

PIETRO STELLA

DON BOSCO
RELIGIOUS OUTLOOK
AND SPIRITUALITY



TRANSLATED BY JOHN DRURY
SALESIANA PUBLISHERS

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DON BOSCO

RELIGIOUS OUTLOOK AND SPIRITUALITY

by Pietro Stella

In *Don Bosco: Life and Work* (1985), the first volume of his trilogy **Don Bosco in the History of Catholic Religious Thought and Practice**, Pietro Stella placed St. John Bosco (1815-1888), founder of the Salesians, in his 19th-century context: the social and religious culture of Piedmont during the period of Italian unification.

With this second volume in the series, Fr. Stella, an authority on the religious culture, spirituality, and theology of Italy in the 18th and 19th centuries, presents the thought and practice of Don Bosco the writer, preacher, teacher, spiritual guide of the young, and founder. He shows how Don Bosco borrowed from, reshaped, and imprinted with his own particular stamp the sources that he used—published works like prayer books and manuals of theology, as well as the popular culture of rural villages and the clerical culture of Turin.

Don Bosco chose as his motto “Give me souls, and take away the rest.” What did he mean, and how did he go about practicing it? Fr. Stella leads his reader through the Saint's teachings and their practical implications: about God, human beings, sin, human history and destiny, Christ and his Church, Mary, the pursuit of holiness especially by young people, the sacramental and prayer life of the Christian, the Salesians as a new type of religious congregation, the “preventive” method of education, and Don Bosco's special charisms.



Pietro Stella was born at Catania, Sicily, on July 19, 1930. When he was six he began to attend the Salesian youth center and St. Philip Neri School there. He entered the novitiate of the Sicilian province of the Salesians in 1945, professed vows the following year, and was ordained at Turin in 1955.

From 1958 to 1971 Fr. Stella was a professor, first of moral theology and then of Church history, in the School of Theology at the Salesian Pontifical University. Between 1961 and 1965 he was also charged by the Salesian superiors with reorganizing the Salesian Central Archives. Thus he became very familiar with documents pertaining to Don Bosco and the origins of the Salesian Society.

Since 1971 Fr. Stella has been professor of modern and Church history in the state universities of Bari (1971-78), Perugia (1978-81), and La Sapienza, Rome (1981-). His research on popular religious sentiments and practice in Italy during the modern period have taught him how deeply run the currents of Jansenism and anti-Jansenism. In this field he has produced works hailed by specialists as foundational and provocative, such as *Documenti per la storia del giansenismo in Italia*, 3 vols. (1966-74); *Studi sul giansenismo* (1972); *Il giansenismo in Italia: Piccola antologia di fonti* (1972); *Atti e decreti del concilio diocesano di Pistoia dell'anno 1786*, 2 vols. (1986).

DON BOSCO:
RELIGIOUS OUTLOOK AND SPIRITUALITY

Volume II of
DON BOSCO IN THE
HISTORY OF CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS
THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

“A man of action, Don Bosco was not interested in talking about or explaining himself. It is through the positions that he took, his words, and the plan of his writings that Fr. Stella helps us understand how Don Bosco experienced God and how he shaped his tendency toward the ideal. Thus Fr. Stella untangles the main lines of his spiritual character and the originality of his teaching.”

N. PLUMAT

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“What a masterpiece of a book: thoroughly readable yet meticulously scholarly, inspirational yet historically solid, a model in modern hagiography! With the loving and meticulous care of a Flemish primitive painter, Pietro Stella's study of Don Bosco's spirituality portrays a man thoroughly rooted in his own time and place and yet compellingly contemporary in his passion for the poor and his zeal for youth ministry. This book will interest not only hagiographers, Church historians, and students of spirituality but anyone interested in the ways God's Spirit shapes and transforms human hearts.”

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Translated by John Drury

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1996

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Catholic Religious Thought and Practice*

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Volume II Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE NOTES

1. Frequently cited works

- Avvisi* Giovanni Bosco. *La Chiesa Cattolica-apostolica-romana è la sola vera Chiesa di Gesù Cristo: Avvisi ai Cattolici. I nostri pastori ci uniscono al papa.* Turin: Speirani and Ferrero, 1850.
- AW St. Alphonsus de Liguori, *The Complete Ascetical Works*, trans. ed. Eugene Grimm, CSsR. 22 vols. Brooklyn: Redemptorist, 1926-1954.
- BM *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco.* An American edition translated from the original Italian (see MB below). Rev. Diego Borgatello, SDB, editor-in-chief. New Rochelle: Salesiana, 1965-. References are by volume and page.
- BS *Bollettino salesiano*
- Cafasso* Giovanni Bosco. *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso, esposta in due ragionamenti funebri.* Turin: Paravia, 1860. English trans. *The Life of St. Joseph Cafasso* by Patrick O'Connell. Rockford, Ill.: TAN, 1983.
- Catt. istr.* Giovanni Bosco. *Il Cattolico istruito nella sua religione: Trattenimenti di un padre di famiglia co' suoi figliuoli secondo i bisogni del tempo.* Turin: De-Agostini, 1853. Original title (1850): *Il Cattolico istruito.*
- Caviglia Alberto Caviglia, ed. *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di "Don Bosco," nuovamente pubblicati e riveduti secondo le edizioni originali e manoscritti superstiti.* 6 vols. Turin: SEI, 1935-65.
- Christian* John Bosco. *The Christian Trained in Conduct and Courtesy According to the Spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul*, trans. Silvester Andriano, ed. Margaret L. MacPherson (Paterson, N.J.: Salesiana, 1956).
- Comollo* Giovanni Bosco. *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo, morto nel seminario di Chieri, ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù.* Turin: Speirani and Ferrero, 1844.
- Const.* *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales secondo il decreto di approvazione del 3 aprile 1874.* Turin: Oratory of St. Francis de Sales,

1875. The English trans. that will usually be followed is found in BM 5:635-45. The trans. of DB's Introduction to the Constitutions is taken from *Constitutions of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales* (Paterson, N.J.: Don Bosco Technical School, 1957) unless otherwise indicated.
- Cornell W.L. Cornell. *Don Bosco: Spiritual Director of Young People*. Manila: Salesiana, 1986. Cited as English trans. of Giovanni Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi* [Life of Francis Besuccho] (Turin, 1864) and Giovanni Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele* [Life of Michael Magone] (Turin, 1861).
- DBLW Pietro Stella. *Don Bosco: Life and Work*. 2d ed., trans. John Drury. New Rochelle: Don Bosco, 1985. (Vol. I of the series "Don Bosco in the History of Catholic Religious Thought and Practice," in which the present volume is Vol. II.)
- DHGE *Dictionnaire d'histoire et géographie ecclésiastiques*
- Doc. *Documenti per scrivere la storia di D. Giovanni Bosco...* (AS 110)
- DSp *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*
- DTC *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*. References are by volume and column.
- Enc. catt. *Enciclopedia cattolica*
- Ep. *Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco*, ed. Eugenio Ceria, SDB. 4 volumes. Turin, 1955-1959. References are by letter number.
- Giov. prov. [Giovanni Bosco]. *Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de' suoi doveri degli esercizi di cristiana pietà per la recita dell'uffizio della beata Vergine e de' principali vespri dell'anno coll'aggiunta di una scelta di laudi sacre, ecc..* Turin: Paravia, 1847. Later editions indicated by date.
- Indice MB E. Foglio. *Indice analitico delle Memorie biografiche di S. Giovanni Bosco nei 19 volumi*. Turin: SEI, 1948.
- LC *Lectures catholiques* [Catholic Readings]
- Maggio Giovanni Bosco. *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata ad uso del popolo*. Turin: Paravia, 1858.
- Maniera Giovanni Bosco. *Maniera facile per imparare la storia sacra ad uso del popolo cristiano*. Turin: Paravia, 1855.
- Maraviglie Giovanni Bosco. *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice*. Turin: Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, 1868.
- MB Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, SDB. *Memorie biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco* [later, *Memorie biografiche del Venerabile Servo di Dio Don Giovanni Bosco*]. Vols. 1-9. San Benigno Canavese-Turin, 1898-1917. Angelo Amadei, SDB. *Memorie biografiche di S. Giovanni Bosco*. Vol. 10. Turin, 1938. Eugenio Ceria, SDB. *Memorie biografiche del Beato Giovanni Bosco* [later, ... *di San Giovanni Bosco*]. Vols. 11-19. Turin, 1930-1939.
- Misericordia Giovanni Bosco. *Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio*. Turin: Botta, 1847.
- MO John Bosco. *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855*, trans. Daniel Lyons, SDB. New Rochelle: Don Bosco, 1989.

- OE Giovanni Bosco. *Opere edite* [Published Works]. Ristampa anastatica. 38 vols. Rome: LAS/Centro Studi Don Bosco, 1976-1977, 1987.
- Regol. Giovanni Bosco. *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per gli esterni*. Turin: Salesiana, 1877.
- RSS *Ricerche storiche salesiane*
- SBPB *Salesian Boys Prayer Book*. New Rochelle: Salesiana, 1954.
- SDS John Bosco. *St. Dominic Savio*. 2d ed. New Rochelle: Don Bosco, 1979. English trans. by Paul Aronica of Giovanni Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico, allievo dell'Oratorio di san Francesco di Sales* (Turin: Paravia, 1859).
- Sei domen. Giovanni Bosco. *Le sei domeniche e la novena di San Luigi Gonzaga con un cenno sulla vita del santo*. Turin: Speirani and Ferrero, 1846.
- Stor. eccl. Giovanni Bosco. *Storia ecclesiastica ad uso delle scuole, utile per ogni ceto di persone*. Turin: Speirani and Ferrero, 1845.
- SWSJB Joseph Aubry, SDB, ed. *The Spiritual Writings of Saint John Bosco*, trans. Joseph Caselli, SDB. New Rochelle: Don Bosco, 1984.

2. Other abbreviations

- a. *anno* [year]
- abp. archbishop
- AS Central Salesian Archives (Rome)
- bp. bishop
- ch. chapter/capitolo/caput
- cons. consideration/considerazione
- DB Don Bosco
- fasc. fascicle
- GC General Chapter (Salesian)
- les. lesson/lezione
- MHC Mary Help of Christians
- ms./mss. manuscript/s
- OSFS Oratory of St. Francis de Sales
- SDB Salesian of Don Bosco
- sec. section/sezione
- s.v. sub verbo (under the heading)
- UPS Università Pontificia Salesiana (Rome)

PREFACE TO VOLUME II

My title announces two kinds of historical reconstruction. I intend to reconstruct both the religious outlook of Don Bosco and his spirituality. By religious outlook I mean the way he sensed his relationship with God and, on that basis, developed his own approach to action and involvement in history. By spirituality I mean his own specific way of perceiving Christian perfection and striving for it. To put it another way, I mean his own way of ordering his life to achieve Christian perfection and to share in the special charisms of the divine presence.

Examining the life of Don Bosco by probing his mental constructs and his thought processes, one finds this core idea: redemptive salvation in the Catholic Church, the sole depository of the means of salvation. One notes that the call of poor and abandoned youth, of young people at loose ends, aroused an educational response in him. He would try to promote their integration into the world and the Church by means of gentleness and charity. Yet there was a certain element of tension involved in this effort because he was anxious about the eternal salvation of the young people.

Blessed Michael Rua (1837-1910), who knew Don Bosco as few others did, left us this brief but highly accurate profile of him:

He did not take a step, utter a word, or put his hand to any enterprise that was not aimed at the salvation of young people. He let others go about accumulating riches, seeking pleasures, and running after honors. Don Bosco's heart was set on nothing but souls. In deed as well as in word, his motto truly was *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle*.¹

Don Bosco himself chose to sum up his aspirations in that motto, and he kept it before his eyes always. In 1854 Saint Dominic Savio (1842-1857) was

¹ Michele Rua, *Lettere circolari* (Turin, 1910), p. 109: letter of Aug. 24, 1894.

able to read it on a poster, and Don Bosco made sure he got its meaning: "Lord, give me souls, take away everything else."²

In Don Bosco's loose, accommodative interpretation of Genesis 14:21, the key term was the word *souls*. For centuries this term in Christian usage had designated the spiritual element of the human being: placed in time but immortal, between salvation and eternal damnation, grace and sin, Jerusalem and Babylon, God and Satan. "If you save your soul, all is well and you will be happy forever; but if you blow it, you will lose soul and body, God and paradise, and be damned forever."³ Elsewhere Don Bosco writes, "If you save it, all is saved; but if you lose it, all is lost. You have only one soul, and a single sin can cause you to lose it."⁴

Don Bosco reminded his collaborators of Saint Augustine's words: ("by saving a soul, you have predestined your own soul [for salvation]").⁵ That alone should suggest the link between his theme and remote frames of reference, and the sort of language that might transpose the words of the king of Sodom to Abraham to a radically different set of ideas. The accommodative sense of his motto is not to be found in the Bible commentary of Archbishop Anthony Martini of Florence (1720-1809), nor even in the commentaries of other authors whom Don Bosco read: e.g., Ferdinand Zucconi, SJ (1647-1732); James Tirin, SJ (1580-1636); Augustine Calmet, OSB (1672-1757). But it can be found in various ascetical and pastoral works that are products of the Tridentine reform.⁶ It readily reminds us of the motto of Saint Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556):

² SDS:53.

³ *Giov. prov.*, 33.

⁴ *Maggio*, pp. 25-26.

⁵ *Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti*. See *Giov. prov.*, 26. Bosco, *Cooperatori Salesiani, ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume ed alla civile società* (S. Pier d'Arca, 1877), p. 4. Conference for the Salesians in 1878: BM 13:622. Circular to Cooperators, Turin, Oct. 15, 1886: *Ep.* 2590.

⁶ DB's interpretation of Gn 14:21 can be found in Louis Tronson, SS (1622-1700), *Forma cleri* 1 (Paris, 1739), pt. 2, ch. 5, art. 2, sec. 3, 1: "Zeal for the Salvation of Souls," p. 23: "Da mihi animas, caetera tolle tibi... Idem dicere debent Clerici." It can also be found in the form of a prayer to be used by members of the clergy, asking God to give them his love for souls and to arouse tepid priests, in Simon Salamo and Melchior Gelabert, *Regula cleri* (Turin, 1762), ch. 4, art. 17: "Zeal for Souls," p. 198: "Domine, qui amas animas, da mihi amorem tui, ut postea ferventer dicam: da mihi animas, caetera tolle tibi. Excita insuper torpescientes sacerdotes ad te sincero cordis affectu amandum; si enim amaverit te, nonne animas a te ita dilectas, et in amorosis tuis visceribus pretiosas, ardentem amabunt?" DB was familiar with the latter work. Note the testimony of Fr. Joachim Berto (1847-1914), his secretary between 1866 and 1886: "As for his mental prayer, I recall that after Mass I myself often brought him the book *Regula cleri*, which he used for his daily meditation." See *S. Rituum Congregatione... Taurinen. Beatificationis et canonizationis servi Dei sac. Ioannis Bosco... Positio super virtutibus. Pars I: Summarium* (Rome, 1923), p. 557.

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam et ad salutem animarum. Once again Don Bosco's key terms are linked: the salvation of souls. But whereas the Ignatian motto states a purpose or goal, Don Bosco's motto takes the form of a dialogue. As the king of Sodom spoke to Abraham, so Don Bosco speaks to his Lord. *Da mihi animas* becomes a prayer to God, who is listening and can answer it. Like the king of Sodom addressing Abraham, Don Bosco expresses to God his desire to have what in fact is already divine property because it is a creature and because, as Martini puts it, it was "won in a just war." *Da mihi animas* is already a proposed way of perceiving God and humanity.

Alluding to his motto, Don Bosco does not trace it back to Ignatius Loyola. He tells us that they were "words often repeated by Saint Francis de Sales," but he does not specify where he got that information.⁷

"To believe and work for salvation" is all a human being can do, according to Don Bosco. That sums up the message of Jesus Christ, who "taught us all we need to believe and do for our salvation."⁸ Jesus told us "he was the only Son of God, the Savior promised to humanity, who had come down from heaven to earth to show them the way to salvation."⁹ Saint Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787) and many spiritual writers of his own day stressed that the salvation of one's soul was the *one thing necessary*, and Don Bosco seems to have felt the same. It seems to have been the heart, the core, of Don Bosco's interior life, of his dialogue with God and his work upon himself, and of his apostolic labors. He saw himself born and called to work for the salvation of poor and abandoned youth.

Taken by itself, this motif appears to be a common one readily found in many other people: e.g., Saint Anthony Claret (1807-1870) and the priest-brothers Anthony Angelo Cavanis (1772-1858) and Mark Anthony Cavanis (1774-1853); educators of youth in the nineteenth century and founders of religious congregations; Saints John Baptist de la Salle (1651-1719), Joseph Calasanz (1556-1648), and Jerome Emiliani (1481-1537).¹⁰ Nevertheless, it does

⁷ SDS:53. The most well known testimony to the fact is in a work by Peter Collet (1672-1741), which was translated from French into Italian and reissued many times between the 1700s and the 1900s. See Pierre Collot, *Lo spirito di S. Francesco di Sales, vescovo e principe di Ginevra: Raccolto da diversi scritti di monsignor Gio. Pietro Camus*, 4th ed. (Venice, 1745), pt. 5, ch. 8, p. 172: "He desired only the conversion of those souls rebelling against the light of truth that shines only in the true Church. At times he would sigh and say, *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle*, speaking of his Geneva, which he always called his beloved Geneva in spite of its rebellion." This can also be found in the revised edition by Angelo Grazioli, pt. 4, c. 3, 5: II (Turin, 1928), 194.

⁸ *Maniera*, p. 47.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁰ On this theme in the context of pastoral activity and catechesis in the modern age, see the documented study of Elisabeth Germain, *Parler du salut? Aux origines d'une mentalité religieuse: La Catéchèse du salut dans la France de la Restauration* (Paris, 1967).

offer a basis for classifying Don Bosco in terms of a specific type of spirituality. Taken in the context of his apostolic concern, for example, the negative notion of detachment from creatures cannot be interpreted as self-annihilation or total melting into God—quite aside from the fact that Don Bosco is far removed from the spirituality of such figures as Meister Eckhart (1260?-1307), Henry of Herp (Harphius van Erp, 1405?-1477) and even Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629), insofar as his spirit, culture, and milieu are concerned. In his spirituality, detachment from creatures does not entail such a pessimistic view of creatures as to obscure their usefulness in accomplishing good. Don Bosco's tendency toward action and hard work, often prompted by a sense of urgent need and awareness of a heavenly mission, frames his spirituality in terms of the active life. That distinguishes him even from Saint Francis de Sales (1567-1622) and others who may have led a life of intense activity, but whose spiritual consciousness gave a large role to psychological and psychosensory efforts to achieve union with God in prayer.

Don Bosco seems to have projected himself into active work in a concentrated way. His remarks on detachment from creatures or things are framed in terms of apostolic activity rather than a state of prayerfulness. Detachment is a state of mind needed for the most complete freedom and availability in meeting the demands of the apostolate itself. In terms of content, the detachment of Don Bosco is fairly close to that of Alphonsus Liguori. Its correlate, too, could be the positive element which Saint Alphonsus uses to sum up Christian perfection: conformity to the will of God. But in Don Bosco, active work once again intervenes to specify what this commitment means concretely. It means devoting oneself to the works that God has assigned one to carry out. Once again active work distinguishes the spirituality of Don Bosco from that of Saint Alphonsus and its concentration on the interior life of the human being.

Moreover, the specific vocation of Don Bosco, his dedication to the salvation of poor and abandoned youths, leads to a restructuring of many elements whose material substance derives from Saint Alphonsus or the general religious mentality of Piedmont in the nineteenth century. In that religious mentality we find characteristically Italian elements that have been profoundly influenced by stimuli from French spirituality of the previous three centuries (1600-1900), all still at work amid the new attitudes of the Risorgimento period. It is a period marked by the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and papal infallibility; by traditionalist strains and an almost medieval faith in the miraculous; by liturgical decadence and an enormous expansion of private devotions; by reaction against rigorism; and by resistance to both the active ferment of Protestantism and the laicization of Italian society.

But to what extent is it possible to probe into the spiritual life of Don Bosco in order to grasp the origin and growth of his quest for Christian perfection? To what extent can we pursue an investigation of his spirituality insofar as that is

understood to be the ordering of his life toward Christian perfection? The dire lack of sources about his interior life poses great obstacles to any such investigation of the origin and growth of Don Bosco's spirit, doctrine, and works along the road to perfection. This lack of sources was noted in *Don Bosco: Life and Work* (p. xx). Don Bosco, an active man caught up in his work, seems almost determined not to satisfy anyone wanting to stop him and study the hidden wellsprings of his energy. Given that situation, I thought it would be more sensible to glean the elements of his spirituality from the broader context of his religious outlook and practice, from all he said and did on the basis of religious principle. In his case, to be sure, that basis was his constant and avowed conviction that he was God's instrument in the education of young people. This approach would permit us to utilize the criteria and methods of religious sociology, folklore study, and other disciplines that may be of assistance in the investigation of a life, a culture, or a certain mentality.

As for the documentation on Don Bosco and, in particular, his own writings, they are enough to discourage anyone seeking to find a rigorous system of thought. But such writings as *The Companion of Youth*, *The Month of May*, *Bible History*, and *Church History* do reveal certain basic themes, the dominant one being the salvation of souls and of all humanity. These basic themes can be arranged in schemes provided by Don Bosco himself. So it is legitimate to examine certain questions one after another: What exactly did the idea of God mean to Don Bosco? What did he think of the human being? What did he think of humanity's vicissitudes in past history and in his own day? Remember that Don Bosco had a particularly lively sensitivity for history. And since he saw the human being as a sinner, and human history as flawed by sin and fraught with danger in time and eternity, we may also ask: What responses were triggered in his life as a priest, educator, catechist, and founder of institutions and projects in nineteenth-century Piedmont?

His religious sensibility spotlighted Jesus Christ as the divine Savior, the Church as the ark of salvation, Mary Immaculate as the mother and helper of individuals and the whole "congregation of the faithful." The theme of eternal salvation gave specific nuances to his view of the last things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell.

Here I shall not try to find tie-ups where Don Bosco did not notice them or add them. I shall examine the themes mentioned above as "constants" in his mind and spirit, noting how these core ideas developed as they interacted with the events of his personal life and the surrounding milieu. Then I shall move on to analyze how these dominant themes affected Don Bosco and how he responded to them in his work for the salvation of souls, and for the salvation of young people in particular.

As priest and educator, Don Bosco elaborated certain basic themes of religious practice and spirituality for young people. He searched for the motives,

ideals, dispositions, and means that were most likely to make them good Christians and upright citizens, to ensure their concern for the great issue of their soul's salvation. On these same themes he then grafted the religious life and spirituality that would serve his "new" religious educators: the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. He also trained them in his educational "system," about which he chose to theorize at a given point in his life.

Finally, I will deal with the extraordinary facets of his life: miracles, dreams, and predictions. They pervade Don Bosco's life from early childhood on. But if one truly wishes to pinpoint the most basic and salient data on those matters, they must be viewed in the larger context of the basic elements in Don Bosco's religious outlook as it matured in interaction with his milieu.

I think I should mention certain features of the approach I have adopted in trying to pinpoint factors that helped to shape Don Bosco's outlook, to solidify it, or to effect changes in it. First, I have tried to base my work primarily on those facts that Don Bosco clearly brought out in his spoken words, his writings, and his actions.

Second, insofar as ideas are concerned, I have had recourse to the means whereby these ideas found expression and fixed form, i.e., his published and unpublished writings. I have followed them through their various stages, from his more or less tortured first drafts to the published editions that have reached the public down to our own day. Wherever possible, I have tried to trace the first composition of his writings back to their sources. Where it was not possible to establish links between facts or writings with absolute certainty, I deemed it legitimate to appeal to spiritual or social elements in his milieu. I mean specifically those elements which very likely were characteristic of the overall milieu that permeated Don Bosco's way of living, thinking, and acting. This explains, e.g., my pages on religious observances in Piedmont, and especially in his native Montferrat area. It should also explain other pages on the vocational and pastoral problems of the clergy of Piedmont. I then try to relate those pages to my study of the religious observances proposed to young people by Don Bosco.

I would like to emphasize, however, that the pages on Don Bosco's milieu are not meant to be an artificial framework, on the one hand, or a detailed treatment on the other. They are included to present elements that are interwoven in the fabric of ideas and events. I am not juxtaposing two sets of data to present a book on Don Bosco *and* his milieu. My focus is on Don Bosco in the history of Catholic religious thought and practice, as the title of this series indicates.

Readers will notice the many quotations from the writings of Don Bosco and other publications appearing in Piedmont. The reason is that many religious works and writings of Piedmont are extremely rare and almost impossible to find. Unfortunately the same holds true for many of Don Bosco's own writings. For his life we have firsthand sources and *The Biographical Memoirs*. Aside from his letters and some thirty works that have been more fortunate, however, Don

Bosco's writings are almost unknown and barely accessible even to most scholars. We lack an *opera omnia*. The edition started by Father Albert Caviglia, SDB (1868-1943), came to a halt at his death. Thirty years later we have only a couple of posthumous volumes dealing with the biographies of Aloysius Comollo, Michael Magone, and Francis Besucco. The critical edition remains no more than the desire of many and the expressed intent of General Chapter XIX of the Salesians (1965). For good or ill, then, I thought it better to overindulge in illustrative citations than to be stingy with them.

* * * *

I wrote the above remarks in 1969. Eleven years later I must say that the critical edition of Don Bosco's writings remains a dream. The Don Bosco Research Center of the Salesian Pontifical University has, however, produced a photocopy edition of many of his published writings, the *Opere edite*. The edition has been under the direct editorship of Fathers Raphael Farina and Peter Ambrosio. Responsibility for finding and selecting the texts has fallen to me. Those patient enough to read the present volume will find most of Don Bosco's texts in this collection. I did not deem it necessary to refer to the pagination added by the *Opere edite* editors since that of the original editions really suffices.

PIETRO STELLA
1980

PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION OF VOLUME II

John Drury's labors in translating my difficult and sometimes contorted Italian deserve great praise. I think his translation has masterfully captured the subtlest nuances, even in the expressions that I have quoted from older Italian texts (prior to the nineteenth century).

This second volume of *Don Bosco in the History of Catholic Religious Thought and Practice* uses a historian's methodology to investigate Don Bosco's religious and spiritual experience—its sources, influences, and context, as well as its content. I hope that through this study the English-speaking world, particularly my Salesian confreres, will appreciate his place in the popular religious attitude of the period of transition—Italy's transition from the French Revolution to the Industrial Revolution—in which he lived, wrote, and founded two religious congregations and a great spiritual and apostolic family.

I wish to express my gratitude to Father Michael Mendl of Don Bosco Publications for his painstaking editorial work.

PIETRO STELLA
December 8, 1992

EDITOR'S NOTE

The English version of volume II of *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, like volume I, has been divided into two parts—the primary text and a separately published appendix.* The appendixes, as methodological essays, do not have a direct relationship to the content of their respective volumes and thus seem to merit distinct publication.

In format, the only difference between this second volume and the first is in the bibliography. Here we have placed the entire bibliography at the end of the book. There is almost no comment on these sources. The reason for these two variations from the format of volume I is that we have followed the format of the respective volumes in Italian. In fact, the Italian volume II has no bibliography; the one published here has been culled selectively from the footnotes. It has also been updated to take advantage of books and articles published since 1980, and, like the bibliographies in volume I, has additional English-language publications.

While answering some of my queries, Father Stella in a few instances has made some emendations to his original text and footnotes, besides the correction of typographical errors. These are not noted in the text published here.

In a greater number of instances, I have added footnotes to the original text to supply additional cross-references or information that might interest the English-speaking reader. These additions are labeled as editor's notes. The numbering of the author's footnotes has been preserved, for the sake of anyone who may wish to check something in the original, except that in chapter XI

* Vol. I: *Don Bosco: Life and Work* and its appendix, *Don Bosco and the Death of Charles*, were published in 1985. The appendix of vol. II, *Don Bosco's Dreams: A Historico-documentary Analysis of Selected Samples*, is being published at the same time as the main text of vol. II.

notes 52 and 53 have been combined and all the following notes are one number lower than in the Italian edition.

We have added first names to the persons referred to in the text or cited in the notes, whenever possible. To help readers by supplying a fragment of historical or theological context, we have tried also to give these persons' life-dates the first time that they are mentioned.

We are grateful to the Very Rev. Edward J. Gilbert, CSsR, and the Brooklyn Province of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer for their gracious permission to use Father Grimm's edition of the Ascetical Works of Saint Alphonsus in this translation.

MICHAEL MENDEL, SDB
Editor

DON BOSCO
RELIGIOUS OUTLOOK
AND SPIRITUALITY

I

GOD: CREATOR AND LORD

1. *Knowledge of God*

Don Bosco's quest for souls, as embodied in his motto *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle* (Gn 14:21), assures that he already knows God and senses his presence; that God is the Lord of his life and vocation. Knowledge of God came to him in early childhood and was deepened as time went on. It bears the stamp of the many arguments in this whole area: for and against the existence of God, for and against the possibility of knowing God, for and against the compatibility of divine perfections with the existence of evil in the world, for and against divine revelation and extraordinary divine interventions. In the nineteenth century the views of such figures as Montaigne (1533-1592), Peter Bayle (1647-1706), Voltaire (1694-1778), and Paul Henry d'Holbach (1723-1779) found their way into catechetics insofar as they were refuted. The teaching of catechism began with the first article of the Creed, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty..." Stress was placed on knowing God and the possibility of such knowledge, on the necessity of religious worship and divine revelation. The topics covered in catechetics were those that had come into prominence in apologetic works and treatises since the middle of the seventeenth century.¹

Thus God dominated the mind of Don Bosco as his noonday sun. Whether operating as apologist for the faith, catechist, or writer of ascetical theology or history, Don Bosco saw and felt God to be Creator and Lord, the ground and ultimate explanation of everything. It is God who is presented first to young people in *The Companion of Youth* and to adults in *The Key to*

¹ For a general overview, see M. Chossat, "Dieu (connaissance naturelle de)," DTC 4:759-810, covering philosophical and theological positions from the 16th to the 19th centuries; A. Michel, "Traditionalisme," DTC 15:1350; Emile Hocedez, SJ, *Histoire de la théologie au XIX^e siècle* (Paris, 1947-52).

Heaven, in *The Religiously Instructed Catholic* and *The Catholic Equipped for Pious Practices*, in his *Bible History* and *Church History*:

Look up at the heavens, and you will notice the sense of God rising spontaneously in your minds.

Look up, my sons, and notice all that exists in the heavens and on earth. The sun, the moon, the stars, air, water, fire: once upon a time none of them existed. There is a God who, in his omnipotence, brought them out of nothingness and created them.²

The existence of God is a truth so easy to know that human beings of every time and place, even the uncivilized..., have had knowledge of the existence of God.³

The biblical inspiration is evident. For Don Bosco, truly “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps 19:2): “Things small and great, heaven and earth, the fishes of the sea, the animals on dry land, the birds of the air—all say with one voice: There is a God who created us, a God who preserves us.”⁴

Even more do we “tangibly touch” the existence of God “if we begin to consider ourselves a bit.” First, there is “the marvelous structure of the human body.” Second, there is “the faculty of thinking, judging, willing.” Third, there is “the marvelous union of the soul besides.”⁵ The arguments are sketchy, hastily transcribed from the *Catechism* of Canon Albert Aimé (fl. 18th c.), which in turn derived from Nicholas Sylvester Bergier (1715-1790) and Bishop Fénelon (1651-1715).⁶ Regarding the marvelous structure of the human body, for example, Don Bosco is content to write that “it represents the masterpiece of an infinitely skillful craftsman.” The French text of Canon Aimé is transparent: “The admirable structure of the human body can only be the masterpiece of an infinitely skillful craftsman.”⁷

² *Giov. prov.*, pt. 1 [sec. 1], art. 1, p. 9.

³ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 1, trat. 1, p. 10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Catéchisme raisonné sur les fondements de la foi*, by Albert Aimé, canon of the church of Arras: new ed. to which are appended excerpts from the letters of Fénelon on the truth of religion (Lyons, 1821).

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4: “La première preuve de l’existence de Dieu, que je trouve en moi-même, c’est l’admirable structure du corps humain, qui ne peut être que le chef-d’œuvre d’un ouvrier infiniment habile... La seconde preuve de l’existence de Dieu, que je trouve en moi-même, c’est la faculté de penser, de juger, de vouloir, car n’avant pu me donner moi-même cette faculté, j’en conclus qu’elle vient de Dieu [italics added. Note DB’s version: “The faculty of thinking, judging, willing that we perceive in ourselves...—since I could not have given these faculties to myself, I must conclude that they come from God”] ...La troisième preuve de l’existence de Dieu, que je tire de moi-même, c’est l’union admirable de mon corps et de mon âme... La quatrième preuve de l’existence de

The universe especially attracts Don Bosco's attention, suggesting the most varied illustrations of the argument leading from order to supreme orderer. He only touches upon the arguments that move from secondary causes to a first cause and from contingent beings to a necessary being. God "is the first cause, without whom the earth would not exist." The example he uses is that of the watch, which presupposes a watchmaker—Voltaire's argument that Kant (1724-1804) criticized. The argument from sufficient reason, on the other hand, is amply illustrated with the example of the chicken and the egg: which came first?⁸

We would not dare to look for much more in writings addressed to young people and to people of modest education, but there is nothing else to indicate how far Don Bosco's own philosophical probing was inclined to go.

What interests us here is his religious outlook, what it has to say to himself and others. Here is one example:

We cannot turn our attention to anything without noticing the benefits granted by God. The air that we breathe, the sun that shines on us, the elements that sustain us, fire and water that serve us in so many ways, the animals tamed for our convenience, all the beautiful, precious, and magnificent things everywhere demonstrate the goodness of God.⁹

Set in relationship with God, things appear to him in their primordial goodness and their ideal order. The structure of the human body is marvelous because at the moment Don Bosco is not thinking of disease and death. The soul is marvelous because for the moment Don Bosco chooses to disregard the ignorance and perversity that thread their way through human history. Fire, fish, and bird speak to him of God because he does not focus on the fight for life and natural disasters. In short, Don Bosco abstracts from evil when he argues for the existence of God. His way of thinking prompts him to look at things insofar as they bear traces or images of God the Creator, but he does not explain or spell out his mental process. He does not do what Archbishop Martini, for example, does in his commentary on Wisdom 13:3-5, where he cites the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine (354-430) to the effect that "the heavens, the earth, and the whole universe speak to the deaf if God himself, out of his goodness, does not speak to the human heart." Yet we can find something close to this in Don Bosco's own writing: "This universal idea of the Divinity

Dieu, que je tire de moi-même, ce sont les rapports merveilleux qui se trouvent entre l'homme et le monde...

⁸ The argument based on the chicken and the egg seems to have been a favorite of DB. To the youths of the Oratory he gave a detailed account of an argument he had on a trip, in which the chicken and the egg played a key role. See his letter from St. Ignatius's Shrine (Lanzo), July 22, 1864, *Ep.* 355; BM 7:421-22.

⁹ *Misericordia*, p. 30.

has undoubtedly been inscribed on the heart of human beings by the Creator.”¹⁰ Note that Don Bosco does not write in terms of dialogue. He does not talk about a “voice” addressing itself to attentive human ears, but rather about an “idea” of divine origin. A common term is “the human heart,” on which this “idea” is inscribed.

Don Bosco’s source is Aimé. In the same context Aimé writes, but only by way of hypothesis, that the idea of God is known by a secret instinct.¹¹ Yet in their different ways both Don Bosco and Aimé present knowledge of God as a fact that requires a prior divine operation. Scattered traces of a certain version of innate ideas can be found elsewhere in Don Bosco’s work: “Human beings carry natural religion engraved in their hearts.”¹² An inner voice “speaks in the heart to all and says: your soul cannot be annihilated and will live forever.”¹³ But Don Bosco does not tell us whether a further divine intervention is needed for us to take cognizance of this idea, whether God must step in to open the “ears of the heart” or affect the “touch of the heart” so that we may perceive what is imprinted there. Nor does he consider the whole question of the probative value of this inner testimony.¹⁴

In short, Don Bosco is more inclined to tell us what these inner voices say than to explain their deeper nature, to indicate the connection of things with God and human beings than to give reasons for it:

Seeing the order and wondrous harmony that reigns throughout the universe, we cannot hesitate for a moment to believe in a God who has created all things, given them movement, and preserves them... In his omnipotence he has given existence to everything, and he provides for them out of his goodness. It is he who sustains and sets in motion the enormous weight of the vast whole. It is he who gives form and life to all living beings. He gives existence to everything as creator, provides for everything as preserver, and to him everything is directed as to its final end. To all he says, “It is I who made you. *Ego sum.*” And this statement, which any human being can and ought to comprehend, expresses his complete power and divinity.

¹⁰ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 1, trat. 1, p. 10.

¹¹ Aimé, p. 2: “Pour que toutes les nations se soient accordées en ce point, il faut nécessairement qu’elles y aient été déterminées, ou par un instinct secret imprimé dans leurs âmes par l’Être-Suprême lui-même, ou par la vue du monde, qui publie si hautement et si éloquemment son existence et ses perfections.” Nevertheless his hypothetical formulation presents an alternative between two terms that are presumably equivalent and hence equally certain.

¹² *Catt. istr.*, pt. 1, trat. 3, pp. 18-19, which seems to draw its inspiration from Aimé, p. 11: “Il y a une Religion naturelle, que Dieu a gravée dans l’esprit et dans la coeur de tous les hommes.”

¹³ *Maggio*, day 2, p. 24.

¹⁴ Discussion about the probative value of experience of the divine comes later, in the era of Modernism. See R. Verneaux, “Dieu,” in *Catholicisme* 3, cols. 780-82.

But here we encounter a truth that will certainly increase our amazement. All the things we see in the universe have been created for us. The sun that shines during the day, the moon that brightens the darkness of night, the stars that decorate the firmament, the air that enables us to breathe, the water that serves human needs, the fire that warms us, the earth that offers us its fruits: all were made by God for us. “You have put all things under his feet” [Ps 8:7]. What feelings of gratitude, respect, and love we should have for such a great and good God! What should we give in return for the great kindness of our God?¹⁵

Converging with this celebration of God that can be heard in the voices of creatures, there is another celebration that can be gleaned in the traditions of peoples, and particularly in the vicissitudes of the Hebrew people. The idea of God is universal because it was “clearly communicated to Adam, the first human being in the world, and handed down by him to all his descendants from one generation to the next.”¹⁶ A divine revelation at the very beginnings of humanity is a certain fact for Don Bosco, and it marks the start of a chain of revelations. For him God’s intervention in human events is something absolutely objective. Don Bosco could well have written the words of Nicholas Jamin, OSB (1712-1782), whose popular publications circulated in Piedmont as elsewhere: “It is not a speculative truth to be decided at the tribunal of reason but a truth of fact, on which testimony has the right to render a decision.”¹⁷

For Don Bosco, then, it seems there are various ways of knowing the idea of God. It can derive from our knowledge of creatures. It is also innate, inscribed by God himself in the human heart. And, finally, it is given to us through divine revelation that has been passed down from generation to generation.

We can readily see that Don Bosco senses and lives the reality of the divine within an atmosphere that is wholly Christian, within a religious tradition grafted on that of the Hebrews. Don Bosco’s God is a God who speaks to his creatures; the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God made flesh and revealed in Jesus as one God in three distinct but equal Persons. He is a personal God, almost materialized in popular religious literature insofar as that literature described God’s nature and operations in images and expressions drawn from human language. He is a God arrived at by way of history: a point stressed vehemently in the golden age of French spirituality over against the abstract,

¹⁵ *Maggio*, day 1, pp. 20-21.

¹⁶ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 1, trat. 1, p. 10.

¹⁷ Nicholas Jamin, *Pensieri* (Venice, 1823), ch. 3, 45, p. 78. This very well received work of popular apologetics was published in Italian in Carmagnola in 1819. With Gallicanizing tendencies taken out, Hyacinth Marietti (d. 1856) published it in Turin in 1823 under the auspices of *Amicizia Cattolica*.

impersonal Supreme Being censured by much philosophy after Descartes (1596-1650).

The common sentiment invoked by people like Don Bosco as proof of the existence of God was quite different from the deist notion of Joseph Butler (1692-1752) or Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781). For the latter it was a matter of emotion and will. Don Bosco's view of it was that of Bishop Jacques Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704) and the seventeenth-century missionaries who defended the Chinese rites. The common sentiment of humanity presupposed the unique derivation of humanity from Adam, a flood that destroyed the human race, and a primitive revelation handed down by the descendants of Noah and spread throughout the world. It thus involved a series of intellectual acts.

Rarely does Don Bosco use the term Supreme Being (*Essere supremo*),¹⁸ although it was suggested as a possible alternative by someone who went over his *Six Sundays*.¹⁹ An elocution manual used in the Piedmontese schools informs us that "Supreme Being" (*Ente supremo*) is an expression to be avoided

because it is not Italian or elegant. It smacks of philosophical affectation and fails to express the goodness, providence, omnipotence of God, the fact that all things are his creatures. Hence one should say "the Omnipotent," "Lord," or "our Father," as the Lord taught us to say; or use some other suitable name of the same sort from Sacred Scripture.²⁰

The term that Don Bosco came to use familiarly was *Lord*. "The Lord tells you that if you start out being good as young people, you will remain such for the rest of your lives."²¹ "Devote yourselves early to virtue, and I assure you that you will always have joyous and contented hearts, that you will know how sweet it is to serve the Lord."²² "The Lord is quick to forgive."²³ "The mercy of the Lord is great."²⁴ The Lord assures us that the benefits which he doles out are for the just and for sinners.²⁵ To die is to give back our souls to the Lord.²⁶ It was the term *Lord* that Don Bosco used with his motto, *Da mihi animas*; not "O Omnipotent and Merciful God" or "Immaculate Virgin Mary, Help of Christians." It is common in his letters, and in a literary context so closely bound up with life, it clearly signifies the same personage addressed in such expressions of the Christian liturgy as "Lord, have mercy" and "The Lord be with you."

¹⁸ See, e.g., *Catt. istr.*, p. 10, where he copies Aimé.

¹⁹ *Sei domen.*, interleaved copy in AS 133 *Sei domeniche*, p. 31.

²⁰ *Trattato della locuzione oratoria e dell'arte poetica approvato dall'eccellentissimo Magistrato della Riforma ad uso delle scuole* (Turin: Stamperia Reale, 1829), ch. 5, pp. 53-54.

²¹ *Giov. prov.*, pt. 1 [sec. 1], art. 3, p. 12.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²³ *Misericordia*, p. 59.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁶ SDS:143.

Besides indicating a sense of dependence and reverent submission, the appellation *Lord* also expresses Don Bosco's conviction of divine omnipotence. God creates out of nothing and preserves all things in existence. He manifests his power by clearly preordaining human events, by foreseeing and foretelling them, by intervening with word and work, by suspending the laws of nature and working miracles.²⁷

Don Bosco cannot comprehend the attitude of those who dispute the possibility of divine revelation or miracles:

If the infinite God created the world we see out of nothing, created us as we are, why could he not make known to us the things needed to achieve the end for which he has created us? Would it not be ridiculous to say that the omnipotent God cannot do what the human beings created by him can do—i.e., make known and communicate their inner thoughts to each other; cannot do what teachers do every day—make clear what they know to their students?²⁸

God is sovereign lord of all things. The word and image derived from biblical sources, but in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they were particularly suited to expressing the idea of absolute dominion and total subjection. The idea of the "Divine Majesty" evoked images associated with the protocol of royal courts: pomp and circumstance, bow and curtsy, respect for the sovereign, fear of doing anything displeasing to him, fear of offending his sacred majesty and thus incurring his justified wrath.²⁹ The approach to prayer of Aloysius Comollo (1817-1839), Don Bosco's fellow seminarian and close friend, was typical. Long periods of undistracted prayer were normal for him, and he explained his technique to his friend:

You want me to tell you how I go about praying. I use a wholly material image that will make you laugh. Closing my eyes, I enter in thought a large, exquisitely adorned hall. At the end of it is a majestic throne, on which the Almighty is seated. Behind him are all the choirs of the blessed. I prostrate myself and do my praying with the utmost respect possible.³⁰

The appellation "His Divine Majesty," so frequently used in the seventeenth century, reached down to Don Bosco's own day and found its way into the rules of the Company of Mary Immaculate.³¹ The "king of awesome

²⁷ It was typical of the mentality of the day to regard revelation and history as manifestations of the invisible power of God. See Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman* (Cambridge, 1957).

²⁸ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 1, trat. 3, p. 20.

²⁹ The elements are brought out for the Baroque Era, e.g., by Josef A. Jungmann, *Liturgisches Erbe und pastorale Gegenwart* (Innsbruck, 1960), pp. 108-19.

³⁰ *Comollo*, p. 47.

³¹ *Savio*, p. 81: "On the day of their admission, the members will receive holy communion, beseeching his Divine Majesty..." (Compare SDS:101-02.)

majesty” of the *Dies irae* and medieval religious practice was alive and present, in all his severity, in considerations dealing with the particular judgment of the soul after death and the last judgment. In the Eucharist God was alive and present in all his incomparable dignity: more dazzling than the sun amid the rays of the monstrance, honored by his court in eucharistic processions such as those held on Corpus Christi, and worshipped in frequent benediction services. Whereas communion prompted emphasis on emotional responses to the presence of the divine guest in one’s own heart, eucharistic adoration tended to evoke sentiments associated with a sense of the Divine Majesty.

God is a merciful and provident Father, “our compassionate Father in heaven.”³² We have direct testimony from people that Don Bosco’s usually flat voice changed when he pronounced the Our Father during common prayers.³³ We do not know what his precise feelings were; but when he wrote of God the Father in such terms, it is clear that he was thinking in the general context of the Christian experience. In that context it was normal to recall all that God had done out of his goodness for Adam and the human race, for sinners and the just, for all those in need of help and the objects of his more than paternal care, and for all those called to eternal salvation in Christ Jesus.³⁴ His stress on the word “Father” surely expressed his own filial devotion, his recognition of what God is for human beings, his declaration of what he himself wanted to be, and his certainty that God the Father would never abandon his children.

All that he has left us on the mercy of God is more than the mere affirmation of a divine attribute. In a climate still marked by reactions against Jansenism and deism, the mercy of God could be the subject of polemical tracts. How was it to be understood in connection with the more discussed themes of predestination, divine premotion, and God’s ongoing action in the conservation of creatures? Don Bosco himself, however, tended to nurture the religious sense and confidence in God.

His methods are not those of the controversialist. Claude Adrian Helvétius (1715-1771), Father Andrew de Boulanger, OSA (1578-1657), and Holbach had offered criticisms of the God of Christians. This God did not prevent the ruin of his creatures even though he was good and omnipotent. He could have redeemed humanity from sin by an act of royal power, but instead he chose a cruel and bloody means: the death of his only-begotten Son. Rigid predestinationism had restricted access to salvation to a small number of the elect; the rest of humanity was doomed to eternal misery. Don Bosco does not set

³² Words of DB cited by Fr. John Bonetti (1838-91), *Annali III*, p. 55, AS 110 Bonetti 4.

³³ Eugenio Ceria (1870-1957), *Don Bosco con Dio* (Turin, 1929), p. 76. Testimony of Fr. Ascanio Savio (1831-1902): see BM 3:414.

³⁴ *Misericordia* celebrates the Lord’s mercies from the very start of creation. The same scheme is adopted in *Maggio*, day 9.

himself the task of answering such objections. His pages are written for believers. For them he once again documents the infinite goodness of God, borrowing from Nicholas Sylvester Bergier and Saint Alphonsus.³⁵ He is closer to the latter when he evokes the sense of guilt that a human being should feel vis-à-vis an infinitely good God. In *Devotion to the Mercy of God* he writes:

Yes, my God, I thank you for all the favors you have done for me and continue to do every day. I was ungrateful to you in the past, but now I love you with my whole heart; I am sorry for having outraged you more than for any evil I could have fallen into. Oh! enlighten me, O infinite goodness! Let me know my great ingratitude. Ah, if only I had never offended you!³⁶

Don Bosco's aim in *Devotion* is to foster a conversion to God, not to offer detached philosophical musings; and he seeks to stimulate that conversion by conveying a certain sense of urgency. He calls to mind the reality of death and the eternal punishments that divine justice will inexorably inflict on those who persist in their guilt: "God punishes sin in the next life," but "the time of mercy and forgiveness lasts so long as the soul is united with the body."³⁷ "God could have let you die right after you committed your first sin. But he has preserved you in life to show you his mercy, and he now offers you his grace."³⁸ The evils that are inflicted on a person in this earthly life can be vindictive punishments for the person involved, but all of them have a medicinal value for humanity. They contain a call to conversion and pardon, which God will surely grant to anyone who repents and turns to him.

The theme of divine providence is not developed much in the writings of Don Bosco, but it is no less a part of his religious sentiment. It tends to surface mainly as a basis for confidence in tight economic situations. But it is also pre-

³⁵ Nicolas-Sylvestre Bergier, *Tableau de la miséricorde divine tiré de l'Écriture Sainte, ou motifs de confiance en Dieu* (Besançon, 1821); the UPS has a copy with the inscription: "Amelie Piosasco née Panissera—Lotterie de D. Bosco." The initiatives of Pius Bruno Lanteri (1759-1830) and *Amicizia Cattolica* were responsible for the reissuing of a work by Alessandro di S. Francesco, OCD (1558-1629), *Manuale pauperum* (Turin: Marietti, 1821?). Published anonymously was the work by Giuseppe Loggero, OMV (d. 1847), *Tesori di confidenza in Dio, ossia compendio del manuale de' poveri coll'aggiunta dello scioglimento delle difficoltà a conforto de' peccatori* (Pinerolo, 1831), 2 vols. It, too, draws on Bergier, and on the anti-Jansenist Bp. Jean-Joseph Languet de Gergy (1677-1753), *Trattato della confidenza nella misericordia di Dio* (Venice, 1780; Milan, 1836).

³⁶ *Misericordia*, p. 37. St. Alphonsus, *Preparation for Death*, cons. 16, pt. 1, "Affections and prayers," AW 1:165: "Yes, my God... I love Thee with my whole heart, and I feel more regret for the outrages I have offered to Thee, than for any evil that could have befallen me. Ah! enlighten me, O infinite Goodness; make me sensible of the wrongs I have done Thee... Ah! that I had never offended Thee, my Jesus..."

³⁷ *Maggio*, day 20, p. 118.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

sent in his contemplation of human events in his own life and in the lives of others, the Church, and his own Salesian Congregation.³⁹

2. Don Bosco and traditionalism

Don Bosco's convictions about our knowledge of God stand out more clearly if we compare them with those expressed in the literary milieu of Turin that was familiar to him. Needless to say, we must not overlook the connection of such convictions with spirituality or the simple, educational nature of the texts that document Don Bosco's mentality.

The following authors may be considered noteworthy: Father Alexander Tassoni (1749-1818) and Bishop Dennis Anthony de Frayssinous (1765-1841), whom Don Bosco claimed to have read as a seminarian; Cardinal Caesar William LaLuzerne (1738-1821), whose pastorals were published in the Library of Good Books; Joachim Ventura (1792-1861) and August Nicolas (1807-1888), cited by Don Bosco in *The Wonders of the Mother of God under the Title of Mary Help of Christians* (1868). These were writers of great repute in their day, apologists infected with fideism and traditionalism to a greater or lesser degree.⁴⁰ Present in their minds were the crisis of Catholicism in Europe, the convulsions of the French Revolution, and the eighteenth century with its corrosive criticism of the faith and its exaggerated esteem for reason. Reacting to the deism of the Enlightenment, they were led to radically opposite views. It was not true that positive religion is useless, that it teaches obscure and incomprehensible dogmas, that it is the fruit of ignorance and superstition, that it is an obstacle to the progress and happiness of peoples and nations.

Nevertheless this criticism of rationalistic optimism led them to accept the skeptical strain of deism itself. Granting that human beings are capable of realizing the existence of a creator God, they wondered what else human beings are capable of deducing. Writes Tassoni:

As soon as one acquires knowledge of God, one feels impelled by nature itself to offer homage, respect, and worship to this sovereign deity. But there is no proportion between human being and God. How and in what way, then, will I be able to honor him? Who will assure me that I am rendering him something pleasing? What sacrifice will be most accepted by him?⁴¹

³⁹ Very eloquent on this point is the choice of episodes in *Indice MB*, pp. 359-60, s.v. "Provvidenza."

⁴⁰ Informative are the headings that the DTC devotes to Frayssinous, LaLuzerne, Nicolas, and Ventura. Also useful is Louis LeGouillou, *L'évolution religieuse de la pensée de F. Lamennais* (Paris, 1966).

⁴¹ Alessandro Maria Tassoni, *La religione dimostrata e difesa*, 1 (Turin: Alliana, 1824), bk. 1, ch. 10, p. 144.

Frayssinous proceeds similarly. From reason and the common sentiment of humanity, I come to know that a supreme intelligence exists, but what more do I know about God? “What is his way of existing? What is his nature? How do the divine perfections fit together?”⁴² The truth deals a deadly blow to any and all human presumptions:

Human beings are placed between existence and nothingness, as it were, and so their faculties have many points of similarity with their divine Author; but at the same time they experience the imperfection and wretchedness of any created thing. If they are intelligent, their intelligence is circumscribed within narrow limits. If they are not absolutely powerless to arrive at truth, they are not permitted to see everything or know everything.⁴³

Cardinal LaLuzerne writes in a similar vein:

Examine the theology of the profound geniuses who enlightened the universe, of the philosophers so admired by their contemporaries and later generations whom unbelievers now proudly claim to be following. Look at their uncertainties, contradictions, and disgraceful mistakes about God, divine providence, the origin, nature, and destiny of the soul, the first principle, and the supreme good. Their ignorance in matters of religion is as great as their scholarly knowledge of other matters. Of all the discoveries made in the search for heavenly truths, there is only one of which the human mind can boast: i.e., the confession made by the great philosophers of their impotence, of the need for a divine revelation.⁴⁴

Religion, concludes Tassoni bluntly, is not only possible but absolutely necessary.⁴⁵ The perversion of religion and morality is what took place outside the tradition of the patriarchs and the Jewish people, who became the trustees of the primitive revelation. This is used by the traditionalists as an obvious proof of the inherent inability of human reason to grasp the basic truths about God and eternal salvation.

Tracing the literature from which such writers as Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821), Frayssinous, Ventura, and Tassoni drew, we soon find ourselves on the road to Port-Royal. We find its Augustinian pessimism about the possibilities of nature, e.g., as expressed by someone like James Joseph Duguet (1649-1733) and then used in even more exaggerated form by Archbishop Anthony Malvin de Montazet (1713-1788) in his pastoral letter on the origins of unbelief and

⁴² Denis Frayssinous, *Difesa del Cristianesimo*, 1:67: “Qual è la sua maniera di esistere?” It is Berkeley’s question that Frayssinous puts forward once again, but without giving a direct answer. He does so further on, and his answer is that of traditionalism.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1:55-56.

⁴⁴ C.G. de LaLuzerne, *Istruzione pastorale sopra la eccellenza della religione* (Turin: Botta, 1849), p. 20.

⁴⁵ Tassoni, p. 144.

the foundations of religion.⁴⁶ The same pessimism was taken over by Antoninus Valsecchi, OP (1708-1791), in various works that became an arsenal of arguments for minor Italian apologists, e.g., Tassoni and the anonymous author of *Cenni sulle principali verità della cattolica religione*, from whom Don Bosco drew for his first draft of *The Religiously Instructed Catholic*.⁴⁷ At the roots of nineteenth-century traditionalism we can find the fideism of Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) or the pessimism of Peter Nicole (1625-1695). Both of them reflect the skepticism of Montaigne and its more immoderate version in Peter Charron (1541-1603).⁴⁸

In Don Bosco's pages the traditionalist element surfaces clearly in his insistence on the necessity of divine revelation. But he does not go so far as to say that God's nature and attributes are unknowable or that human beings do not sufficiently sense by nature the proper sentiments that should be felt for their Creator and Lord:

Natural religion certainly leads humanity to knowledge of many truths, but there are a whole host of truths that would have remained unknown to humanity forever without divine revelation. For example, natural religion tells us that we human beings should offer worship to God, but it does not tell us adequately how or what worship we should offer. So we see that many peoples, guided only by natural religion, have fallen into the most shameful errors, even to the point of worshipping filthy animals as God... In Greece and other places human victims were sacrificed to the sun, moon, and stars. In China children were killed when there were too many of them. Elsewhere human flesh has been eaten, and similar barbarities have been practiced in places where people were estranged from the principles of revelation.⁴⁹

In the pages of *The Religiously Instructed Catholic*, as in those of the traditionalists, we do not find a clear-cut distinction between the philosophical realm and the historical realm, between metaphysics and history; and the approach is polemical. A neo-Thomist philosopher might well have been able to criticize this fairly illegitimate and unfavorable extrapolation of positive theology and sacred history in the area of philosophical inquiry. At the root of this po-

⁴⁶ Antoine de Montazet, *Istruzione pastorale di monsignor arcivescovo di Lione sopra le sorgenti dell'incredulità e sopra li fondamenti della religione* (Naples and Vercelli, 1778), dedicated to the bishop of Novara, Marcus Aurelius Balbis Bertone (1725-89). For the dependence on Duguet, see Pietro Stella, "Jacques-Joseph Duguet (1649-1733) e le sue fortune in Italia," *Salesianum* 27 (1965), 638-39.

⁴⁷ (Alba: Chiantore e Sansoldi, 1849). Bossuet, Frayssinous, Valsecchi, and Tassoni are specifically cited in the Preface, p. 6.

⁴⁸ See H. Busson, *La pensée religieuse française de Charron à Pascal* (Paris, 1933). Anna Maria Battista, *Alle origini del pensiero politico libertino: Montaigne e Charron* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1966).

⁴⁹ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 1, trat. 3, p. 19.

tential or actual confusion, one can glimpse not only the reaction against Enlightenment thinking but also the serious problem posed to the Catholic philosopher by original sin. Granting that human beings in history are somehow debilitated, one must then try to deduce the characteristics proper to human nature in its pure state—a wholly abstract endeavor.

Don Bosco moved well beyond these conundrums and his earlier line of argument in his reworking of *The Religiously Instructed Catholic* (1870-1883). He reworks his proofs for the existence of God in three basic categories: the metaphysical argument, the physical argument, and the moral argument. His source was a new one, a book by Canon Henry Giovannini.⁵⁰ The metaphysical argument includes the principles of causality, sufficient reason, and reasoning from the contingent to the necessary; much play is given to the example of the chicken and the egg. The physical argument is the argument from order, from the watch to the watchmaker. The moral argument is based on the fact that “all peoples” have always recognized the existence of the divinity.

As he has done before, Don Bosco then stresses the necessity of religion and revelation. His comments on revelation are now firmly rooted in Christian theology derived from revealed data, and they are clearly marked off from what he has written earlier on the origin of the idea of God in and through reasoning.

The necessity of revelation, writes Don Bosco, derives from the fact that God has destined human beings for a “supernatural final end.” To reach that end, they must profess a fair number of truths that are above their natural understanding. The necessity of revelation also derives from the fact that

human intelligence, clouded by original sin, is not capable of knowing all the truths needed for its moral guidance without mixing in serious errors. So God graciously deigned to reveal the truths of the supernatural order and also many truths of the natural order.⁵¹

The greater clarity of this exposition, the distinction between two kinds of revealed truths, was due more than anything else to a major event. The First Vatican Council had condemned traditionalism. This had led to clarifications in Catholic theology and catechesis. Don Bosco’s direct source for these clarifications was Giovannini’s catechetical work.⁵²

What impact might traditionalism have had on the religious outlook of the nineteenth century? Here I shall leave abstract considerations aside and focus

⁵⁰ Enrico Giovannini, *I doveri cristiani esposti alla studiosa italiana* (Bologna, 1872). He borrows extensively from Ambroise Guillois, *Spiegazione storica, dogmatica, morale, liturgica e canonica del Catechismo* (Prato, 1863, 1865²). Both authors are recommended to SDBs by GC2 (Sept. 1880): *Deliberazioni* (Turin, 1882), p. 68.

