835. To avoid contagion the archbishops arranged that the exams for admission to clothing not be done in Turin but by the local Church authority (cf. *Circular* to parish priests on September 1, 1835, in the Archbishop's Archives, *Provvisioni semplici 1835*).



us a student in the college, I do not remember ever hearing any talk, not a single word that could be considered immoral or irreligious. At the end of rhetoric course, of the 25 students, 21 embraced the clerical state, three became doctors, and one became a merchant.

When I got home for the holidays I gave up acrobatics. I dedicated myself to reading good books which, I am ashamed to say, I had neglected up to then. I still kept up my interest in the youngsters, entertaining them with stories, pleasant recreation, sacred music; especially, finding that many of them, even the older ones, were almost ignorant of the truths of faith, I also undertook to teach them their daily prayers and other things more important at that age.

It was a kind of oratory, attended by about fifty children, who loved me and obeyed me as if I were their father.

## Second decade 1835-1845

### 1. Clerical clothing – Rule of life

Having made up my mind to enter the seminary, I took the prescribed examination. I prepared carefully for that most important day because I was convinced that one's eternal salvation or eternal perdition ordinarily depends on the choice of a state in life. I asked my friends to pray for me. I made a novena, and on the feast of St Michael (October 1834)<sup>185</sup> I approached the holy sacraments. Before the solemn high Mass Doctor Cinzano, the provost and vicar forane of my region<sup>186</sup> blessed my cassock and tested me as a cleric. He instructed me to remove my lay clothing, praying: "*Exuat te Dominus veterem hominem suis.*"<sup>187</sup> As he did so, I thought, *Oh, how much old clothing there is to cast off. My God, destroy in me all my evil habits.* When he gave me the collar he said: "*Induat te Dominus novum hominem, qui secundum*

<sup>185</sup> He should have said: 1835; clothing took place on Sunday 25 October 1835. On the 24th the feast of St Raphael was celebrated (St Michael was on 29 September).

<sup>186</sup> Antonio Pietro Michele Cinzano (1804-1870), doctor of theology, parish priest of Castelnuovo from 1834.

<sup>187</sup> cf. Col 3:10.

*Deum creatus est in iustitia et sanctitate veritatis!*<sup>188</sup>. Deeply moved, I thought to myself, *Yes, O my God, make me henceforth to lead a new life in complete conformity with your holy will. May justice and holiness be the constant objects of my thoughts, words, and actions. Amen. O Mary, be my salvation.*

After the ceremonies in church, the provost wanted another, more worldly celebration. He brought me to the celebration of St Michael at Bardella (a district of Castelnuovo). He meant well, but I looked on it as a kindness misplaced. I felt like a newly dressed puppet on public display. After my weeks of preparation for that long-awaited day, I now found myself sitting down to dinner amongst people of every sort, men and women, who were there to amuse themselves, to laugh and chatter, to eat and drink. These people, for the most part, spent their time in pleasure-seeking, sport, dancing, and amusements of every kind; what association could such people have with one who that very morning had put on the robe of holiness to give himself entirely to the Lord?

The parish priest saw that I was ill at ease. When we got home he asked me why I was so thoughtful and reserved on a day of such public rejoicing. I replied quite frankly that the morning's ceremony at church contrasted in gender, number, and case with the evening ceremony. "Moreover," I added "seeing priests the worse for drinking and indulging in buffoonery with the guests, aroused in me almost a revulsion for my vocation. Should I ever turn out to be a priest like them, I would prefer to put this habit aside and live poorly as a layman but a good Christian."

"That's the world as it is," answered the provost "and you must take it as you find it. You must see evil if you are to recognise it and avoid it. No one becomes a battle-tryed warrior without learning how to handle arms. So we, too must do who are engaged in continual war against the enemy of souls."

I kept quiet then but in my heart I said, "I will never again attend public festivals, unless obliged because of religious ceremonies."

<sup>188</sup> cf. Eph 4:22-24.

After that day I had to pay attention to myself. The style of life I had lived up to then had to be radically reformed. My life in the past had not been wicked, but I had been proud and dissipated, given over to amusements, games, acrobatics, and other such things. These pursuits gave passing joy, but did not satisfy the heart.

I drew up a fixed rule of life. To impress it more vividly on my memory, I wrote up the following resolutions:

1. For the future I will never take part in public shows during fairs or at markets. Nor will I attend dances or the theatre, and as far as possible I will not partake of the dinners usual on such occasions.

2. I will no longer play games of dice or do conjuring tricks, acrobatics, sleight of hand, tightrope walking. I will give up my violin-playing and hunting. These things I hold totally contrary to ecclesiastical dignity and spirit.

3. I will love and practise a retiring life, temperance in eating and drinking. I will allow myself only those hours of rest strictly necessary for health.

4. In the past I have served the world by reading secular literature. Henceforth I will try to serve God by devoting myself to religious reading.

5. I will combat with all my strength everything, all reading, thoughts, conversations, words, and deeds contrary to the virtue of chastity. On the contrary, I will practise all those things, even the smallest, which contribute to preserving this virtue.

6. Besides the ordinary practices of piety, I will never neglect to make a little meditation daily and a little spiritual reading.

7. Every day I will relate some story or some maxim advantageous to the souls of others. I will do this with my companions, friends, relatives, and when I cannot do it with others, I will speak with my mother.

These are the resolutions which I drew up when I took the clerical habit. To fix them firmly on my mind, I went before an image of the Blessed Virgin and, having read them to her, I prayed and made a formal promise to my heavenly benefactress to observe them no matter what sacrifice it cost.

## 2. *Departure for the seminary*

I had to be in the seminary on October 30 of that year, 1835. My little wardrobe was ready. My relatives were all pleased and I even more than they. It was only my mother who was pensive. Her eyes followed me round as if she wanted to say something to me. On the evening before my departure she called me to her and spoke to me these unforgettable words: “My dear John, you have put on the priestly habit. I feel all the happiness that any mother could feel in her son’s good fortune. Do remember this, however: it’s not the habit that honours your state, but the practice of virtue. If you should ever begin to doubt your vocation, then—for heaven’s sake!—do not dishonour this habit. Put it aside immediately. I would much rather have a poor farmer for a son, than a priest who neglects his duties. When you came into the world, I consecrated you to the Blessed Virgin. When you began your studies, I recommended to you devotion to this Mother of ours. Now I say to you, be completely hers; love those of your companions who have devotion to Mary; and if you become a priest, always preach and promote devotion to Mary.”

My mother was deeply moved as she finished these words, and I cried. “Mother,” I replied “thank you for all you have said and done for me. These words of yours will not prove vain; I will treasure them all my life.”

The following morning I went off to Chieri, and on the evening of that same day I entered the seminary. After greeting my superiors, I made my bed, and then, with my friend Garigliano, strolled through the dormitories, the corridors, and finally into the courtyard. Glancing up at a sundial, I saw written: *Afflictis lentae, celeres gaudentibus horae*<sup>189</sup>. “That’s it,” I said to my friend “that’s our programme. Let’s always be cheerful, and the time will pass quickly.”

The following day I began a three-day retreat, and I went out of my way to make it as well as I could. At the end of the retreat I approached Dr Ternavasio of Bra<sup>190</sup> the lecturer in philosophy. I asked him for some rule of life by which I

<sup>189</sup> The hours drag for the sad, fly for the happy.

<sup>190</sup> Francesco Ternavasio (1806-1886).

might fulfil my duties and win the goodwill of my superiors. "Just one thing," replied the good priest "the exact fulfilment of your duties."

I made this advice my norm and applied myself with all my soul to the observance of the rules of the seminary<sup>191</sup>. I made no distinction between the bells that called me to study, to church, to the refectory, to recreation, or to bed. This diligent observance won me the affection of my companions and the esteem of superiors. Consequently, my six years at the seminary were a very happy period.

### 3. *Seminary life*

As there is little variety in the daily round of seminary life, I shall give a brief sketch of the general background and then an account of some events in particular. I will begin with a word about the superiors<sup>192</sup>.

I was greatly attached to them, and they always treated me with the greatest kindness; but my heart was not satisfied. The rector and the other superiors usually saw us only when we returned after the holidays and when we were leaving for them. The students never went to talk to them, except to receive corrections. The staff members took weekly turns to assist in the refectory and to take us on walks. That was all. How often I would have liked to talk to them, ask their advice, or resolve a doubt, and could not. In fact if a superior came on the scene, the seminarians, with no particular reason, would flee left and right as if he were a monster. This only served to inflame my heart to become a priest as quickly as I could so that I could associate with young people, help them, and meet their every need.

And as for my companions, I stuck to my beloved mother's advice. That is, I fraternised only with companions who had a devotion to Mary and who loved study and piety. Here I must give a word of warning to seminarians. In

<sup>191</sup> The *Regolamento* of the seminary in Chieri had been approved by Archbishop Luigi Fransoni nel 1832.

<sup>192</sup> There were six superiors: The Rector, Sebastiano Mottura (1795-1876), the Spiritual Director, Giuseppe Mottura (1798-1876), the theology professor, Lorenzo Prialis (1803-1868), his assistant (tutor) Innocenzo Arduino (1806-1880), the philosophy professor, Francesco Ternavasio, Fr Matteo Testa (1782-1854) confessor and Rector of the church of St Philip connected with the seminary.

the seminary there are many clerics of outstanding virtue, but there are others who are dangerous. Not a few young men, careless of their vocation, go to the seminary lacking either the spirit or the goodwill of a good seminarian. Indeed, I remember hearing some companions indulging in very bad language. Once a search amongst some students' personal belongings unearthed impious and obscene books of every kind. It is true that these later left the seminary, either of their own accord or because they were expelled when their true character came to light. But as long as they stayed, they were a plague to good and bad alike.

To avoid such dangerous associates I chose some who were well known as models of virtue. These were William Garigliano, John Giacomelli of Avigliana<sup>193</sup> and, later, Louis Comollo. For me, these three friends were a treasure.

The practices of piety were well conducted. Each morning we had Mass, meditation, and rosary; edifying books were read during meals. In those days Bercastel's *History of the Church* was read<sup>194</sup>. We were expected to go to confession once a fortnight, but those who wished could go every Saturday. We could only receive holy communion, however, on Sundays and on special feasts. We did receive communion sometimes on weekdays, but doing so meant that we had to act contrary to obedience. It was necessary to slip out, usually at breakfast time, to St Philip's Church next door, receive holy communion, and then join our companions as they were going into the study hall or to class. This infraction of the timetable was prohibited. But the superiors gave tacit consent to it since they knew it was going on and sometimes observed it without saying anything to the contrary. In this way, I was able to receive holy communion much more frequently, and I can rightly say it was the most efficacious support of my vocation. This defect of piety was corrected when, through an order of Archbishop Gastaldi, things were arranged so as to permit daily communion, provided one is prepared.

<sup>193</sup> Giovanni Francesco Giacomelli (1820-1901), would succeed Don Bosco as chaplain at St Philomena's little hospital and would be his confessor from 1873 onwards.

<sup>194</sup> Antoine Henri BÉRAULT-BERCASTEL, *Storia del cristianesimo*. Venezia, F. Stella 1793-1809, 36 vols.

*[3A.] Amusements and recreation*

The game known as *Bara rotta* was the most popular game we played. I used to play it in the beginning, but since this game was very similar to those acrobatics which I had absolutely renounced, I wanted to give this up too. There was another game called tarots which was permitted on certain days, and for a while I also played this game. Even here sweetness and bitterness intermingled. I was not a great player, but I was rather lucky and nearly always won. At the end of a game my hands would be full of money, but seeing how distressed my companions were at losing it made me more miserable than they. I should add that my mind would become so fixed during a game that afterwards I could neither pray nor study; the troubling pictures of the King of Cups and the Jack of Spades, of the 13 and the fifteen of tarots filled my imagination. So I resolved to give up this game as I had given up the others. This was in 1836, mid-way through my second year of philosophy.

In the longer recreation periods, the seminarians went for walks to the many delightful places round Chieri. These walks were useful for learning too. We tried to improve our academic knowledge by quizzing one another as we walked. If there was no organised walk, students could spend the recreation time walking about the seminary with friends, discussing topics of common interest, or edifying and intellectual matters.

During the long recreations, we often gathered in the refectory for what we called the "study circle."<sup>195</sup> At this session, one could ask questions about things he did not know or had not grasped in our lectures or textbooks. I liked this exercise and found it very helpful for study, piety, and health. Comollo, who was a year behind me, made a name for himself with his questions. A certain Dominic Peretti<sup>196</sup>, now parish priest of Buttigliera, always had plenty to say and was always ready to venture an answer.

<sup>195</sup> Study Circle: teaching activity aimed at going over the treatises and arguing about them. It took place for half an hour in the afternoon, under the tutor's guidance. He would ask one student to defend a thesis and another to refute it.

<sup>196</sup> Domenico Peretti (1816-1893), would become parish priest of Buttigliera Alta, a town 26 km from Turin, near Avigliana (not to be confused with Buttigliera d'Asti).

Garigliano was a good listener and limited himself to an occasional interjection. I was president and judge of last appeal. Sometimes it happened in our friendly discussions that certain questions were asked or problems of knowledge raised that nobody was able to answer adequately. In these cases we divided up the problems; each one was responsible for looking up the parts assigned to him before the next meeting.

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

This marvellous companion was my fortune. He could, as the occasion demanded, advise me, correct me, or cheer me up, but all with such charm and charity that I even welcomed his admonitions and looked for them. I dealt familiarly with him, and I was naturally led to follow his example. Although I was a thousand miles behind him in virtue, if I was not ruined by dissipation but grew in my vocation, truly I remain in his debt above all. In one thing alone I did not even try to emulate him, and that was in mortification. He was a young man of nineteen, yet he fasted rigorously for the whole of Lent and at other times laid down by the Church. In honour of the B.V., he fasted every Saturday. Often he went without breakfast, and sometimes his dinner consisted of bread and water. He put up with insults and affronts without the least sign of annoyance. When I saw how faithful he was in even the slightest demands of study and piety, I was filled with admiration. I regarded my companion as an ideal friend, a model of virtue for any seminarian.

#### *4. Holidays*

Holidays were dangerous times for clerical students. In those days our summer break ran to four and a half months<sup>197</sup>. I spent my time reading and writing; but not having as yet learnt how to use my days profitably, I wasted many of them in fruitless activity. I tried to kill time by sheer manual labour. On the lathe I turned spindles, pegs, spinning tops, and wooden balls. I made

<sup>197</sup> Holidays began June 24 and finished October 30.



clothes and shoes and I worked wood and iron. To this very day there are in my house at Murialdo a writing desk, a dinner table, and some chairs, masterpieces to remind me of my summer holiday activities. I worked in the fields, too, harvesting hay and wheat. I trimmed the vines, harvested the grapes, and made the wine, and so on.

I also found time for my youngsters, as I used to, but this was possible only on feast days. It was a great consolation for me to catechise many of my companions who were sixteen or seventeen years old but were deprived of the truths of the faith. I also taught some of them quite successfully to read and write. They were so anxious to learn that many youngsters of a variety of ages surrounded me. I charged no tuition, but I insisted on *diligence*, *concentration*, and *monthly confession*. At first some were not inclined to accept these conditions. They went their own way, but their departure served to inspire and spur on those who stayed.

I also began to preach and to lecture with the permission of my parish priest, and with his help. In Alfiano<sup>198</sup>, I preached on the Holy Rosary in the holidays after my year of physics<sup>199</sup>; In Castelnuovo d'Asti, at the end of my first year of theology, I spoke on St Bartholomew the Apostle. In Capriglio I preached about the nativity of Mary. But I do not know how much fruit this bore. Everywhere I got high praise. In fact vainglory somewhat carried me away, till I was brought down to earth as follows. One day, after my sermon on the birth of Mary, I asked someone who seemed to be one of the more intelligent what he thought of it. He was full of praise for it but spoiled it by saying, "Your sermon was on the souls in purgatory." And I had preached the glories of Mary! The parish priest of Alfiano, Joseph Peleto<sup>200</sup>, was a learned and holy man. I also asked for his opinion of my sermon there.

"Your sermon," he said "was very good. It was well put together, well delivered, and embellished with scriptural quotations. Go on like that and you will be a success as a preacher."

<sup>198</sup> Alfiano Natta: town some 27 km from Castelnuovo.

<sup>199</sup> Physics: second year of philosophy (summer 1837); the first year of philosophy was called "logic".

<sup>200</sup> Giuseppe Pellato (1797-1864).

“Did the people understand it?” I asked him.

“Hardly,” he replied. “Only my brother priest and I, and perhaps a few others, knew what it was about.”

“How is it,” I wanted to know “that such simple concepts were not understood?”

“To you they are simple,” he explained “but to ordinary people they appear difficult. Allusions to the Bible, philosophising on one or another aspect of church history, are things the people do not understand.”

“What do you suggest I do?”

“Give up your high-sounding language and stick to dialect where possible, and when you use Italian, speak the language of the people, the people, the people. Instead of speculations, use examples, analogies, and simple, practical illustrations. Bear in mind always that the common people understand hardly anything you have to say because the truths of the faith are never sufficiently explained to them.”

This fatherly advice has served as a guiding principle for the rest of my life. I still have copies of those early sermons in which, to my shame, I can now see nothing but affectation and vanity. But God, in his goodness, saw to it that I should have that kind of correction. It was a lesson for me which henceforth bore fruit in my sermons, catechism classes, instructions, and in the writing in which I began to engage.

##### *5. Feast day in the country – Playing the violin – Hunting*

When I said that holidays in the country were a time of danger, I was speaking for myself. A poor cleric will often find himself in grave danger without realising it. I learned this through experience. One year I was invited to celebrate a feast day at the home of some relatives of mine. I did not want to go, but discovering that there was no cleric to serve in church, I yielded to the insistent invitations of one of my uncles and went. When the sacred ceremonies, at which I served and sang, were over, we went to dinner. All went well till the wine began to go to the heads of some of the party.

When they began to use language which should not be tolerated by a cleric. I tried to protest but my voice was drowned out. Not knowing what to do, I decided to leave. I got up from the table, got my hat, and was ready to go; my uncle stopped me. At that moment, there was an outburst of even more objectionable language as someone began to insult all the others at table. In a flash, all was pandemonium. There were angry shouts and threats, backed up by horrible racket of glasses, bottles, plates, spoons, forks, and then knives. In this extremity, I beat a hasty retreat. When I got home, from the bottom of my heart I renewed the resolution so often made before to remain withdrawn if I wanted to avoid falling into sin.

A different kind of experience, none the less unpleasant, befell me at Crovaglia, a district of Buttigliera<sup>201</sup>. It was the feast of St Bartholomew. I was invited by another uncle to assist at the church services, to sing, and even to play the violin, which I had given up, though it was my favourite instrument. The church services went very well. My uncle was in charge of the celebrations, and the dinner was at his house. So far, so good. Dinner over, the guests asked me to play something of a light nature for them. I refused. "At least play along with me," one of the musicians said. "I'll take the lead, and you play the accompaniment."

The wretch that I was! I did not have it in me to say no. Taking up the violin, I played for a while. Then I heard the murmur of voices and the sound of a lot of dancing feet. I went to the window, and out in the courtyard was a crowd dancing happily to the sound of my violin. Words could not describe the anger that welled up in me at that moment. Turning on the dinner guests, I addressed them vehemently: "How is it, after I have so often spoken against public shows, that I should have become their promoter? It will never happen again." I smashed the violin into a thousand pieces. I never wanted to use it again, though opportunities for doing so were not lacking at sacred ceremonies.

<sup>201</sup> He should have said: *Crivelle*, a hamlet of Buttigliera d'Asti, 6.5 km from Castelnuovo. Croveglia is a hamlet belonging to the district of Villanova d'Asti.

Another incident happened to me while I was hunting. During the summer, I used to go bird-nesting; in the autumn, I'd catch the birds with birdlime, use traps, or even shoot them. One morning, I found myself running after a hare. From field to field, from vineyard to vineyard, up hill and down dale, I chased my quarry for several hours. Eventually I got near enough to take a shot at him. The poor animal, its ribs broken by the shot, rolled over, leaving me deeply upset at the sight of the poor creature in its death throes. The gunshot brought some of my companions on the scene. While they were delighted at the kill, I took a long look at myself. There I was in my shirt-sleeves, my cassock discarded, wearing an old straw hat that made me look like a smuggler. I realised I was more than two miles from home.

I was quite mortified. I apologised to my companions for the bad example I had given them by throwing off my cassock. I went straight home, once more making a resolution to be done with every kind of hunting. This time, with the Lord's help I was able to live up to my word. May God forgive me for that scandal.

These three incidents taught me a terrible lesson. Henceforward I resolved to be more reserved. I was convinced that he who would give himself entirely to the Lord's service must cut himself off from worldly amusements. It is true that often they are not sinful; but it is certain that on account of conversation, of the manner of dressing, of speaking, and of acting, there is always some risk to virtue, especially to the most delicate virtue of chastity.

*[5A.] Louis Comollo's friendship*

As long as God preserved the life of this incomparable companion, we were always very close to each other. During the holidays, we often corresponded and visited back and forth. In him I saw a holy youth, and I loved him for his rare virtue. He loved me for the help I gave him with his studies. When I was with him, I modelled myself on his conduct.

Once during the holidays, he came to spend a day with me. Just then, my relatives were in the fields for harvest. He asked me to check over a sermon he was to preach on the feast of the Assumption. Afterwards, he practised his

delivery, accompanied by gestures. We talked with delight for hours. Suddenly we realised it was nearly dinner time. There was nobody in the house but us. What were we to do? "Just a minute," said Comollo "I'll light the fire. You get a pot ready and we'll cook something."

"Right you are," I replied "but first let's catch a chicken in the yard. It'll provide us with soup and dinner. That's what mother would like us to do."

In no time we had our chicken. But which of us felt up to killing it? Neither of us. So as to come to the conclusion that we wanted, we decided that Comollo was to hold the bird down on a block, and I was to cut off its head with a sickle. The blow was struck, and the head dropped from the body. The two of us got squeamish and took off screaming.

"We're just childish" Comollo said after a while. "The Lord gave us the beasts of the earth for our use. Why should we be so squeamish?" Without further difficulty we picked up the chicken, plucked it, cooked it, and had our dinner.

I would have gone to Cinzano to hear Comollo's Assumption sermon, but I myself had to preach on the same theme at another venue. When I went the next day, I heard praise of his sermon from all sides. That day (August 16) was the feast of St Roch. It was popularly known as "the Feast of the Kitchen" because relatives and friends took occasion to invite their loved ones to enjoy some public entertainment. Here something happened which showed the extent of my audacity.

They waited for the preacher for that solemn occasion right up till the moment when he was to go to the pulpit, and he had not turned up. In an effort to help the provost of Cinzano out of his embarrassment, I did the rounds of the many priests present, begging and insisting that someone say a few words to the numerous people assembled in the church. There were no takers. Some even got annoyed by my repeated pleading and turned harshly on me: "You're a fool<sup>202</sup> you know! It's no joke to preach off the cuff on St

<sup>202</sup> The word is *Minchione*, from Piedmontese *mincion*, fool (cf. Michele PONZA, *Vocabolario piemontese-italiano*. Vol. II. Torino, Stamperia Reale 1832, p. 227).

Roch. Instead of pestering others, why don't you do it yourself?" Those words brought applause from everyone. I was humiliated, my pride wounded. "I certainly wasn't looking for this," I said "but as everyone else has refused, I accept." The people in church sang a hymn to give me time to collect my thoughts. I had read the life of the saint. I recalled his story as I mounted the pulpit. I have always been told that the sermon I preached that day was the best I have ever given.

It was on this vacation and on this same occasion (1838) that my friend and I went walking together<sup>203</sup> to the top of a hill, where we had a wonderful view of the meadows, fields, and vineyards below.

"Look, Louis," I began to say to him "what a lean harvest there will be this year! The poor farmers! So much work for such poor returns."

"The hand of the Lord weighs heavily upon us," he replied. "Believe me, our sins have brought this on us."

"I hope the Lord will give us better crops next year."

"So do I. I hope there will be good times for those who are here to enjoy them."

"Come on, away with such gloomy thoughts. Let's be patient for this year. Next year we'll have a bumper grape harvest and we'll make better wine."