⁵¹ Bosco, *Il cattolico nel secolo* (Turin, 1883), p. 35.

⁵² Compare, e.g., DB’s “senza mescolamento di gravi errori” with Giovannini’s “mescolanza di molti errori” (*Doveri cristiani*, p. 38).

on more concrete matters. The authors noted above, it seems to me, have a tendency to expand the boundaries of revelation. Revelation takes in humanity, going beyond the special revelation entrusted to the Jewish people and the New Testament generation. The new people of God, the Church, continues to be the magnetic field for God's extraordinary interventions: revelations, miracles, predictions, oracles of all sorts, and heavenly apparitions. In this predisposition toward prodigies and prophecies, we can see their reaction against the suspiciousness aroused by rationalism in the eighteenth century. Note these remarks by August Nicolas:

Confronting miracles that occur later than the Gospel, we are in exactly the same situation as when we confront any other historical fact.

Where they seem to be sufficiently established, we should acknowledge them without any difficulty. Indeed our inclination should be to vouch more openly for these testimonies to the power and goodness of the God we worship... to be more afraid of giving up our belief in real miracles than of admitting some dubious or fake ones.⁵³

It is in God's very nature, maintained Nicolas, to keep giving indisputable signs and proofs of his economy of salvation for human beings, right up to the end of time. Their frequency or infrequency is due to many factors. One important factor is the presence or absence of a lively faith:

In our day miracles are rare because faith is rare. The Son of man no longer worked miracles when he was in the hands of the scribes and Pharisees, or when he appeared before Pilate and Herod. He no longer worked miracles during his passion, he who had worked so many in the midst of the believing multitudes of Judea. And so he hardly works any miracles in our time, though he worked so many in the Middle Ages. His divinity abstains from them fully to rest or punish us. But let him rise again, let holiness reappear, and the greatest miracles will be accomplished.⁵⁴

We find a similar tendency in Don Bosco. God's hand has not been foreshortened. Holiness and extraordinary things can explode in the Church at any moment. The more hearts burn with faith and love of God, the less surprised we should be to find God's omnipotence being manifested in prodigies. Insofar as God has extraordinary plans, his intervention is all the more likely.⁵⁵ Indeed it is unwise to initiate extraordinary undertakings in the Church without the accompaniment of extraordinary signs from God. Salesian tradition reports a significant incident dealing with this point:

⁵³ Auguste Nicolas, *La Vergine Maria vivente nella Chiesa: Nuovi studi filosofici sul Cristianesimo* (Turin: Biblioteca Ecclesiastica, 1863), pt. 2, bk. 3, ch. 8, p. 159.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁵⁵ I shall examine the role of miracles in DB's religious outlook in ch. VII, sec. 4.

The Oratory was visited for a few days by Father Seraphim Allievi [1819-1892]... Father Allievi was planning to open a home for derelict boys and to found a religious congregation to look after them, and so he sought Don Bosco's advice. Well aware of the serious difficulties involved in such an undertaking, Don Bosco asked him—for his own sake—if he had ever experienced anything of a supernatural character which could assure him that this was God's will. Father Allievi answered negatively. Thereupon Don Bosco dissuaded him from the attempt, though he encouraged him to continue unflinchingly in his work.⁵⁶

3. *God in Don Bosco's own life*

The conviction of being impelled by a very singular divine urging dominated Don Bosco's life. It lay at the root of his boldest resolves, ready to burst out in uncommon acts. In Don Bosco the belief that he was the Lord's instrument for a very special mission was strong and deep. We learn from his own lips what he felt when he noted the element of the miraculous in his life, thanks to the report of Father Joseph Vespignani (1854-1932):

One day we ventured to ask Don Bosco about his dreams and extraordinary gifts... Smiling and stopping to look at us, as if to give things a serious turn, he said, "Tell me, what could a poor fellow like Don Bosco do if some special help did not come from heaven every minute? I assure you that the responsive disposition of our boys was enough to provoke miracles."

It was then that he told us about the miracle of the hosts. On one of the most solemn feasts, Don Bosco informed the sacristan that a new ciborium of hosts would have to be consecrated for the general communion; but the sacristan forgot about it. When the moment came for Don Bosco to take the ciborium out of the tabernacle, he took off the lid and found only about fifteen hosts inside. He began to give communion to the boys with these, thinking that once they were finished he would soon get the others he thought were in the back of the tabernacle. He finished a railing of communicants and began a second one, noting that fresh hosts were flowing from his hand without interruption.

"I began to tremble and feel confused, seeing the hosts increase in my fingers. I went through a large crowd of communicants and had hosts to spare at the end. When I got back to the altar, I saw that there wasn't another ciborium. It was then that I realized that the Lord had wanted to reward all those good boys. Otherwise they would have lost out on holy communion.

⁵⁶ BM 7:36. This report was used by Pietro Ricaldone (1870-1951), "Fedeltà a Don Bosco santo," *Atti del Capitolo Superiore*, no. 74 (Mar. 24, 1936), pp. 8-9.

Like the multitude in the desert, they would have lacked strength because they would have lacked the aid of divine grace.”⁵⁷

Feelings of deep emotion or trepidation were sometimes mixed with a sense of joy or careful concern not to show anything that might spark derision. But on the whole, Don Bosco saw and felt a guarantee from on high. It gave rise in him to the religious attitude of the biblical servant of God, the prophet who cannot evade God’s wishes. It was not merely reverential fear but also a profound conviction that God the Father was enormously kind to his children. We have solid testimony to his flood of tears when he celebrated his first Mass in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. It was 1887. Don Bosco was old and dying, and he had spent more than five years trying to raise money to build that basilica. He did not see the crowd of faithful around him. His mind went back to the past, to the voice that he had heard in a dream when he was nine or ten: “In due time everything will be clear to you.” Finally, Don Bosco came to see that the Lord had made use of him, a poor, obscure little shepherd from Becchi, to accomplish great things.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Giuseppe Vespignani, *Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco (1876-1877)* (Turin: SEI, 1930), pp. 33-34.

⁵⁸ MB 18:340-41.

II

THE HUMAN BEING

For Don Bosco the human being is not simply a soul, although his preference and predilection is consideration of the human soul. In the whole of creation the human being is viewed as the most perfect of visible creatures,¹ second in perfection only to the angels, who are pure spirits. This graded ranking is made clear in his account of creation, which starts with lower creatures and then moves on to human beings and the angels. It is also made clear in his account of sin, which moves from the angels and humanity to all creatures.²

The human being is a composite of soul and body, and sometimes Don Bosco pretty much says that.³ More often, however, he says it more simply in his apologetic and spiritual writings. The human being is endowed with a soul and a body. That is the message he repeats in one form or another. Typical is his statement at the beginning of his consideration of the end of the human being in *The Companion of Youth*: “Consider, my son, that this body and soul of yours were given to you by God without any merit on your part.”⁴ Here we can see the simple elements that form the backbone of his spiritual writing: the soul, the body, and God; himself the writer, often represented by a reader or narrator in his books; and the person reading the book or listening to the dialogue. The diverse attitudes and stances of these elements, which may even clash with one another, help to highlight the sacred drama.

¹ *Giov. prov.*, pt. 1 [sec. 1], art. 1, p. 9. *Storia sacra* (Turin: Speirani, 1847), epoch 1, ch. 1, p. 13.

² This scheme is not confined to his *Storia sacra* and *Maniera*. It is substantially present as well in *Misericordia, Maggio*, and the compendium (*Compendio di ciò che un cristiano deve sapere, credere, e praticare*) in *La chiave del paradiso*.

³ “The human being is made up of two substances...”: sermon on death which begins, “Se io potessi...” [1842], AS 132 Prediche A2, f. 1v.

⁴ *Giov. prov.*, pt. 1, seven considerations, 1, “End of the Human Being,” p. 32. And in *Maggio*, day 2: “God has given us the gift of a soul...”

Don Bosco makes clear his concern for me and my soul, his fear that I may forget the essential aims of my existence. Stopping to listen and engage in self-examination, I tremble when I ponder my past and present conduct and what it means for my body and soul. I say to myself, “My soul should be the object of my actions. It is a matter of eternal happiness or eternal unhappiness, so everything should be done to make sure I am saved.” Then I turn to God: “My God, pardon me my sins.” Or else I am urged to speak to myself as follows: “So say to yourself: I have a soul. If I lose that, I have lost everything...”⁵

This way of expressing himself in his writings is something that Don Bosco picked up from his own favorite authors. In his meditation on the end of the human being, Saint Alphonsus Liguori begins the same way:

Consider, O my soul! that the being which you enjoy was given to you by God: he created you to his own image, without any merit of your part.⁶

Consider [Christian] and say within yourself: I have a soul, and if I lose it all is lost; I have a soul, and if in losing it I were to gain the whole world, what would it profit me? I have a soul, but if I lose it, although I were to arrive at the highest pinnacle of glory, of what advantage will it be to me?... Since, then, I have a soul, and only one, to save...I ought to endeavor to save it. This is an affair of the highest importance to me.⁷

1. *The soul*

If the human being is worth more than the other visible creatures, the reason is that it has a soul. The soul is the breath of God: “When God created the soul, he breathed on the human being and gave it the spirit of life.”⁸ It is the soul that turns the human being into the image and likeness of God. And since human beings have received this divine breath, they also possess the essential prerequisites of the spirit. The faculties of the soul—memory, intellect, and will—make this clear.

Don Bosco more readily argues from reason, the faculty of thinking. It is a gift we possess “by means of the soul.” He writes: “The fact that through the soul we have the capacity to create ideas, combine them, and produce certain masterpieces that elevate humanity above all other creatures” proves that the soul “is the symbol or countersign of God’s intelligence.”⁹ The fact that no created thing contents human beings demonstrates that their will and emotions have

⁵ *Giov. prov.*, pt. 1, seven considerations, p. 34.

⁶ St. Alphonsus, *Maxims of Eternity*, “The End of Man,” I, in *Preparation for Death*, AW 1:387.

⁷ *Ibid.*, “The Importance of our Last End,” III, p. 392.

⁸ *Giov. prov.*, p. 9.

⁹ *Maggio*, day 2, p. 24.

been created to find rest in God alone. Thus this innate tendency also makes clear the superior nature of the human being vis-à-vis all other visible creatures.

The soul is immortal. This image and likeness of God “would be incomplete if it did not receive from the Creator the chief prerogative: immortality.”¹⁰

When God created the soul, he breathed on the human being and gave it the spirit of life. This breath is simple and spiritual, made in the image and likeness of God, who is eternal and immortal. Hence our soul must be immortal.¹¹

The soul is free:

God gave our soul freedom, i.e., the capacity to choose good or evil, guaranteeing a reward for doing good and threatening punishment for choosing evil. And since this...does not occur in the present life, God set aside eternity, where those who do good will be recompensed with a reward that will never come to an end, and where those who transgress the divine law will be punished with an eternal torment.¹²

2. *The body*

Undoubtedly the body, too, is a gift from God. Don Bosco says so in discussing the creation of the human being. In *The Month of May* he writes that God “created the body with those beautiful qualities we contemplate in it.”¹³ Once again we are asked to contemplate something that has been given to us and now is ours, forgetting for the moment that the body is an essential component of human nature. In one of his early sermons Don Bosco says:

The human being is made up of two substances. One is spiritual. Because it thinks, reasons, and judges, it has to be without parts into which it might be divided; hence it is immortal of its very nature. This spiritual substance called soul is united with another, material substance...¹⁴

Thus Don Bosco ideally presents us with both body and soul, united until death intervenes. Death is “the separation of the soul from the body.”¹⁵

¹⁰ Ibid. See also *Maniera*, pp. 8-9.

¹¹ *Maggio*, pp. 24-25.

¹² Ibid., p. 25.

¹³ Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁴ Sermon on death; see n. 3, above.

¹⁵ *Giov. prov.*, seven considerations, “Death,” p. 36: “Death is a separation of the soul from the body, with a total abandonment of the things of this world.” DB summarizes his sermon on death: “It is an absolute and total separation from the things of this world... The soul has to leave the body, with a total abandonment of this world.”

Death, which means the “dissolution” of human existence,¹⁶ makes clear the form of union between body and soul. Although “they depend on each other,”¹⁷ the body is properly the instrument of the soul. Like a garment or material thing, the body is something that belongs to us and serves us; but it does not deserve our greatest attachment or devotion. Compared to the soul and its worth, the body must always take a subordinate place: “True, this body is a fine gift to us from God, given to cover our soul; but humility is the most beautiful ornament of the soul.”¹⁸

The body is not a merely passive instrument, however, as the soul comes to realize in the course of our mortal life. The soul finds itself under the influence of bodily instincts and passions, which may or may not be ordered and kept under control by the powers of the soul. At the moment of death the soul reveals its tendency to rise into a realm that is not the body’s, as if the soul itself possessed some sort of corporeality enmeshed in that of the body. The body endures agony at the separation because “anxiety and oppression” are part and parcel of the efforts which the soul must naturally make “in breaking its ties with the body.”¹⁹ It is at the moment of death that the soul is seen to be something existing within the body. At that moment “my last sigh shall summon my soul from my body.”²⁰

In all these expressions we can see traces of the Platonism that found its way into Christian language, and Christian spiritual writing in particular. Over the centuries it managed to resist the suggestive influence of the Aristotelian language that prevailed in tracts of scholastic theology.

The soul is not called a spark of the spirit enclosed in the prison of the body. Under Christian influence it is called a divine breath, a created entity defined in biblical terms as the image and likeness of God. But Platonism does intervene to spell out the terms of this likeness. The human being is not like God because it has a body or is a composite of two principles. Rather, it is like God because one of these two principles is an immortal spirit capable of thinking and willing.

Traces of Platonism can also be detected in a maxim of Saint Philip Neri (1515-1595) that Don Bosco made his own: “Don’t treat the body delicately.”²¹

¹⁶ Note his “Litany for a Happy Death” in *Giov. prov.*, p. 142: “Lord Jesus, ... receive my last tear, the sign of my dissolution...” (SBPB, p. 127).

¹⁷ Sermon on death.

¹⁸ *Maggio*, day 3, p. 31.

¹⁹ *Savio*, p. 114. Death without suffering is a special grace, as DB brings out in the case of his pupil Michael Magone (1845-59): “There was no agony of any sort; no agitation, pain, anguish, or other suffering that is naturally experienced in the terrible separation of the soul from the body. I don’t know what to call the death of Magone except a joyous sleep bearing his soul from the pains of life to blessed eternity” (SWSJB:123).

²⁰ “Litany for a Happy Death,” *Giov. prov.*, p. 142 (SBPB, p. 128).

²¹ Here, too, the body is regarded as something entrusted to our care and management. See Bosco, *Porta teco cristiano, ovvero avvisi importanti intorno ai doveri del cri-*

Such traces are also evident in a maxim of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga (1568-1591) found in one of Don Bosco's sources for his *Six Sundays*:

No one has ever been heard to reach the heights of perfection without driving the body there as one would a stubborn beast, with beatings and similar penances... When someone urges us not to use strict measures against our body, we should reply that God has given the body into our custody as one would a slave who has rebelled repeatedly against his master.²²

In Don Bosco's presentation the images of beast and slave, which bring out the difference in nature between the body and the person who receives it in custody, are replaced by an appeal to Jesus Christ as the model for every Christian: "When someone tells you it is not proper to be so strict with our body, reply that one who does not choose to suffer with Jesus Christ will not be able to rejoice with Jesus Christ."²³

The antithetical approach to the body remains present in Don Bosco. We must act against the body, convinced that it is recalcitrant and hence deserves to be treated strictly. While such language is usual with respect to the body, yet it is rare with respect to the soul, even when he is talking about the latter's more diabolical tendencies. This way of viewing things in Christian thought clearly reflects the theology of sin and its consequences. Don Bosco's way of expressing himself, like that of other spiritual writers, is not in terms of pure philosophical speculation. It reflects awareness of a factor due to divine revelation or a primitive tradition.

stiano (Turin, 1858), p. 34: General reminders for young people by St. Philip Neri. They are found in many little works addressed to young people. The following are a few such works in DB's milieu: [Giovanni Battista Isnardi, OMV (1807-62)], *Voce angelica, ossia l'angelo custode che ammaestra una figlia* (Pinerolo, 1835), p. 68; reissued by the Salesian press (S. Benigno Canavese, 1889); [S.A. Burzio], *Un mazzolin di fiori ai fanciulli ed alle fanciulle, ossia antiveleno cristiano* (Turin: Paravia, 1836), p. 243; [Carlo Ferreri (1810-71)], *Regole di vita e buone massime per la gioventù studiosa* (Turin: Paravia, 1840), pp. 69-71 (some reminders from St. Philip Neri); there are admonitions of St. Philip Neri to young people in Bp. Louis Abelly (1603-91), *Indirizzo per procurare utilmente la salute delle anime* (Turin: Botta, 1850), ch. 1, disp. 20-21, pp. 278-79 (Library of Good Books), and in Giovanni Battista Pagani (1806-60), *Considerazioni sulla S.S. Eucaristia e pratiche devote per vivere cristianamente* (Novara, n.d. [1850s]), pp. 83-85.

²² Pasquale DeMattei, *Il giovane angelico san Luigi Gonzaga proposto in esemplare di ben vivere... A celebrare con frutto le sei domeniche* (Genoa, 1843), pp. 26-27 (Sunday 3).

²³ *Sei domen.*, Sunday 2, "Practice," in *Giov. prov.*, p. 59.

3. *The heart*

It is not unusual to find Don Bosco using another set of expressions that concentrate on the heart. Such comments are not confined to his pedagogical works, where he stresses that one of the aims of the educator should be to win over the heart of the student so as to be able to educate him effectively.²⁴ What did Don Bosco mean by “speaking the language of the heart”? That may well be an interesting question, but here I shall restrict myself to what he meant by it in a strictly religious and theological context.

Don Bosco speaks of the heart as being a part of us—*our* heart. It is not simply an organ of love but a central part of our existence. The heart wills, desires, comprehends, understands, hears what is said to it, reflects, moves, is inflamed with love. This mode of expression is common to many peoples and cultures. In Christianity it is perennially nurtured by Sacred Scripture, and it found its way down to Don Bosco through classic authors and other sources, e.g., Saint Augustine, Saint Gregory the Great (540?-604), Saint Bernard (1091-1153), Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), Cardinal Bérulle, the literature of Port-Royal, and writings on the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.²⁵

For the spiritual theology of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, the heart is not just the symbol of love. It also has the ability to *think*, but its perceptiveness is fraught with emotion and desire rather than being a matter of sheer reason. Don Bosco has a young person pray as follows: “Saint Aloysius, ...grant that in the future my heart may think of nothing but the things of heaven and ever despise those of earth.”²⁶ The parallel between “think of” (*pensare*) and “despise” (*avere a vile*) makes it clear that he is using “think” in the sense of “value” or “prize” (*avere in pregio*).

Prizing the things of heaven and despising those of earth may legitimately be considered equivalent to another pair of expressions: detaching the heart from the things of earth and esteeming only those of heaven. We find them in his *Six Sundays*. His source was not an Augustinian devotee of Port-Royal but the Jesuit provincial of Naples in the middle of the eighteenth century, Paschal De-Mattei (1705-1779). Don Bosco writes:

If we also want to detach our hearts from the things of this world and attach ourselves to the things of God, we should begin by despising the earthly

²⁴ Such expressions crop up frequently in “The Preventive System.” See BM 4:380-85; e.g., no. 1, p. 381; no. 4, p. 382. Cf. *Inaugurazione del patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare* (Turin, 1877), pp. 25-26.

²⁵ See A. Guillaumont, “Les sens des noms du coeur dans l’antiquité,” in *Le coeur (Études carmélitaines* 13 [1950], 41-81), and other essays in the same anthology. Also see the bibliography in A. Hortelano, *Teología del corazón: Estudio sobre la metodología teológica afectivo-práctica, vista a través de Vicente Contenson* (Madrid, 1957), pp. 114-17.

²⁶ *Sei domen.*, Sunday 4, in *Giov. prov.*, pp. 62-63.

goods that stand in our way and prizing only those things that will help lead us to blessed eternity. Like Saint Aloysius, we should say, “What is not eternal is nothing at all”: *Quod aeternum non est nihil est.*²⁷

This general detachment presupposes detachment of the heart, which is also described as purification. DeMattei writes about “purity of mind.” In negative terms it means “purifying thoughts and emotions by detaching them from the filthy things of this world.” In positive terms it means the purity that “unites thoughts and emotions in God, the very font of purity.” The first stage raises us “above the coarse vapors of this lowly region.” The second stage raises us still higher, “where the air is purer and the mind more enveloped in the warmth and light of the sun.”²⁸

Thoughts and emotions are mentioned together because purification really covers both. Another author known to Don Bosco was Archbishop Anthony Martini, who translated and commented on biblical passages. In his commentary on Matthew, Martini notes that three degrees of understanding are possible with respect to the truths of the kingdom of heaven: understanding of the letter, understanding of the spirit, and understanding of the heart.²⁹ Combining the comments of Martini and DeMattei, we could say that understanding of the heart occurs when the heart is pure, freed from the muck and mire of earth and filled with love for the things of heaven.³⁰

Writing about the deceased Oratory pupil Francis Besucco (1850-1864), Don Bosco says, “His heart was emptied of the things of this world, and God filled it with His graces.”³¹ Don Bosco got the expression from an account of Francis’s childhood by Father Francis Pepino (d. 1899), his pastor, but it can be found elsewhere. Saint Alphonsus, for example, tells us that perfection consists in detaching the heart from the things of earth and putting it in conformity with the will of God. He warns us that “whoever continues bound by slightest fondness to things of earth can never rise to a perfect union with God.” But

²⁷ *Giov. prov.*, p. 62.

²⁸ DeMattei, *Il giovane angelico*, Sunday 4, pp. 40-41.

²⁹ This is how Martini translates Mt 13:11: “To you has been granted to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but to them it has not been granted.” Then he comments, “It is clear that Christ is not talking about understanding of the letter or even understanding of the spirit, but what he elsewhere with Isaiah calls understanding of the heart. Through the latter, the truths of religion are not only learned but loved; and he is saying that this understanding is granted only to a few.” I have ventured an exegesis of this expression in my article, “Il vangelo di Matteo tradotto e annotato da Antonio Martini: Derivazioni e fortune,” in *Salesianum* 29 (1967), 345.

³⁰ DeMattei speaks of understanding the things of heaven with the following contrast: “If you are too much enamored of things here below, it is because your heart is too mired in the earth, too heavy and weighted down, so it is dragged down to earth, the center of heavy things.” See *Il giovane angelico*, Sunday 4, p. 42.

³¹ Cornell, p. 182. The text from which DB transcribes is in AS 133 Besucco 1, p. 17.

“when the heart is detached from creatures, the divine love immediately enters and fills it.”³²

Detachment, then, is both a human and a divine work. Close to the image of rising above the polluted atmosphere of earth to the pure air of heaven is another image: the ebb and flow of divine and human interaction. Grace flows in to put down concupiscence, and concupiscence takes over to drive away grace. Stressing the work of the human being, the writer notes that God steps in to fill the heart with heavenly graces after the human being has emptied it of earthly attachments. Stressing God’s work, the writer notes that God gives the gift of his grace gradually until it prevails in the human heart. The penetration of divine grace is described as an action that starts outside, that softens and enlightens the heart,³³ that turns it toward its connatural axis: the realities of heaven. Our “restless heart” then finds as much satisfaction as is possible on earth: the fullness of divine love and the hope of reaching the goal toward which it instinctively strives.

It is a bit surprising to find that Don Bosco says of the soul what Saint Augustine says of the heart. Don Bosco writes that the soul is the invisible entity

that we sense in ourselves and that ever tends to rise to God; the intelligent entity that thinks and reasons, that cannot find its happiness on earth. Hence in the midst of the riches...and pleasures of earth, it is ever restless until it finds rest in God, because only God can make it happy.³⁴

If we wanted to say that soul and heart were equivalent for Don Bosco, we would have to find something that suggested as much or stated that explicitly. Instead we find soul and heart juxtaposed in more than one text. In *The Month of May* Don Bosco asks, “Have you not perhaps invested your heart and soul in love for creatures, riches, honors, and certain illicit pleasures?”³⁵ As we have already seen, at the moment of death the gasps of the heart force the soul to leave the body.³⁶ Now in Augustinian terminology the heart is the seat in which the soul displays its spiritual activities of thought and emotion, so it is very

³² St. Alphonsus, *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, in *The Holy Eucharist*, AW 6:474, 375.

³³ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 1, trat., 1, p. 12: “The Good God, to soften the heart of that sovereign, made him feel the weight of his power...” On the divine enlightenment that removes the blindness of the heart, see the *Imitation of Christ*, bk. 1, ch. 1.

³⁴ *Maggio*, day 2, pp. 23-24.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, day 12, p. 77. Such questions are common in this genre of writing. DeMattei, e.g., asks: “Do these things, which are vain and false, deserve my love? These are their two characteristic features: Vanity, they are worthless nothings; and they are false and deceiving in pretending to be a big deal. They are *Vanitas et mendacium*” (*Il giovane angelico*, p. 42). A popular dirty in Italy went: “Vanità di vanità, Tutto il mondo e ciò che ha, Ogni cosa è vanità (Vanity of vanities, The whole world and what it has, Everything is vanity).” For Piedmont, see *Libro d’oro, ossia via del Paradiso insegnata dai missionari coll’aggiunta delle lodi spirituali che si cantano nelle S. Missioni* (Turin: Marietti, 1840), p. 136.

³⁶ *Giov. prov.*, p. 142.

possible that Don Bosco did not fully realize the import of the terms that he had assimilated, terms that derived from an anthropology that was not Aristotelian.

Finally, for Don Bosco as for Saint Alphonsus and many writers of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, there are no middle roads. Human beings are faced with a stark alternative: to give themselves to God or to creatures, to have a heart attached to creatures or detached from them, to be dedicated to God or to worldly things:

Love any object of earth whatever, you will still find a void in your heart if you do not love God... If you had two hearts or could divide the heart you have in two, then you could invest one part in loving God and the other in loving the world. But no, says God, you shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul, and your whole mind.³⁷

“Giving oneself to God” can be regarded as equivalent to “giving one’s heart to God” because giving one’s heart means total giving of self, and giving oneself to God—Creator, Lord, and Father—means serving him. The heart finds joy and delight in the service of God. One who serves the devil, on the other hand, “no matter how much he tries to act content, will always have a sad heart telling him: You are unhappy because you are God’s enemy.”³⁸

Giving oneself to God does not mean total renunciation of earthly goods and pleasures. Even when he borrows from Saint Alphonsus, Don Bosco tones down his expressions. For example, Saint Alphonsus writes, “You did not come into this world for the sake of enjoyment, to grow rich and powerful, to eat, drink, and sleep like irrational animals, but solely to love your God...” Don Bosco puts it this way: “You are not in the world *solely* to enjoy pleasures, to get rich, to eat, drink, and sleep as do brute animals; your aim is to love your God.”³⁹ Here Don Bosco, more than Saint Alphonsus, makes clear the proper ordering of earthly aims to our ultimate aim and the legitimacy of seeing oneself in the world also to enjoy pleasures, to get rich, and to eat and drink, not as brute animals but as rational creatures subordinating secondary ends to their ultimate end.

Earth assumes its classic role as a place of passage. Saint Alphonsus invites us to consider the present life as a “journey to eternity”:

³⁷ *Maggio*, day 12, p. 77. Fr. Hippolyte Delehaye (1859-1941) claimed that this antithesis was due to the simplifying tendencies of the popular mind. See, e.g., ch. 2 of his *Legends of the Saints*. Others allude to dualistic or outright Manichean tendencies. Nevertheless we must not overlook or underrate statements made in other contexts that suggest a very different attitude, i.e., the possibility of using created things in a proper way and of becoming holy in any walk of life. See Michel de Certeau, SJ, et al., *Le mépris du monde: La notion de mépris du monde dans la tradition spirituelle occidentale* (Paris: Cerf, 1965). I shall return to this subject again insofar as DB himself is concerned.

³⁸ *Giov. prov.*, pt. 1 [sec. 1], art. 3, p. 13.

³⁹ St. Alphonsus, *Maxims of Eternity*, AW 1:387-88; *Giov. prov.*, pp. 32-33.

We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come (Heb 13:14). This earth is not our country; it is for us a place of passage, from which we shall soon go to the house of eternity. “Man shall go into the house of his eternity” [Eccl 12:5].⁴⁰

For Don Bosco, too, human beings who know their true end follow the instincts of their souls and see themselves as travellers on the road to heaven.⁴¹ Saint Alphonsus writes, “*Walk whilst you have light* (Jn 12:35). We must walk in the way of the Lord during life, now that we have light; for, at the hour of death this light is taken away.” Don Bosco puts it this way: “To walk on the road to heaven now while we have light, because that light is lost in death. ‘Walk while you have light.’”⁴² The Lord and heaven are basically equivalent. God, writes Don Bosco, “consoles the blessed with his loving gaze and floods their hearts with a sea of delights.” Or, “the blessed one will be so immersed in delights that he or she will exclaim: I am satiated, O Lord, with your glory. *Satiabor cum apparuerit gloria tua* [“I shall be content in your presence”: Ps 17:5].”⁴³

⁴⁰ St. Alphonsus, *Preparation for Death*, cons. 14, AW 1:144.

⁴¹ *Maggio*, day 12, p. 79.

⁴² St. Alphonsus, *Preparation for Death*, cons. 11, AW 1:122; *Maggio*, day 10, p. 68.

⁴³ *Maggio*, day 28, p. 161; *Giov. prov.*, seven considerations, cons. 7, p. 49.

III

SIN

Don Bosco's ideas about God and human beings are enough to suggest many reasons for his radical rejection of sin.

Seeing God as Creator, Lord, and Sovereign, he consequently regards sin as rebellion by the creature, disobedience by the servant, an offense against our Lord and Father, and cause for just indignation and punishment.¹ Don Bosco's basic scheme is the same whether he is describing the sin of our first parents along the lines of Father Francis Soave (1743-1806) in his *Bible History*, following Cardinal Hyacinth Sigismond Gerdil (1718-1802) in *The Religiously Instructed Catholic*, or taking his inspiration from Peter Collot or from the *Historical Catechism* of Bishop Francis Mary Bigex (1751-1827) in his own *Easy Way*. By different routes Don Bosco always goes back to the same interpretation of Scripture and the sinfulness of humanity.

His writings in ascetical theology that derive from Saint Alphonsus give the same picture of sin. It is the blasphemous act of the servant who says to the Creator: "I will not serve."²

From God's standpoint, sin is ingratitude of the most senseless sort:

Who is this God against whom you choose to act? He is the God who has given you your life, who preserves it, and who can take it away from you at any moment. God is the great benefactor who has given you everything you have in your present life. Health, worldly goods, memory, tongue, eyes, ears, feet,

¹ See the entries "Offesa di Dio" and "Peccato" in *Indice MB*, pp. 282-83, 315-16.

² St. Alphonsus, *Maxims of Eternity*, "Mortal Sin," I-II AW 1:393: "The man who sins says to God...begone from me. I [will not obey Thee,] will not serve Thee, will not acknowledge Thee for my God: The God whom I adore is this pleasure, this interest, this revenge... [*Dixisti, non serviam*]" (bracketed words omitted in English ed.).

Giov. prov., Sette considerazioni, cons. 2, p. 35: "The man who sins says to the Lord: get away from me, O God. I will no longer obey you, will no longer serve you, will no longer acknowledge you as my Lord: *Non serviam*. The God whom I adore is this pleasure, this revenge, this anger, this bad talk, this blasphemy." See *Maggio*, day 14, p. 94.

hands: all of them were given to you by him, and you have used these gifts to offend him.³

Who are you, Christian, who are rebelling against your Creator? You are a miserable creature who cannot do anything, a blind person who sees nothing, a poor wretch possessing nothing: *Miser et pauper et coecus et nudus*. And you, miserable creature, have the impudence to provoke this God of yours, in whose presence heaven, hell, and earth tremble? “Does worthless dust dare to incite such dreadful majesty?” (Saint Bernard).⁴

Thus, in the light of biblical passages and the ascetical tradition closer to Don Bosco himself, turning away from God to creatures is translated into personal terms. Instead of stressing the objective order based on the nature of things, Don Bosco stresses the will of the Creator and the will of the free creature.

Viewed in terms of human beings, sin is a disfigurement of the quality that makes them the most perfect of visible creatures: their likeness to God. Turning to creatures has the effect of brutalizing human beings. Don Bosco resorts to an etymology that was widely accepted in his day: *peccato* (“sin”)

comes from *pecus* (“beast”), because in sinning human beings act against reason, act like brute beasts, lower themselves to the status of beasts, become vile, deformed, ferocious, and brutish, dishonor and degrade themselves, vilely turning themselves into the most horrible and dreadful sort of monster.⁵

The biblical inspiration is also evident. Don Bosco frequently cites Psalm 49:21: “Man, for all his splendor, if he have not prudence, resembles the beasts that perish.”⁶ He offers this commentary:

Have you ever noticed what beasts do as they move around? Any fodder that appears before them, anything to drink, no matter how clear or dirty the water may be—provided that it can satisfy their bestial appetites—they run about eating and drinking, biting and chewing and swallowing anything that

³ *Maggio*, day 14, p. 87.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁵ Sermon on mortal sin, Apr. 17, 1842, autogr. draft, AS 132 Prediche A4, f. 6r.

⁶ An exegesis similar to DB's is given by others. See Paolo Segneri (1624-94), *La manna dell'anima*, May 14, in *Opere* 7 (Turin: Soc. Tipografico-Libraria, 1832), 350-52. Along with Jerome Francis Tornielli, SJ (1693-1752), Segneri is one of the authors cited by DB in the margin of his sermon on death (see ch. II, n. 3). See also Luís de la Puente, SJ (1554-1624), *Meditazioni sui misteri*, 10th ed. (Turin: Marietti, 1892), pt. 1, med. 3, punt. 3, 1, pp. 57-58. DB and the SDBs meditated on this work: see BM 13:199. On “*pecca, non quasi pedem capio, ut nugantur, sed a pecus*,” see Gerardus Johannes Vossius (1577-1649), *Etymologicum linguae latinae* (Lyons, 1664), p. 377. See also Matthias Martinius (1572-1630), *Lexicon philologicum* 2 (Utrecht, 1711), 196; on this dictionary see BM 3:87. Finally, see also Hubert Humbert (1686-1778), *Pensieri sopra le più importanti verità della religione* (Turin: Marietti, 1828), ch. 19, 1, p. 67: “With his behavior the sinner degrades himself and becomes like a brute beast. *Homo, cum in honore esset...*”

might please their palates and fill their greedy bellies. Well, that is what a human being does when he sins. He puts out the clear light of reason, plunging into the filthiest actions. Like a beast, he follows the vile things of the world...⁷

Whether he is writing of sin in general, or of sins against faith or chastity in particular, the image of the brute beast is on Don Bosco's mind, and the words of Scripture echo in his ears:

I should cover my face in confusion and repeat the rebuke made by God through the mouth of his prophet. The human being, he says, was elevated to the highest honor but did not acknowledge his Creator, instead lowering himself to act like a beast without reason and conduct himself like a filthy animal.⁸

Through the abominable vice of impurity, a human being "is like the senseless beasts, resembles the beasts that perish."⁹

In Don Bosco's dreams, sin, Satan, and the youths victimized by them often take the form of animals. One wonders if there is not some mutual interaction and influence between his writings and his dreams insofar as the depiction of sin is concerned. What about his dream around the age of nine, in which he saw the quarreling and cursing boys as goats, dogs, cats, and bears? Is it rooted in some sermon or book on sin where sinners were compared to brute animals? Or did this early dream help to impress the basic image on Don Bosco's mind, so that he came to see sinners as filthy beasts?

The brutish degradation works its effects on the powers of the soul:

The darkened memory forgets the blessed end for which it was created. It becomes attached solely to things of the senses and the flesh, focusing continually on pleasures already enjoyed and wishing to enjoy them even more. The will becomes cowardly and fainthearted, able to strive for nothing but vile and inordinate things. Reason, the faculty that makes a human being so much superior to all other animals, is clouded and blinded by sin. No longer does it look to heaven, its true home, but only for the delights and realities of the senses.¹⁰

The one who sins

puts out the clear light of reason, plunging into the filthiest actions. Like a beast, he follows the vile things of the world, sparing no effort to find things that will exercise his sensual cravings. Misdeed is added to misdeed, vice to vice, sin to sin: "Deep calls unto deep" [Ps 42:8]. He arrives at the point of depravity where

⁷ Sermon on mortal sin, f. 6r.

⁸ *Maggio*, day 9, p. 63.

⁹ *Ibid.*, day 25, p. 145. See also his sermon on indecency in MB 16:598 (AS 132 Prediche B4).

¹⁰ Sermon on mortal sin, f. 6r.

he desires nothing but the foul airs of sin and sees nothing but the foul allurements of sin.¹¹

The consequences of original sin, transmitted to the whole human race by our first parents, are similar. The catechism of the Turin archdiocese explained the effects of original sin as follows: “It makes us enemies of God and slaves of the devil, inclined toward evil, subject to all the miseries of this life and to bodily death, and deserving of hell in the next life.”¹² Like Collot and Bigex, Don Bosco makes a distinction in his *Easy Way* between the miseries of the soul (ignorance, concupiscence, exclusion from heaven) and the miseries of the body (poverty, sickness, death).¹³ Ignorance provides him with a chance to spell out the basic thesis of the moderate traditionalists: “Ignorance means that humanity cannot know its end, nor its duties, without revelation.”¹⁴ Concupiscence is defined with a biblical term, but the sense is specific to Augustinian theology: “By concupiscence we mean an *inclination* to sin.”¹⁵

1. Corruption of the heart

When Don Bosco is exploring the causes of sin and its attendant phenomenology, the term “heart” signifies both an act and a state. The cycle takes in three stages: diabolical pride, culpable ignorance, abominable impurity. And it is centered around two things: corruption of the spirit and corruption of the flesh. Its earthly end is apostasy, i.e., idolatry or atheism.¹⁶

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *Compendio della dottrina cristiana ad uso della diocesi di Torino* (Turin: Paravia, 1843), a catechism for young people who have already received first communion, pt. 1, les. 2, p. 58.

¹³ *Maniera*, IV, “Caduto dell’uomo,” p. 12: “Q. What are the consequences of this sin? A. The consequences of original sin are all the miseries of soul and body. Q. What are the miseries of the soul? A. The miseries of the soul are ignorance, concupiscence, and exclusion from heaven...”

[François-Marie Bigex], *Catechismo storico* (Turin: Stamperia Reale, [1821]), p. 8: “Did the sin of Adam and Eve bring any harm to their descendants? Yes, it brought on all the miseries of body and soul. —What are the miseries of the soul? Ignorance, concupiscence, and exclusion from paradise...”

[Pierre Collot], *Explication des premières vérités de la religion*, new ed. (Lyons-Paris, 1827), pp. 37-38: “To what were they subjected? —They were subjected to ignorance, concupiscence, life’s miseries, bodily death, and eternal death...”

¹⁴ *Maniera*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 13. [Collot], *Explication*, p. 38: “Concupiscence is the inclination to sin.”

¹⁶ These ideas were widely shared. In a pastoral letter of Jan. 25, 1869, Abp. Alexander Riccardi di Netro of Turin (1808-70) wrote, “Rarely will you find an unbeliever who, having rejected God, has not also rejected virtue and morality. For unbelief

Don Bosco deals specifically with corruption of the heart and ignorance as causes of unbelief in an unpublished piece that was to be incorporated into Part Three of *The Religiously Instructed Catholic*. Unbelief ordinarily comes at the end of a chain of sins rather than at the beginning:

FATHER: Experience teaches us that those who give in to vices and the free play of passions easily move on to deny the truths of religion.

SON: How does this sad move come about?

FATHER: In most cases it happens like this. A young person, for example, begins to give in to vices, goes from one sin to the next, but is not content in this state and feels a thorn prick in his heart that disturbs his pleasure. The thorn is the thought of religion, which forbids evildoing and makes him feel remorse for his sin. How can he remove the thorn? Give up his illicit pleasures? He does not want to. So he begins to abhor the religion that forbids such vices. Then he begins to have doubts about the faith, to stop frequenting the sacraments, and to live as if heaven and hell did not exist. In this way a young person, or a grown man or woman, who had been very fervent in religion gradually comes to have doubts about it all, to deny some truths of the faith, and thus become an unbeliever.¹⁷

In *The Month of May*, giving in to vices and pleasures is giving in to impurity. The picture painted by Don Bosco follows the same basic scheme as the unpublished piece cited above:

We see Christians who are happy and fervent in their religious practices, assiduous in attending the sacraments. But as soon as indecency makes its way

is either the daughter of corruption or quickly becomes the mother of corruption” (Turin: Botta, 1869, p. 6).

DB did not believe there were complete unbelievers or atheists in whom no glimmer of religiosity remained. “The word *unbeliever* really means one who believes nothing. But since even irreligious and immoral people never manage to convince themselves completely that nothing about religion is to be believed, we say that people make themselves out to be unbelievers more than they really are. In that sense there are two types: those who speak and act as if there were no religion; and those who do not speak ill of religion but live as if it did not exist” (*Catt. istr.*, pt. 3, trat. 1, autogr. ms., AS 133).

¹⁷ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 3, trat. 3, which depends on the *Cenni sulle principali verità della cattolica religione* (Alba, 1849), pp. 109-10: “The cause of unbelief: corruption of the heart. Experience tells us that those who give in to vice and passion readily move on to deny the truths of religion. If I am not mistaken, it goes something like this. A young person, for example, begins to enjoy the delight of sinning and gradually indulges in the free play of passion. Yet he is not content in this state of indulgence, feeling a thorn in his heart that disturbs his pleasure. This thorn is the thought of religion, which forbids sin and free indulgence in passion. Reluctant to go back and give up those pleasures, he begins to abhor the religion that will not grant him his longing. He begins to have doubts about that religion. He ends up denying that there is a heaven or hell, that there is any truth taught by religion. That, I think, is the reason why many become unbelievers.”

into their hearts, they begin to grow lukewarm, attend the sacraments less, become bored with the word of God, and entertain doubts about the truths of the faith. Falling lower and lower, they end up as unbelievers or even real apostates. "Lust amounts to abandonment of God" [cf. Sir. 10:12].¹⁸

The crisis of heresiarchs is almost always presented in terms of the same scheme. Martin Luther (1483-1546), for example, "from boyhood manifested such a perverse character or disposition that many of his biographers assert that he was a child of the devil himself."¹⁹ He had "a daring talent and a venturesome spirit; but he was haughty, ambitious, prone to rebelliousness and calumny, given to every vice, especially immodesty."²⁰

After he apostatized from his religious order and the Catholic religion, he trampled on...his solemn vows. He made a hapless nun share in his sacrilege, abandoned himself to drunkenness, and often went into excesses of furious rage so that he seemed to be possessed by the devil. He authorized the robbing and plundering of the Church's possessions. More than one hundred thousand people slaughtered; seven cities leveled; a vast number of churches, monasteries, and castles plundered, razed, or demolished: such was the work of the Reformation, of Luther's revolt.²¹

John Calvin (1509-1564), born of "a woman of ill repute...corrupted his behavior at the age of fourteen and soon was leading a dissolute life." He was prosecuted and found guilty of "an abominable offense."²² He had for a teacher the wily Lutheran Melchior Wolmar, who "could easily insinuate his errors into the corrupted heart of his pupil."²³ Thus Calvin became an heresiarch and apostle of iniquity. "Embracing every sort of vice," this sordid and cruel man "lived in concubinage, was a convicted robber, sodomite, and hypochondriac."²⁴

¹⁸ *Maggio*, day 25, p. 147. A major proponent of this viewpoint was Paul Segneri. He held that dissolute behavior was the most despicable of the vices. More than any other vice, it clouded one's mind and hardened one's heart, eventually taking away one's faith. See Paolo Segneri, *Il cristiano instruito nella sua legge* (Turin: Marietti, 1855), p. 982, s.v. *Disonestà* in the index. The same views are expressed in *L'incredulo senza scusa*.

¹⁹ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 20, p. 106, which seems to depend on St. Alphonsus, *Storia delle eresie*, ch. 11, art. 1, §1, no. 3, in *Opere dommatiche* (Turin: Marietti, 1848), pp. 172-73: "Cardinal [Vincent Louis] Gotti [1664-1742] writes that the rumor was that the devil was let into the house in the guise of an old-clothes dealer, had intercourse with Luther's mother, and that is how she conceived this accursed offspring."

²⁰ *Catt. istr.*, p. 106. Cf. St. Alphonsus, *Storia delle eresie*, ch. 11, art. 1, pp. 173-74: "Luther, daring in spirit...full of vice, haughty, ambitious, petulant, prone to rebelliousness, calumny, and all sorts of immodesty."

²¹ *Ibid.*, pt. 2, trat. 20, p. 112.

²² *Ibid.*, pt. 2, trat. 24, p. 130.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-34.

King Henry VIII (1491-1547), who was responsible for the schism in England, “let himself be blinded by the vice of unchastity. And the Lord lets us know in a terrible way that giving in to this vice is the same as giving up the faith: ‘Lust amounts to abandonment of God.’”²⁵

Thus it is not enlightened reason that leads to sin, unbelief, or irreligion. Don Bosco, clearly reacting against Enlightenment thought, is an advocate for “the lights of faith and religion.” He writes in terms inherited from eighteenth-century apologetics. The manuscript pages of *The Religiously Instructed Catholic*, to which I alluded above, derive from an anonymous work: *Notes on the Catholic Faith, with an Appendix on Modern Skepticism*. The latter, in turn, makes use of sources from the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century: Antoninus Valsecchi, OP; Alexander Tassoni, Bishop Frayssinous, and Bossuet.²⁶

The sinister portraits of Luther, Calvin, and Henry VIII are drawn mainly from Saint Alphonsus’s *History of Heresies*. The bitter polemics of several centuries have erased from them any hint of religious motivation or the anxious search for truth and eternal salvation.²⁷ All that is left is a portrait of their rebelliousness, framed against the backdrop of biblical history. The heresiarchs “were driven by the spirit of arrogant pride that drove the rebel angels to prefer being hurled into a fiery abyss over rendering obedience to their Maker.” The teachings of the Muslims, the Greek Orthodox, and the Protestants are viewed as “diabolical in their authors, beastly in their followers, and worldly in their protectors.”²⁸ Heresy, unbelief, and atheism seem necessarily to be bound up with immorality, with corruption of heart in some form: with arrogant pride or lust, and, easily, with both.

“Protestantism is the corruption of Catholicism and, of its very nature, leads to vice and depravity,” writes Don Bosco.²⁹ “Vice leads to Protestantism, upright behavior and good morals to Catholicism.”³⁰ There can be honest, upright heretics because they may keep “many maxims of the Gospel”; or because

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pt. 2, trat. 26, p. 143.

²⁶ *Cenni ... cattolica religione*, p. 6.

²⁷ We find a similar strain in Protestant writings against Catholicism. They depict Catholicism as a sewer of vulgarity and wantonness, religious hypocrisy, superstition, and cruelty to the Jews, Huguenots, Waldensians, etc. Examples of this literature in Piedmont are Jacques Maranda (1742-1810), *Tableau du Piémont sous le régime des rois avec un précis sur les Vaudois* (Turin: l’an XI [1803]); Amadeus Bert (1809-83), *I Valdesi, ossia i cristiani-cattolici secondo la Chiesa primitiva* (Turin, 1849).

²⁸ Paolo Segneri, *L’incredulo senza scusa*, pt. 2, ch. 13, in *Opere* (Turin, 1832), 10:293.

²⁹ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 40, p. 310.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pt. 2, trat. 41, p. 315.

Protestants, “living in Catholic countries, dealing with Catholics, and reading or hearing of Catholic books, may somehow be constrained to keep their maxims or follow their example.”³¹ But people are corrupt if they find out what Catholicism essentially is and then remain in heresy. Don Bosco finds it hard to admit good faith in Protestant ministers and Catholic apostates. To him the latter are unhappy wretches who gave in to their passions. Louis DeSanctis (1808-1869), one of the first teachers on the Waldensian theological faculty, “was a priest who became a Protestant in order to lead a scandalous life.”³²

Don Bosco’s main focus of concern is his own youngsters. He is grieved by both sin and a person’s persistence in it. He is thinking of the soul and its eternal destiny. The symbol of the heart suggests to him biblical terms that bring out the turning away from God as a prolonged state of rebellion. He talks of obstinate and hardened hearts resisting the grace of God and drawing down on themselves the wrath of God. Interesting in this connection is Don Bosco’s Good Night to his boys on January 12, 1862. In it the terms heart and soul are used alternately to express his basic ideas:

Listen, here at the Oratory we have several obstinate hearts stubbornly resisting God’s grace and calling down on themselves his wrath and the threat of dire punishment. The Blessed Virgin, who has always protected this house, visibly held back these punishments, as we have just seen, and mercifully warned those with stubborn hearts.

I assure you that I grieve and weep when I think of the spiritual condition some of you are in. It’s heartbreaking to see boys so indifferent and unconcerned about their souls, in spite of endless heavenly favors showered on them. Unless these youngsters quickly make up their minds to give up sin and return to God, they may never again have a chance to mend their ways... A short time ago your hearts underwent a very minute inspection, but none of you were aware of it. For the good this must be a comfort and a guarantee for their souls; for the thoughtless, a warning to give serious thought to their predicament.³³

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact import of these expressions. Heart and soul are both related to God and his divine grace. Both, as usual, are regarded as belonging to human beings and under their control. The assumption seems to be that there is a bipolarity in human free will. On the one hand, it is located in the heart and soul; on the other hand, it is located in the responsible ego. Don Bosco’s appeal is directed mainly to the latter. As the center of supreme responsibility, it must step in to dismantle everything that makes the heart obstinate and the soul unwilling to accept the Lord’s grace.

³¹ Ibid., pt. 2, trat. 40, p. 310.

³² Bosco, *Il cattolico nel secolo*, pt. 3, trat. 2, p. 315.

³³ MB 7:38-39, which comes from the chronicle of Fr. Bonetti.

2. *Creatures after sin*

Created things are seen as marvelous insofar as they issue from the hands of God, but they come under a sinister light once they are associated with human beings corrupted by sin. They reflect the bewitching spell of sin and take on a bewitching allure of their own. They may proffer certain pleasures to human beings, but their promise of happiness is a fraud. As an ascetical writer Don Bosco follows the custom of transposing to things the unbridled tendencies of human passion. Worldly things end up being presented as a world of delusions: "In this world we are, as it were, on a stormy sea, in exile, in a vale of tears."³⁴ The world is a sea where we risk shipwreck:

We plow a treacherous sea,
From a world that would us betray;
To the longed-for shore,
Who will show us the way?³⁵

"World, I have gotten to know you," Alphonsus Liguori is said to have exclaimed after his bitter experience of human intrigues as a young lawyer in Naples.³⁶ And in his spiritual songs he sings, "World, you are no longer for me, nor I for you."³⁷ The pleasures of the world, writes Don Bosco, are a snare in the hand of "the enemy of the human race."³⁸ It is folly and delusion to work in order to make money, to "buy a field, a vineyard, a farm, or land," or to win honors.³⁹

In *The Companion of Youth* Don Bosco reiterates the refrain of Saint Alphonsus: "World, you are no longer for me..."⁴⁰ It is another indication that he continues to draw inspiration from the ascetical current that Saint Alphonsus represents.

³⁴ *Maggio*, day 30, p. 169.

³⁵ A popular hymn inserted in *Giov. prov.*, p. 449.

³⁶ Oreste Gregorio, CSsR, "L'ultima causa difesa di S. Alfonso," in *Asprenas* 7 (1960), 119.

³⁷ St. Alphonsus, *Canzoncine spirituali*, in *Opere ascetiche* (Turin: Marietti, 1845), 1:527.

³⁸ Bosco, Introduction to *Const.* (p. 2), "Entrance into Religion": "The enemy of the human race exercises his malignant power against man in three ways: by pleasure or earthly satisfaction; by temporal goods, especially riches; and by the abuse of his liberty."

On the snares "that the devil is wont to set for the soul," see *Giov. prov.*, pt. 1 [sec. 2], art 6: tricks used by the devil to deceive young people, pp. 28-29; the snares that entrap them and cause them to fall are discussed in his dream of hell, BM 9:85-99.

³⁹ *Maggio*, day 12, p. 86.

⁴⁰ *Giov. prov.*, p. 424; see also succeeding editions.

3. *Sin and the world in Don Bosco's ascetical approach*

Saint Alphonsus also helps to shed light on the roles of sin and the world in Don Bosco's ascetical writings. From the writings of Alphonsus he derives much of what he has to say on our last end, sin, death, the other last things, the preciousness of time, and God's mercy. This is evident in *The Companion of Youth*, *The Jubilee Year*, *The Month of May*, and his conferences to Salesians.

Let us compare Saint Alphonsus's *Maxims of Eternity* with corresponding considerations in Don Bosco's *Companion of Youth*. Saint Alphonsus addresses his remarks to the riffraff of Naples or to the rough and simple people of the rural areas where he preached his missions. His comments on eternal salvation are direct and to the point:

Consider, O my soul! that the being which you enjoy was given to you by God: he created you to his own image... that you might know him, love him, and serve him in this life, and thereby arrive at the eternal possession of him in heaven.⁴¹

But instead of proceeding to evoke feelings of joy over this destined end, he invokes exclamations of unhappy amazement: "Woe is me, since I have thought about everything else but my final end!" The mention of our final end is not even followed by an examination of conscience. Assuming it as a given, he sees it leading quickly to dismay because we find ourselves in guilt.

The same process underlies his consideration of sin: enunciation of our end, our sense of guilt. "Consider, O my soul! that having been created to love God, you have rebelled against him, and thereby been guilty of the basest ingratitude."⁴² Urged to place himself before the divine judge, the reader is immediately made to feel that he is in mortal sin: "Consider that the soul will no sooner have departed from the body than it will appear before the tribunal of God to be judged. This judge is the Almighty, whose wrath is provoked by your sins."⁴³

In short, Saint Alphonsus is writing a book to be placed in the hands of sinners. Others might invite their readers to see death as the moment of final liberation from the snares of this world, return to our homeland, and reunion with our mystical Head. But conversion is what Alphonsus has in mind. He sows the sense of guilt in order to evoke sorrow from the penitent sinner and the decision to return to God once and for all. He has the sinner exclaim, "Unfortunate sinner that I have been! What is the fruit of all my crimes?—a conscience gnawed with despair, a troubled heart, a soul overwhelmed with grief, hell deserved, and God lost." Then, "Ah! My God, my heavenly Father! bind me to Thy love!" This is followed by an admonition: "Reflect that your all is at stake: remember that in a very short time, your body will be deposited in the earth, and your soul will

⁴¹ St. Alphonsus, *Maxims of Eternity*, "The End of Man," AW 1:387.

⁴² Ibid., "Mortal Sin," AW 1:392-93.

⁴³ Ibid., "Judgment," AW 1:397.

go to dwell in the house of eternity. How dreadful, then, will be your misfortune if you are condemned to an eternity of woe! Reflect well on this; for then you can have no remedy.”⁴⁴ The sinner exclaims, “If I lose [my soul] once, it is lost forever... O my God! I am forced to acknowledge with shame and confusion that I have hitherto blindly wandered astray from Thee... O my Father, save me...”⁴⁵

Anxiety pervades every line written by Saint Alphonsus, but so does the awareness of where our strength lies: in the certainty that salvation depends on both God and ourselves. The sinner’s prayerful plea is his or her first *great means* to find reincorporation into God’s plan of salvation. We find a similar thrust in Don Bosco’s approach.

Who can assure you that you will not die right after sinning and thus cast your soul down to hell? ...So leave sin behind, because it is the height of evil and deprives you of every good thing.⁴⁶

Everything else is to be set aside for the sake of attaining salvation: “My God, forgive me my sins and grant that I will never again commit the disgrace of offending you. Grant that I may be able to serve you faithfully in the future.”⁴⁷ “Lord, I have offended you enough. I do not wish to spend the rest of my life offending you. Instead I will spend it loving you and lamenting my sins.”⁴⁸

As soon as your soul leaves your body, it will appear before the divine Judge. The first thing that makes this encounter terrible is the fact that the soul will find itself before a God it scorned, a God who knows every thought and every secret of your heart.⁴⁹

The Six Sundays follows the same basic scheme. It starts not with any doctrinal statement but with a description of the virtuous acts of Saint Aloysius. In a few strokes they are presented in a concentrated, idealized, universalized form. Personal examination of conscience is assumed, and the reader is immediately made to feel discomfort over the gap between self and model. Discussing the two peccadillos committed by Aloysius in early childhood, for example, Don Bosco follows the approach of Paschal DeMattei, SJ. He dwells on the fact that Aloysius

wept over these two faults for the rest of his life. When he first confessed them, he was overcome by such strong anguish...that he fainted before his confessor. He could not go on with his confession that day, and in the years to come he could not recall them without weeping bitter tears.

⁴⁴ Ibid., “The Importance of our Last End,” AW 1:391-92.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 392.

⁴⁶ *Giov. prov.*, Sette considerazioni, cons. 1, p. 33.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

⁴⁸ Ibid., cons. 2, p. 36.

⁴⁹ Ibid., cons. 4, p. 40.

How ashamed we must feel, who have committed so many sins and such serious ones, making light of them and giving no thought to repentance! Think that a single mortal sin outrages a God of infinite goodness, causes us to lose Paradise and all its treasures, and merits us hell with all its evils! Who could hold back tears at such a thought?⁵⁰

The plain fact is that Don Bosco himself was profoundly upset by the thought of sin. The emotion-laden pages he wrote, on his own initiative or under the inspiration of Saint Alphonsus, served to trigger his own religious worldview based on his personal experience of God, human beings, and the devil. His approach is that of prophet and father. He is joined with God in the fight against sin, and he himself is cut to the quick by fear when he thinks that one of his own is threatened by sin. During a light-hearted conversation, his boys saw him pale and almost faint; when he recovered, he explained bitterly, "I saw a flame go out; at that moment a youth of the Oratory abandoned the Faith."⁵¹ He would burst into tears in the pulpit when he told how young Charles had died in mortal sin, been awakened by Don Bosco's call, and been reconciled in confession, thus escaping eternal misery in an extraordinary manner.⁵² "What a disaster!" he would exclaim whenever he encountered mortal sin.⁵³

These feelings reveal the heart of Don Bosco, his fear of God in all its range and depth: fear of an offended God, fear of God the Judge, fear of the disastrous consequences, and total revulsion for sin itself. Don Bosco's fear is ever on the alert, nurtured by theology and personal experience. His confidence in young people is easily documented. Indeed one can rightly define his educational method as an optimistic embodiment of Christian humanism. But his optimism is carefully weighed and discreet, based upon his convictions about human nature:

As a tender plant, though placed in fertile ground, will not grow straight or will otherwise end up badly unless properly cared for and cultivated until

⁵⁰ *Sei domen.*, Sunday 1, in *Giov. prov.*, pp. 56-57.

⁵¹ Gioachino Berto, *Episodi ed aneddoti diversi riguardanti D. Bosco anteriori agli anni 1867*, AS 110 Berto 11, p. 48: "This incident occurred during the early days of the Oratory, according to the account of Joseph Buzzetti [1832-92]. DB was sitting and talking with some people. Suddenly he grew serious and pale, trembling a bit and staring fixedly for a few minutes. The people with him were frightened, thinking that he had had a fainting spell. But when DB came back to normal, he said: "At that moment I saw a candle go out. A boy of the Oratory has become a Protestant." See BM 5:193-94 for another example.

⁵² See Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco and the Death of Charles*, trans. John Drury (New Rochelle: Don Bosco, 1985), originally published as the appendix to vol. I of this series, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica: Vita e opere*, rev. ed. (Rome: LAS, 1979), pp. 257-93.

⁵³ See the entries "Offesa di Dio," "Orrore al peccato," and "Peccato" in *Indice MB*, pp. 282-83, 298, 315.

it reaches a certain size, so you, my dear sons, will *surely* give way to evil unless you let yourselves be guided by those who have that responsibility.⁵⁴

If the person with that responsibility is an educator in a school environment, he must be vigilant at all times and everywhere: “Supervise your boys constantly and everywhere; make it just about impossible for them to do wrong. Be more alert in the evening after supper, so as to prevent the smallest disorder.”⁵⁵ A cleric should be slipped into every group. Otherwise “bad conversations will ruin hearts.”⁵⁶ Such statements suggest several possible hypotheses: either there was reason to worry about the boys at Valdocco; or Don Bosco’s fear stemmed from convictions of principle; or his theological and pedagogical convictions found justification and confirmation in hard facts. Don Bosco’s insistence recalls that of Saint Alphonsus with regard to seminarians:

The prefect should be the first up and the last to bed. He should be ready to accompany the seminarians when they go to chapel, class, or table... The one in charge of the seminarians during their nightly rest should be careful to lock the main entrance and put the key under his pillow. He should also keep a lamp lit, making sure that the wick is trimmed and that there is sufficient lamp oil. He should keep the tinderbox nearby in case the light goes out... When the seminarians go to morning prayer, he should check to see whether anyone is still in the bathroom. He should not leave him alone, or at least inform the corridor prefect... Whenever a seminarian is called to the door, he should be accompanied by the corridor prefect and never allowed to go alone... During recreation indoors and outdoors, he should try to make sure that all are under his watchful eye and close by... He should also have two seminarians, or at least one, scouting for him and reporting secretly to him of any fault that he might not have been able to notice.⁵⁷

The conviction that young people would surely fall into wrongdoing if left to themselves, in one form or another dominated the thinking of Saint Alphonsus, Don Bosco, and many other Catholic educators of the modern period. They were profoundly influenced by the Christian mystery of human nature: weakened by original sin and fatally inclined toward evil. The educational school of Port-Royal was not the only one preoccupied with the idea of guiding young people lest they fall into sin. The same concern is evident in the disciples of Saint John Baptist de la Salle, whose dependence on the pedagogy of Port-Royal in

⁵⁴ *Giov. prov.*, pt. 1 [sec. 1], art. 4, 13-14. The phrase “will surely give way to evil” remains unchanged in the edition of 1888¹⁰¹, p. 13.

⁵⁵ BM 6:216.

⁵⁶ MB 14:840.

⁵⁷ St. Alphonsus, *Regolamento per i seminari*, §3, in *Opere ascetiche* 3:883. See Oreste Gregorio, CSsR, “Il *Regolamento per i seminari* di sant’Alfonso,” in *Asprenas* 10 (1963), 408-19.

various ways is well documented. It is also evident in those who hearkened back to Claude Lancelot, OSB (1616-1695), Peter Coustel (1621-1704), and Charles Rollin (1661-1741). Establishing rules for youthful boarders, Jesuit John Croiset (1666-1738) wrote,

Do not take it hard if a large number of prefects and other persons watch you and never let you out of their sight. Do not be surprised if you never go out without having an escort who never leaves you alone for a moment, and who is obliged to give an exact account of your conduct to Father Principal, who is responsible for your conduct. Do not take it hard if you cannot take a step without being observed. If each one of you is under the eyes of many prefects in your room, your study hall, at play, on walks, and in all your recreation, and if your behavior is watched night and day, the reason is that this is the price of a good education. This perpetual vigilance is oppressive but necessary. It would not suffice if it were less concerned, less watchful, less attentive in its application. Only great zeal for your salvation and a supernatural motive could account for the slavish dedication of so many worthy people. It is to their vigilance and tireless zeal that you should attribute the blessings that God pours out on you.⁵⁸

This protective guidance could become oppressive. Don Bosco admitted as much in giving the Good Night to students during their retreat, on April 15, 1877. But he did not back down:

There are a few—very, very few—who are chronic gripers, stirring discontent in the student body by moaning, “We can’t read the books we want without having someone dash up and snatch them away. Every place we go, the superiors have their eyes on us!” And on and on. How thoughtless they are! Your superiors would be cruel if they were not to act this way: It is their duty, and your good requires it. If they were to choose their personal interests, they would have plenty of other things to do. If supervising you were not their explicit duty, they wouldn’t have to worry. They act as they do in order to prevent evil, and this for your own good. The superiors, furthermore, will have to account to God if they neglect their pupils and consequently allow their boys to fall into sin. I say this only for those who need to hear it.⁵⁹

In priestly reading material of the day, the commonplace maxim was that a priest never went to heaven or hell by himself. Don Bosco’s sentiments were in line with those expressed by Saint Alphonsus in his *Rules for Seminaries*: “How many prelates will suffer damnation and cause the damnation of many of

⁵⁸ Jean Croiset, SJ, *Règlements pour messieurs les pensionnaires des Pères Jésuites* (Lyons: Bruyset, 1739^e), pt. 1, §28, p. 64. There is a copy of this work at the UPS in Rome.

⁵⁹ BM 13:330.

their little flock because they paid too little attention to the proper running of their seminaries!"⁶⁰

The Last Things and the problem of eternal salvation cast their shadow in every manifestation of the Christian life. The sense of sin and its consequences modulated the theology and life of Don Bosco along lines rooted in the Catholic doctrines of original sin, freedom, and grace. Those doctrines had undergone elaboration as far back as the era of the Protestant Reformation, and they had been influenced by the writings of Saint Augustine against Pelagius (354?-418?). As I have stressed already, many of the elements were not exclusive to Port-Royal or the Jesuits. They were part of a shared mentality that went beyond factional disputes and institutional antagonisms. To this common mentality was added Don Bosco's own personal experience of the age in which he lived as a very lamentable time of rampant apostasy and the dechristianization of European society.

But our perspective is likely to be distorted if we do not at this point recall other elements in the picture. First and foremost, we must remember the milieu in which Don Bosco, his co-workers, and his young people operated. We must remember the growth and development of Valdocco itself. At first it was the meeting place for festive gatherings of students and youthful apprentices, natives of Turin or residents of the capital who had come from provincial towns and rural districts. Every Sunday was a day of festivity. They invaded every floor of the Pinaridi house as it was gradually acquired by Don Bosco. With him in the lead, they happily moved out into the meadows and hills.

The festive oratory continued to inject new life into the house, which gradually came to be a boarding school and orphanage and to house an ever increasing number of students, clerics, and apprentices. Workshops and boarding schools arose. There was still freedom of movement for the youngsters, however, under the paternal guidance of Don Bosco, the maternal care of Mama Margaret Bosco (1788-1856), and the help provided by their assistants: older youths and clerics such as Michael Rua and Joseph Buzzetti.

Then the boarding home became a private high school with two autonomous sections, one for artisans and one for more academic students. The resident population now was made up almost exclusively of adolescents who were supervised and taught by Salesians. The various groupings had large contacts in assembly areas: study halls, common rooms, church. The boys could readily go from one place to another, even by themselves, and recreation periods turned the house into an anthill. The majority were outside, but boys could also flit noisily through the corridors and make their way to the room of some superior. Visitors who came to see the Oratory, imagining it in terms of

⁶⁰ St. Alphonsus, *Regolamento per i seminari*, introd., p. 878.

a typical private school, came away with an impression of chaos. It seemed to be a wretched educational institution with no discipline at all.

This basic setup, which perdured even beyond Don Bosco's death, grew out of a singular educational mind-set. For all the influence provided by other private schools, in its own way the Oratory tried to maintain the features of the early childhood experience at home. Much freedom was left to the boys, even though the idea was to draw them together at school and oratory functions. Vigilance over them seemed indispensable: "The primary reason for this system is the inconstancy of youth, who in a moment forget the rules of discipline and the punishments which they threaten."⁶¹

But above and beyond considerations of order and discipline, Don Bosco's horizons were dominated by ethical and religious considerations. He wanted his boys to act as they pleased, so long as they did not sin. His was the maxim of Saint Philip Neri: "Enjoy yourselves. I don't want scruples or melancholy. Just don't commit sin."⁶² We can surely hear echoes of this option for freedom in Don Bosco's own system:

Let the boys have full liberty to jump, run, and shout as much as they please. Calisthenics, music, declamation, dramatics, and outings are most effective means of obtaining discipline and promoting morality and health. But care must be taken that the entertainment, the persons who take part in it, and the words used be beyond reproach. "Do whatever you like," the great friend of youth, St. Philip Neri, used to say, "provided that you do not sin."⁶³

However much based on careful guidance and vigilance, the pedagogy of Don Bosco was even more deeply rooted in an appeal to the moral sense of his young people. Vigilance had its justification, but it was secondary. Outside school and oratory life there could be no real vigilance. That did not undermine the efficacy of Don Bosco's educational approach at all because it was based on the moral sense of the boys and the personal ties between pupil and teacher. The teacher-pupil relationship was absolutely necessary in Don Bosco's eyes. He could not imagine a process of total self-education: "You will surely give way to evil unless you let yourselves be guided by those who have that responsibility."⁶⁴ As a priest and educator, Don Bosco finally had only one theological reason for his views, namely, his belief in original sin and its consequences. I shall return to these matters when I discuss his educational system.

⁶¹ "The Preventive System," BM 4:381, no. 2.

⁶² *Porta teo cristiano* (Turin, 1858), p. 34.

⁶³ "The Preventive System," BM 4:382-83, no. 3.

⁶⁴ See n. 54 above.

IV

HISTORY AND SALVATION

Our treatment so far has clearly brought out an important feature of Don Bosco's spirituality: the reciprocal relationship between theology and life. His ideas of God, human beings, and sin are rooted in his own religious experience; and they are reflected in his spiritual writings and his educational practice. The very same relationship and interaction can be found in Don Bosco's sense of history and its meaning.

Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) and others found that Don Bosco's *History of Italy* was tendentious.¹ The same verdict could have been passed on any of his historical writings, but it is surely polemical and unfortunate to do so. It is a sound insight gone astray. For the moment Croce forgot that Don Bosco was a typical writer of the Risorgimento era, and that the same thing could be said of many historical pages written during that period. A man of nineteenth-century Italy and the Risorgimento, his use of history is deliberate; it is a tool, a weapon if you will, for educating readers and proclaiming the faith he himself lives.

Many writers presented episodes in history in a way that reflected their own feelings. The resistance of the medieval communes to Emperor Frederick II (1194-1250), for example, might be pictured as an example of national sentiment for home rule or a stage in the building of a united Italy; it was a reconstruction of events evoked and interpreted by a consuming personal passion.² Cola di Rienzo (1313-1354) and the Sicilian Vespers (1282) embodied the ir-

¹ Croce's hasty (and hardly persuasive) review is in *La Critica* 34 (1936), 157. Response to it in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 87 (1936), 138-48; reprinted in Mario Barbera, *San Giovanni Bosco educatore* (Turin, 1942), pp. 121-41. Other negative evaluations of DB's *Storia d'Italia*: Ernesto Codignola, in *Pedagogisti ed educatori* (Milan, 1939), col. 87; Luigi Bulferetti, "La Restaurazione," in *Questioni di storia del Risorgimento e dell'unità d'Italia* (Milan, 1951), p. 179. For my point of view, see DBLW, pp. 259-63.

² The resistance of the communes to the German emperor in Risorgimento historiography is the starting point for Carlo Morandi, *I partiti politici nella storia d'Italia* (Florence, 1963), p. 1.

repressible urge toward liberty and unity, genuine popular feelings, and the intangible designs of Providence.

The whole climate of the Risorgimento gave new justification and impetus to religious historiography, with which Don Bosco is more directly linked. Past events were seen not only as hints of national aspirations, but also as fulfillments of a divine plan for liberation from sin and the salvation of all human beings.³ The Risorgimento period offered new material, which was interjected into the historiographical pattern. The presentation was interpretive insofar as new providential links were forged between various events. It also confirmed the notion of purpose. Don Bosco's ethical and religious endeavors of an educational nature, following a line of historiography that went back to Bossuet and Saint Augustine, found inducements and supports in the thrust of Risorgimento historiography.

If there is something new in the historical writing of Don Bosco and others like him, as compared with Bossuet's *Discourse on Universal History*, it lies in the reader to whom he addresses his work and in the new historical climate. Don Bosco is not writing for a young prince or for upper-class students in high school. He is writing for "people of every class." There is no use of concepts or phrases that might complicate his simple, popular language or make his work less accessible to his readers. His writing is for people with little or no education, and his words and phrases are those of a man who is consciously trying to make himself understood by simple people.⁴

³ Worth recalling is a little work by Fr. Angelo Volentieri, *La religione studiata nella storia: Opera compilata per ammaestramento della gioventù* (Turin: Paravia, 1849³). Around 1859-60, it was adopted in Turin and Piedmont for classes in the humanities and rhetoric. From the Paravia invoices (AS 112 Fatture) we learn that the Oratory also acquired it.

On the link between contemporary historiography and that of Bossuet, Volentieri makes statements that gave guidelines for the young students, still partially valid today: "The idea of developing the providential principle in history is not new. It dominates Bossuet's famous *Discourse on Universal History* [and in a footnote: Even before him, in *De civitate Dei* St. Augustine developed the providential principle of history]. Our times feel even more keenly the moral and religious usefulness of these investigations. We see major works on this theme, all following in the footsteps of the immortal bishop of Meaux. Two of these grandiosely conceived works are now coming out simultaneously in Italy: the *Storia universale* of Cesare Cantù [1805-95] and the *Meditazioni storiche* of Cesare Balbo. In this vein Friedrich von Schlegel [1772-1829] wrote his *Philosophy of History* in Germany. And in France Abbé René Rohrbacher [1789-1856] has offered us his *Histoire universelle de l'Eglise Catholique depuis le commencement du monde jusque à nos jours*" (p. 14).

⁴ Statements by DB in the Preface to *Storia sacra*, p. 7. He imitates educators interested in popular education: Fr. Augustine Fecia (1802-71) and Vincent Garelli (1818-78). Concern to adopt the living language helped to preserve a certain freshness in DB's writing. There are fewer archaisms than in the style of Silvio Pellico (1789-1854), for example.

Whatever novelty may be found in this approach, it reflected the concern for popular education in Turin that Don Bosco shared with others: Saint Joseph Cafasso (1811-1860), Fathers John Borel (1801-1873), Peter Baricco (1819-1887), John Anthony Rayneri (1810-1867), Ferrante Aporti (1791-1858); the supporters of the Family Readings (*Lecture di famiglia*) of Lawrence Valerio (1810-1865), the Popular Library (*Biblioteca popolare*) of Joseph Pomba (1795-1876), and evening schools for artisans; and all those who sensed the dignity of the common people and the role that they might assume in the new social and political order of Italy.

1. Don Bosco's general view of the history of religion

Even before his *History of Italy*, we find certain key elements of Don Bosco's interpretation of history in his *Church History*, his *Bible History*, and his outline history of religion in *The Religiously Instructed Catholic*. Those key elements remain unchanged, even when he is writing a history of Italy from its earliest inhabitants to the middle of the nineteenth century.

First and foremost are his own convictions about divine creation, the unique origin of the human species, and the sin committed by our first parents and then transmitted to all their descendants. Peoples and nations quickly disappear from the historical picture if they have no contact or relationship with the Hebrew people, who were called to be the people of God. Major points are the promises of a redeemer for all humanity, the striking events that mark God's intervention, and his efforts to maintain the purity of the religion he had revealed as the only acceptable one. The masses of humanity outside the people of God are viewed solely in terms of their deviant course on the pathways of idolatry and immorality. Only rarely do they surface in the story as Canaanites or Philistines, Assyrians or Egyptians: snares for the chosen people or instruments of perversion and divine punishment.

The supreme evil stressed by Don Bosco is idolatry and the moral corruption that inevitably accompanies it: cruelty, wantonness, and arrogance. The supreme good is religion, preserved in all its purity and observed in line with its cultic and ethical dictates. Economic prosperity and political prestige are viewed in a religious light: as temptations or rewards for the good, even as acts of mercy toward the wicked since they will not enjoy the happiness of eternal life. Predictions and miracles continually bear witness to God's existence and concrete intervention. Their verification spotlights God's dominion over human happenings. God's rewarding of good deeds and punishment of evil deeds make clear that human beings are free and that they are responsible for their actions.

Don Bosco does not look into the causes and connections between the events of history; rather, if we wish to be exact, his focus is on their religious and

ethical meaning. Thus a certain fact surfaces in history because it had been predicted in connection with the Messiah, who was to be born of a virgin and crucified, to shed his blood as the price for redeeming humanity from its enslavement to the devil. Moses, David, Jonah, the paschal lamb, and the bronze serpent find their reason for existence in the fact that they prefigure Jesus Christ. Christ heals the blind, the mute, and the deaf as Isaiah had predicted. The flood is explained as a punishment for corrupted humanity and a reward for Noah, who remained upright in his religion and his behavior. It prefigures the plight of humanity even after the coming of Jesus Christ. The ark riding out the flood was God's instrument of salvation for Noah, the storehouse of the salvific promises made to Adam, and a prefiguration of the Church, which over the course of centuries would ride out every type of flood.

Don Bosco uses themes from the Old and New Testaments as well as allegorical and typological interpretations that can be found in Saint Augustine, Saint Gregory the Great, Bossuet, and commentators such as Anthony Lemaistre (1608-1658), Augustine Calmet, OSB, and Archbishop Anthony Martini. They proclaim that God exists, predisposing human events and manifesting his own desires. The Catholic Church is the one and only religion acceptable to God, the only religious society or institution endowed with the means of salvation, the one true ethics, and the one true creed. Preparations for its appearance began at the moment of creation. It was prefigured in the synagogue, founded by Christ, and destined to be the ark of salvation until the end of time.

In Don Bosco's *Church History* and his comments on the history of religions in *The Religiously Instructed Catholic*, the world's peoples bloom once again when the cross announcing the Gospel dawns on their horizons. Heretical movements, reduced to heretical sects with founders and followers, are considered only insofar as they entail hardship for the Church and serve as instruments of divine admonition and purification. The "gates of the netherworld" (Matt 16:18), or powers of hell, lie in ambush for the Church. They are viewed as hidden forces involved in the production of some evil, of religious and ethical evils in particular. Don Bosco sees the start of schisms and heresies in the machinations of the devil:

Seeing idolatry almost totally destroyed, and enraged by the victories of the Church over persecutions, hell sought to afflict the Church with schisms and heresies...over the course of more than four hundred years...⁵

A similar picture frames the start of modern European history. More than any other period, it seems to be filled with struggle and conflict. In Don Bosco's eyes, it embodies a characteristic feature of religious history in general:

⁵ *Stor. eccl.*, epoch 2, pp. 115-16.

the more furious the assaults of the devil, the more luminous the triumphs of the Church:

Never had the Church been more assailed or won such signal victories as in this fifth epoch. A flood of heretics assailed it furiously. Instead of supporting the Church, many of its ministers rebelled and inflicted deep wounds. They were joined by secular rulers, who oppressed the Church by sword, plunder, and ruin in the hope of annihilating it. The devil hid under the cloak of secret societies and modern philosophy, instigating rebellions and bloody persecutions. But the Church is the work of God, so all the efforts of hell are futile. New religious orders, tireless missionaries, indomitable apostles, and Popes great in holiness, zeal, and doctrinal teaching joined forces with one heart and mind. Supported by the arm of the Almighty, they threw the lying spirit into confusion, mightily defended Catholic truth, and carried the light of the Gospel message to the very ends of the earth. Thus the Church, gravely injured but far from destroyed, enjoyed new conquests and even more glorious triumphs.⁶

For Don Bosco, then, history is what it was for the monk Mauro Cappellari (the future Pope Gregory XVI, 1765-1846), Father René Francis Rohrbacher, Pius IX (1792-1878) and hundreds of bishops, Father James Margotti (1823-1887) and hundreds of Catholic publicists. It was an ongoing cycle of struggle and triumph: triumph of good over evil, of the Church over its enemies, of the mystical woman over the hellish serpent. And why was one victory more luminous than others? Because the assaults of the devil had been more violent. Don Bosco did not share the views of those in the mid-nineteenth century who foresaw a total extinction of the faith, such as Auguste Nicolas.⁷ Nor did he see its demise just in Europe.⁸ He did not see the state of the Church in the

⁶ Ibid., epoch 5, pp. 287-88. The “flood of heretics, rebels against the Church” is also in *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 20, p. 101.

⁷ Auguste Nicolas, *La Vergine Maria vivente nella Chiesa* (Turin, 1863), 2:164 [l. 3, q. 8]: “It is predicted that when the reign of the Antichrist comes, which is to precede the final triumph of the Son of man, when there will no longer be faith on earth, all sorts of magical feats will contend for credulity.”

⁸ So writes the anonymous source of *Il Cattolico istrutto: Cenni sulla cattolica religione* (Alba, 1849), p. 102: “Think for a moment what a terrible disgrace would be ours if we, with our lack of love and our sacrilegious disdain for the holy religion that is our treasure and our best glory, should practically force God to take away from us that glory and precious treasure of ours? Let Italians ponder this especially. If they love themselves, their families, their people, and Italy, let them not help to bring down on their homeland such a terrible punishment!”

Similarly, Bp. Louis Rendu (1789-1859) of Annecy writes in *Pensieri...opportunitissimi a confortare i cattolici nelle presenti tribolazioni della Chiesa* (Library of Good Books, a. 11, disp. 23 and 24, Turin, 1860), p. 69: “We also know that to punish great infidelities and monstrous apostasies, God sometimes abandons whole peoples to their private sense and all the fluctuations of thought. Ah, then, what a woeful state!...

nineteenth century prefigured in the decline or death of Rachel as she gave birth to sons of new hope.⁹ For Don Bosco,

the Catholic religion is progressing in its missions, triumphing despite persecution in some areas. It is flourishing in Europe, too, although it meets with many obstacles. They are overcome as they arise; and the oppressive measures imposed on Catholics in some countries seem to be paving the way for a reaction that will universally benefit Catholicism.¹⁰

Don Bosco's forecasts for the future of the Church are optimistic. At the conclusion of his *Church History* he writes bluntly:

[The Church] has always triumphed. It has seen kingdoms, republics, and empires crumble and disintegrate around it. It alone has remained firm and immobile. It is now in the nineteenth century since its founding, and every day it looks more flourishing. Others will come after us, and they will see it flourishing still. Guided by God's hand, it will gloriously overcome all human vicissitudes, triumph over its enemies, and advance surefootedly through the turmoil of the ages until the end of time. Then it will make all its children a single kingdom in the homeland of the blessed.¹¹

2. *The history of Italy*

Don Bosco's *History of Italy*, a string of anecdotal accounts in chronological order, did not lend itself as well as his *Bible History* and *Church History* to a presentation of events in accordance with some design of divine Providence. Like other popular works of the time, it was conceived as a history of Italy; and so it fluctuates between a geographical and an ethnic focus. Italy first shows up as a junction or amalgam of diverse peoples, then the unifying center of the Mediterranean area, then a major center of civilization and religion, and then a nation that is culturally united although politically fragmented.

Here and there we see his concern to highlight elements contributing to cultural and spiritual unification.¹² Don Bosco clearly stresses the role of religion

Peoples abandoned to every wind of doctrine fall from revolution to revolution into servitude, barbarity, and all their accompanying calamities."

⁹ Such was the opinion of Jansenist epigones in Italy at the time of Don Bosco. See Pietro Stella, "I 'macolatisti' pavese e il tramonto del portorealismo in Lombardia," *Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia* 19 (1965), 38-85.

¹⁰ *Stor. eccl.*, epoch 5, p. 386.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

¹² *Storia d'Italia*, epoch 1, p. 86, ed. Caviglia 3 (Turin, 1935), 74: Rome's concession of citizenship to the peoples of Italy "is a most noteworthy fact in history because all Italy united with Rome and became a single people."

and the Church in fostering progress, including civil progress. His is a reaction against those who were depicting the papacy and the organized Church as instruments of oppression and regression.

Individuals play important roles as military commanders, magistrates, leaders, artists, sages, and saints.¹³ Power, exemplary lives, and contributions to civil and moral progress are depicted as blessings from God for living a virtuous and religious life. Don Bosco does not fail to underline the thread of progress in many earthly pursuits (art, commerce, general welfare), as Enlightenment historiography had chosen to do and as some of his own models did: Julius Raymond Lamé-Fleury (1797-1878), Louis Alexander Parravicini (1800-1880), Louis Zini (1821-1894), Hercules Ricotti (1816-1883).¹⁴ But Don Bosco stresses the ethical and religious components involved even in civil vicissitudes and forward steps, thus following the example of such writers as Anthony Henry de Bérault-Bercastel (1720-1794), Cardinal Hyacinth Gerdil, and John Nicholas Loriquez, SJ (1767-1845).

The greatest example of decline and fall is the collapse of the Roman Empire and the inrush of the barbarian peoples. Sometimes Don Bosco points to the responsibility of an inept individual, but usually he highlights moral and religious factors: cruelty, dissoluteness, envy, egotism, treaty violations, betrayal, and sacrilege. Four wicked emperors are pointed out as those “who introduced such disorders into the Empire that they can be said to have greatly contributed to its plunge into the abyss of immorality and debauchery.”¹⁵ Attila (406?-453), the Franks, and Napoleon (1769-1821) are typical personifications of arrogance or cruelty, which sooner or later incurs divine punishment.

Plagues, wars, famines, defeats, sorrows of all sort, and betrayals of individual and public trust are always rooted in some sin. In oppressing others the sinner serves as an instrument of their punishment but also incurs punishment from God. The Pisans “sacked Amalfi terribly..., then saw their own city fall prey to worse disasters.”¹⁶ The armies of the Italian cities allied with Frederick Barbarossa (1123?-1190) helped to destroy Milan, “to vent their hatred of that city, which in previous years had almost completely devastated the cities of Lodi and Como.”¹⁷

¹³ The highlighting of virtues and vices derives greatly from the fact that DB polarizes events around personages. In the definitive edition, 118 of 152 sections take their title from one or more persons. This tendency to portray protagonists, prompted by pedagogical motives, is also clear in one of DB's sources, Parravicini's *Giannetto*.

¹⁴ See Gianni M. Pozzo, *La storia e il progresso nell'Illuminismo francese* (Padua, 1964), and especially what is presented on divine pedagogy and the education of the human race in Michelangelo Ghio, *L'idea di progresso nell'illuminismo francese e tedesco* (Turin, 1962), pp. 9-10, 133-45, 167-80, etc.

¹⁵ *Storia d'Italia*, epoch 2, pp. 127-31; ed. Caviglia, pp. 108-11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, epoch 3, p. 293; ed. Caviglia, p. 244.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 268; ed. Caviglia, p. 224.

More than any other city, it is Rome that is seen as the object of God's plans.

Providence, which had destined Rome to dominate all of Italy, saw to it that the peaceful Numa would be followed immediately by two courageous, warlike kings who would extend the boundaries of Roman rule over other Italic peoples.¹⁸

The destiny of Rome was to become the "glorious see of the Vicar of Jesus Christ," after passing through the crucible of purification. As a pagan capital, it had been a haughty city. With the sack of Rome by Alaric (A.D. 410) and its countless disasters, "the haughty city made expiation for its abuse of its past grandeur." The devastation was intensified by

a terrible thunderstorm and continued lightning [which]...brought down several temples and reduced to ashes the idols that had been adored once upon a time and then preserved by Christian emperors as embellishments of the city.¹⁹

Virtues and vices are not considered solely in terms of the progress or decline of peoples. They are also the cause of singular events, which serve as clear-cut arguments for God's extraordinary intervention. Nero took his own life on the very same date on which he had had his mother killed some years earlier.²⁰

Count Ugolino [della Gheradesca, 1220?-1289] was cruel to his homeland and had caused many of his fellow citizens to perish in prison. Before dying, he himself had to taste all the horrors of a ravenous hunger. How terrible are the judgments of God!²¹

At Fontainebleau, Napoleon "was forced to renounce his crown..., bathing with his own tears the very place where he had made the Roman Pontiff shed tears."²²

Don Bosco is careful to point out that such curious cases of reversal have been prearranged by God. The evils that befall the wicked prove that "there is a just God, who doles out deserved punishment in due time and place."²³ He is convinced that "evildoers are always punished for the evil they do, all the more severely when they are rich and powerful."²⁴ There is due proportion, then, in God's punishments, even here on earth: "[Lucius Cornelius] Sulla [138-78 B.C.], sated with the blood of citizens, abandoned himself to two despicable vices: in-

¹⁸ Ibid., epoch 1, p. 27; ed. Caviglia, p. 29.

¹⁹ Ibid., epoch 2, pp. 162-63; ed. Caviglia, p. 135.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 112; ed. Caviglia, p. 98.

²¹ Ibid., epoch 3, p. 293; ed. Caviglia, p. 244. The same expressions are in his *Stor. eccl.*, epoch 5, p. 367. [Editor's note: Ugolino's story is told by Dante, *Inferno* xxxii-xxxiii, and Chaucer, "The Monk's Tale."]

²² Ibid., epoch 4, p. 468; ed. Caviglia, pp. 389-90.

²³ Ibid., epoch 1, p. 22; ed. Caviglia, p. 24.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 36. "Always punished" is toned down to "ordinarily punished"; see ed. Caviglia, p. 36.

temperance and dissoluteness. This brought on a cruel malady, and he ended up being eaten alive by worms.”²⁵ During the sack of Rome [1527], Duke Charles of Bourbon, betrayer of Francis I and apostate, was killed by a musket shot, thereby “paying the price for having betrayed his king and his religion.”²⁶

Besides giving his young readers reasons for the deaths of people, Don Bosco also suggests the deeper reasons why evils are portioned out in different measures: “In the cholera epidemic [1854], experts noticed that those who were leading dissolute lives were the first to be struck down by the disease.”²⁷

Vices never lead to progress; they cause only corruption. Virtue, on the other hand, benefits peoples and nations, as the case of Theodolinda (d. 628) proves.²⁸ Don Bosco’s thesis, like that of Bossuet, is poles apart from that of Hobbes (1588-1679) or of Bernard de Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* (1714). In Don Bosco’s eyes it is absolutely false that private vices can be the cause of public benefits.

3. *Human history as documentary proof of God’s dominion*

The whole pageant of human events, as described in the historiographical works of Don Bosco, inculcates in the observer an attitude akin to that which the religious spirit feels in contemplating creation.

It is God who dominates human events, even though human beings are the actors. Clear, incontrovertible proof is provided by extraordinary interventions: revelation, predictions, and miracles. It is also evident in the course of events leading up to the one, true religion. In this respect Don Bosco’s *History of Italy*, like neo-Guelph historiography, dovetails with the third part of Bossuet’s *Discourse on Universal History*, in which Bossuet illustrates how the vicissitudes of empires are providentially arranged to lead toward “the establishment of Christ’s kingdom.”²⁹

Another proof of divine dominion is the fact that vices or religious and moral disorders never win out. Despite all the snares and conflicts, good always

²⁵ Ibid., p. 87. “Dissoluteness” was later changed to “indecentcy”; see ed. Caviglia, p. 77.

²⁶ Ibid., epoch 4, p. 388; ed. Caviglia, p. 321.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 517; ed. Caviglia, p. 420. The text goes on to say, “Hence the more learned doctors were advising people to lead a decent, temperate life, and to purify their consciences with the consolations of religion in order to pacify the feelings of remorse felt by those agitated by guilt.”

²⁸ Ibid., epoch 3, pp. 200-05; ed. Caviglia, pp. 172-77.

²⁹ Bossuet, *Discorso sulla storia universale*, pt. 3 (Naples, 1857), pp. 339-431. See ch. 1 in particular. The first Italian edition was in 1712.

manages to triumph. God's work of justice and mercy is always pedagogical, ordinarily operating through secondary causes. Individuals and nations, moral and natural causes, are depicted as God's instruments. History bears the imprint of God for Don Bosco. Indeed it is more than mere imprint because it is chock-full of God's word and God's activity.

4. *Literary borrowings and inner convictions of Don Bosco*

The allusion to Bossuet and his time might seem less persuasive than my reference to Risorgimento historiography, but it is just as well founded. There is the same basic spirit in the manner of approaching events, although the events of the late seventeenth century were obviously different from those of the mid-nineteenth century. The substantive similarity finds solid confirmation from a close study of the religious literature on which Don Bosco's historiographical work draws.

I have already noted that the history of religion included in Don Bosco's *Religiously Instructed Catholic* follows the outline by Cardinal Gerdil in his *Brief Exposition of the Traits of the True Religion*.³⁰ If one looks at other sources used by Don Bosco—Father John Loriguet's *Bible History* and *Church History*,³¹ Father

³⁰ Here are a few samples by way of comparison:

Gerdil, *Breve esposizione dei caratteri della vera religione* (Turin, 1822), p. 5:

Three things he promised him especially:

that he would give to his posterity the land to which he had him come, which therefore was called the land of promise; that he would make him father of a great people, numerous as the stars of the sky and the sands of the sea;

and that all the nations of the earth, previously immersed in the darkness of idolatry, would be blessed, i.e., recalled to the knowledge of God, in one who would be born of him.

³¹ [Loriguet], *Storia sacra* (Turin: Marietti, 1847), pp. 10, 12:

The devil, who had already been cast down from heaven,... envious...

Adam died after a penitence of 930 years...

Bosco, *Il Cattolico istruito*, pt. 1, trat. 6, p. 32:

Three particular promises God made to Abraham:

1. that he would make him father of a people numerous as the stars of the sky and the sands of the sea...

2. that he would give his descendants the land of Canaan...

3. that all the nations would be blessed, i.e., recalled to the knowledge of God by *One* who would be born of him.

Bosco, *Storia sacra*, pp. 14, 17:

The devil, who shortly before had been thrown out of paradise,...envious...

...he then led a penitent life in expiation for his sin, and died in holiness at the age of 930 years.

Francis Soave's *History of the Jewish People*,³² or the *Accounts Drawn from Sacred Scripture* of Father Christopher Schmid (1768-1845)³³—one can easily go back to even earlier times and works. Loriquet himself informs us that he used Father Charles Francis Lhomond (1727-1794) for his *Church History*.³⁴ Lhomond's sources were known: the *Outline of the History and Morality of the Old Testament*; the historical sections of the *Exposition of Christian Doctrine* by Francis Philip Mésenguy (1677-1763), one of the best Jansenist writers in the eighteenth century; and Bossuet's *Discourse on Universal History*.³⁵

Loriquet also informs his readers that he took over almost the whole of the *Outline of Sacred History* by Abbé Durand (1682-1771) and made his own Durand's *Proofs of Religion*.³⁶ In the preface to his *Bible History*, Don Bosco offers

³² Soave, *Storia del popolo ebreo* (Vigevano, 1814), pp. 40-41:

Out of vile fear Aaron consented. Having gotten the women to bring their gold earrings, he melted them down and made a calf, which the Hebrews set about adoring with sacrifices, celebrations, and riotous feasting.

God saw their perversity...

³³ Christoph Schmid, *Racconti cavati dalla Santa Scrittura: Nuovo Testamento* (Milan: Pirotta, 1840), p. 89:

There was also a certain beggar named Lazarus, who lay at the door of that rich man, full of sores, desiring to eat of the crumbs that fell from his table. But no one gave any to him; only the dogs came to lick his sores.

³⁴ [Loriquet], *Storia ecclesiastica* (Turin: Marietti, 1844), pp. 5-6: "The excellent history of the Church written by Lhomond is the pure source from which we have drawn."

³⁵ Besides the *Histoire abrégée de l'Église*, Lhomond compiled several other works for young people and educators: *Histoire abrégée de la religion avant la venue de Jésus-Christ*, *Doctrine chrétienne en forme de lectures de piété*, *Epitome historiae sacrae*, etc. It is possible to document their interdependence. Volentieri tells us in *La religione studiata nella storia* (Turin, 1849)—and I have verified it—that the *Histoire abrégée de la religion* "is largely nothing but a medley of selections from Mezanguy [*sic*] and therefore sometimes loses sight of the close connection and natural dependence of events so necessary for that sort of work" (p. 14).

³⁶ The notice was eliminated in the preface to Loriquet's *Storia sacra* published in Italian by Marietti. But in the French eds., e.g., *Histoire sainte* (Lyons: Lesne, 1842), we

Bosco, *Storia sacra*, p. 63:

Fearing their threats, Aaron agreed. Having gotten the gold earrings of the women brought to him, he melted them down and made a calf of them, which the Hebrews set about adoring with sacrifices, celebrations, and riotous feasting.

God saw their perversity...

Bosco, *Storia sacra*, p. 178:

There was also a beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who lay at the door of that rich man and was so tormented by hunger that he desired to sate himself with the crumbs that fell from that rich man's table, and he did not give them to him. Only the dogs, more compassionate than he, went to lick his sores.

an argument for the divinity of the sacred books that comes from Durand's later work by way of Loricquet.³⁷ Durand, in turn, tells his readers that one of his resources for bible history was a very successful work that came from the circle of Port-Royal: the *History of the Old and New Testaments* by Lemaistre de Sacy, sieur de Royaumont.³⁸ An Italian version was also printed in Turin by the Paravia Press,³⁹ publisher of *The Companion of Youth* and printer of many of the

read: "For a long time there has existed an *Abrégé de l'Histoire sainte par demandes et par réponses*. The intentions of the author were most praiseworthy, but it seems to me that he did not derive all the fruit from such a rich subject that we might have expected. (1) He injects several strokes that surely can and should be kept unknown to children. (2) We do not find in his narrative the order and coherence that would tie different events together... (3) His choice of events is not always felicitous, and his redaction is often faulty..." (p. vii).

³⁷ [Loricquet], *Storia ecclesiastica*, p. 152

Q. What proofs do we have of the divinity of Scripture?

A. We have four: (1) the miracles worked by the prophets, which show that God had sent them; (2) the prophecies about the coming of Jesus Christ and many other events, which were completely verified; (3) the loftiness of scriptural doctrine, which is so holy and perfect that only God could be its author; (4) the admirable effect it has on those who read it, since it sanctifies their hearts and fills them with contentment and peace.

Bosco, *Storia sacra*, p. 12

Q. How do we prove that the authors of the Bible were assisted and enlightened by God?

A. There are four reasons that demonstrate divine assistance in the sacred authors: (1) the miracles worked especially by the prophets, which prove that God had sent them; (2) the prophecies about the coming of Jesus Christ, and many other events that were completely verified; (3) the sublimity of the teaching of the Holy Bible, which is so pure and perfect that only God could be its author; (4) the admirable effect it has on the hearts of those who read it, since it sanctifies their hearts and fills them with contentment and peace.

[Durand], *Abrégé de l'Histoire sainte avec des preuves de la religion, par demandes et par réponses*, new ed. (Paris: Veuve Estienne, 1733), p. 211: "Q. What proofs do we have of the divinity of Scripture? A. We have four. (1) The miracles that the prophets worked, which prove that God had sent them. (2) The prophecies about Jesus Christ and other events, which were all fulfilled. (3) The sublimity of the teaching of Scripture, which is so holy and so perfect that only God could be its author. (4) The admirable power it has over those who read it; for in sanctifying their hearts, it fills them with joy and consolation."

The edition of Durand cited here is unknown to Barbier, *Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes et pseudonymes* (Paris, 1872), 1:27. DB later expands what he wrote in *Storia sacra*; see *Catt. istr.*, pt. 1, trat. 5, pp. 26-27.

³⁸ [Durand], p. xiv. On p. xi he says that he also used Doujeat, *Éloges des personnes illustres et l'Ancien Testament*, and Fleury, *Les moeurs des Israélites et des Chrétiens*.

³⁹ [Nicolas Fontaine], *Storia del Vecchio e Nuovo Testamento, ossia della Bibbia sacra con riflessioni morali: Opera del Signor LeMaitre de Sacy, ossia Royaumont* (Turin: Paravia, 1837). This work, published anonymously as *Histoire du Vieux et du Nouveau Testament*, was attributed erroneously by many French and Italian publishers to Louis-Isaac

Catholic Readings, and it was cited by Don Bosco in his *Massimino*.⁴⁰ Soave's *History of the Jewish People* and Bercastel's *History of Christianity* draw upon the works of Calmet, Rollin, Claude Fleury (1640-1725), and hence upon the whole milieu of which Bossuet and the Port-Royal people are typical expressions.

I cited above the conclusion of Don Bosco's *Church History*, which focuses on the struggles and triumphs of the Church. It can be readily detected in Loriquet's own ending to his *Church History*:

LORIQUEUET:

It has seen kingdoms, republics, and empires tremble and collapse around it and in its midst. It alone has remained firm and unmoved. And after eighteen

DON BOSCO:

It has seen kingdoms, republics, and empires crumble and disintegrate around it. It alone has remained firm and immobile. It is now in the nineteenth cen-

Lemaistre de Sacy (1613-84), a lawyer and younger brother of Anthony Lemaistre; both were Jansenists.

⁴⁰ Bosco, *Massimino, ossia incontro di un giovanetto con un ministro protestante sul Campidoglio* (Turin: OSFS, 1874), p. 6: "In the years of elementary school and the first two years of high school, he had read and studies the histories of a number of authors. Soave, Calmet, Secco, Royamond [sic], Bosco were as familiar to him as the Hail Mary."

The Secco in question is Luciano Secco, SJ, *Storia sacra dell'Antico e Nuovo Testamento* (Turin: Marietti, 1841). He depends partly on Schmid, whom DB prefers in some places:

Secco, p. 273:

Then having called over a child and placed him in their midst, he embraced him, adding, "In truth I tell you, if you do not become humble and simple, like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. One who has become small, like this child, will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

He went on to say, "One who receives in my name such a child receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. So if someone scandalizes one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for him to have a millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea...; their angels in heaven always see the face of my heavenly Father."

Bosco, *Storia sacra*, p. 173:

He had a child come over and placed in their midst, embraced him, and added, "In truth I tell you, if you do not become humble and simple, like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

"One who has become small, like these children, will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." "One who receives a child in my name receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me, my heavenly Father." He went on to say, "If someone scandalizes one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for him to have a millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea...; their guardian angels always see the face of my heavenly Father."

Schmid, *Racconti*, p. 81: "One who receives a child like one of these in my name receives me. But for someone who has scandalized one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better to have a millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea...; in heaven their angels continually see the face of my divine Father."

centuries, it displays all the vigor, beauty, and fecundity of its first years.

Future times will see it still flourishing. And it will continue to advance surefootedly through time and human turmoil until the end of time, then to be reunited with Jesus in the sojourn of eternal jubilation.⁴¹

tury since its founding, and every day it looks more flourishing.

Others will come after us, and they will see it flourishing still. Guided by God's hand, it will gloriously overcome all human vicissitudes, triumph over its enemies, and advance surefootedly through the turmoil of the ages until the end of time. Then it will make all its children a single kingdom in the homeland of the blessed.

Such citations might also be used, however, to raise doubts whether the pages of published writings truly express the mind of Don Bosco himself. One of the keys to resolving the question is to be found in words of Don Bosco that are not connected with such remote sources. Such would be his more independent comments in his prefaces to various apologetic and hagiographical works, e.g. *Conversations Between a Lawyer and a Rural Pastor* (1855), *The Life of Saint Martin* (1855), and *Apparition of the Blessed Virgin at La Salette* (1871). The comments on the events of his time in his *Gentleman's Almanac* would fit into the same category; even though written anonymously, most of them can be attributed to Don Bosco by internal analysis, and consistent tradition did so attribute them.⁴²

⁴¹ [Loriquet], *Storia ecclesiastica*, p. 129. The same conclusion, with slight variations, can be found in the *Storia della Chiesa dalla sua fondazione fino al pontificato di Gregorio XVI* (Turin: Marietti, 1843), pp. 329-30: "What lesson should we learn from the history of the Catholic Church? The history of the Catholic Church teaches us that its destiny here on earth is to be always persecuted and always triumphant... It has seen kingdoms, republics, and empires crumble around it and disintegrate in its midst. It alone has remained firm and immobile; and after eighteen centuries it displays all the vigor and fecundity of its youth.

"Those who come after us will find it constantly the same. It will continue to advance surefootedly through time and human revolutions until the end of time, to be reunited with Jesus Christ in the place of his eternal repose."

This other *Storia della Chiesa*, structured differently from Loriquet's, seems to be of Austrian derivation. It was translated by the Jesuit Acacio Saracinelli (1725-1802), with additions by his confrere Paul Beorchia (1795-1859), who was in Turin at various times. See Carlos Sommervogel, SJ (1834-1902), *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus*, 1, col. 1317.

One can see that there is a similarity of terminology between Loriquet and this other work: *turmoil/revolution, the end of time, surefootedly*. Many expressions of DB in his early period are close to the latter's: "It has seen kingdoms...crumble around it..."

⁴² See *Il Galantuomo: Almanacco per l'anno 1889* (Turin, 1889), p. 49: "As I told you above, *Galantuomo* was almost completely the work of D. Bosco in that early period." In *Don Bosco's Dreams: A Historico-documentary Analysis of Selected Samples*, I examine coincidences between the prophecies of *Il Galantuomo* for 1870-74 and those sent to Pius IX in the same period.

Don Bosco had a great fascination for apparitions of the Virgin Mary, predictions, and miraculous cures. Like the Marist John Mary Huguet (1812-1884), Monsignor Louis Gaston de Ségur (1820-1881), and other reporters of them, Don Bosco used them to publicize and proselytize. The apparitions at LaSalette (1846) and Lourdes (1858), the eye movements of a picture of Mary in Taggia, the wondrous movements of a statue of Saint Dominic in Soriano, apparitions to pious young women, and the predictions of Sister Mary of the Nativity (1836-1907) and of Louise Lateau (1850-1883): all of these were given room in his *Catholic Readings*, as were miracles wrought by Mary Help of Christians and extraordinary graces obtained through the intercession of Saint Pancras, Louis Comollo, and Dominic Savio. Miraculous happenings always have many and varied merits:

These sensible signs of divine omnipotence are always omens of important events manifesting the Lord's mercy and goodness or his justice and indignation, but in such a way as to redound to his greater glory or to the greater benefit of souls.⁴³

Wars, cholera epidemics, diseases, deaths, and big funerals at court are always linked to the sinfulness that weighs on humanity:

War is a scourge sent by God on human beings for their sins. These sins still go on... People work or have others work on holy days. Sermons are preached, but many do not go to them. There are priests and confessionals, but to avoid being upset by them many people go to them rarely, even though they are neither heretics nor Jews. More than a few never go. Some go so far as to make fun of the good that others do.⁴⁴

The present evils serve to forecast punishments of every sort in the near future. The 1860 edition of *The Gentleman's Almanac* goes on to say:

Now I will allude to other scourges which, I am afraid, are to happen this year. We will have another, even bloodier war. If it does not spill as much blood, it will nevertheless send an even greater number of souls to hell. We will have two terrible diseases. I do not wish to name them, but their terrible effects will be seen. Two well known figures will disappear from the political scene, along with their renown. Many fathers and mothers will be unable to find peace due to the insubordination of their children. They will bemoan the vexation...and strife they cause within the family. They will go looking for a remedy and find only poison because the only remedy is the religion that they themselves neglect.⁴⁵

⁴³ Bosco, *Apparizione della Beata Vergine sulla montagna di LaSalette* (Turin: OSFS, 1871), p. 7.

⁴⁴ *Il Galantuomo: Almanacco piemontese-lombardo per l'anno bisestile 1860, aggiuntevi varie utili letture. Anno XII* (Turin: Paravia, 1859), p. 20-21.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

In the 1869 edition of *The Gentleman's Almanac*, there appears a judgment of divine condemnation on the behavior of Louis Charles Farini (1812-1866), historian and liberal politician:

To those who seek to Protestantize Italy, I will say that a man who left this world, struck down by the justice of God in a terrible way, had written a fine statement that applies to them. I cite it here in its entirety for our comfort and the desolation of scoundrels: "Destroying Catholicism in Italy is historical and political folly, a childish fantasy. Italy...is Catholic, and there is no other Catholicism except Roman Catholicism."⁴⁶

Farini was the one who in 1860 had ordered the first police searches of the Oratory.

After presenting all the events that had rocked Europe in the preceding year, *The Gentleman's Almanac* for 1873 offered this admonition:

I know that there are many who do not recognize these disasters as real punishments from God. But they are blind, like the obstinate and foolish pharaoh who thought that the plagues of Egypt were something natural.⁴⁷

In short, contemporary events, no less than those of the remote past, continue to manifest the hand of God in human affairs, the latter being directed in accordance with his justice and mercy. Humanity continues to be called to truth and goodness, to Christ their Savior, to the Church as the only true ark of salvation, and to eternal life. There is no break or contradiction between the lessons of past history and those of current events. Don Bosco reveals himself equally and fully in recording both. His dominant motifs remain the same: God, salvation from sin and eternal death, ethical and religious values as the criteria for interpreting events, and inspiring people to bring their lives into conformity with the divine plan. We find these motifs in his presentation of events and his predictions for the future:

Since there is one sole God, one sole faith, and one sole religion, let us also unite in one sole bond of faith and charity to help each other in the needs of this present life; so that mutually comforted and supported in body and spirit, we may one day reign eternally with God in the homeland of the blessed in heaven.⁴⁸

This is the conclusion Don Bosco gave to his *History of Italy* in 1855, leaving it substantially unchanged in the later editions published while he was still alive and able to supervise them.⁴⁹ The supreme teaching of history is a religious

⁴⁶ *Il Galantuomo: Almanacco per l'anno 1869. Anno XVII: Strenna offerta agli associati alle Lett. cattoliche* [Turin: OSFS, 1868], p. 4.

⁴⁷ *Il Galantuomo: Almanacco per l'anno 1873. Strenna offerta agli associati alle Letture cattoliche* [Turin: OSFS, 1872], p. 8.

⁴⁸ *Storia d'Italia*, p. 525.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 17th ed. (Turin, 1886), p. 488.

one, according to Don Bosco. History, too, teaches us that the unity of religious values, after the break caused by sin, lies in a toilsome process of unification, knowledge, adhesion, liberation, and salvation. The decisions that history should induce us to make, and that Don Bosco proposes, have to do with faith and morality.

At this point, then, we do well to see how these general considerations affect Don Bosco's judgment of his own century.

5. *Nineteenth-century society between religion and revolution*

Amid the simmering interplay of events in Turin and Italy, Don Bosco found his own place, first as a catechist of youthful apprentices who had come to Turin to find jobs. He then became the founder and director of various educational works. Compelled to seek aid from anyone who could help him, at least financially, he soon learned the ways of public and private institutions. Begging taught him the art of getting across the usefulness of his oratories to Turinese patricians, the clergy, municipal administrators, and departments of the Ministry of the Interior. He relied on the sense of urgency that all could recognize in the need to provide education, shelter, food, and clothing for youths who might otherwise become delinquents.⁵⁰

But we must not forget that other things were going on while Don Bosco was knocking on the doors of the Turin archdiocesan chancery, the royal palace, the Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus, the Agency for the Instruction of the Destitute [*Regia Opera Pia per la Mendicizia Istruita*], and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. In Italy and Europe profound changes were taking place in many sectors: in social structures, in relations between the Catholic Church and the political authorities, and in relations between practicing Catholics, the indifferent, and adversaries of the Church. This complex of events could not help but have an impact on Don Bosco, and of course that would include political events as well. Don Bosco described his own politics as that of the Our Father.⁵¹ Such statements might seem to be enlightening, suggesting that Don Bosco intended to take his own path, to do good, and that was that. Placed in context, however, they might well seem evasive answers, given when he was confronted

⁵⁰ A dramatic description of poor youth abandoned to themselves, for whom the "direst consequences are to be feared" if the situation is not remedied, can be found in the circular for the lottery organized in 1851 (AS 131/04 Circolari e inviti; *Ep.* 43). In later writings DB was more circumspect. But he again picks up the tone of urgency after 1870, especially in conferences to his Cooperators or in the annual reports given in the BS. The expression "shelter, food, and clothing" comes from *Const.*; see DBLW:114-15, n. 37.

⁵¹ DB is supposed to have said that to Pius IX in 1867 (BM 8:259-60).

by simplistically proffered questions or backed into a corner in a friendly way and asked whether he was for Garibaldi, Mazzini, or Pius IX.⁵²

They seem all the more circumspect when we consider other bits of testimony that might seem conflicting. In 1889 Bishop Jeremiah Bonomelli of Cremona (1831-1914) offered this recollection:

One day, not many years ago, I was speaking familiarly with Don Bosco, a man of God and a true apostle of youth whose name is regarded with reverence. Characteristically simple and practical, he told me these exact unforgettable words: "In 1848 I realized that if I wanted to get anywhere in doing some good, I had to put all politics aside. From then on, I always shied away from politics and managed to do good without interference. In addition I found help where I least expected it."⁵³

A more precise sense is given to the notion of "putting all politics aside" in the exhortation that Bishop Bonomelli adds to Don Bosco's own testimony. Priests, Bishop Bonomelli notes, are sent by Jesus Christ

into the world to continue his work, i.e., to teach, administer the sacraments, pray, exhort, admonish, correct, console, and save souls. This is the mission we have received, and these are the weapons we have been given to fight our battles... Let us strive to make good Christians of all those entrusted to our care, and we will have excellent voters who will devote themselves with love and intelligent zeal to the inseparable interests of country and religion.⁵⁴

It is interesting to explore at this point how well Don Bosco's later recollections dovetail with the documented data he himself left us both before and after 1848. We can look at the circumstances which led him, in that fateful year, to discover that "if I wanted to get anywhere in doing some good, I had to put all politics aside." We will then be in a position properly to evaluate not only the prescription he left the Salesians not to engage in politics, but also some facts that might leave us otherwise perplexed, e.g., his letter to the Austrian Emperor Francis Joseph (1830-1916) in 1873, in which he suggested a series of alliances and other measures that can hardly be described as non-political.

⁵² Several episodes are noted in *Indice* MB, pp. 332-33, s.v. "Politica."

⁵³ Cited here from BM 6:396-97. See Geremia Bonomelli, *Il clero e la società moderna* (pastoral letter of 1889), reprinted in *Problemi e questioni del giorno* (Milan, 1892), p. 306.

⁵⁴ Bonomelli, p. 307. For the history of ideas and attitudes adopted by European Catholics, it is interesting to note that Bonomelli, by his own admission, draws on the circular of Abp. Mary Dominic August Sibour of Paris (1792-1857), dated Jan. 15, 1851: *Mandement de monseigneur l'archevêque de Paris, pour développer et confirmer le Décret du Concile de Paris relatif à l'intervention du Clergé dans les affaires politiques* (Paris, 1851). Some copies of this document are found in Turin as well.

6. Conservatism up to 1848

The feeling that the times were difficult pervaded the pastoral letters of Archbishop Louis Fransoni of Turin (1789-1862) from the time Don Bosco was a high school student in Chieri. In Fransoni's 1833 pastoral letter for Lent, Don Bosco could hear how the Pope had become a target "of the modern enemies of the altar and the throne."⁵⁵ In his 1846 pastoral letter for the election of Pius IX, Don Bosco could read that the sectarians were everywhere "taking aim at the altar and the throne" and threatening the worst sort of attacks.⁵⁶ The tide of enemies suggested an "ever rising" torrent that threatened to crest and break over the evangelical field. Fransoni urged people to join together in prayers for Pope and king, both of whom he saw besieged by enemies:

We have urged you to ask the Lord's most vigorous help for the supreme head and pastor of the Catholic Church, Pius IX, so that he may gloriously triumph over the assaults of his enemies, who grow more and more furious. And since their ruthless warfare also seeks to topple thrones, we should repeat the same request for our beloved sovereign, King Charles Albert.⁵⁷

To Archbishop Fransoni, the papal nuncio Archbishop Benedict Anthony Antonucci (1798-1879), and Charles Albert (1798-1849) himself, the cries of radical democrats at that point recalled the Jacobins and the monstrous hydra of the French Revolution, i.e., everything that the literature of the Restoration depicted as a cause of the ills afflicting Church and society, throne and altar.⁵⁸

Don Bosco's writings before 1848 reflect this state of mind. His *Church History*, for example, does not pause to distinguish what might be valid in the aspirations of those who followed Saint-Simon (1760-1825), Mazzini (1805-

⁵⁵ Pastoral letter of Feb. 18, 1833 (Turin: Botta, 1833), pp. 15-16.

⁵⁶ Pastoral letter of June 25, 1846 (Turin: Botta, 1846), p. 5: "The terrible vexations have gone on for a long time, it is true, unchecked and with eyes fixed on altar and throne, threatening a terrible assault." On p. 4: "Nor let it be objected that the time of the conclave for the election of Pius VII was still worse..."—an anticipation of the parallel between the two Popes, which Catholics will rely on to hope for the definitive triumph of Pius IX over his enemies, just as Pius VII triumphed over the French Revolution and Napoleon.

⁵⁷ Pastoral letter of Aug. 7, 1847 (Turin: Botta, 1847), p. iii. In this period the archbishop, a tenacious defender of the Jesuits, became increasingly unpopular. See the documents presented by Maria Franca Mellano, *Il caso Fransoni e la politica ecclesiastica piemontese (1848-1850)* (Rome, 1964), pp. 54-61.

⁵⁸ See Nicolò Rodolico, *Carlo Alberto negli anni 1843-1849* (Florence, 1943); Pietro Pirri, SJ, *Pio IX e Vittorio Emanuele II dal loro carteggio privato. 1: La laicizzazione dello Stato Sardo, 1848-1856* (Rome, 1944); Fausto Fonzi, "Antonucci (Benedetto Antonio)," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome, 1961), 3:591-93. Antonucci was in Turin as nuncio from Nov. 1844 to Apr. 12, 1851. Interesting sources for this period are Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-52), *Il Gesuita moderno* (Lausanne, 1847), and Clemente Solaro della Margarita, *Memorandum storico politico* (Turin, 1851).

1872), or Abbé Félicité de Lamennais (1782-1854). It focuses solely on their subversive attitude, denouncing and condemning it. In answer to a request for information about the Saint-Simonians, Don Bosco writes:

Count Claude de Saint-Simon, a native of Paris, gave his name to these modern innovators. Having spent a part of his life as a soldier, he decided to establish a new Christianity, and so declared war on monarchy and religion. He expressed belief in God and creation, but soon he was contradicting himself by claiming that matter is eternal. He thought that everyone was bound to enlist in his reform. But when he saw that his efforts brought persecution down on him everywhere, he fell into a deep melancholy and in his desperation shot himself with a pistol...