"You'll drink it."

"Perhaps you mean to keep drinking water as usual?"

"I'm looking forward to a much better wine."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Never mind, never mind. The Lord knows what he's doing."

"That's not what I asked. I want to know what you mean by I'm looking forward to better wine. Do you mean you'll be in paradise?"

<sup>203</sup> From here until the end of the chapter he includes part of the life of Louis Comollo (cf. no. 305, pp. 1142-1143).

"Though I have no guarantee of going to heaven when I die, yet I have a well-grounded hope of it. For some time I've had such a burning desire to taste the happiness of the blessed that it seems impossible for my life to last much longer."

As Comollo spoke these words, his face glowed with cheer. He was bubbling with good health and looking forward to returning to the seminary.

### 6. *Comollo's death*

The memorable events surrounding the edifying death of this dear friend have already been described in another place. Whoever wishes can read them at his pleasure. But here I would like to mention something that caused a lot of talk, something hardly touched upon in the memoirs already published. Given our friendship and the unlimited trust between Comollo and me, we often spoke about the separation that death could possibly bring upon us at any time. One day, after we had read a long passage from the lives of the saints, we talked, half in jest and half in earnest, of what a consolation it would be if the one of us who died first were to return with news about his condition. We talked of this so often that we drew up this contract: "Whichever of us is the first to die will, if God permits it, bring back word of his salvation to his surviving companion." I did not realise the gravity of such an undertaking and frankly, I treated it lightly enough. I would never advise others to do the like. We did it, however, and ratified it repeatedly, especially during Comollo's last illness. In fact, his last words and his last look at me sealed his promise. Many of our companions knew what had been arranged between us.

Comollo died on April 2, 1839. Next evening he was solemnly buried in Saint Philip's Church. Those who knew about our bargain waited anxiously to see what would happen. I was even more anxious because I hoped for a great comfort to lighten my desolation. That night, after I went to bed in the big dormitory which I shared with some twenty other seminarians, I was restless. I was convinced that this was to be the night when our promise would be fulfilled. About 11:30 a deep rumble was heard in the corridor. It sounded as if a heavy wagon drawn by many horses were coming up to the dormitory

door. It got louder and louder, like thunder, and the whole dormitory shook. The clerics tumbled out of bed in terror and huddled together for comfort. Then, above the violent and thundering noise, the voice of Comollo was heard clearly. Three times he repeated very distinctly: "Bosco, I am saved." All heard the noise; some recognised the voice without understanding the meaning; others understood it as well as I did, as is proved by the length of time the event was talked about in the seminary. It was the first time in my life I remember being afraid. The fear and terror were so bad that I fell ill and was at death's door. I would never recommend anyone to enter into such a contract. God is omnipotent; God is merciful. As a rule he does not take heed of such pacts. Sometimes, however, in his infinite mercy he does allow things to come to fulfilment as he did in the case I have just described.

#### *7. Prize – Sacristy – Dr John Borel*

In the seminary I was quite fortunate in that I always enjoyed the affection of my companions and of all my superiors. At the mid-year examinations it was customary to give a 60 franc prize, for each of the different years, to the person who obtained top marks for study and conduct. God truly blessed me; for the six years I spent at the seminary, I won this prize. In the second year of theology I was made sacristan. It was not a post that carried much weight, but it showed one was appreciated by the superiors and it did carry with it another sixty francs. All this meant that I could provide for half my fees, while good Fr Cafasso provided the rest. The sacristan has the job of seeing to the cleanliness of the church, the sacristy, and the altar; he also has to look after the lamps, candles, and all the other objects needed for divine services.

This was the year in which I had the good fortune of making the acquaintance of a man who was really zealous in the sacred ministry. He had come to preach our seminary retreat. He appeared in the sacristy with a smiling face and a joking manner of speaking, but always seasoned with moral thoughts. When I saw the way he celebrated Mass, his bearing, his preparation, and his thanksgiving, I realised at once that here was a worthy priest. He turned out to be Dr John Borel of Turin. When he began to preach,



I noted the simplicity, liveliness, clarity, and fire of charity that filled all his words; we were unanimous in rating him a man of real holiness.

In fact we all raced to go to confession to him in order to speak of our vocations and receive some advice. I too wanted to discuss the affairs of my soul with him. When, at the end, I asked him for some advice on how best to preserve the spirit of my vocation during the year and particularly during the holidays, he left these memorable words with me: "A vocation is perfected and preserved, and a real priestly spirit is formed, by a climate of recollection and by frequent communion."

The retreat preached by Dr Borel was a landmark in the life of the seminary. Even after many years had passed, the holy points he had made in his preaching, or given in personal advice, were remembered and repeated to others.

#### 8. Study

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

At the beginning of my second year of philosophy, I paid a visit to the Blessed Sacrament one day. I had no prayer book with me, so I began to read *The Imitation of Christ*. I went through some chapters dealing with the Blessed Sacrament. I was so struck by the profound thoughts expressed, and the clear and orderly way these great truths were clothed in fine language that I began to say to myself: "*The author of this book was a learned man.*" Again and again, I went back to that golden little work. It was gradually borne in on me that even one verse from it contained so much doctrine and morality as I had found

in whole volumes of the ancient classics. To this book I owe my decision to lay aside profane literature. Subsequently, I went on to read Calmet's *History of the Old and New Testaments*<sup>204</sup>; Next I tackled the *Jewish Antiquities* and *The Jewish War* of Flavius Josephus; Bishop Marchetti's *Discussions on Religions*<sup>205</sup> followed; then Frayssinous, Balmes, Zucconi<sup>206</sup> and many other religious writers. I even enjoyed Fleury's *Church History*<sup>207</sup>, unaware that it was a book to avoid. With yet more profit I read the works of Cavalca, Passavanti, Segneri<sup>208</sup> and all of Henrion's *History of the Church*<sup>209</sup>.

Perhaps you will say that with so much time given to extraneous reading I must not have been studying the treatises. This was not the case. My memory continued to be a blessing to me. Paying attention at lectures and just reading the treatises were sufficient for me to perform my duties. Thus I was able to spend the hours of study reading different books. The superiors knew all about this and left me free to do it.

<sup>204</sup> Augustin CALMET, *Storia dell'Antico e del Nuovo Testamento e degli Ebrei*. Torino, G. Pomba 1829-1832, 18 vols.

<sup>205</sup> Giovanni MARCHETTI, *Trattenimenti di famiglia su la storia della religione*. Torino, Bianco 1823, 2 vols.

<sup>206</sup> Denis de Frayssinous (1765-1841), vicar general, Paris; His conferences were published in 4 volumes: *Défense du Christianisme ou Conférences sur la religion* (1825). Jaime Luciano Balmes (1810-1848), philosopher and Spanish publisher; the work that made him famous throughout Europe – *El Protestantismo comparado con el Catolicismo en sus relaciones con la civilización Europea* (1842-1844) – was translated into various languages (certainly Don Bosco did not read it at the seminary but later). Ferdinando Zucconi (1647-1732), Jesuit, author of *Lezioni sacre sopra la divina Scrittura* (5 vols.), of which there were many editions.

<sup>207</sup> Claude Fleury (1640-1723), French academic and confessor of King Louis XV. His *Histoire ecclésiastique*, in 20 volumes, is considered to be the first systematic history of the Church.

<sup>208</sup> Domenico Cavalca (m. 1342) and Iacopo Passavanti (1297-1357), Dominic Friars and authors of much loved ascetic works in the 19th century for their pure literary style. Paolo Segneri (1624-1694), Jesuit, author of collections of sermons considered master-pieces of sacred eloquence.

<sup>209</sup> Mathieu Richard Auguste Henrion (1805-1862), lawyer, author of historical and apologetic works amongst which *Histoire générale de l'Eglise pendant les XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles* (1836) and his monumental *Histoire generale de l'Eglise depuis la predication des apotres jusqu'au pontificat de Gregoire XVI* in 12 volumes (1834-36).

One subject close to my heart was Greek. In my secondary classical studies I had already mastered its basic elements. With the help of a dictionary, I had worked my way through the first translations after I had studied the grammar. A good opportunity soon arose for me to deepen my knowledge of it. When cholera threatened Turin in 1836, the Jesuits had to send the boarders from Our Lady of Mount Carmel College away to Montaldo<sup>210</sup>. This move meant that they had to double their teaching staff because they had to cover the classes for the day students who continued to come to school. Fr Cafasso, who was consulted, proposed me for a Greek class. This spurred me to get down to the serious study of the language to make myself capable of teaching it. Besides that, I was lucky enough to meet a priest of the Society, named Bini, who had a profound knowledge of Greek. I learned a lot from him. In only four months he pushed me to translate almost the whole New Testament, the first two books of Homer, and a selection of the odes of Pindar and Anacreon. That worthy priest, admiring my goodwill, continued to help me. For four years, each week he corrected a Greek composition or translation which I sent him, and he returned it promptly with suitable comments. By this means I managed to be able to translate Greek almost as well as I could Latin.

At this time, too, I studied French and the principles of Hebrew. These three languages, Hebrew, Greek, and French, always remained my favourites after Latin and Italian.

### *9. Ordinations – Priesthood*

The year Comollo died (1839) I received the tonsure and the four minor orders, the third year of theology<sup>211</sup>. When the school year ended, I got the idea of attempting something for which one was rarely given permission in those days—to cover the course of a year's theology during my holidays. With this in mind and without telling anyone, I presented myself to Archbishop

<sup>210</sup> Our Lady of Carmel College: institute of higher education for the ruling class only. Montaldo Torinese is a town about 8 km from Chieri.

<sup>211</sup> He should have said: fourth year. John Bosco received the tonsure and 4 minor orders on March 29, 1840.

Fransoni to ask permission to study the fourth-year texts during the holidays. In the following school year (1840-1) I would complete the quinquennium. I quoted my advanced age—I was 24—as the reason for my request.

That holy bishop made me very welcome and, after verifying the results of the exams I had taken till then in the seminary, granted the favour I was asking on condition that I take all the treatises in the course I wanted to take. My vicar forane, Dr Cinzano, was charged with carrying out the wishes of our superior. After two months of study, I finished the prescribed treatises, and for the autumn ordinations I was admitted to the subdiaconate<sup>212</sup>. When I think now of the virtues required for that most important step, I am convinced that I was not sufficiently prepared for it. But since I had no one to care directly for my vocation, I turned to Fr Cafasso. He advised me to go forward and trust in his advice. I made a ten-day retreat at the House of the Mission in Turin.<sup>213</sup> During it I made a general confession so that my confessor would have a clear picture of my conscience and would be able to give me suitable advice. Though I wanted to complete my studies, I quaked at the thought of binding myself for life. Before I took the final step I wanted to receive the full approbation of my confessor.

Henceforward I took the greatest care to practice Doctor Borel's advice: a vocation is preserved and perfected by recollection and frequent communion. On my return to the seminary I was put into the fifth year and made a prefect. This is the highest responsibility open to a seminarian.

*Sitientes day* of 1841 saw my ordination as deacon<sup>214</sup>, on the Ember Days of summer I would be ordained a priest. I found the day I had to leave the seminary for the last time very difficult. My superiors loved me and showed continual marks of benevolence. My companions were very affectionate towards me. You could say that I lived for them and they lived for me. If

<sup>212</sup> It was September 19, 1840.

<sup>213</sup> Province centre for the Vincentians in Turin. The Turin Diocese had entrusted them with preaching the retreats to ordinands.

<sup>214</sup> *Sitientes*, Saturday before Passion Sunday; it was March 27, 1841.

anyone wanted a shave or his tonsure renewed, he ran to Bosco; if he wanted someone to make a biretta for him, to sew or patch his clothes, Bosco was the man he turned to. So you can imagine how sad was the parting from that place where I had lived for six years, where I received education, knowledge, an ecclesiastical spirit, and all the tokens of kindness and affection one could desire.

My ordination day was the vigil of the feast of the Blessed Trinity<sup>215</sup>, I said my first Mass in the church of St Francis of Assisi, where Fr Cafasso was dean of the conferences. Though a priest had not said his first Mass in my home place for many a day, and my neighbours were anxiously waiting for me to say mine there, I preferred to say it without fuss in Turin. That day was the most wonderful day of my life. At the *Memento* in that unforgettable Mass I remembered devoutly all my teachers, my benefactors spiritual and temporal, and especially the ever-lamented Fr Calosso, whom I have always remembered as my greatest benefactor. On Monday I said Mass in the Church of Our Lady of Consolation to thank the great Virgin Mary for the innumerable graces she had obtained for me from her divine Son Jesus.

On Tuesday I went to say Mass in St Dominic's Church in Chieri, where my old professor Fr Giusiana was still living. With fatherly affection he was waiting for me. He was so moved that he cried all through the Mass. I spent the whole day with him, one I can call a day in paradise.

Thursday was the solemnity of *Corpus Christi*. I went home and sang Mass in the local church and there I officiated at the procession of the Blessed Sacrament<sup>216</sup>. The parish priest invited to dinner my relatives, the clergy, and the the leading citizens of the town. They were all happy to be a part of it because everyone was happy for anything that would turn out to my advantage. I went home that evening to be with my family. As I drew near the house and saw the place of the dream I had when I was about nine, I

<sup>215</sup> Saturday June 5, 1841. John Bosco was ordained priest in the church attached to the archbishop's palace, dedicated to the Immaculate.

<sup>216</sup> June 10, 1841.

could not hold back the tears. I said: “How wonderful are the ways of Divine Providence! God has truly raised a poor child from the earth to place him amongst the princes of his people.”

*10. Priestly work begins – Sermon at Lavriano and John Brina*

In that year (1841) my parish priest was looking for a curate. I helped him out for five months. I found the work a great pleasure. I preached every Sunday. I visited the sick and administered the holy sacraments to them, except penance since I had not yet taken the exam. I buried the dead, kept the parish records, wrote out certificates of poverty, and so on. My delight was to make contact with the children and teach them catechism. They used to come from Murialdo to see me, and on my visits home they crowded round me. I was also beginning to make companions and friends in town. Whenever I left the presbytery there was a group of boys, and everywhere I went my little friends gave me a warm welcome.

As I had a certain facility in expounding the word of God, I was in much demand as a preacher, to give festal homilies in the nearby villages. At the end of October that year I was invited to preach on St Benignus at Lavriano<sup>217</sup> I was happy to accept because that was the birthplace of my friend Fr John Grassino, now parish priest in Scalenghe<sup>218</sup>. I was anxious to do justice to the occasion and so prepared and wrote out my address carefully, trying to make it popular and at the same time polished. I studied it well, determined to win glory from it. But God wanted to teach a terrible lesson to my pride. It was a feast day, and I had to say holy Mass for the people before setting off. To get there in time for the sermon I had to go on horseback. Sometimes trotting, sometimes galloping, I was about halfway along and had reached

<sup>217</sup> Lavriano: farming and commercial community 24 km from Castelnuovo.

<sup>218</sup> Giovanni Grassino (1821-1902), companion of Don Bosco's in the seminary and at the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*); he helped him at the Oratory in Valdocco and at the Guardian Angel oratory; he was director of the junior seminary at Giaveno, when it was entrusted to Dn Bosco (1860-1862). Scalenghe: a town 30 km from Turin.

the valley of Casalborgone between Cinzano and Berzano<sup>219</sup>. As I passed a millet field, a flock of sparrows took sudden flight. The noise of their flight frightened the horse, and he bolted down the road and across the fields and meadows. Somehow I managed to stay in the saddle, but then I realised that it was slipping under the horse's belly. I tried an equestrian manoeuvre, but the saddle was out of place and forced me upwards, and I fell head first onto a heap of broken stones.

From a hill close by, a man could see this regrettable accident; he ran to my assistance with one of his workers and, finding me unconscious, carried me to his house and laid me on his best bed. They gave me the most loving care, and after an hour I came to and realised that I was in a strange house. "Don't let that worry you," my host said "and don't be upset that you're in a strange house. Here you'll want for nothing. I've sent for the doctor, and someone has gone to catch your horse. I'm a farmer, but I have everything I need. Do you feel any pain?"

"God reward you for your charity, my good friend" I said. "I don't think I've done much damage. A broken collar bone, maybe. I can't move it. Where am I?"

"You're on Bersano Hill in the house of John Calosso, better known as Brina. I'm at your service. I, too, have got round a bit and know what it is to need help. How many adventures I've had going to fairs and markets."

"While we're waiting for the doctor, tell me some of your stories."

"Oh," he said "I have lots of things I could tell you. Like this one. One autumn a few years ago, I was going to Asti on my donkey to collect winter provisions. On my way home, when I got to the valley of Murialdo, my poor beast, quite overloaded, fell in a mud hole and lay there in the middle of the road unable to move. Every effort to get her up again proved useless. It was midnight, dark and wet. Not knowing what else to do, I shouted for help. In a few minutes someone answered from a little house nearby. They came, a

<sup>219</sup> Berzano S. Pietro is 8 km from Castelnuovo; Casalborgone is 6 km further on.

seminarian and his brother, and two other men with a lamp to light their way. They got her out of the muck, having first unloaded her. They took me and all my baggage to their house. I was half dead and covered with mud. They cleaned me up and put new life into me with a magnificent supper. Then they gave me a nice, soft bed. In the morning before I left I wanted to pay them for all they had done for me, but the seminarian turned everything down flat, saying, ‘Who knows? Someday we may need your help.’”

I was moved to tears by his words. When he saw my reaction, he asked me if I were ill.

“No,” I replied “your story gives me great pleasure, and that’s what moves me.”

“How happy I would be” he went on, “if I knew what I could do for that good family! What fine people.”

“What was their name?”

“Bosco” he said, “popularly known as Boschetti. But why are you so moved? You know them, maybe? How is that seminarian?”

“That seminarian, my good friend, is this priest whom you have repaid a thousand times for what he did for you. The very one whom you’ve carried to your home and put into this bed. Divine Providence wants to teach us through this incident that one good turn deserves another.”

You can imagine the wonder, the pleasure, that good Christian and I both felt, that in my hour of need God had let me fall into the hands of such a friend. His wife, his sister, his other relatives, and his friends were delighted to know that the one who had so many times featured in their conversation was actually in their house. I was treated with every possible attention. The doctor arrived a short time later. He found no bones broken. After a few days I could head home on the recaptured horse. John Brina came the whole way home with me. For as long as he lived we remained fast friends.

After this warning, I firmly resolved that in the future I would prepare my sermons for the greater glory of God, and not to appear learned and erudite.



### 11. *The Pastoral Institute (Convitto Ecclesiastico) of St Francis of Assisi*

At the end of the holidays, I had three situations to choose from. I could have taken a post as tutor in the house of a Genoese gentleman with a salary of a thousand francs a year. The good people of Murialdo were so anxious to have me as their chaplain that they were prepared to double the salary paid to chaplains up to then. Last, I could have become a curate in my native parish. Before I made a final choice, I sought out Fr Cafasso in Turin to ask his advice. For several years now he had been my guide in matters both spiritual and temporal. That holy priest listened to everything, the good money offers, the pressures from relatives and friends, my own goodwill to work. Without a moment's hesitation, this is what he said: "You need to study moral theology and homiletics. For the present, forget all these offers and come to the *Convitto*." I willingly followed his wise advice; on 3 November 1841, I enrolled at the Pastoral Institute.

The Pastoral Institute [from now on we will use the English term, or call it simply the Institute] completed, you might say, the study of theology. In the seminary we studied only dogma, and that speculative; and in moral theology only controversial issues. Here one learnt to be a priest. Meditation, spiritual reading, two conferences a day, lessons in preaching, a secluded life, every convenience for study, reading good authors—these were the areas of learning to which we had to apply ourselves. At that time, two prominent men were in charge of this most useful institution: Doctor Louis Guala<sup>220</sup> and Fr Joseph Cafasso. Doctor Guala was the work's founder. An unselfish man, rich in knowledge, prudent, and fearless, he was everyone's friend in the days of the regime of Napoleon I. He founded that extraordinary seedbed where young priests fresh from their seminary courses could learn the practical aspects of their sacred ministry. This proved very valuable to the Church, especially as a means of eradicating the vestiges of Jansenism that still persisted in our midst.

Amongst other topics the most controversial was the question of Probabilism and Probabiliorism<sup>221</sup>. Chief amongst the former's advocates were

<sup>220</sup> Luigi Fortunato Guala (1775-1848).

<sup>221</sup> Probabiliorism and probabilism: schools of moral theology developed between 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, one more rigorous the other more moderate.

Alasia<sup>222</sup>, and Antoine, along with other rigourist authors. The practice of this doctrine can lead to Jansenism. The Probabilists followed the teaching of St Alphonsus<sup>223</sup>, who has now been proclaimed a Doctor of the Church. His authority can be called the theology of the Pope since the Church has proclaimed that his works can be taught, preached, and practised, as they contain nothing worthy of censure. Dr Guala took a strong stance between the two parties; starting from the principle that the charity of O.L.J.C. should be the inspiration of all systems, he was able to bring the two extremes together. Things came together so well that, thanks to Doctor Guala, St Alphonsus became our theological patron. This was a salutary step, long desired, and now we are reaping its benefit.

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

A hidden gold mine amongst the Turinese clergy, Dr Golzio Felice<sup>224</sup>, was also at the Institute. In his modest life-style he was hardly noticeable. But he was a tireless worker, humble and knowledgeable; he was a real support, or better, Guala and Cafasso's right-hand man. The prisons, hospitals, pulpits, charitable institutes, the sick in their homes, the cities, the villages, and we might add, the mansions of the rich and the hovels of the poor felt the salutary effects of the zeal of these three luminaries of the Turinese clergy.

<sup>222</sup> Giuseppe Antonio Alasia (1731-1812), professor at the University of Turin; published a powerful treatise used at the Atheneum and the Turin seminaries: *Commentaria theologiae moralis auctore Josepho Antonio Alasia*. Editio altera recognita et aucta. Augusta Taurinorum, Typis Heredum Botta 1830-1831, 8 vol. Paul Gabriel Antoine (1678-1743), Jesuit, author of a *Theologia universa speculativa et dogmatica* (1723) and a *Theologia moralis universa* (1726) with many editions in Europe between the mid-17th and 18th centuries.

<sup>223</sup> St Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori (1696-1787), avid theological writer and of spiritual literature too. Here the reference is to the 7 volume *Theologia moralis* (1753-1755). His most influential spiritual works were: *Visite al SS. Sacramento e a Maria SS.* (1745); *Le glorie di Maria* (1750); *Apparecchio alla morte* (1758); *Del gran mezzo della preghiera* (1759); *Pratica di amar Gesù Cristo* (1768). Guala and Cafasso were amongst the most fervent disseminators of Alphonsus' thinking.

<sup>224</sup> Felice Golzio (1808-1873), first a professor at the Institute then Rector of the Consolata; Don Bosco's confessor after Fr Cafasso died.

These were the three models placed in my path by Divine Providence. It was just up to me to follow their example, their teaching, their virtues. Fr Cafasso, who for six years had been my guide, was also my spiritual director. If I have been able to do any good, I owe it to this worthy priest in whose hands I placed every decision I made, all my study, and every activity of my life. The first thing he did was to begin to take me to the prisons, where I soon learned how great was the malice and misery of mankind. I saw large numbers of young lads aged from 12 to 18, fine, healthy youngsters, alert of mind, but seeing them idle there, infested with lice, lacking food for body and soul, horrified me. Public disgrace, family dishonour, and personal shame were personified in those unfortunates. What shocked me most was to see that most of them, when they were released, left with firm resolutions to lead a good life, and yet in a short time they landed back in prison, which they had left only a few days earlier.

On such occasions I found out how quite a few were brought back to that place; it was because they were abandoned to their own resources. "Who knows," I thought to myself: "if these youngsters had a friend outside who would take care of them, help them, teach them religion on feast days ... Who knows but they could be steered away from ruin, or at least the number of those who return to prison could be lessened." I talked this idea over with Fr Cafasso. With his encouragement and inspiration I began to work out in my mind how to put the idea into practice, leaving to the Lord's grace what the outcome would be. Without God's grace, all human effort is vain.