The errors of Saint-Simon have largely been followed by Abbé Lamennais. Though at one time he wrote in favor of the faith, he has now misled people and done harm to religion. Today he follows a doctrine that leads to deism, almost to atheism, I would say.⁵⁹

Religion is the value that Don Bosco sees besieged by the “modern innovators.” Feeling it is the root of all real good and all human progress, he feels obliged to condemn persons and movements that challenge or reject either the Church or any of its teachings. Members and adherents of such movements as the Carbonari, Young Italy, or radical reform parties are “modern enemies of the faith.” They belong to societies which “may change their name but always maintain the same principles and can be described as secret conventicles aiming to overthrow the civil, moral, and religious order.”⁶⁰

Again in 1855 Don Bosco spoke out for the conviction that “religion is the support of thrones and the happiness of those peoples who honor it and practice its precepts.” Of Austria’s Emperor Francis Joseph he writes:

Recognizing that the promotion of religion is the most potent means of preserving States, and that scorn for religion is their ruin, Francis Joseph began to do many things in favor of religion... He made a concordat with the Holy See in which he granted full freedom to practice religious worship, thus giving the Church all the favor and protection it could want from a truly Catholic sovereign.⁶¹

After 1860 the two words, throne and altar (or throne and religion), become infrequent in the works that Don Bosco published under his own name. Indeed one can say that they are not in his vocabulary during the last fifteen years of his life. Other expressions predominate, suggested by the contemporary climate of

⁵⁹ *Stor. eccl.*, pp. 375-76.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

⁶¹ *Storia d'Italia*, p. 522.

the press: religion and homeland,⁶² morality and homeland,⁶³ good behavior and civil society.⁶⁴ Nevertheless one's impression is that Don Bosco's way of expressing himself in writings prior to 1848 reflected a value judgment shared by those who sympathized with the alliance of throne and altar in the struggle against the new forces that seemed to find their origin in the French Revolution.⁶⁵ In the *Memoirs of the Oratory* he recalls that around 1848 because of "the perversion of ideas and actions...I could no longer trust the domestic staff."⁶⁶

7. *The Neo-Guelph moment*

The year 1848, when King Charles Albert granted the Constitution and the first war of independence broke out, was also a time when the Neo-Guelph flame was briefly lit.⁶⁷ It seemed to many that the right way had been found to satisfy national aspirations and sentiments of respect for the Pope. The forces of union would be channeled toward a federation of Italian States. The Pope would maintain his temporal dominion, not to defend peoples against barbarian invasions at this point, but rather to safeguard his own autonomy as spiritual leader.

For this period the sources on Don Bosco's attitude are discrepant. The *Memoirs of the Oratory* reveals nothing about any possible patriotic enthusiasm on his part. It describes his reluctance to let the youths of his two oratories participate in the national festivals celebrated for the granting of the Constitution (February-March). It also places a rather significant episode in that period:

On the Sunday following the [national] festival, at two in the afternoon I was at recreation with the youngsters. One of them was reading *L'Armonia* when the

⁶² Fragment of a circular for *L'Amico della Gioventù* (Turin: Marietti [1848]), AS 131/04.

⁶³ *Le scuole di Beneficenza dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales in Torino davanti al Consiglio di Stato, pel sacerdote Giovanni Bosco* (Turin: Salesiana, 1879), p. 4.

⁶⁴ Bosco, *Cooperatori salesiani, ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume e alla civile società* (S. Pier d'Arena: St. Vincent de Paul, 1877).

⁶⁵ *Stor. eccl.*, p. 370: "Q. What have been the effects of persecution on the Roman Church? A. The French persecution, like that of the Roman emperors, merely served to add new splendor to the Church of Jesus Christ. The philosophers clucked..."

[Loriquet], *Storia ecclesiastica*, p. 122: "Q. What have been the latest efforts of modern philosophy? A. It started an open persecution as bad in duration and cruelty as that of the early centuries of the Church. The philosophers had spread..."

⁶⁶ MO:324.

⁶⁷ With regard to DB and 1848, other perspectives are pursued by the following authors: Eugenio Valentini, SDB (1905-92), "Don Bosco e le aspirazioni del Risorgimento"; Alberto Caviglia, SDB, "La romanità di Don Bosco" and "Don Bosco e i bisogni sociali dell'epoca"; and Giuseppe Mattai, SDB, "Don Bosco e la questione operaia." All these studies are anthologized in *Don Bosco e il '48* (Turin, 1948).

priests who usually came to give me a hand in the sacred ministry appeared in a body. They were all decked out with medals and cockades and carried a tri-colour flag. Worse, they had a copy of a truly immoral newspaper called *L'Opinione*.

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 finished with this rubbish." 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... His manner of speaking and acting took my breath away.⁶⁸

We get a vivid picture of the feelings of those on the scene. Don Bosco has nothing against the reading of *L'Armonia* [Harmony]; the other priests are fierce partisans of *L'Opinione* [Opinion]. The former, initially the organ of the clerical moderates and later of Catholic intransigents, had free entry into the Oratory. The latter was the militant journal of a group of moderate liberals headed by General James Durando (1807-1894), brother of the Vincentian Mark Anthony Durando (1801-1880), who was highly influential in Turin; it was regarded by Don Bosco as plainly immoral.⁶⁹

But *L'Armonia* began publication on July 4, 1848, when the times were no longer propitious for the Piedmontese and Italian armies on Lombard soil. The episode cannot be fixed absolutely around the constitutional celebrations, as Fathers John Baptist Lemoyne, SDB (1839-1916), and Eugene Ceria, SDB (1870-1957), tend to do. So there is reason to wonder whether the sentiments of Don Bosco recorded in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* adequately and frankly reflect his whole attitude, i.e., what he thought, tolerated, and did in the months preceding the Constitution, a period when most of the clergy espoused Neo-Guelphism and applauded the war for independence—even those prelates who later detached themselves from the national cause and sided with intransigence.

The documentary data inviting reflection here are twofold. First, there is his description of Vincent Gioberti as "great" in the second edition of Don Bosco's *Church History* (1849).⁷⁰ Second, there are the surviving fragments of the po-

⁶⁸ MO:361.

⁶⁹ On *L'Armonia*, see Bice Montale, "Lineamenti generali per la storia dell'Armonia dal 1848 al 1857," in *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento* 63 (1956), 475-84. For the broader context, see G. Bustico, "Per la storia del giornalismo in Piemonte," *ibid.* 24 (1937), 1657; L. Piccioni, "La frusta torinese del 1850," *ibid.* 22 (1935), 599-604; and *Giornalismo del Risorgimento* (Turin, 1961), put out by the National Committee for the Celebration of the Parliamentary Press. There are brief comments on *L'Armonia*, *L'Istruttore*, and *L'Amico* in Antonio Manno, *Bibliografia storica degli Stati della Monarchia di Savoia* (Turin, 1884), 1, nos. 3291 and 3293; but the whole prospectus of periodicals that came out around 1848 is of interest.

⁷⁰ With regard to Pius IX, note *Stor. ecl.*, 2d ed. (Turin: Speirani and Ferrero, 1848),

litical-religious newspaper for young people of which Don Bosco was editor-in-chief: *L'Amico della gioventù—giornale politico-religioso* [The Friend of Youth: A Political & Religious Newspaper].⁷¹

This publication was cited by Don Bosco in *The Religiously Instructed Catholic* (1853) and in *The Month of May* (1858);⁷² then it disappears completely. This is very surprising when we consider all the papers Don Bosco preserved, including his student notebooks from Chieri and many other insignificant memoranda. All we have now are two circulars (a fragment of the one announcing publication, and one soliciting subscriptions), and a verse satire against Angelo Brofferio (1802-1866), printed by Julius Speirani as an excerpt from *L'Amico della gioventù*. Other materials relating to *L'Amico* are a few lists of associates and the file of materials covering Speirani's suit against Don Bosco after the failure of the newspaper. That occurred in early May 1849, after its sixty-first issue.

In May, *L'Amico* amalgamated with *L'Istruttore del popolo* [The People's Instructor], which was founded on February 2, 1849, and also printed by Speirani.⁷³ Throughout the time it coexisted with *L'Amico*, this newspaper had constitutional leanings. From an initial Giobertian Neo-Guelphism it shifted to a moderate progressivism. It respected political and municipal autonomy, along the lines of Caesar Balbo (1789-1853) and Massimo d'Azeglio (1798-1866). With regard to the cause of nationalism, then, it was anti-Austrian. In the lead article of February 2, 1849, we read:

p. 182: "The great Gioberti said that the day he saw him was the most beautiful day of his life. The very heretics admire and praise him. The whole world rises again to new glory in this incomparable Pope. We Catholics, meanwhile, beseech God to help him find timely ways to prevent the harm that the wicked are trying to cause the Church, and to govern it with new triumphs." I have cited a few sentences because I think that there may be latent evaluations in the fact that "the great Gioberti" is closely followed by "the very heretics," and then comes "we Catholics."

⁷¹ We have (1) the circular fragment cited in n. 62; (2) the 1849 circular printed by Julius Speirani (1802-85), which once belonged to Fr. John Baptist Appendini (1807-92), now in AS 131/04, published in *Ep.* 17; (3) satire against Brofferio, printed by Speirani, in AS 134; (4) court proceedings relative to *L'Amico*, file also containing autographed writings of DB in AS 112 Processi-Speirani; (5) lists of subscribers and records in AS 132 Quaderni-taccuini.

An announcement of publication is in the *Gazzetta piemontese*, Oct. 26 and Nov. 1, 1848: "L'Amico della gioventù—religious, moral, and political paper, published Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Subscriptions to the publisher in Turin, Hyacinth Marietti; in the provinces, to the post office. Price for three months in Turin, L.3; in the provinces of the kingdom, postage free, L.4.50; foreign, free to the border, L.4.50." It is scrutinized in a review in the satirical periodical *Il Fischietto*, Dec. 28, 1848, entitled "Fisiologia del giornalismo torinese." A few inaccuracies in BM 3:338-45 are corrected by Eugenio Valentini, "L'italianità di Don Bosco," *Salesianum* 10 (1948), 322-38, at 334-36.

⁷² *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 9, p. 16; *Maggio*, day 20, example, pp. 122-23.

⁷³ The collection of *L'Istruttore* is in the municipal libraries of Turin.

We are convinced that while Italians may be divided on secondary issues, they all agree on the issue of independence. “Out with the Austrians” is the cry of every good citizen from the northernmost Alps to the tip of Sicily..

At home we want a monarchy surrounded by liberal institutions, or what we believe is the same, the Constitution with all the progressive modifications required by reason and the times. We believe that the eternal Creator of human beings and things said to human institutions, as to the waves of the sea, “so far you shall go, and here you shall break the pride of your designs”; because alongside the progress of liberty, we believe must go a principle of order to stem the overflow of the popular will and defend the people’s sovereignty against their own excesses.

It is in this sense that we believe the principle of national sovereignty is to be taken, which we thus distinguish from the sovereignty of the people: that is, as a principle of order concentrated in the hereditary monarchy of the House of Savoy, and a progressive principle of liberty represented by the concurrence of the people in making laws through parliamentary representation. Thus it is the union of these two elements that we believe is indispensable for the happiness of the nation. We do not recognize in either the monarchic power or the people’s power the right to change the bases, because a nation has no more right to destroy its fundamental constitution than does an individual the authority to destroy his own existence.

In the light of these principles, we think the convocation of an Italian constituent assembly with unlimited power is not only dangerous but antipolitical. But we wholeheartedly support the one proclaimed by Gioberti to deal with common interests, excepting the autonomy of the individual Italian States.

For the rest, we defend the following as intimately connected with the people’s interests: the broadest possible municipal institutions, the liberty and independence of the Church separated from the State, freedom of teaching under the Church’s close and watchful supervision, and in short, all the measures advantageous to the moral, intellectual, and economic growth of the most numerous class of society.⁷⁴

In the same issue the “great philosopher” Gioberti is defended as a “Catholic of firm convictions” against those who were opposing him or attributing to him sentiments that were actually those of groups of his less faithful followers. *L'Istruttore* also takes a stand against the radicals, particularly Angelo Brofferio, described as a thunderbolt of eloquence, the magniloquent hero of the Subalpine assembly. Beginning with number 69 (Wednesday, May 2), *L'Istruttore* took on the subtitle *L'Amico*. This is after the defeat at Novara (March 23), the abdication of Charles Albert, and the armistice (March 26). Peace negotiations were under way, to be sanctioned on August 6. Piedmont was going through very sad times, ruined economically and politically by the war.

⁷⁴ The article is signed: Attorney Casanova.

With the failure of the Neo-Guelph policy, moderate groups declined and the political scene, after 1851, would be dominated by Count Camillo Cavour (1810-1861) and the "liberal Right." The failure of Neo-Guelph papers was followed by that of various moderate publications, such as *L'Istruttore del popolo*, which closed its doors in December 1850.

The fact that *L'Amico* had fused with *L'Istruttore* could lead to a hasty conclusion that both journals were of the same turn. But it is quite possible that the reasons for their fusion had been of a very different sort. For Don Bosco they may have been mainly financial. The bankruptcy situation may have induced him to accept conditions imposed by others, e.g., by the printer, interested in combining the subscribers to *L'Amico* with those of the other paper from his presses.

What is certain is the antiradical attitude of Don Bosco before and after 1848, and his constant favor for *L'Armonia* and its brilliant editor, Father James Margotti. In the progressivist concerns of the moment, moreover, the surviving circulars of *L'Amico* show us the place occupied by young people. They were the favored portion "of the human race, on whom were set the hopes of the country, the prosperity of the family, and the honor of religion." Don Bosco's words to parish priests and parents in search of subscribers make clear the concreteness of his educational ideal. Deriving in large part from native inclinations and his ecclesiastical training, that ideal was also enmeshed in the ethical and religious urgencies of the historical moment.

8. *Antiradical and anti-Protestant sentiments after 1848*

In Piedmontese tradition 1848 became a synonym and symbol of revolt. For the conservative tradition it was a symbol of tumultuous, almost satanic revolt. The abolition of ecclesiastical censorship (decreed October 30, 1847) and the general imposition of civil censorship had, as a negative consequence, the confiscation of a pastoral letter by Archbishop Fransoni; in it he had written against liberalism, patriotic societies, and constitutional aspirations in the terms that Archbishop Columban Chiaverotti (1754-1831) had used after the uprisings of March 1821.⁷⁵

The change in the censorship law was merely the beginning of a series of structural reforms, put through in the name of civil liberty and progress. In 1848, freedom of worship was declared. In 1850, the ecclesiastical court was abolished. In 1855, the ecclesiastical bank was set up with the funds of suppressed religious corporations. In 1859, penalties were threatened against ministers of worship who were exerting moral pressures on citizens at election time.

⁷⁵ Pius IX is supposed to have been sorry about the stiffening of the episcopate of Piedmont in this situation, and particularly about the removal of Bp. Andrew Charvaz (1793-1870) as bishop of Pinerolo. He was inclined to approve the attitude of Charles Albert. See Mellano, pp. 51-52.

The reforms often were based on juridical and legal principles elaborated by royalist or episcopal concepts of jurisdiction. Archbishop Fransonì, for example, was denounced more than once for his abuse of power, in terms recalling the classic appeal against abuse. The State, regarded as the protector of the Catholic religion up to 1848, henceforth became desacralized willy-nilly, and conservative Catholic opinion was in anguish.⁷⁶ It kept sentiments of veneration for the sacred person of the king and for public authority through distinctions and reminders of Saint Peter's admonition to obey and respect superiors.⁷⁷

Everything became a symptom of the profound transformation underway—a transformation of mentality as well. The attitude suggested by Rome, and followed not only in Turin, was intransigence—the fear being that to let the smallest stone be removed would mean the irremediable collapse of the dike against the anti-Christian, subversive spirit. In other words, conservatives felt it was necessary to stand firm on principles, make no concessions to “revolution,” reconquer the rebellious children for the Church, and restore her authority, not only for reasons of prestige and for the progress of society, but also for the effectiveness of the saving mission that the Church was to continue to carry out in these lamentable times.

The “Fransonis” of Fribourg, Cologne, and Poznan-Gniezno were then named Stephen Marilley (1804-1889), Clement August von Droste-Vischering (1773-1845), and Martin von Dunin (1774-1842). But in those places it was possible to find less disastrous solutions than in Turin, whose archbishop was arrested, tried, exiled, and never again desired by the ruling political classes.⁷⁸

Meeting at Villanovetta (Saluzzo) in 1849, the bishops of the ecclesiastical province of Turin tried to grasp the lessons of the bitter 1848 experience. There were various evils: “the sordid abuse of the press, the terrible consequences of licentiousness, the horrors of impiety and anarchy.” But these things helped open the eyes of the most blind lovers of liberty, whose brief, illusory dreams were followed by the long vigil of disenchantment and regret. And they confessed that without God and religion there is neither restraint nor order, and society is nothing but a chaos of errors and an abyss of dreadful calamities.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ These states of mind are brought out in particular by A.C. Jemolo, *Chiesa e Stato in Italia negli ultimi cento anni* (Turin, 1955), and “Il ‘partito cattolico’ piemontese nel 1855 e la legge sarda soppressiva delle comunità religiose,” in *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento* 11-12 (1918-19), 1-52, now reprinted in Jemolo, *Scritti vari di storia religiosa e civile* (Milan, 1965).

⁷⁷ See the Minutes of SDB GC I (1877), autograph of Fr. Barberis, words of DB (AS 046), reported in BM 13:214. DB gives an accommodative sense to the text of 1 Pt 2:18.

⁷⁸ The comparison is made, e.g., by Giuseppe Griseri in a review of Mellano in *Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia* 21 (1967), 263-68.

⁷⁹ *I vescovi della provincia ecclesiastica di Torino insieme congregati, al venerabile clero e al diletissimo popolo delle loro diocesi*, Villanovetta, July 29, 1849 (Turin: Marietti, 1849), p. 9.

The “most recent upsets” had served “very clearly to separate the good from the wicked.” “Just as God made light spring from darkness, and good from evil, purging his mystical vine from the darnel that contaminated it,” so God permitted the darkness to spread widely “to confound his enemies with the works of darkness itself, and to defend the Church with the weapons of its very adversaries.”⁸⁰

Now it was necessary to step above events and see their value as the harbinger of a new era:

Our age seems to be in between an old order of things that is collapsing and a new order of things arising: divided between the memories of the past and the uncertain desires of the future, hence continually agitated by hopes and fears and by some sort of vague, tormenting yearning that anxiously assails it.⁸¹

Examples from near and far were perused:

In the United States and in Germany, the bishops have met in synods to safeguard the faith, to restore ecclesiastical discipline to its pristine splendor, to reform morals, and to vindicate the rights and freedom of the Church. Their example was followed by the bishops of Savoy, has begun to be imitated by those of Piedmont, will continue to be emulated in all the provinces and, we hope, will so find fulfillment in a National Council. Thus, just as the State has its parliament in action, so will the Church have one to safeguard within their proper limits the interests of both Christian and civil society.⁸²

The national synod remained only a planned project. But the fact that it had been put on the program may be considered the sign of a unifying sentiment and a closing of the ranks, to which the new crisis of European civilization was driving the hierarchy. It was also a prelude to both Vatican I (1869-1870) and the organization of Catholics that began in earnest after 1870.

Other more immediate and concrete fruits came from the Villanovetta meeting: a sense of unity among the bishops and the whole range of press organs that was to form Catholic public opinion together with *L'Armonia*: the “Library of Good Books” (first issue, September 1, 1849); *La Campana* [The Bell] (number 1, March 30, 1850); the “Church Library” (1852); and, finally, the *Catholic Readings* (first issue, March 1, 1853).⁸³

Don Bosco made a point of stressing that the *Catholic Readings* were born with the protection, support, and help of the Piedmontese episco-

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 12.

⁸² Ibid., p. 10.

⁸³ Like *La Campana*, the *Catholic Readings* also felt the impact of the establishment of the Waldensian periodical *La buona novella*. This latter began in Turin in 1851, printed by A. Pons and Co., with the subtitle *Giornale dell'evangelizzazione italiana*; it was edited by J.P. Meille. See Valdo Vinay, *Luigi Desanctis e il movimento evangelico fra gli Italiani durante il Risorgimento* (Turin, 1965).

pate.⁸⁴ But that support came mainly from Bishop Louis Moreno of Ivrea (1800-1878) and Bishop John Peter Losana of Biella (1793-1873).

It is not easy to say what arrangements led to the appearance in the *Catholic Readings* of such reactionary and irritating pamphlets as the *Catholic Catechism on Revolutions* (1854) or Baron Nilinse's on the theft of Church goods (1855), which allegedly brought down public divine punishments in Piedmont as well as elsewhere.⁸⁵ Nor is it easy to establish responsibility for some fairly explosive and intransigent presentations. But it is possible to point up agreement of ideas and coincidences with pages done by Don Bosco or at least signed by him (e.g., in *The Religiously Instructed Catholic*).

The pages in which we find more openly the conviction that religion and revolution are irreconcilable are the lead-in pages to the *Catholic Catechism on Revolutions*. The note "To the Reader" begins with the picture of difficult times and "sad events" that can provoke revolution, which Catholicism can neither promote nor connive with:

The fundamental reason why Catholicism will never favor revolutions is that all are bound to a certain authority, which is the Church. And this Church, backed up by Sacred Scripture, says to all the faithful: obey legitimate authorities. Those who resist authority resist God, on whom all authority depends. And since the faithful must conform to this opinion, it follows that no good Catholic will be a partisan of revolutions.⁸⁶

This view is substantially in line with what Don Bosco wrote in 1845 in his *Church History* about the devil, who "under the cloak of secret societies, of mod-

⁸⁴ The subscription plan for the *Catholic Readings* indicates: "In cities and areas of the provinces, the subscriptions are taken by those persons designated by the respective diocesan ordinaries." In Ivrea this function was performed by the vicar general himself. The bishop of Biella endorsed the *Catholic Readings* in a circular (see LC, a. 2, fasc. 1, pp. iii-viii).

⁸⁵ On the punishments in Piedmont, there is an appendix in the work of Jacques-Albin Collin de Plancy, Baron Nilinse (1793-1881), *I beni della Chiesa come si rubino* (Turin, 1855), pp. 76-83: "1815—Permission obtained and order given to sell ecclesiastical assets for the needs of the State. Terrible harvest, need to make war, resulting in the ruin of finances and of the provinces occupied by troops. God save us from other evils. 1828—King Charles Felix [1765-1831] restores to the Church the assets that had been taken away earlier and presents to the churches the due funds. The wars cease. Fertility in the fields, thriving commerce. May 4, 1850—The archbishop of Turin is put in jail. That same day a stiff frost withers plants, mulberries, and some trees, causing 15 million or more [lire] in damage to Piedmont. (More recent events are not mentioned because, alas, they are only too well known by all.)"

⁸⁶ [Serafino Sordi, SJ, 1793-1865], *Catechismo cattolico sulle rivoluzioni* (Turin, 1854), p. 3: "To the Reader." Sommervogel, 7, cols. 1389-90, cites an 1832 edition. The LC, in the preface that we noted above, cites LC, fasc. 12 (*Catt. istr.*, pp. 245-340); and in a footnote, Milner, cited in *Catt. istr.*, p. 305, adds a citation from the *Annales Catholiques de Genève*, Dec. 1853.

ern philosophy, stirs up rebellions and bloody persecutions.”⁸⁷ One understands then, how in a time of Waldensian and evangelical proselytism, Don Bosco might, in a polemical way, compare modern innovators to Protestant heretics. Like Archbishop Andrew Charvaz of Genoa, Abbé Anthony Martinet (1802-1874), and Bishop Louis Rendu of Annecy, he denounces Protestantism as the enemy of throne and altar, tending toward anarchy and regicide. According to *The Religiously Instructed Catholic*, the principle of free inquiry comes down to:

Make a religion to your liking...; do what you want. Rob, disobey, kill your king, ministers, and whoever seems culpable in your own eyes. You will certainly be doing good, because you believe you are performing good actions.⁸⁸

In the preface to the *Catholic Catechism on Revolutions* we read:

If he wishes to be consistent with himself, the Protestant should say: my only authority is reason. So away with all religious dependence, away with all social convention, away with all order, law, and authority: My reason and nothing else. Only force will make me obey. As a matter of fact, if one or more Protestants should get the idea of forming a conspiracy, of killing one of their superiors, even the sovereign, they could do it, because it seems a good thing to them.⁸⁹

Set alongside these expressions, Don Bosco’s appeals for the education of youth take on a more precise sense: to save young people for the Church, God, and eternal life; but also to deprive revolution of renewal and to prepare the younger generations to enter society as good Christians and upright citizens. The image of an impetuous torrent, found in an 1847 pastoral letter of Archbishop Fransoni, crops up again in the preface to an issue of the *Catholic Readings* in 1854: it is the task of the good to oppose, “with every activity and with all licit and honest means, the torrent that is trying to upset society and religion in its corrupt waves.” The union of forces will bring

the consolation one day of seeing our enemies, the enemies of the Catholic Faith and of society, either convinced of their errors, turning away from their utopias and uniting with us, or scorned and confused, enveloped in the mire of their defeat, and no longer capable of doing harm.⁹⁰

This is the intransigent program of the “clerical party,” moving it in political and administrative elections to its “neither elected or electors” stance of 1861, and to the *non expedit* of 1871, which would be interpreted as a prohibition in 1886.

⁸⁷ *Stor. eccl.*, pp. 287-88.

⁸⁸ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 37, p. 284.

⁸⁹ [Sordi], p. 4.

⁹⁰ “Ai nostri associati,” appeal of the LC management put at the beginning of the fascicle *Ai contadini: Regole di buona condotta per la gente di campagna utili a qualsiasi condizione di persone* (Turin, 1854), pp. 6-7.

The 1854 edition of *The Gentleman's Almanac* is the only one where we find the call to vote, vote well, everybody vote. "No one has the right not to vote because no one has the right not to save his country. Not voting is the act of a bad citizen. Voting badly is a sin." The religious element enters as an essential criterion of judgment: Catholics who go to the polls to choose deputies or municipal councillors should consider above all whether the candidates have "common sense, sound experience, and religion."⁹¹

Don Bosco's antipathy for the revolutionary spirit comes out clearly in his pages on the police searches endured after 1860. Those he called "democratic liberals" or simply "Italians" were responsible for all the ills of society and the Church in Italy. They had promoted "the spirit of revolution, ranging from the royal palace of our sovereigns to the hovel of the rude peasant and poor artisan":

Having suppressed the religious corporations of both sexes, set in disregard every Church law and the authority of the Pope himself, abolished the ecclesiastical court, and confiscated the assets of collegiate churches, seminaries, and episcopal altars, they also invaded most of the States of the Holy See. To strike terror in everyone and show that they feared no one, the administrators of public affairs initiated house arrests and house searches.⁹²

On the administrators of public affairs, as on revolution, Don Bosco's judgment does not change. The holders of authority merit respect because authority comes from God; but the evil officials of the present, like those of past centuries, will be struck down by the justice of God. The diabolic plot to harm Don Bosco and the Oratory, manifested in a heavy-handed way in the house searches, is, like other extraordinary events, a sign that the Oratory is the work of God and envied by the devil. But the forces of hell will not prevail. For Don Bosco's work, as for the Church, vexations presage future triumph. On the other hand we have enough elements to realize that Don Bosco was one of those who judged the events leading to national unification from a religious viewpoint and were unable to silence their condemnation of the persons and factions who unilaterally stripped the Church and papacy in Italy of their privileged positions.

9. *The Roman question*

Obviously Don Bosco could not accept and justify any Mazzinian, Garibaldian, or "Italian" movement to deprive the Roman Pontiff of his temporal domain.

⁹¹ *Il Galantuomo: Almanacco nazionale pel 1854* (Turin: De-Agostini, 1853), pp. 86-88.

⁹² Autograph of DB, AS 132 Perquisizioni, pp. 1-2; see BM 6:315. DB uses the terms "democrat" and "democratic" pejoratively in two letters from Turin to Pius Galleani d'Agliano, Aug. 13-14, 1855 (*Ep.* 107-08).

In his programmatic discourse to parliament on March 25, 1861, Cavour had stated:

We ought to go to Rome, but on two conditions. We ought to go there in concert with France, but in such a way that the reunion of the city with the rest of Italy cannot be interpreted by Catholics in Italy and elsewhere as the signal of the Church's enslavement. That is, we ought to go to Rome without the real independence of the Pope being diminished. We ought to go to Rome without the civil authority extending its authority over the spiritual order. These are the two conditions to be met so that we can go to Rome without endangering the fate of Italy.⁹³

But how to guarantee the real independence of the Pope without some sort of temporal domain? In his *Church History* Don Bosco, along the lines of Lorient, had made clear his disapproval of what had happened in Rome in the time of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic empire. After the Roman revolution of 1849, he explicitly confronted the issue of temporal power in *The Religiously Instructed Catholic* (1850), mentioning the "great outcry" that Protestants and "modern unbelievers" were leading against the temporal dominion of the Popes.⁹⁴ In his *History of Italy* he devotes an entire paragraph to the argument, expressing what can be found in many Catholic publicists of the day.⁹⁵ Far from being against the spirit of the Gospel, he writes, the temporal domain of the Pope is the fruit of a providential design. Circumstances have provided that the Pope become sovereign of a territory, guaranteeing him the autonomy needed to carry out his task as father of all believers and Vicar of Christ:

⁹³ "It was the third plundering of the republican program by Cavour's policy": so noted Stephen Jacini, underlining one of the urgencies behind Cavour's concrete political sense. To aim for Rome meant to channel into the national monarchical forces many spirits that might otherwise have adhered to Mazzini or Garibaldi. See Stefano Jacini, *La questione di Roma al principio del 1863* (Turin: Pomba, 1863), pp. 14-23.

⁹⁴ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 11-13: Temporal domain of the Popes. Scripture is not against the temporal domain of the Popes. Some objections of modern people against the temporal domain of the Popes.

⁹⁵ Cf. the plethora of publications issued in the period of the French Revolution, the uprisings of 1831, the confiscation programs of 1848, and the Roman revolution of 1849. The inspiration is often 18th-century: from works dealing with mortmain (Thomas Mamachi, OP, etc.) to the work on the temporal domain of the Pope by Alfonso Muzzarelli, SJ (1749-1813), published separately or in his larger work, *Il buon uso della logica in materia di religione*, often reprinted (Sommervogel, 5, col. 1493-95). A discreet bibliography, including pamphlets, is provided by G. Moroni, *Dizionario di erudizione storico ecclesiastica* (Venice, 1854), 67:268-332, s.v. "Sovranità de' Romani Pontefici e della S. Sede." With regard to DB's *Storia d'Italia*, it is possible to find coincidences, not only with passages of *La Civiltà Cattolica* and Moroni (see Caviglia 3 [Turin, 1935], 548-49, 556-58), but also with Muzzarelli; the Savoyard Antoine Martinet, *L'arche du peuple, par Platon-Polichinelle 2* (Paris, 1851), entretien 21^e, pp. 39-53; and with pages of *L'Armonia*.

Suppose in these times the Roman Pontiff were not a king and that he, as head of Catholicism, had to command something contrary to the wishes of the sovereign to whom he was subject. Would he be able to have free relations with the Catholic kings of the whole world when, as might unfortunately happen, he became the subject of an heretical king or one who persecuted Christianity?

Regarding the temporal domain, Don Bosco goes even further:

This temporal domain not only belongs to the subjects of the Roman States but can be called the property of all Catholics. As affectionate children they have always helped, and should help today, to preserve the liberty and estates of the head of Christianity.⁹⁶

So not even the Pope could renounce territories to which not only their inhabitants but also all Christians had a certain right of ownership? Remarkably enough, this was the argument put forth by Pius IX in documents of 1860, and the *Catholic Readings* echo the argument in 1867:

We [said Pius IX] cannot give up what is not ours. We cannot renounce the provinces belonging to our papal domain without violating the solemn oaths to which we are bound, without inflicting injury on all Catholics. Insuperable difficulties prevent us from this surrender.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ *Storia d'Italia*, pp. 213-14.

⁹⁷ P. Boccalandro, *Del dominio temporale del Papa: Conversazioni tra uno studente ed un professore* (Turin, 1869), pp. 102-04, which cites the encyclical of Jan. 19 and the allocution of Sept. 28, 1860.

The appeal to the will of Catholics all over the world has the air of an *ultima ratio* to check the "Italians" and remind them what they will have to deal (perhaps even militarily) with Catholics of other nations. Backed into a corner, DB gets away by saying that if the Pope admits the Piedmontese, then he [DB] too will be happy to tell them to go to Rome. Noteworthy is this entry in the chronicle of Fr. Bonetti (*Annali III*, AS 110 Bonetti 4, pp. 20-24):

July 7 [1862]. This evening when we were with Don Bosco we tried to get him to speak about [this topic] in order to learn how we could handle it in these troublesome times. Without his catching on, we managed to get him to say the following:

"Today I happened to be in a private home with a group of democrats. After we had spoken of a variety of indifferent matters, the conversation got around to the current political situation. In fact these dyed-in-the-wool liberals wanted to know what Don Bosco thought of the Piedmontese marching on Rome, and on that they questioned him. Realizing that discussing such matters with such people would only waste his breath, Don Bosco answered quite frankly: 'I'll tell you right away what I think: I stand with the Pope; I am a Catholic, and I obey the Pope blindly. If the Pope were to tell the Piedmontese, "Come to Rome," then I too would say: "Let's go!" But as long as he considers the Piedmontese expedition to Rome a seizure, I'll agree with him.'

"But they began to shout: '*Sit rationabile obsequium vestrum*' [Rom 12:1].

"Yes, "Let your service be reasonable" [Douay] in the manner, for example, that we must say morning and night prayers, in the way we must make brief meditations

The same year the Oratory print shop reissued a pamphlet by Bishop Thomas Ghilardi of Mondovì (1799-1873), with an even more polemical title: *The Revolutionary Aspirations in Rome Opposed by All Laws, Execrated by All Good People, Cursed by All the Saints*.⁹⁸ In Rome the celebrations commemorating the martyrdom of Saint Peter brought together hundreds of bishops and thousands of pilgrims, who in that way wanted to show their own devotion to the Pope. On July 1, for example, a day of canonization, Saint Peter's Basilica was packed. Margotti's new newspaper in Turin, *Unità Cattolica* ["Catholic Unity"], reported:

At the Offertory, the *Tu es Petrus* was chanted by six hundred voices divided into three choirs of boys—one over the entrance at the back, one at the confession [of Saint Peter], and one on the cupola balcony... The final *non praevalerunt* [see Matt 16:18] came out marvelously. You would have said it was the echo of the Word of God's word repeated by all creatures. And this word is true forever.⁹⁹

According to his own statement after Rome's fall to the forces of King Victor Emmanuel II (1820-1878) in 1870, even then Don Bosco was persuaded of the fallacy of the hopes expressed by *Unità Cattolica* or others, in Rome and elsewhere. But this did not change his mind about the temporal power. In *The Catholic Church and Its Hierarchy* he writes:

Though not absolutely necessary for the Pope, this temporal power is nevertheless relatively necessary, considering the conditions of the times. Surrounded by all the obstacles put in his way even as head of the Catholic Church, he could not freely and suitably govern the Church, look after the

daily; in things like these, *Sit rationabile obsequium vestrum*. But when a dogma of our faith is at stake, then if we want to be Catholics, we must be of one mind and heart with the Pope.'

"Well, tell us at least what you think of our chances of success in this expedition.'

"I'll tell you what I think: you're dreaming if you think the Piedmontese will enter Rome; you're dreaming if you think the Piedmontese could hold it, should they take it; and finally I'll say sometimes even when you're dreaming you may crack your skull!"

"They burst into laughter and showed their satisfaction. This is how to win without getting into an argument with someone who would otherwise get all worked up and become more obstinate in his views." (Compare BM 7:131-32.)

⁹⁸ Ghilardi, *Le aspirazioni rivoluzionarie a Roma avversate da tutti i diritti, esecrate da tutti i buoni, maledette da tutti i santi*, 5th ed. (Turin: OSFS, 1867).

⁹⁹ *L'Unità cattolica*, July 4, 1867. These sentiments, already expressed in terms of faith confirmed by events in 1849-50, took on the tone of confidence in divine intervention around 1867. See, e.g., *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1 (1850), 647; and the sentiments expressed in *L'Episcopato e la Rivoluzione in Italia, ossia Atti collettivi dei Vescovi italiani preceduti da quelli del Sommo Pontefice Pio IX contro le leggi e i fatti della Rivoluzione* (Mondovì, 1867), 2 vols. Note that for the occasion DB republished in LC his life of St. Peter under the title *Il centenario di S. Pietro apostolo colla vita del medesimo* (Turin: OSFS, 1867); and LC that year published several other issues dealing with the papacy.

welfare of the souls entrusted to him, if he were not independent of every civil power whatsoever and every sovereign.¹⁰⁰

After 1870, we have no new explicit statements on the temporal power. Catholics might delude themselves about a possible Austrian intervention against Italy.¹⁰¹ Some thought that God would bless the armies that would restore the Pope to his legitimate throne and that he would humiliate the revolution. Don Bosco declared to Emperor Francis Joseph in a prophetic message of 1873:

May 24, 1873-June 24, 1873

Thus says the Lord to the emperor of Austria: "Be of good cheer and look after My faithful servants and yourself. My wrath is now spilling over all the nations because they want to make people forget My laws, glorifying those who defile them and oppressing faithful adherents. Will you be the rod of My power? Will you carry out My inscrutable designs and become a benefactor of the world? Rely on the Northern Powers, but not on Prussia. Enter into relations with Russia, but form no alliance. Join forces with Catholic France; after France, you shall have Spain. All together, become one in will and action.

Observe absolute secrecy with the enemies of My holy name. Prudence and vigor will make you and your allies invincible. Do not believe the lies of whoever tells you otherwise. Abhor the enemies of the Cross. Put your hope and trust in Me. I make armies victorious. I am the Savior of nations and sovereigns. Amen. Amen.¹⁰²

It is not easy to discover what Don Bosco was aiming at with this message. Was he contemplating a reestablishment of the temporal power? To what was he alluding with the hints of victories and armies? At the same time, Don Bosco was predicting for Pius IX new afflictions, perhaps a new exile, which would be

¹⁰⁰ *La Chiesa Cattolica e la sua gerarchia* (Turin: OSFS, 1869), pp. 81-82. The same ideas are expressed by Muzzarelli, e.g.: "I deduce as evident that the temporal sovereignty of the Pope is certainly not necessary, nor can it be called useful absolutely and indiscriminately; on the other hand, it can be of help to the Church in certain times and circumstances" (*Del buon uso della logica* [Naples, 1865], 1:515).

¹⁰¹ Divine justice would give Rome to the Pope and punish the wicked and inept. After Rome fell into Victor Emmanuel's hands, this was one of the major themes of *La Civiltà Cattolica* and of *L'Armonia* (which had moved to Florence); see Bruno Malinverni, "Risorgimento e unità d'Italia ne *La Civiltà Cattolica* (1870-1898)," in *La Scuola Cattolica* 89 (1961), 445-48. In Turin *L'Ortodosso: Periodico di sacra teologia e scienze ecclesiastiche* 2 (1870), 25, noted that Austria "is pushed by her Catholic peoples to fight Italy in order to restore the Pope to his throne." Deserving of mention is a work from which DB drew inspiration: Domenico Cerri, *Morte infelice dei principi infensi ed oppressori della S. Chiesa C.A.-Romana* (Library of Good Books, a. 12, disp. 4 and 5, Turin: Armonia, 1861).

¹⁰² Fr. Berto's copy, revised by DB, in AS 132 Sogni 1; cited here from BM 10:57.

followed by a glorious triumph and an era of peace. *The Gentleman's Almanac* was also predicting afflictions, triumphs, and times of peace for its friends.¹⁰³ What he had to say to members of the Salesians' First General Chapter (1877) about obedience to legitimate authorities, "also those who are perverse" (1 Pet 2:18), makes clear that his opinion about the holders of power in Italy had not changed. His judgment on his times is no less heavy than that expressed back in 1845 in his *Church History*, with the added weight of his experience of what had happened since:

I think that things have never been so bad since Saint Peter's time. Cunning is artful and has unlimited resources. Not even the persecutions of Julian the Apostate [331-363] were as hypocritical and harmful.¹⁰⁴

Yet in such difficult times Don Bosco does not approve of recriminations or struggles with drawn sword. He is for patience, endurance, and work to the utmost to keep things going forward well, in this case, Salesian educational projects. In this way they will benefit both civil and ecclesiastical society.¹⁰⁵

10. *Intransigent mentality and practical flexibility*

Given this thoroughly negative judgment on the events and persons that achieved the unity of Italy, what significance is there to Don Bosco's mediation between the Holy See and the Italian government?¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ *Il Galantuomo: Almanacco per l'anno 1870. Anno XVIII: Strenna offerta agli associati delle Letture cattoliche* (Turin: OSFS, 1869), p. 6 (in anticipation of Vatican I): "In these days we, still alive, will see the whole world marvel at the great recoveries of the Church and applaud...its triumph." For 1871, p. 8: be resigned to the will of God; patience leads to victory. For 1873, p. 10: "In our day God wills to work a great miracle, we pray; and when we least expect it, we will hear a great crash, the tower of Babel falling to the ground as one day the walls of Jericho fell at the sound of a trumpet." Was he writing about the fall of the Italian Revolution?

In the 1875 edition, the focus on imminent events fades out: "Just take a look at the past, the present, and as far as experience permits a view, the future as well; you will find nothing new" (pp. 3-4). In *Il Galantuomo* for the following years, allusions to the ills of humanity become increasingly general in nature.

¹⁰⁴ So at least we read in Fr. Julius Barberis's (1847-1927) Minutes of the GC preserved in AS 046/1877. See also BM 13:214.

¹⁰⁵ See BM 13:215.

¹⁰⁶ Quite a few episodes are mentioned in *Indice MB*, s.v. "Temporalità" and "Vescovi (Elezione dei)," pp. 450-51, 475. The documentation exhibited by the MB can be found in AS 112 Vescovi (writings and press clippings gathered by Fr. Berto); 110 Lemoyne, the collection *Documenti*, which also inserts by year a few documents from 1865 on. Recently added to the AS are photocopies of documents of the Vatican Sec-

On this point it is useful to examine briefly the orientations of the Piedmontese bishops in the middle of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁷

Taking as the measuring rod the relationship between Church and State, reform and conservatism, recent studies present Archbishop Louis Fransoni of Turin and Bishop John Negri of Tortona (1788-1874) as prelates tending toward rigid, intransigent positions. They were the first to be hit negatively by the reforms. Young prelates, such as Bishop Louis Fantini of Fossano (1803-1852, previously curate of Annunciation Parish in Turin, where Father John Cocchi [1813-1895] began the first oratory) and Bishop Lawrence Renaldi of Pinerolo (1815-1873), were on the opposite side and were regarded as liberalizers, together with the aged Bishop John Peter Losana of Biella.

Other bishops held intermediate positions, disposed to compromise on specific questions or even to a general agreement in which the demands of the ruling liberal class were taken into account. Bishop Dennis Pasio of Alessandria (1781-1854) and Archbishop Alexander d'Angennes of Vercelli (1781-1869, Pasio's predecessor at Alessandria) were two prelates of the Restoration era who were sympathetic to the reforms in different degrees. Andrew Charvaz, bishop of Pinerolo and then archbishop of Genoa, and Louis Nazari di Calabiana (1808-1893), bishop of Casale and then archbishop of Milan, were conservatives inclined to negotiate some sort of settlement between Church and State. Initially condescending or open to compromise, but less so as time passed, were John Anthony Gianotti (1784-1863), bishop of Saluzzo before Lawrence Gastaldi (1815-1883); Bishop Clement Manzini of Cuneo (1803-1865); and Bishop John Anthony Odone of Susa (1794-1866). Fierce fighters, favoring the political participation of Catholics and conciliatory solutions to specific or general issues, were Bishop Thomas Ghilardi of Mondovì and Bishop Louis Moreno of Ivrea; hence they were much linked to the liberalizers as well.

To define Don Bosco's position, we must also keep in mind that of the Turin clergy, to which he more immediately belonged. Various influential members of the secular clergy had key posts in city administration or cultural institutions. Father Peter Baricco was vice-mayor for a long time. Fathers Amadeus Peyron (1785-1870), Joseph Ghiringhello (1807-1879), and John Anthony Rayneri were professors at the University of Turin for a long time. Others, such as Canon Stanislaus Gazelli di Rossana (1817-1899) and Abbé Camillo Pelletta di Cortazzone (1811-1903), had influence at the royal court.

retariat of State (now in the Secret Vatican Archives) with unpublished writings of DB, Card. James Antonelli (1806-76), Msgr. Cajetan Tortone (1814-91), etc. These documents certainly take on more sense in the context of the letters relating to the Vegezzi and Tonello mission, which are in the relevant archives of the Italian government and the Holy See. I do not mention any of the many celebratory writings that appeared around 1929-34 in the atmosphere of Fascism, or in 1960-61 on the centenary of Italian unification.

¹⁰⁷ See the brief overview provided by Griseri in his review of Mellano (n. 78 above).

Still others had varying degrees of influence, or could at least get a hearing, in the political sphere, e.g., Father Mark Anthony Durando, CM, and, through his publications of incitement or protest, Father James Margotti.

Before 1860 we can document a certain understanding between the parties, and an inclination toward supple solutions in matters of political, administrative, and religious life. The common mentality in Turin was not in accord with the evaluations and impulses of Rome and the Romans, which were maladapted and presaged useless tensions and fatal fractures.

After 1860 this atmosphere diminished somewhat, but not to the point where there was no understanding between civil and ecclesiastical administrative authorities. Particularly before the royal court was transferred from Florence to Rome, there was a certain harmony between the court, the clergy, and charitable or educational works directed or influenced by church entities. After the death of Cavour (1861), in fact, we know that Victor Emmanuel II revived his inclinations to carry out a personal political activity, outside governmental channels, by making use of men of the court, among others.¹⁰⁸

Astonishing as it may seem, for example, in 1865 Don Bosco was able to get the participation of Prince Amadeus of Savoy (1845-1890) at the laying of the cornerstone of the Church of Mary Help of Christians. But precisely at that time the royal court was trying, by extra-governmental channels as well, to soften frictions between Church and State.

In 1863, at a time when Garibaldians and Mazzinians were looking decidedly at Rome and conservative Catholics were writing "they will not prevail," people in Turin were beginning construction of a church dedicated to the Apostles Peter and Paul in Borgo San Salvario. Canon Joseph Zappata (1796-1883), vicar capitular, told the clergy and people that the choice of that name had won lively approval from Pius IX, who hoped it would serve to safeguard and defend the faith in Turin. He added that the municipality had officially decided to allocate a large sum for the construction of the church.¹⁰⁹ Prince Amadeus and the city council took part in laying its cornerstone on June 13, 1863. The fairly large church was quickly completed, despite a cost of over half a million lire.¹¹⁰ It was consecrated by John Anthony Balma (1817-

¹⁰⁸ On the material briefly presented above, the historiography dealing with Victor Emmanuel II, Cavour, Constantine Nigra (1828-1907), and Marquis Philip Anthony Gualterio (1819-74) is abundant and convincing. I need only refer readers to W. Maturi, *Interpretazioni del Risorgimento: Lezioni di storia della storiografia* (Turin, 1962).

¹⁰⁹ Circular letter dated Mar. 19, 1863.

¹¹⁰ This period of political compression was also a time of widespread religious practice and lofty fervor, as we shall see further on with regard to frequent communion. At this time the construction of the following churches was completed in Turin: (1) parish church of St. Maximus, 1853, at a cost of L.1,500,000; (2) parish church of St. Julia, 1863, L.650,000; (3) parish church of Sts. Peter and Paul, 1865, L.540,000; (4) parish church

1881), the titular bishop of Ptolemais, on November 12, 1865. The first Mass was attended by the duchess of Genoa, Elizabeth of Savoy (1830-1912), and Princess Margaret (1851-1926), her daughter and later queen of Italy, along with the populace. The transfer of the Eucharist, holy oils, and sacred vessels from the old to the new parochial residence involved not only priests and seminarians but also students of the municipal schools and over sixty thousand people.¹¹¹

To place Don Bosco in relationship to the bishops and his own milieu, I would say that he was close to those bishops with whom he had greater familiarity: Moreno (at least until 1860-1864) and Ghilardi. In terms of his practical attitude, Don Bosco was close to very many of his confreres in the Turin clergy: close to Saint Joseph Cafasso and Father Amadeus Peyron; closer to Archbishop Fransoni than to Archbishop Lawrence Gastaldi; closer to the Murialdo cousins, Saint Leonard (1828-1900) and Father Robert (1815-1883), than to Father John Cocchi and his more immediate collaborators, Fathers Peter Ponte (1821-1892), Hyacinth Carpano (1821-1894), Joseph Trivero (1817-1894), and Hyacinth Tasca (1826-1897); close to Count Charles Cays (1813-1882), president of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society before becoming a Salesian, and of conservative sentiments. But there was this difference between him and all the others: He was able to step out of the local area with a set of works that spread even across the ocean, and he could approach Pius IX as both a totally loyal son and a prophet.

Between Church and State Don Bosco did not step in showily with projects of his own. Unlike Margotti, the Jesuit editors of *La Civiltà Cattolica* [Catholic Civilization], Nicholas Tommaseo (1802-1874), and Ruggero Bonghi (1828-1895), he did not advocate programs or directions in the cultural and political fields. He was a cautious publicist of the intransigent viewpoint and a diligent mediator when it was necessary. Coming from the lower clergy, he was able to approach and study persons, to weigh sentiments and situations. Under the post-Cavour governments of the Right, particularly from the second premiership of Bettino Ricasoli (1866-1867) to Emilio Visconti-Venosta as foreign minister (1869-1876), Don Bosco was able to present lists of names acceptable to both the Holy See and the Italian government for vacant episcopal sees; between 1868 and 1873, he was able to intervene with some personal effect in the complex negotiations on the temporalities of the bishops.

But his value judgment of events and persons was probably well known. To Pius IX and his secretary of state, Cardinal James Antonelli, Don Bosco was a

of the Immaculate Conception, 1867, L.220,000; (5) church of Mary Help of Christians, 1868, L.890,000; (6) parish church of St. Barbara, 1869, L.336,000. See *Atti del congresso eucaristico tenutosi in Torino nei giorni 2-6 settembre 1894* (Turin, 1895), 2:389-90.

¹¹¹ Lorenzo Pampirio, OP, bishop of Alba (1836-1904), *Elogio funebre del teol. Maurizio Arpino [1824-87], fondatore e primo curato della parrocchia dei SS. Apostoli Pietro e Paolo* (Turin, 1887).

thoroughly loyal, holy, and zealous priest, very discreet and shrewd, full of sound common sense and affability. Those who stood for national progress saw in Don Bosco a zealous priest who, despite his antiliberal ideas, was contributing to the education of the populace. Those whose partisan spirit did not go beyond the myth of progress and the ideal of the nation, such as Urbano Rattazzi (1808-1873),¹¹² Paul Vigliani (1814-1900), Louis Cibrario (1802-1870), and Francesco Crispi (1819-1901), found in Don Bosco good reasons for admiration, benevolence, and trust. This was particularly true when they thought of other priests or anticlericals, equally sectarian in their intransigence but in no way “useful” for building Italians once there was an Italy.

In Don Bosco, as in Bishop Ghilardi, a value judgment on the events of the century was strongly influenced by a set of supreme, irrenounceable values. These transcendent values, they felt, were incarnated in the Catholic Church, the unique depository of the true religion, of goodness, truth, virtue, justice, and the moral forces capable of ensuring solidity and progress to civil society.

Anything seen as a threat to the Church or its mission was readily viewed as a fruit of the diabolic spirit, indeed as an incarnation of the devil, who in recent times was exciting rebellions and bloody persecutions under the mantle of modern philosophy and secret societies.¹¹³

Suffering that might befall outstanding or active members of the Catholic Church was interpreted as either a divine test or a devilish snare. With reflection, this judgment about the elect members became a religious, ethical judgment: they are the good, the favored of God. The sorrows, calamities, illnesses, and deaths of those associated with revolution, on the other hand, were interpreted as terrible divine chastisements. The madness of Louis Charles Farini, the fall of Napoleon III (1808-1873) in disgrace, and the sudden bombardment of Paris in 1870 were interpreted as punishments; we thus learn indirectly that Don Bosco placed Farini and Napoleon among the wicked and Paris among the corrupt cities punished like Sodom and Gomorrah.¹¹⁴ Thus the same types of events are interpreted as condemnations or merciful tests, depending on whether

¹¹² Today it is easier to revise one-sided judgments calmly. We cannot say of Rattazzi exactly what Roger Aubert said of Joseph Siccaldi (1802-57), who gave his name to the 1850 law suppressing the ecclesiastical courts. He described Siccaldi as a jurist favoring the modernization of institutions without in any way being a sectarian (mentioned, with other appraisals, by Mellano, p. 97). The religious attitude of Siccaldi was quite different from the spirit of Rattazzi, which was anticlerical at the very least. But neither can we overlook Rattazzi's sympathy for various charitable institutions and works.

¹¹³ *Stor. eccl.*, p. 288.

¹¹⁴ See sec. 4 of this chapter. On Napoleon, see the relevant pages of *Stor. eccl.* and *Storia d'Italia*. On Paris, see *Il Galantuomo: Almanacco per l'anno 1873*, p. 8: “There the war has already taken place. We have seen the Babylon of our time, the most corrupt city of all—where, to show disrespect for Jesus Christ, people ate meat on Good Friday—surrounded by its enemies, devoid of food, and at the mercy of fires.”

wicked or good people are the victims. The good are destined for victory; the wicked are summoned to repentance, or justly struck down with final punishment as a warning to the public.

In line with this mentality, it is not surprising that Don Bosco, like others, suggests that the main remedies for the ills of society are a good confession and communion, the practice of one's Christian obligations, and reconciliation with God and the Church. It is not surprising that he, like others, suggests that acts of love for God and devout practices are the first line of defense against cholera and the precondition for obtaining graces of a material order.¹¹⁵ And it is not surprising that he should stress as well the political benefits deriving from events that were in themselves religious, e.g., the civil benefits to Europe deriving from Christianity in the Middle Ages or from the definition of papal infallibility.¹¹⁶

This mentality also suggests how we are to evaluate other episodes, e.g., his letter to Emperor Francis Joseph about an alliance with France and Spain; his suggestions to Pius IX in 1870 ("let the sentinel of Israel remain at his post"); or the messages about domestic sorrows which he had sent to Victor Emmanuel II in 1854-1855. Don Bosco certainly hoped to have some influence on political decisions as well. But his specific position was that of a religious prophet, like Moses presenting himself in God's name to the pharaoh, the Egyptians, and the Hebrews. He is concerned about the impact that the course of political events may have on the spiritual activity of the Church. What he says in such cases is presented as the voice of God, and it is addressed to someone felt to be operating in a plan willed by God, from whom comes all power in both religious and civil society. When Don Bosco suggests alliances, in other words, his mind is fixed on the supernatural origin of his prophetic message and its beneficial consequences for religion, not on the political value that international alliances and forces may have in themselves. Thus Don Bosco addresses his messages to in-

¹¹⁵ See the heading "Colera" in *Indice MB*, p. 77. See also *Modo sicuro di scansare o per lo meno incontrare senza danno ed anzi con vantaggio il cholera-morbus di cui siamo minacciati: Compilazione del C.G.M.G.* (Library of Good Books, a. 6, disp. 123-24, Turin, 1854), ch. 2, art. 2 (pp. 75-97); Supernatural means to fight cholera. (1) Stop sinning and convert your heart to God. (2) Have recourse to God with humble and confident prayer in the adorable name of Jesus Christ. (3) Invoke the powerful intercession of Mary.

¹¹⁶ For the Middle Ages see sec. 2 of this chapter. On papal infallibility, note this comment in *Giov. prov.* (1885), p. 434: "It benefits sovereigns themselves because the infallible word of the Pope tells people more authoritatively of their obligation to be subject to the rulers of the land and condemns rebellion against them. By its very nature, then, the papacy becomes the most solid support of their thrones and of public peace." On the benefits that "social authority" derives from the definition of papal infallibility, see Secondo Franco, SJ, *L'infallibilità pontificia proposta ai fedeli* (LC: Turin, 1871), pp. 188-89, which was a source for *Giov. prov.*

dividuals in a personal, private, even secretive way, appealing to conscience in a way less conditioned by public opinion and strictly political influences.

It is in that sense that he could feel that his actions could not be considered political in the proper sense. That is why he could tell both Bishop Jeremiah Bonomelli and his Salesians that in 1848 he realized he would have to set politics aside if he wanted to accomplish some good. That being the case, we again have reason to consider Don Bosco as flexible in practice as he tended to be integral in outlook. He did not focus on the political merit of his actions and suggestions; his focus was on their ethical and religious import, and on the beneficial repercussions that politics might have on the ecclesiastical institution in which he lived and worked.

11. *The social question*

Here we might also add a few words on Don Bosco's attitude toward the social question. It does not seem that he confronted the problem of the social classes and their changing situation. At least there are no documents that give evidence of such a concern. Don Bosco noted that society was threatened by revolution and that there was evident separation and tension between rich and poor. But he did not theorize or offer plans as did Anthony Frederick Ozanam (1813-1853) and Joseph Toniolo (1845-1918).¹¹⁷ Instead he called for obedience and respect, begged from the rich, preached almsgiving, and asked for donations in traditional ways that might be found in any century (except insofar as they were ways peculiar to the previous three centuries or depended on situations in his own day).¹¹⁸ He does not seem to have been touched by the Marxist cry. The mutual aid society instituted in 1850 among the members of the Company of Saint Aloysius, of which he was the natural director, did not have much of a following. It was one among many such societies in an era when laborers were trying to defend themselves in a liberal and paternalistic society.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ See Giuseppe Mattai, "Don Bosco e i bisogni sociali dell'epoca," in *Don Bosco e il '48*, pp. 48-52. He writes of "Don Bosco's contributions to the solution of the labor question."

¹¹⁸ One is reminded of the pages on almsgiving as a means to win paradise in *Maggio*, day 29, pp. 164-68. They and the maxim *quod superest, date pauperibus* [What is superfluous give to the poor] will provide the main ideas later expressed in conferences to Salesian Cooperators (Mattei gives a quick overview, pp. 47-48). But DB's ideas do not have the richness and explicit concreteness of Muratori's work on Christian charity, which dates from 1721 and reveals a broad, organic view of society in his day.

¹¹⁹ A picture of mutual aid societies in the 19th century can be found in Giuseppe Melano, *La popolazione di Torino e del Piemonte nel secolo XIX* (Turin, 1961), pp.

The deeply rooted intuition of Don Bosco's life and activity had to do with the education of young people, whom he saw as the fundamental factor in social transformation: "One who wants to regenerate a city or a region has no more potent means; the way to begin is by opening a good festive oratory."¹²⁰

But what did he mean by "social regeneration"? It does not seem that he was taken up by the economic issue in Saint-Simonian, liberal, or Marxist terms. He does not seem to have worried about the vast scale of pauperism as a factor of social upheaval.¹²¹ For him social regeneration seems to be equivalent to making upright citizens and good Christians. The social question is not ruled out of that program, and it could be a part of it. But it was not effectively a part of it in the terms being played out historically at the time. In the thought and practice of Don Bosco, social problems coincide with those involved in the ethical and religious education of the populace. Such problems call for a certain kind of educator who is adept at working with the poorer classes and who will ask for the help of those who can and should collaborate.

136-45. The notice preceding the rules of the *Società di mutuo soccorso di alcuni individui della Compagnia di San Luigi eretta nell'Oratorio di san Francesco di Sales* (Turin: Speirani and Ferrero, 1850), [p. 3], signed by DB, approves the society and its intention of setting aside a penny a week. It then merely recommends the rules to the Company of St. Aloysius, "on which depends the basic advantage, that of the soul."

¹²⁰ The statement is recalled as typical of DB by Fr. Rua in a letter to parish priests of Italy (Parma: Fiaccadori, 1896), p. 1. But the problem of the education of youth within a broader theoretical, historical, and social framework is obviously not tackled by DB as it was, e.g., by Emiliano Avogadro della Motta, *Saggio intorno al Socialismo e alle dottrine e tendenze socialistiche* (Church Library, Turin: Speirani and Tortone, 1854), 2:187-89.

¹²¹ But DB was well aware of the ethical and religious responses, even though he may not have assimilated the terminology of the day (democracy, capitalism, etc.). Typical seem to be his comments to his Cooperators in Lucca on Jan. 15, 1882 (BS 6 [1882], 81-82): "Among us Catholics there are neither *our* works nor the works of others. We are all children of God and of the Church, children of the Pope... If youths are gathered in a festive oratory, if they attend school and are sheltered, the moral and civil benefit goes to Lucca... *Quod superest date eleemosynam* ["But let what you can afford be given in charity": Luke 11:41 NEB alt.]... A person with 1000 francs' income may be able to live decently on 800. Well, then, the remaining 200 come under the injunction *date eleemosynam*... Those who do not give their surplus rob the Lord..."

EXCURSUS

*Consequences of these persecutions*¹²²

God is good. God is great. He often permits tribulations and then, from the very things that appear evil to us, in his immense mercy he manages to draw good. The house searches caused us much upset, but in the end they brought great benefit, even materially, to our institution.

The first benefit was to assure the government that our supposed compromising relations with the Jesuits, Archbishop Frasoni, and the Pope were silly accusations made to the government. And those from Saluggia, who repeatedly assured Minister Farini that such relations did exist, were shown to be solemn liars.

The same conviction came to be shared by all the authorities: civil, fiscal, municipal, and those charged with public security and instruction. They realized that even though we remained firm Catholics despite our difficult position and the gloominess of the times, we were teaching nothing that could in the slightest way harm or clash with governmental tendencies or laws. For it has always been our firm intention to give to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's [Matt 22:21], saving conscience alone. Hence our houses have always been looked upon favorably by every government authority, and protected and helped where there were trade shops.

But we were given a terrible indication of the radical change in the times. At first, things that had only a beneficent purpose or a religious aim, or were administered by religious bodies, were left to themselves, and government authority did not interfere at all. Later the intention was to regulate everything strictly by law. We faced a time of watching out for our institutions and forestalling the lengthy vexations to which many institutions of our sort were to be exposed.

What proved to be highly advantageous to us was constant observance of the maxim never to get involved in politics *either for or against*. Today you may be able to support a principle in good conscience. Tomorrow there may be a new official proposing something unacceptable, and there will hostility and enmity from those whose ideas cannot be approved.

¹²² Editor's note: The author transcribes the last portion (ll. 1090-1201) of DB's autogr. ms. "Le perquisizioni," AS 132 Perquisizioni. Pietro Braido and Francesco Motto published a critical edition of the entire document in *Ricerche storiche salesiane* 8 (1989), 143-92, with a textual and historical introduction (pp. 111-42), explanatory comments, and additional documentation (pp. 193-200).

Our institute was publicly scrutinized by both the religious press and the bad press, and nothing blameworthy was found. It acquired high credit in public opinion. Many bishops—e.g., [Louis Nazari di] Calabiana of Casale—and many municipalities—e.g., Lanzo—asked us to go to their respective dioceses and regions in order to open educational houses.

Among the many people worthy of high regard who offered us consolation and comfort in that situation, there was the charitable Canon Louis Anglesio [1803-1881], rector of the Little House of Divine Providence. Leaving me, he offered me this parting sentiment: “Rejoice in the Lord. Your work has been tested. When persecution began against the apostles, they left Jerusalem and set out to carry the faith to other cities and regions. So it will be with your house.”

He spoke the truth. From that period on, we began to get such an exorbitant number of requests on behalf of young people that we could not house them all in Valdocco. We were forced to open more and more houses, of which the first was the little seminary or school of Saint Charles in Mirabello Monferrato.

The final end of some of our police investigators

While I adore God’s wishes in all things human, I cannot but note certain facts that some might say happened by chance but that religion regards as permitted by the Lord. God guard me against any self-complacency about them. Rather, I pray that his heavenly blessings will be poured out on those who may unwittingly have done evil to us. I set down a few facts, then.

Fumagalli and Grasselli (attorneys).¹²³

These two attorneys were zealous in the searches they made in this house and among other families of the city. As a reward for their political zeal, they were shortly afterwards sent as delegates for public security to Bologna.

While there, they doubled their efforts to prove themselves worthy of their promotion. One evening, around midnight, as they were returning from police headquarters, both were shot down by an unknown hand and were killed on the spot.

¹²³ Fumagalli (d. 1861) may be a mistaken reading of the document which the investigators gave to DB. They were Constantine Meregalli, third-class clerk in the second division of the Ministry of the Interior; Cavalier Stephen Gatti, member of the governing board of the Ministry of Public Instruction, acting as inspector of normal, training, and technical schools; attorney Anthony Grasselli (d. 1861), public security inspector for the Moncenisio district of Turin; attorney Stephen Tua, acting as public security inspector for the Borgo Dora district of Turin. See *Calendario generale del Regno pel 1860* (Turin, n.d.), pp. 70, 86, 664.

Gatti (knight)—He always spoke words of courtesy and protection to my face, but in secret he did all the harm he could. He presented a whole series of totally unfounded things to the minister. He had calumnies published in papers hostile to religion and morality. He asked for several copies of the biography of Dominic Savio, claiming to seek edification from his heroic virtues. But in fact he wanted to make it the butt of mockery and disdain in numerous articles that he had published in the Asti paper known as *Il Cittadino* [The Citizen].¹²⁴

But those were his last exploits. Some sort of melancholy assailed him. His intellectual faculties became so disturbed that he was first given different jobs and then discharged as a mental case. His mania caused him to attempt suicide several times. One day he attacked his wife and killed her. I was told that after a period of living miserably, he had ended his days unhappily in the area of ...[*blank in the original*] in the month of [*blank*] and the year [*blank*].¹²⁵

Farini¹²⁶—Knight-Commander Farini, warm promoter of the Italian revolution, surrounded by the riches he was amassing from all sides, claimed that he wanted to die poor. And so it turned out.

He had purchased for himself a rich villa in Saluggia. There he used to gather his friends to deal with political matters of special importance. There he was also repeatedly assured that in Don Bosco's house were to be found the famous compromising reports and correspondence.

I have been assured that the last decree that he signed was the one ordering the police search of our houses. Overtaken by the fear and panic that rendered him unsocial, he came to feel that all were in rebellion against him. All Europe, he kept saying, was in revolution against Italy.

¹²⁴ *Il Cittadino: Giornale politico, amministrativo, commerciale della provincia d'Asti* (Asti, 1851 and later). See Manno, *Bibliografia storica degli stati della monarchia di Savoia*, 2:11474. For the celebration of the national flags in Asti, Gatti published *Il dì XIX dicembre 1847 in Asti: Narrazione* (Asti, n.d.); see Manno, n. 11431.

¹²⁵ On Louis Stephen Gatti (1824-76), knight of the Order of St. Maurice, we have a memorandum of Fr. Berto, AS 132 Perquisizioni: "Information on Cav. Stephen Gatti.

"(1) It is believed he was a native of Felissano (Alessandria). In 1849 he was a clerk in the editorial offices of *L'Opinione*. When [Giovanni] Lanza [1815-82] was nominated Minister of Public Instruction, he chose Gatti to be his private secretary.

"(2) He was then nominated Central Inspector of Schools, and around 1860 head of the accounting division in said ministry. At the end of 1862 he moved on to the division for upper schools and universities.

"(3) When the capital or seat of government was transferred to Florence in 1864, he was first laid off. Some years later he re-entered the ministry but probably was no longer there when the Italian government moved to Rome.

"(4) While still in service, he was stricken with madness and retired to his own region.

"(5) There, in a moment of greater derangement, he gave his wife a terrible blow that caused her death. A few years later he, too, died.

"That's all we have on him."

¹²⁶ On Farini, see P. Zama, *L.C. Farini nel Risorgimento italiano* (Faenza, 1962).

He was then forced to abandon the ministry. His madness grew rabid, reaching the terrible extreme where he would eat nothing but his own excrement. After three years in this miserable state, he died truly poor in the region of [blank], to which he had retired to hide his misfortune from human company. He died on [blank] in the year [blank].

Camillo Cavour—The life of this famous politician is historically well known. Fine promises, courteous behavior to all, then sad actions behind one's back. He came to the Oratory several times, liked to chat with the boys, and enjoyed watching them play. He took part in the sacred services. More than once he was in our Saint Aloysius procession, carrying a candle in one hand and chanting the *Infensus hostis gloriae* out of a prayer book in his other hand. If I wanted to speak with him, he would insist it be at dinner with him. He did not sign the decree ordering the police searches. But he was aware of it and, as president of the council of ministers, he confirmed what the others were doing.

Speaking in the Chamber of Deputies in October 1860, he said: Who knows what will become of us within the next six months! Precisely six months later, on the day of his celebration, i.e., that of national unity, in which democracy high and low, all the revolutionaries, were anxious to take part, the chief promoter of all those things was absent. He fell into a grave illness that soon took his life, without his being fortified by the consolations of our holy religion. He had his foot on the highest rung of glory when he was cast down into his tomb.

He had persuaded the municipality of Turin not to share any longer in the expenses of Corpus Christi or to participate in the procession (June 6, 1861). That very day Cavour's corpse was escorted by the deputies to the tomb. And those who had refused to escort the Blessed Sacrament in procession found themselves, on that day and at that same hour, escorting the funeral carriage of the famous deceased man. Cavour died on [blank] in the year [blank].¹²⁷

I hope all these personages have found mercy in God's sight, as I and my boys have prayed with all our hearts. I simply wanted to note these facts to prove to my Salesian sons that God blesses those who bless us and highly favors our benefactors; and that he has punished with no light afflictions those who have been our adversaries.

¹²⁷ Cavour died on Thursday, June 6, 1861, a few minutes before 7:00 a.m. The burial rites took place in very solemn fashion at 7:00 p.m. on the following day. "Count Cavour was perhaps a unique example in parliamentary history of a man...who in ten years, moving from great unpopularity to an ever greater popularity, was able to introduce such great changes... We would certainly not use all the means that he used, and used lavishly, to succeed in his aims" (*Il campanone*, Friday, June 7, 1861).



JESUS CHRIST

1. Jesus in the Eucharist

When Don Bosco is choosing material for his biographies of Aloysius Comollo, Dominic Savio, Father Cafasso, Michael Magone, and Francis Besucco, under the influence of hagiographical and moralistic concerns, the Jesus he sees inserted in their way of life is the Jesus of the Eucharist. It is worth noting that we find this in his first published work, the *Life of Aloysius Comollo*, which brings us back very close to the early spiritual experiences of Don Bosco himself.

Aloysius Comollo's emotional life was somewhat stifled by his surroundings; he felt ill at ease because he was timid by nature. But in the Eucharist he found the Person in whom he could concentrate all his feelings within a religious context. From the very first time he was admitted to confession and communion, writes Don Bosco, he took such delight in it that "he experienced the greatest consolation in approaching it and never missed an opportunity to profit from it." And since sacramental communion "did not suffice to satisfy his consuming love for Jesus, he managed to provide nicely for that full satisfaction with spiritual communion."¹

Don Bosco gives detailed descriptions of Comollo's manifest emotion in the atmosphere of eucharistic union: "To spiritual and sacramental communion he added frequent visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, for whom his love was so deep that he often ended up spending hours with his beloved Jesus, pouring out his fervent and tender feelings."² As a seminarian,

he preceded communion with a day of strict fasting in honor of Mary. After confession he did not want to speak of anything except those things concerning the greatness, goodness, and love of his Jesus, whom he was preparing to receive the following day. When the time came to receive, I noticed that he would be

¹ *Comollo*, p. 10.

² *Ibid.*

absorbed in the most devout and lofty thoughts. With an attitude of complete devotion, measured step, lowered eyes, and frequent shudders of holy emotion, he would approach to receive the Holy of Holies. When he got back to his place, he seemed to be outside himself, visibly filled with emotion and deep devotion. His prayer was interrupted with sobs, inner groans, and tears; and he could not still the transports of tender emotion until Mass was finished and the chanting of Matins had begun.

I warned him more than once to restrain these external signs of devotion lest they attract the attention of others. "I feel," he replied to me, "I feel so full of contentment in my heart that, if I did not let it out in some way, it would take my breath away." Sometimes on a day he had received communion he would say: "I feel so full of gentleness and contentment that I can neither comprehend nor explain it."³

We are struck not only by Comollo's sentiments, but also by the attention Don Bosco pays to them. He regards them as worthy of admiration, if not of imitation.⁴ They readily call to mind the ones stressed by hagiographers after the Council of Trent, a period when Catholic reaction to Protestant heresies on the real presence helped to project Catholic spirituality onto Jesus in the Eucharist.⁵ Don Bosco himself tells us which book had helped to arouse Comollo's deep emotion and attachment to the Eucharist:

When he was already a seminarian...he was heard to say more than once: "It was the outstanding work by Saint Alphonsus entitled *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament* that taught me to make spiritual communion, which I can say has been my support in all the dangers to which I used to be subjected while I was still a layman."⁶

We find a certain coincidence here with what we know about John Bosco as a youth. He had the same work of Saint Alphonsus in his hands as an adolescent.⁷ Its role had been a largely beneficial one in periods when both

³ Ibid., pp. 33-34.

⁴ Ibid., p. 3: "To the seminarians of Chieri: Since the example of virtuous actions is worth much more than an elegant discourse, it will not be out of place to offer you a historical account of the life of someone who lived in the same place and under the same discipline that you do, and who therefore can serve you as a true model, so that you may prove worthy of the sublime goal to which you aspire and one day become first-rate priests in the Lord's vineyard."

⁵ I refer readers to my essay, "L'Eucaristia nella spiritualità italiana da metà Seicento ai prodromi del movimento liturgico," in *Eucaristia: Memoriale del Signore e Sacramento permanente* (Turin: LDC, 1967), pp. 141-82.

⁶ Comollo, p. 10.

⁷ BM 1:177. The ascetical works in question, noted by Lemoine, could be the volume: *Opere spirituali del beato Alfonso de' Liguori, vescovo di S. Agata de' Goti. Parte Prima, che contiene la Visita al SS. Sacramento, ed a Maria Santissima per ciascun giorno del mese... di più le Massime eterne, La quiete per gli scrupolosi, Il modo di conversare familiarmente con Dio... Parte seconda, che contiene L'amore delle anime, cioè riflessioni ed affetti sulla Passione di Gesù Cristo* (Turin: Balbino, 1820).

ordinary religious life and even its mystical variety were being repressed by anti-Quietist polemics and so found their safe and inviolate channel in eucharistic spirituality.⁸

Comollo's fervor exploded during his final illness when Viaticum was brought to him:

When he had finished his confession and prepared himself to receive Viaticum, the director, acting as minister, followed by seminarians, entered the infirmary room. At his appearance the sick youth became greatly agitated, changing color and expression. In holy transport he exclaimed: "O what a beautiful sight...gladdening to see...! See how that sun shines! All the beautiful stars crowning it! All the people that fall prostrate and adore it, not daring to lift their bowed heads. Ah, let me kneel down with them and also worship that never-seen sun!"

While he was saying these things, he tried to get up and make rushes toward the Blessed Sacrament. I made every effort to keep him in his bed. Tears flowed from my eyes in affection and amazement. I did not know what to say, how to answer him; and he kept struggling all the more to get to the Blessed Sacrament, quieting down only when he had received it.

After communion he remained immobile for awhile, his affectionate feelings concentrated on his Jesus. Then, filled with wonder: "O wonder of love! Who am I to have been made worthy of such a treasure! The angels in heaven may exult, but I have much more reason to rejoice. For the one they see unveiled in heaven and bow down to in respect, I hold in my bosom: *quem Coeli capere non possunt meo gremio confero: magnificavit Deus facere nobiscum*. The Lord worked wondrous things with me, and I was filled with heavenly glory and divine consolation: *et facti sumus laetantes*."⁹

We are reminded of Aloysius Gonzaga and *The Six Sundays*, which Don Bosco published two years after the biography of Comollo. Saint Aloysius nurtured such tenderness for Jesus in the Sacrament that

he spent several hours a day before the altar of the Sacrament. He spent three days preparing for communion, and three days making his thanksgiving afterwards. Receiving the sacred Host, he broke down in such tears and feelings of faintness that he often did not have enough strength to stand up.¹⁰

"On being advised he was dying, he chanted the *Te Deum*. Full of joy, he kept repeating: O what joy, let us go: *Laetantes imus*."¹¹

⁸ Stella, "L'Eucaristia," pp. 165-73.

⁹ Comollo, pp. 57-58. [Editor's note: The second part of the first Latin quotation and the final Latin phrase are Ps 126:3: "The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad indeed."]

¹⁰ *Sei domen.*, day 6, p. 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, day 9, pp. 36-37.

Saint Alphonsus begins his twelfth Visit by recalling Philip Neri's reception of Viaticum:

When [he] received the Holy Communion as Viaticum, on seeing the Most Blessed Sacrament enter his room, he exclaimed: "Behold my love! behold my love!" Let each one of us, then, say, here in the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament: Behold my love! behold the object of all my love for my whole life and for all eternity!¹²

Eucharistic communion reveals the affinity and irresistible reciprocity between the soul and Jesus. Saint Alphonsus expresses it by alluding to the visions of a medieval mystic:

One day the Lord said to Saint Mechtilde [1241?-1298]: "No bee flits over the flowers to suck honey with such vehemence as I, in the vehemence of love, do come to souls in holy communion." So if Jesus Christ has such a passionate desire to come to our souls, with all the more reason should we desire greatly to receive him and his divine love in communion.¹³

In communion, Alphonsus notes, the soul experiences "a great detachment from creatures and a great desire to advance in divine love."¹⁴

Using other terms, Don Bosco stresses the same convictions in his biography of Dominic Savio. When Dominic was led to frequent and daily communion by Don Bosco, he found deep happiness in it:

If I am at all worried...I go to my confessor, and he tells me what God wants me to do, because Our Lord tells us that the confessor speaks God's own words. Then, if I want something important, I go to communion and receive the Host offered for us. It is the body, blood, soul, and divinity which Jesus offered on the cross to His Eternal Father. What else do I need to be happy? Nothing in this world. Just to be able to see Him whom I now see by faith and adore on the altar.¹⁵

Don Bosco also tells us that "it was a treat for Dominic to spend an hour in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Without fail he made at least one visit a day, taking other boys with him."¹⁶

¹² St. Alphonsus, "Visits to the Blessed Sacrament," visit 12, AW 6:154.

¹³ St. Alphonsus, *Opere spirituali*, pt. 2, "Apparecchio alla Comunione," *ibid.*, p. 406; cf. AW 6:227, which is an abridgement of this passage.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 405; cf. AW 6:226. But this was common teaching, which can be found in St. Thomas, Lawrence Scupoli (1530-1610), St. Francis de Sales, Saint-Cyran (1581-1643), and John Baptist Scaramelli, SJ (1687-1752).

¹⁵ Bosco, *Savio*, p. 69; SDS:84.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71; SDS:85.

As in his biography of Comollo and the historically based *Power of a Good Upbringing*, Don Bosco dwells on Dominic's preparations for his first communion and then his later ones:

His preparation for communion was devout and edifying. The night before, on going to bed, he said a special prayer concluding with: "Blessed and praised every moment be the most holy and divine Sacrament!" In the morning he gave himself ample time for preparation, but his thanksgiving knew no bounds. Most of the time, if he were not reminded, he would forget all about breakfast and recreation and school, so rapt was he in prayer and in contemplation of the goodness of God, who opens his treasures of mercy to us in ways that defy description.¹⁷

From Dominic Savio we learn of another literary source for this sort of eucharistic piety: *The Hidden Treasure of the Mass* by Saint Leonard of Port Maurice (1737). It was published again in the *Catholic Readings* (1861), and reprinted several times by the Oratory print shop.¹⁸ The work did not just have Protestants in mind. Its author was also thinking of the dechristianization of Europe and certain scandalous "propositions" in the air that "smack of atheism and poison piety: one Mass more or less does not really matter; it is no little matter to hear Mass on feast days; that priest's Mass is like a Holy Week Mass—when he steps out on the altar, I head out of the church."¹⁹

Such is hardly the view of Don Bosco, Saint Leonard, Saint Alphonsus, and Scupoli. For them an attraction and desire for the Eucharist served as a lookout post. It was in such feelings that one could detect the rootedness of a person's faith and charity, the person's taste for heavenly things, and hence that person's degree of Christian perfection. Don Bosco disapproved of Comollo's sobs and sighs, but he also admired and noted what Comollo had confided to him: "I feel so full of gentleness and contentment that I can neither comprehend nor explain it."²⁰ Comments Don Bosco:

So anyone can clearly see that Comollo was advanced on the way of perfection. Those feelings of tender emotion, gentleness, and contentment over spiritual

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 70; SDS:85. Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione* (Turin: Paravia, 1855), pp. 30-38; ch. 4, "Il giorno della Comunione." The whole selection is a translation from a French work, *Un mari comme il y en a beaucoup, une femme comme il y en a peu* (Caen-Paris, 1869), pp. 21-30: "On waking up, the first thought of John Peter was a word of adoration and love, a rush of his heart toward the God he was soon to receive."

¹⁸ Dominic Savio wrote about it in a letter to his friend, John Massaglia (1836-56). The letter, missing in the 1st ed. of *Savio*, was incorporated in the 2nd (Turin: Martinengo, 1860), pp. 102-04; SDS:112-13.

The 1st ed. of *Il tesoro nascosto nella S. Messa* in the LC is in Feb. 1860 (Turin: Paravia); the 4th in 1884 (Turin: Salesiana). There was a later printing: Turin: SEI, 1930.

¹⁹ S. Leonardo da Porto Maurizio (1676-1751), *Opere complete* (Venice, 1868), 2:325.

²⁰ *Comollo*, p. 34.

things were effects of the living faith and burning love that were deeply rooted in his heart and that guided him in all his actions.²¹

Notice his diagnosis of Dominic Savio:

This spiritual attitude let Dominic pass his days in true joy. It accounts for his deep happiness and the heavenly bliss which shone in his face at all times. We are not to think that Dominic did not fully realize the importance of these two sacraments. Rather, his Christian life was such as to allow him to receive communion often. His conduct was above reproach.²²

As for Michael Magone, “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.”²³ After he had received the Sacrament,

he was so attentive, recollected, and composed that he seemed insensible to all external activity. Often 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.²⁴

There is always a chapter on the sacraments in Don Bosco’s biographies. And always there is a chapter on death, the moment of Viaticum, and the love for God that finds expression in uncontainable affection for the Eucharist: the Bread that offers hope in life when the organism is dissolving. Magone, writes Don Bosco, “through a special grace of the Lord Jesus, he did not feel the pain but seemed to derive consolation from his ailments.”²⁵ He said: “Tell [my mother] that I love her, and want her to continue her virtuous life with courage—and that I go willingly with Jesus and Mary. I’ll be waiting for her in Heaven.”²⁶

His mother, Joan Mary Magone, gave herself entirely to God’s service after Michael’s death. As Father Rua reports:

Allowed to end her days at the Oratory where her son had led a saintly life, she showed her gratitude by working tirelessly. She always attended early Mass,

²¹ Ibid., pp. 34-35.

²² *Savio*, pp. 69-70; SDS:84.

²³ *Magone*, pp. 41-42; Cornell, p. 126.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 40; Cornell, p. 126. The same thing is found in *Giov. prov.*, pt. 1 [sec. 1], art. 5, p. 17: “St. Stanislaus Kostka was so deep in devotion in church that many times he did not hear the calls or feel the prods of his servants when they were trying to get him home.” St. Aloysius, too, when he was praying, “though loudly called, found it difficult to hear what was being asked of him, so great was his delight in conversing with God” (*Sei domen.*, day 8; in *Giov. prov.*, p. 69).

²⁵ Bosco, *Magone*, p. 25; SWSJB:122.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 81; SWSJB:122.

loved prayer, and feared sin. After an illness of seven days she received the last rites and died fully resigned, invoking Jesus, Mary, and Joseph and praying to her son Michael to take her with him to heaven.²⁷

Even more characteristic is the death of Francis Besucco, the godchild of the pastor in Argentera, a village way up in the Maritime Alps. Coming to the Oratory, he wore himself out in the tensions of study, asceticism, and a city climate that did not suit him. On his deathbed, ejaculations and snatches of hymns came from his fevered mind. They were the hymns and prayers that had filled his solitude when he was a shepherd boy, when he prayed as a child before Christ on the crucifix in the little church of Argentera, or when he prayed before the Blessed Sacrament at Valdocco:

At about half past ten, it seemed he would be with us only a few more minutes. Then he tried to raise his arms. I took his hands and folded them to rest on his chest. He unfolded them and raised them once more with a smile, gazing steadily at a point from where he seemed to derive great contentment...

Just then a pink glow came over his face, which made it appear healthier than ever before in his life. It began to shine with such beauty and splendor as dimmed all the lights in the infirmary and would have dimmed even the very light of a noonday sun. Those present, ten altogether, were not only frightened, but also amazed and stunned as, in deep silence... Wonder grew all the more when the stricken boy, raising his head ever so slightly and stretching out his arms as if to reach the hand of a loved one, began to sing in a strong, joyous tone of voice: [*Lodate Maria/O lingue fedeli/Risuoni ne' cieli/La vostra armonia!*

[He then made several efforts to raise himself up and, clasping his hands devoutly, he again began to sing: *O Gesù d'amore accesol/Non vi avessi mai offeso/O mio caro e buon Gesù/Non vi voglio offender più.* He then went right on to sing: *Perdon caro Gesù/Pietà mio Dio/Prima di peccar più/Morir vogl'io...*

[We all were caught up in wonder when] Francis continued to sing, but his words came out haltingly and his sentences were left unfinished as if he were answering loving questions. I could make out only a few of them, like "King of heaven...how beautiful...I am a poor sinner...to you I give my heart...give me your love... my loving and beloved Lord..." Then he fell back on his pillow...and gave no sign of life. Yet, noticing that prayers were no longer offered, nor exclamations recited, he turned his head and said, "Help me, let us pray. [Jesus,] Mary and Joseph, help me through this, my last agony. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, may I give up my soul in peace to you"...

[At 11:00 p.m. he wanted to speak again, but he could only say: "The crucifix..."] A few moments (after 11:15 p.m.), his soul left his body, winging its way gloriously, as we have every reason to hope, toward the bliss of Heaven

²⁷ She died at the Oratory on Jan. 20, 1872. See the obituary written by Fr. Rua in *Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales. Torino*, Defunti, AS 276. Cited here from BM 10:149, n. 7.

where he shall reside in the company of the pure and innocent who served God in this world, and who now enjoy and bless Him forever.²⁸

Jesus, then, dominates the spiritual life of Don Bosco and of the milieu that has him as its center. And it is the Jesus of the Eucharist, first and foremost, with all the elements that form part of worship of that Jesus by the individual and the community. This is the Jesus with whom Don Bosco himself converses in his daily afternoon visit in church. This is the Jesus before whom he places his boys in prayer, when he takes off to beg charity for them in the city. When he deals with this Jesus in his later years, he is no longer able to control himself completely. Don Bosco's own emotion breaks through. His Masses are bathed in tears and interrupted by the kind of sobbing he had not approved in Comollo. When he had difficulty moving around in his final years, he spent long hours in his room while his Salesians were busy with the boys. It was during these years that the levitations and ecstatic expressions on his face were witnessed by the boy who served his Mass and later became a Salesian missionary, Father Evasio Garrone (1861-1911).²⁹

2. *Jesus Christ as judge*

In sharp contrast to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament was the Jesus evoked in connection with the Last Things. The Jesus of the Eucharist is the Jesus who loved human beings so much, God with us, benign, patient, full of love and inflaming us with his darts of love. The Christ of the Last Things is a fearsome and awesome Christ, the Christ of the *Dies irae* with all its wrath and calamity. And the reason is, we are told in *The Companion of Youth* and *The Month of May*, that the time of mercifulness has come to an end after death.³⁰ Don Bosco makes his

²⁸ *Besucco*, pp. 171-72; SWSJB:133-35. Bracketed words do not appear in this Eng. ed.

²⁹ BM 13:701-02.

³⁰ *Giov. prov.* (1885), p. 499: "In this life the Lord exercises the function of merciful Father, in the next life that of strict Judge." This remark is not in previous editions. It may have been added by others, but it is fully in line with what DB wrote in his meditation on judgment back in 1847: "The soul will turn for help to God's mercy but that mercy will no longer be there for it, because the time of mercy ends with death" (p. 42). In *Maggio*, day 20, p. 118: "The time for mercy and pardon lasts so long as the soul remains united with the body."

St. Alphonsus, from whom DB borrows his arguments on judgment and mercy, specifies the matter a bit more. Accepting a statement by St. Leonard of Port Maurice, Alphonsus writes that the time for mercy may be limited even on this earth. When sinners have done their full measure of sinning, God withdraws efficacious grace: "God waits; but when the time of chastisement arrives, he waits no longer, but executes vengeance..."

own the descriptions to be found in the literature of popular devotion. In nineteenth-century Italy that literature still found its inspiration in such authors as Paul Segneri, Saint Leonard of Port Maurice, John Peter Pinamonti, SJ (1632-1703), and Saint Alphonsus.³¹ At the judgment Jesus Christ will be angry, demanding a very strict accounting for graces bestowed, for the use made of his mercies, for the havoc wrought with his precious blood, and for the insolent or insane responses to his insistent appeals. The daily meditations on the Last Things in *The Companion of Youth*, those in the monthly Exercise of a Holy Death, and those for the annual retreats keep proposing the mechanics of conversion, hence anything that could stir up repentance, return to God, and the firm resolve not to sin any more. So it is easy for Don Bosco and his youths to get involved in the dynamics of the Last Things as terrified, conscience-stricken sinners facing an enraged judge and a gaping hell. Once again, be it weekly, monthly, or annually, they want to proclaim themselves repentant sinners, fall at the feet of their heavenly Father as did the prodigal son, kneel at the tree of life, and be sprinkled with its blessed blood:

As soon as the soul leaves the body, it will appear before the Divine Judge. The first thing making that appearance terrible is the fact that your soul will find itself before a God it scorned, a God who knows every secret of your heart and your every thought. What things will you bring with you? Whatever good and whatever evil you did in life: *refert unusquisque prout gessit sive bonum, sive malum* ["each one receives recompense, according to what he did...whether good or evil": 2 Cor 5:10]. You will find no excuse or pretext. Above you will be an angry judge; on one side of you the sins accusing you, on the other the demons ready to execute the sentence of condemnation; inside you a conscience upsetting and tormenting you; below a hell waiting to swallow you. In such straits where will you go, where will you flee to?...

The Divine Judge will say: "Look! Despite so many gifts and graces, how badly you measured up to the faith you professed! You had barely reached the age of beginning to know me when you began to offend me with

He either sends them a sudden death, and makes them die in sin, or he deprives them of his abundant graces, and leaves them with the sufficient grace, with which they can, but will not, save their souls. The blindness of their understanding, the hardness of their heart, the evil habits which they have contracted, will render their salvation morally impossible; and thus they will be, if not absolutely, at least morally abandoned." See *Preparation for Death*, cons. 17, point 2, in AW 1:175-76; A. Gemelli, *Il francescanesimo* (Milan, 1936³), p. 263.

³¹ A decent selection of spiritual works on the Last Things in relation to St. Alphonsus is offered by Giuseppe Cacciatore, CSsR, "Le fonti e i modi di documentazione," in St. Alphonsus, *Opere ascetiche: Introduzione generale* (Rome, 1960), pp. 214-16. For DB we should add Francesco Antonio Biamonti, *Serie di meditazioni, prediche ed istruzioni ad uso delle sacre missioni* (Milan: Pirotta, 1844); Giuseppe Zama-Mellini (1788-1838), *Gesù al cuore del giovane* (Rome, 1833; Turin: Marietti, 1834).

lies, disrespect for churches, disobedience to your parents, and many other transgressions of your duties. As you grew in age, you could at least have governed your actions better, but instead you grew in disdain for my law..."³²

The bill of indictments proceeds without any possibility of excuse, mitigation, or escape:

Your soul will look for help to the angels, the saints, Mary Most Holy. In the name of them all, she will reply: "Now you ask for my help? You did not want me for your Mother in life. Now I no longer know you for my child: *nescio vos* ['I do not know you': Luke 13:25]."³³

Sometimes emotion seems to have gotten out of dogmatic control in these dramatic presentations. Over against Christ, the implacable judge, we are to imagine Mary, our all-powerful advocate, still the compassionate mother of all believers at that moment, still entreating for them as if in opposition to her divine Son. A popular hymn asks her to be her child's advocate at the throne of her Son above, even as she has been here in this life of exile:

*Avvocata in quest'esiglio.
Deh! lo sii per me lassù.
Cara Mamma, d'un tuo figlio!
Presso il Trono di Gesù.*³⁴

This contrast, deplored energetically by Adam de Widenfeldt (1617-1677?) in his *Salutary Warnings of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Her Indisceet Devotees*, by Peter Nicole, Louis Anthony Muratori (1672-1760), and Segneri, had disappeared in the more careful works to which Don Bosco preferred to resort: i.e., the *The Glories of Mary*, the *Preparation for Death*, and other writings of Saint Alphonsus that had noted the reservations expressed by Muratori in his little work on properly regulated devotion (*Della regolata devozione*).³⁵ The picture is more consistent, and there is less of a contrast. Now the drama does not stem from any opposition between Jesus and Mary but rather from the inner desperation of the damned soul and its inescapable fate:

Your soul will look for help to the divine mercy, and there will no longer be any mercy for it, because the time of mercy ends with death. Your soul will look for help to the angels, the saints, Mary Most Holy. In the name of them all, she will reply: "Now you ask for my help? You did not want me for your Mother in life.

³² *Giov. prov.*, pp. 40-41. The very same expressions are picked up in *Maggio*, day 16, pp. 95-96.

³³ *Giov. prov.*, p. 42.

³⁴ From the hymn, "O del Cielo gran Regina," *Scelta di Laudi sacre ad uso delle missioni* (Turin: Salesiana, 1879³), p. 36; *Giov. prov.* (1885), p. 467.

³⁵ See Giuseppe Cacciatore, CSsR, *S. Alfonso de' Liguori e il giansenismo* (Florence, 1944).

Now I no longer know you for my child: *nescio vos*.” Finding no escape, the sinner will cry for the mountains and rocks to cover him, but they will not move. He will invoke hell and see it open: *Inferius horrendum chaos*. At that moment the inexorable Judge will deliver the terrible sentence: “Faithless child, get far away from me. My heavenly Father has cursed you. I curse you. Be off into eternal fire...”³⁶

The boy reading this, the child of common stock, the Salesian listening to such a sermon on his retreat: all are being induced to become serious and fearful. As a hymn pictured it, they are to imagine the terrible trumpet sounding, the wish to be covered by rock and earth, the terrible sentence, and the need to ask for pardon now:

*Ahi! che l'orribil tromba
Già rimbomba intorno
E nell'estremo giorno
Già sento in me l'orror...*

*Monti, su me cadete,
Apriti, terra, ormai,
Confuso griderai,
Ma invano sarà il gridar.*

*Del Giudice supremo
l'orribile presenza,
E la fatal sentenza
Fa d'uopo sostener....*

*Di quel gran dì fatale
Scuotiti al lampo, al tuono
Ed or, che puoi, perdono
T'affretta ad implorar.³⁷*

The intention underlying these dread pictures and images of judgment, of Christ the Judge surrounded by demons and angels, the wicked and the good, also finds expression in a devotion that is grounded surely and preferably on the theology of Saint Alphonsus. It gives a very ample place to grace and freedom, prayer and devotion to the Virgin Mary: “My Jesus, grant me the grace to be one of those blessed ones. Most Holy Virgin, help me; protect me in life and in death, and especially when I will present myself to your Divine Son to be judged.”³⁸

3. *Jesus as an example*

In Don Bosco, too, we find a notable role given to Jesus as “example” within the general context of spirituality as part of life, piety, and Christian pedagogy. Unlike some of the fonts that inspired him, such as Charles Gobinet (1613-1690) and *The Imitation of Christ*, Don Bosco does not explain what he means by that

³⁶ *Giov. prov.*, pp. 42-43.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 336-38. Such a hymn was already being used in Piedmont in the 18th century. It is found, for example, in *Lodi spirituali per le missioni ad uso di diverse diocesi del Piemonte* (Asti: Massa, n.d. [179...]), pp. 30-32.

³⁸ *Giov. prov.*, p. 43.

exactly: nor does he offer any doctrinal development for this theme.³⁹ For example, we find hints, but only hints, that the faithful person must be conformed to Christ on this earth if he or she is really to be a living member of Christ the Head, to be acknowledged and recognized by him at the judgment, and to be declared a blessed child of the heavenly Father.⁴⁰ Rather than focusing on the analogy of the body,⁴¹ Don Bosco prefers to focus his attention on the earthly mysteries of Jesus and the teachings he imparted through his actions and discourses. Don Bosco implies that we have not given them due attention.

Here and there *The Companion of Youth* presents Jesus as the model of obedience or meekness, Jesus making clear how much he loves young people (the *filiū hominum*).⁴² The example derived from the life of Christ is, more frequently than not, one taken from the life of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga or that of Aloysius Comollo. The reason for this preference on Don Bosco's part is implicit in his conviction that Christ is the divine model imitated by such people as Gonzaga, Comollo, Saint Philip Neri, and Saint Rose of Lima (1586-1617).

Don Bosco's *Bible History* and *Easy Way* fill out elements that were expressed in germinal form earlier. Jesus is the model by virtue of his life. He is the teacher by virtue of his sayings, his Sermon on the Mount, and his parables. They all inculcate such things as detachment from the things of earth; love for God; the need to surrender to God to win salvation and freedom from sin; prudence, hid-

³⁹ Gobinet, *Istruzione della gioventù nella pietà cristiana* (Turin, 1831), pt. 3, ch. 15, maxim 11, p. 428. More noteworthy is *Un mazzolin di fiori ai fanciulli ed alle fanciulle, ossia antiveleno cristiano* (Turin: Paravia, 1836), pp. 30-40: "Lesson III: The imitation and love of Jesus Christ." The work is anonymous, but it is actually by Stephen Alexis Burzio, OMV. He was the uncle of Joseph Burzio (1822-42), over whom DB was prefect in the seminary. DB left testimony on Joseph Burzio that was later published by Felice Giordano, OMV (1814-1904), *Cenni istruttivi di perfezione proposti a' giovani desiderosi della medesima nella vita edificante di Giuseppe Burzio* (Turin: Artisti Tipografici), pp. 96-137. See also BM 1:375-79.

⁴⁰ *Giov. prov.*, p. 42.

⁴¹ One of his very rare statements on the subject is in *Maggio*, last day of April, p. 15: "Mary is also our Mother because she regenerated us in grace through Jesus Christ... On this point St. William the [Augustinian] monk [William of Newburgh, 1136-98?] said: 'Mary is the mother of the Head; so she is also the mother of the members, which we are: *Nos sumus membra Christi*.'" Stress is put on the spiritual maternity of Mary, which is invoked to arouse practical devotion in the month of Mary. DB's source was Agostino Ferrari, *Simboli mariani, ossia il mese di maggio santificato ad onore di Maria* (Turin: Marietti, 1853³), p. 28: "She, says William the Monk, ... is the mother of the head, hence the mother of many members... Mary is our mother because she gives back to us the life of grace that had been taken away by our first ancestress... *In uno Salvatore omnium Iesu plurimos Maria peperit ad salutem... Eo ipso quod Mater est capitis, multorum membrorum, mater est. Mater Christi mater est membrorum Christi; quia caput et corpus unus est Christus*... William the Monk, cant. 4." From the bills of Marietti we learn that DB got several copies of the Ferrari work: see AS 112 Fatture, Marietti.

⁴² *Giov. prov.*, pp. 11, 14.

denness, meekness even in the face of contradiction or mistreatment; charity without bounds that manages to ask pardon even for one's killers.

His consideration of Jesus differs from his treatment of Mary, the metaphorical sense prevailing in the latter case. In the case of Jesus, the example derives from facts and statements. Thus Don Bosco does not follow the metaphorical leanings of Royaumont that typified an age imbued with Augustinianism and allegorism as reactions to Protestant emphasis on the literal interpretation of Sacred Scripture. Don Bosco is more in line with Augustine Calmet, Francis Soave, and Christopher Schmid. He does not care much to append moral considerations to the facts. He wants the facts themselves to bring out the examples.

The practice of "confirming what has been said so far with an example" was typical of *The Practice of Christian and Religious Perfection* of Alfonso Rodríguez, SJ (1526-1616), of many sermons, and of other works of pious literature. Don Bosco adopts it for such works as *The Month of May* and *Devotion to Your Guardian Angel*. But it is not to be found in the biographies of Savio and Magone, which are written more in the manner of his *Bible History*, *Church History*, and various *Lives* of the Popes. In such works he seems more consciously to have followed the maxim he suggested to Father Lemoyne: "Remember that this is a biography; therefore any moral must be woven into the narrative rather than offered apart."⁴³

The use of an example to confirm a point is present, however, in the conferences he gave to Salesians regarding their formation. In the retreats he gave at Trofarello (and then several more times along the same lines), he almost always gives the teaching or example of Jesus a place of honor when he is illustrating the religious life in general, specific vows, or the main virtues. His literary sources were *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ* by Saint Alphonsus and *The Practice of Perfection* by Rodríguez.⁴⁴ A more remote incentive for the schema-

⁴³ DB to Lemoyne, Turin, Nov. 3, 1869: AS 131/01; *Ep.*, 786; cited here from BM 9:350-51.

⁴⁴ E.g., consider the phrase in his instruction on "the advantages of one's living in a congregation" (AS 132 Prediche E4; MB 9:936-37): *Homo vivit purius, cadit varius, surgit velocius...* ("One lives more purely, falls more rarely, rises more quickly..."). Usually attributed to a homily of St. Bernard, the words come from St. Alphonsus, *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, "Advantages of the Religious State," AW 10-11:41. Its direct source seems to be Carlo Gregorio Rosignoli, SJ (1631-1707), *La saggia elezione, ovvero avvertimenti per fare la buona elezione* (Turin, 1673²), pt. 1, ch. 15, pp. 258-90; and the indirect sources are those gathered in St. Alphonsus, *Opere ascetiche* 14 (Rome, 1935), 37-60.

The section on the *rendiconto*, the "manifestation of conscience" (AS 132 Prediche G3; MB 9:995), is interwoven with citations and phrases that can be found in Rodríguez, *Esercizio di perfezione e di virtù cristiane*, pt. 3, trat. 7, "Della chiarezza con che si dee procedere co' Superiori e Padri spirituali," ch. 3 and 5 (Turin: Marietti, 1828), 3:476-89. Borrowings from the same tract of Rodríguez in the Introduction to *Const.* are noted by Pietro Brocardo, *Direzione spirituale e rendiconto* (Rome, 1966), p. 165.

tization he came to prefer in time may well have been what he wrote in the *Rules or Constitutions*, which in turn was probably inspired by the Rules of the Vincentians:

Just as Jesus Christ began to work and to teach, so the members will keep trying to perfect themselves by practicing inner and outer virtues and by acquiring knowledge; then they will set to work for the welfare of their neighbors.⁴⁵

The evocation of Jesus was deeply ingrained in the religious milieu. To take but one example, we can see it in Don Bosco's biography of Dominic Savio. He incorporates testimony from Father Joseph Cugliero (1808-1880), Dominic's elementary-school teacher in Mondonio. When some of Dominic's schoolmates did something wrong, they decided to put the blame on Dominic. Dominic took the blame and said nothing. When his teacher discovered the truth, he asked Dominic why he had not defended himself and declared his innocence:

Because that boy had been in trouble before and would have been expelled. I hoped I would be forgiven because this would have been my first fault. Besides, I remembered too that Our Lord had been falsely accused once.⁴⁶

We find something similar in Don Bosco at moments of inescapable suffering. Mama Margaret, annoyed and weary, had decided to return to Becchi from Valdocco. Don Bosco said nothing to her. He simply pointed to the crucifix on the wall.⁴⁷ In 1860, Don Bosco was taken by surprise by the first house search. He could not hide his own vexation, particularly considering the insolence of the searchers at a time when the sacredness of the priesthood was keenly felt in religious circles:

They entered my room and I surrendered to their arbitrary ways. They began by putting my hands behind my back. Everything was searched: pockets, notebooks, money purse, trousers, jacket, cassock, hems. Even the tassel of my biretta was scrutinized for the *corpus delicti*, as they put it. Since these actions were performed in a very rude manner and I was spun around every which

⁴⁵ *Regole della Società di San Francesco di Sales*, "Scopo di questa congregazione," art. 2; AS 022/1, p. 6, ms. of Fr. Rua with corrections by DB; see SWSJB:268. Note the *Regole, ovvero costituzioni comuni della congregazione della Missione* (n.p., 1658), ch. 1, art. 1, pp. 9-10; "Jesus Christ...began first to work and then to teach." Also to be recalled here is DB's so-called "Spiritual Testament" to his Salesians: "Although your first Director is dead, our true Superior, Jesus Christ, will never die. He will always be our Master, our Guide, and our Model. But remember that He will also be our Judge when the time comes to reward our faithfulness" (AS 132 Quaderni 6, p. 30; MB 17:258; cited here from SWSJB:350).

⁴⁶ SDS:46. The original of Fr. Cugliero's letter is in AS 9 Savio (uncatalogued).

⁴⁷ Lemoyne, *Scene morali di famiglia esposte nella vita di Margherita Bosco* (Turin, 1890²), ch. 23, p. 143. This ed. contains some revisions due to DB himself.

way, I could not restrain a murmur: *Et cum sceleratis reputatus est* ["He was counted among the wicked": Is 53:12].

Asked one of them: "What are you saying?"

I replied: "I'm saying that you are doing me the same service that others once did for our Divine Savior."⁴⁸

The episode indicates Don Bosco's capacity for self-control. He indicates his feelings of protest and aversion, but not in such a way that he makes himself clear and readily understood. At the same time the element of temperament does not smother his religious sentiment. What he expressed at the moment was something deeply believed and lived.

4. *Jesus as Divine Savior*

When Don Bosco is calmly writing historical comments or acting as apologist, catechist, or sacred orator, there is another Christ that dominates alongside Jesus in the Eucharist. It is Jesus, the Divine Savior who came down from heaven to redeem us from the bondage of sin and save us from eternal death. The influence of local catechesis is evident and can be documented. The exposition of Christian doctrine in the Turin archdiocese clearly stressed the salvific role of the Word Incarnate. Jesus means Savior.⁴⁹ By way of summing up the same line of thought, Don Bosco writes: "Jesus Christ taught us all that is necessary for us to believe and to do for salvation."⁵⁰ The Gospel announces to

⁴⁸ Bosco ms. AS 132 Perquisizioni, pp. 9-10, presented with some variants in BM 6:320-21.

⁴⁹ *Compendio della dottrina cristiana ad uso della diocesi di Torino: Breve catechismo* (Turin: Paravia [1844]), Catechism for Communicants, pt. 1, les. 3, p. 60: "His name is Jesus, which means Savior, because he saved us from the eternal death we deserved because of our sins."

⁵⁰ *Maniera*, p. 47. See [François-Marie Bigex], *Catechismo storico* (Turin: Stamperia Reale [1821]), p. 19: "What did Jesus Christ teach in his preaching? All that is needed to believe and do in order to be saved." On the other hand, note Pierre Collot, *Explication des premières vérités de la religion* (Lyon-Paris, 1827), ch. 4, art. 3, p. 95: "What did Jesus Christ teach? He taught all that is necessary for salvation."

Another synthesis in the very same line can be found in DB's *Storia sacra*, p. 158: "After our father Adam fell from the state of innocence in which he had been created by God, he and all his descendants would have to groan for many centuries in their harsh bondage to the devil, who dragged a great many of them with him to eternal damnation. Nor was there any other means of salvation for humanity than faith in the Liberator that the divine goodness had promised it. Thus all the events of the Old Law, the hope of the patriarchs, and the predictions of the prophets look forward to the fortunate time of this universal Savior." The passage, except for the last sentence, is already found in his *Stor. eccl.*, p. 20.

human beings “the way to obtain eternal salvation.”⁵¹ In offering a doctrinal synthesis of the gospel message, his *Easy Way* combines ethical and soteriological elements in the presentation:

Q. Why did Jesus Christ perform all these miracles?

A. Jesus Christ performed all these miracles to prove that his teaching was divine and that he was the Son of God.

Q. What did he teach specifically about honors?

A. He taught that the proud would be humbled and the humble glorified.

Q. What did he teach about the use of riches?

A. He taught that only one thing is necessary; that it profits a person nothing to gain the whole world, if one then loses his or her soul.

Q. What did he teach about earthly pleasures?

A. He taught that at death worldly pleasures and joys will turn into reasons for sadness, and that the sadness of the just person will turn into pleasure and joy...

Q. What did Jesus Christ say about himself?

A. He said that he was the only Son of God, the Savior promised to human beings, who had come down from heaven to earth to teach them the path to salvation.⁵²

Elsewhere (e.g., *The Religiously Instructed Catholic*, various *Lives* of the Popes, and Marian writings) Don Bosco also offers Jesus as Divine Savior. It is worth noting a shading that differentiates Don Bosco from Saint Alphonsus. The latter also uses the expression “Divine Savior,” but pretty much interchangeably with “our Divine Redeemer.” When Don Bosco is depending on pages of Saint Alphonsus, he incorporates both “Redeemer” and “Savior.”⁵³ But when Don

⁵¹ *Maniera*, pp. 56-57.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49. Other authors present different summaries: e.g., Fleury, Collot, Francis Aimé Pouget (1666-1723), William Hyacinth Bougeant, SJ (1690-1743), and Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855). The value of DB’s schematization comes out better by comparison with others. John Dominic Borighioni, for example, sums up the teaching of Jesus Christ as follows: “First, do penance. (2) Do good to those who do us wrong. (3) Scorn the vanity of the world. (4) Carry the cross. (5) Pray to God continually” (*Compendio della dottrina cristiana* [Turin: Avondo, 1771], pt. 1, ch. 22, pt. 70).

⁵³ Here we could offer a long series of parallels between St. Alphonsus’s *Maxims of Eternity*, *Preparation for Death*, and *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ* on the one hand, and DB’s *Giov. prov.*, *Maggio*, and Introduction to *Const.* on the other. Let me cite just one obvious instance:

St. Alphonsus, *Prep. for Death* (Turin: Marietti, 1845), cons. 16, point 2, AW 1:165-66:

Speaking of you, Jesus appears to say *I have labored with crying: my jaws are become hoarse* [in n.: Ps. 68:4]. My son, I have al-

Bosco, *Misericordia*, pp. 62-63.

Hence it is no wonder that the sacred fathers apply the following words to our Divine Savior, as if he were saying them to

Bosco departs somewhat from his sources, it is the term “Divine Savior” that alternates with “Jesus” almost always. This is true whether he is reworking French sources such as Loriguet (*Sauveur*) or looking for inspiration solely to Saint Alphonsus.

Don Bosco sees salvation polarized in the institution known as the Church. Our Divine Savior is viewed as its institutor, founder, and legislator; and he is venerated and heard in those who are his vicars, ministers, and representatives. In *The Month of May* he writes:

Our Divine Savior, who came down from heaven to save us, willed to establish a means that would ensure the deposit of faith by the founding of a spiritual kingdom on earth. This kingdom is his Church, the congregation of the Christian faithful all over the world. They profess the teaching of Jesus Christ under the leadership of its legitimate pastors, of the Roman Pontiff in particular, who is its God-appointed head.⁵⁴

The theme of Jesus Christ the Head, whose members are the faithful, is often mentioned but not developed.⁵⁵ In the mentality of Don Bosco, it is not vividly present, as is the notion of Jesus as the Head of the one, true religion.

More than anything else, Don Bosco fails to offer any adequate development of the doctrine of grace. In this he may have been influenced by the archdiocesan catechism, which was born during a time of sharp polemics on grace; hence it was reticent on this topic, perhaps with good reason, since it did not want to give the appearance of adopting a partisan position associated with one school of thought.⁵⁶ But Don Bosco certainly did not forget grace. Writing

most lost my voice in calling you [to repentance: added in Eng. ed]. Remember, O sinners, says St. Teresa, that that Lord who will one day be your judge is now calling you to return to him.

the human sinner: *I have labored with crying: my jaws are become hoarse* (Ps. 68 [Douay]). My son, I have almost lost my voice in calling you. Remember, O sinners, says St. Teresa, that that Lord whom you have so offended is calling you.”

In *Maggio*, the consideration for day 3 is typical: “Redemption” (pp. 28-31). DB speaks continually of the Savior, promised Messiah, and Son of God.

⁵⁴ *Maggio*, day 4, p. 33, which finds its inspiration in *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 3, p. 88, and hence in its various sources.

⁵⁵ The most suggestive hints come with respect to the Roman Church. It is holy “because holy is its Head, Jesus Christ, source of all holiness.” See *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 5, p. 99. Similar expressions can be found in such works as the *Fondamenti della cattolica religione*, *Maggio*, and *La Chiesa Cattolica e la sua gerarchia*. Here, too, DB is obviously a spokesman for material in the catechisms, starting with that of the Turin archdiocese: “Q. Why is the Church called holy? A. Because holy is its Head, who is Jesus Christ... Because all its members are called to holiness...” (*Compendio della dottrina cristiana*, Catechism for Communicants, pt. 1, les. 10, §2, p. 72).

⁵⁶ Pietro Stella, “Alle fonti del catechismo di san Pio X: Il catechismo di mons. Casati,” in *Salesianum* 23 (1961), 43-81.

to friends, particularly to clerics and priests, he almost never failed to include the expression: "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us."⁵⁷

Feeling called to promote the salvation of souls and adopting as his motto *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle*, Don Bosco had a strong incentive to prefer the appellation "Divine Savior." But we must not overlook the circumstances of his time and place. People felt it was a lamentable time. The faithful were plowing through the treacherous sea of a traitorous world, under a flood of errors, the parching wind of indifferentism, and blasphemous irreligion. So the word "divine" affirmed a faith that was being combatted and repudiated by many people who lived around him, and whose impact on his own life and the fortunes of the Church and souls was felt from one day to the next. The word "Savior" also meant something special, given the spiritual dangers that souls and the mystical ark of salvation (the Church) were going through as they headed for the safe port of blessed eternity.⁵⁸

The keen sense of Jesus as Savior also helps to explain why many other elements of the Christian mystery are muted in the spoken and written words of Don Bosco. That is true, first and foremost, of the mystery of the Trinity. Of course the Trinity is a dogma. Those who do not know it or believe in it cannot be admitted to the sacraments. But the mystery of the Trinity is not one of the truths on which Don Bosco dwells. That mystery is, to be sure, the most characteristic and fundamental mystery of divine revelation. But Don Bosco's meditations on paradise focus on a personal God, the supreme good that will assuage the thirst for happiness in the human heart; creatures cannot satisfy that thirst precisely because the human being is made for God. Of course Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God. But unlike Cardinal Bérulle, Louis Thomassin, CO (1619-1695), or his contemporary Matthias Joseph Scheeben (1835-1888), Don Bosco does not offer contemplations or considerations that go beyond mere affirmation.⁵⁹

Rather than focusing on the mysterious manner of the Incarnation and Christ's theandric life, Don Bosco's attention turns to three areas: the divine person of Jesus, the mysteries of his life on earth, and the Christ who is at the disposal of a humanity weakened by sin.

⁵⁷ The phrase runs through the *Ep.*, particularly the last 2 vols.

⁵⁸ Like the *Catéchisme* of Aimé, *Catt. istr.* (pt. 1, trat. 12-13) smacks particularly of the Deist and Enlightenment polemics regarding the divinity of Jesus Christ. It is obvious that it is not simply a matter of literary reminiscences with DB. He is deeply involved in something that preoccupied all of Christendom in his day.

⁵⁹ Like the archdiocesan catechism, DB evokes the Father and the Holy Spirit when he describes the Incarnation, Pentecost, and the sacraments in historical, catechetical, and devotional works.



THE CHURCH

1. Attachment to the Catholic Church

It is worth comparing two documents that stand at the two ends of Don Bosco's literary activity. One is his *Life of Aloysius Comollo*, first published in 1844; the other is what has come to be known as *The Spiritual Testament*, which was composed between 1884 and 1886. In manuscript the first work reveals the hand of a peasant who took up writing belatedly and allows himself to race clumsily across the page, in spite of his ecclesiastical studies. The late work is written in the uncertain hand of an old man, whose nervous characters are dashed down between one pulse beat and the next.

When Don Bosco wrote his sketch of Comollo, he was still a young priest. His life was centered in and around the Ecclesiastical College, to which he had gone after ordination. The most notable elements of his priestly ministry were catechism lessons for poor boys in the sacristy of Saint Francis of Assisi Church, prison visits, perhaps a few triduums and retreats for communities; but with these communities he had not yet established the ties of familiarity that adolescents and young men inspired in him. His mind was still back at Chieri, thinking of the young seminarians for whom the altar was still a goal. All this is reflected in his book. The Comollo he offers for edification and imitation is wholly bent on acquiring the virtues needed by a man who is approaching the holy mountain of the priesthood, who is going to touch the immaculate flesh of Christ made present on the altar with his poor, sinful hands. Don Bosco's sense of the Church is implicit and germinal. The Church he notes (with a capital C) is the place of worship and little more. He writes about church functions,¹ church things, and a Comollo who remains in church.² He views the priesthood mainly in terms of the divine sacrifice. The pastoral ministry peeks

¹ *Comollo*, pp. 22, 31-32, 35, 38.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 26.

through when he talks about charity toward one's neighbor, or about the anxiety that assails Comollo when he reflects that he, a "tender of oxen," is to become a priest, a "pastor of souls."³

By contrast, the document of 1884-1886 is that of a man who has fought a long battle and who is the driving force behind a vast network of institutions. Don Bosco predicts victories, foresees missionary expansion, and names distant regions where thousands of young people will benefit from the tireless zeal of his Salesians. Almost every page and every line condenses the long life and experience of a man who has done much, who has become deeply familiar with human beings and the most hidden turns of their mind and spirit: "As long as we shall concentrate on converting pagans and serving the poorest of the poor among the boys, the world will always gladly welcome us. This is our fortune, which no one will envy or try to steal."⁴

He is thinking of service to the Church in the world:

Let us remember that we are giving a great treasure to the Church when we obtain a good vocation. It does not matter whether this vocation or that priest joins the staff of the diocese, or the missions, or a religious house. It is always a great treasure which is presented to the Church of Jesus Christ.⁵

His Salesians, whom he managed to lead through difficulties to official recognition as a clerical society in the Church, are to follow the norms prescribed by the holy Church, the Salesian Constitutions, and the deliberations of the General Chapters.⁶ He has advice for difficult situations: "If, in any town or place, difficulties should arise with the ecclesiastical or civilian authorities, always try to explain your actions personally. A face-to-face discussion of your good intentions will considerably lessen and often overcome ill will."⁷

Taking a look back over all he himself has done personally, Don Bosco feels compelled to point up its thrust and underlying motivation:

In my sermons, talks, and published books I have always done my best to support, defend and promote Catholic principles. Nevertheless, if a sentence or a word were to arouse a single doubt or not state the truth properly, I would want to take it back in order to correct erroneous thoughts or opinions. Speaking in general, I submit every sentence of every publication to the decision or correction of Holy Mother Church.⁸

Finally, like many other priests and bishops, Don Bosco makes his last declaration of fidelity to the Church: "I intend to die the way I have lived—within

³ Ibid., pp. 25, 38, 45-46, 62.

⁴ AS 132 Quaderni 6; MB 17:272. Cited here from SWSJB:363-64.

⁵ MB 17:262. SWSJB:355.

⁶ MB 17:264.

⁷ MB 17:270. SWSJB:361.

⁸ MB 17:265. SWSJB:355-56.

the holy Catholic religion which is headed by the Roman Pontiff, who is the Vicar of Christ on earth. I believe and profess all the truths of the faith that God has revealed to the Holy Church.”⁹

We are reminded of the book that helped to inspire him in 1850, when he was writing the *Warnings to Catholics* and the *Fundamentals of the Catholic Religion* in order to stem the tide of Waldensian proselytism among the common people. It was a French work that had been translated into Italian: *Inviolable Attachment to the Catholic Religion Especially Necessary in Our Calamitous Times*. More than once we come across the same maxim in its pages: “I want to live and die a faithful child of the Catholic Church”:

With the help of God’s grace, I want to live and die a faithful child of the Holy Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church, because it is divine. It was founded on earth by Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, God himself and in all things equal to his Father...