#### *12. Feast of the Immaculate Conception and beginning of the festive Oratory*

Hardly had I registered at the Convitto of St Francis, when I met at once a crowd of boys who followed me in the streets and the squares and even into the sacristy of the church attached to the Institute. But I could not take direct care of them since I had no premises. A humorous incident opened the way to put into action my project for the boys who roamed the streets of the city, especially those released from prison

On the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (December 8, 1841), I was vesting to celebrate holy Mass at the appointed time. Joseph

Comotti, the sacristan, seeing a boy in a corner, asked him to come and serve my Mass. "I don't know how" he answered, completely embarrassed.

"Come on," repeated the sacristan "I want you to serve Mass."

"I don't know how," the boy repeated "I've never served Mass."

"You big blockhead," said the sacristan, quite furious "if you don't know how to serve Mass, what are you doing in the sacristy." With that he grabbed a feather duster and hit the poor boy about the head and shoulders.

As the boy beat a hasty retreat, I cried loudly, "What are you doing? Why are you beating him like that? What's he done?"

"Why is he hanging round the sacristy if he doesn't know how to serve Mass?"

"But you've done wrong."

"What does it matter to you?"

"It matters plenty. He's a friend of mine. Call him back at once. I need to speak with him."

"*Tuder, tuder!*"<sup>225</sup> he began to shout, as he ran after him. Promising him better treatment, he brought the lad back to me. He came over trembling and tearful because of the blows he had received.

"Have you attended Mass yet?" I asked him with as much loving kindness as I could.

"No" he answered.

"Well, come to Mass now. Afterwards I'd like to talk to you about something that will please you." He promised to do as I said. I wanted to calm down the poor fellow's spirit and not leave him with that sad impression towards the people in charge of that sacristy. Once I had celebrated my Mass and made due thanksgiving, I took my candidate into a side chapel. Trying to allay any fear he might have of another beating, I started questioning him cheerfully:

<sup>225</sup> "Tuder": dialect term for a rough, uneducated type.

"My good friend, what's your name?"

"My name's Bartholomew Garelli."

"Where are you from?"

"Asti."

"Is your father alive?"

"No, my father's dead."

"And your mother?"

"My mother's dead too."

"How old are you?"

"I'm sixteen."

"Can you read and write?"

"I don't know anything."

"Have you made your first communion?"

"Not yet."

"Have you ever been to confession?"

"Yes, when I was small."

"Are you going to catechism classes now?"

"I don't dare."

"Why?"

"Because the other boys are smaller than I am, and they know their catechism. As big as I am, I don't know anything, so I'm ashamed to go."

"If I were to teach you catechism on your own, would you come?"

"I'd come very willingly."

"Would you come willingly to this little room?"

"I'd come willingly enough, provided they don't beat me."

"Relax. No one will harm you. On the contrary, you'll be my friend and

you'll be dealing with me and no one else. When would you like us to begin our catechism?"

"Whenever you wish."

"This evening?"

"Okay."

"Are you willing right now?"

"Yes, right now, with great pleasure." I stood up and made the sign of the cross to begin; but my pupil made no response because he did not know how to do it. In that first catechism lesson I taught him to make the sign of the cross. I also taught him to know God the Creator and why he created us. Though Bartholomew's memory was poor, with attentive diligence in a few feast days he learned enough to make a good confession and, soon after, his holy communion.

To this first pupil some others were added. During that winter, I concentrated my efforts in helping grown-ups who needed special catechism, above all those who were just out of prison. I was beginning to learn from experience that if young lads just released from their place of punishment could find someone to befriend them, to look after them, to assist them on feast days, to help them get work with good employers, to visit them occasionally during the week, these young men soon forgot the past and began to mend their ways. They became good Christians and honest citizens. This was the beginning of our Oratory. It was to be blessed by the Lord with growth beyond my imagining at that time.

### *13. The Oratory in 1842*

All my efforts that winter were concentrated on getting the little Oratory established. My aim was to bring together only those children who were in greatest danger, ex-prisoners by preference. Nevertheless, as a foundation on which to build discipline and morality, I invited some other boys of good character who had already been taught. These helped me maintain order, and they read and sang hymns. From the very beginning I realised that without

songbooks and suitable reading matter, these festive gatherings would have been like a body without a soul. In those days, the feast of the Purification (February 2) was still a holy day of obligation. On that day in 1842, I already had about twenty children with whom we were able to sing for the first time "Sing Praises to Mary, O Tongues of the Faithful."

By the feast of the Annunciation to the Virgin, our numbers had risen to thirty. On that day we had a small celebration. In the morning, the pupils went to the holy sacraments. In the evening we sang a hymn, and after catechism we had a story by way of a sermon. Because the side chapel we had been meeting in could no longer contain our numbers, we moved into the sacristy chapel, which was nearby.

Our Oratory programme ran along these lines. On every feast day, the boys were given a chance to receive the holy sacraments of confession and communion. But one Saturday and Sunday each month was set aside for fulfilling this religious duty. We came together in the evening at a fixed time, sang a hymn, had a catechism lesson followed by a story, and then the distribution of something, sometimes to all, sometimes by lot.

Amongst the boys who came to the Oratory in its earliest days I would like to single out Joseph Buzzetti<sup>226</sup>, who came regularly and gave good example. He had such an affection for Don Bosco and that feast day gathering that he refused to go home to his family (at Caronno Ghiringhello<sup>227</sup>) His three brothers, Charles, Angelo, and Joshua<sup>228</sup> were also outstanding. John Gariboldi and his brother were mere labourers at the time, and now they are master bricklayers.

<sup>226</sup> Giuseppe Buzzetti (1832-1891) remained with Don Bosco for the rest of his life, first as a collaborator then a Salesian layman (cf. *Memorie biografiche di Giuseppe Buzzetti, coadiutore salesiano*. S. Benigno Canavese, Scuola Tip. Salesiana 1898; Eugenio PILLA, *Giuseppe Buzzetti, coadiutore salesiano*. Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale 1960).

<sup>227</sup> Caronno Ghiringhello (today Caronno Varesino) town in Varese province, 148 km from Turin.

<sup>228</sup> Carlo (1829-1891) and Giosuè (1840-1902), became building entrepreneurs and worked for Don Bosco with the buildings at Valdocco and the church of Mary Help of Christians

As a rule the Oratory boys included stonecutters, bricklayers, stuccoers, road pavers, plasterers, and others who came from distant villages. They were not church-goers, and had few friends; so they were exposed to the dangers of perversion, especially on feast days.

Good Doctor Guala and Fr Cafasso enjoyed these assemblies of the children. They gladly supplied me with holy pictures, leaflets, pamphlets, medals, small crucifixes to give as gifts. At times they provided me with the means to clothe some of those in greater need, and to feed others for weeks at a time until they were able to support themselves by their work. Moreover, as the boys' numbers grew they sometimes gave me permission to gather my little army in the adjoining courtyard for recreation. If space had allowed, we would have been a hundred; but we had to restrict ourselves to about eighty.

When they went to the sacraments Dr Guala or Fr Cafasso used to pay us a visit and and tell some edifying stories.

Dr Guala wanted to make a special feast in honour of St Anne, the feast of the bricklayers; after the morning ceremonies he invited all of them to breakfast with him. Almost a hundred gathered in the big conference hall. There all were provided with ample provisions of coffee, milk, chocolate, pastries, cakes, semolina, and other sweet dainties much loved by children. Anyone can imagine the stir that celebration caused, and the numbers that could have come if we had had the room!

On feast days, I gave all my time to my youngsters. During the week I would go to visit them at their work in factories or workshops. Not only the youngsters were happy to see a friend taking care of them; their employers were pleased, gladly retaining youngsters who were helped during the week, and even more on feast days, when they are in greater danger.

On Saturdays, my pockets stuffed sometimes with tobacco, sometimes with fruit, sometimes with rolls, I used to go to the prisons. with the object always to give special attention to the youngsters who had the misfortune to find themselves behind bars, help them, make friends with them, and thus encourage them to come to the Oratory when they had the good fortune of leaving that place of punishment.



#### 14. Priestly work – Taking a job at the Refuge (September 1844)

At that time I began to preach publicly in some of the churches in Turin, in the Hospital of Charity, in the Hospice of Virtue, in the prisons, and in the College of St Francis di Paola<sup>229</sup>. I preached triduums, novenas, and retreats. After two years of moral theology I did my examination for faculties to hear confessions. This put me in a better position to cultivate discipline, morality, and the good of the souls of my youngsters in the prisons, at the Oratory, and wherever there was need of it.

It was consoling for me to see forty or fifty youngsters outside my confessional during the week and especially on feast days, waiting hours and hours for their turns for confession. This is how things normally ran at the Oratory for nearly three years, up to the end of October 1844.

Meanwhile, new things, changes, and even tribulations were being prepared by Divine Providence.

When I had completed three years of moral theology, I had to undertake some specific sacred ministry. Comollo's uncle Fr Joseph Comollo, parish priest of Cinzano, was now advanced in years and sick. He was advised by the archbishop to ask me to help him administer his parish, which he was too old and infirm to handle any longer. Dr Guala himself dictated my letter of thanks to Archbishop Fransoni; he was preparing me for something else.

One day, Father Cafasso took me aside and said, "Now that you've finished your studies, you must get to work. These days the harvest is abundant enough. What is your particular bent?"

"Whatever you would like to point me towards."

"There are three posts open: curate at Buttigliera d'Asti, tutor in moral theology here at the Pastoral Institute, and director at the Little Hospital beside the Refuge. Which would you choose?"

<sup>229</sup> Charitable Hospital and Hotel of Virtue: charitable institutes going back to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, looking after the elderly and abandoned children, the second for education of children of working families. The College of St Francis di Paola was one of the secondary public schools in the city.

“Whatever you judge best.”

“Don’t you feel any preference for one thing rather than for another?”

“My inclination is to work for young people. So do with me whatever you want: I shall know the Lord’s will in whatever you advise.”

“At the moment what’s the wish nearest your heart? What’s on your mind?”

“At this moment I see myself in the midst of a multitude of boys appealing to me for help.”

“Then go away for a few weeks’ holiday. When you come back I’ll tell you your destination.”

I came back from the holiday, but for several weeks Fr Cafasso never said a word. And I asked him nothing. One day he said to me, “Why don’t you ask me about your destination?”

“Because I want to see the will of God in your choice, and I don’t want my desires in it at all.”

“Pack your bag and go with Dr Borel. You’ll be director at the Little Hospital of St Philomena, and you’ll also work in the Refuge. Meanwhile God will show you what you have to do for the young.”

At first this advice seemed to cut across my inclinations. With a hospital to take care of, preaching and confessions in an institute for more than four hundred girls, there would be no time for anything else. Nevertheless this was the will of heaven, as I was soon assured.

From the first moment that I met Dr Borel, I always judged him to be a holy priest, a model worthy of admiration and imitation. Every time I was able to be with him, he always gave me lessons in priestly zeal, always good advice, encouraging me in doing good. During my three years at the Institute, he often invited me to help at the sacred ceremonies, hear confessions, or preach for him. Thus I already knew and was somewhat familiar with my field of work.

We often had long discussions about procedures to be followed in order to help each other in visiting the prisons, fulfilling the duties entrusted to us, and at the same time helping the youngsters whose moral condition and neglect drew the priests' attention everyday more. But what could I do? Where could I bring these youngsters together?

Dr Borel said, "For the time being you can bring the boys who are coming to St. Francis of Assisi to the room set aside for you. When we move to the building provided for the priests beside the Little Hospital, we can scout around for a better place."

### *15. A new dream*

On the second Sunday in October that year (1844<sup>230</sup>) I had to tell my boys that the Oratory would be moving to Valdocco. But the uncertainty of place, means, and personnel had me really worried. The previous evening I had gone to bed with an uneasy heart. That night I had another dream, which seems to be an appendix to the one I had at Becchi when I was nine years old. I think it advisable to relate it literally.

I dreamt that I was standing in the middle of a multitude of wolves, goats and kids, lambs, ewes, rams, dogs, even birds. All together they made a din, a racket, or better, a bedlam to frighten the stoutest heart. I wanted to run away, when a lady very handsomely dressed as a shepherdess signalled me to follow her and accompany that strange flock while she went ahead. We wandered from place to place, making three stations or stops. Each time we stopped, many of the animals were turned into lambs, and their number continually grew. After we had walked a long way, I found myself in a field where all the animals grazed and gambolled together and none made attacks on the others.

Worn out, I wanted to sit down beside a nearby road, but the shepherdess invited me to continue the trip. After another short journey, I found myself in a large courtyard with porticoes all round. At one end was a church. I then saw that four-fifths of the animals had been changed into lambs and their number greatly increased. Just then, several shepherds came along to take care

<sup>230</sup> Sunday, October 13.

of the flock; but they stayed only a very short time and promptly went away. Then something wonderful happened. Many of the lambs were transformed into shepherds, who as they grew took care of the others. As the number of shepherds became great, they split up and went to other places to gather other strange animals and guide them into other folds.

I wanted to be off because it seemed to me time to celebrate Mass; but the shepherdess invited me to look to the south. I looked and saw a field sown with maize, potatoes, cabbages, beetroot, lettuce, and many other vegetables.

“Look again,” she said to me. I looked again and saw a wondrously big church. An orchestra and music, both instrumental and vocal, were inviting me to sing Mass. Inside the church hung a white banner on which was written in huge letters, *Hic domus mea, inde gloria mea*.

As my dream continued, I wanted to ask the shepherdess where I was. And I wanted to know the meaning of that journey with its halts, the house, the church, then the other church. “You will understand everything when you see in fact with your bodily eyes what you are looking at now with the eyes of your mind.” Thinking that I was awake, I said, “I see clearly, and I see with my bodily eyes. I know where I’m going and what I’m doing.” But at that moment the bell of the Church of St Francis sounded the *Ave Maria*, and I woke up.

This [dream] lasted most of the night. I saw it all in great detail. But at the time I understood little of its meaning since I put little faith in it. But I understood little by little as the dream began to come true. Later, together with another dream, it served as a blueprint for my decisions.

#### 16. *The Oratory goes to the Refuge*

On the second Sunday of October, feast of the maternity of Mary, I broke the news to my youngsters that the Oratory would be moving to the Refuge. At first they were somewhat upset; but when I told them of the spacious grounds waiting just for us to sing, run, jump and enjoy ourselves, they were pleased. They eagerly looked forward to the next Sunday, to see the new situation which seized their imaginations. The third Sunday of October<sup>231</sup>,

<sup>231</sup> It was October 20, 1844.

was dedicated to the purity of the Virgin Mary. A little after noon a mob of youngsters of all ages and conditions descended on Valdocco looking for the new Oratory.

"Where's the Oratory? Where's Don Bosco?" they shouted to all and sundry. No one knew what they were talking about. No one in that neighbourhood had heard of either Don Bosco or the Oratory. The questioners, believing that they were being teased, raised their voices more insistently. The locals, believing that they were being insulted, shouted indignant threats. Matters were getting serious when Dr Borel and I heard the commotion and came out of the house. At sight of us, the noise died down and calm was restored. The boys crowded round us asking where the Oratory was.

We had to tell them that the real Oratory was not ready yet, but meantime they could come to my room. It was quite big and would serve us well enough. In fact things went quite well that Sunday. But on the following Sunday, so many pupils from the locality came in addition to the old ones that I no longer knew where to gather them. My room, the corridor, the stairs were all thronged with children. On the feast of All Saints, Dr Borel and I prepared to hear confessions. But everybody wanted to go; what could we do? There were more than two hundred children but only two confessors. One boy was trying to light the fire; another decided to put it out. The one brought wood, the other water. Buckets, tongs, shovel, jug, basin, chairs, shoes, books—everything was turned topsy-turvy while they were trying to tidy things up!

"We can't go on like this," said the dear Doctor, "we really must find a more suitable place." Yet we spent six feast days in that restricted space, which was the room above the main entrance hall of the Refuge.

Meantime, we went to speak to Archbishop Frasoni. He understood how important our project was. "Go," he told us "and do what you think best for souls. I give you all the faculties you may need. Speak with Marchioness Barolo<sup>232</sup>. She may be able to provide better accommodations for you. But tell me, couldn't these boys be taken care of in their own parishes?"

<sup>232</sup> Giulia Vittorina Barolo, nee Colbert de Maulévrier (1785-1864); together with her husband Tancredi she provided new educational and social works (cf. Ave TAGO, *Giulia Colbert di Barolo, madre dei poveri. Biografia documentata*. Città del Vaticano, LEV 2007).

“For the most part,” [I replied] “these youngsters are foreigners who spend only a part of the year in Turin. They don’t have any idea what parishes they belong to. Many of them are badly off, speaking dialects hard to understand, so that they understand little and are little understood by others. Some are already grown up and don’t like associating in classes with little boys.”

“That means,” continued the archbishop “they need a place of their own, adapted to their own needs. Go ahead, therefore. I bless you and your project. If I can be of service to you, come by all means, and I will always help in any way I can.”

I went in fact to speak with Marchioness Barolo. As the Little Hospital was not to be opened till August of the following year, that charitable lady was happy to put two large rooms at our disposal for use as a chapel. They were intended for the recreation of the priests of the Refuge when they transferred their residence there. Access to the new Oratory, therefore, was through where the door of the hospital is now, along an alley running between the Cottolengo Institute<sup>233</sup> and the aforementioned building, to what is now the priests’ residence, and inside up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor.

That was the site Divine Providence chose for the first Oratory church. We began to call it after St Francis de Sales for two reasons: first, because Marchioness Barolo had in mind to found a congregation of priests under his patronage, and with this intention she had a painting of this saint done, which can still be seen at the entrance to this area and, because we had put our own ministry, which called for great calm and meekness, under the protection of this saint in the hope that he might obtain for us from God the grace of being able to imitate him in his extraordinary meekness and in winning souls. We had a further reason for placing ourselves under the protection of this saint: that from heaven he might help us to imitate him in combating errors against religion, especially Protestantism, which was beginning to gain ground in our provinces, and more especially in the city of Turin.

<sup>233</sup> Opera Cottolengo (*Piccola Casa della Divina Provvidenza*): founded by St Joseph Cottolengo (1786-1842) for poor sick or chronically ill, physically and psychologically disabled people, the elderly and beggars as well.

On December 8, 1844, a day dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the long-awaited chapel was blessed, with the archbishop's permission. It was a bitterly cold day. There was deep snow, and it was still snowing heavily. Holy Mass was celebrated, and many youngsters went to confession and communion. I finished that sacred liturgy with a few tears, tears of joy, because in a certain way I saw that the work of the Oratory was now established, with the object of entertaining the more abandoned and endangered youths after they had fulfilled their religious duties in church.

### *17. The Oratory of St Martin's of the Mills – Problems – The Lord's hand*

At the chapel beside St Philomena's Hospital the Oratory was making a very good start. On feast days, youngsters came in big numbers to make their confessions and go to communion. After Mass there was a short explanation of the gospel. In the afternoon we had catechism lessons, hymn singing, a short instruction, the litany of our Lady, and benediction. Various intervals were filled with games and amusements which took place in the alley which still runs between the convent of the Little Magdalens<sup>234</sup> and the public road. We spent seven months there. We thought that we had found heaven on earth; then we had to leave our beloved asylum and go look for another.

Marchioness Barolo, though she cast a kindly eye on every charitable work, still, as the opening of her Little Hospital approached (it opened 10 August 1845), wanted our Oratory far away before then. True, the premises used as chapel, class rooms and the youngsters' recreation had no communication of any sort with the interior of the establishment. Even the shutters were fixed in place and turned upwards. None the less we had to obey. We positively pestered the municipal government of Turin. Through the kind offices of Archbishop Fransoni, we were allowed to move our oratory to the church of St Martin at the Great Mills, that is to say, the public mills.<sup>235</sup>

<sup>234</sup> Monastery of the Penitential Sisters of Mary Magdalene founded by Marchioness Barolo in 1833, adjacent to the Little Hospital and the Refuge.

<sup>235</sup> Molazzi (Dora Mills): large complex for milling grain going back to the 14th century, extended and modernised between 1700 and 1800. Archival research tells us that the events in this chapter happened later, after those in chapter 18; cf. Francesco MOTTO, *L'Oratorio di don Bosco presso il cimitero di S. Pietro in Vincoli in Torino*. Una documentata ricostruzione del noto episodio, in RSS 5 (1986) 199-220.

Imagine us then, on a July Sunday in 1845, making our way laden with benches, kneelers, candlesticks, some chairs, crucifixes, and pictures large and small. Everyone carried some object suited to his strength. We must have looked like emigrants on the move; with din, laughter and regret, we marched out to establish our headquarters in the place just indicated.

Dr Borel gave an appropriate talk before we set out and another when we arrived at our new church.

That worthy minister of the sanctuary, in that common-folk style of his that could be said to be more unique than rare, spoke these thoughts: "My dear boys, cabbages never form a big, beautiful head unless they are transplanted. The same is true of our Oratory. So far it has been moved from one place to another many times, but in the different places where it has stopped it has always grown bigger, with no little advantage to the boys involved. We started at St Francis of Assisi with catechism and a little singing. That was as much as we could do there. At the Refuge we made just a whistle stop, as train travellers say, so that our boys might receive spiritual help by way of confession, catechism classes, sermons, and games during the months we were there. There, beside the Little Hospital a real Oratory began, and we thought we had found true peace, a place suitable for us. But Divine Providence ordained that we had to move again and come here to St Martin's. How long will we stay here? We don't know. We hope we'll be here a long time; but however long our stay, we believe that like transplanted cabbages, our Oratory will grow in the number of boys who love virtue, will increase their desire for music, singing, evening classes, and even day courses. Will we be here long, then? We mustn't let this thought worry us. Let's throw all our worries into the Lord's hands; he'll take care of us. It's certain that he blesses us, helps us, and provides for us. He'll show us a good place for contributing to his glory and the good of our souls. Now the Lord's graces form a kind of chain with each link locked into the next; so if we turn to good account the graces he gives us, we are sure that God will grant us bigger graces. And if we fall in with the aims of the Oratory, we will progress from virtue to virtue, till we reach that blessed homeland where the infinite mercy of Our Lord Jesus Christ. will reward each of us as his good works deserve."



An immense crowd of youngsters attended that solemn ceremony, and a *Tè Deum* of thanksgiving was sung with the greatest emotion.

We carried out our religious devotions as we had at the Refuge, though we could not celebrate Mass or give benediction in the evening. This meant that the boys could not receive communion, which is the fundamental element to our institution. Even our recreations were often disturbed, broken up because the lads were forced to play in the street and in the little square in front of the church where a constant stream of people on foot, carts, horses, and carriages passed by. Since we had nothing better, we thanked heaven for what we had been given and hoped for some better spot.

But fresh problems fell upon us. The millers, their apprentices, and other employees could not put up with the jumping, the singing, and the occasional shouting of our pupils. They grew alarmed and agreed to lodge a complaint with the municipal government. It was then that people began to say that such meetings of youngsters were dangerous, that at any moment they could erupt in riots and revolution. This fear was founded on the prompt obedience with which the boys responded to every little order of the superior. Without any foundation, it was added that the kids were doing untold damage in the church, outside the church, on the pavement. It seemed that if we continued meeting there Turin must be ruined.

Our troubles came to a head when a secretary at the mills wrote a letter to the mayor of Turin. In it he included all the vague rumours and amplified the imagined damages. [The mayor sent an inspector, who found the walls, the outside pavements, the floor, everything about the church in good order. The only damage consisted of a little scratch on one wall, which a lad might have made with the end of a nail]. He said that the families connected with those businesses could not go about their duties in peace.

People went so far as to say that the Oratory was a hotbed of immorality. Though the mayor was convinced that these charges were unfounded, he wrote a stiff letter ordering us to take our Oratory elsewhere at once. General disappointment, useless sighing! We had to go.

It is worth noting, however, that the secretary, whose name is cussetti (never to be published), author of that famous letter, never wrote anything else. He was suddenly stricken by an uncontrollable shake in his right hand. Within three years he was dead. God permitted his son to be abandoned, thrown out into the street and obliged to seek food and lodging at the hospice which was later opened in Valdocco.