I want to live and die a faithful child of the Catholic Church because it is one. Throughout the world it has the same faith, the same teaching, the same sacraments. All these things develop more or less according to circumstances, but they never change...

I want to live and die a faithful child of the Catholic Church because it is holy: holy in its invisible Head, Jesus Christ; holy in its faith, its teaching, and its sacraments, which were instituted by Jesus Christ and which sanctify those who receive them worthily; and holy in its goal, eternal life...¹⁰

The work lamented the attitude and behavior of “deluded Catholics.” It regretted “to see a large number of Catholics letting themselves be deceived and led astray, to see them becoming enemies of the Church willy-nilly because of their negligence.”¹¹

Don Bosco felt the same apprehensions from what was going on in Turin around his Oratory, because of the efforts of Protestant propagandizing and the ferment of the Risorgimento. It was a time when Marx was launching his *Manifesto* and Mazzini his proclamations, so Don Bosco also launched his appeal:

Catholic peoples, open your eyes. Dangerous traps are being laid to tempt you away from the only true, holy religion, preserved in the Church of Jesus Christ.

⁹ MB 17:272. SWSJB:362-63.

¹⁰ *Attaccamento inviolabile alla religione cattolica necessario massimamente ai tempi nostri calamitosi*, trans. from French with the addition of a letter by Fr. John Piva to well-educated and honorable young people (Genoa, 1840), pp. 14-34. Other editions: Novara, 1841; Mondovì, 1851 and 1852. Fr. Piva’s letter was also printed at the Oratory, without the author’s name and without notes, under the title *Un’arma di difesa ai giovani colti per conservare la propria fede*. 2nd ed.: *Opuscoli cattolici* 3 (Turin: OSFS, 1875).

¹¹ *Attaccamento inviolabile*, p. 13.

This danger has already been proclaimed in various forms by our legitimate pastors, the bishops.

The very voice of the Vicar of Jesus Christ has warned us of this snare set for Catholics: i.e., that many malevolent people would like to eradicate from your hearts the religion of Jesus Christ. They deceive themselves and others. Don't believe them.

Instead, with one heart and soul, bind yourselves to your pastors, who have always taught you the truth.

Jesus said to Saint Peter: You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it [Matt 16:18] because I will be with its pastors all days, even to the end of the world [Matt 28:20].

Jesus said this to Saint Peter and his successors, the Roman Pontiffs, and to no one else.

If people tell you anything different from what I am telling you, don't believe them. They are deceiving you.

Be inwardly convinced of these great truths. Where the successor of Saint Peter is, there the true Church of Jesus Christ is. No one is in the true religion who is not a Catholic. No one is a Catholic without the Pope.

Our pastors, especially the bishops, unite us with the Pope. The Pope unites us with God.

Right now read attentively the following warnings. Deeply impressed on your heart, they will suffice to preserve you from error. What is briefly expounded here right now will be more fully explained in a suitable book.

May the Lord of mercies give all Catholics the courage and constancy needed to remain faithful adherents of the religion in which we were fortunate enough to be born and educated.

May our courage and constancy render us willing to endure any evil, even death, rather than say anything contrary to the Catholic religion, the one, true religion of Jesus Christ, outside of which no one can be saved.¹²

The tone of Don Bosco publishing his *Warnings to Catholics* in 1850 is quite different from his tone five years earlier when he published his *Church History*, a work of great usefulness "for every type of person." The *Church History* manifests a security and certainty, based on theological convictions, that has become a consciously acquired position: the enemies of the Church have never prevailed, so the new ones will not succeed or prevail against the rock of the Church.

By 1850, however, many things had changed. The Jesuits had been expelled from Piedmont. The patriotic hopes invested in Pius IX had turned to disillusionment. The archbishop was unpopular, and anticlerical public outcries were becoming increasingly frequent. In Piedmont people were becoming enemies of the Church without any notice being taken. It was really necessary to open one's

¹² *Avvisi*, pp. 3-6.

eyes and counteract the “dangerous traps” that were being laid to lure people away from the only true, holy religion, “outside of which no one could be saved.”

Don Bosco’s cry of alarm did have a basis, echoing that of the bishops of the Turin province at their 1849 meeting in Villanovetta:

Before the most recent upheavals, when the august name of Pius IX was celebrated with hymns and festivities from one end of our peninsula to the other, it seemed that the Church was about to enjoy the peace prophesied by Isaiah (chapter 2): when even the wildest beasts would grow tame at the coming of the Messiah. But then unfortunately, through the fault of some, it turned into that fatal and most bitter peace deplored by that same prophet in chapter 30.¹³

Beloved, we pray that the Divine Redeemer’s terrible lament and prediction for Jerusalem will not come true for any of you! Through us he offers you a loving invitation and an extraordinary call...speaking to you through us, united together here, who seek your true happiness and your eternal salvation. Hear...the paternal exhortations of your bishops. In our united voice, which admonishes and pleads with you, recognize the...voice of your Savior, who comes to visit you and calls you to his bosom.

Emulate the faith and piety of your ancestors. Heed the voice of Peter’s legitimate successors, the Roman Pontiffs, whose faith is indefectible, as Christ promised.

Outside of Catholicism there is no salvation. Only where Peter and his successor are, is the true Church.¹⁴

Freedom of worship had been proclaimed in 1848, and the Waldensians were building their house of worship in Turin. Various Protestant denominations had begun their proselytism in Piedmont. The bishops were alarmed by the acquiescence of Catholics, who were favoring apostasy in the name of freedom. They were not just concerned that the institution was crumbling. They keenly felt that the eternal salvation of souls was at stake. Those leaving the Church were depriving themselves of the means of salvation:

I am the vine and you are the branches, Christ said to his disciples [Jn 15:5]. All the Roman Pontiffs have always been united with that Gospel vine uninterruptedly, from Saint Peter to Pius IX; and with them, all true Catholics. That vine has been alive and fruitful for eighteen and a half centuries. One who does not draw nourishment from it does not live with Christ. The branches that detach themselves from it dry up and are set aside for the flames. Fortunate are you, Beloved, who are part of that mystical vine, which is immortal as Christ

¹³ *I vescovi della provincia ecclesiastica di Torino insieme congregati al venerabile clero e al diletteissimo popolo delle loro diocesi* [Villanovetta, July 29, 1849] (Turin: Marietti, 1849), p. 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

himself is! But for God's sake, be on your guard, we pray and beseech you, with all the compassion of Jesus Christ! Today there is nothing less than an attempt to detach you from that vine, Jesus Christ, and to rob you of your most precious treasure, the true Faith and the true religion! People are already going around asking even Catholics *to sign endorsements of Protestant doctrines*. That is why we have deemed it necessary in this letter of ours to remind you of the bases and the glories of the one true religion, the Catholic religion.

We, Protestants?...Yes, we do indeed protest the sacrilegious and outrageous attack on our *Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman religion*...¹⁵

By 1850, then, the excitement of battle and consternation over apostasy had been added to Don Bosco's certainty of the Church's triumph as seen in history. And when the apostate was a youth who had frequented the Oratory for a time, Don Bosco's fatherly feelings were deeply hurt. That helps to explain the sometimes brisk and lively tone of the pages he wrote between 1850 and 1860 against the Waldensians: in particular, against the ministers Amadeus Bert and G.D. Peyran and against the apostate priests C.L. Trivier and Louis DeSanctis.¹⁶ Like the bishops and the publicists of *L'Armonia*, *La Campana*, and the Library of Good Books, Don Bosco also posed the problem of fidelity to the Church in terms of a stark alternative: either live as true Christians in the true Church and be saved; or don't live as true Christians, live outside the true Church, and risk eternal damnation:

As there is only one God, one faith, one baptism, so there is also only one true Church, outside of which no one can be saved.

Consider and tremble, Christian, as you reflect on the vast number of those who are not in the bosom of the Catholic Church, all of them, therefore, not on the road that leads to heaven. Consider and rejoice in your heart, because God created you in this Church of his, in which there are so many means of salvation. Be grateful to God and, by way of thanks, strive to obey the precepts that the Church proposes to its children in God's name.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁶ Polemics against them are found especially in *Catt. istr.* DeSanctis is targeted in *Conversazioni tra un avvocato ed un curato di campagna sul sacramento della confessione* (Turin: Paravia, 1855). It contains an Appendix on his book entitled *La Confessione saggio dogmatico storico* (ibid., pp. 112-122).

¹⁷ *Maggio*, day 4, pp. 35-36. Among the many works that reflect the same outlook and anxiety, I would mention the *Fedele osservanza dei precetti della Chiesa con esempi adattati a ciascuno di essi* (Library of Good Books, a. 12, disp. 18, Turin, 1850). The Introduction laments that "only a few privileged places now remain safe from the damages wrought by unbelief.... And you had better keep a sharp lookout, Christian, who still regard the Church as your mother and are resolved to remain faithful to its precepts..." (p. 5). It was reprinted in LC (July 1860) and in a 2nd ed. at the Oratory in 1873. DB drew on this work for his "Compendio di ciò che un cristiano deve sapere, credere e praticare," in *La chiave del paradiso in mano al cattolico* (Turin: Paravia, 1856), pp. 5-27.

2. *The outlines of ecclesiology: the Church and salvation*

We see clearly the role that Don Bosco assigns to the institution, the hierarchy, and the signs of ecclesiastical communion. Unlike the Jansenists, Don Bosco does not pose the problem of children of the Church who have been unjustly driven out of their father's house.¹⁸ In his own life he did not have the bitter experience of excommunication, although he did have his differences with bishops and fellow priests. Perhaps that is why his written comments on membership in the Church are more peremptory, almost always centering around images of the Church as a way, a house, a mother, a ship, a flock, a body.

The archdiocesan catechism, for that matter, does not bother to make many distinctions either. One question is: "Can a person be saved outside the Roman, Apostolic, Catholic Church?" Its answer is: "One cannot be saved, just as no one could be saved outside Noah's ark, which was a figure of that Church."¹⁹ Don Bosco makes this conviction his own as early as his *Fundamentals of the Catholic Religion*:

Q. Can there be salvation for someone outside the Roman, Apostolic, Catholic Church:

A. No. Because just as those who were not in Noah's ark perished in the flood, so those not in the Roman, Apostolic, Catholic Church are not in the Church of Jesus Christ. Only in it is the true religion to be found, so no one can be saved outside it.²⁰

Not adhering to the Catholic Church is not adhering to Christ. When Protestants say that they believe in Christ and the Gospel message and hence are in the true Church, one must reply:

You say that you believe in Christ and the Gospel message, but it is not true because you do not believe all that Jesus Christ teaches us in his Gospel. You do not believe in his Church. You do not believe in the Roman Pontiff, who was

¹⁸ See Proposition 91 of Quesnel on the fear of unjust excommunications. Others dwell on the argument, e.g., Jacques Gudvert, *Jésus Christ sous l'anathème* (Amsterdam, 1713); Nicolas Petitpied (1665-1747), *Examen pacifique de l'acceptation et du fond de la Bulle Unigenitus* (Cologne, 1749), 3:193-202; Francis Mésenguy and Peter Sebastian Gourlin (1695-1775) in their catechisms; Tommaso Tamburini in his treatise, *De Ecclesia*. See Pietro Stella, "La dottrina del Corpo mistico nell'ecclesiologia giansenista del Settecento," in *De Ecclesia praelectionum selectio* (lithographed, Turin, 1962), pp. 211-27.

¹⁹ *Compendio della dottrina cristiana ad uso della diocesi di Torino: Breve catechismo* (Turin: Paravia, [1844]), Catechism for Communicants, pt. 1, les. 10, sec. 2, p. 72. Apart from elements bearing the influence of the local milieu, the underlying ideas on the Church as the "ark of salvation" in Piedmont are the same ones documented for France by Elisabeth Germain, *Parler du salut? Aux origines d'une mentalité religieuse: La Catéchèse du salut dans la France de la Restauration* (Paris, 1967), pp. 467, 559.

²⁰ *Avvisi*, p. 14.

appointed by Jesus Christ himself to govern his Church. Moreover, by permitting every individual freely to interpret the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you open the door wide to error. Guided by one's own lights, one almost inevitably will fall into error. So you Protestants are like members of a body without a Head, sheep without a shepherd, disciples without a teacher, being separated from the font of life, Jesus Christ.²¹

Insofar as a vocation to the religious life or priestly state is concerned, Don Bosco notes that following such a path can be an *easier* way to salvation.²² But membership in the Church is a matter of necessity rather than of easiness. The only pathway of salvation is the true Church of Christ.

There is more, and Don Bosco spells it out in 1851 by adopting as his own two patristic citations from the *Inviolable Attachment to the Catholic Religion*. The fatherly benevolence of God and true virtue do not exist outside the true Church:

“Those who do not have the Church for their mother cannot have God for their father” (Saint Cyprian).

“Those who separate themselves from the Catholic Church, however good their lives may be, will never possess eternal life; rather, the wrath of God will come upon them for the single offense of being separated from the unity of Jesus Christ. This goodness and uprightness which is not submissive to the Church is subtle and pernicious hypocrisy” (Saint Augustine).²³

The churches of heretics, we are told in *Fundamentals of the Catholic Religion*, “are not holy, because they reject some or all of the sacraments, from which alone comes true holiness.”

It is obvious that we are in the area of popularization, of works written for young people and the general populace. Writers of this genre readily opt for sharp contrasts, focusing the minds of their readers on very different elements set out in bold relief without any intervening shadings.

We are in the area of polemics, where sharp contrasts and opposing positions are set up. And we are in a time for objectifying and arguing rationally. People write of what is true and what is false, as we see in the case of the bishops of Piedmont and Don Bosco. The same terms can be found clearly in other writers and other times: In Cardinal Gerdil, Antoninus Valsecchi, Bossuet, and the Walenburch brothers (Adrian, d. 1669, and Peter, d. 1675); in tract writers such as Honoré Tournély (1658-1729) and Charles René Billuart (1685-1757); and in writers of manuals such as Peter Collet, CM (1693-1770),

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²² Introduction to the *Const.*, “Importance of Following a Vocation,” p. 4.

²³ *Giov. prov.* (1851), p. 332. On the *Inviolable Attachment*, see n. 10 above.

Louis Bailly (1730-1808), Peter Gazzaniga, OP (1722-1799), and John Perrone, SJ (1794-1876).²⁴

Only in 1863 do we find some specifications introduced into *Fundamentals of the Catholic Faith* regarding the salvation of those who are not of the Catholic faith:

Among Protestants those who can be saved are:

(1) children who die before the use of reason, provided that they have been validly baptized;

(2) also those who are in good faith, i.e., who are firmly convinced they are in the true religion. For these people in their hearts are Catholics, and if they knew the Catholic religion they would certainly embrace it.²⁵

Even when speaking to Catholics, Don Bosco proposes no halfway measures. Faith must be integral and whole. He may have in mind liberal Catholics or followers of Mazzini, torn between Church and country, going to church and marching against Rome. In *The Month of May* (1858), he writes:

Our faith must have certain qualities, without which it is of no use in saving us. Our faith must be whole and entire...taking in all the articles of our religion. All the truths of faith have been revealed by God. Hence one who refuses to believe a single article of faith refuses to believe God himself... The articles of faith are all linked, forming a chain that links reason with revelation and constituting a ladder by which human beings climb to God. But if one link of the chain or one step of this mystical ladder is broken, then our relationship with God is broken. What use is it to you to believe in the Church, in the Vicar of Jesus Christ, if you then spurn their teachings? If you speak ill of the Supreme Pontiff? Let us speak clearly: either all the articles of our faith or none; because to deny a single one is to deny them all.²⁶

In 1867 these statements were censured as not being in conformity “with theological teachings.” Indeed they do lend themselves to being taken in the erroneous sense noted by Canon Pius Delicati (d. 1895), who examined them in a different book for the Sacred Congregation of the Index: “The violation of any

²⁴ Among general-coverage works that offer some idea of the dominant themes and schemes, see Karl Werner, *Geschichte der apologetischen und polemischen Literatur der christliche Theologie*, Band 4 (Schaffhausen, 1865); Jean Danielou et al., *Sentire Ecclesiam* (Rome, 1964), 2 volumes.

²⁵ *Giov. prov.* (1863), p. 392. DB published the *Fundamentals* as a separate booklet in 1850, then incorporated it into the 1851 ed. of *Giov. prov.*; see DBLW, p. 267.

²⁶ *Maggio*, day 8, pp. 50-51. DB’s text is consonant with that of Raffaele Ricca, OM, *Il figlio di Maria nel mese di maggio* (Genoa, 1857), pp. 42-45, which is his probable source: “Let your faith be whole and entire also. In the true religion, not to believe everything is to believe nothing. You wrong God as much by believing nothing as by denying one single article of faith...”

divine commandment is the transgression of an article of faith, from which one might infer that whoever sins against a divine precept always sins against the faith.”²⁷ But the mind of Don Bosco is sufficiently clear. He is insisting on full and complete faith, on a faith that must be alive if it is to be “true,” i.e., vivified by divine grace; for only thus can it be called saving faith. His use of adjectives and qualifiers, which he may have assimilated from popular apologetic works and pastoral writings in Piedmont, could in this case carry him to the edge of ambiguity and misunderstanding, absorbed as he was in the problem of eternal salvation.

In his lines of argument it is eternal salvation that ultimately imposes the criteria for choosing between various religious confessions. In his catechetical and controversial writings he readily makes use of an anecdote that goes back to the Wars of Religion in France:

Henry IV, King of France, was the head of the Calvinist party when he mounted the throne. But God enlightened him by introducing him to the true religion. First he sought to be correctly instructed in the dogmas of the Catholic religion. Then he summoned Protestant ministers to his presence. He asked them if they believed he could be saved in the Roman Church. After serious reflection they answered yes. Then the king wisely replied: “Why, then, did you abandon it? Catholics affirm that no one can obtain salvation in your sect. You agree that it can be had in theirs. Reason dictates that I stick to the surer way and prefer that religion in which, by common consent, I can be saved.” So the king renounced heresy and re-entered the bosom of the Catholic religion.²⁸

The story, which passed from Don Bosco’s *Church History* to his *Fundamentals of the Catholic Religion*, was borrowed from John Nicholas Loricquet, who had gotten it from appendices in Fleury’s *Church History*.²⁹ Thus it goes back to

²⁷ Strictly speaking, the censure was directed at DB’s consideration of faith that went intact from *Maggio* to *Il centenario di S. Pietro apostolo colla vita del medesimo principe degli apostoli ed un triduo in preparazione della festa* (Turin: OSFS, 1867), pp. 214-19. DB suppressed the section, and I have also omitted it in the above text. It reads: “Thus suppose someone says he loves his neighbor but takes the name of God in vain; or honors his father and mother but steals the property of others or succumbs to indecency, contempt for the sacraments or the Vicar of Christ. That person, I say, transgresses an article of faith, which makes him guilty of all the others” (See *Vita di S. Pietro* [Turin: OSFS, 1869], p. 216). But he left the concluding remark that equally lends itself to equivocation: “What use is it to you to believe in the Church...if you speak ill of the Supreme Pontiff?...to deny a single one is to deny them all.”

The censure of Canon Delicati, in copy, is in AS 133 Papi, S. Pietro; also in MB 8:763. For fuller background, see BM 8:327-42. Finally, I would point out that the text on faith in *Maggio* has continued to be reprinted whole and intact right down to our own day.

²⁸ *Avvisi*, pp. 20-21.

²⁹ [Loricquet], *Storia ecclesiastica*, epoch 9: From the Abjuration of Henry IV (Turin, 1844), pp. 111-12. The text is identical with that of Fleury, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, l. 180,

a time when doctrinal consideration of moral systems was very important, and when everyone viewed tutorism as the obligatory course of action with regard to the issue of eternal life and the means necessary to obtain it.

The argument from the mid-seventeenth century has been arrived at through laborious conversations: sometimes serene, sometimes polemical, sometimes interwoven with appeals to charity, sometimes marked by sudden outbursts of disdain and abuse. The Protestant minister Paul Ferry (1591-1669) had made a valuable admission. Bossuet picked it up and used it as the prop for a dialogue of sorts on reunion and reconciliation that spread beyond France and involved even Leibniz (1646-1716). If Catholics could be sure of possessing the means of salvation in the Catholic Church, then those in the reformed religions should have respected them. The means of salvation recognized by our “so-called reformed brethren” was the proclamation of the good news, which was done sufficiently in Catholicism and hence guaranteed the action of divine grace.³⁰ But there was more to it. Catholics, said Bossuet, felt that the Gospel preaching done in the reformed Churches was insufficient. So if people wanted to be sure of having the means of salvation, they should abandon the Reformation claim and embrace Catholicism.

Don Bosco, too, envisions the return of Protestants to the Catholic Church. This desire certainly animated his compassionate gesture to the apostate DeSanctis when he had a falling out with the Waldensian Church in 1854-1855. Replying to Don Bosco’s letter of November 17, 1854, DeSanctis wrote:

You cannot imagine how moved I was by your gracious letter of yesterday. I never expected to find such generosity and kindness in one who is my avowed opponent... You offer me a helping hand even as you contend against me. You show that you love me sincerely and practice that Christian charity which so many can only preach.³¹

But Don Bosco’s mind is on his young people most of all, and on the faithful whose faith is menaced. He is anxious to stop apostasy and stem the tide of Protestant evangelism. To do this, he presents Catholics with a theme that profoundly affected minds and hearts in those days, keyed as it was to the literature on the last things and eternal maxims.

Indicative is the dramatic dialogue that Don Bosco sets up at the bedside of the young apostate Severino, who is gravely ill. It takes place between his former director at the Oratory (real or fictitious) and a Waldensian minister:

§61, t. 36 (Paris, 1751), p. 466, which borrows from sources of the preceding century. DB introduced the episode into his *Storia ecclesiastica*, 2nd ed. (Turin, 1848), pp. 150-51.

³⁰ Karl Werner, pp. 724-72. R. Struman, “La perpétuité de la foi dans la controverse Bossuet-Jurieu,” in *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 37 (1941), 145-89.

³¹ Louis DeSanctis to DB (Turin, n.d., postmarked Nov. 18, 1854), orig. in AS 126/1 DeSanctis. Cited here from BM 5:90.

“I’m telling you to get out,” said the minister resentfully. “You have nothing to say or do with this boy.”

“I have a great deal to say and do with this son of mine.”

“Who are you that act so boldly?”

“Who are you that presume to give orders?”

“I am the Waldensian minister. And who are you?”

“I am the director of the Oratory...”

“What to you want with this sick boy?”

“I want to help him save his soul.”

“He no longer has anything to do with you.”

“Why not?”

“Because he has joined the Waldensian Church and no longer has religious relations with Catholics.”

“I enrolled him, before you, in the list of my sons, and he was one. I want to be a real master [*padrone*] for him. Thus he has nothing to say or do with Waldensians.”

“Speaking like that, Reverend Father, you are disturbing the conscience of this sick boy; and you are risking certain consequences that you may come to regret.”

“When it comes to the salvation of a soul, I fear no consequences...”

“Stop right there. You ought to get out of here.”

“Stop right there, yourself. You ought to get out of here before me.”

“Do you realize to whom you’re talking?”

“I know very well to whom I’m talking. And I think you also know to whom you’re talking.”

“Don’t you realize...I have the authority...”

“In matters of religion I respect everyone, but I fear no one. Still less do I fear you at this moment because I know this sick boy regrets having given his name to your belief and wants to die a Catholic.”

“That’s a big lie. Isn’t it true, Severino, that you want to remain in our church?”

“I want to persevere in religion...”

“Take it slow. Be careful about what you are saying.”

“Reverend Pastor,” said the priest, “speak more calmly. Just let me question the sick boy. His answer will serve to guide us both.”

The minister fell silent and sat down, his eyes fixed on the priest. The priest turned to me lovingly and said: “Listen, Severino. This gentleman wrote a book in which he says over and over again that good Catholics can be saved in their religion: hence no Catholic should embrace another belief in order to be saved. All Catholics likewise say that they certainly will be saved by following their own religion. But they also add that one who persists in clinging to Protestantism will surely be damned... Now tell me, do you want to leave the certainty of being saved and expose yourself to uncertainty—in fact, say Catholics, to the certainty of being lost for all eternity?”

I replied: "No, definitely not, no, no! I was born a Catholic, I want to live and die a Catholic... I repent of what I have done."

Then the minister got up, took his hat, turned to the priest, and said: "At this moment it is no longer possible to discuss the matter. I will come at a better time. But you, Severino, you are throwing yourself into an abyss..."³²

Don Bosco effectively presents the high points of his action and argumentation: to evoke the crisis of the Protestant conscience and offer the certainty of Catholicism. In his own way he is following the "new" apologetics proposed by Peter Charron and masterfully planned out by Pascal. It is a psychological apologetics that works on the whole human being. As the idiom of the day put it, it acts on the human heart and feelings, which is to say, on the innermost convictions of the person's life.³³

Charron lived between the Renaissance and the Counter Reformation. He was a close friend of Montaigne and a man of the Church, prone to promote scepticism yet pious enough. To the missionaries of China he suggested that they first induce Pyrrhonic scepticism about the religious values held by the Chinese, then move on to offer them the certainties of Christianity. And in different shadings and degrees we find the same approach in the apologetics of Pascal, Bishop Peter Daniel Huet (1630-1721), Paul Segneri, many followers of Port-Royal, and many traditionalists and fideists from the middle of the seventeenth century on. Their starting presupposition is fallen human nature. They describe the gross errors into which human beings have fallen in ethical and religious matters. They evoke the terrible divine judgment that will come down on those who transgress God's mandates. They describe the unhappy state of uncertainty into which the "strong spirits" (apostates and libertines) have fallen, particularly at the point of death. Then they propose the security, happiness, and human progress that have been made possible by the Catholic religion.³⁴

All of this is in Don Bosco too. But his practical bent gives a large role to deeds, to faith at work. As he grew older, he realized the power that deeds can have over a world grown incredulous and sceptical, even toward the life of prayer lived by consecrated souls. Note his two following remarks, the first in a letter to Leo XIII (1810-1903) in 1878 and the second to justify his course of action in 1877:

Our times need new religious congregations. By their steadfast faith and undertakings they must wage war on the idea that human beings are only

³² Bosco, *Severino, ossia avventure di un giovane alpigiano* (Turin: OSFS, 1868), pp. 164-67.

³³ See Louis Cognet, *La spiritualité moderne 1: L'essor: 1500-1650* (Paris, 1966), 414-16. Anna Maria Battista, *Alle origini del pensiero politico libertino: Montaigne e Charron* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1966).

³⁴ A. Prandi, *Religiosità e cultura nel '700 italiano* (Bologna, 1966). He deals specifically with preachers and apologists against the "strong spirits," treating Segneri, Bp. Adeodato Turchi, OFM Cap, Daniel Concina, OP (1687-1756), Gerdil, and Valsecchi, among others.

matter. Worldly-minded people despise those who pray and meditate, but they shall have to believe what they see.³⁵

Our times call for action. The world has become materialistic, and so we have to go out of our way to make known the good that we are doing. Even if we were to work miracles by praying day and night in solitude, the world would neither notice it nor believe it. The world has to see for itself... Today the world wants to see things being done; it wants to see priests working, teaching and helping poor, destitute youths in hospices, schools, workshops and so on. The only way to save underprivileged youngsters is to instruct them in the faith; it is also the only way to Christianize society.³⁶

Don Bosco's apologetics, then, had been anticipated by action and by apologetic arguments on the advantages of religion that were elaborated between the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Pragmatism. It was not in line with the first stirrings of the modern apologetic approach that would stress the Augustinian theme of the restless human heart which can find rest only in God. It was in line with another contemporary strain which foreshadowed that stress on "Christian witness" characteristic of Catholic apologetics and pastoral activity in our own day. In short, its ties were with the apologetics of charity and social action then being elaborated around the work of the national Catholic Congresses (1875-1904). Among the clergy its prophets were Bishops John Baptist Scalabrini (1839-1905) and Jeremiah Bonomelli, Cardinal Alphonsus Capecelatro (1824-1912), Don Bosco, Saint Leonard Murialdo, and the Franciscan Louis da Casoria (1814-1885). Ideally it would move along the lines of Saint Vincent de Paul (1580?-1660) and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society organized by Frederick Ozanam, thus ultimately responding to the insistent view of men like Voltaire, Rattazzi, and Crispi. They looked favorably on any good action but declared their disgust with confessional controversies and religious dogmatism.

3. *The Church: its features and its pastors*

In describing the Church, Don Bosco readily resorts to images that are familiar to him: kingdom, monarchy, family. Those images could have been suggested to him by his own personal experience as well as by the traditional apologetics in major and minor works.³⁷ The form of civil government in his

³⁵ Autograph ms. of DB in AS Sogni 1. Cited here from BM 13:380.

³⁶ BM 13:126. "Combien une bonne action est préférable à la controverse": see Voltaire, "Questions sur l'Encyclopédie," s.v. *Religion*, sec. 2, in *Oeuvres* 46 (London, 1776), 164.

³⁷ See Gustave Thils, *Les notes de l'Église dans l'apologétique catholique depuis la Réforme* (Gembloux, 1937); idem, "Le notion de catholicité de l'Église à l'époque moderne," in *Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses* 13 (1936), 5-73.

childhood and early years as a priest was that of the “highly religious” (*piùssimi*) sovereigns Charles Felix and Charles Albert. He remembered them as rulers who protected the Church, respected the clergy, and zealously looked after the material and spiritual welfare of their subjects. In history these sovereigns have come down to us as the epigones of paternalistic absolutism in Piedmont of the Restoration period.

Kingdom and family were also suggested to him by the circumstances of the papacy. The Roman Pontiffs of his day were the fathers of all the faithful throughout the world and sovereigns in their temporal domain.

The image of family was also suggested to Don Bosco by his own educational predilections. His ambition was to be the head and father of his street kids. He often called them *figliuoli*, putting the dialect *fieui* into more correct Italian. But all that was sublimated by moral and spiritual content that linked up with his role as a priest. He was one who had become the spiritual father, director, and confessor of boys, clerics, and priests.

His starting point for describing or defining the Church is invariably the term “congregation.” The Church is the congregation of believers, of the faithful.³⁸ It is a term suggested to him by the archdiocesan catechism, where the Church is defined as “the congregation of all the faithful who espouse the faith and law of Jesus Christ under the rule of the legitimate pastors.”³⁹ Treating of

³⁸ See Y.M.J. Congar, “Note sur les mots ‘confession,’ ‘église’ et ‘communion,’” in *Chrétiens en dialogue* (Paris, 1964), pp. 211-42.

Here is a sampling of DB’s definitions of the Church: (1) *Stor. eccl.*, p. 14: “It is the congregation of all who profess the faith and doctrine of Jesus Christ and are governed by a Supreme Head, who is his Vicar on earth”; the identical words are found in Paolo Beorchia, SJ, ed., *Storia della Chiesa della sua fondazione fino al pontificato di Gregorio XVI* (Turin: Marietti, 1843), p. 11.

(2) *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 3, p. 88: “Jesus Christ, before ascending to heaven, founded a Church: i.e., a congregation of true believers who, under the direction of a head established by Jesus himself, would faithfully profess the faith and law that he taught.”

(3) *Maniera*, p. 58: “Before ascending to heaven, he founded a society of faithful people, who were to profess the teaching of the Gospel under the rule of a head whom he established.”

(4) *La chiave del paradiso*, p. 10: “Before ascending to heaven, Jesus Christ founded a Church, which is the congregation of Christian faithful who, under the guidance of the Supreme Pontiff and its legitimate pastors, profess the religion established by Jesus Christ and participate in the same sacraments.”

(5) *Maggio*, p. 33: “Having come down from heaven to save us, our Divine Savior chose to establish a means whereby the deposit of faith would be ensured, founding a spiritual kingdom on earth. This kingdom is his Church, i.e., the congregation of Christian faithful all over the world who profess the teaching of Jesus Christ under the guidance of its legitimate pastors, of the Roman Pontiff especially, who is its head established by God.”

³⁹ *Compendio della dottrina cristiana* (see n. 19), p. 72.

the Church, Don Bosco follows the lead of the diocesan catechism, Loriguet, Canon Aimé, John James Scheffmacher, SJ (1668-1733), Gerdil, and the usual sources of catechesis and apologetics. He quickly focuses attention on Church structures, on the hierarchy first and foremost: “its legitimate pastors.”

For Don Bosco it is in the very nature of things that the Church be hierarchical, indeed monarchical. In his pages a democratic constitution implicitly makes no sense. It would be something unnatural and constitutionally chaotic:

As in earthly kingdoms there is an order, starting from the sovereign and moving down gradually to the least and last subject, so in the Catholic Church there is an order, called the Church hierarchy. In this hierarchy we start with God, the invisible Head of the Church, move to the Roman Pontiff, his Vicar and visible Head on earth, and then to the bishops and other sacred ministers, through whom God’s wishes are communicated to all the remaining faithful scattered throughout the world.⁴⁰

The Church of Jesus Christ is similar to a kingdom. Now no kingdom is made by the monarch who is to rule it; rather, the monarch is created to govern the kingdom. So long as the kingdom lasts there will be someone to govern and head it; otherwise it would collapse.

Similarly, the Church was not established by the Pope; rather, the Pope was established to govern the Church. Hence it follows that so long as the Church exists, it will have to have its foundation and head, which is the Pope.⁴¹

Imagine a family that is supposed to last until the end of the world. How will it be able to preserve itself? Child: “That family will survive insofar as it always has a good head to govern it.” Father: “Do you understand now who this family is, and who its head is?” Children: “Oh yes, we understand it very well. This great family is the Church, and this Head is the Roman Pontiff.”⁴²

Don Bosco does not overlook the bishops. Indeed, he expressly speaks of them when he is offering arguments about the unity, perpetuity, and apostolicity of the Church. These notes and features are ensured by the legitimate succession of Catholic bishops from the twelve apostles. But Don Bosco is readily inclined to see the function of the bishops as subordinate or even merely auxiliary to that of the Pope. They are his representatives and spokesmen to the faithful, who for numerous reasons cannot communicate directly with their common father.⁴³

⁴⁰ Bosco, *Il cattolico nel secolo* (Turin, 1883), pt. 1, trat. 25, pp. 163-64, which substantially picks up *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 8, p. 8.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pt. 1, trat. 18, p. 115; *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 12, p. 40.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 116; *Catt. istr.*, pp. 41-42.

⁴³ *Maggio*, day 6, p. 43: “The Church is a congregation of Christian faithful scattered throughout the world who, like a large flock, are governed by a supreme pastor, who is the Roman Pontiff. But if all individual Christians were supposed to have direct connections with the Vicar of Jesus Christ, it would be difficult for him to be able to get his

The Councils have their importance. Don Bosco notes it and proclaims it as well on the eve of Vatican I, making use of Father Bonetti's pen.⁴⁴ But it is the image of the family that dominates his mind. It may have been strongly reinforced by the particular circumstances of his own life, by the familiar intimacy he managed to establish with Pius IX. Don Bosco knew how to make himself understood quickly by Pius IX. He used quick, short phrases of a deliberate nature. The Pope was able to sense their meaning and respond appropriately and quickly, almost always in the sense that Don Bosco desired. Don Bosco himself, you see, wanted to ensure himself a solid prop back in Turin. There he readily came under the watchful eyes of others: men of admittedly large views and solid experience (e.g., Father Mark Anthony Durando, CM), but men with whom he did not feel in perfect harmony and from whom he could fear obstacles. Such possible obstacles were reduced and overcome by the support he got from the Pope.

One point for veneration and for use as an apologetic argument is brought out by contemplating what lies behind Pius IX and the bishops for centuries past: a whole series of pastors going back like a chain to the apostles and Jesus Christ, guaranteeing the legitimacy of the hierarchy, and bearing the charism of divinity in the Catholic Church.

In the seventeenth century the old argument of Tertullian (fl. 190-220) found a powerful voice in Bossuet. The popularizers still heard in the Piedmont of Don Bosco's day took their inspiration from Bossuet and others of his day, as well as from Saint Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), the Walenburchs, Henry Holden (1596-1662), and the more commonly used catechetical works (i.e., those of Peter Marchant [1585-1661], Peter Nicole, Francis Aimé Pouget, and Nicholas Tourlot [d. 1651]). So would Gerdil in his very popular work, *Brief Exposition of the Traits of the True Religion*:

This Church is apostolic because it is founded on the apostles; because it is the depositary or trustee...of the doctrine entrusted to it by them; because the apostolic ministry of the dispensation of the mysteries is propagated in the Church through sacred ordination, whereby the succession of pastors is continued with-

words to them, and seldom would he be able to share his thoughts with them..." For day 5 ("The Head of the Church"), p. 39, we read: "*Pasce oves meas, pasce agnos meos* [Jn 21:15-17]. From Sacred Scripture it is clear that the lambs here refer to all the Christian faithful, and the sheep are the sacred pastors, who are to depend on the Supreme Pastor, Peter, and his successors after him."

⁴⁴ Bosco, *I concili generali e la Chiesa Cattolica* (Turin: OSFS, 1869). In AS 133 Concili generali: outline of the work sent by DB to Fr. Bonetti, autograph of DB, 2f. (MB 9:681-82) and ms. fragment of Bonetti, 1f: "Tomm.—Costui ne parla così bene..."; later published on pp. 79-80.

Also useful, even though it does not consider the problem of sources and manuscripts, is Giacomo M. Medica, SDB, "I concili generali e la chiesa Cattolica" nel pensiero di Don Bosco," in *Rivista di pedagogia e scienze religiose* 1 (1963), 3-28.

out interruption. This succession is fully evident in the Roman Pontiffs. Saint Irenaeus [d. 202?] bears witness to it up to Pope Saint Eleutherius [d. 189]. So does Saint Augustine, living in the fifth century. Enumerating the reasons that keep him inviolably attached to the Church, he cites the uninterrupted succession of Popes after Saint Peter, to whom Christ entrusted the task of feeding his flock.

In his *Discourse on Universal History...*, Bishop Bossuet pointed out how much of a consolation it was for the children of God, and how strong an argument for the truth, that one could go back from the then Pope, Innocent XI [1611-1689]...uninterruptedly to Saint Peter, who had been constituted prince of the apostles by Jesus Christ; then, picking up the Pontiffs who had served under the Law, one finally got back to Aaron, then Moses, then the patriarchs, and then to the beginning of the world. So if in matters pertaining to salvation the human spirit needs to be assured and guided by some certain authority, subject as that spirit is to such instability in and of itself, what greater authority could be desired than that of the Catholic Church, which combines in itself the authority of all the centuries past and the ancient traditions of the human race from its very beginnings?⁴⁵

In *The Religiously Instructed Catholic* Don Bosco faithfully echoes Gerdil's presentation:

This Church is called *apostolic* because it is founded on the truths taught by Jesus Christ and preached by the apostles. It is *apostolic* because from Saint Peter, prince of the apostles, the series of his successors runs without interruption down to our own day... This succession of the Roman Pontiffs is fully evident. Not to mention other writers, Saint Irenaeus, who lived in the second century, bears witness to it up to Pope Saint Eleutherius. Eusebius [260?-340], bishop of Caesarea, lists the series and principal actions of the Popes from Jesus Christ to his own time, i.e., to the beginning of the fourth century. Saint Augustine, living in the fifth century and enumerating the reasons that keep him inviolably attached to the Church, cites the uninterrupted succession of Popes after Saint Peter, to whom Christ entrusted the task of feeding his flock. After the fifth century it is no longer necessary to demonstrate this succession because from that time to this day all Church and secular histories, even those written by heretics, bear luminous testimony to it.

And the pastors who administer the churches, i.e., the dioceses of the various Catholic countries, some of them at least, also reckon their predecessors back to the apostles or to apostolic times...

On this matter one of the most learned writers (Bishop Bossuet) observes that it is a great consolation for those in the Catholic Church, and also an argument for the truth, to see that one can go back from the reigning Pope uninterruptedly

⁴⁵ Gerdil, *Breve esposizione dei caratteri della vera religione* (Turin: Marietti, 1822), pp. 45-46.

to Saint Peter, who was constituted prince of the apostles by Jesus Christ, and then, picking up the Pontiffs of the Old Law, one gets back to Aaron, then Moses, then the patriarchs, and then to the beginning of the world.

So if in matters pertaining to religion and the salvation of souls the human spirit needs to be assured and guided by some certain authority, subject as that spirit is to such instability in itself, what greater authority could be desired than that of the Catholic Church, which combines in itself the authority of all the centuries past back to Adam, who was the first human being in the world?⁴⁶

Writing about the apostolicity of the Church in his *Fundamentals of the Catholic Religion*, Don Bosco had already made the point:

This prerogative is very consoling for us Catholics. For it is only our Church, starting from our reigning Pius IX, that goes back from one Pope to the next uninterruptedly to Saint Peter, who was constituted prince of the apostles and head of the Church by Jesus Christ himself.⁴⁷

He will reiterate this conviction over and over again. So we may assume that it expresses one of the main elements of his ecclesial spirituality, a component of his overall spirituality focused on the problem of his own salvation and the salvation of all souls.

The result is a spirituality of respect, docility, and obedience toward what is felt to come indirectly from God. Here, too, Don Bosco seems to be the interpreter and spokesman for the common religious outlook of his milieu as evidenced by popular expressions of feeling for the person of the Pope, by the politico-religious press, by pastoral letters, and by prayers in use.⁴⁸

The *Eucologio* was a devotional manual used in the Turin archdiocese, intended mainly for students. It contains a beautiful prayer to Jesus, the invisible head of the Church, on behalf of the Supreme Pontiff (“first pastor” and “visible head” of the Church):

May he be first in holiness, doctrine, and zeal as he is in dignity. May he be the Vicar of your love, as he is the Vicar of your authority and power. May he follow the example of Peter, whose successor he is. The more he is exalted over others, the more may he love you and lead your flock with your love, taking your love as the model for his own.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 7, pp. 107-11.

⁴⁷ *Avvisi*, p. 11.

⁴⁸ For many years various Catholic periodicals noted the offerings sent to the Pope as St. Peter's Pence, the homage paid by bishops, well known people, and the simple populace, Italian and foreign pilgrimages, etc. They also noted the real or imagined insults uttered against the “Supreme Hierarch” of the Church by the enemies of the Church.

⁴⁹ *Eucologio* (Turin: Mussano, 1844), pp. 65-66. The prayer is found in the earlier *Prato spirituale* (Turin: Francesco Prato, 179...), pp. 135-37. The *Eucologio* was printed several times in the 19th century and also at the beginning of the 20th.

The Catholic Equipped for Pious Practices of Don Bosco (and Father Bonetti) reflects the combative climate of the second half of the nineteenth century. The eternal and omnipotent God is asked to be merciful to his servant, our Supreme Pontiff:

Guide him on the pathway of eternal salvation, so that by your grace he may ardently desire and forcefully carry out what is pleasing to you. Lord, preserve him, fortify him, make him happy on this earth, never allowing him to fall into the hands of his enemies. Grant that he may labor with apostolic zeal to further the welfare of souls and extend your kingdom in the hearts of all human beings. Grant that he stoutly defend the rights of your Church and, like an expert pilot on the turbulent sea of this world, guide the bark of Peter to the port of salvation. Grant that he may see happy days for the Church, errors destroyed, scandals ended, his enemies defeated and converted. Grant that he, at the head of a numerous flock, may reach heaven and receive his eternal recompense from you, the Supreme pastor. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.⁵⁰

Insofar as the Pope is viewed as a father and the bishops as pastors, the attitude of the faithful toward them is depicted as that of people receiving nurture, guidance, and orders. Here again we seem to be on solid ground when we say that this outlook reflects Don Bosco's propensity to translate the teacher-pupil relationship into familiar terms:

[FATHER:] "What would you say of a child who made a thousand protestations of love for his father but disregarded or even trampled on his orders? What would you say of a subject who claimed to wish his king well and to promote the welfare of his kingdom but did not obey the laws discussed by the king's ministers and approved by the sovereign?"

CHILDREN: "We would think and say that the one is a bad child and the other a bad subject."

FATHER: "Well, that father is the Pope, and his children are all Christians. The kingdom is the Church; its supreme, invisible King is Jesus Christ; its visible King is his Vicar, the Roman Pontiff. You yourselves can make the application of this simile."⁵¹

At this point we are reminded of the whole range of his activities as an apostle and priest of underprivileged youth and as the founder of religious institutes.

⁵⁰ [Bosco], *Il cattolico provveduto per le pratiche di pietà con analoghe istruzioni secondo il bisogno dei tempi* (Turin: OSFS, 1868), pp. 663-64. The ms. of this prayer, like most of *Il cattolico provveduto*, is Fr. Bonetti's.

⁵¹ Bosco, *Il cattolico nel secolo*, pt. 1, trat. 26, p. 173; *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 9, pp. 13-14. Among the many expressions of devotion to the Pope in the 19th century, the following one in *Il movimento cattolico* (1889), p. 388, is worth noting: "There may be a danger of a Catholic work not being papal enough, but there will never be a danger of its being too papal." See Giorgio Candeloro, *Il movimento cattolico in Italia* (Rome, 1961), p. 255.

The pedagogical principles brought together in the pages of “The Preventive System” (1877) are grounded on his own personal experience as well as on the pedagogical tradition. Winning the hearts of his students and making them his friends is mirrored in his corresponding efforts to win over the people with whom he must deal and work, to make them his friends.

While John was still a seminarian, Archbishop Fransoni excused him from one year of his theological studies, given the fact that he was older than his colleagues in the seminary.^{51a} As a priest, he won the archbishop’s confidence and trust among those taking care of oratories, and a series of privileges for the clerics who were helping him. Even after the Turin seminary was reopened, they were permitted to reside at the Oratory in Valdocco.

We are reminded of his dealings with bishops and the Holy See over his Salesian Society and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. For his Salesians he won understanding, sympathy, and help; but there were also conflicts that drove him to seek solid support in Rome. It was different with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, where he ran into disagreement with the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. He then sought support from the bishop of Acqui and other local pastors. They approved the tender plant of Mornese because it was backed up by the already existing trunk of the Salesian Society, which was now sufficiently robust. Don Bosco got Rome to temporize, to wait and see what would come of an experiment that was being made under the aegis of legitimate local authorities of the Church. In 1874 the Salesian Constitutions were approved. Don Bosco told his Salesians that they could consider them infallible because they had been approved by the Pope. But in later years, as we shall see, his application of this principle was so free and bold that it stirred anxiety and protest in more than one person in Turin and Rome.⁵²

Don Bosco, then, was a docile, obedient son of the Church, but also a capable one. He was an adult son, capable of judging, getting a hearing, and getting things done the way he believed was in line with the spirit of the Church and the task of saving souls. Thus his words and his life complement and complete his works of popular catechesis and apologetics, in which the faithful are simply encouraged to be devout, obedient children.

Don Bosco knew how to pick the right moment, the right approach, and the right person to talk to. He had a sense of the hierarchy, but he also had a sense of the special charism bestowed on him and his works. Sometimes he boldly presents himself as the Lord’s spokesman, writing prophetically to Pius

^{51a} Editor’s note: He did one year’s course work during the summer of 1840. See MO:165.

⁵² BM 14:167-69. Introduction to *Const.*, p. 1. For similar statements see MB 17:296: “The Rules have been approved by the Holy See, which never errs; obeying it, we are immediately obeying God... Our Rules, you see, are infallible...”

IX and Leo XIII. In other instances he prefers to present his works to others as the mark of God's favor. This outlook is reflected in one of his letters: "Every time they set up roadblocks my response is always to open another house."⁵³ His basic temperament was that of a man of action. That comes out clearly when he is approaching those who do not believe in the reasons of either the heart or the mind. To them he simply presents the rationale and reality of his works themselves, convinced that is the most suitable approach to the people of his own day and their propensities.

4. *The Church and holiness*

Educational motives and bonds of sympathy and friendship lay behind Don Bosco's pages on Aloysius Comollo, which were addressed to the seminarians of Chieri. The same motives prompted Don Bosco, in similar circumstances, to write his biographies of Father Cafasso, Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, and Francis Besucco. But when we compare the first (1844) and second (1854) editions of his biography of Comollo, we discover that something new has found its way into Don Bosco's consciousness as a writer of hagiography. The 1854 edition offers new details about Comollo's life. It also reveals a new approach in viewing the link between his virtuous life and the Catholic Church. Virtue does not grow just anywhere:

It is peculiar to the Catholic religion alone to have saints and people of distinguished virtue. It alone abounds in the means to comfort human beings in all the needs of life. In their youth it instructs and guides them on the pathway of truth. In adulthood it fortifies them with the sacraments and the word of life. It doubles its care in times of illness, never doing less than it can to contribute to their spiritual, eternal welfare and their temporal welfare as well. And only it comforts and fortifies them just before their death, at death, and after death.⁵⁴

It is clear that the 1854 edition has been influenced by the apologetic works that Don Bosco wrote prior to it: i.e., *Warnings to Catholics* and *The Religiously Instructed Catholic*. What Don Bosco had already written on holiness as an exclusive mark of the true Church of Christ will now be echoed in all his hagiographical and biographical works. He now senses the catechetical and apologetic role that such works can play. Note his remark in the next edition of *Six Sundays* (1854):

⁵³ DB to Fr. Francis Dalmazzo, Turin, July 21, 1880 (*Ep.* 2073); compare BM 14:169.

⁵⁴ *Comollo* (De-Agostini, 1854), p. 95.

How fortunate Catholics are to find themselves in a religion that has always had glorious heroes in every age, place, state of life, and phase of life. Through innocence of life and austere penance, these heroes reached those degrees of holiness to which only the holy religion of Jesus Christ can lead people.⁵⁵

We find the sentiment repeated in the panegyric he includes in the Comollo biography:

O Catholic religion, holy religion, divine religion! How great are the benefits you offer those who practice you, those who place their hope and trust in you! How fortunate are those who find themselves in your bosom and practice your precepts.⁵⁶

Many of his writings around 1855-1856 reflect this tempering of educational aims with apologetics: e.g., *The Power of a Good Upbringing*, the *Life of Saint Martin*, and the *Life of Saint Pancras*. Indeed the whole series of *Lives of the Popes* resulted from a combination of interests: Don Bosco's hagiographical predilections, already evident in his *Church History*, are now combined with a concern to preserve and defend the faith.⁵⁷ Don Bosco states this is his *Life of Saint Peter*, which initiates the series:

More than once I have pondered a way to still the hatred and aversion manifested by some in these sad times against the Popes or their authority. A very effective way, it seemed to me, was to let people know the facts about the lives of these supreme pastors appointed to take the place of Jesus Christ on earth and guide our souls on the way to heaven. I thought to myself that reasonable people would not be so malicious as to be hostile to men who did so much spiritual and temporal good for peoples, who led holy and industrious lives, who have always been revered by all good people in every age, and who often defended religion and their own authority with their blood in order to promote the glory of God and the welfare of their neighbor.⁵⁸

In other words, hagiography serves a function similar to that of good works. Don Bosco relies on the persuasive power that facts and deeds can have on the pragmatic and utilitarian mind of his time.

On the other hand, his perception of holiness in the Church is also his perception of the divine flow in the "congregation of the faithful," the congregation of his own milieu in Turin and the Oratory. We thus can understand his inner excitement and enthusiasm in contemplating holiness as a lived reality, his paeans of praise for acts of virtue that seemed to guarantee the way he had embraced and maintained.

⁵⁵ *Sei domen.* (De-Agostini, 1854), p. 3.

⁵⁶ *Comollo* (1854), p. 96.

⁵⁷ As I noted in DBLW, ch. X, sec. 3, DB readily inserts episodes from Croiset (*Esercizi di pietà per tutti i giorni dell'anno*) in his *Church History* and *Lives of the Popes*.

⁵⁸ Bosco, *Vita di san Pietro, principe degli apostoli*, (Turin: Paravia, 1856), pp. 3-4.

It is worth noting that holiness in the Catholic Church seems to have attracted the attention of various people around the same time. In different terms and environments, it drew the attention of scholars such as John Adam Möhler (1796-1838), John Henry Newman (1801-1890), and pastors of souls such as Don Bosco. Newman and Möhler contemplated the cascade of grace effected by the Holy Spirit in the Catholic Church. In this realm of ideas Don Bosco was more under the influence of Bossuet, noting the tie-up with Christ and, through Christ, directly with God. Thus his reflection on holiness in the Church and the faithful is consciously framed within a markedly christological and soteriological mentality.

The fact that there are sinners in the Church does not evoke serious doctrinal problems in his writings. When he is commenting on sin and sinners Don Bosco is more inclined to resort to the analogy of the family or the mother than to that of the mystical body.⁵⁹ Mother Church is holy, without stain or wrinkle. She remains such even though many of her children may be sinners or may even oppose and disown her:

The Roman Catholic Church can truly be called holy because its head is holy: Jesus Christ, the source of all holiness, who guides and governs it with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. It is holy because it has the most effective means for sanctifying souls: the sacraments, the sacrifice of the Mass, public prayer, the evangelical counsels, and similar things. It is holy because in every age and place it has always had a large number of saints who stood out because of their virtues and their miracles.⁶⁰

Don Bosco does not go in for the exegesis of biblical texts applied figuratively to the Church, not even in Archbishop Anthony Martini's terms. Note Martini's commentary on *Nigra sum, sed formosa* (Song 1:4, "I am black but beautiful" [Douay]):

⁵⁹ With regard to the theoretical tracts especially, see A. Kerkvoorde, "La théologie du Corps mystique au XIX^e siècle," in *Nouvelle revue théologique* 67 (1945), 1025-38.

⁶⁰ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 5, pp. 99-100. It is obvious that the concepts expressed by DB can be found in the books he had at hand. See, e.g., Johann Jakob Scheffmacher, SJ, *Catechismo di controversia* (Library of Good Books, a. 2, disp. 13 and 14, Turin 1851), p. 49: "The Church is holy because Jesus Christ, its head, is the source of all holiness; because its teaching and sacraments are holy; and because we do not find saints except in its community." Also see Albert Aimé, *Catéchisme raisonné sur les fondements de la foi* (Lyons, 1821), pt. 4, ch. 4, pp. 143-44: "Q. How do you prove that the Roman Church is holy? A. I prove that the Roman Church is holy: (1) because it has in its hands the most efficacious means for sanctifying souls—the sacraments, the sacrifice, public prayer, the evangelical counsels, etc; (2) because in all times an infinity of saints has been formed in this Church; (3) because in all times God, with the most striking miracles, has indicated his approval of the worship rendered to him in this Church."

First: With Saint Augustine (*De doctrina christiana*, III, 32) we can say that the Church is both black and beautiful because both good and bad fish are now together in the same net (Matt XII.27 [*sic*])...or we can say that the Church is black because our nature has been corrupted by sin but is beautiful because of grace (Sermon 201, *De tempore*).

Second: The persecutions, tribulations, heresies, and scandals presently infesting the Church give her a rather sad exterior aspect, similar to the poor tents of the herdsmen of Kedar. Exposed to the heat of the sun and the buffeting of the air, those tents are horrid to look at. But the Church's interior is beautiful, splendid, and magnificently adorned with distinguished virtues: with humility, patience, faith, unvanquished charity and the merits it assembles in heaven; and with the huge throng of saints it welcomes... The beauty of the Church is a sovereign and incorruptible beauty...that will never diminish, not even in the outrageous war that will be waged on her at the end by her enemy, the Antichrist. It is a beauty that makes her worthy of her bridegroom's love, and of the love of all those souls deemed worthy to know and appreciate this interior beauty, who are called the daughters of Jerusalem.⁶¹

On the other hand there is substantial agreement between Don Bosco and Martini in their interpretation of heretical sects. Martini's commentary on the Song of Songs goes on to say:

Very beautiful is the Catholic Church among women: i.e., among all the societies, synagogues, sects, or groups of human beings who profess religion. All these sects are ugly and deformed by blindness, ignorance, errors, and vices; hence, in the language of the scriptures, they are like corrupt, adulterous women.

But the true Church is a virgin: pure, uncontaminated, espoused to one husband only, i.e., Christ. In her we find the true faith uncorrupted...the wholly pure science of morals, the deposit of the holy scriptures whole and inviolate, the sacraments, and the unique sacrifice. Although she also has sinners in her bosom, their deformity does not obscure her sparkling brightness because she detests their sins. Nor can their sins be ascribed to her as the sins of their adherents can be ascribed to other sects. For those other sects slacken the bridle on human passions in many ways, corrupting the root of all goodness in them, i.e., faith, and thereby opening the field wide for the free play of wickedness.⁶²

Don Bosco uses the analogy of the vine, akin to that of the body, to explain why there can never be "true" (complete) holiness in those who are not in communion with the Catholic Church. They can be compared to

⁶¹ Antonio Martini, *La sacra Bibbia secondo la Volgata tradotta in lingua italiana* (Florence, 1852), 3:752-53. It seems to be the 1851 ed. that DB cites in *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 37, p. 279. [Editor's note: The biblical citation at the beginning of the quoted passage is not correct. The parable of the fish is found at Matt 13:47-48.]

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 753, note on Song 1:7.

branches of a tree cut off from its trunk, i.e., separated from the tree of holiness that is Jesus Christ and, after him, his Vicars, whom he appointed to take his place on earth. Heretics are like withered branches, incapable of bearing fruit. So instead of teaching a holy doctrine, they teach the most absurd and wicked things. They say, for example, that good works are useless.⁶³

With regard to apostates, Don Bosco often makes clear his conviction:

No one ever abandoned the Catholic religion to lead a more virtuous life. On the contrary, we know from history that all those who abandoned it to embrace some other religious belief did so to lead a freer and more disordered life. This is a clear sign that they were moved to it not by cognizance of the truth but by the desire for a looser religion that was more favorable to their ill-fated passions.⁶⁴

The theme of holiness inevitably evokes the topic of miracles, prophecies, and other extraordinary happenings. Miracles, writes Don Bosco, are events that far surpass the forces of nature. They are effected by divine power.⁶⁵ They always presage “important events manifesting the Lord’s mercy and goodness, or his justice and indignation, but in such a way as to redound to his greater glory and the greater benefit of souls.”⁶⁶

It is an obvious fact for Don Bosco that there are miracles and that all of them are in favor of the Church:

Jesus said that in the Church greater miracles would be worked than even he worked. He did not set a fixed time or number. So long as the Church exists, we will see the hand of the Lord manifesting his power with prodigious happenings. Yesterday, today, and always, Jesus Christ is the one who governs and assists his Church right down to the end of time.⁶⁷

⁶³ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 5, p. 102. But see n. 25 above, and the corresponding text for his added specifications about the salvation of children who have not attained the use of reason and about heretics of good faith. Note that he does not deal expressly with the problem of atheists and pagans; nor does he explore the issue of apostates or those who refused to adhere to Catholicism even though it was somehow known to them.

⁶⁴ *Avvisi*, p. 22. The text I transcribed above is missing in the 1850 ed. but is in later editions. The thesis that immorality is at the root of apostasy is proved by the description of Luther, etc. See also ch. III, sec. 1, of the present work, pp. 32-36.

⁶⁵ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 1, trat. 12, p. 52: “The miracles of Jesus Christ cannot be effects of the laws of nature because they are far superior to those laws. For example, when a person dies, the corpse should naturally decay. The miracle, on the other hand, suspends the laws of nature when, by divine action, the corpse does not decay but instead is preserved or restored to new life.” In the same context Aimé (*Catéchisme*, pt. 2, ch. 4, p. 83) writes: “The miracles of Jesus Christ could not have been the effects of the laws of nature because they were done *against* those very laws.”