*18. The Oratory at St Peter in Chains – Chaplain's housekeeper – A letter – A sad event*

Since the mayor and the city council in general were persuaded that the charges brought against us had no foundation, it was an easy matter for us, especially since we had the backing of the archbishop, to get permission to hold our meetings in the church and courtyard of the Cemetery of Christ Crucified, popularly known as *St Peter in Chains*<sup>236</sup>. So, after a two-month stay at St Martin's, we had to move to a new place. Though we felt a bitter sadness about moving, the new place was more convenient for us. The long portico, the spacious yard, and the church for our sacred functions all so aroused the youngsters' enthusiasm that they were overcome with joy. But in that place we came up against a formidable and unsuspecting rival. This was not the ghost of one of the great numbers of the dead who slept peacefully in the nearby tombs. This was a living person, the chaplain's housekeeper. No sooner had she heard the pupils singing and talking, and, let us admit, their shouting too, than she rushed out of the house. In a furious rage, with her bonnet askew and her arms akimbo, she launched into tongue-lashing the crowd of merrymakers. Joining in her assault upon us were a small girl, a dog, a cat, all the hens, so that it seemed that a European war was about to break out. I tried to approach her to calm her down, pointing out to her that the kids meant no harm, that they were just playing innocently. Then she turned and gave it to me.

<sup>236</sup> The events in this chapter happened on Sunday May 25, 1845, before transferring to the Molazzi (Mills). St Peter in Chains: cemetery built in 1777, square in shape with porticoes on three sides and a church on the fourth; it had not been used since 1832.

At that point I decided to end the recreation. I gave a short catechism lesson, and after we recited the rosary in church, we broke up hoping to come back the next Sunday to a better reception. Quite the contrary! When the chaplain came home that evening, the good housekeeper went to work on him, denounced Don Bosco and his sons as revolutionaries and desecrators of holy places. All of them rascals of the worst kind, she said. She prevailed upon the good priest to write a letter to the civil authorities.

He wrote while the servant dictated, but with so much venom that a warrant was issued immediately for the arrest of any of us who should return there. Sad to say, that was the last letter written by Fr Tesio, the chaplain. He wrote it on Monday, and within a few hours he suffered a stroke from which he died very soon afterwards<sup>237</sup>. Two days later a similar fate befell the housekeeper. News of these events spread like wildfire and deeply impressed the souls of the boys and of everyone who heard it. Everyone had a mad desire to come and hear about these sorry cases. But since we were forbidden to meet at St Peter in Chains, and the time was so short to make alternative arrangements, no one, not even I, had any idea where our next meeting would take place.

### *19. The Oratory at the Moretta house*

On the Sunday following that prohibition, a large number of youngsters went to St Peter in Chains because it had not been possible to send them word of the ban. When they found everything locked up, they came in a body to my room beside the Little Hospital. What was I to do? I had a pile of equipment for church and for recreation; a mob of children trailing me wherever I went; but not an inch of ground on which to assemble them.

Trying to conceal my dismay, I put on a cheerful face for everyone and tried to keep their hopes up by telling them a thousand wonderful things about the future Oratory, which at that moment existed only in my own mind and in the decrees of the Lord. To entertain them on feast days, I took

<sup>237</sup> Giuseppe Tesio (1777-1845), ex-Capuchin, died Wed. May 28.

them sometimes to Sassi, sometimes to Madonna del Pilone, to Our Lady of the Field<sup>238</sup>, to the Mount of the Capuchins<sup>239</sup> and finally to the Superga<sup>240</sup>. In these churches I arranged to celebrate Mass for them in the morning and explain the gospel. In the afternoon we had a little catechism, hymn singing, and some stories. Then we toured or hiked till it was time to head for home. It seemed that this critical state of things would have to bring any thought of an Oratory to nothing, but instead the number of boys coming increased extraordinarily.

In the meantime, we had moved into November (1845), not a very practical season for outings or walks to places outside the city. In agreement with Dr Borel, we rented three rooms in the house belonging to Fr Moretta<sup>241</sup>, which is the one near, almost in front of, the Church of Mary Help [of Christians] today. Now the house is practically a new one because of renovations. We spent four months there, confined in that restricted space, yet happy at least to be able to collect our pupils in those rooms and give them instructions and especially an opportunity to go to confession. That same winter we began night classes. It was the first time that this kind of school was spoken of in our area. Consequently it was much discussed: some favoured it; others were against it.

At that time, also, some strange rumours began to get round. Some called Don Bosco a revolutionary; others called him a madman, or even a heretic. This was their reasoning: “This Oratory alienates youngsters from their parishes. As a result, the parish priests will find their churches empty and will no longer know the children, for whom they must render an account before

<sup>238</sup> Sassi: a town 3 km from Turin. Madonna del Pilone: suburb 2.5 km from town with a Marian sanctuary. Our Lady of the Fields: parish attached to a Capuchin monastery on the road between Turin and Venaria, 3 km from the capital.

<sup>239</sup> Monte dei Cappuccini: beautiful 15th century church overlooking Turin on the right bank of the Po.

<sup>240</sup> Superga: basilica on hill overlooking Turin; built by architect Filippo Juvarra. Some members of the Royal Family are buried in the crypt.

<sup>241</sup> Two-storey building, with nine rooms on the ground floor (cf. F. GIRAUDI, *L'Oratorio di don Bosco...*, pp. 49-50).

the tribunal of the Lord. Therefore Don Bosco should send the children to their own parishes and stop gathering them in other places."

This is what two respectable parish priests of this city told me when they called on me, also on behalf of their colleagues.

"The young men whom I gather," I told them "have no adverse effect on parish church attendance. For the most part they know neither parish nor pastor."

"Why?"

"Because almost all of them are visitors who have been abandoned by their relatives in this city; or they have come here looking for work and failed to get it. Boys from Savoy, Switzerland, the Val d'Aosta, Biella, Novara, Lombardy are the ones who most frequently come to my activities."

"Couldn't you send these youngsters to their various parishes?"

"They don't know where their parishes are."

"Why not teach them?"

"It isn't possible. They're far from home, they speak diverse dialects, they have no fixed places to stay, and they don't know the city. These considerations make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to belong to any parishes. Besides, many of them are grown men already: 18, 20, even 25 years old. And they are completely ignorant in matters of religion. Who could ever expect them to mix with kids of 8 or 10 who are much better instructed."

"Couldn't you go with them yourself and teach them catechism in their parish churches?"

"At most I could go to one parish, but not to all. It could be done if every parish priest would come himself, or send someone to fetch these children and accompany them to their respective parishes. Even that would be difficult because many of these boys are dissipated, even dissolute. These, attracted by the games and outings which we organise, decide to attend the catechism classes and the other practices of piety too. Therefore it would be necessary

for every parish to establish a fixed place where these youngsters could be assembled and entertained in pleasant recreation.”

“Those things are impossible. There aren’t any places, nor do we have priests free on feast days for these activities.”

“What then?” I asked.

“Then do as you think best. In the meantime, we’ll decide amongst ourselves what it’s best to do.”

The problem then became a talking point amongst the parish priests of Turin. Should the oratories be promoted or opposed? Some were for, some against. The parish priest of Borgo Dora, Fr Augustine Gattino, and Dr Ponzati, parish priest of St Augustine, brought me their decision: “The parish priests of Turin, meeting in their regular conference, discussed the advisability of the oratories. After weighing the fears and the hopes, the pros and the cons, they concluded that each parish priest could not provide an oratory in his own parish and that they would encourage the priest Bosco to continue until some other decision should be reached.”

While these things were going on, the spring of 1846 arrived. The tenants at the Moretta house were upset by the shouting and the din of the constant coming and going of the youngsters. They complained to the landlord, all telling [him] that they would all quit their rented quarters [and leave] if these noisy meetings did not stop. So the good priest Moretta had to tell us to look immediately for another place to gather our young men if we wished to keep our Oratory going.

### *20. The Oratory in a field – Outing to Superga*

With deep regret and no little inconvenience to our assemblies in March of 1846, we had to leave the Moretta house and rent a field from the Filippi brothers<sup>242</sup>. Today an iron foundry or smelting works occupies this ground. There I was, under the open sky, in the middle of the field bounded by a

<sup>242</sup> Pietro Antonio and Carlo Filippi, owners of houses and land next to Fr Moretta’s house.

broken-down hedge, which gave free admission to all and sundry. The youngsters, between three and four hundred of them, looked upon their Oratory as heaven on earth, even though its ceiling and walls were the sky.

But in a place like this, how could one hold religious services? Doing the best we could, we held catechism classes, sang hymns, sang vespers. Then Dr Borel or I would stand on a hillock or on a chair and give a short sermon to the youths, who came up close to hear it.

For confessions, this is how we managed: I would be in the field early on feast day mornings, where many would already be waiting for me. I would sit on a hillock hearing one's confession while others were preparing or making their thanksgiving. Afterwards many went back to their games. At a fixed time of the morning, all the boys assembled in answer to a bugle call. A second blast on the bugle brought them to silence, giving me a chance to speak and tell them where we were going for Mass and holy communion.

Sometimes, as I said, we went to Our Lady of the Fields, to the Church of Our Lady of Consolation, to Stupinigi<sup>243</sup> or to the places mentioned earlier. Since we often trudged to centres a good distance away, I will describe one hike we did to Superga, which was typical of the others.

When the boys had collected in the field, we let them play *bocce*, *piastrelle*, stilt-walking, etc., for a while. A drum was sounded, then a bugle call, to call them together and signal that we were ready to move out. We usually arranged that all of them should have heard Mass beforehand. Soon after 9:00 we set out for Superga. Some carried baskets of bread, some cheese, salami, fruit, or other provisions for the day. They kept quiet till we were outside the populated parts of the city, but from then on they began yelling, singing, and shouting, though they kept ranks.

On reaching the foot of the hill, where the path climbs to the basilica, I found a lovely little pony, already saddled up, which Fr Joseph Anselmetti<sup>244</sup>

<sup>243</sup> Stupinigi: 8 km from the city with a building used by the King when he went hunting, flanked by a large park and wooded area.

<sup>244</sup> Giuseppe Maurizio Anselmetti (1778-1852), priest at the parish of Our Lady's Nativity, not far from the Basilica at the Superga.

pastor of the church, had put at my disposal. There was also a note from Dr Borel, who had gone on ahead. It read: "Come along with our dear boys, and don't worry. The soup, the dinner, and the wine are ready." I mounted the horse and read the letter aloud. They all crowded round the horse, and after hearing the message, broke into applause and cheers, shouting and singing. Some pulled the horse by his ears, others by the muzzle or the tail, bumping sometimes into the poor beast, sometimes into his rider. The gentle animal took it all with more patience than his rider would have shown.

Amid that uproar the music struck up, provided by a tambourine, a bugle, and a guitar. It was absolute discord, but it served as a backing for the noisy voices of the boys. The result was wonderfully harmonious.

Worn out with all the laughing, joking, singing, and I would say, the yelling, we reached our destination. The perspiring youngsters gathered in the courtyard of the shrine and were soon given food enough to satisfy their voracious appetites. When they had a while to rest, I called them all round me and told them all the details of the wonderful history of the basilica, with its royal tombs in the crypt, and the Ecclesiastical Academy which Charles Albert<sup>245</sup> had established there and the bishops of the Kingdom of Sardinia supported.

Dr William Audisio, the president<sup>246</sup>, generously provided the soup and main course for all the guests. The parish priest donated the wine and the fruit. We took a couple of hours for a tour of the area and later assembled in the church, where many people had already taken their places. At 3:00 p.m. I gave a short discourse from the pulpit, after which some of the best choir boys sang a *Tantum ergo*. Their clear voices and the novelty of it won everyone's admiration. At six we sent up some balloons to signal our departure. With renewed and lively thanks to our benefactors we struck out again for Turin, singing, laughing, running, and sometimes praying on our way. When we got

<sup>245</sup> King Charles Alberto of Savoy-Carignano (1798-1849), came to the throne in 1831.

<sup>246</sup> Guglielmo Antonio Audisio (1802-1882), president of the Superga Academy until 1849; then went to Rome where he took up the Chair of *Natural and people's Law* at La Sapienza University.



to the city, the boys dropped out of our procession a few at a time at points along the route closest to their homes and returned to their families. When I got back to the Refuge, I still had with me 7 or 8 of the strongest lads, who had carried the equipment used during the day.

### 21. *Threats from Marquis Cavour – Oratory in trouble again*

Words cannot describe the enthusiasm these expeditions aroused in the youngsters. They thoroughly enjoyed the mixture of devotions, games, and outings, and they became so attached to me that they not only obeyed my every command, but they were eager that I should give them some task to do. One day, a *carabiniere* saw me bring four hundred chattering and playful boys to silence in the field by raising my hand; he exclaimed, "If this priest were an army general, he could take on the most powerful army in the world." Really, the obedience and affection of my pupils bordered on folly. This very thing gave renewed credence to the rumour that Don Bosco and his sons could start a revolution at a moment's notice. It was a ridiculous claim, but local authorities swallowed it again, especially Marquis Cavour<sup>247</sup>, father of the famous Camillo<sup>248</sup> and Gustavo<sup>249</sup>. At that time he was vicar of the city, which means he was in charge of the civil power. He therefore summoned me to city hall and reasoned with me at length about the silly stories about me which were then doing the rounds. He ended up by saying, "My good priest, take my advice: let these scoundrels go their own way. They will bring only trouble on you and the public authorities. I have been assured that these meetings are dangerous, and therefore I cannot permit them."

I replied, "Lord Marquis, I have no other aim but the betterment of these poor sons of the people. I do not ask for financial assistance but only for

<sup>247</sup> Michele Giuseppe Benso, Marquis Cavour (1781-1850), from 1835 to 1847 he was *Vicar General of policy* and police for the capital (*Vicar of the City*), looking after public order.

<sup>248</sup> Camillo Benso, Count Cavour (1810-1861), second born son of Michele, Prime Minister from 1852 to 1860, promoted a liberal policy and brought about national unity (17 March 1861).

<sup>249</sup> Gustavo Filippo Benso, Marquis Cavour (1806-1864), first-born son of Michele, scholar of philosophy and followed Rosmini's thinking; he was one of the founders of the *L'Armonia*.

a place where I can bring them together. In this way I hope to reduce the number of loafers and those headed for prison.”

“You’re fooling yourself, my good priest. You’re labouring in vain. Because I regard such meetings as dangerous, I cannot give you any place for such assemblies. And where will you get the money you need to pay rent and to meet the expenses that care of these vagabonds entails? Let me say again: I cannot allow you to hold these meetings.”

“My Lord Marquis, the results so far convince me that I am not working in vain. Many totally abandoned youngsters have been gathered, freed from dangers, apprenticed to some trade, and are no longer dwelling in the prisons. So far, material support has not been lacking to me. This matter is in God’s hands, who sometimes uses worthless instruments to accomplish his sublime designs.”

“Have patience, and do as I say. I cannot allow such meetings.”

“My Lord Marquis, don’t grant this concession for my sake, but for the good of so many abandoned youngsters who would, most likely, come to a sad end.”

“Quiet! I’m not here to argue. This is a disorder, and I wish to and must put a stop to it. Don’t you know that every meeting is banned, unless held with lawful permission?”

“My meetings have no political scope. I teach catechism to poor boys, and I do so with the archbishop’s permission.”

“Does the archbishop know what is going on?”

“He is fully informed. I have never taken a step without his consent.”

“But I cannot allow these gatherings!”

“I cannot believe, Lord Marquis, that you want to forbid me to teach catechism when my archbishop permits it.”

“And supposing the archbishop were to tell you to drop this ridiculous undertaking of yours, would you put difficulties in the way?”

"None whatsoever. I undertook this work on the advice of my ecclesiastical superior, and I have continued with it. At the least sign from him I would be ready to do his bidding."

"Go. I shall speak with the archbishop. But don't be obstinate in accepting his orders, or I shall be forced to take severe measures which I would prefer not to use."

At this stage of the proceedings, I believed that we would be left in peace for at least a while. Imagine my disappointment, therefore, when I arrived home to find a letter from the Filippi brothers, ordering me out of the place leased to me!

"Your boys," they told me "have killed the grass down to the very roots with their continuous trampling on our field. We are prepared to forgo the rent owing if you are out of the field in two weeks. There can be no extension beyond that."

When my friends got wind of these latest difficulties, many came to advise me to quit. Others, noting my preoccupation and seeing me always surrounded by boys, began to say I had gone mad.

One day, in the presence of Fr Sebastian Pacchiotti<sup>250</sup> and others, Doctor Borel suggested to me: "Let's cut our losses now and salvage what we can. Let's send away all the youngsters except for about twenty of the youngest. While we continue to teach catechism to them, God will open the way and opportunity of doing more."

"There's no need to wait for further opportunity" I told them. "The site's ready: a spacious courtyard, a house with many children, a portico, a church, priests, clerics, all at our disposal."

"But where are these things?" Dr Borel broke in.

"I don't know where they are, but they do exist, and they are ours".

<sup>250</sup> Pacchiotti Sebastiano (1806-1885), chaplain at the Barolo Work along with Borel and Don Bosco.

At this Dr Borel burst into tears. “Poor Don Bosco,” he exclaimed, “he’s losing his mind.” He took me by the hand, embraced me, and went off with Fr Pacchiotti, leaving me alone in my room.

*22. Goodbye to the Refuge – Fresh imputations of insanity*

Marchioness Barolo became alarmed by all that was being said about Don Bosco, especially because the city council of Turin were opposed to my projects.

One day she came to my room to speak to me. She began, “I am very pleased with the care you take of my institutions. Thank you for all you have done to introduce in them hymn-singing, plainchant, music, arithmetic, and even the metric system.”

“No thanks necessary. These are duties which priests must perform. God will repay everything. No need to mention it further.”

I wanted to say that I regret very much how your multiple occupations have undermined your health. You cannot possibly continue to direct my works and that of your abandoned boys, especially now when their number has increased beyond counting. I propose to you that from now on you concentrate just on your obligations, that is, the direction of my Little Hospital. You should stop visiting the prisons and the Cottolengo and give up all your care for the youngsters. What do you say to that?”

“My Lady Marchioness, God has helped me up to now and will not fail me in the future. Don’t worry about what should be done. Fr Pacchiotti, Dr Borel, and I will do everything.”

“But I cannot allow you to kill yourself. Whether you like it or not, so many diverse activities are detrimental to your health and my institutions. And then there are the gossip about your mental health and the opposition of the local authorities, which oblige me to advise you ...”

“Advise me to do what, My Lady Marchioness?”

“Give up either the work for boys or the work at the Refuge. Think about it and let me know.”

"I can tell you right now. You have money and will have no trouble in finding as many priests as you want for your institutes. It's not the same with the poor youngsters. If I turn my back on them at his time, all I've been doing for them now will go up in smoke. Therefore, while I will continue to do what I can for the Refuge, I will resign from any regular responsibility and devote myself seriously to the care of abandoned youngsters."

"But how will you be able to live?"

"God has always helped me, and he'll help me also in the future."

"But your health is ruined; you're no longer thinking straight. You'll be engulfed in debt. You'll come to me, and I tell you here and now that I'll never give you a soldo for your boys. Now take my motherly advice. I'll continue to pay your salary, and I'll increase it if you wish. Go away and rest somewhere for a year, three years, five years. When you're back to health, come back to the Refuge and you'll be most welcome. Otherwise you put me in the unpleasant position of having to dismiss you from my institutes. Think it over seriously."

"I've thought it over already, My Lady Marchioness. My life is consecrated to the good of young people. I thank you for the offers you're making me, but I can't turn back from the path which Divine Providence has traced out for me."

"So you prefer your vagabonds to my institutes? In that case, you are dismissed from this moment. This very day I shall arrange for somebody to take your place."

I pointed out to her that such a sudden dismissal would give rise to conjectures that would do neither of us credit. It would be better to act calmly and preserve between us that charity about which we should both have to answer before the Lord's tribunal.

"In that case," she concluded "I give you three months' notice. After that you will leave the direction of my Little Hospital to others."

I accepted my dismissal, abandoning myself to whatever God's plan for me might be.

Meanwhile, the reports that Don Bosco had gone mad were gaining strength. My friends were grieved; others were amused. But they all kept far away from me. The archbishop did not interfere. Fr Cafasso advised me to bide my time; Dr Borel kept quiet. Thus all my helpers left me alone in the midst of about four hundred boys.

At that time some respectable persons wanted to take care of my health. "This Don Bosco," they said amongst themselves "has some fixations which will inevitably end up in madness. Perhaps he would benefit by treatment. Let's take him to the asylum and leave it to them to do whatever they think best." Two of them were appointed to come with a carriage to pick me up and escort me to the asylum. The two emissaries greeted me politely and then inquired about my health, the Oratory, the future building and church; they sighed deeply and exclaimed aloud, "It's true." After that they invited me to go for a drive with them. "A little air will do you good. We have a carriage at hand. We'll go together and have time to converse."

At this point I understood their game, and without letting on that I had them figured out, I walked with them to the carriage, insisting that they get in first and take their places. But instead of getting in there myself, I slammed the door shut and called out to the coachman, "Straight to the asylum with all speed. They're expecting these two priests there."

### *23. Transfer to the present Oratory of St Francis de Sales in Valdocco*

While all this was going on, we came to the last Sunday on which I was allowed to keep the Oratory in the field (March 15, 1846)<sup>251</sup>. I said nothing at all, but everybody knew how troubled and worried I was. On that evening as I ran my eyes over the crowd of children playing, I thought of the rich harvest awaiting my priestly ministry. With no one to help me, my energy gone, my health undermined, with no idea where I could gather my boys in the future, I was very disturbed.

<sup>251</sup> The event described here happened, probably, the Sunday before, March 8, as we can deduce from a letter of Don Bosco's to the Vicar of the City dated March 13, 1846 (see above, no. 1).

I withdrew to one side, and as I walked alone I began to cry, perhaps for the first time. As I walked I looked up to heaven and cried out, "My God, why don't you show me where you want me to gather these children? Oh, let me know! Oh, show me what I must do."

When I had finished saying this, a man called Pancrazio Soave<sup>252</sup> came up. He stammered as he asked me, "Is it true that you're looking for a site for a laboratory?"

"Not a laboratory, but an oratory."

"I don't know the difference between an oratory and a laboratory, but there's a site available. Come and have a look at it. Mr Joseph Pinardi<sup>253</sup>, the owner, is an honest man. Come and you'll get a real bargain."

At that very moment my faithful colleague from the seminary, Fr Peter Merla, showed up. He was the founder of a pious work named the *Family of St Peter*<sup>254</sup>. Filled with zeal for his sacred ministry, he had begun his institute because so many single girls and disgraced women, after suffering imprisonment, found themselves sadly abandoned. For the most part, honest society abhorred them, and they could find neither bread nor employment. When he had a little free time, that worthy priest hastened eagerly to help his friend. Usually he found me alone amongst a mob of boys.

"What's wrong?" he asked as soon as he saw me. "I've never seen you so down. Has something bad happened?"

"Misfortune, no. But I'm in a real predicament. Today is the last day on which I'm allowed to use this field. It's evening already, two [hours] to

<sup>252</sup> Pancrazio Soave: businessman who rented the Pinardi house from November 10, 1845 (cf. F. GIRAUDI, *L'Oratorio di don Bosco...*, p. 66).

<sup>253</sup> He should have said Francesco Pinardi. He bought the house on July 14 1845 from the Filippi Brothers; on Nov. 10 the same year he let it to Pancrazio Soave, except for the shed "being built behind the house", and the land around it; (cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica...*, p. 75).

<sup>254</sup> Pietro Merla (1815-1855), Don Bosco's companion in the seminary; chaplain of the female prisons; in 1848 he founded the *Ritiro di San Pietro* (also called the *Family of St Peter*) to take in women who had come out of prison.

nightfall. I have to tell my sons where to assemble next Sunday, and I don't know where. This friend here says he knows of a place that might do. Can you keep an eye on the recreation for a while? I'll go take a look, and I'll be back before long."

When I reached the place indicated, I saw a shabby little two-storey house with a worm-eaten wooden stairway and balcony. All round were gardens, pastures, and fields. I was about to climb the stairs, but Pinardi and Pancrazio stopped me.

"No," they told me. "The place we have in mind for you is here at the back" There was a long shed; one side of its roof leaned against the wall of the house, and the other ended about three feet above the ground. If it were necessary, it could be used as a woodshed, but not much else. To get into it I had to bend my head so as not to bump against the ceiling.