⁶⁶ Bosco, *Apparizione della Beata Vergine sulla montagna di LaSalette con altri fatti prodigiosi* (Turin: OSFS, 1871), p. 7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

For Don Bosco it is obvious that there are no holy miracle-workers among Protestants. Such is the case outside the Catholic Church:

All the other churches cannot show us a person of their persuasion who has worked a single miracle. But the Roman Church, besides a great number of saints and miracles acknowledged even by heretics, presents thousands of monuments attesting to the fact that miracles are being worked—from the time of Jesus Christ right down to our own day, in every century and, we could say, every year.⁶⁸

Don Bosco loves to repeat what Erasmus wrote: that the founders of Protestantism were not able to cure even a lame horse.⁶⁹

As hagiographer and biographer, Don Bosco is readily inclined to dwell on sensational facts and events: on the marvels of Saint Pancras and Mary Help of Christians; on the prodigies of Saint Martin and the favors attributed to the intercession of Dominic Savio. The Introduction to his *Life of Saint Martin* is a curious document of popular hagiography projecting heterogeneous facts on the same plane:

To talk about miracles in our day! Will they be believed at all? Take it slow, Christian reader! Don't be deluded by what some of the enemies of Christianity say. Your amazement and surprise will cease if you realize that we read of great miracles being worked in the sacred books; that our Savior said that the preachers of the Gospel message would do the most striking things. Let us note some of them.

A serpent speaks to Adam and Eve in their earthly paradise; a universal flood covers the whole earth; a shower of fire burns and engulfs the Five Cities of the Plain; Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt; an angel holds back Abraham's arm and tells him not to kill his son; the ten plagues of Egypt; the rod of Moses first is changed into a serpent and then divides the waters of the Red Sea; the manna rains from the sky for forty years; the Ark of the Covenant stops the current of the Jordan; Balaam's donkey speaks with a human voice; the sun stops at Joshua's command; the ravens regularly deliver food to Elijah; dead people are revived, bread and oil multiplied.

These and a countless number of wonders are recorded in the history of the world. And while they may greatly surprise you, isn't it true that at the same time they come across to you as the most certain and indubitable facts because they are recorded in a divine book, the Bible?

What, then, shall we say of what we read in the Gospels? A star announces the birth of the Savior. A band of angels gives the joyful news to shepherds. Water is changed into wine. With a little bread several thousand peo-

⁶⁸ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 5, p. 101.

⁶⁹ *Giov. prov.* (1851), p. 325; *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 28, p. 159.

ple are amply fed. The deaf regain their hearing, the blind their sight, the mute their speech. Lepers are cleansed. Illnesses beyond the capacity of human curing techniques are instantly cured. People dead for four days, the corpses already rotting, rise to life again, speak, and move about. The Gospels are full of such facts. And our Savior said that his followers would do even greater things...

This glorious saint labored mightily to proclaim the Gospel message while he was a mortal on earth, working prodigies to spread the faith of Christ among idolaters and preserve it among heretics. And now that he is blessed in heaven, may he deign to turn his kindly gaze on us and from God obtain for us the courage and strength to be able to live and die in the holy Catholic religion: the only true one, the only holy one, the only one that in every age has had holy human beings, and outside of which no one can be saved.⁷⁰

The miraculous is a great agglomeration in which Don Bosco sees the supernatural: the ongoing and multiform explosion of the divine in the Church. And he expresses that in simple, popular terms.

From all that, Don Bosco derives certainty and security for himself and all those who lean upon his personality for support. But when it comes to contemporary events, he finds it difficult to use the word “miracle.” He prefers to talk about “extraordinary events” or “marvelous events.” He is convinced that Mary intervenes benignly in his favor, even with miraculous deeds, but he prefers to talk always about extraordinary graces and wonders. It is possible he has in mind the letter of warning sent from the Congregation of the Index to the newly appointed Archbishop Riccardi of Turin regarding complaints about the *Catholic Readings*:

I also avail myself of this opportunity to alert Your Excellency that other denunciations have come to us these days concerning a periodical published in Turin, entitled *Letture Cattoliche*, wherein are found, if not manifest errors, at least such phrases and stories as to arouse laughter and derision rather than public edification at a time when religion—especially when presented in ascetic and mystic publications—is so much discredited.⁷¹

5. *The Church victorious*

There is no need for us at this point to dwell on the sense of struggle and triumph with regard to the Church. The struggle of good against evil is embodied

⁷⁰ Bosco, *Vito di san Martino, vescovo di Tours* (Turin: Ribotta, 1855), pp. iv-viii.

⁷¹ Angelo Vincent Modena, OP (1796-1870), secretary of the Congregation of the Index, to Abp. Alexander Riccardi, Rome (from the *Minerva*), Apr. 29, 1867; BM 8:335.

in the struggle of the forces of hell against the Church, particularly against its visible head.

Don Bosco, too, sees the bark of Peter plowing undaunted through the furious waves, under a hail of enemy missiles. The rock withstands the shattering waves. The new ark of Noah will overcome “the flood of errors of every sort, the blasphemy, heresy, libertinism, bad faith, unbelief, and indifferentism.”⁷² All should moor their boats to papal Rome: “One who is united with the Pope is united with Jesus Christ; one who breaks that tie will suffer shipwreck in the stormy sea of error and unhappily be lost.”⁷³

Even when they are revised, Don Bosco’s *Bible History*, *Church History*, and *History of Italy* invariably end with the certainty that the Church will always be victorious:

Even though we may see the Church persecuted, we must remain firm in the faith, certain that the war will end with the triumph of the Church and its supreme pastor. So it is our duty to preserve and increase our faith, hope, and charity so that we may merit to share in the glory that God has prepared for true Catholics in paradise, where we will be happy for all eternity.⁷⁴

⁷² This is the image of the dream of the two columns (BM 7:107-09). It is also found in hagiographical prints: e.g., the frontispiece of Alfonso Muzzarelli, *Delle cause dei mali presenti e del timore de’ mali futuri e suoi rimedi* (Turin: OSFS, 1874). The caption alludes to the ship of the Lord making its way through the storms of the age, secure in Christ’s promises but still bearing its God-given concerns. The helmsman is on watch, but that does not mean the sailor can sleep. The point was a commonplace of committed Catholics. See the print reproduced in Giovanni Spadolini, *L’opposizione cattolica da Porta Pia al ’98* (Florence, 1961), p. 272. The citation I inserted in the text with regard to the mystical ark of Noah comes from a pastoral letter of Bp. John Peter Losana of Biella, Jan. 29, 1866 (Biella: Amosso, 1866), p. 4.

⁷³ Bosco, *Il centenario di S. Pietro*, p. v.

⁷⁴ *Stor. eccl.* (1870), p. 371, epilogue that remains unchanged in the 10th ed. (1888), p. 439.



MARY

1. *The initial elements of Don Bosco's Marian piety*

Among the earliest recollections of Don Bosco, one salient event was the dream he had “between nine and ten years of age.” Mary and Jesus Christ are never mentioned explicitly by name. The mysteriousness surrounding their identity heightens the sense of awe and the supernatural. There can be no doubt, however, that Mary is the “lady of stately appearance,...wearing a mantle that sparkled all over as though covered with bright stars.” And Jesus is certainly the “dignified man..., a nobly dressed adult... His face shone so that I could not look directly at him.” The majestic lady is also maternal and friendly: “She beckoned me to approach her. She took me kindly by the hand...”¹

Putting the dream down on paper in 1873 and seeking terms to express it, Don Bosco may well have had recourse to terms and images already at hand: e.g., the description of the lady who appeared at LaSalette (1846), sad but affectionate, of dazzling countenance and radiant dress. The word *Dama*, used in the 1854 account of LaSalette, was changed to *Signora* in the 1871 edition; and that is the term we find in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*.²

In any case Don Bosco's account of his youthful dream, as recorded in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* or reported by independent sources of testimony, ade-

¹ MO:18-19.

² Bosco, *Raccolta di curiosi avvenimenti contemporanei* (Turin: De-Agostini, 1854), pp. 51, 57-58: “Then we saw a Lady [*Dama*] in the midst of the light... She had a pale, long face. I could not look at her for long.” Bosco, *Apparizione della Beata Vergine sulla montagna di LaSalette, con altri fatti prodigiosi raccolti da pubblici documenti* (LC, a. 19, fasc. 5, Turin: OSFS, 1871), pp. 11, 18: “Then we saw a Lady [*Signora*]. She had a pale face...” DB's text is a wholly faithful rendition from Giuseppe Confalonieri, *L'apparizione della Beata Vergine a due pastorelli sulla Montagna di Salette, diocesi di Grenoble in Francia il 19 settembre 1846* (Novara, 184...); 1856 ed., pp. 11-12: “Then we saw a Lady [*Dama*] in the midst of the light...” The source is cited by DB at the start of the narrative, *Raccolta*, p. 47.

quately offers us the terms that formed the substance of the popular piety imbibed by young John Bosco in Becchi. These first seeds of his Marian devotion are confirmed by other data. Mary was invoked three times a day in the recitation of the Angelus and honored with the recitation of the rosary, with feasts, and with titles proper to the Morialdo-Chieri area; e.g., Our Lady of the Rosary, Our Lady of Castello, Our Lady of Sorrows, and Our Lady of Grace.³ He himself tells us that readings from *The Kings of France* on winter evenings were opened and closed with the sign of the cross and a Hail Mary.⁴

At the age of twenty, when he was anxiously exploring what way of life to pursue, he tells us that he prayed fervently, made a novena to the Madonna, and got his crucial response from the uncle of Aloysius Comollo on the very last day of his novena, right after he had heard one Mass and served another in the cathedral of Chieri at the altar of Our Lady of Grace.⁵

No less indicative are his comments in his *Life of Aloysius Comollo*. Now a newly ordained priest, Don Bosco tells his colleagues in the seminary how Comollo venerated Mary:

Even as a little child he was in the habit of making little sacrifices to the Madonna, abstaining from some portion of food or fruit that went along with his bread in order to give it to Mary as a gift.⁶

When Comollo grew older, “he offered fasts to Mary every week at his meals..., often leaving the table at the height of a meal under some specious pretext..., always out of love for Mary.”⁷ When he was in church, “he never left before conversing a bit with Jesus and commending himself to his dear mother Mary.”⁸

These practices were continued in the seminary. Before going to communion, Comollo “spent the previous day in a strict fast in honor of Mary.”⁹ That is also how he spent Saturday of every week.¹⁰ Comollo himself admitted that the inspiration for these Marian devotions came from Saint Alphonsus’s *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin*.¹¹ Recalls Don Bosco:

³ The feast of the Holy Rosary, the first Sunday of October (at that time), was celebrated in Morialdo, Mondonio, and other places in Piedmont. Our Lady of Castello was venerated in Castelnuovo. In Chieri there were solemn celebrations and processions for the feasts of Our Lady of Sorrows and Our Lady of Grace.

⁴ MO:28.

⁵ MO:111.

⁶ *Comollo*, p. 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10. The treatise referred to is found in AW 6:110-212.

He talked with great fervor of our Lord's immense love for us in giving himself as food in holy communion. Whenever he spoke of the Blessed Virgin, his whole being was suffused with tenderness. After he had told of some temporal favor granted by her, such as recovering from an illness, he would become flushed, and sometimes with tears in his eyes he concluded his story exclaiming: "If the Blessed Virgin is so generous as regards our fragile body, how much more generous will she not be for the good of the soul? Oh! If everyone truly loved the Blessed Virgin, how happy this world would be!"¹²

On his deathbed Comollo expressed all his criticism and bitterness regarding false devotion and false devotees of Mary. The terms he supposedly used on the occasion remind us of those used by Louis Anthony Muratori in his *Regolata devozione*.

Even if hell arms fully against us, ours will be the victory with Mary as our defense. But be careful not to go among those who think they are protected by her because they recite some prayer to her or offer her some mortification, while at the same time leading an utterly dissolute life. Instead of being one of those devotees, it were better not to be her devotee at all. Their behavior is sheer hypocrisy, an attempt to be favored in their wicked designs and if possible—which is even worse—to get her to approve their disordered way of life. Always be true devotees of Mary by imitating her virtues, and you will experience the sweet benefits of her kindness and love.¹³

Already expressed here are almost all the elements of devotion to Mary that Don Bosco would present in a different key. This devotion is grounded on the motherhood of Mary. It should find expression in a virtuous life. And it guarantees us "the most powerful patronage" we can have as we struggle "in this vale of tears."¹⁴

2. *Mary and salvation*

We can also clearly see how Don Bosco focuses attention on the role played by Mary in the personal salvation of the individual. The pages on Mary in *The Companion of Youth* are framed in that perspective. Don Bosco assures his readers: "If you are her devotees, she will lavish blessings on you in this world, and you will also have paradise in the next life."¹⁵ As does Saint Alphonsus in his *Glo-*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 24. Cited here from BM 1:255.

¹³ *Comollo*, pp. 62-63.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁵ *Giov. prov.*, p. 51. Note the conclusion of the whole consideration: "If he can, let him say his rosary. But never forget to say three Hail Mary's and three Glory be's daily, with the ejaculation: Dear Virgin Mary and Mother, grant that I may save my soul." The

ries of Mary, Don Bosco backs up his assertion with a biblical passage from the Old Testament that was already applied to Mary in the liturgy for her Immaculate Conception: *Qui elucidant me vitam aeternam habebunt* ("They that explain me shall have life everlasting," Ecclus 24:31 [Douay]).¹⁶

In the biblical text *elucidare* means "explain" or "interpret," says Martini.¹⁷ In Saint Alphonsus's usage it takes on the meaning of "striving to make Mary known and loved." For Don Bosco it means "to be devoted to Mary." Common to both their interpretations is the feeling that wise interpretation, true zeal, and authentic devotion can only derive from "purity of conduct," to echo the words used by Martini in his commentary on the biblical passage.¹⁸ Thus "eternal life" is not interpreted by Saint Alphonsus and Don Bosco, as it is in the classic mariology of Cardinal Hugh of Saint-Cher (1200?-1263), for example, as the contemplative life, "which is perpetual."¹⁹ They interpret it as "paradise in the next life." And in the language of Don Bosco even more than in that of Saint Alphonsus, it entails first and foremost appetitive elements: happiness and the eternal enjoyment of God and all other good things, without any evil.

The importance of Mary for salvation is taken for granted in the implicit Marian theology of Don Bosco's *Companion of Youth*, and it is brought out briefly in his other writings: "She is the holiest of all creatures: the mother of God, our mother, a powerful and compassionate mother who desires to shower us with heavenly favors."²⁰ Borrowing from the Benedictine Joseph Ansart,

pious practice of three Hail Mary's had been inculcated by others earlier, including St. Leonard of Port Maurice and St. Alphonsus. See Benedetto Innocenti, OFM, "S. Leonardo da Porto Maurizio (1676-1751) e S. Alfonso Maria de' Liguori (1696-1787)," in *Miscellanea francescana* 51 (1951), 582.

¹⁶ St. Alphonsus, *The Glories of Mary*, AW 7-8:30. The Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) text appeared in the epistle for the vigil of the Immaculate Conception.

¹⁷ "They that explain me shall have life everlasting: my interpreters, those who labor to dispense to others, particularly the little ones, the bread of my heavenly teaching, will have eternal life." Thus Antonio Martini, *La Sacra Bibbia, ossia il Vecchio ed il Nuovo Testamento secondo la Volgata* (Turin, 1839), 4:367.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 367: "It is assumed that these [interpreters] will uphold the honor of such a holy ministry with a suitable purity of conduct..." No allusion to accommodated Marian interpretations.

¹⁹ "*Qui elucidant me, vitam meam verbo et exemplo praedicando, vitam aeternam habebunt:* (ad literam) vel vitam contemplativam, quae perpetua est: Vel *vitam aeternam*, idest duri, idest, qui Beatam Mariam praedicant, vitam debent ducere duram, sicut ipsa. *Hugo Cardinalis*": see José de S. Miguel y Barco, *Biblia mariana* (Genoa, 1749), Dubium 108, p. 198. As indicated (DBLW, p. 271, n. 31), this work was a source for DB's *Maraviglie*, but not for this exegesis.

²⁰ *Maggio*, last day of April, p. 16. DB drew inspiration from Agostino Ferrari, *Simboli mariani, ossia il mese di maggio santificato ad onore di Maria* (Turin: Marietti, 1853), p. 22: "We will begin this holy exercise by considering the principal reasons compelling Christians to be her devotees: (1) because she is adorned with the most surpassing holiness among creatures; (2) because she is God's mother and our mother." In other con-

Don Bosco writes that the devotion of Saint Vincent de Paul to Mary originated in his “desire to glorify God” in the person whom God himself chose to glorify.²¹ Ever present is the sense of Mary’s dignity as the mother of the incarnate Word. Such expressions as “our heavenly mother” and “our heavenly protectress” are used explicitly and frequently. The underlying conviction is that we possess a great guarantee of salvation when we entrust ourselves to the mother of Jesus, who is also our mother. Indeed in one sermon on Mary, Don Bosco condenses this conviction in the thesis that devotion to Mary is a sign of predestination.²²

The writings and discourses of Don Bosco stress the same point that others were concerned to underline: e.g., Comollo, Saint Alphonsus, Muratori, and John Crasset, SJ (1618-1692). True devotion is that which flows from a real, effective desire to lead a virtuous life. Hence it manifests itself in exercises of virtue and acts of homage, sometimes called *fioretti* and sometimes called *ossequi*.

In Don Bosco’s ascetical books this conviction of pastoral theology is transformed into resolutions and prayers that they may be carried out. This is particularly true in works where the influence of Saint Alphonsus remains strong. In *Devotion to the Mercy of God*, Don Bosco petitions: “Loving mother of mercy and gentleness, comfort of sinners, grant that I may be heard; for no one has ever asked God for grace, through you, and been refused it.”²³

Equally strong is Don Bosco’s sense of the subordinate nature of Mary’s mediation. She is indeed the mother of God, but she intercedes for us with her divine son: “From her divine son Jesus, she obtains for us the grace enabling us to know, love, and serve God in this life and one day go to enjoy him eternally in heaven.”²⁴ Even after we have acknowledged our penitence to God, the

texts the agreement between DB and Ferrari is more transparent and specific.

²¹ John Bosco, *The Christian Trained in Conduct and Courtesy According to the Spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul*, trans. Silvester Andriano and Margaret L. MacPherson (Paterson: Salesiana, 1956), p. 55: “His devotion to the Mother of the Son of God, and to all the saints, sprang from the same principle: the desire to glorify God in the person of those whom He Himself had glorified.” Giuseppe Ansari (1723-90), *Lo spirito di S. Vincenzo de’ Paoli* (Genoa, 1840), 1:178: “His devotion to the Mother of the Son of God, and his devotion to the saints, sprang from the same principle...”

²² A marginal note by DB himself indicates that the sermon was given in Turin, at the home for orphan girls, not far from Valdocco and the Ecclesiastical College. See AS 132 Prediche D11. “Madre, Celeste protettrice”: e.g., in *Maggio*, p. 16.

²³ *Misericordia*, p. 38. Here we find the same procedure used in Alphonsus’s *Preparation for Death*. After each point for consideration there are suggested affections and prayers. DB’s prayer takes its inspiration in part from St. Bernard’s famous plea: “Never was it heard that anyone who turned to you for help was left unaided”; and in part from St. Alphonsus, *Preparation for Death*, cons. 16 (“The Mercy of God”), pt. 2: “Mary, thou art the Mother of mercy...” (AW 1:168).

²⁴ *Maggio*, day 12, p. 80. I would not venture to say how much theological vigilance is deliberately at work in DB. It was certainly there in the case of St. Alphonsus, who was vividly conscious of the apprehensions expressed by Muratori, Peter Nicole, and Adam

Father of mercies, Don Bosco urges us to turn our gaze to Mary and plead for her help:

Since Mary most holy, the mother of the Savior, is the most beautiful ornament of Christianity, I turn to you, most merciful Virgin Mary. I am sure I will gain the grace of God and the right to paradise, i.e., regain my lost dignity, if you will pray for me: *Auxilium christianorum, ora pro nobis.*²⁵

Some titles applied to Mary from the middle of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century were censured by such people as Theophilus Raynaud, SJ (1583-1663), Pascal, and Muratori, e.g., *Omnipotentia supplex*. Hence they came to be used sparingly, and they do not seem to be found in Don Bosco. What is found is the feeling that the devotional literature correctly attached to even the most hyperbolic titles: i.e., the conviction that the Mother of God enters the picture as a most effective advocate and mediatrix before God. To Don Bosco, Mary is the new Esther, wresting the salvation of her people from the divine king. And as the liturgy itself does, he and others see her figuratively represented in the tree of life, the ark of Noah, and Jacob's ladder.²⁶

Don Bosco's approach is that of a Christian educator and pastor of souls rather than that of a speculative theologian. He does not consider problems such as the universal mediation of Mary. Instead he insistently keeps urging people to throw themselves confidently into Mary's arms. She is the loving mother and advocate "at the right hand of the judge...as if to make sure that divine justice does not triumph over divine mercy."²⁷ One of the ways he uses to get across these convictions, and one he suggests to others, is to offer "examples." Many of them are drawn from Saint Alphonsus or the abundant Marian literature of the nineteenth century, particularly that which has to do with May devotions. They highlight the protection effectively offered by Mary to her devotees in life and in death, as well as the requisites of true devotion to Mary.

de Widenfeldt and of the polemics surrounding denunciations of intemperance in devotion to Mary. See Paul Hoffer, *La dévotion à Marie au déclin du XVII siècle: Autour du jansénisme et des "Avis salutaires de la B.V. Marie à ses dévots indiscrets"* (Fribourg, 1938); Giuseppe Cacciatore, CSsR, *S. Alfonso de Liguori e il giansenismo* (Florence, 1944).

²⁵ *Maggio*, day 9, pp. 63-64.

²⁶ Marian symbols popularized by Marian theology and devotion and legitimized by allegorical interpretations of Scripture. The most explicit texts published by DB are in *Maggio*, last day of April, pp. 12-13, and *Maraviglie*, pp. 6-19. They are the basis for other writings such as *Rimembranza* (1868), *Nove giorni* (1870), etc.

²⁷ *Maraviglie*, p. 13: "A good advocate must have diligence, influence with the judge, authority in the royal court, and expert knowledge in dealing with the cases...as if to make sure that divine justice does not triumph over divine mercy." See José de S. Miguel y Barco, *Dubium* 49, p. 83: "Est Advocata generis humani. Bonus advocatus debet habere diligentiam, et coram Rege aliquam potentiam, et coram familia Regis magnam gratiam, et in proponendis allegationibus magnam sapientiam..."

Besides acts of virtue and devotion (*fioretti*) and examples, he also uses sacred hymns to nurture devotion to Mary. The hymns express praise, affection, and fervent confidence. Hymns of filial dedication and love were familiarly used in Valdocco, as elsewhere in nineteenth-century Italy. There was a certain preference for the following refrain, wherein Mary's sons gather at her feet and offer their beloved mother their loving hearts:

*A' tuoi piè, Maria diletta,
Vengon tutti i figli tuoi
Cara Madre, il dono accetta
Degli amanti nostri cuor.*²⁸

As we have already noted, some hymns forget the parables of the Prodigal Son and of the Good Samaritan. They focus on the God of Israel as one who punishes the people (or the soul) that has betrayed him. It is Mary on whom her children can rely when they stand before their Creator in heaven and must account for their many sins:

*Se l'offeso Creatore
Cambia l'ira in lenità,
Tu disarmi il gran furore
E c'impetri ognor pietà.*²⁹
*Siam rei di mille errori
Abbiam il Ciel nemico
Da' giusti suoi rigori
Chi ci difenderà?*³⁰
*Ecco dunque, o peccatori,
Di salute ecco la via:
Siate amanti di Maria,
Ché Maria vi salverà.*³¹

Finally, for the Oratory and the circle around Don Bosco, a characteristic source of devotion was Don Bosco's dreams. They often gave him comfort and confidence in crucial moments. Such was the case in 1844, for example, when he had to leave the Ecclesiastical College and was afraid for his own future and that of the young people whom he had gathered around him. In a dream Mary was the kindly mother who encouraged him, urged him to continue his edu-

²⁸ *Giov. prov.* (1885), p. 475. The hymn was introduced in the 1873 ed., p. 442.

²⁹ *Ibid.* (1885), p. 466; from the hymn *O del Cielo gran Regina*, introduced in the 1863 ed., pp. 406-07.

³⁰ *Ibid.* (1885), p. 476; hymn introduced in the 1851 ed., pp. 356-57.

³¹ *Ibid.* (1885), p. 480; from the hymn *Peccatori, se bramate*, introduced in the 1873 ed., pp. 446-47.

cational work, and offered him prospects of a better future: a house and church from which God would spread the glory of his most holy mother.³²

Shepherdess, guide, queen, and mother: the lady of Don Bosco's dreams is one of the elements typifying the Marian devotion of the Oratory. Don Bosco's own conviction became that of his boys and his Salesians. He and his works were under the very special protection of the Virgin Mary. Nothing had been done without palpable proof that Mary had stepped in to suggest solutions, smooth out problems, or offer protection from diabolic snares. His Marian dreams helped to give a community sense to the basic conviction that those devoted to Mary were the object of special graces. The dreams assured each and every one of those living with Don Bosco that they shared in this very special charism. Don Bosco did not conceal his own innermost conviction:

We may say that nothing has happened which was not known in advance. Our Congregation took no step that had not been suggested by some supernatural occurrence, and approved no change, improvement, or expansion that was not prompted by God.³³

The older he got, the more he seemed to reiterate and stress the conviction that his work was the Lord's, and Mary's in particular: "Up to now we have walked on sure ground. We cannot go astray. Mary is the one who guides us."³⁴ The words heard in his childhood dream came back to him when he was celebrating Mass in the Church of the Sacred Heart at Rome on May 6, 1887, at the altar of Mary Help of Christians:

I saw vividly the scene, when I dreamed of the Congregation at about the age of ten. I saw and heard my mother and brothers asking me questions about it... Then the Madonna had said: "In due time you will understand everything."³⁵

³² DB himself reported the dream of 1844: MO:209-10.

³³ BM 12:52, which draws on the Chronicle of Fr. Barberis (AS 110): conference of DB to SDB directors given Feb. 2, 1876.

³⁴ DB is supposed to have said this in 1887, according to what his secretary Fr. Charles Viglietti (1864-1915) relates, from which we get MB 18:439. As I shall mention in ch. XV, Viglietti is a source to be used with caution. He tends to amplify, add color, and fill out to dimensions that evoke wonder and devotion. But what we have transcribed here is fully in line with convictions often expressed by DB. Here we may recall once again MO:3: "This chronicle...will serve to make known how God himself has always been our guide." Also see the ms. on the house searches at the Oratory (n. 48 of ch. V in this volume, p. 105).

³⁵ MB 18:340-41. Fr. Viglietti is the source.

3. *The Immaculate Conception*

Don Bosco's veneration for the Immaculate Conception of Mary went just as far back in his life, and it deserves special consideration because of the role played by his devotion to her.

In the eighteenth century devotion to the Immaculate Conception became more restrained. Muratori took it to be a Marian devotion based on a pious belief that was disputed by various theological schools of thought. The Church permitted it, he said, because in substance it was sound; homage to Mary in this case was based on a mystery that was obviously connected with the Incarnation.³⁶ At Nice (then part of the kingdom of Sardinia, but now in France), Dominican Bishop James Astesan had raised a protest in 1762 over the involvement of municipal authorities, in ceremonial dress, at celebrations for the Immaculate Conception held in the Jesuit church.³⁷ More than these remote precedents, however, what interests us here are the factors in the local milieu that stimulated Don Bosco's religious outlook to give a privileged place to the Immaculate Conception.

First, we must remember that the seminary church of Chieri had been consecrated to the Immaculate Conception even before it was acquired by the archdiocese of Turin. She dominated the church from the main altar-piece; and every day the seminarians could contemplate a wooden statue of her in the chapel adjoining the church, where they made their devotions.³⁸ The church attached to the archbishopric of Turin, where Don Bosco was ordained, was also dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary.³⁹ And Don Bosco himself tells us that he began his first lessons in catechism under the auspices of Mary Immaculate on December 8, 1841.

It was henceforth to be a time when theology, devotion, and fervor would focus many of their best feelings on the Immaculate Conception, turning the Virgin who was crushing the hellish serpent into a symbol, forecast, and ideal. This was partially a reaction against the restrained devotion of the previous century, partially a reflection of the enthusiasm stimulated by Romanticism, and partially a response to the indifferentism, apostasy, and more or less studied insolence of anticlerical patriots.

³⁶ Works of Muratori to be noted: *De ingeniorum moderatione* and *De superstitione vitanda*. These were followed by other works pro and contra by himself and others. See Julien Stricher, CSsR, *Le voeu du sang en faveur de l'Immaculée Conception* (Rome, 1959), 2 vols.

³⁷ See Pietro Stella, *Il giansenismo in Italia* (Zurich, 1966), I/1:561-63.

³⁸ On the Church of St. Philip Neri in Chieri, see Antonio Bosio, *Memorie storico-religiose e di belle arti del Duomo e delle altre chiese di Chieri* (Turin, 1878), pp. 273-87.

³⁹ On the Church of the Immaculate Conception see Giuseppe Isidoro Arneudo, *Torino sacra* (Turin, 1898), pp. 67-69.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the normal process of cultural and emotional osmosis also implanted in Piedmont devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which was exciting a wide spectrum of the faithful in France. More than two million French people had enrolled in the archconfraternity dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It began in the church of Our Lady of Victory in Paris and spread from there.⁴⁰ One of its promoters in Pinerolo was Father Stephen Burzio, uncle of the Joseph Burzio about whom Don Bosco wrote a tribute.^{40a} In Turin the Jesuits made themselves apostles of this devotion, and it continued to flourish after they were driven out. In 1866 the curate of Holy Martyrs Church began *Il Cuor di Maria* [The Heart of Mary], a bulletin noteworthy for its enthusiastic reports about the “month of Mary,” which brought huge crowds of the faithful to church in Turin and other places.⁴¹

In the new association protestations of faith in Mary as mother of salvation, immaculate mother, and loving mother, were joined to expressions of anxiety over sinners and the enemies of the Church. A manual published in Turin in 1852 had this to say:

In these recent, calamitous times, when unbelief has been trying to destroy all religious feeling in the hearts of peoples, God in his mercy has willed the canonical establishment of the Pious Association of those devoted to the Sacred Heart of Mary.⁴²

The success of the association was a sign of God’s approval:

Today there are more than seventeen million members enrolled in this devotion. In Turin alone, Holy Martyrs Church has 219,000 members. The Company of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is canonically erected in 994 churches. Its principal aim is to pray ceaselessly for the conversion of sinners. Thus the members can regard themselves as very fortunate...knowing that every week daily prayers are said for them and that every Saturday, at 994 altars, Mass is said for those enrolled in this beautiful devotion, as well as for those sinners who are specially recommended to God.⁴³

⁴⁰ See the *Manuale di divozione...in onore del Santissimo ed Immacolato Cuore di Maria* (Pinerolo, 1842). It appeared anonymously. Its author, Stephen Alexis Burzio, OMV, is indicated by Felice Giordano, OMV, *Cenni istruttivi di perfezione proposti a’ giovani desiderosi della medesima nella vita edificante di Giuseppe Burzio* (Turin: Artisti Tipografici, 1846), p. 161.

^{40a} Editor’s note: See ch. V, n. 39, p. 102.

⁴¹ *Il Cuor di Maria: Bullettino mensile italiano dell’arciconfraternita del Sacro ed Immacolato Cuor di Maria per la conversione dei peccatori* (Turin: Speirani, 1866-).

⁴² *Manuale per gli aggregati alla pia unione dell’Immacolato Santissimo Cuore di Maria canonicamente eretta nella chiesa parrocchiale de’ S. ti Martiri in Torino* (Turin: Speirani and Tortone, [1852]), p. 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Another authoritative confirmation came from the Pope himself:

In a ceremony blessing a bishop and other missionaries departing for the foreign missions, ...Pius IX said to them: "If you want to convert nations to the Catholic faith, don't forget that marvelous work of God, the institution of the Archconfraternity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which was founded a few short years ago in Paris and has now spread throughout the world. This devotion will save not only France but the whole world."⁴⁴

In 1854, the year that the Immaculate Conception of Mary was defined as a dogma, Turin had managed to get through the terror of the cholera in one way or another. Around December 8 and in the following months, the faithful flocked into their beloved sanctuary of Our Lady of Consolation to thank Mary for her heavenly protection, to avow their faith, and to plead for her very powerful intercession at a time when their country seemed to be drifting toward sacrilege and apostasy. There was high tension at the time between proponents and opponents of the law for the suppression of religious orders. One after another, pious associations filled Our Lady of Consolation to attend Mass, hear the scheduled preacher, and go en masse to communion. One day was even reserved for the boys of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales.

In the last week of March 1855, the city was turned into one fantastic public display of light. Lamps and multicolored lanterns shone from hundreds of windows and skylights by evening, and the slogan "Believe" could be read under statues or images of Mary Immaculate. On March 25, the feast of the Annunciation, Princess Clotilda (1843-1911), the firstborn of Victor Emmanuel II, was seen "in the crowd" before the picture of Our Lady of Consolation. The following Wednesday his younger children were noticed. Was the princess imploring God's mercy on the serious decisions that her father was making? Was she asking for God's help? Was she seeking the consolation of Mary in heaven?⁴⁵

On the evening of March 25, Father Vincent Berchialla, Oblate of the Virgin Mary (future archbishop of Cagliari), took his sermon cue from the protoevangelium in Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman." He attacked socialism and the forbidden societies. As history proved, he said, all of them would be defeated by the Church, just as original sin had been. Then he praised the faithful of Turin:

You have chosen to honor Mary Immaculate and to give the lie solemnly to the calumnies of those who are challenging your holy religion, who say that

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁴⁵ Vincenzo Gregorio Berchialla, OMV (1825-92), *Feste torinesi al santuario della Consolata per la definizione dogmatica dell'Immacolata Concezione* (Turin: Marietti, 1855).

the cause of Catholicism and the See of Peter is now hopeless... You have confounded the enemies of God, Mary, and the Church, who can now see for themselves that they are only a small minority in uttering such wild mistakes.⁴⁶

It is easy enough to see that devotion to Mary Immaculate in the middle of the nineteenth century differed profoundly from that of the previous century. In the age of Muratori and Saint Alphonsus people were still deeply involved in the Catholic reaction against the Protestant Reformation, although there was some fear of the growing phenomena of unbelief and indifferentism. Protestant theology denied the subordinate mediation of Mary and the saints; it also refused to accept gradations in the doctrine of the universality of original sin. Reacting against all that, eighteenth-century Catholic devotion concentrated on the honor due to Mary as a privileged creature. Those who were caught up in the serious problems of predestination and eternal salvation also countered Protestantism by proclaiming their own filial trust in Mary. They felt inwardly convinced that by honoring their heavenly mother and affirming the privilege of her having been immaculately conceived they were ensuring for themselves a sign of predestination. Indeed, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries individuals and groups had pledged to shed their blood, even to uphold and defend the privilege of the Immaculate Conception.⁴⁷

In the middle of the nineteenth century Catholics were also concerned about the Church and the decline of faith. There was anxiety for the Catholic faith, now besieged by new incarnations of the hellish serpent in the modern heresies of indifferentism, irreligion, hatred of the Church, and violations of the dignity and rights of the clergy and the Pope.

Now there was the image of Mary Immaculate atop the globe, beatified and beatifying, serene and smiling, her face bathed in a celestial vision and her foot crushing the hellish serpent. On the Miraculous Medal it was Mary dressed in white with a blue belt and mantle, extending her arms to the world and bathing it in shining rays of light. These were symbols for the new circumstances. On one side were the Church, the Pope, the besieged faith, and the good people; on the other side were the sects, the errors, the wicked enemies of goodness. All the latter would be crushed because the former put their trust in God and knew that divine grace would triumph in them, even in these lamentable times, as it had in Mary. The appeals of Catherine Labouré (1806-1876), the children of LaSalette, and Bernadette Soubirous (1844-1879) echoed and re-echoed. Mary was pleading for people to undergo conversion because her divine Son's arm was growing heavier and God's wrath was reaching the breaking point. Divine punishments, hunger, poverty, and war would engulf the earth

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁷ See n. 36 above.

if human beings did not undergo conversion and if good people did not multiply their supplications.⁴⁸

This was the new way of conceiving the relationship between heaven and earth, with Mary as mediatrix. In Italy and other countries, dioceses stripped of their pastors felt a more pressing need to protest their fidelity to the Church and to give assurances to themselves and their pastors.⁴⁹ Thus it was an age in which the problem of personal salvation was immersed in the larger problem of the survival of the community's faith and of the institutions regarded as the trustees of the means of salvation.

In that hour of darkness Catholics looked up to the Morning Star, to Mary Immaculate crushing the devil, and proclaimed their faith aloud: *non praevallebunt* (Matt 16:18)—their enemies would not prevail. Mary, the glory of Israel and her people, was the victor over all heresies: *tu gloria Israel, tu onorificentia populi nostri* (see Jud 15:9), *tu cunctas haereses sola interemisti in universo mundo* ("You are the glory of Israel, the honor of our people; you alone have destroyed every heresy in the whole world"). Many proclaimed Mary to be the "stoutest defense" of the Church—from Pius IX to the most humble apostles of the month of Mary. It was she who "has always destroyed all heresies"; she, "all beautiful and immaculate, who crushed the venomous head of that most cruel serpent"; she who "has saved the faithful nations from all sorts of serious ills"; she who is "the most secure refuge and faithful help" for Christians.⁵⁰ Thus Mary Immaculate takes her resplendent place in the religious mentality that sees human history as a struggle for victory between good and evil, between the Church and its enemies. As one popularizer of the month of Mary put it:

Has there ever been an age, my children, when we were more in need of invoking the most holy Virgin to help Christians and dispel heresies? Not just against infidels and heretics, but against children of the Church who have betrayed it and become its enemies! Enemies brazenly censuring, grumbling, and uttering ridicule against the most august mysteries of the faith; against the Church, its commandments, rites, and feasts; against the Vicar of

⁴⁸ Pietro Lustrissimi, SM, *La mariologia nel secolo XIX* (Rome, 1964), p. 26: "The theological accomplishments [in the 19th century] were much inferior to the spiritual and charismatic phenomena that blossomed" (allusions to Sts. Catherine Labouré and Bernadette Soubirous).

⁴⁹ Expressions of loyalty to bishops exiled from their sees were expressed to some extent by all the Catholic periodicals of the day. Many documents relating to Abp. Frasoni were published by Emanuele Colomiatti, *Mons. Luigi dei marchesi Frasoni* (Turin, 1892).

⁵⁰ Expressions from the Apostolic Letter *Ineffabilis Deus*, Dec. 8, 1854. These and many others from the documents of Pius IX are reported by Giuseppe Quadrio, SDB (1921-63), "L'Immacolata e la Chiesa nell'insegnamento di Pio IX," in *L'Immacolata Ausiliatrice* (Turin: SEI, 1955), pp. 41-64.

Jesus Christ on earth, bishops, priests, cloistered religious, and all those consecrated to the Lord, all pious and devout people!⁵¹

To the open enemies of the Church are added indifferent Christians:

those who care nothing about God, the faith, the Church, piety, and devotion. Living with all the appearance of wise people before humanity, they live as beasts before God, caring nothing about Church, sacraments, fasts, abstinences, prayers, as if religion, the Church, and the next life were fables! Even under the most terrible blows from the Lord, they do not give a thought to heaven. They blame everything on the weather, the season, rain, drought, and wind! As if he had not sworn countless times in his Scriptures that the fruits of sin are calamities and death.

This indifference, this lethargy in matters of religion, might be considered the universal heresy of our day!⁵²

Another writer bemoans the sad fact that

in many areas devotion to Mary is slackening and declining. It is no longer being instilled so assiduously in children, nor being cultivated so lovingly in adults. People blush to be seen as devotees of that august Lady.⁵³

People were now in the most difficult of times, indeed in the “last days.” The mid-nineteenth century saw the resurrection of the manuscript of Saint Louis de Montfort (1673-1716), *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*. With fear and hope people read what he had written about events in the last days:

The devil, knowing that he has but little time, and now less than ever, to destroy souls, will every day redouble his efforts and his combats. He will presently raise up cruel persecutions, will put terrible snares before the faithful servants and the true children of Mary, whom it gives him more trouble to conquer than it does to conquer others.

It is principally to these last and cruel persecutions of the devil, which shall go on increasing daily till the reign of Antichrist, that we ought to understand that first and celebrated prediction and curse of God, pronounced in the terrestrial paradise against the serpent.⁵⁴

⁵¹ A. Fontana, *Il mese dei fiori consacrato a Maria Santissima: Libricciuolo pel popolo* (Monza, 1856), p. 63.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 65. After Félicité de Lamennais's *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion* (4 vols., 1817-23), there were frequent cries of alarm from apologists and Popes (Gregory XVI and Pius IX) against the “heresy” of religious indifferentism.

⁵³ Francesco Cabrini, SJ (1814-62), *Il sabbato dedicato a Maria, ossia considerazioni sulle grandezze, virtù e glorie della SS. Vergine per tutti i sabbati dell'anno* (Milan and Venice, 1869), p. 373; 1st ed. 1859.

⁵⁴ Louis Mary de Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, trans. Frederick William Faber, rev. ed. (Bay Shore, N.Y., 1950), p. 34.

It is for the last days that God has reserved a direct clash between Satan and the Woman, between the followers of Mary and the cutthroats of the Evil One. Devout readers could read the peremptory statements of the prophet: “God wishes that His holy Mother should be at present more known, more loved, more honored, than she has ever been.”⁵⁵ That will certainly come to pass if predestined souls, enlightened by grace and the Holy Spirit, enter into the inner and perfect practice of true devotion to Mary. They will be the elect sentries of the Church in the last days, guarding against the powers of hell:

They shall be clouds thundering and flying through the air at the least breath of the Holy Ghost, who, detaching themselves from everything and troubling themselves about nothing, shall shower forth the rain of the Word of God and of life eternal. They shall thunder against sin; they shall storm against the world; they shall strike the devil and his crew; and they shall pierce through and through, for life or for death, with their two-edged sword of the Word of God, all those to whom they shall be sent on the part of the Most High.

They shall be the true apostles of the latter days, to whom the Lord of Hosts shall give the word and the might to work marvels, and to carry off with glory the spoils of His enemies.⁵⁶

In a book that Don Bosco considered a work of gold, Jesuit Francis Cabrini had this exhortation for Christians:

If you live in one of those dismal epochs when God permits the Church to be persecuted, for the punishment of sins or the lofty designs of his providence, do not lose heart. On this earth the Church is militant. It will be assailed, but its victory is certain because “the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it” [Matt 16:18]. You stand firm on the principles of the faith. Increase your trust and your prayer as the need increases. Prayer has not lost its effectiveness, and the arm of Mary has not shrunk. Turn to her and ask for her help; “be not far from me, O my help” [Ps 22:20]. Urge all to pray to her, assured that she will crush the enemies of God and the Church and turn battles into victories, persecutions into triumphs.⁵⁷

Meditation on Scripture was not the only inducement to hope. Recent history also suggested coincidences deserving of reflection. Heresy had earlier tried to humiliate the papacy in the person of Pope Pius VII (1740-1823), but after that trial God had granted a splendid victory to Pope and Church. Looking closely at the matter, said Don Bosco, one could see that Mary certainly was involved:

The illustrious Pius VII saw the protection of Mary in his own restoration to the Papal See and the return of peace to the Church after a series of sad events.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 37.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 39.

⁵⁷ Cabrini, p. 375. DB's reference to it as a work “of gold” is in an outline for *Nove giorni* (AS 133). Cabrini is cited in *Maraviglie*, p. 93.

As a token of gratitude to the Queen of heaven, in 1815 he instituted the feast of Mary Help of Christians in her honor.⁵⁸

Now revolution was plotting against another Pius, but one could be sure that she would intervene again on behalf of the Pope who had officially honored her with the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.⁵⁹ Once again she would prove herself to be *auxilium Christianorum*, help of Christians. The logic of factual events would lead people to venerate Mary Immaculate as the help of Christians, and of the Pope in particular. The advent of some new apostle or some extraordinary event would stir up a new wave of Marian fervor and put the invocation, “Mary Help of Christians,” on the lips of all the faithful.

Within the walls of the Oratory, devotion to the Immaculate Conception took on a more intimate sense, one less affected by sociopolitical tremors. Speaking familiarly with his boys, Don Bosco stresses things that will help to arouse greater religious fervor and more diligence in the context of educational activity. Mary Most Holy, the “mother of purity” in *The Companion of Youth* (1847),⁶⁰ readily becomes the Virgin Immaculate after 1854. She is now that most pure mother who “hates everything that goes against purity.”⁶¹ Don Bosco repeatedly had thousands of little cards printed up with a little wreath of prayer (*coroncina*) addressed to the Immaculate Virgin Mary.⁶² From 1854 on, thoughts that had earlier focused around devotion to Saint Aloysius were now directed toward Mary of the Immaculate Conception.⁶³ Even May devotions in honor of Mary Most Holy now tend to become devotions in honor of the Immaculate Conception.⁶⁴ Papal definition of the dogma put greater em-

⁵⁸ *Maggio*, day 9, p. 65.

⁵⁹ There was almost an instinctive tendency to see an historical recycling of the pontificate of Pius VII in that of Pius IX, both being caught up in revolution. See the following by way of example: Ignazio Costa della Torre, *Pio VII e Pio IX: Reminiscenze e conforti* (Turin, 1860); Antonio Brignole Sale, *Considérations sur la question romaine* (Genoa, 1860), pp. 31-32; Hellion de Barreme, *Rome vue à Rome* (Paris and Marseille, 1862), p. 43: “The sword of Victor Emmanuel is not prepared to raise the rock that broke the sword and genius of Napoleon.”

⁶⁰ *Giov. prov.*, p. 53. Already in that text we read the ejaculation: “Blessed be the holy and immaculate conception of the most blessed Virgin Mary” (p. 122)

⁶¹ *Maggio*, day 26, p. 154.

⁶² AS 112 Fatture, DeAgostini: “Jan. 24, 1855. 8,000 *Coroncine in onore dell’Immacolata Concezione*, 4 pag. in-16.” This may be the *Coroncina ad onore dell’immacolato concepimento di Maria sempre Vergine* that was published as an appendix to [Bosco], *Il giubileo e pratiche devote per la visita delle chiese* (Turin:De-Agostini, 1854), pp. 59-61.

⁶³ Indicative are the *fioretti* assigned by DB for the novena of the Immaculate Conception as well as comments in his profiles of Savio, Magone, and Besucco. Note this comment on Dominic Savio: “His special love was for the Immaculate Heart of Mary. When entering the church he always knelt before her altar, asking for grace to keep his heart free of impurity. ‘Mary,’ he would pray, ‘I always want to be your son. Let me die before I commit a single sin against chastity.’” (SDS:80)

⁶⁴ *Maggio*, passim.

phasis on the novena and feast of December 8, now solemnized with sermonettes and little acts of piety. Before Mary Immaculate, Don Bosco felt, his charges should feel an instinctive need for purification; on the community level, that meant “house cleaning.” Around the time of that feast, Don Bosco often noted, Mary gave him the grace to single out boys who were not suited for the Oratory, and who therefore were asked to leave. This winnowing process was, often enough, accompanied by a “dream” manifestation, which helped to reinforce the halo of the supernatural around Don Bosco and his work.⁶⁵

There is no point in looking for lengthy tracts on the privilege of Mary’s Immaculate Conception. Among Don Bosco’s published works, the most extensive treatment is to be found in two pages of *The Month of May*. Mary is

the holiest of all creatures, wholly beautiful and spotless, full of grace..., created and formed in grace, which means that from the first instant of her existence Mary was without original and actual stain, and she remained stainless until the last breath of her life.⁶⁶

Don Bosco offers us little doctrinal treatment. In practice his tendency is to give Mary Immaculate a role in his work of education. In a general atmosphere of Marian fervor, he sets high value on exercises of virtue and devotion “in honor of Mary Immaculate.” They will ensure her protection of us in this life, and particularly at the hour of our death.⁶⁷

It is possible for us to look a bit more closely at Don Bosco’s devotion to Mary, either in general or in terms of Mary Immaculate, and detect the seed of his turn toward Mary Help of Christians. Father John Baptist Giacomelli (1820-1901) noted that Don Bosco had pasted five pictures of the Virgin on an 1848 calendar: one of Our Lady of Victories, one of her as mother, and three of Mary Immaculate. One of these three bore the printed invocation: “O Immaculate Virgin, you who have overcome all heresies, come now to help us. We invoke you with all our heart. Help of Christians, pray for us.” Don Bosco had added in his own handwriting: *Inde expectamus consolationem* (“From you we await consolation”).⁶⁸

A decade later Don Bosco was hanging a piece of cardboard in his room with three pictures of Mary attached. Two were souvenirs of the month of Mary

⁶⁵ Evening talk of Nov. 27, 1860: “We are about to begin the Immaculate Conception novena. Every novena at the Oratory is fatal to someone because Our Lady uses this occasion to separate the cockle from the wheat and dismiss those who persist in their evil ways” (BM 6:460, from Fr. Ruffino’s Chronicle). [Editor’s note: The American reader should note that Dec. 8 was just five weeks into the new school year in 19th-century Piedmont.]

⁶⁶ *Maggio*, last day of April, pp. 12-13.

⁶⁷ The aim of the Company of Mary Immaculate was formulated in these terms. See SDS:99.

⁶⁸ BM 3:414-15. [Editor’s note: Fr. Giacomelli was a close friend of DB from their seminary days; from 1873 to 1888 he was also DB’s confessor.]

celebrated at Turin in the churches of the Holy Trinity and of the Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration. The third picture was of Mary Immaculate, inscribed: "O Immaculate Virgin... Help of Christians, pray for us!" To this Don Bosco added in pencil: *Terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata* (Song 6:4, "Awe-inspiring as bannered troops!").⁶⁹

What was he thinking about when he looked at those pictures and read those invocations? The struggles of the Church? The battles for souls against the snares of evil? In *The Month of May*, which belongs to 1858, we again find the expressions, "Help of Christians" and "Terrible as an army in battle array." Both are in his consideration of "Mary, our protector at the hour of death." She will be our protector during life, but even more at the hour of our death, when the danger will be greater. At that hour she will be the "Help of Christians," as the Church has us call her. She "will be a fierce captain, like an army drawn up for battle, repulsing the assaults of the enemy from hell: *terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata*."⁷⁰ Mary as "Help of Christians" is also invoked at the end of a short petition in the same volume, where the petitioner avows his certainty that he will win grace and the right to paradise if Mary intervenes with her intercession.⁷¹

Thus the expression "Help of Christians" was before Don Bosco's eyes in his room before he began to promote Mary Help of Christians. It was known to him from its connections with the battle of Lepanto (1571) and Pius VII, and it may have been one of the familiar invocations he used in his own supplications to the Holy Immaculate Virgin and Mother of God.

4. *Mary Help of Christians*

The political and religious circumstances that gave a particular cast to devotion to the Immaculate Conception also had their impact on devotion to Mary Help of Christians. After the Second War of Italian Independence (1859-1860), the Papal States seemed irremediably lost. Any human hope for the retention of temporal power by the Pope seemed futile. Zealous bishops raised their voices, asking the faithful to plead for God's assistance. On February 2, 1860, the bishops of Umbria, echoing *Ineffabilis Deus* (the 1854 encyclical pronouncing the Immaculate Conception a dogma of faith), expressed their confidence in the "Mother of Mercy..., unconquered and unconquerable warrior." She to whom "all the victories of the Church were due" would not remain idle. They urged the faithful to plead with God "through the intercession of the Immaculate

⁶⁹ BM 6:8.

⁷⁰ *Maggio*, day 31, pp. 175, 177.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, day 9, p. 64.

Heart of Mary, Mother of God, Help of Christians, that most powerful lady who holds under her feet the rebel head of the ancient serpent."⁷²

A few months after their appeal, Umbria became part of the kingdom of Italy. The national cause now took a dramatic and decisive turn. Italy, it seemed, would strip its spiritual Father of his temporal domains. In terms of history and geographic position, the city of Rome seemed destined to become the capital of the new kingdom. But there were those who were turning their gaze elsewhere. Some were suggesting that Rome be left to the Pope. Others were suggesting that Rome be given back to Italy, but without that crown that had been too long associated with the papacy and should now be abolished. Spoleto was also mentioned as a possible capital, due to its central location on the peninsula.⁷³ While people were casting their eyes on the Umbrian town as a potential capital, Spoleto caught the attention of Catholic Italy. In March 1862, news circulated that near Spoleto (in Fratta, between Castelrinaldi and Montefalco) an ancient image of Mary in a rundown church had spoken to a little boy just under five years of age, Righetto Cionchi. On March 19, a chronically ill young farmer felt inspired to go to the image; in a few days he had recovered without any medical help. The image soon became a focal point for devout worshippers and petitioners. On May 17, Archbishop John Baptist Arnaldi of Spoleto (1806-1867) sent a report of events to *L'Armonia* in Turin; it was published in the May 27 issue of the paper. It told of the marvel and of the "crowds" of people flocking to the miraculous image from Spoleto, Todi, Perugia, Foligno, Nocera, Narni, and Norcia. On feast days, in particular, there was a lavish spectacle of the faithful, "led there as if by a heavenly light and force...a gathering that was spontaneous...inexplicable, and inexpressible....a miracle of miracles... The enemies of the Church and those of weak faith had to admit that this holy enthusiasm of the populace could not be explained" and could not be attributed to "priest work."

The image itself the faithful referred to simply as the Madonna, the Madonna Made Known [*Madonna scoperta*], Our Lady of the Stars [*Madonna della Stella*], or Our Lady of Spoleto. The archbishop officially named her Our Lady Help of Christians, convinced that this title was "the most suitable in every respect."⁷⁴ He may have been influenced in this choice by the upcoming feast of Mary Help of Christians on May 24, which he hoped to celebrate on the site of the marvel. Perhaps he, like many others, was thinking of similarities between Pius VII, who made May 24 a feast of the universal Church, and Pius IX, who could give greater recog-

⁷² *Lettera circolare dell'arcivescovo e vescovi di Spoleto, Terni, Foligno, Rieti, Norcia, Civita Castellana, Amelia, Narni ai loro diocesani* (Spoleto, 1860), pp. 4, 31; cited by Pietro Brocardo, SDB, "L'Ausiliatrice di Spoleto e Don Bosco," in *L'Immacolata Ausiliatrice* (Turin: SEI, 1955), p. 252.

⁷³ Brocardo, *ibid.*, p. 253. For a vivid presentation of the feelings in the decade 1860-70 regarding where the capital of Italy should be placed, see Federico Chabod, *Storia della politica estera italiana del 1870 al 1896* (Bari, 1962), pp. 191-209.

⁷⁴ Report of Abp. Arnaldi in *L'Armonia*, May 27, 1862.

nition to that title in Spoleto itself after his complete triumph over the Revolution. For that had been his episcopal see before he was elected to the See of Peter.⁷⁵

The eyes of Italian Catholics turned to Umbria. Papers in Rome, Turin, Genoa, Milan, and Naples published the reports of Archbishop Arnaldi and others about Spoleto, the cures effected by Mary Help of Christians, the ever growing crowds of people, and the spreading wave of spiritual enthusiasm. On June 26, 1862, Archbishop Arnaldi reported: "Like an electric spark, holy enthusiasm for the glorious image has shot over land and sea."⁷⁶ The following November, a Turin newspaper offered its assessment:

This very beautiful and wondrous image showed itself in a locale that is the center of the archdiocese of Spoleto, ...of Umbria, and even more noteworthy, of Italy itself. We would say that this is a manifestation of the will of God and the Virgin. Presenting herself so wondrously in these calamitous times, right at the center of Italy, she wanted to make clear that she sets herself in the middle of Italy to aid and defend Italy, to assist her in all her temporal and eternal needs.⁷⁷

In one report Archbishop Arnaldi exclaimed:

Blessed be God always, who in his mercifulness has deigned to revive the faith in all Umbria through the wondrous manifestation of his great mother, Mary. Blessed be the Virgin, who with this manifestation has deigned to show her predilection for the archdiocese of Spoleto. Blessed be Jesus and Mary, who with this merciful manifestation are opening the hearts of Catholics to a livelier hope for the desired triumph of the Church and its august Head and for the conversion of wretched sinners.⁷⁸

It was indeed the Lord's work that the flat countryside around the sacred image had become "a temple resounding with hymns and peals of praise for the great Mother of God. *A Domino factum est istud* ('By the Lord has this been done' [Ps 118:23])."⁷⁹ The Virgin was giving her pledge of the Church's triumph in the not too distant future.⁸⁰ It was as if she were saying:

⁷⁵ In his report of Mar. 24, 1863, he expresses the hope that Pius IX will come to crown Our Lady of Spoleto when she is housed in the church built by the devotion of the faithful: "I would also express the hope that the reigning Pontiff, returning from his future victory over his enemies and imitating his great predecessor of venerable memory, Pius VII, who crowned the miraculous Virgin in Savona as an act of gratitude, will take the opportunity to place the crown of victory offered him by Mary on the head of the image that is being so devoutly venerated these days" (*Relazioni sulla taumaturga immagine di Maria Auxilium Christianorum prodigiosamente manifestatasi nelle vicinanze di Spoleto* [Bologna, 1863³], pp. 72-73.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁷⁷ *La buona settimana* 7 (Nov. 23-29, 1862), 383.

⁷⁸ Report of May 17, 1862.

⁷⁹ Report of Sept. 3, 1862.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

I am for your defense, as I have been throughout the centuries. Summoned to help, I crushed the head of all the ancient heresies. I will do so again this time. As the Church triumphant in the past has laid the spoils of its enemies on my altar through the hands of its visible Head, so the moment of victory will come for me, your mother, and for you, my children.⁸¹

Mary manifestly is choosing to help Pius IX: “The Madonna, whose Immaculate Conception was proclaimed by this holy Pope, wants to save him at all costs and lead him to the most splendid victory.”⁸²

In September 1862, the archbishop launched the idea of building a large church on the plain of Fratta. It would house the wonder-working image and become Mary’s fortress. Contributions were sought through the Catholic press. Turin, one of the first cities to hear of the events in Spoleto and one of the biggest contributors to Peter’s Pence, was singularly enthusiastic in its response. From 1863 to 1867, first *L’Armonia* and then *L’Unità Cattolica* published lists of contributors and special issues devoted specifically to Spoleto and the miraculous favors granted there and elsewhere through the intercession of the wonder-working image. Engravings of Mary Help of Christians were also made and published in Turin by Hyacinth Marietti, printer and publisher. They were accompanied by a prayer composed by Pius IX, which asked God for fidelity, through the mediation of Mary, in the midst of such terrible assaults.⁸³ From Bologna and Spoleto itself came a prayer that was both a protestation of faith and an enthusiastic commitment to the fight:

O Mary, Help of Christians so powerful, ...finally abandoning and entrusting ourselves to your maternal protection, we promise...and resolve to stand firm and constant down to our last breath, no matter what the cost may be for

⁸¹ Report of Mar. 24, 1863. The same themes are brought out in a book printed at Valdocco: Giuseppe Gatti, *La vergine Maria proposta in ragionamenti apologetici e morali* (Turin: OSFS, 1864), pp. 106-07: “We can be assured that in the great conflicts of life we will never lack the protection of the august lady proclaimed the Help of Christians. And what I say of the Church in general applies also to each of us in particular. So when you chance to see the Church experiencing difficult trials in the person of its head, or its pastors, or the Christian people, don’t be discouraged or lose heart, good souls. Just call upon the ever living Help of Christians, the persistent fighter, Our Lady of Victory. You will see the head of the serpent bruised more and more. When she appears, you will see the storm die down and fair weather return under the skies of Christianity.”