"I can't use it," I said "it's too low."

"I'll fix it to suit your needs," Pinardi graciously suggested. "I'll dig it out, I'll make steps, I'll put in a new floor. I really would like you to establish your laboratory here."

"Not a laboratory, but an oratory, a little church where I can bring together some youngsters."

"Better still. I'll gladly help with the work myself. Let's draw up a contract. I can sing too, so I'll come along and give a hand. I'll bring two chairs, one for me and one for my wife. And I have a lamp at home, too; I'll bring that as well." The good man seemed to be beside himself with joy at having a church in his house.

"Thank you, my good friend," I said "for your kindness and goodwill. I accept these generous offers. If you can lower the floor at least a foot (20 in.), I'll take it. But what's your price."

"Three hundred francs. I have better offers but I prefer yours because you're going to use the place for the public good and religious purposes."



"I'll give you three hundred and twenty if you'll throw in the strip of ground round the house as a playground for the boys, and if I can bring my kids here as soon as next Sunday."

"I understand. It's a deal. Come, by all means. Everything will be ready."

I made no more demands. I ran right back to my boys. I gathered them round me and began to shout in a loud voice, "Great news, my sons! We've got a place for our Oratory, a more reliable one than we've had till now. We'll have a church, a sacristy, classrooms, and a place to play. Sunday, next Sunday, we'll go to our new Oratory, which is over there in Pinardi's house." And I pointed the place out to them.

Wild enthusiasm greeted this announcement. Some ran around shouting and jumping for joy; some stood stock still; some raised their voices, I would say, to yelling and screaming. They were moved like people who feel so intensely happy that they cannot express their feelings. Overcome with deep gratitude, we thanked the holy Virgin for hearing and answering the prayers which we had made to her that very morning at Our Lady of the Fields. Now we knelt for the last time in that field and said the holy rosary. After that, everyone went home. Thus we said good-bye to that place which each of us had loved out of necessity, but which each of us, hoping for something better, left behind without regret.

On the following Sunday, April 12, which was Easter Sunday, all the church furniture and the equipment for recreation were brought there, and we went to take possession of our new place.

### **Third decade 1846-1855**

#### *1. The new church*

Even though this new church was really a hovel, still, since we held our lease by a formal contract, we were freed from the anxiety and the grievous inconvenience of having to move so often from one place to another. To me it seemed then truly to be the place of which I had dreamed and seen written:

*Haec est domus mea, inde gloria mea.* Heaven, however, had other plans. The house close beside us caused no little difficulty: it was a house of ill fame; and there were difficulties from the Gardener's Inn, now called the Bellezza House<sup>255</sup>, where all the good-time Charlies of the city congregated, especially on feast days. Nevertheless, we were able to overcome all the problems and began to hold our meetings regularly.

When our work was done, the archbishop on April [10] granted the faculty of blessing and consecrating that humble building for divine worship. That was done on Sunday April [12], 1846. To show his satisfaction the archbishop renewed the faculty already granted while we were at the Refuge to have sung Masses; to offer triduums, novenas, and retreats; to admit to confirmation and to holy communion; and to certify *that all those who regularly attended our programme had fulfilled their Easter duty.*

A regular meeting place, the signs of the archbishop's approval, our solemn ceremonies, the music, the noise from our play garden attracted children from all directions. Several priests began to drift back. Amongst those who helped in our work should be noted Dr Joseph Trivero, Dr Hyacinth Carpano, Dr John Vola, Dr Robert Murialdo<sup>256</sup>, and the intrepid Dr Borel.

This is how we arranged our functions. The church was opened early in the morning on holy days, and we heard confessions until it was time for Mass, which was scheduled for eight o'clock. Often, because there were so many for confession, Mass had to be put off till nine or even later. One of the priests, when they were present, assisted, and the prayers were recited in alternating choirs. Those who were prepared went to holy communion during Mass. When Mass was over and the vestments put away, I stood up on a low rostrum to explain the gospel. Then this was changed in order to begin

<sup>255</sup> It was a tavern, in the house belonging to Mrs Teresa Caterina Novo, widow Bellezza, a few metres from the Pinardi house.

<sup>256</sup> Young priests, friends of Don Bosco's, involved in pastoral and social activity. Giuseppe Trivero (1816-1894); Giacinto Carpano (1821-1894), who from 1847 to 1852 would run the St Aloysius Oratory; Giovanni Vola (1806-1872) collaborator and successor to Fr Pietro Merla; Roberto Murialdo (1815-1882), Royal chaplain, would be director of the Guardian Angel Oratory from 1849.

a regular presentation of Bible history. These narratives were presented in simple and popular language, vividly portraying the customs of the times, the places, the [ancient] geographical names with their [modern] counterparts. This pleased very much the youngest, the adults, and even the priests who were present. After the instruction, there were classes till noon.

At one o'clock in the afternoon, recreation began, with bocce, stilts, rifles, wooden swords, and our first gymnastics equipment. At two-thirty we started catechism. On the whole, ignorance abounded. Many times I began to sing the *Ave Maria*, but not one of the approximately four hundred youngsters present could continue if I stopped.

After catechism was over, since we were not yet able to sing vespers, we recited the rosary. Later we began to sing *Ave Maris Stella*, then the *Magnificat*, then the *Dixit*, and on to the other psalms, and finally an antiphon. In the space of a year, we had become capable of singing the whole vespers of Our Lady.

These practices were followed by a short sermon, usually a story in which some virtue or vice was personified. It all concluded with the singing of the litanies and with benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

When we came out of church, there was a period of free time for each to do as he pleased. Some continued their catechism class, some practised their singing, some worked at their reading. Most of them, however, jumped about, ran, and enjoyed themselves in various games and pastimes. All those exploits of jumping, running, juggling, tightrope walking, stick balancing that I had learned long before from acrobats, were practised under my instruction. In this way I could control that crowd, which, in the main, could be described thus: "*Sicut equus et mulus, quibus non est intellectus*"<sup>257</sup>. Like a horse or a mule, without understanding."

I must say, however, that despite their great ignorance I always admired the great respect they had for everything in church and for the sacred ministers, and their eagerness to learn more about their religion.

<sup>257</sup> Cf. Ps 31:9.

I made use of that unorganised recreation period to introduce my pupils quietly to thoughts of religion and use of the holy sacraments. To one I might, with a word in the ear, recommend to be more obedient, to be more prompt in attending to his duty; to another I would suggest regular attendance at catechism, or at confession, or so on. In this way these play periods provided me with an opportune means of making personal contact with a crowd of youngsters who, on Saturday evening or Sunday morning, would willingly come for confession.

Sometimes I would even call them away from their games to lead them to confession when I had seen some resistance to that important obligation. I will mention one case out of many. One youngster had been constantly reminded about his Easter duty. Every Sunday he promised to do it, but then he never kept his word. One feast day when our devotions were over, he was in the thick of the games, running and jumping everywhere and bathed in perspiration, his face flushed; he no longer knew whether he was in this world or in the other. I stopped him in his tracks and asked him to help me with something in the sacristy. He wanted to come just as he was, in shirt sleeves. “No” I told him, “put on your jacket and come.” When we got to the sacristy, I led him to the apse and said, “Kneel on this *priedieu*.” He did, but he wanted to move the kneeler.

“No,” I replied “leave everything as it is.”

“Then what do you want me to do?”

“Make your confession.”

“I’m not ready.”

“I know.”

“What then?”

“Then get ready, and I’ll hear your confession.”

“Fine, that’s fine,” he exclaimed “I really need it. You did well to catch me like this; otherwise I wouldn’t have come, out of fear of my companions.”

While he prepared, I read part of my breviary. Then he made a good confession and a devout thanksgiving. From that time on, he was always

amongst the most diligent boys in fulfilling his religious duties. He used to tell the story to his companions, concluding thus: "Don Bosco used a clever stratagem to cage the blackbird."

As night fell, we all returned to church when the bell rang. There we said a few prayers or recited the rosary and the Angelus, and everything ended with the singing of the "Praised for ever be."

As they left the church, I went in their midst and accompanied them while they sang and shouted. When we reached the Rondò, we would sing a verse from some hymn. Then I would invite them back for the following Sunday, and with a loud chorus of "good nights" all round, each went his way.

Quite unusual was the scene of the departure from the Oratory. As they came out of church, each would wish the others good night a thousand times without making any move to leave his companions. "Off home with you," I would urge them repeatedly. "It's getting late. Your people are waiting for you." To no avail. I had to let them gather round. Six of the strongest made a kind of seat by linking hands, and on this improvised throne I had to sit. Then they organised a procession, carrying Don Bosco over the heads of the tallest boys on that platform of arms, and wended their way with laughter, song, and yelling to the roundabout commonly called the Rondò. There they sang some more hymns and ended with a solemn rendition of "Praised for ever be." When they finally settled into a deep silence, I was able to wish them all a good night and a happy week. They all answered as loud as they could, "Good night." And then I was let down from my throne. Each headed for his own family, while some of the oldest accompanied me as far as my home; I would be half dead with fatigue.

## *2. Cavour again – City council – Police*

In spite of the order, discipline, and tranquillity that reigned in the Oratory, Marquis Cavour, vicar of the city, demanded that our assemblies, which he claimed were dangerous, come to an end. Knowing that I had always proceeded with the consent of the archbishop, he called a city council meeting at the archbishop's residence because that prelate was rather ill just then.

The city council was a select group of municipal department heads. In their hands rested the whole power of the civil administration. The council's head, called the council president, the first councillor, or also the vicar of the city, was more powerful than the mayor<sup>258</sup>.

Said the archbishop: "When I saw all those dignitaries assembled in that hall, I thought I was at the last judgement." There was much discussion for and against, but in the end they decided that these meetings absolutely should be blocked and dispersed because they threatened public order.

One member of the council was Count Joseph Provana of Collegno, our outstanding benefactor. At that time he was comptroller general, or minister of finance, in King Charles Albert's government. Many times he had sent me donations both on his own behalf and on behalf of our sovereign. This prince was very pleased to hear all about the Oratory. When we had a celebration of any kind he would gladly read the account which I would send him in writing, or which Count Collegno would give him orally. Many a time he informed me how much he esteemed this kind of priestly ministry, comparing it to work in the foreign missions. He expressed a sincere wish that every city and province in his kingdom should establish similar institutions. At New Year's, he always used to send me a subsidy of 300 lire with this greeting: "For Don Bosco's little rascals."

When he found that the council was threatening to ban our meetings, he charged Count Collegno to communicate his will in these words: "It is my wish that these assemblies be promoted and protected. If there is danger of disorders, ways should be studied to forestall them and prevent them."

The count had listened in silence to the whole lively debate. When he observed that they were resolved on the banning order and final break-up, he got to his feet and requested the floor. He conveyed the sovereign's wishes and let them know that the king meant to protect that microscopic work.

<sup>258</sup> Government of Turin City was entrusted to two bodies, one a restricted group, the *Civic administration or Council* (2 mayors, 1 treasurer, 6 councillors and 1 secretary), and a larger group, the *decurion* (comprising the Council or 50 others).

These words silenced the vicar and silenced the city council. Without delay the vicar ordered me to appear again, continued his menacing tone, and told me I was obstinate. He concluded with these well-meant words: "I have no wish to harm anybody. You work with good intentions, but what you're doing is fraught with danger. Since I have a duty to safeguard public order, I'm going to send men to watch you and your meetings. Should the slightest thing compromise you, I'll immediately scatter your rascals; and you shall be accountable to me for anything that might occur."

Perhaps it was pressure he was subject to, perhaps it was some illness he was battling. In fact, that was the last time that Vicar Cavour went to city hall. He was stricken with very painful gout, and within a few months he was dead.

But for the six months that he lived, every Sunday he sent some agents or policemen to spend the whole day with us, watching all that was said or done in church or outside it.

"Well," Marquis Cavour said to one of these guards "what did you see and hear in the midst of that rabble?"

"Lord Marquis, we saw a huge crowd of boys enjoying themselves in a thousand ways. In church we heard some hair-raising sermons. They said so many things about hell and devils that it made me want to go to confession."

"And what about politics?"

"Politics weren't even mentioned. Those boys wouldn't understand anything about politics. Now if you were to start a discussion about bread and butter, that is a subject each of them would be qualified to speak about."

When Cavour died, no one else at city hall bothered us. In fact, whenever there has been an occasion the Turin authorities were always favourable to us until 1877.

### *3. Sunday and evening classes*

At St Francis of Assisi, I was already conscious of the need for some kind of school. Some children who are already advanced in years are still completely ignorant of the truths of the faith. For these, verbal instruction would prove

long and mostly tedious. They quickly would stop coming. We did try to give them some lessons, but we were beaten by lack of space and of teachers ready to help us. At the Refuge and later at the Moretta house, we started a regular Sunday school, and when we came to Valdocco we also started a regular night school<sup>259</sup>. As we wanted to get some good result, we took just one subject at a time. For example, one or two Sundays were devoted to going over and over the alphabet and the structure of syllables. Then we started right off on the small catechism and, syllable by syllable, pupils were taught to read one or two of the first catechism questions. That served as a lesson for the week. The following Sunday that work was reviewed and a few more questions and answers were added. In this way in about eight weeks I could succeed in getting some to read and study on their own a whole page of catechism. This was a great time-saver. With the other method, the older boys would have had to come to catechism for some years before they could be properly prepared just for confession.

The Sunday school project was a boon to many. But that was not enough: not a few of the slower pupils forgot what they had learned the previous Sunday. It was then that we introduced night courses. We had begun them at the Refuge, put them on a more regular basis at the Moretta house, and better yet as soon as we had our established place at Valdocco.

The night courses brought two good results. They inspired the youngsters to come to learn to read, which they realised was very important. At the same time, these classes gave us an excellent opportunity to instruct them in religion, which was the object of our concern.

But where could I find so many teachers, when almost every day brought the need of adding new classes?

To meet this need, I myself began to give lessons to some youngsters from the city. I taught Italian, Latin, French, and arithmetic without a fee. In return they were obliged to help me teach catechism and run the Sunday and night schools. These young teachers of mine, at first numbering eight or ten, continued to increase. This is how our academic programme started.

<sup>259</sup> Northern outskirts of the city, then market gardens, and where the work of Barolo and Cottolengo were located.



When I was still at the St Francis of Assisi Institute, amongst my students was John Coriasco, who is now a master carpenter. Felix Vergnano is now a dealer in ribbons and braids. Paul Delfino is now a technical instructor. At the Refuge was Anthony Melanotte, who now has a spice shop. John Melanotte is a confectioner. Felix Ferrero is a broker. Peter Ferrero is a compositor. John Piola has his own carpentry shop. There were others too: Louis Genta, Victor Mogna, and others who came only once in a while. I had to spend a lot of time and money, and as a general rule the bulk of them let me down when I needed them.

To these I can add other pious gentlemen from Turin. Mr Joseph Gagliardi, a dealer in knick-knacks; Joseph Fino, in the same business; Victor Kitner, a jeweler; and others were dependable. Priests used to help me especially by celebrating holy Mass, preaching, and teaching catechism to the more mature young men.

Books presented a major problem because when we had worked through the short catechism we had no other textbooks. I took a look at all the little Bible Histories which were used in the schools. None of them suited my need. Lack of a popular style, unsuitable stories, and long or outdated questions were common defects. Many events were presented in a fashion dangerous to the morality of the youngsters. All of them failed to focus on points that should serve as the foundation for the truths of our faith. The same could be said of facts referring to external worship, purgatory, confession, the Eucharist, and the like.

With a view to providing for this area in education that the times absolutely demanded, I set about compiling a Bible History I aimed for a simple and popular style, free of the defects already mentioned. That was my reason for writing and publishing the text called *Bible History for use in schools*<sup>260</sup>. I could not guarantee an elegant production, but I worked entirely with the good intention of helping young people.

<sup>260</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Storia sacra per uso delle scuole utile ad ogni stato di persone*. Torino, Speirani e Ferrero 1847 (OE III, 2-212).

After a few months of school, we gave a public exhibition of our feast day teaching. The pupils were questioned on all of Bible history, on the geography of the Bible, and all the related questions. Present as spectators were the distinguished Fr Aporti<sup>261</sup>, Boncompagni, Dr Peter Baricco, professor Joseph Rayneri<sup>262</sup>; all applauded the experiment.

The success of the Sunday and night courses encouraged us to introduce arithmetic and art to our classes in reading and writing. These schools were the first of their kind in these parts. Everybody talked of them as a great innovation. We often had visits from professors and other persons of distinction. Even the city sent a deputation under the direction of Comm. Joseph Duprè<sup>263</sup> to see for themselves if the results of our night school were as good as they were reported to be. They themselves examined the boys in pronunciation, arithmetic, and recitation. They found it hard to explain [how young men] who were illiterate until they were 18 and even 20 years of age had progressed so well in manners and instruction in a few [months]. After seeing such a great number of young adults gathering at night to go to school instead of roaming the streets, those gentlemen left full of enthusiasm. When they reported back to the full city council, an annual prize of three hundred francs was assigned to the Oratory. This prize was given every year up to 1878 when, for some reason that could never be learned, it was withheld and given to another institute.

At that time, Chev. Gonella<sup>264</sup>, whose zeal and charity are leaving a glorious and imperishable memory in Turin, was director of the work called the *Schools*

<sup>261</sup> Ferrante Aporti (1791-1858), priest and pedagogue, the first in Italy to open infant schools (1828). In 1848 he sought refuge in Turin where he became a Senator, President of the University Council, Commission for Secondary Schools and inspector general for the infant schools.

<sup>262</sup> Carlo Boncompagni (1804-1880), magistrate, pedagogue and politician. Pietro Baricco (1819-1887), priest, member of the Turin city council and headmaster of two important schools, the Liceo Gioberti and the Liceo Cavour. Giovanni (not Giuseppe) Antonio Rayneri (1810-1867), priest, professor of anthropology and pedagogy at the University of Turin, cf. José MANUEL *Prelezzo*, *G. A. Rayneri negli scritti pedagogici dei salesiani*, in "Orientamenti pedagogici" 40 (1993) 1039-1063.

<sup>263</sup> Giuseppe Luigi Duprè (died 1884), banker, city councillor, administrator of various charitable works.

<sup>264</sup> Andrea Gonella (1770-1851), banker and industrialist (textiles). His son Marco Guglielmo (1822-1886), enthusiastic supporter of Don Bosco's, became a Salesian Cooperator.

*for the Poor*<sup>265</sup>. He often came to visit us, and a year later (1847) he introduced the same kind of schools and the same methods in the work entrusted to him. And when he reported everything to the administrators of that work, in full session they voted an award of a thousand francs for our schools. The city government followed his example, and within a few years night schools were established in all the principal cities of Piedmont.

Another need showed up: a prayer book suitable for the times. There is no shortage of prayer books which have been put together by excellent people and are available to everyone. But, on the whole, these books were written for educated people, for adults, and most of them could be used by Catholics, Jews, or Protestants. Seeing how insidious heresy was spreading quietly every day, I undertook to compile a book suitable for the young, adapted to their religious ideas, based on the Bible, and setting out the foundations of the Catholic religion clearly and concisely. This was *The Companion of Youth*<sup>266</sup>.

I had to do the same thing to teach arithmetic and the metric system. True, the metric system did not become obligatory until 1850, but it was introduced in the schools in 1846. Though it was introduced by law in the schools, there were in fact no textbooks. I supplied this need with a booklet entitled *The Metric System Simplified*<sup>267</sup>, etc.

#### 4. *Illness – Recovery – Planning to stay at Valdocco*

My many commitments in the prisons, the Cottolengo Hospital, the Refuge, the Oratory, and the schools meant I had to work at night to compile

<sup>265</sup> *Opera della Mendicizia Istruita*: Schools for the Poor: charitable institute in Turin, founded in 1743 to educate poor youth. It managed 15 primary schools for boys, 12 for girls in the poorest parts of the city.

<sup>266</sup> Cf. no. 184.

<sup>267</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Il sistema metrico decimale ridotto a semplicità preceduto dalle prime operazioni dell'aritmetica ad uso degli artigiani e della gente di campagna*. Torino, G. B. Paravia e Comp. 1849 (OE IV, 1-80). The shift from the old system of weights and measures to the new metric decimal system, established by Royal Decree (September 11, 1845), came into force on January 1, 1850.

the booklets that I absolutely needed<sup>268</sup>. On account of that, my already frail health deteriorated to such a degree that the doctors advised me to stop all my activities. Doctor Borel, who loved me dearly, for my own good sent me to spend some time with the parish priest of Sassi<sup>269</sup>. I rested during the week and went back to work at the Oratory on Sunday. But that was not enough. The youngsters came in crowds to see me; the boys from the village came too. So I was busier than in Turin, while I was causing a great deal of inconvenience to my little friends.

Not only those who attended the Oratory hastened, one could say, every day, to Sassi, but also the pupils of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. This episode is one of many. A retreat was being preached to the students in the St Barbara Schools<sup>270</sup> which were under the care of these same religious. As I was confessor to a great number of the boys, they came in a body to the Oratory looking for me at the end of the retreat. Not finding me there, they set out at once for Sassi, two and a half miles from Turin. It was raining. The boys were not sure of the way and went wandering about the fields, meadows, and vineyards looking for Don Bosco. Eventually about four hundred of them, all worn out by their hike and by hunger, bathed in perspiration and covered with dirt, and mud too, showed up and asked to go to confession. “We’ve made the retreat,” they said “and we want to be good. We all want to make a general confession. So we got our teachers’ permission to come here.” They were told to return at once to their college in order to keep their teachers and families from worrying, but they insisted that they wanted to go to confession.

<sup>268</sup> As well as the *Bible History, the Companion of Youth, the Metric decimal system*, over those years Don Bosco published others: *Historical sketch on the life of Louis Comollo* (1844, in OE I, 1-84); *The devotee of the Guardian Angel* (1845, in OE I, 87-158); *Church History for use in schools* (1845, in OE I, 160-556); *Exercise of devotion to God’s mercy* (1847, in OE II, 71-181); *The Christian guided by virtue and civilisation according to the spirit of St Vincent de Paul* (1848, in OE III, 215-503).

<sup>269</sup> Dr (Fr) Pietro Abbondioli (1812-1893). Sassi is about 4 km from Turin city centre, on the right bank of the river Po.

<sup>270</sup> Primary schools run by the de la Salle Brothers, located near the old cittadella beside St Barbara’s parish.

The local school master, the parish priest, his assistant, and I heard as many as we could, but we would have needed at least fifteen confessors.

But how to restore, or rather to appease, the appetite of that multitude? That good parish priest (it was Dr Abbondioli) gave those pilgrims all the food he had: bread, polenta, beans, rice, potatoes, cheese, fruit—everything was prepared [cooked] and served up to them.

Imagine the consternation when the preachers, teachers, and some prominent persons invited for the closing of the retreat arrived for Mass and the general communion and found not one pupil in the college! It was a real mess. Measures were taken to ensure that it would never happen again.

Back home again, I collapsed [fainted] and was carried to my bed. I had bronchitis, combined with coughing and violent inflammation. A week later, I was judged to be at death's door. I had received holy Viaticum and the anointing of the sick. I think that just then I was ready to die. I was sorry to abandon my youngsters, but I was happy that before I departed I had given a solid foundation to the Oratory.

When the news spread that my illness was grave, the show of widespread, serious regret could not have been greater. Constant streams of tearful youngsters came knocking at the door to inquire about my health. The more they were told, the more they wanted to know. I heard the conversations between them and the housekeeper, and I was deeply moved by them. I heard later what their affection for me had moved them to do. Without prompting they prayed, fasted, went to Masses, and received holy communions. In turns they prayed all night and day for me before the image of Our Lady of Consolation. In the morning they lit special candles for me, and until the late evening large numbers were always praying and imploring the august Mother of God to preserve their poor Don Bosco.

Some made vows to recite the whole rosary for a month, others for a year, some for their whole lives. There were some who promised to fast on bread and water for months, years, and even their whole lives. I know that some bricklayer apprentices fasted on bread and water for entire weeks, without

lessening from morning to evening their heavy work. In fact, when they had any bit of free time they rushed to spend it before the Most Blessed Sacrament.

God heard their prayers. It was a Saturday evening, and it was believed that it would be the last night of my life. So said the doctors who came to see me, and so was I convinced myself. I had no strength left because of a continuous loss of blood. Late in the night I grew drowsy and slept. When I woke I was out of danger. Next morning when Doctor Botta and Doctor Cafasso<sup>271</sup> examined me, they told me go thank Our Lady of Consolation for the grace received.

My boys could not believe it if they did not see me. They saw me in fact soon after, when I went with my walking stick to the Oratory. The emotion can be imagined but not easily described. A *Te Deum* was sung. There were a thousand acclamations and indescribable enthusiasm.

One of the first things to be done was to change into something manageable all the vows and promises which many had made without due thought when my life was in danger.

This illness overtook me at the beginning of July 1846, just at the time I was due to leave the Refuge and move elsewhere.

I went home to Murialdo to spend some months of convalescence with my family. I would have stayed longer there in my home town, but the youngsters began to turn up in crowds to see me, indicating that it was no longer possible to enjoy either rest or tranquillity. Everyone advised me to get away from Turin for a few years and go to some unknown place to recover my former health. Fr Cafasso and the archbishop were of this opinion. But that seemed too drastic to me; it was agreed that I could return to the Oratory provided that for a couple of years I would refrain from hearing confessions and preaching. I disobeyed. When I got back to the Oratory, I continued to work as before, and for 27 years I had no need of either doctors or medicine. This leads me to believe that work does no damage to bodily health.

<sup>271</sup> Giovanni Botta and Gaetano Cafasso were doctors who looked after the city's poor.

### 5. *Permanent residence at the Valdocco Oratory*

After convalescing for several months at home, I felt I could return to my beloved sons. Every day many of them were coming to see me or were writing to me, urging me to come back to them soon. But where could I find lodging? I had been sent away from the Refuge. What means did I have to keep my work going, work that was daily becoming more demanding and expensive? How was I to support myself and the persons who were indispensable to me?

At that time, two rooms fell vacant in the Pinardi house, and these were rented as a dwelling for me and my mother.

"Mother," I said to her one day "I should take up residence in Valdocco, but considering the people who live in that house, I can't take anyone with me but you. She knew what I was hinting at and replied straightaway, "If you think such a move is God's will, I'm ready to go right now." My mother made a great sacrifice. At home, even though we were not well off, she was in charge of everything, everyone loved her, and to young and old she was a queen.

We sent ahead some of the more necessary items, and together with my things from the Refuge, these were delivered at our new lodgings. My mother filled a hamper with linen and other things we would need. I took my breviary, a missal, and some of the more important [books] and copybooks. This was our entire fortune. On foot, we set out from Becchi towards Turin. We made a short stop at Chieri, and on the evening of November 3, 1846, we arrived at Valdocco.

When my mother laid eyes on those barren rooms, she said jokingly, "At home I had so many worries about administration and direction. Here I'll be much more at ease: I have nothing to manage, nobody to command."

But how were we to live? What were we to eat? How could we pay the rent and supply the needs of the many children who constantly asked for bread, shoes, clothes, or shirts, which they needed to go to work? From home we had brought some wine, corn, beans, wheat, and so forth. To meet initial expenses, I had sold some pieces of land and a vineyard. My mother sent for her wedding trousseau, which up to then she had jealously preserved intact.

From some of her dresses we made chasubles; from the linen we made amices, purifiers, surplices, albs, and altar cloths. Everything passed through the hands of Mrs. Margaret Gastaldi<sup>272</sup>, who since then has helped look after the needs of the Oratory.

My mother also had a little gold necklace and some rings; they were quickly sold to buy braid and trimmings for the sacred vestments. My mother was always in good humour. One evening, she laughingly sang to me: “*Woe to the world if it should learn / We’re just penniless strangers!*”

When our domestic affairs were somewhat organised, I rented another room, which was intended for a sacristy. As we lacked classrooms, for the time being we had to use the kitchen or my room. But the students—prime little rascals—either destroyed everything or put everything topsy-turvy. When we started, some classes met in the sacristy, in the apse, or in other parts of the church. But the noise, the singing, the coming and going of one group disturbed whatever the other groups were trying to do. After a few months, we were able to rent two other rooms and so organise our night classes better. As was said above, during the winter of 1846-7(1) we got excellent scholastic results. Let it be remembered that the first night school set up in Turin was the one opened at the Moretta house in 1845. We could take only two hundred students into three rooms or classes. The good results from the school prompted us to re-open it the following year as soon as we had fixed quarters in Valdocco.

#### *6. Regulations for the Oratories – St Aloysius Sodality – Visit by Archbishop Fransoni*

When we got firmly settled at Valdocco, I gave my full attention to promoting the things that could work to preserve our unity of spirit, discipline, and administration.

In the first place, I drew up a set of regulations in which I simply set down what was being done at the Oratory, and the standard way in which things

<sup>272</sup> Margherita Volpati Gastaldi (1790-1868), mother of the future archbishop of Turin, Lorenzo Gastaldi.



ought to be done. Since this has been printed elsewhere, anyone can read it as he wishes<sup>273</sup>. This little Rule brought this notable advantage: Everybody knew what was expected of him, and since I used to let each one be responsible for his own charge, each took care to know and to perform his appointed duties. Many bishops and parish priests asked for copies, studied them, and adopted them when they introduced the work of the oratories to the cities and villages of their respective dioceses.

When the framework for the smooth running and administration of the Oratory had been set up, it was necessary to encourage piety by means of a set of standard practices. We did this by starting the St Aloysius Sodality. The Regulations were drawn up in a style that I believed suitable for young people. I sent them to the archbishop. Having read them, he passed them on to others who studied them and then reported back to him. He praised and approved them, and he granted special indulgences on [April 12, 1847]. These Regulations can be read elsewhere.<sup>274</sup>

The St Aloysius Sodality caused great enthusiasm amongst our youngsters: they all wanted to enrol in it. Two conditions were demanded for membership: good example in and out of church; and avoidance of bad talk and frequent reception of the holy sacraments. A very notable improvement in behaviour was soon evident.

To encourage all the boys to celebrate the six Sundays in honour of St Aloysius<sup>275</sup> we bought a statue of the saint and had a banner made. The boys were given the opportunity of going to confession at any time of day, evening, or night. Because hardly any of them had yet been confirmed, they were prepared to receive that sacrament on the feast of St Aloysius. What a

<sup>273</sup> The Regulations were published right at the time he was writing the *Memoirs: Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per gli esterni*. Torino, Tipografia Salesiana 1877 (OE XXIX, 31-94); cf. no. 180.

<sup>274</sup> Cf. no. 206.

<sup>275</sup> The *pious practice of the six Sundays in honour of St Aloysius Gonzaga* came about through Jesuit colleges with the aim of encouraging the pupils to imitate the Saint's virtues; published in the *Companion of Youth* (cf. no. 184, pp. 722-731).

crowd! With the help of various priests and gentlemen (1) however, they were prepared and all was in readiness for the saint's feast day.

It was the first time that celebrations of this kind were held at the Oratory, and it was also the first time the archbishop came to visit us.

In front of our little church was erected a kind of pavilion under which we received the archbishop. I read something appropriate for the occasion. Then some of the boys put on a little comedy entitled *Napoleon's Corporal*. It was just a caricature of a corporal who, to express his surprise at that solemnity, came out with a thousand pleasantries. That made the prelate laugh a great deal and he really enjoyed it; he said that he had never laughed so much in his life. He responded very kindly to all, expressing the great consolation which our institution gave him. He praised us and encouraged us to persevere and thanked us for the cordial welcome which we had given him.

He celebrated holy Mass and gave holy communion to more than three hundred youngsters; then he administered the sacrament of confirmation.

It was on that occasion that the archbishop, just as the mitre was being put on his head, forgot that he was not in the cathedral; he raised his head too quickly and banged into the church ceiling. That amused him and all those present. He often used to relate this incident with pleasure, thus recalling our meetings. Father Rosmini<sup>276</sup> said that it reminded him of similar happenings in the countries and churches of the foreign missions.

I must add that two canons from the cathedral and many other churchmen came to assist the archbishop at these sacred ceremonies. When the ceremony ended, we wrote a record of the event, noting who had administered the sacrament and the name of the sponsor, and the place and day. Then the certificates were collected, sorted according to the various parishes, and passed on to the diocesan chancery to be sent to the parish priests concerned.

<sup>276</sup> Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855), one of the most important Italian philosophers of the 1800s; theologian, pedagogue and master of spirituality; in 1828 he founded the *Institute of Charity*, congregation of simple vows. His philosophical and political writings aroused enthusiasm and debate to the extent that they were censured. He had excellent relations with Don Bosco whom he helped financially. He was beatified on November 18, 2007.

### 7. *The start of the hospice – first boys admitted*

While we worked to set up ways of supplying instructions in religion and literacy, another crying need became evident; it was urgent to make some provision for it. Many youngsters from Turin and migrants [were] quite willing to try to live hard-working and moral lives; but when they were encouraged to begin, they used to answer that they had no bread, no clothing, and no shelter where they could stay at least for a while. To accommodate at least some of those who in the evening knew not where to go, a hay loft had been made ready where they could spend the night on a bit of straw. But some of them repeatedly made off with the sheets, others with the blankets, and in the end even the straw itself was stolen and sold.

Now it happened that late one rainy evening in May [1847] a lad of fifteen showed up soaked to the skin. He asked for bread and shelter. My mother took him into the kitchen and put him near the fire; while he warmed himself and dried his clothes, she fed him a bowl of soup and some bread.

As he ate, I asked him whether he had gone to school, whether he had family, and what kind of work he did. "I'm a poor orphan" he answered me. "I've come from the Sesia Valley<sup>277</sup> to look for work. I had three francs with me, but I spent them all before I could earn anything. Now I have nothing left and no one to turn to."

"Have you been admitted to first communion?"

"I haven't been admitted yet."

"And confirmation?"

"I haven't received it yet."

"Have you been to confession?"

"I've gone a few times."

"Now where do you want to go?"

<sup>277</sup> Valle di Sesia (Valsesia): Eastern area in Piedmont, with the Sesia river running through it, down from the eastern slopes of Mount Rosa; the most important city is Varallo 120 km from Turin.

“I don’t know. For charity’s sake, let me stay in some corner of your house tonight.”

At this point he broke down and cried. My mother cried with him. I was moved.

“If I could be sure you weren’t a thief, I would try to put you up. But other boys stole some of the blankets, and you might take the rest of them.”

“Oh no, Sir. You needn’t worry about that. I’m poor, but I’ve never stolen anything.”

“If you wish,” replied my mother “I will put him up for tonight, and tomorrow God will provide.”

“Where?” I asked.

“Here in the kitchen.”

“You’re risking even your pots.”

“I’ll see that it doesn’t happen.”

“Go ahead, then.”

The good woman, helped by the little orphan, went out and collected some bricks. With these she built four little pillars in the kitchen. On them she laid some boards and threw a straw mattress on top, thereby making the first bed in the Oratory. My good mother gave the boy a little talk on the necessity of work, of trustworthiness, and of religion. Finally she invited him to say his prayers.

“I don’t know any,” he answered.

“You can say them with us,” she told him. And so he did.

That all might be secure, the kitchen was locked, and opened only in the morning.

This was the first youngster at our hospice. Very soon we had a companion for him, and then others. But during that year, lack of space prevented us from taking more than two. It was the year 1847.

Convinced that for many children every effort would prove useless unless they were offered shelter, I set about renting more and more rooms, even though the cost was exorbitant.

Thus, besides the hospice, we were also able to start our school of plainchant and vocal music. Since it was the first time (1845) that public music lessons were offered, the first time that music was taught in class to many pupils at the same time, there was a huge crowd.

The renowned musicians Louis Rossi, Joseph Blanchi, Cerutti, and Canon Louis Nasi<sup>278</sup> came and *attended* eagerly every evening my classes [as observers]. This contradicted the Gospel dictum that the disciple is not above his teacher: there was I, not knowing a millionth of what those illustrious men knew, playing the master amongst them. They came to see how the new method was applied, the same method which is practised today in our houses. In times past, any pupil who wished to learn music had to find a teacher to give him individual lessons.

#### 8. *St Aloysius Oratory – Moretta house – Seminary land*

In proportion to our efforts to extend our schools and provide instruction, the number of our pupils increased. On feast days, only some of the pupils could fit into the chapel for the ceremonies or into the playground for games. Then, always in agreement with Dr Borel, to meet this growing need a second oratory was opened in another quarter of the city. For this purpose, we rented a small house at Porta Nuova<sup>279</sup> on Viale del Re, commonly called the Avenue of the Plane Trees after the trees lining the street

To secure that house, we had to engage in a very fierce battle with the inhabitants. It was occupied by a group of washerwomen who believed that

<sup>278</sup> Luigi Felice Rossi (1805-1863), the most outstanding of Turin's musicians at the time; Giuseppe Blanchi (1827-1899), organist and composer; Luigi Nasi (1821-1897), theologian, musician, canon of the Turin cathedral.

<sup>279</sup> Porta Nuova: recently expanded commercial and residential area where they were building the railway station, opened the following year (1848). The Viale del Re (Corso Vittorio Emanuele II), marked the south of the city and connected Piazza d'Armi with Parco del Valentino and the Po.

abandoning their ancient abode would cause the end of the world. But we used a gentle approach and offered some compensation, and so a deal was struck before the belligerents reached a state of war.

Mrs Vaglianti owned that site and the play garden, which she later left in her will to Chev. Joseph Turvano. The rent was 450 francs. We called this new foundation the Oratory of St Aloysius Gonzaga, a name by which it is still known <sup>(280)</sup>.

Dr Borel and I opened the new oratory on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, 1847. The extraordinary mob of youngsters there relieved somewhat the crowded ranks of those at Valdocco. Direction of that oratory was entrusted to Dr Hyacinth Carpano, who for several years laboured entirely gratis. The same Regulations drawn up for the institution at Valdocco were adopted at the St Aloysius Oratory, without any modifications being introduced.

In that same year, with a desire of giving shelter to a multitude of children asking for it, we bought the whole Moretta house. But when we looked into the work of adapting it to our requirements, we found the walls were not strong enough. Because of this, we thought it wiser to resell it, especially since we were offered a very attractive price.

Then we acquired a section of land (.944 acres) from the Turin seminary. This is the site where the Church of Mary Help of Christians was later built, and the building which at present houses the workshops for our trade boys.

*9. 1848 – Growth in number of trade boys and their way of life – Brief evening talk – Archbishop grants privileges – Retreat*

In this year, political events and the public mood presented a drama, the outcome of which nobody could foresee.

Charles Albert had granted the Constitution! Many thought that the Constitution also granted freedom to do good or evil at will. They based

<sup>280</sup> “The current church of St John the Evangelist now covers the site where there was the church, sacristy and small house for the doorkeeper at St Aloysius oratory” (note by Don Bosco in margin of original ms).

this assertion on the emancipation of the Jews and Protestants, claiming as a consequence that there was no longer any distinction between Catholics and [those of] other faiths. This was true in politics, but not in matters of religion<sup>(281)</sup>.

Meantime, a kind of frenzy seized the minds even of youngsters; they would get together at various points in the city, in the streets and squares, believing that it was praiseworthy to insult priests or religion. I was attacked many times at home and in the street. One day as I was teaching catechism, a harquebus shot came through the window, passing through my cassock between my arm and my ribs, and making a large hole in the wall. On another occasion, a certain well-known character attacked me with a long knife in full daylight while I stood in the middle of a group of children. It was a miracle that I was able to get away, beating a hasty retreat to the safety of my room. Dr Borel was also able to escape miraculously from a pistol shot, and from the blows of a knife one time when he was mistaken for someone else. It was, therefore, quite difficult to control such aroused young people. In that perversion of thought and ideas, as soon as we could provide additional rooms, the number of artisans was increased, coming to fifteen, all amongst the most abandoned and endangered.

There was a big problem, however. Because we had no workshops in our institution yet, our pupils went to work and to school in Turin, with ensuing harm to morality. The companions they mixed with, the conversations they heard, and what they saw frustrated what was said to them and done for them at the Oratory.

It was then that I began to give very short little sermons in the evening after prayers with a view to presenting or confirming some truth which might

<sup>281</sup> "In December 1847 King Charles Albert was presented with a petition signed by 600 illustrious citizens, many of them clergy, demanding the famous emancipation. They gave reasons, but took no notice of the heretical expression in that petition, against religion. After that period the Jews came out from the ghetto and became the people who owned most things. The Protestants were let loose, and although their numbers were few as far as we were concerned, nevertheless supported by the civil authority they caused problems for religion and behaviour." (note by Don Bosco in margin of original ms).

have been contradicted during the day. What happened to the artisans was likewise to be lamented regarding the students. Because the most advanced scholars were divided into various classes, they had to be sent to Prof. Joseph Bonzanino for grammar and to Prof. Fr Matthew Picco for rhetoric. These were most distinguished schools, but going to and from was fraught with danger. In the year 1856, to everyone's advantage, workshops and classes were permanently established at the Oratory itself.

At that time the perversion of ideas and actions seemed such that I could no longer trust the domestic staff. As a consequence my mother and I did all the housework. To my lot fell cooking, setting the table, sweeping, chopping firewood, cutting out and making trousers, shirts, jackets, towels, sheets, and doing the necessary mending. But these things turned out very advantageous, morally speaking, for I could conveniently give the boys some advice or a friendly word as I went round handing out bread, soup, or something else.

Discerning the need to have someone come and help me in both domestic and scholastic matters in the Oratory, I began to take some [of the boys] with me into the country and others to spend the holidays at Castelnuovo, my native country. Some of them came for dinner with me, others in the evening to read or write something, always with the purpose of providing an antidote to the poisonous opinions of the day. This was done with greater or lesser frequency from 1841 to 1848. I adopted every means to pursue also my own particular objective, which was to observe, get to know, and choose some individuals who had a suitable inclination to the common life, and to take them with me into my house. With this same purpose, in that year (1848) I put it to a test with a little spiritual retreat<sup>282</sup>. About fifty boys gathered at the Oratory house for it. They all ate with me; but because there were not enough beds for all, some had to sleep with their own families and return to the Oratory in the morning. This coming and going to their homes risked almost all the benefit to be reaped from the sermons and instructions which

<sup>282</sup> The Retreat was preached by Blessed Federico Albert (1820-1876), from 1852 parish priest at Lanzo Torinese (cf. MB II, 221-223), and in 1864 would convince Don Bosco to take on the boarding school in the city.



are customary on such occasions. The retreat began on Sunday evening and finished on the following Saturday evening. It succeeded quite well. Many boys for whom I had laboured in vain for a long time really gave themselves to virtuous living. Several entered religious life; others, while continuing in the secular life, became models in their regular attendance at the Oratory <sup>(283)</sup>.

More will be said on this point in the History of the Salesian Society.

In that same year some parish priests, especially those of Borgo Dora, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, and St Augustine, complained anew to the archbishop because the sacraments were being administered in our oratories. When they did, the archbishop issued a decree giving us full faculties to prepare and present the children for confirmation and holy communion and [for them] to fulfil their Easter duty in the oratories, as long as they came regularly. He renewed the faculty allowing us to hold every religious ceremony ordinarily held in parish churches. These churches, the archbishop said, will be parish churches for those young, abandoned strangers as long as they are resident in Turin.

*10. Progress in music – Procession to the Consolata – Award from the city and Schools for the poor – Holy Thursday – The Lavabo*

The dangers to which youngsters were exposed in matters of religion and morality called for greater efforts to safeguard them. In the night school, as well as in the day programme, we thought it would be good to add courses in piano, organ, and even instrumental music to those in vocal music. So I found myself as teacher of vocal and instrumental music, of piano and organ, though I had never truly been a student of them myself. Goodwill made up for everything. Having prepared a group of the best soprano voices, we began to sing at church services at the Oratory; afterwards we ventured

<sup>283</sup> "Arnaud Giacinto, Sansoldi, both deceased; Buzzetti Giuseppe; Galesio Nicola; Costantino Giovanni, deceased; Cerutti Giacomo, deceased; Gastini Carlo; Gravano Giovanni; Borgialli Domenico, deceased, are listed amongst those who made the retreat that year and were always good Christians" (note by Don Bosco on the original ms).

into Turin, to Rivoli, Moncalieri<sup>284</sup>, Chieri and other places. Canon Louis Nasi and Fr Michelangelo Chiattellino<sup>285</sup> were willing helpers in training our musicians, accompanying them, and conducting them at public church services in various towns. Since choirs of boy sopranos had not been heard on choir lofts [of churches] up till then, and our solos, duets, and full choral renderings were so novel, our music was spoken of everywhere and our singers were much sought after for various solemn occasions. Canon Louis Nasi and Fr Michelangelo Chiatellino were generally the two accompanists of our emerging philharmonic society.

Every year we used to go to perform at a religious function at the Church of Our Lady of Consolation. This year we marched in procession from the Oratory. The singing along the way and the music in church drew a numberless crowd of people. Mass was celebrated, holy communion received, and then I gave a short sermon suited to the occasion in the underground chapel. Finally, the Oblates of Mary<sup>286</sup> put a fine breakfast for us in the cloisters of the shrine. In this way we began to overcome human respect, we gathered youngsters, and we had opportunities to inculcate with the greatest prudence a spirit of morality and respect for authority and to encourage frequent reception of the holy sacraments. But such novelty gave rise to rumours.

This year, too, the city of Turin sent another deputation composed of Chev. Peter Ropolo, Capello called Moncalvo<sup>287</sup>, and Comm. Duprè to assess the vague reports that were being put about. They were highly satisfied with us. When their report was sent in, an award of 1000 francs was decreed, and a very flattering letter. From that year the city assigned an annual subsidy that was paid until 1878, when the 300 francs, which the judicious rulers of Turin

<sup>284</sup> Rivoli: city 8.5 km west of Turin. Moncalieri: city 12 km south of Turin.

<sup>285</sup> Michelangelo Chiattellino (1822-1901), became a Salesian Cooperator.

<sup>286</sup> Oblates of the Blessed Virgin: congregation founded by Pio Brunone Lanteri (1759-1830).

<sup>287</sup> Pietro Ropolo (born 1805), industrialist and member of the city council since 1853. Gabriele Capello known as "il Moncalvo" (1806-1877), furniture maker, worked for the Royal Palace, was a councillor along with banker Giuseppe Luigi Duprè. All three were part of the presidency for the first raffle Don Bosco organised in 1851 (cf. no. 6).

had budgeted to provide lighting for the night school for the benefit of the sons of the people, was withdrawn.

The Schools for the Poor also sent a deputation, headed by Chev. Gonella, to visit us. That work had also introduced night schools and music schools, using our method. As a mark of their approval, they gave us another award of a thousand francs.

Every year on Holy Thursday, we used to go together to visit the altars of repose. But because of the ridicule - we would even say contempt - not a few of the boys no longer dared to join their companions. To encourage our young men ever more to disdain human respect, in that year for the first time we marched in procession to make those visits, singing the *Stabat Mater* and chanting the *Miserere*. Then youngsters of every age and condition were seen joining us along the route and racing to join our lines. Everything went off in a peaceful and orderly fashion.

That evening was the first time that we performed the ceremony of the washing of the feet. For this purpose twelve youngsters were chosen, who are usually called the twelve apostles. When the ritual washing was finished, a moral exhortation was preached to the public. Afterwards, the twelve apostles were all invited for a frugal supper, and each one was given a small gift which he proudly carried home.

Likewise in that year the stations of the cross were erected according to the prescriptions of the Church and solemnly blessed. At each station there was a brief little Sermon, and an appropriate motet was sung.

In such ways our humble Oratory continued to consolidate at the same time that grave events were running their course, events which were destined to change the face of Italian politics, and perhaps the world's.

*11. 1849 – Seminaries closed – Pinardi house – Peter's Pence – Rosaries from Pius IX – Guardian Angel Oratory – Parliamentarians, visit*

This year was very memorable. The war between Piedmont and Austria, begun the previous year, had shaken all Italy. Public schools were suspended. The seminaries, especially those in Turin and Chieri, were closed and occupied

by the army. As a consequence, the diocesan clerics had neither teachers nor a place to gather. It was then, to have at least the consolation of doing what we could to mitigate these public calamities, that we rented the whole of the Pinardi house. The tenants screamed; they threatened me, my mother, even the proprietor. Though great financial sacrifices had to be made, we still succeeded in getting possession of the whole building. Thus that den of iniquity, which for twenty years had been at the service of Satan, was at our disposal. It embraced the whole site which now forms the courtyard between the Church of Mary Help of Christians and the house behind it.

In this way we were able to increase our classes, to extend the chapel, and double our playground space. The number of young men rose to thirty. But the main aim, as in fact happened, was to be able to gather together the diocesan seminarians. We can say that our Oratory house for almost 20 years became the diocesan seminary.

Towards the end of 1848, political events forced the Holy Father Pius IX to flee Rome and seek refuge at Gaeta<sup>288</sup>. This great Pontiff had already shown us many times his customary kindness. When the rumour got about, that he was in financial straits, a collection was taken up in Turin. It was called *Peter's Pence*. A committee composed of Dr. Canon Francis Valinotti<sup>289</sup> and Marquis Gustavo Cavour came to the Oratory. Our collection amounted to 35 francs. It was a small sum, which we tried to make a bit more acceptable to the Holy Father with a message that pleased him very much. The Pope expressed his pleasure in a letter to Card. Antonucci, at that time nuncio in Turin, and now archbishop of Ancona<sup>290</sup>. He asked the nuncio to convey to us how much consolation he received from our offering, but even more from the sentiments accompanying it. Finally, with his apostolic blessing he sent us a parcel of 60 dozen rosaries, which were solemnly distributed on July 20 of that year

<sup>288</sup> Gaeta: fortified city belonging to the Kingdom of Naples. The *political events* referred to are what happened when Pius IX condemned the war, culminating on 15 November 1848 with the assassination of Minister Pellegrino Rossi followed by outbreaks of violence in Rome.

<sup>289</sup> Francesco Michele Valinotti (1813-1873), who would be the administrator for the *Catholic Readings*.

<sup>290</sup> Benedetto Antonio Antonucci (1798-1879), archbishop of Ancona from 1851.

(1850). See the booklet printed on that occasion, and various newspapers<sup>291</sup>. Letter of Card. Antonucci, at that time nuncio to Turin.

The growing number of youngsters attending the oratories made it necessary to consider opening another centre. This was the Holy Guardian Angel Oratory in Vanchiglia<sup>292</sup>, near the place where, especially through the work of Marchioness Barolo, the Church of St Julia was later built.

Fr John Cocchi had some years previously established that oratory with a scope somewhat like ours. But consumed by love of his country, he judged it better to teach his pupils the use of rifle and sword, put himself at their head, and march against the Austrians, which he did in fact.

That particular oratory was closed for a full year. When we rented it, Dr John Vola, of happy memory, was entrusted with its direction. This oratory continued until 1871, when it moved alongside the parish church. Marchioness Barolo left a legacy for this need, on condition that the boys' centre and the chapel be attached to the parish, as has been done.

A solemn visit was paid to the Oratory at that time by a committee of deputies and others appointed by the ministry of the interior, who came to honour us with their presence. They inspected the whole place, talking to everyone in a friendly way. They then made a full report to the Chamber of Deputies. This report was the subject of long and lively debate, as may be seen in the *Gazzetta Piemontese* of 29 March 1850. The Chamber of Deputies gave a grant of 300 francs to our boys. Urban Rattazzi<sup>293</sup>, who was then minister of the interior, designated a sum of 2000 francs for us. The documents may be consulted.

<sup>291</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *Breve ragguaglio della festa fattasi nel distribuire il regalo di Pio IX ai giovani degli oratorii di Torino*. Torino, G. B. Paravia 1850 (OE IV, 93-119).

<sup>292</sup> Vanchiglia: popular suburb on the northeast outskirts of Turin.

<sup>293</sup> Urbano Rattazzi (1808-1873), held various government positions; member of the anti-clerical party (his is the law of 1855 to suppress religious bodies), had sincere regard for Don Bosco and helped him financially (cf. no. 148).

Amongst my pupils at last I had one who donned the clerical habit. Ascanio Savio, presently rector of the Refuge, was the first seminarian from the Oratory. His clothing ceremony took place at the end of October of that year.

## 12. *National festivals*

In those days a strange event took place which caused no little upset to our meetings. People wanted our humble Oratory to take part in public demonstrations which were being staged in cities and towns under the name of national festivals. Those who took part in them and wished to make a public display of their patriotism parted their hair in the middle and let it fall in curls in the back; they wore tight-fitting jackets of various colours, and a national flag, a medal, and a blue cockade on the breast. Thus attired, they went in procession singing anthems to national unity.

Marquis Robert d'Azeglio<sup>294</sup>, was chief promoter of these demonstrations and he sent us a formal invitation. Despite my refusal, he sent us whatever we would need to make an honourable appearance with the rest. A spot was reserved for us in piazza Vittorio, amongst all the organisations of whatever name, purpose, and condition. What was I to do? To refuse was to declare myself an enemy of Italy. To acquiesce would mean accepting principles which I judged would have disastrous results.

"My Lord Marquis," I answered the above-mentioned d'Azeglio "this family of mine, these boys who come here from all over the city, are not a corporation. I would make a laughingstock of myself were I to pretend to make my own an institution which depends entirely on civic charity."

"Exactly. Let civic charity know that this newborn work isn't against modern institutions. That will work to your advantage. Support for your work will increase. The city council and I myself will give you generous help."

"My Lord Marquis, it is my firm system to keep out of anything political. Never *pro*, never *con*."

<sup>294</sup> Roberto Taparelli d'Azeglio (1790-1862).

"What do you want to do, then?"

"To do what little good I can for abandoned youngsters, using all my powers to make them good Christians in regard to religion, honest citizens in civil society."

"I understand all that," replied the marquis "but you're making a mistake. If you persist in this principle, everybody will abandon you, and your work will become impossible. One must study the world, understand it, and shape both old and new institutions to the needs of the times."

"Thank you for your goodwill and the advice you offer. Invite me anywhere that a priest can exercise charity, and you'll find me ready to sacrifice life and means. But I want now and always to remain outside politics."

That renowned nobleman went away satisfied. From that day on he had no further dealings with us. After him many other laymen and priests deserted me. More than that, I was left quite alone after the incident I am now about to relate.

### 13. A particular episode

On the Sunday following the festival just mentioned, at two in the afternoon I was at recreation with the youngsters. One of them was reading *L'Armonia* when the priests who usually came to give me a hand in the sacred ministry appeared in a body. They were decked out with medals and cockades and carried a tricolour flag. Worse, they had a copy of a truly immoral newspaper called *Opinione*<sup>295</sup>. One of them, a man of respectable zeal and learning, came right up to me. Noticing the boy reading *L'Armonia* beside me, he sneered, "This is outrageous! It's time we get rid of these dewy-eyed [sentimental] bigots (*rugiadosi*)."<sup>296</sup> With that, he grabbed *L'Armonia* from the boy's hand, tore it into a thousand pieces, threw them on the ground, spat on them, and stomped all over them. Having thus freely expressed his

<sup>295</sup> *L'Armonia*: Catholic conservative journal run by Fr Giacomo Margotti (1823-1887). *L'Opinione*: anticlerical left-wing daily.

<sup>296</sup> *Rugiadosi*, negative reference to Catholic conservatives.

political fervour, he stood facing me. “Now this is a worthwhile paper” he said, thrusting *L’Opinione* in my face. “This paper and no other should be read by every true and honest citizen.”

His manner of speaking and acting took my breath away. Not wishing to compound the scandal in a place where good example should be given, I limited myself to asking him and his colleagues to discuss such matters in private and amongst ourselves only. “No sir,” he answered “no longer should anything be either private or secret. Let everything be brought into the clear light of day.”

At that moment the bell called us all to church. It summoned also one of those priests, who had been charged with preaching a short sermon on morality to the poor youngsters. But on this occasion it was really immoral. Liberty, emancipation, and independence resounded through the whole sermon. I was in the sacristy, impatient for a chance to speak and put an end to this disorder. But the preacher left the church immediately after finishing the sermon, and no sooner was benediction given than he invited priests and boys to join him. Heartily intoning national songs and passionately waving the flag, they marched straight to the Mount of the Capuchins. There a formal promise was pronounced not to go back to the Oratory again unless they were invited and received with all their national insignia<sup>297</sup>.

While all this was going on, I had no way to express either my thoughts or my reasoning. But I was not afraid of anything that clashed with my duty. I let those priests know that they were strictly forbidden to come back to me. The boys then had to report to me one by one before they were readmitted to the Oratory. Everything ended well for me. None of the priests tried to come back. The boys apologised, pleading that they had been misled and promising obedience and discipline.

<sup>297</sup> All the expressions they used then: national flag, blue cockade and patriotic hymns.



#### 14. *New problems – Some comfort – Fr Rosmini and Archpriest Peter de Gaudenzi*

But I remained alone. On feast days I was obliged to begin hearing confessions early in the morning, to celebrate Mass at nine and preach afterwards; then there were singing classes and literature lessons until midday. At one in the afternoon there was recreation, and then catechism, vespers, an instruction, benediction, more recreation, singing, and school until night.

On weekdays, I was obliged to work during the day for my artisans, and to give *ginnasio* courses to a group of about ten youngsters. In the evening, lessons in French, arithmetic, plainchant, vocal music, piano, and organ all had to be attended to. I do not know how I was able to keep going. God helped me! A great support and a great consolation to me in those days, however, was Doctor Borel. That marvellous priest, though burdened with his other important duties of the sacred ministry, tried to help me every moment he could. He frequently stole from his hours of sleep to come and hear the boys' confessions. He denied rest to his weary body to come and preach to them. This critical situation lasted until I was able to get some relief from the seminarians Savio, Bellia, Vacchetta. But soon I was left without their help. For, following advice given them, they left without a word to me and entered the Oblates of Mary<sup>298</sup>.

On one of those feast days, I had a visit from two priests whom I think it appropriate to name. At the beginning of the catechism period, I was totally occupied with arranging my classes when two clergymen arrived. They were coming with a humble, respectful bearing to commend me and seek information about the origin and system of the Oratory. As my only answer, I said, "Would you be good enough to help me." One I asked, "Would you come to the apse and take the big boys?" To the taller one I said, "I entrust you with this class which is the wildest."

<sup>298</sup> Ascanio Savio entered the Oblate novitiate in 1852, and was ordained priest on May 29 1858, but left them and entered the diocese in 1866. Giacomo Bellia (1834-1908), made his novitiate in 1853; he left the Oblates in Feb. 1862 and was incardinated in the diocese of Biella. Giuseppe Stefano Vacchetta (1827-1898) was professed as an Oblate in October 1854; ordained priest in 1856, finished his days in the Oblate house in Nice (France).

Realising that they were excellent catechists, I asked one of them to give a short sermon to our boys, and the other to give benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Both accepted graciously.

The shorter priest was Father Antonio Rosmini, founder of the Institute of Charity. The other was Canon Archpriest De Gaudenzi, the present bishop of Vigevano<sup>299</sup>. From that time, both of them were always kindly disposed towards our house; in fact they were benefactors.

### *15. Buys the Pinardi and Bellezza Houses – 1850*

The year 1849 was painful and sterile, even though it had cost great fatigue and enormous sacrifice. But it was a preparation for 1850, which was less turbulent and much more fruitful. Let us begin with the Pinardi house. Those who had been dislodged from this house found it hard to take. “Isn’t it disgusting,” they went round saying, “that a house of entertainment and relaxation should fall into the hands of a priest, and an intolerant priest at that!”

Pinardi, moreover, was [offered] a rent almost twice as great as ours. But he felt considerable remorse at getting more money by sinful means. So several times he had offered to sell [the house] if ever I wished to buy it. But his price was exorbitant. He was looking for eighty thousand francs for a building whose value must have been one-third that. God wished to show that he is the master of hearts, and he showed it here.

One feast day, while Doctor Borel was preaching, I was at the courtyard gate to prevent assemblies and disturbances when Mr Pinardi came along. “Hello there,” he said, “Don Bosco should buy my house.”

“Hello there,” I replied. “Mr Pinardi should sell it to me for what it’s worth, and I’ll buy it at once.”

“Of course I’ll sell it for what it’s worth.”

<sup>299</sup> Pietro Giuseppe de Gaudenzi (1812-1891), canon and parish priest of the cathedral at Pavia, then bishop of Vigevano from 1871.

"How much?"

"The price I've been asking."

"I couldn't think of it."

"Make me an offer."

"I can't."

"Why?"

"Because your price is excessive. I don't want to insult you."

"Offer what you wish?"

"Will you sell it to me for what it's really worth?"

"On my word of honour, I will."

"Shake hands on it, and I'll make my offer."

"How much, then?"

I suggested to him, "I've had it valued by a friend of yours and mine. He assured me that in its present state we ought to be discussing [a price] between 26 and 28 thousand francs. And, to close the deal, I'll give you 30,000 francs."

"Will you throw in a brooch worth 500 francs as a gift for my wife?"

"I'll give her that" I said.

"Will you pay cash?"

"I'll pay cash."

"When can we sign the papers?"

"Whenever you please."

"Two weeks from tomorrow. Payment in one instalment."

"Everything just as you wish."

"A fine of one hundred thousand francs on whoever backs out."

"Amen."

That transaction took only five minutes. But where was I to get that sum at such short notice? Then began a beautiful stretch of Divine Providence. That same evening, Fr Cafasso did something unusual on a feast day; he came to visit me, and he told me that a devout lady, Countess Casazza-Riccardi<sup>300</sup>, had entrusted him with ten thousand francs for me, to be spent on whatever I considered to be for God's greater glory. The next day a Rosminian who had come to Turin to invest 20,000 francs came to ask my advice in the matter. I proposed that they should lend it to me for the Pinardi contract. In that way the sum I was looking for was put together. The three thousand francs for related costs were donated by Chev. Cotta, in whose bank the much-desired deed was drawn up.

Having thus secured ownership of that building, I turned my attention to the so-called Gardener's Inn. This was a tavern where pleasure-seekers used to gather on feast days. Music from accordions, fifes, clarinets, guitars, violins, basses and double-basses, and songs of every kind flowed there from all day long. Indeed it was not seldom that all those sounds issued at once in concert. As only a simple wall divided our courtyard from this building, the Bellezza house, it often happened that the hymns from our chapel were confused and drowned out by the din of the music and of the bottles of the Gardener's Inn. In addition there were the constant comings and goings between the Pinardi house and the Gardener's Inn. One can easily imagine the disturbance this caused us, and the danger for our boys.

To free ourselves from this odious situation, I tried to buy the house, but I did not succeed. I tried to rent it, and the landlady was willing; but the tavern keeper claimed exorbitant damages. Then I proposed to take over the whole tavern, pay the rent, and buy all the furnishings of the bedrooms, table service, cellar, kitchen, etc.

By paying dearly for it all, I was able to have the place under my control. I changed their character immediately. In this way was destroyed the second seedbed of iniquity which up to then had existed in Valdocco alongside the Pinardi house.

<sup>300</sup> Sabina Casazza (died 1888) was sister of Archbishop Alessandro Ottaviano Riccardi di Netro.

## 16. Church of St Francis de Sales

Freed from the moral vexations of the Pinardi house and the Gardener's Inn, we had to think about a more decorous church for our worship, better suited to our growing needs. The old one, it is true, had been considerably enlarged; it was situated where the superiors' refectory is now (1875). But it was uncomfortable on account of its capacity and its lack of height. To enter one had to go down two steps; as a result in winter and when it rained we were flooded out. In summer the heat and the bad odours suffocated us. Few feast days passed without some pupil fainting and being carried out limp. So it was necessary to start a building more proportionate to the number of youngsters, better ventilated, and more healthy.

Chev. Blachier drew up plans for what we now know as the Church of St Francis and the building that stands round the courtyard beside the church. The contractor was Mr Frederick Bocca.

When the foundations had been dug, the cornerstone was blessed on 20 July 1850<sup>301</sup>. Chev. Joseph Cotta placed the stone in position; Canon Moreno, royal almoner, blessed it; the renowned Fr Barrera<sup>302</sup>, moved by the sight of such a large crowd, stood upon a mound of dirt and improvised a marvellously appropriate speech. He began with these exact words: *"Ladies and gentlemen, the cornerstone which has just been laid in the foundations of this church has a twofold significance. It is like the grain of a mustard seed destined to grow into a mystical tree in which many boys will find refuge; it symbolises also that this work is founded on a cornerstone which is Jesus Christ, against which the enemies of the faith will hurl themselves in vain."*

Then he proved both points, to the great pleasure of his audience, who thought that the eloquent preacher was inspired.

<sup>301</sup> He should have said: July 20, 1851, as we see from the curia document drawn up at the time (in ASC A0210411). Don Bosco confuses two events: distribution of the rosaries from Pius IX to the boys (July 21, 1850) and the blessing of the foundation stone for the new church (July 20, 1851); Fr Barrera was involved on both occasions.

<sup>302</sup> Andrea Barrera (1802-1879), superior of the Priests of Christian Doctrine.

Here is the record etc. The record of that solemn occasion was written down<sup>303</sup>.

Such well-publicised occasions attracted youngsters from all over. Many turned up at all hours of the day; others begged for shelter. That year their number passed fifty, and we began some workshops in the house; for we were finding it ever more ruinous for the boys to go out to work in the city..

The sacred building for which we longed was beginning to rise above ground, when I realised that my funds were completely exhausted. I had collected 35 thousand francs by selling some property, but these disappeared like ice in the sun. The treasury<sup>304</sup> granted us nine thousand francs, but they were to be turned over only when the work was nearing completion. Bishop Peter Losana of Biella realised that the new building and that whole institution especially benefited the bricklayer apprentices from Biella. He sent out a circular letter to his parish priests encouraging them to help with contributions. *The circular read thus*<sup>305</sup>.

The appeal brought in one thousand francs<sup>306</sup>. But that was only a drop in the ocean; and so a lottery of various small prizes was conceived. This was the first time that we appealed in such a way to the charity of the general public, and the project was favourably received. Three thousand, three hundred prizes were collected. The Supreme Pontiff, the king, the queen mother, the queen consort<sup>307</sup>, and in general the whole royal court distinguished themselves with their gifts. The tickets sold out (50 cents each). When the public drawing took place at city hall, one individual was trying to buy a ticket; even though he offered five francs for one, there was not a ticket to be had. *The plan and the rules of the lottery can be obtained*<sup>308</sup>.

<sup>303</sup> Cf. MB IV, 277-279.

<sup>304</sup> Royal Apostolic Treasury General: depended on the Ministry for Grace and Justice for administration of ecclesiastical goods.

<sup>305</sup> Found in MB IV, 319-321.

<sup>306</sup> Cf. no. 110.

<sup>307</sup> The King was Victor Emmanuel II who came to the throne in March 1849 after the abdication of his father, Charles Albert. The Queen Mother was Maria Teresa d'Asburgo-Lorena (1801-1855), widow of Charles Albert. The Queen Consort was Maria Adelaide d'Austria (1822-1855).

<sup>308</sup> Cf. no. 6.

Many of the prize-winners gladly left their prizes to help the church. This proved to be an extra bonus. Though there was considerable outlay, still the net gain came to 26 thousand francs.

*17. The powder magazine blows up – Gabriel Fassio – Blessing of the new church*

While the items were on public show, the powder magazine near the Cemetery of St Peter in Chains blew up (26 April 1852). The concussion that followed was horrible and violent. Many buildings near and far were shaken and suffered heavy damage from it. Of the workmen, 28 were killed. That the disaster was not even worse was due to a certain sergeant named Sacchi<sup>309</sup>, who at great personal risk prevented the fire from reaching a bigger supply of powder. This could have destroyed the whole city of Turin. The Oratory house, which was badly constructed, suffered serious damage; the deputies sent us an offering of 300 francs to help repair it.

In connection with this incident, I would like to recall a fact which refers to one of our young artisans, Gabriel Fassio<sup>310</sup>. The previous year he fell ill and was at death's door. At the height of his delirium he kept saying over and over, "Woe to Turin! Woe to Turin!"

His companions asked him, "Why?"

"Because it's threatened by a terrible disaster."

"What kind of disaster?"

"A horrible earthquake," he answered.

"When's it coming?"

"Next year. Oh, woe to Turin on April 26."

"What should we do?"

"Pray to St Aloysius to protect the Oratory and those who live in it."

<sup>309</sup> Paolo Filippo Sacchi (1807-1884).

<sup>310</sup> Fassio Gabriele (1838-1851), one of the first boys taken in at the Oratory home.

It was then that, at the request of all the youngsters of our house, a *Pater, Ave,* and *Gloria* addressed to this saint were added to our common morning and evening prayers. In fact, relative to the danger, our house suffered slight damage, and there were no injuries to our boarders.

Meanwhile, the work on the Church of St Francis de Sales went on with incredible speed, and in the space of eleven months it was completed. On 20 June 1852, it was consecrated for divine worship with a solemnity that was more unique than rare amongst us. At the entrance to the courtyard an arch of colossal height was erected. On it in outsized letters was written: *In letters of gold - we shall write on every side - may this day live for ever.*

From every side echoed these verses which had been put to music by Maestro Joseph Blanchi, of happy memory:

*Sooner shall the setting sun / Return to its rising, / Sooner shall every river / Return to its source, / Than shall the memory / Of this beautiful day / Be forgotten amongst us.*

The following words were recited and sung with ardent enthusiasm:

As a bird flits from branch to branch / Goes searching for trusty shelter, etc. This was written down<sup>311</sup>.

Many newspapers reported this celebration<sup>312</sup>; see the *Armonia* and the *Patria* of those days.

On June 1 that same year a Mutual Aid Society was established to stop our boys from enrolling in the so-called Workers Society, which right from its start showed that its principles were anything but religious. *One may refer to the booklet we published*<sup>313</sup>. It served its purpose wonderfully. Our aid society

<sup>311</sup> Cf. MB IV, 437-438.

<sup>312</sup> The article in the *Armonia* came out on 23 June 1852 with the title: "Blessing of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales". *La Patria*, a moderately liberal paper was published in Turin from 1852 to 1855.

<sup>313</sup> *Società di mutuo soccorso di alcuni individui della Compagnia di san Luigi eretta nell'Oratorio di san Francesco di Sales*. Torino, Tipografia Speirani e Ferrero 1850 (OE IV, 83-90); cf. no. 4.



later converted into an affiliated conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society, which is still functioning<sup>314</sup>.

The church was built but needed all kinds of furnishings. Civic charity did not let us down. Comm. Joseph Dupré undertook to decorate a chapel dedicated to St Aloysius and buy a marble altar which still adorns the church. Another benefactor undertook to fit out the choir loft, where a small organ was set up for the day boys. Mr. Michael Scannagatti bought a complete set of candlesticks; Marquis Fassati undertook to supply our Lady's altar and provided a set of bronze candlesticks, and later the statue of our Lady. Fr Cafasso paid all the expenses incurred for the pulpit. The high altar was provided by Doctor Francis Vallauri and completed by his son Fr Peter, a priest<sup>315</sup>. Thus in a short time the new church was fitted with everything needed for both private and solemn ceremonies.

### 18. *The year 1852*

The new church, complete with sacristy and bell tower, enabled us to provide for those youngsters who wished to attend sacred services on feast days, the night school, and day classes too. But how were we to provide for the multitude of poor children who were appealing for shelter all the time? This was the more acute because the explosion of the powder magazine the year before had almost ruined our ancient building. In that moment of supreme need, we decided to build a new wing on the house. In order to continue using the old building, we began the new one on a site a bit apart. It stretched from the end of the present refectory to the print foundry.

The builders made rapid progress. Although autumn was already well along, they reached roof level. In fact, all the trusses had been put in place, all the crosspieces nailed in, and the tiles were stacked up on the beams ready to

<sup>314</sup> The constitution for the St Vincent de Paul youth conferences in Don Bosco's three Oratories came into being around 1855; they were recognised by the General Council in Paris on May 11 1856 (cf. Francesco MOTTO, "Le conferenze "annesse" di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli negli oratori di don Bosco", in José Manuel PRELLEZO (ed.), *L'impegno nell'educare. Studi in onore di Pietro Braido*. Roma, LAS 1991, pp. 467-492.

<sup>315</sup> Pietro Marcellino Vallauri (1829-1900).

be laid down neatly. Then a torrential rain interrupted all work. Water poured down for days and nights, flowing from the beams and the crosspieces; it wore and washed away the fresh mortar, leaving the walls only of soaked bricks and stones. Around midnight, when we were all in bed, we heard a loud rumble which became louder and more frightening by the moment. Everyone woke up and, completely ignorant of what was happening, utterly terrified, wrapped in blankets and sheets, ran from the dormitory and fled in confusion with no idea where to go, with only the idea of putting distance between himself and the danger, as one can imagine. The noise and the chaos got worse. The roof framework and the tiles mixed with the wall materials as everything collapsed into ruins with a mighty roar.

Since that construction had stood against the wall of the lower, older building, the fear was that everyone lay crushed under the falling rubble. But, as it proved, the only harm was the horrendous noise, which caused no personal injury.

City engineers came to inspect things in the morning. When Chev. Gabetti<sup>316</sup> saw another pillar cracked at the base and leaning over a dormitory, he exclaimed: "You should go and give thanks to Our Lady of Consolation. Only a miracle is keeping that pillar up. If it had fallen, it would have buried in rubble Don Bosco and the thirty boys sleeping in the dormitory below."

As the building was still unfinished, most of the loss was the builder's. Our damage was estimated at 10,000 francs. The accident took place at midnight on 2 December 1852.

Amid the continual sad afflictions which befall the poor human race, there is always the loving hand of the Lord to lighten our misfortunes. If the disaster had happened a couple of hours earlier, it would have buried our night school pupils. They finished their lessons at ten, and when they came out of their classrooms, about 300 of them, they used to run round the empty building under construction for half an hour or so. A little later the collapse occurred.

Not only did the advanced season no longer allow work on our ruined house to be completed; we could not even begin to rebuild part of it. In the

<sup>316</sup> Carlo Gabetti, city architect responsible for testing the construction.

meantime, who would provide for us in such straits? What could we do for so many boys with such limited facilities, and these half ruined? We made a virtue of necessity. After the walls of the old church had been reinforced, it became a dormitory. We then transferred classes to the new church, which was therefore a church on feast days, a school during the week.

The bell tower beside the Church of St Francis de Sales was also built in this year. Our benefactor Mr Michael Scanagatti presented us with an elegant set of candlesticks for the high altar, which are still one of the most beautiful furnishings of this church.

[19.] 1853

As soon as the weather permitted, we began promptly to rebuild the ruined house. Work went ahead rapidly, and by October the building was finished. Because we so badly needed room, we rushed at once to move in. The room which I first took is the one which, by God's grace, I still occupy. The classrooms, refectory, and dormitory were permanently established, and the number of our pupils went up to sixty-five.

Various benefactors continued to look after us. Chev. Joseph Duprè at his own expense presented a marble altar rail for the St Aloysius chapel; he adorned the altar and had the whole chapel stuccoed. Marquis Dominic Fassati gave us the small altar rail for the altar of our Lady and a set of bronze gilt candlesticks for that altar. Count Charles Cays, our outstanding benefactor, prior of the St Aloysius Sodality for the second time, paid a long-standing debt for us, twelve hundred francs owed the baker, who was beginning to give us problems with our bread deliveries. He bought a bell, which was the object of a charming ceremony. Dr Gattino, our parish priest of happy memory, came to bless it; then he took the opportunity to give a little sermon to the many people gathered from the city. After the religious services, a comedy was presented which everyone enjoyed. The count also gave us a handsomely decorated set of drapery (*panta*)<sup>317</sup>, the current baldacchino and other items for the church.

<sup>317</sup> "Panta": Piedmontese word for drapery.

With the new church thus furnished with what was essential for worship, we were finally able for the first time to fulfil the shared desire to celebrate the forty hours devotion. Though the church was not very richly adorned, there was an extraordinary assembly of the faithful. To comply with their religious fervour and to provide all of them with an opportunity to satisfy their devotion, when the forty hours finished we followed with an octave of preaching, which was literally spent hearing the confessions of the crowds. That unexpected attendance was our reason in the years that followed for continuing to organise the forty hours devotion with regular preaching; many people came to receive the holy sacraments and attend the other practices of piety

[20.] *Catholic Readings*

That year [1853], in March, periodic publication of the *Catholic Readings*<sup>318</sup>. In 1847, when the emancipation of the Protestants and the Jews took place, it became necessary to put some antidote into the hands of the Christian faithful in general, and of the young in particular. From that act it appeared that the government meant only to grant freedom to those beliefs and not to harm Catholicism. But the Protestants did not understand it in this light. They produced propaganda with all the means available to them. They distributed three newspapers (*La Buona Novella*, *La Luce Evangelica*, *Il Rogantino Piemontese*) and many books both biblical and non-biblical. They gave assistance freely, found employment, supplied work, offered money, clothing, and food to those who came to their classes or attended their lectures or simply joined them at church. They used all these means to make proselytes.

The government was aware of all this and allowed it to go on; with its silence it gave them effective protection. The Protestants, moreover, were organised and furnished with every means both moral and material. Catholics, on the other hand, had relied on the civil law for protection and defence up till then; they possessed a few newspapers, a few classic or learned works, but no newspapers or books to put into the hands of the working classes.

<sup>318</sup> Cf. no. 9. It is a monthly publication in small format, for youth and ordinary folk founded with the financial support of bishop Luigi Moreno, bishop of Ivrea, and had wide dissemination; from 1863 it was printed at the Oratory Press. The print run in the first years was three thousand, then rose to more than ten thousand (cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica...*, pp. 347-368). It ceased publication in 1954.

At that time, advised by necessity, I began to draw up some summaries about the Catholic Church, and then some posters entitled "*Reminders for Catholics*" I handed them out to both children and adults, especially at missions and retreats.

These handouts and pamphlets were eagerly welcomed, and I had soon given away thousands and thousands of them. This convinced me of the need for some popular means of spreading knowledge of the fundamental Catholic doctrines. So a pamphlet entitled "*Advice to Catholics*"<sup>319</sup> was printed. Its aim was to put Catholics on the alert lest they let themselves be caught in the nets of the heretics. Its distribution was extraordinary; in two years it sold more than two hundred thousand copies. This pleased the good, but it enraged the Protestants, who had begun to think that they had the field of evangelisation all to themselves.

It was then that I began to see that the matter of preparing and printing books for the people was urgent, and I laid out plans for the so-called *Catholic Readings*. I wanted to get them printed at once. But an obstacle loomed up, as unexpected as it was unforeseen. No bishop wanted to take the lead. Those from Vercelli, Biella, and Casale refused, saying that it was dangerous to tangle with the Protestants. Archbishop Fransoni was then in exile at Lyons. He approved and recommended [the project], yet no one was willing even to undertake the ecclesiastical review. Canon Joseph Zappata<sup>320</sup>, the vicar general, was the only one who acceded to the archbishop's request and reviewed half of one issue: Then he sent the manuscript back to me with this comment: "Take your work. I can't see my way to signing it. The cases of Ximenes and Palma<sup>(321)</sup> are far too recent. You challenge and take the enemy head on, but I prefer to sound the retreat before it's too late."

<sup>319</sup> Giovanni BOSCO, *La Chiesa apostolica-romana è la sola vera Chiesa di Gesù Cristo. Avvisi ai cattolici*. Torino. Tipografia Speirani e Ferrero 1850 (OV IV, 121-143); ristampato nel 1851 e nel 1853.

<sup>320</sup> Giuseppe Zappata (1796-1883).

<sup>321</sup> "Fr Ximenes, director of a Catholic paper, *The Contemporary* in Rome, was murdered. Bishop Palma, papal secretary and writer for the paper, was struck by a bullet (*arqebus*) in the hall of the Quirinale itself" (note by Don Bosco on the original manuscript).

With the vicar general's consent, I explained everything to the archbishop. His reply was accompanied by a letter to Bishop Moreno of Ivrea<sup>322</sup>, asking that prelate to take under his patronage the publication I was planning and to assist it through his censor and with his authority. Bishop Moreno readily agreed. He delegated his own vicar general, the canon lawyer Pinoli, to act as censor, stipulating that the censor's name was not to be published. A programme was quickly put together, and the first issue of *The Catholic Companion*<sup>323</sup> came out on March 1, 1853.

[21.] 1854

The *Catholic Readings* were warmly received, and the number of readers was extraordinary. But they also aroused the anger of the Protestants. They fought back in their own newspapers and their *Gospel Readings*, but they lacked readers. So they launched attacks of every kind against poor Don Bosco. Now one, now another would come to dispute, convinced, they said, that no one could withstand their arguments, that Catholic priests were just so many simpletons and therefore could be easily confounded.

At first they came to assault me one at a time. Later they came in pairs and finally in groups. I always listened to them, and I always recommended that they should refer back to their own ministers those problems which they did not know how to answer, and then kindly relay the answers to me. Those who came were Amadeus Bert<sup>324</sup>, then Meille<sup>325</sup>, the evangelist Pugno<sup>326</sup>, then

<sup>322</sup> Luigi Moreno (1800-1878), bishop of Ivrea from 1838; espoused Catholic Action; he was a believer in the press, and was amongst those who founded *L'Armonia*.

<sup>323</sup> He should have said *Il cattolico istruito*; Giovanni BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito nella sua religione. Trattamenti di un padre di famiglia co' suoi figliuoli secondo i bisogni del tempo*. Torino, Tipografia P. De-Agostini 1853 (OE IV, 195-646).

<sup>324</sup> Amedeo Bert (1809-1883) ran the Waldensian parish (1849-1864); he dedicated himself to social work: founded a hospital, school, the Claudiana Publishers and promoted building the Waldensian church in Turin.

<sup>325</sup> Jean Pierre Meille (1817-1887) in 1851 founded the journal *The Good News*; Waldensian pastor who led the community in Turin from 1865 to 1884.

<sup>326</sup> Leading member of the Evangelical community in Turin.

others and still others. But they could make no headway towards getting me to cease speaking or publishing our discussions. This aroused them to absolute fury. I think it good to relate some episodes on this subject.

One Sunday evening in January I was informed that two gentlemen had come to speak with me. They came in and, after a long series of compliments and flattery, one of them began to say, "Good Doctor, nature has favoured you with the great gift of being able to make yourself read and understood by the common person. So we'd like to ask you to use this precious gift in the service of humanity and for the benefit of science, commerce, and the arts."

"At the moment," I said "I am taken up with the *Catholic Readings*, and I intend to devote myself wholeheartedly to that project."

"It would be much better if you were to write a good book for young people on, say, ancient history, geography, physics, or geometry, but not the *Catholic Readings*."

"Why not the *Catholic Readings*?"

"Because its topics have already been dealt with over and over again by many authors."

"These topics have already been dealt with by many authors, but in learned volumes and not for ordinary people. That is precisely my aim with the *Catholic Readings*."

"But this project is of no advantage to you," they argued. "On the other hand, if you were to take on the projects which we are recommending to you, you'd gain a nice sum for the wonderful institute that Providence has entrusted to you. Here, take this advance (they were four thousand franc notes). And it won't be the last donation you'll get. You'll get even more."

"What's all this money for?"

"To encourage you to undertake the works we've been suggesting, and to help you with your most praiseworthy institute."

“You’ll pardon me, gentlemen,” I said, “if I return your money. At present I can’t take on any scholarly project other than the *Catholic Readings*.”

“But if a project is useless ... “ they started to say.

“If it’s a useless project, why are you worrying about it? Why are you offering me this money to get me to stop?”

“You don’t realise what you’re doing,” they persisted. “Your refusal endangers your work, exposes you to certain consequences, certain dangers ...”

“Gentlemen, I understand what you’re trying to tell me; but I tell you clearly that when I stand up for the truth I’m not afraid of anyone. When I became a priest, I was consecrated to the good of the Church and the good of poor humanity. And I intend to continue with my weak efforts to promote the *Catholic Readings*.”

“You’re making a mistake!” Their tone and attitude changed as they got to their feet. “You’re making a mistake. You’ve insulted us, and who knows what might happen to you, here, and,” they added menacingly “if you leave the house, will you be sure of coming back?”

“Gentlemen, you don’t know Catholic priests. While they have life they try to do their duty. If they must die because of their labour, that they would consider their good fortune and their greatest glory.”

By then they both seemed so annoyed that I was afraid they were about to attack me. I got to my feet and put a chair between them and me. Then I said, “If you wish to use force, I’m not cowed by your threats. But a priest’s strength rests on patience and forgiveness. Now please go.”

I walked round the chair and opened the door of my room. “Buzzetti,” I said “take these gentlemen to the front gate; they’re not accustomed to the stairs.”

That command confused them. “We’ll meet again under more favourable circumstances,” they said as they left, their faces and eyes afire with indignation. Several newspapers, especially *L’Armonia*, carried reports of this encounter.



[22.] *Attempt on my life*

It looked as if some group of either Protestants or Freemasons had organised a conspiracy against me. I shall narrate a few short examples.

One evening, I was amidst the boys teaching school when two men called me to hurry to a man who was dying<sup>327</sup> at the *Golden Heart*. I went immediately, but I wanted to take some of the bigger boys with me.

"There's no need," they explained, "to bother your pupils. We'll take you to the sick man and bring you back home. Their presence might upset the patient." "Don't worry," I replied, "my pupils will take a little stroll and then wait downstairs while I attend to the sick man."

When we arrived at the house where the Golden Heart was, they told me, "Wait here a minute; relax a bit while we go to let the patient know you're here."

They showed me into a ground-floor room where some good-time Charlies were eating chestnuts after their supper. They welcomed me profusely with praise and applause, and they wanted me to help myself and eat some of their chestnuts. I would not taste them, alleging that I had just finished my supper.

"Then at least drink a glass of our wine," they answered. "You won't find it unpleasant. It comes from around Asti."

"I don't feel like it. I'm not accustomed to drinking outside of meals. It doesn't agree with me."

"A small glass certainly won't upset you." With that they poured wine for everyone. But when they came to mine, they took a bottle and glass that had been put to the side. Then I understood their wicked ruse; nevertheless I accepted the glass and joined in their toast, but instead of drinking, I tried to put the wine back down on the table.

"You can't do that," one said. "It's offensive."

<sup>327</sup> The *Cuor d'Oro*: inn along via Cottolengo, 300 metres from the Oratory.

“It’s an insult,” another chimed in. “You can’t put us off like that.”

“I don’t feel like, I cannot, and I will not drink.”

“You’ll drink it for sure!” one exclaimed as he grabbed my left shoulder. An accomplice grabbed my right shoulder and added, “We can’t let this insult pass. Drink it by choice or by force.”

“If you really insist that I drink, I’ll oblige you. But let me go. And since I can’t drink it myself, I’ll get one of my sons to drink it in my place.”

With this misleading remark, I moved towards the door, opened it, and invited my young men to come in.

“There’s no need for anybody else to drink it, none at all!” they cried. “Never mind, then. We’ll go [up] shortly to forewarn the sick man. These boys can stay downstairs.”

I certainly would never have given that glass to anybody else, but I acted as I did the better to expose their treachery in trying to get me to drink the poisoned wine.

I was then taken to a room on the second floor where instead of a sick man I discovered lying there the very fellow who had come to the Oratory to fetch me. He put up with some of my questions but then burst out laughing. “I’ll go to confession tomorrow morning,” he said.

I left promptly to get back to my own business.

A friend of mine made some enquiries about the people who had summoned me and about their intention. I was assured that a certain individual had treated them to a big meal on the understanding that they should try to get me to drink a little wine that he had prepared.

*[23.] Attacks – A hail of blows*

These attacks that I am recounting may seem like fables, but sadly, they are all too true. Many people witnessed them. Here is an even stranger attempt on my life.

One August evening around six o'clock, I was standing at the gate that gave access to the Oratory courtyard, surrounded by my young men. Suddenly a cry went up: "A murderer! A murderer!"

And there was a certain man whom I knew quite well and had even given assistance to. He was in his shirt sleeves and was brandishing a big knife. Rushing wildly at me, he was shouting, "I want Don Bosco! I want Don Bosco!"

All of us scattered in every direction, and the intruder chased one of the seminarians, mistaking him for me. When he realised his mistake, he turned and came running furiously in my direction. I just had time to beat a retreat to the stairs of the old house, and the lock to the gate was barely secured when the madman reached it. He hammered, shouted, and bit at the iron bars to open them, to no avail. I was safe inside. My young men wanted to overpower the unfortunate man and break him apart, but I repeatedly forbade them and they obeyed me. We sent word to the police, to police headquarters, to the *carabinieri*. It was not till 9:30 that evening, however, that two *carabinieri* arrested the rogue and took him to the barracks.

Next day, the chief of police sent an officer to ask whether I would drop the charges against my attacker. I answered that I forgave that assault and all other injuries. But in the name of the law, I demanded of the authorities greater protection for the persons and property of citizens. But would you believe it? At the very same time when I had been attacked, as I was leaving the house, there was my attacker waiting for me a short distance off.

A friend of mine, seeing that I could not expect police protection, decided to speak to the wretched man. "I've been paid," he was told. "If you give me as much as the others do, I'll go away peacefully."

He was paid 80 francs for back rent, another 80 to book him into new lodgings well away from Valdocco, and so ended that first comedy.

The second which I am going to relate was not like that. About a month after the episode just narrated, one Sunday evening, I was asked to hurry to

the Sardi house near the Refuge to hear the confession of a sick woman who was said to be dying. Because of my previous experiences, I asked several of the bigger boys to come along with me. “There’s no need,” I was told. “We’ll accompany you. Leave these lads at their games.”

This was enough for me not to go alone. I left some of them in the street at the foot of the stairs. Joseph Buzzetti and Hyacinth Arnaud<sup>328</sup> were on the first-floor landing not far from the door of the sick woman. I went inside and saw a woman gasping as if she were about to breathe her last. I asked the men in attendance, four of them, to move off a little so that we might speak of her soul. “Before I make my confession,” she said in a strong voice, “I want that blackguard there in front of me to take back the calumnies he has been spreading about me.”

“No!” one of them answered.

“Shut up!” added another, rising to his feet.

Then they all stood up from their chairs. “Yes”, “No”, “Watch it”, “I’ll strangle you”, “I’ll cut your throat.” These shouts, mixed with horrible curses, echoed diabolically all over the room. In the midst of that melee, the light was put out. As the din increased, a hail of blows began to be aimed over where I was sitting. I quickly figured out their game, the point of which was to do me in. In that predicament with time neither to ponder nor to reflect, necessity became the mother of invention. I grabbed a chair, put it over my head, and as I edged towards the door under that helmet, a shower of blows from sticks fell with a tremendous racket upon the chair.

Exiting that hotbed of Satan, I flew into the arms of my young men; when they heard that noise and those yells, they were determined to break in, come what may. I had suffered no serious wound. One blow struck my left thumb, which was exposed against the back of the chair. The nail and half the tip were ripped away, so that I carry the scar to this day. The worst harm was the fright.

<sup>328</sup> Giacinto Arnaud (b. 1826) lived at the Oratory house from 1847 till February 1856 (cf. ASC E720 *Censimento dal 1847 al 1869*, p. 1).

I never could discover the real reason for this persecution, but it seems that all these attempts on my life were intended to make me stop, they would say, calumniating the Protestants.

[24.] *Grigio the dog*

The grey dog was the topic of many conversations and various conjectures. Many of you have seen him and even petted him. Now, laying aside the fantastic stories which are told of this dog, I will tell you plainly only what is pure truth.

The frequent attacks which had been made against me made it inadvisable for me to walk to or from the city of Turin alone. In those days, the asylum was the last building on the way to the Oratory. The rest of the way was land covered with hawthorn and acacia trees. One dark evening, rather late, I was making my way home with some trepidation when a huge dog appeared beside me, which at first sight gave me a start. But he seemed friendly and even nuzzled me as if I were his master. We quickly became friends, and he accompanied me as far as the Oratory. Many other times that evening's experience was repeated. Indeed, I may say that *Grigio* did me valuable service. Here are a few examples.

On a wet, foggy night at the end of November 1854, I was coming from the city. So as not to have a long way to go alone, I took the street connecting Our Lady of Consolation and the Cottolengo. At one point along the street I noticed two men walking a little in front of me. They matched their pace to mine, quickening or slowing down as I did. When I crossed the road to dodge them, they crossed right over in front of me. I attempted to turn back but was not in time. For with two quick leaps backward, keeping an ominous silence, they threw a cloak up against my face. I fought to keep from getting tangled up but it was no use. Then one also tried to stuff a rag into my mouth. I was trying to shout but could no longer do so. At that moment *Grigio* appeared, and growling like a bear he leapt into the face of one man while snapping viciously at the other. They plainly would have to tangle with the dog before finishing with me.

“Call off your dog,” they began to cry, trembling with fear.

“I’ll call him off,” I said, “when you agree to leave passers-by alone.”

“Call him off quick,” they exclaimed. Grigio continued growling like an enraged wolf or bear.

The two men took to their heels, and Grigio stayed by my side, accompanying me until I went into the Cottolengo Institute. After recovering from my scare, and refreshed by a drink which that charitable institute always seems to come up with at the right moment, I went on home with a good escort.

Every evening when I had no other company, as I passed the [last] buildings I would see Grigio bound out of nowhere along the way. Many times the Oratory boys saw him. Once he was the centre of an amusing incident. The boys saw him coming into the courtyard. Some wanted to strike him, and others wanted to throw stones at him.

“Don’t tease him,” Joseph Buzzetti ordered, “that’s Don Bosco’s dog.”

They turned to patting and stroking him then as they brought him along to me. I was in the refectory having supper with some seminarians and priests and with my mother. They were alarmed at the unexpected sight of the dog.

“There’s no need to be afraid,” I said. “It’s my Grigio. Let him come in.” In fact he made a wide tour round the table and came joyfully up to me. I patted him too and offered him soup, bread, and meat, but he refused all of it. He would not even sniff at what I offered. “Well, what do you want?” I asked. He only cocked his ears and wagged his tail. “Eat or drink, otherwise be on your way,” I concluded. He continued to evidence contentment, resting his head on my napkin as if he wanted to speak to me and say “Good night.” Then the boys, wondering a great deal and quite happy, led him outside. I remember that I had come home late, and a friend had brought me in his carriage.

The last time that I saw Grigio was in 1866 while I was going from Murialdo to Moncucco to see my friend Louis Moglia<sup>321</sup>. The parish priest of

<sup>321</sup> Luigi Moglia, owner of a farm near Moncucco where John Bosco had been taken in as a farmhand as a boy.

Buttigliera<sup>329</sup> wanted to accompany me part of the way, and as a consequence I was surprised by nightfall only halfway on my journey. "Oh, if only I had my Grigio," I thought to myself, "how fortunate I would be." Having said that, I started across a field to take advantage of the last rays of light. Just then Grigio came bounding up to me, full of affection. He accompanied me for the stretch of road that I still had to travel, which was three kilometres.

When I got to my friend's house, where I was expected, they asked me to go round another way, fearing there would be a fight between my Grigio and the family's two mastiffs.

"If they got into a fight," said Moglia "they would tear each other to pieces." I talked a lot with the whole family before we sat down to supper. My companion was left to rest in a corner of the room. When we had finished our meal, my friend said, "We must also give Grigio his supper." He took a little food to bring to the dog; he looked in every corner of the room and of the house, but Grigio was not to be found. We all wondered, since neither door nor window was open, nor had the family dogs given any sign of his departure. We renewed our search upstairs, but no one could find him.

That is the last news I had of the grey dog that was the subject of so much enquiry and discussion. I never was able to find out who was his owner. I only know that the animal was truly providential for me on many occasions when I found myself in danger.

<sup>329</sup> Giuseppe Vaccarino (1805-1891), parish priest of Buttigliera for 59 years.

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## THEMATIC INDEX

The thematic index is not intended, of course, to provide an exhaustive list of the many topics discussed or mentioned by Don Bosco in the writings collected in this volume of *Salesian Sources*. Within a number of the important thematic areas concerning Don Bosco's life, thought and experience it highlights - indicating the pages in which they are treated - relevant topics within the three areas selected: historical, educational, and spiritual. In a nutshell: rather than offering a complete range of issues, we have tried to highlight significant ones that may constitute, as a whole, a useful guide for consulting and reading the work.

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