⁸² Preface to *Relazioni sulla taumaturga immagine*, p. 6.

⁸³ The “image of Mary...manifested miraculously near Spoleto in 1862” appears as the frontispiece to Luigi Maini, *Manifestazione, culto e miracoli di una immagine di Maria Santissima nelle vicinanze di Spoleto* (Turin: Marietti, 1862). It also appears as an illustration in the appendix to *Divoti esercizi in onore del glorioso patriarca S. Giuseppe, di S. Camillo de Lellis e di M.SS. Miracolosa di Spoleto* (Turin: Marietti, 1863). In 1865 people were also selling little opera glasses with an image of the Spoleto Virgin. See ch. XII, n. 84, of the present work, p. 308.

us in terms of temporal disaster; and to lose even our lives in the true faith as children ever obedient, reverent, and docile to the Holy Roman Catholic Church, to the Supreme Hierarch and Vicar of Christ on earth, and to the other legitimate pastors of our souls. That is what we choose to do. That is what we promise. With your help may it be so, O Virgin Immaculate, O most loving Mother, O Mary, constant, most powerful, and most benign helper of Christianity.⁸⁴

The tie between the two titles, Immaculate Conception and Help of Christians, is explicit and complete. We find the same content, the same religious motivations, and the same scriptural titles that will reappear in Don Bosco. We even find the image of the bark of Peter amid the waves that will recur in the dream reported by Don Bosco to his boys on May 30, 1862:

Protect and guard, in particular, the Supreme Pontiff, so that on the tempestuous sea he may guide the bark of Peter to the port of salvation, triumphing over the haughty waves that seek to sink it.⁸⁵

* * *

News of the events in Spoleto reached the Oratory very quickly. At the Good Night talk on the evening of May 24, 1862, “Don Bosco very joyfully told of some miraculous events connected with a painting of Mary near Spoleto.”⁸⁶ *L'Armonia* had not yet published the first report by Archbishop Arnaldi, but word may have gotten around concerning the title he gave to the image: Help of Christians. On May 30, Don Bosco told the boys about his “dream” a few

⁸⁴ Maini, pp. 55-57; *Relazioni sulla taumaturga immagine*, pp. 66-68.

⁸⁵ Maini, p. 56; *Relazioni*, p. 67.

⁸⁶ BM 7:105. Fr. Lemoyne cites in quote marks a passage that he claims came from Fr. Bonetti's Chronicle. I have vainly looked in that Chronicle and the contemporary one of Fr. Ruffino for any reference to the evening talk of May 24, 1862. In Fr. Bonetti's Chronicle it should be in *Annali III*, pp. 6-7, AS 110 Bonetti 4.

From our experience it seems quite clear that Fr. Lemoyne's quote marks have only relative value. He sometimes has quote marks around passages that do not exist as such in the document he is supposedly citing. At other times he does not put quote marks around passages that are transcribed literally from one source or another, be it expressly named or not.

Finally, I would call attention to two little mistakes in chronology with respect to the little talks reported in BM 7:105 as dated May 23 and May 25. In the original source (Bonetti, *Annali III*, pp. 7, 11) the dates are May 25 and May 26, 1862, respectively. The order of the BM is May 23, (24), 25 instead of May (24), 25, 26.

The little talk of May 24 is not to be found either in AS 110 Lemoyne, *Doc.* 8:54, which records the talks from Bonetti's *Annali*; but that of May 25 already has the mistaken date of May 23.

nights earlier. The ship of the Church, steered by the Pope, is being attacked at sea by a formidable array of enemy vessels:

In the midst of this endless sea, two solid columns...soar high into the sky. One is surmounted by a statue of the Immaculate Virgin, at whose feet a large inscription reads: *Auxilium Christianorum* [Help of Christians]. The other, far loftier and sturdier, supports a Host of proportionate size and bears beneath it the inscription: *Salus credentium* [Salvation of believers]... Standing at the helm, the Pope strains every muscle to steer his ship between the two columns...⁸⁷

As I noted above, it was in September 1862 that the archbishop of Spoleto launched his project for a large church in honor of Mary Help of Christians.⁸⁸ In December of the same year, Don Bosco communicated his decision to build a church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians. Father Paul Albera, not yet a priest at the time, reported what Don Bosco himself had said to him:

There were a lot of confessions tonight, but truthfully I hardly know what I said or did, because all the time I had something on my mind which totally absorbed me. I kept thinking: *Our church is too small. We have to pack in our boys like sardines. We must build a larger, more imposing one under the title of Mary, Help of Christians.*⁸⁹

Notice the order of needs and resolutions expressed by Don Bosco according to this report. He was not thinking of Spoleto, the glory of Mary, or the needs of the local area. He was absorbed with the situation of his own community in Valdocco, with the fact that his boys barely squeezed into the Church of Saint Francis de Sales. The first urgency was the need for a new church for his Oratory. Then came the title and any other motives.

As for the title itself, we have another interesting statement of Don Bosco reported by Father John Cagliero (1838-1926). It goes back to the end of 1862 or the early part of 1863: "The Madonna wishes us to honor Her under the title of Mary, Help of Christians. The times are so bad that we sadly need Her help to preserve and safeguard our faith."⁹⁰

The statement has the ring of truth, especially considering the house searches and other administrative setbacks that Don Bosco was going through

⁸⁷ BM 7:107-108. I deal further with this "dream" in *Don Bosco's Dreams: A Historico-documentary Analysis of Selected Samples*, trans. John Drury (New Rochelle: Don Bosco, 1996).

⁸⁸ The first stone was laid on Sept. 21, 1862. Abp. Arnaldi reports the event to Fr. Cajetan Maini, rector of the Carpi Seminary, in a letter of Sept. 22; see *Relazioni sulla taumaturga immagine*, p. 44.

⁸⁹ BM 7:196. Fr. Albera was born at None in the province of Turin in 1845, entered the Oratory in 1858, and was elected Rector Major of the SDBs in 1910. He died in 1921.

⁹⁰ BM 7:197.

at the time. We find it convincingly reaffirmed in the pages wholly written by Don Bosco and placed at the beginning of the book entitled *Wonders of the Mother of God Invoked under the Title of Mary Help of Christians* (1868). They are in the key of Marian eschatology. Like Saint Louis de Montfort, Don Bosco writes of the last days and calamitous times as so many indications of the fact that we are now in Mary's hour, the hour of Mary Help of Christians (*Auxilium Christianorum*):

The title of *Auxilium Christianorum* attributed to the august Mother of the Savior is not something new in the Church of Jesus Christ. Even in the holy books of the Old Testament Mary is called Queen; and she stands at the right hand of her divine Son, clad in gold and surrounded by variety [see Ps 45:10]... In this sense Mary was hailed as help of Christians from the very beginning of Christianity.

But there is a special reason why the Church *in these last days* wants to focus attention on the title *Auxilium Christianorum*. Bishop Parisis puts it this way: "Almost always when the human race has found itself in the midst of extraordinary crises, it has been able to handle the situation when God made it worthy of recognizing and praising some new perfection in this admirable creature, Mary; here below, she is the most magnificent reflection of the Creator's perfections" (Nicolas, page 121).

The universally felt need today to invoke Mary is not particular but general. It is no longer a matter simply of imbuing fervor in the tepid, converting sinners, or preserving the innocent. These things are always useful, for any person in any time or place. But now it is the Catholic Church itself that is being assaulted: in its liturgy, its sacred institutions, its Head, its doctrine, its discipline. It is being assaulted as the Catholic Church, as the center of truth and teacher of all the faithful.

And it is precisely to win special protection from heaven that it is appealing to Mary as our common Mother and special helper of kings, Catholic nations, and Catholics all over the world!⁹¹

Don Bosco applies August Nicolas's citation of Peter Louis Parisis (1795-1866), bishop of Arras, regarding the Immaculate Conception, to the title that Archbishop Arnaldi gave to the wonder-working image of Spoleto. In the crowds of people and wondrous works, Father Charles Dufrique-Desgenettes (1778-1860) had seen a sign that this was the hour of the Most Holy and Im-

⁹¹ *Maraviglie*, pp. 5-7. The Nicolas citation is thus unspecified in DB's ms. (AS 133 Maraviglie). It comes from Auguste Nicolas, *La Vergine Maria vivente nella Chiesa: Nuovi studi filosofici sul Cristianesimo* (Turin: Biblioteca Ecclesiastica, 1863), pt. 1, l.1, ch. 5, §2, p. 121. The context is a polemic against John Bordas-Dumoulin (1798-1859), an opponent of the dogma of Mary's immaculate conception. He was associated with the last of the faithful of Port-Royal in Paris, but they did not necessarily share all his assertions. Bordas-Dumoulin was anxious to guard against *Marianism*, the divinization of Mary; he saw the dogma as a manifestation of that tendency.

maculate Heart of Mary.⁹² Events in Spoleto and reasons of both an historical and theological nature induced Don Bosco to say that now was a time when Mary wished to be honored and invoked as Help of Christians (*Ausiliatrice*).

Don Bosco had earlier supervised the publication of an Italian edition of the *History of the Archconfraternity of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary*.⁹³ Back in 1854 he had publicized the apparitions of LaSalette, and between 1844 and 1847 he had published *The Seven Sorrows of Mary*. Without giving up any of these other devotions, after 1860 he became the determined apostle of devotion to Mary Help of Christians.

As the press continued to report events in Spoleto, Don Bosco pushed ahead with his own project. In her diary Marchioness Mary Fassati (1824-1905) records that some gentleman promised contributions to Don Bosco, provided that the new church would be named after Mary Help of Christians.⁹⁴ It appears that Don Bosco had spoken to wealthy friends about the Oratory's need for a church but without having made any firm decision about its name. The name apparently came out of discussions and prevailed. It was ultimately accepted by his benefactors and city authorities, even though the latter might have had some misgivings and fears that it would cause disturbances and hostile reactions in Turin as it had done in Spoleto. The final and definite choice of a name was not made immediately if there is truth in the report that the intervention of Pius IX, probably solicited, settled all doubts. Writes Don Bosco:

Informed of our need for a church in the place mentioned above, he sent his first generous offering of five hundred francs and noted that Mary Help of Christians [*Maria Ausiliatrice*] would be a name certainly pleasing to the august Queen of Heaven.⁹⁵

In a diary entry of June 12, 1864, Marchioness Fassati noted that construction of the church would soon begin: "All the preliminary difficulties

⁹² See, e.g., Claude Savart, "Pour une sociologie de la ferveur religieuse: l'archiconfrérie de Notre-Dame-Des-Victoires," in *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 59 (1964), 823-44.

⁹³ See AS 112 Fatture, Speirani, Mar. 11, 1857: 5,000 printed copies of "Storia della Conf.ta S.C. Maria," i.e., Fr. Dufriche-Desgenettes, *Storia dell'archiconfraternita del SS. ed immacolato Cuore di Maria, eretta nella parrocchia della Madonna delle Vittorie in Parigi*, 2nd ed., with additions from the 13th French ed. (Turin: Speirani and Tortone, 1857).

⁹⁴ Fassati diary, mentioned in Brocardo, p. 267, footnote.

⁹⁵ *Maraviglie*, pp. 108-09. What DB wrote at an early point in his draft (AS 133 Maraviglie 1) is worth noting: "With regard to the title to give to the new building, we were still deliberating and it seemed that it might be *Maria Auxilium Christianorum*, Mary Help of Christians. Then something happened that eliminated any doubts..." Also worth recalling is Fr. Bonetti's remark in his Chronicle (Bonetti, *Annali III*, p. 61). DB wrote to Abp. Arnaldi and got a reply on Jan. 31, 1863. Arnaldi expressed his esteem for DB, whom he knew for his "great zeal for the glory of God."

have finally been resolved... There had been disagreements because of the title *Auxilium Christianorum*, which was considered antigovernmental because of Spoleto.⁹⁶ The cornerstone was laid on April 27, 1865. One important and significant fact was the presence of Amadeus of Savoy, son of Victor Emmanuel II.⁹⁷ His presence may have been achieved through the benevolence of personages associated with the royal court: Marchioness Fassati, Countess Charlotte Callori (1827-1911), Chevalier d'Agliano, and even Count John Visone (1814-1893), superintendent of the royal household. Royal political policy may also have been at work, as we noted earlier.^{97a} The presence of the prince may have been another step to reduce tension between Turin and Rome by defusing the charge of intransigence associated with the title *Auxilium Christianorum* in Spoleto. Finally, preference was given to another title over the Latin *Auxilium Christianorum* and its Spoleto equivalent, *Aiuto dei Cristiani*. Choice fell on a title already in use and well known in local tradition: *Maria Ausiliatrice* or *Beata Vergine Ausiliatrice*.

Like Archbishop Arnaldi, Don Bosco made much of popular enthusiasm, the expectation of wondrous works, and the heavenly favors granted through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians. He, too, published the favors and graces reported by the faithful. In Turin, as in Spoleto, images and pictures of Mary Help of Christians were printed and distributed. And the Turin sanctuary became an object of pilgrimages and a museum of gift offerings for favors received.

Devotion to Mary Help of Christians gave a new twist to the May devotions celebrated in Valdocco and Don Bosco's other houses. Mary's month began in the last week of April, so that its closing coincided with the feast of Mary Help of Christians (May 24). Thus a sense of security and certain hope was linked up with recollections of the wonders wrought by Mary under that title. The May devotions in Valdocco became one of the best attended religious services in Turin and Piedmont. Many came from the provincial countryside and even farther away, going into raptures when they heard the strong polyphonic choirs led by Maestro John DeVecchi (d. 1905), Father Cagliero, and finally Brother Joseph Dogliani (1849-1934). They could hear the *Missa Papae Marcelli* or that of

⁹⁶ Fassati diary, in Brocardo, p. 270.

⁹⁷ DB made efforts to give the event wide publicity. See [Bosco], *Rimembranza della funzione per la pietra angolare della chiesa sacrata a Maria Ausiliatrice in Torino-Valdocco il giorno 27 aprile 1865* (Turin: OSFS, 1865); *Il Galantuomo: Almanacco per l'anno 1866. Anno XIII: Strenna offerta agli associati alle Letture cattoliche* (Turin: OSFS, 1865), pp. 32-48; *Lotteria d'oggetti posta sotto la speciale protezione delle loro Altezze Reali il Principe Amedeo di Savoia duca d'Aosta... il principe Eugenio di Carignano, la principessa Maria Elisabetta di Sassonia duchessa di Genova... a favore degli Oratori maschili di Valdocco, di Porta Nuova e di Vanchiglia in Torino e per l'ultimazione di una chiesa in Valdocco* [Turin: OSFS, 1865]; *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio*; and other little works relating to MHC.

^{97a} Editor's note: See ch. IV, sec. 10, p. 81.

Rossini, the powerful renditions of *Tu es Petrus*, and stirring evocations of the battle of Lepanto with trumpet peals and soaring waves of song.

Spoleto went into decline, becoming a local sanctuary and even losing the title of Mary Help of Christians. It came to be known as Our Lady of the Stars. The church in Valdocco grew into a sanctuary of worldwide repute, as well as an active local center for spreading devotion to Mary Help of Christians far and wide.⁹⁸ Salesians heading off to America would never forget the ceremony in which they received their crucifixes at the feet of Mary Help of Christians. The Daughters of Mary Immaculate, originating in Mornese, would become the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. They, too, would head out over the world from the sacred ground of Valdocco, which was all the more sacred because it supposedly had been blessed by the blood of martyrs. According to one fantastic etymology, *Valdocco* derived from *Vallis occisorum*.⁹⁹ In one of his own dreams Don Bosco learned that the glorious martyrs of the Theban Legion venerated in Turin, Adventor and Octavius, had shed their blood on the precise spot where the Church of Mary Help of Christians was to be erected.¹⁰⁰

The grand painting of Mary Help of Christians by Thomas Lorenzone (1824-1902), which was admired and publicized by Don Bosco, effectively expressed the state of mind being nurtured by many Catholics. They were in the midst of a grave conflict and much in need of secure certainty. Mary stands in regal dress, holding Jesus in her arms and the scepter of her power in her hand. This is how Don Bosco himself describes her:

The Virgin, bathed in a sea of light and majesty, is on a throne of clouds. She is draped in a mantle held up by a band of angels encircling her and offering her homage as their queen. In her right hand she holds the scepter symbolizing her power, as if alluding to her words in the Gospel: *Fecit mihi magna qui potens est*. He, God, who is mighty has done great things for me [Luke 1:49]. In her left hand she holds the baby Jesus, whose arms are open to offer his

⁹⁸ Here would be the place to recall the solemn celebrations of 1871 commemorating the victory at Lepanto three centuries earlier and those enthusiastically recorded in the *Bollettino salesiano*: throngs of people, twinkling lights both inside church and outside in the evening, special graces every day of the well-attended novena. By way of example, see the *Bollettino* of June 1881: "Someone took the trouble to count the people who entered the Church of Mary Help of Christians by the main door and had the consolation of calculating some fifty thousand... a huge crowd... even the avenue and part of the Corso Regina Margherita, about 650 feet away, were filled with people, who were delighted when the main door was opened wide... In ten days some twenty thousand people received communion in homage to Mary Help of Christians... We wish some unbelievers of our time had been present... We would like to have heard what they would say upon hearing so much testimony in unison to honor Mary and... her effective help in relieving human miseries..."

⁹⁹ On the etymology of Valdocco, see ch. XV, n. 53.

¹⁰⁰ MO:209-10; BM 2:232-33.

graces and mercy to those who have recourse to his... mother. On her head is the diadem or crown that proclaims her queen of heaven and earth...¹⁰¹

As the hopes of Italian Catholics for many things faded after 1870, Mary Help of Christians continued to express their sense of struggle and conflict, now even more keenly felt and alive. The hymn composed by the cleric Joseph Bongiovanni (1836-1868) became a familiar one at the Oratory. A band of her sons implores Mary's help, assured that they will triumph even as she did over the serpent:

<i>Salve, salve, pietosa Maria,</i>	<i>Tu che un giorno col piè vincitore</i>
<i>Al tuo trono di gloria celeste</i>	<i>Gli calcasti la testa superba,</i>
<i>Uno stuolo di figlio vorria</i>	<i>Tu disarmare il crudo livore,</i>
<i>Il tuo aiuto potente implorar...</i>	<i>Tu di lui trionfanti ci fa.</i> ¹⁰²

The symbol of the Immaculate Conception pervades devotion to Mary Help of Christians. She is addressed and implored in the days of the novena with a whole series of vibrant prayers:

You see, O Virgin Immaculate, the advances being made in our city and countryside by the abysmal spirit of vice let loose in this vale of tears. Just look at the raging warfare everywhere against our most holy religion, the assaults of hell against the Church and its august Head, and the immense religious and moral harm entailed for civil society. O Queen of Heaven, take compassion on the enormous number of souls losing the right way amid the general confusion and running the risk of eternal damnation. Free Christian nations from the whirlwind of impiety and profligacy that now envelopes them...¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *Maraviglie*, p. 127. See also BM 9:110-11.

¹⁰² *Giov. prov.* (1885), pp. 478-79. The hymn was introduced into the 1873 ed., pp. 444-46.

¹⁰³ *Solenne novena di preghiere ed opere buone secondo i bisogni dei tempi in preparazione alla festa di Maria Santissima Aiuto dei Cristiani* (Turin: Salesiana, 1882), pp. 5-6. The author would be Paul Pius Perazzo (1846-1911), a militant layman and admiring friend and imitator of DB: see Mariano Manni, OFM, *Il servo di Dio P.P.P. capo-ufficio nelle Ferrovie dello Stato, terziario francescano* (Turin, 1929), p. 187. Other formularies for triduums and novenas to MHC can be found in DB's works: *La nuvoletta del Carmelo, ossia la divozione a Maria Ausiliatrice premiata di nuove grazie* (Turin: Salesiana, 1877), pp. 110-13: "O Maria Ausiliatrice, Figlia prediletta del divin Padre..."; *Giov. prov.* (1877?), pp. 143-44: "O Maria SS., aiuto potente dei Cristiani...," expanded in the 1885 ed., pp. 161-64.

In 1869 a four-page leaflet was put out. On p. 1 was a Zambelli reproduction of Lorenzone's painting. On p. 2 was "a prayer of St. Aloysius Gonzaga dedicating himself to Mary." On pp. 3-4 was an "Act in which one takes the Virgin Mary for one's mother." There was nothing warlike in the leaflet. Subsequently a picture was issued. On the front was Lorenzone's image in color. On the back was a prayer to the "Most Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculate, Mother of God and Help of Christians," with an indulgence granted by Leo XIII: "Virgin Immaculate, Mother of God and our Mother, Mary, you

On the last day of this pleasant novena, Virgin Immaculate, Help of Christians, we ask from your powerful patronage a very special grace, as a sure pledge of obtaining the healing of disordered humanity from the ills we have been deploring.

The terrible, incessant war being waged against religion by all sorts of means has upset the minds of human beings and divided their hearts. So we beseech you with all our heart, Most Holy Mary, to bring calm to all their minds and reunite their hearts. May all human beings have but one mind and one heart in doing good, and be submissive not only to the dictates but also the wishes and counsels of the Supreme Pontiff. With the help and blessing of heaven, may this concord of minds and oneness of purpose and work enrich the labors of all in defense of the good cause and ensure them the fullest measure of success.¹⁰⁴

Without Spoleto it is quite probable that Don Bosco would not have become the apostle of Mary Help of Christians, even though this particular devotion was practiced by people he knew well, e.g., Marchioness Juliet Falletti of Barolo (1785-1864) and Father Victor Alasonatti (1812-1865), both of whom were enrolled in the pious association associated with the Church of Saint Francis of Paola in Turin.¹⁰⁵ Without Don Bosco, on the other hand, the flame of

see the assaults being made everywhere by the devil and the world on our Catholic faith, in which we intend, God willing, to live and die in order to obtain eternal glory. Helper of Christians, repeat your ancient victories for the salvation of your children. They offer you their firm resolve never to join the ranks of heretics or sects. All Holy One, present our resolutions to your divine Son and ask him to give us the graces we need to remain firm in them to the very end. Comfort the visible Head of the Church, sustain the Catholic episcopate, protect the clergy and people who acclaim you Queen, and through your potent petitions hasten the day when all peoples will be gathered around the Supreme Pastor. Amen." MHC is the "invincible victor over the hellish serpent," who gives victory to her children, especially to the Roman Pontiff, in a novena of Giuseppe Riva, *Manuale di Filotea* (Bergamo, 1897), pp. 511-13.

¹⁰⁴ *Solenne novena*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁰⁵ From the records of the Confraternity established in Turin, we learn that Marchioness Barolo was enrolled back in 1827, Fr. Alasonatti in 1834. His "affiliation" booklet is preserved in AS 275 Alasonatti. We might also note that in Ivrea Bp. Moreno had instituted an Association of MHC in 1854. Its main purpose was "through prayer, the distribution of religious literature, and efforts to stop the circulation of bad literature, to petition for the preservation of the Catholic faith in our districts and the conversion of sinners and those who have gone astray." Thus his Association had aims very similar to those of the Association of St. Francis de Sales that was established in Genoa and then carried to other areas.

From a letter of Bp. Ghilardi (Mondovì, Dec. 28, 1852) to Abp. Fransoni we learn that at least that early Abp. Fransoni, originally from Genoa, was thinking of establishing in Turin a Pious Union of MHC. Its aim would be to coordinate Catholic efforts, at least on the level of charitable works, by relying on parochial structures. Bp. Ghilardi had a more ambitious plan: "When the Pious Union is solidly organized in the capital, the cen-

Spoleto would probably have been a passing episode typical of the decade 1860-1870, part of the climate of Marian eschatology and messianism before the collapse of the Papal State. Linking devotion to Mary Help of Christians to his own person and institutions, Don Bosco ended up giving it worldwide significance and scope.

Gradually the events of Spoleto lost their causative force in the Marian devotion at Valdocco. They faded into the memory of the faithful as items devoid of emotional force. There remained the fact itself: i.e., the sanctuary with the painting commissioned by that great servant of Mary, Don Bosco, and by divine inspiration entitled Mary Help of Christians. The *Ausiliatrice* of Don Bosco, unlike that of Spoleto, had not originated in a miraculous manifestation whose prophets were lay people and commoners. In the first phase of the devotion, the seer and prophet Don Bosco made efforts not to publicize heavenly communications. But soon the allure of the miraculous came to envelop the Valdocco painting and its place of worship. People saw a miracle in the fact that Don Bosco, in such "calamitous times," was somehow able to feed so many young people and, with only four pennies in his pocket, had given the go-ahead to the building of such a grandiose church. It was not just the ties between Don Bosco's church and that of Spoleto that dissolved in people's minds. So did the ties between the church in Valdocco and the bank of Commander Joseph Anthony Cotta (1785-1868), as well as those between Don Bosco's church and the purses of major contributors. People fervently avowed that every brick had been a favor or grace from Mary Help of Christians. The link between the church and banker Cotta had been forged by a healing epiphany. People focused not on his generous impulses but on his illness, Don Bosco's visit to him, and his astounding, immediate cure that was followed up by generous donations of money.

Two distinguished religious orders, the Cistercians and the Augustinians, had nurtured the trust of the common people vis-à-vis the Church of Our Lady of Consolation in Turin and that of Saint Pancras in Pianezza. The Church of Our Lady Help of Christians had its origin in Don Bosco, his poor and abandoned youths, and his writings. Later there would be the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. The Augustinians had publicized the *Wonders of Saint Pancras*, i.e., his life, his martyrdom, and the graces obtained

tral committee with an apposite prospectus can, through prayer, invite all the bishops of the State to follow the example of the archdiocese. When the diocesan committees are subsequently linked up with the central committee, the set-up of the Pious Union will be complete." See Giuseppe Griseri, "L'allontanamento e la mancata rinuncia di mons. Luigi Frasoni, arcivescovo di Torino," in *Bollettino storico bibliografico subalpino* 64 (1966), 482. Abp. Frasoni had planned to make the feast of MHC a diocesan one by way of thanksgiving upon his return to Turin. After his death and the events in Spoleto, his wish was fulfilled by Vicar Capitular Joseph Zappata. See the archives of the Turin archdiocese, *Provisioni semplici* (1863), 2:8.

through his intercession in Pianezza.¹⁰⁶ *The Wonders of the Mother of God*, of Mary invoked as Help of Christians, were publicized by Don Bosco in much the same vein. The book closes with a garland of favors and graces received through her intercession. The faithful are given indications how and in what circumstances they might proceed with their hopes and their supplications. He shows how effective it is to appeal to Mary Help of Christians, to visit her in her shrine at Valdocco, or even to call her to mind through pictures and the invocation of her name. There is good reason, therefore, to appeal to her wherever one may be and whatever need one may be facing, whether the evils at hand threaten an individual or entire nations.¹⁰⁷

In Valdocco, then, the absence of an initial wonder was largely offset by the whole web of wondrous works that followed. In the end there was no longer any real need to rely on the fact that Valdocco was holy ground watered by the blood of the saints of the Theban Legion. The holy ground gradually spread from Valdocco to other places, as the wonder-working image of Mary Help of Christians was perfectly or substantially reproduced. Mary Help of Christians was a sign of union between heaven and earth, a symbol of benevolence flowing down on people and places, wherever she was installed as she had been in Valdocco: in churches, chapels, classrooms, houses of former students or family members of the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians; at one's bedside, study desk, or workbench; around one's neck or in books of devotion and culture. The religious consciousness of countless people recalled the words of Mary's servant, Don Bosco: "Be devoted to Mary Help of Christians, and you will see what miracles are."

After 1870, the title "Help of Christians" (*Ausiliatrice*) is always presented in terms of events that make the point clear, reminding people of Church victories from Lepanto to Vienna, of the captivity of Pius VII, and of more recent "calamities."¹⁰⁸ The Church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin will now

¹⁰⁶ Carlo Giovenale [Barberis], *Delle meraviglie di san Pancratio, martire* (Carmagnola, 1655).

¹⁰⁷ To ward off the cholera in 1884, "the medals distributed in Italy alone numbered more than 400,000." See Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, *La Vergine potente, ossia alcune grazie concesse da Maria SS. Ausiliatrice* (LC: Turin, 1885), p. 117.

¹⁰⁸ Noteworthy is an allegory of the sanctuary due to the painter Giuseppe Rollini and described as follows in Bosco, *Maria Ausiliatrice, col racconto di alcune grazie ottenute nel primo settennio dalla consacrazione della chiesa a Lei dedicata in Torino* (Turin: OSFS, 1875), p. 49: "The angel messenger of God, in the flush of youth and strength, drives out *Heresy*, a group of figures: [1st] the *Reformation*, pictured as a woman, who flees in fear upon seeing the reverent angels adoring the Blessed Sacrament; in one hand she is carrying her adulterated Bible, while from her other hand drop, as so many blunt instruments, the mask of hypocrisy and the bribery money used to incite war on the Blessed Sacrament; 2nd, *Materialism*, pictured as an athletic man, holding a lighted torch to bring fire and destruction wherever the Reformation passes; he, too, is routed by the angel, seeming to tumble from on high head-first toward the ground."

affect all of Don Bosco's Marian language and piety. The faithful, too, will make their contribution. Such works as *Mary Help of Christians and Her Favors* and *Devotion to Mary Help of Christians*, as well as graces and favors published in the *Salesian Bulletin*, document how the faithful are coming to view Mary Help of Christians somewhat like Our Lady of Consolation, Our Lady of Succor, and Our Lady of Grace. The title or invocation is one that has demonstrated its efficacy in recent times. Don Bosco himself makes no distinctions. He urges people to ask Mary Help of Christians for any grace or favor, whether it concerns soul or body, self or others, the needs of peoples or the needs of the Church.

But when he acts out of the deepest roots of his Marian devotion, even he almost seems to forget the title he has done so much to promote. In 1867, for example, he was in anguish over the fact that attempts were being made to proscribe his *Saint Peter's Centenary* and put it on the Index. Bishop Gastaldi, still his friend at the time, had prepared a statement in his defense. As Don Bosco read it, in a moment of moral prostration, his heavy hand let just these words go on the paper: "Mary, help me." Note: not "Mary Immaculate" or "Mary Help of Christians," just "Mary." Then, coming to himself and remembering his favorite title, in a lighter hand he added "Help of Christians" before the other two words. So today, at the bottom of the page containing Gastaldi's neat lines, we can read the clumsily written words that bear witness to deep religious feeling rather than to neat calligraphy: *Ausiliatrice Maria, aiutatemi.*¹⁰⁹

On his deathbed his invocations are not to Mary Immaculate or Mary Help of Christians, but simply to Mary or Mother: "Mother, Mother... Mary Most Holy, Mary..." Mary is present in the role most essential for every Catholic: as the one who prays for us in life and in death, as the one who joins her Son in opening the gates of paradise. And that is how Don Bosco invokes her: "*In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum* (Lk 23:46: 'Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit') ... O Mother... Mother..., open the gates of paradise for me."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ See AS 133 Papi, S. Pietro; reproduced in Leonard von Matt and Henri Bosco, *Don Bosco*, trans. John Bennett, SDB (New York: Universe, 1965), plate 118.

¹¹⁰ MB 18:537; see also SWSJB:373-76.



THE LAST THINGS

1. Death and the hereafter in Don Bosco's life

We must not forget that death touched John Bosco at an early age. He lost his father before he was two. He remembered well what had gone on when all the others were leaving the dead man's room and he absolutely wanted to stay there:

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.¹

Other sorrowful deaths are recorded in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*: of Father John Calosso (1760-1830), his friend Paul Braja, and the student who drowned in the *Fontana Rossa*.²

The *Life of Aloysius Comollo* is fairly close to actual facts, so it helps us to gain a more direct appreciation of the feelings spurring Don Bosco in his evocations of the ultimate destiny awaiting human beings. Indeed in more than one event we can see continuity in themes and attitudes that will stick with Don Bosco for life. Death dominates his *Comollo* because of its connections with eternal reward or punishment. Looming in the background, to stir the emotions of the reader, is that final destiny. Eternity makes death a matter of fear and anxious uncertainty. The hour of death is uncertain, a person's behavior in those last moments is uncertain, and hence uncertain is the fate that awaits each of us for all eternity. Don Bosco offers his readers these considerations as the last words of his dying friend:

¹ MO:8.

² MO:42-43, 76-77, 85.

You do not yet know whether the days of your life will be long or short. However uncertain the hour may be, its arrival is certain. Act in such a way that your whole pattern of living is nothing else but a preparation for death and judgment.³

The theme is a typical and familiar one in ascetical and devotional books of the day.

Among such works known to Don Bosco or Comollo were Saint Alphonsus's *Maxims of Eternity* and *Preparation for Death*, as well as John Peter Pinamonti's *L'Inferno aperto al cristiano*. In *Comollo* we can detect the watermark of Comollo's mind and heart, which is that of Don Bosco as well. Like his friend, John Bosco betrays a certain anxiety about his eternal fate and a desire to know the secrets of the hereafter that awaits them. At bottom it is another manifestation of the basic concern for one's personal salvation. In the *Memoirs of the Oratory* we read this account by Don Bosco:

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 of 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."⁴

The biography of Comollo even more clearly highlights the link between this mutual promise and anxiety over salvation. As we read in it and the *Biographical Memoirs*, the dying Comollo said to his friend:

Now, before we part, I want to leave you some thoughts, in memory of our friendship. Friendship does not consist only in complying with a friend's request during life, but it also means carrying out after death whatever has been promised. Hence, the solemn pact we made of praying for each other's eternal salvation should last until we are both dead. Therefore, I want you to pledge under oath that you will pray for me as long as you will live!⁵

Around midnight of the night after Comollo's burial, when the memory of the deceased seminarian still weighed heavily on all, there was a terrible rumbling sound that terrified Don Bosco and the other seminarians in the dormitory with him. He and others heard the voice of his friend call out three times: "Bosco, I am saved!"⁶

³ *Comollo*, p. 61.

⁴ MO:151. Stories of this sort are frequent in hagiographical writings. See Valerio Ballardini da Venezia, OFM Cap (d. 1618), *Prato fiorito di varii essempi* (Venice, 1605), bk. 1, ch. 20, example 21, p. 214: "Bishop Vincent tells the story of two very devout and virtuous schoolboys who liked each other a lot. They made a pact that the first of them to die was to appear to the other after death, God willing. After some time one of them did die. A few days later, he appeared to his living companion. Asked how he was, the dead friend answered: 'I'm fine. I could not ask for more...since I am united with Christ in our heavenly home.'" This book was often reprinted in Venice: e.g., 1612, 1620, 1750.

⁵ *Comollo*, pp. 60-61. Cited here from BM 1:346.

⁶ MO:152. May I suggest that *Bosco, io son salvo!* might be the Italian translation of Piedmontese dialect *Bosch, mi son salv*. See also Bosco, *Nuovi cenni sulla vita del giovane*

To a large extent Don Bosco's anxiety was later transferred to a concern for his youths. Whispered words, questions thrown out in private conversations, notes left on pillows, and strips of paper offered as presents from our Lady brought up the same questions: How is your soul? What if you were to die tonight? Try to make up for the past with a better future. Why delay?⁷

Fully reflecting his basic outlook was his reaction against Father Aporti's pedagogy, which sought to avoid frequent mention of death to young students:

Do you want to know who Father Aporti really was? He was the spokesman of all who want to reduce religion to a mere sentiment. Never forget this: one of the evil features of modern pedagogy is its aversion to mentioning eternal truths and, above all, death and hell.⁸

The view seems to echo what Comollo had earlier recommended to his friend:

Fortunate are those who spend their days in holy and pious works and who are thus ready for that moment. If you are called by the Lord to guide the souls of others, never stop impressing upon them the thought of death and judgment and respect for churches...

People think of death now and then and believe that undesired hour will come, but they do not prepare themselves for it. When it comes, they are still in a muddle; and most of those who die in a muddle find themselves in a muddle for eternity!⁹

It is quite possible, then, that Comollo influenced Don Bosco's later stress on the importance of the Exercise of a Holy Death^{9a} and the mighty words of encouragement and advice to be given to pupils by their director. To Father Cagliero he wrote: "When you will give a talk to our confreres, earnestly recommend that they never neglect the monthly Exercise for a [Holy] Death. This is the key to all."¹⁰

Luigi Comollo (Turin, 1884), p. 107: "Comollo's voice was distinctly heard. It called out his companion's name three straight times and then said, 'I am saved'" (see MO:153).

⁷ See, e.g., BM 6:210-11, 222. The last expression is one of the *fioretti* given to his boys in 1862 in the name of Mary: AS 132 Fioretti, reprinted in Leonard von Matt and Henri Bosco, *Don Bosco*, trans. John Bennett, SDB (New York: Universe, 1965), plate 97.

⁸ DB reportedly said this to Fr. Francis Cerruti around 1885. See BM 2:168.

⁹ *Comollo*, pp. 61-62.

^{9a} Editor's note: The Exercise of a Holy Death was a monthly day of retreat in which Salesians and pupils meditated upon their eventual deaths. It stressed the reception of the sacraments of penance and communion as if for the last time and detachment from all earthly possessions and affairs.

¹⁰ Letter to Fr. John Cagliero, Turin, Aug. 1, 1876. Original ms. in AS 131/01 Cagliero; BM 12:195; *Ep.* 1477. But in rule 6 for applying the Preventive System, we read that the Good Night, too, is "the key" to everything: "Every evening after the usual prayers, before the pupils go to bed, the director, or someone in his stead, shall address a few kind words in public, giving advice or counsel about things to be done or to be

Comollo repeatedly read Pinamonti's meditations on hell. Although the subject was "sad and terrifying," he thought it better to consider the pains of hell while still alive than to be forced to experience them personally after death.¹¹ Aloysius Comollo had died in the "odor of sanctity," and that is what Don Bosco wanted for his youths as well.

The question of eternal salvation was also to play a major role in the emotional reactions of Don Bosco to any death and the effect it would have on those around him. Etched on the memory of Brother Peter Enria was the grief of Don Bosco over the first boy to die at the Oratory, Secondo Gurgo, and he recounted the story at the proceedings for Don Bosco's beatification:

At the Good Night Don Bosco was looking about... After a while he said: "Gurgo is the first boy to die here at the Oratory. He was well prepared and we hope he is now in heaven. I exhort you to be ever ready..." He could say no more, so great was his grief at the loss of one of his boys.

All the boys were profoundly moved by his feelings for one of their own. Nor could they forget his desolation when Mama Margaret was dying. So great was his grief that she insisted he leave the room for her sake.¹²

When Don Bosco contemplated death apart from emotional ties, on the other hand, he almost automatically surrounded the physical fact with anthropological and theological images and conceptions of both educated and uneducated people. As we saw in an earlier chapter, human beings are a composite of body and soul. Death is the "separation" of those two elements, the moment when the soul finally breaks away from its bodily bonds. Thus the body is seen in almost Platonic guise. It is a prison or heavy weight confining the spiritual soul to this wretched, matter-bound earth.

In his poem *The Dream of Gerontius* (1866), Cardinal Newman depicts the fading life of the dying person: the gradual extinguishing of psychic capacities, the imminence of dissolution, the fear of falling into nothingness, the sense of no longer comprehending anything or even being anything. Following the line of popular tradition rooted in the Middle Ages, Don Bosco places the devil alongside the dying person and depicts his hellish efforts to drive the person's soul into damnation. In those terrible moments come attacks of desperation, protest, and lack of faith and hope. The person wants this life here, not eternal life. He or she is ashamed to confess personal sins, is afraid that past confessions

avoided. He shall try to draw useful lessons from events which have happened during the day in the institute or outside. But his talk shall never be longer than two or three minutes. This is the key to morality, to the good running of the institute, and to success in education." (Cited from BM 4:383).

¹¹ Comollo, p. 48.

¹² Bro. Enria's testimony is in AS 110 Enria, quaderno 2, pp. 23-25; see BM 5:247. On the death of Mama Margaret, see BM 5:370-73.

were faulty or sacrilegious, and is terrified by the thought of the terrible judgment soon to be faced. Hymns tell the same story of the terror of that scene:

*Tutti i peccati tuoi
Verranno a te davante,
Ohimè! le gravi e quante
Vedranse colpe in te.
Qual candida colomba,
Qual innocente Abele,
Tu puro e senza fiele,
Eri creduto un dî.
Qual vista allor faranno
I tuoi pensieri indegni
E que' livori e sdegni
Che l'alma in sen nutri.*

*E se per vil rossore
Tacesti il tuo peccato,
Sarà in quel dî svelato
Per farti vergognar.
Monti, su me cadete,
Apriti, terra, omai,
Confuso griderai,
Ma invan sarà il gridar.
Del Giudice supremo
L'orribile presenza,
E la fatal sentenza
Fa d'uopo sostener.¹³*

*Spirato che sarò, ecco il giudizio,
Senza pietà il Signor
Pien d'ira e di terror
Mi cerca i conti.
Pietà, Signor, pietà d'un miserabile
Pietà d'un traditor,
Pietà, perdon, Signor,
Se no, son perso.
Mi vedo sotto il piè l'inferno aperto.
Demoni, Turchi, Ebrei
Bruciar, gridar co' miei
Tristi compagni.
Pietà, Signor, pietà d'un miserabile...¹⁴*

Thus Newman, a contemporary of Don Bosco but coming from a very different cultural milieu and possessing a sensibility rooted in other interests, imagines the temptations associated with a world that has doubts about the very existence of a hereafter. Don Bosco, on the other hand, frets and sings in the strains of popular tradition and piety, influenced by a theology that is firmly convinced of its spiritual and immortal values.

From a different standpoint death is seen as a stroke of bad luck, as a consequence of the first sin and hence as expiation for it. That brings up once again the great problem of suffering in the world.¹⁵

¹³ From the hymn, *Ahi! che l'orribil tromba*, found in various anthologies of hymns for mission weeks in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is also found in *Giov. prov.*, pp. 336-38.

¹⁴ Hymn on the four last things entitled *So, che ho da morir*. It, too, is part of popular Piedmontese tradition. Found in *Giov. prov.*, pp. 335-56.

¹⁵ See the Prayer for a Holy Death: "When I shall shed my last tear, the sign of my dissolution, do Thou receive it as a sacrifice of expiation, so that I may expire a victim

In a somewhat more optimistic vein, death is depicted as a favor or grace. God, motivated by his own mercifulness, substituted physical death for the eternal death that all humanity deserved to endure.¹⁶ But this continues to offer the best motives and reasons for death, at least when it is linked up with the death of Jesus Christ. The offering up of one's own death to God as a sacrifice of expiation is framed within a piety and theology that focus on the death of Christ as a sacrifice of adoration and expiation offered to God, the "destruction" of one's very existence being considered the sacrificial element.

There is also a joyous vision of death in Don Bosco's outlook, but the joy does not derive from any linkup with the resurrection. Don Bosco does not talk or write about death as the start of the glorified Christ's triumph in his members as well. For him it is a matter of ransom and recompense bought with the Savior's divine blood and merits. Here Don Bosco is in the line of Father Cafasso, Saint Alphonsus, and Bishop Bossuet, stressing that Jesus "humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). The ignominy of his death goes beyond the fact of the cross. Death itself is humiliating for human nature, which was degraded by its original sin of pride.¹⁷ The note of joy comes with a glimpse of the eternal happiness that will eventually succeed the years spent in this vale of tears.

2. Heaven

Even the thought of heaven must be the reflection of a good conscience if it is to offer a motive for hope. Only a good conscience can evoke and justify the joyous strains of a popular hymn that had made its way into Don Bosco's own milieu. The pure and elect rejoice in the perfect happiness of the heavenly city, and one can only long to find oneself there at last:

of penance... O God, Who hast doomed all men to die, but hast concealed from all the hour of their death..." (*Giov. prov.*, pp. 141-42; trans. SBPB, pp. 127-28).

¹⁶ *Misericordia*, p. 55: "Our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God and by sinning became unfit for paradise and liable to death. The merciful God changed eternal death into temporal death for them, comforting them with the promise of a savior." The inherent penalty of sin is placed in clearer relief in *Maggio*, day 20, p. 119: "Adam disobeyed God, and with that disobedience condemned himself and all his descendants to eternal death. But God soon came to the rescue with his mercy, changing eternal death for the soul into temporal death for the body and offering a means of salvation with the promise of the Savior."

¹⁷ *Maggio*, day 3, p. 30: "Consider as well what a great evil sin is. For, to make up for its consequences, the Son of God had to leave the delights of heaven, subject himself to all the miseries of our life, and end up dying on a cross."

Paradiso! Paradiso!
Degli eletti, o gran città,
In te gioia, canto, e riso,
Regna, e sempre regnerà.
Sono puri in te i diletti,
Non mai misti di dolor,
Paghi sempre son gli affetti,
Scevri affatto di timor.
O felice e lieto giorno,
Che a goderti volerò,
In che amabile soggiorno
Ivi ognor mi troverò!¹⁸

The idea of heaven is one of the sovereign ideas compensating for the dissatisfaction of life on earth. Into the process of inner healing Don Bosco often inserts the prospect of God's glory and the soul's salvation. These are motives for altruistic love. As he tells his own Salesians, one should be ready to endure heat, cold, hunger, thirst, and contempt when the greater glory of God and the welfare of souls demand that.¹⁹ No less natural to him is his confidence that a patch of heaven mends everything. These convictions were nurtured by his reading of ascetical theology, e.g., *The Sinner's Guide* by Dominican Luis de Granada, the *Introduction to the Devout Life* by Saint Francis de Sales, the *Preparation for Death* by Saint Alphonsus, and various lives of the saints. For his pages on heaven Don Bosco borrows specifically from the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and the *Month of May* by Jesuit Alphonsus Muzarelli. Their most suggestive images come from delights of sense and imagination: food, music, and things of beauty that satisfy our sight. All these things will be ours in heaven, deriving substantially from the sight and enjoyment of God himself.²⁰

¹⁸ *Giov. prov.*, pp. 340-42.

¹⁹ The statement is in *Const.*, ch. 13, p. 39; see BM 5:644, no. 12. But it reflects an outlook evident whenever DB discourses on the salvation of souls.

On the place of the glory of God in DB's spirituality, see ch. 7 in Francis Desramaut, *Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life*, trans. Roger M. Luna, SDB (New Rochelle: Don Bosco, 1979), pp. 209-44.

²⁰ *Giov. prov.*, "Del paradiso," pt. 48: "What a beautiful sight is the sky with its multitude and variety of stars! Add to that the sight of a beautiful day, of such a sort that the brightness of the sun does not hinder clear sight of the stars and moon..." Note this passage in St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, pt. 1, ch. XVI: "Consider a beautiful, clear night, and reflect how delightful it is to behold the sky bespangled with all that multitude and variety of stars. Next, join this beautiful sight with that of a fine day, so that the brightness of the sun may not prevent the clear view of the stars or of the moon..." (trans., New York: Harper, 1950, p. 26).

Maggio, day 28, p. 160: "Do we like music? But how sweet will be the music of the angels and saints in paradise! A single celestial instrument played for a few moments by a seraph transported St. Francis of Assisi out of his senses into ecstasy." See Alfonso Muz-

The note of heaven is particularly evident in Don Bosco's hagiographical and biographical writings. Its light shines out transparently in the faces and actions of those dying in holiness. There is the petition to Saint Joseph that the person may die in the arms of Jesus and Mary, as he did. There is the aspiration: "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with you."²¹ These seem to be almost transformed into the hagiographical interpretation of the last moments of Comollo, Savio, Magone, Cafasso, and Besucco. Aloysius Comollo, "upon hearing the names of Jesus and Mary pronounced, smiled pleasantly as if surprised by the sight of something wondrous and beautiful, and [died] without making any movement."²² In the case of Dominic Savio we read:

For a while he appeared to be resting, much like one who is lost in thought before making an important decision. Then he slowly came to, and with a smile he said clearly, "Good-bye, Dad, good-bye! The pastor wanted to tell me something else, but I can't remember... Oh, what a beautiful thing I see!" With these words and a heavenly smile on his lips, Dominic breathed his last, his hands crossed upon his breast. He did not make the slightest movement.²³

And so it goes with others. Magone "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."²⁴ Just before dying, Father Cafasso opened his eyes, seemed to want to speak, and raised his hands. His body seemed to be uplifted. Exclaims Don Bosco: "Yes, Mary has come to comfort him, Mary assists him, calls him."²⁵ When Francis Besucco was very near death, he moved his hands from under the coverlets and tried to raise them on high. Don Bosco took them and tried to put them down again on his bed. Besucco raised them again, "smiling, gazing steadily as if at some more consoling sight."²⁶ With only the necessary variations in detail, the same motif pervades the joyous death of just souls in all the hagiographical works of Don Bosco: the lives of Saint Martin, Blessed Catherine de Mattei of Racconigi (1486-1547), and Blessed Mary of the Angels, OCD (1661-1717), as well as portraits in his *Church History*.

The theme of going joyfully to the Lord at death (*Laetantes ad Dominum ibimus* [cf. Ps 122:1]), which Don Bosco drew from the literature on Saint Aloysius Gonzaga that was familiar to him (Virgil Cepari, SJ [1564-1631];

zarelli, SJ, *Il mese di Maria*, day 15 (Turin: Marietti, 1842), p. 62: "Do you like music? But how sweet will be the music of the angels and saints in paradise! A single celestial instrument played for a few moments by a seraph transported St. Francis of Assisi out of his senses into ecstasy."

²¹ *Giov. prov.*, p. 139; SBPB, p. 37.

²² *Comollo*, pp. 70-71.

²³ SDS:141.

²⁴ Cornell, p. 153.

²⁵ *Cafasso*, p. 58.

²⁶ See Cornell, p. 227.

Anthony Cesari, CO [1760-1828]; John Croiset, SJ; Paschal de Mattei, SJ),²⁷ acquired its full sense from the two poles of the human situation. We find ourselves journeying between this vale of tears and our eternal reward, between exile on earth and our heavenly home. In the heart of the Middle Ages this sense of exile and pilgrimage did not necessarily entail feelings of mistrust toward the persons and things from which one detached oneself. Pilgrims of that period concentrated their spirituality on the state they had embraced, a state that permitted them to immerse themselves more easily in the contemplation of God. Don Bosco's own day, however, followed in the wake of the pious literature of the late Middle Ages and early modern period, whether inspired by Saint Alphonsus or not. Consideration of our pilgrim status on earth more readily evoked the image of the world as a treacherous place with seductions and snares. Thus the *Laetantes imus* suggested the relief of a person finally getting out of our dangerous situation. Religious idealization readily tended to create symbols of the desired goal, to transfer some foretaste of heaven to surroundings that helped people to give themselves to God and to concentrate on the values regarded as the most sublime. Life at the Oratory was akin to that of heaven. Valdocco was a little island of security amid treacherous seas, a tranquil corner blessed with extraordinary graces from the Lord, a haven for young people in calamitous times. Many ended up remaining at this oasis during summer vacations, or even for their whole lives, because they saw it as the ideal spot for living rightly on earth and being assured of heaven.²⁸

3. Hell

In the nineteenth century popular religious literature was still nourished by themes and images derived from the Middle Ages. Hell was a place of sensual

²⁷ *Sei domen.*, day 9, pp. 36-37: "So, made aware of his approaching death, he chanted the *Te Deum* and joyfully kept repeating... 'We're going: *Laetantes imus*.'" See DeMattei, *Il giovane angelico san Luigi Gonzaga* (Genoa, 1843), Sunday 5, pt. 3, p. 57: "Made aware of his approaching death, he chanted the *Te Deum* and kept repeating with joy: *Laetantes imus*." For fuller details on *Sei domen.* and DB's treatment of St. Aloysius, see BM 2:281-85.

[Editor's note: On happiness in the face of death, see also More's *Utopia*, bk. 2, ch. 9, on Utopian religion.]

²⁸ See the comments of Francis Besucco on his happiness at the Oratory in Cornell, pp. 206-16. The originals of these letters are in a more incorrect Italian (AS 123 Besucco), but they substantially coincide with the text reproduced by DB. Regarding the Oratory in this connection, we should also mention the little letters of boys (AS 115) and the Salesians of the first days (AS 275): John Bonetti, John Baptist Francesia (1838-1930), Frederick Oreglia (1830-1912), Angelo Savio (1835-93), et al.

and spiritual pains. Its torments affected the five senses of the body as well as the three faculties of the soul: memory, intellect, and will. Fire was the universal instrument of punishment. With it went glowing hot sulphur, lead, a hellish stench, smoke stinging one's eyes, the sight of demons, never-ending howls of despair, the torments that human beings inflicted on one another, and the more or less refined tortures that the rebel angels tried on them. All were devoured by the worm of remorse, by the knowledge that they had traded away eternal riches for benefits of a fleeting instant.

Don Bosco adopted and repeated all these images, including the picture of hell as an underground place. They appear in *The Companion of Youth* and *The Month of May*, in sermons and dreams, and in his admonitions about saving one's soul and gaining heaven. His most direct sources for them are the *Preparation for Death* and *Maxims of Eternity* of Saint Alphonsus, but he may also have been influenced by Lawrence Beyerlinck (1578-1627), Paul Segneri, SJ, John Peter Pinamonti, SJ, Charles Gregory Rosignoli, SJ, Charles Ambrose Cattaneo, SJ (1645-1705), and Francis Anthony Biamonti. As pastors of souls, these authors made use of hell to lead readers to conversion.

To such terrifying images one need add only the theological concept of hell as eternal privation of God and as condemnation to every possible evil for depraved human beings. That is enough to explain them. But these images must also be seen as one of the major elements in the Catholic religious process of conversion, an element developed and honed by those who well understood the psychology of the people, preachers of retreats and parish missions. In the larger context of all preaching and religious practice, hell was only one phase. It was used to inculcate motivations that one wanted to nurture: fear, a firm resolve to fall at the feet of our heavenly Father as did the Prodigal Son, assurance of gaining God's forgiveness, and a determination not to lose sight of the supreme end for which we were created.²⁹

²⁹ *Giov. prov.*, p. 45, borrowing almost completely from St. Alphonsus's *Maxims of Eternity*, concludes its consideration of hell as follows: "Cursed by God, you will be thrown out of that blessed homeland, away from enjoyment of him and from the company of Mary, the angels, and the saints. So show repentance. Do not wait until you no longer have time. Give yourself to God. Who knows, this might be your last call. And if you do not respond to it, God may abandon you and let you plummet down into those eternal torments." As I have noted, DB is not just employing a literary genre here. He is trying to push a certain outlook. His boys were meant to be startled when DB, whom they knew to be a prophet, seemed to address to them the question: What if you should die tonight?

IX

HAPPINESS AND SALVATION: HUMAN AND CHRISTIAN YEARNINGS

1. *Happiness and religion*

Don Bosco was obviously not the first person to point up the relationship between happiness and religion. These basic matters are as old as the human race. Nor was he the first to link them with the basic concerns and desires of young people. When he addresses himself to young people for the first time in a systematic exposition, in his *Companion of Youth*, he merely expresses in fairly personal terms what he might have found in the *Angelic Guide*, a little ascetical manual for adolescents compiled by a Milanese priest in the middle of the eighteenth century.¹

The basic yearning recognized in human beings is the desire for happiness. This is the value to which all others are often subordinated, including religious values of the present and future life. Like the author of the *Angelic Guide*, Don Bosco accepts that viewpoint without argument.² It certainly did not conflict with his own outlook, which saw God as the goal supremely satisfying the human thirst for beatitude: "Man was born for pleasure."³

The boy with whom he begins a conversation in the Prologue of his *Companion of Youth* is obviously a boy who has faith. To the latter, religion (the Catholic religion) is a necessity. It is something that has to be accepted, at least before he appears before the divine judge, if he is to escape the eternal unhappiness of hell. But to him religion also seems to go very much against nature,

¹ *Guida angelica, ossia pratiche istruzioni per la gioventù: Opera utilissima a ciascun giovenetto*, by a secular priest of Milan, rev. and enlarged (Turin: Stamperia Reale, 1767). See Pietro Stella, *Valori spirituali nel "Giovane provveduto" di san Giovanni Bosco* (Rome, 1960), pp. 51-61.

² See nn. 4 and 5 below.

³ BM 7:306. *Maggio*, day 2, p. 24. It is the teaching of the catechism: "Q. For what end has God created you? A. To know, love, and serve him in this life and then enjoy him forever in our heavenly home." See *Compendio della dottrina cristiana ad uso della diocesi di Torino: Breve catechismo* (Turin: Paravia, [1844]), les. 1, p. 12

forcing people to move in a certain groove and demanding the renunciation of pleasures that people tend to seek by nature as sources of satisfaction.

But what nature is in question here? Is it the nature seen by Christian doctrine as weakened by sin and hence inclined to mistake for good what is actually bad for human beings even in this earthly life? Or is it a nature regarded as whole and healthy, a nature pursued in terms of its saner values?

The boy whose thoughts are scrutinized and publicly expressed by Don Bosco does not seem to make any such distinction. To him religion seems to be a life lived in the grace of God, a life in which everything is carefully weighed, ordered, controlled, and practiced in such a way as to avoid sins of thought, word, and deed. Religion is viewed basically as serving God, as fulfilling a service that necessarily restricts us to “a dull life without any fun or pleasure.”⁴

To enjoy success and pleasure in this life and the next, it seems that the boy might decide to dedicate himself to God’s service only at the very end of his life, at the moment of death. His conviction apparently is that he could never last for forty, fifty, or sixty years on “the difficult path of virtue, remote from fun and pleasure the whole time.”⁵

By examining the correspondence and autobiographies of contemporary figures (e.g., Vittorio Alfieri [1749-1803], Camillo Cavour, Santorre di Santarosa [1783-1825], and Massimo d’Azeglio), one could check out the extent to which the boyish attitude evoked by Don Bosco actually reflected an objective situation in the milieu of Piedmont. Knowing Don Bosco’s sensitivity to the “signs of the times,” we would not expect him to resort solely to a literary device. We would expect to find further evidence, for or against Don Bosco’s theses, in various contemporary books and journals (e.g., *Letture di famiglia* [Family Readings] and *La Gazzetta del popolo* [The People’s Gazette]).

⁴ *Giov. prov.*, pp. 5-6: “There are two main tricks which the devil uses to seduce the young. The first is to make them believe that serving God is synonymous with a dull life, a life without fun or pleasure... The other trick of the devil is to hold out the hope for a long life with the possibility of conversion in old age or at the time of death.” Cited here from SWSJB:74-75.

Guida angelica, p. 5: “One of the main tricks used by the hellish enemy to keep young people from undertaking a modest, recollected, and devout life in the flower of their years is to promise them a long life and the convenience of converting to God at the end of their lives.”

⁵ *Giov. prov.*, p. 28: “The first trap that the devil is wont to set for your soul is to suggest that you could never last for 40, 50, or 60 years on the difficult path of virtue, remote from fun and pleasure the whole time.”

Guida angelica, p. 71: “One of the temptations and main tricks used by the devil to try to seduce unwary youths from the service of God is to suggest to them that they could never last for 40, 50, or 60 years on the path of virtue with such strictness and circumspection, continually combatting their enemies and remote from fun and pleasure the whole time.”

The mentality he confronts here is not really that of the atheist. It is the mentality of people ranging from Christianity to deism, from Catholicism to other Christian denominations, from a life wholly immersed in the systematic practices inculcated by the pastoral ministry to a life tending toward the bare minimum of external requirements in sacramental practice and a focus on those things that might ensure greater economic, cultural, and emotional well-being in “civil society.”

Don Bosco will not accept the objection that young people could or did make to the “service of God.” It is not a dull life at all, far from it:

We see that those living in God’s grace are always happy. Their hearts are content even in afflictions. Those who give themselves up to amusements, on the other hand, live an exasperated life. They try to find peace in their diversions, but they only become increasingly unhappy: *non est pax impiis* [“There is no peace for the wicked”: Is 48:22].⁶

This categorical reply probably represents the point where Don Bosco focuses all the coordinates of his own personal experience and theology.

As early as his youthful years in Chieri, his experience had been marked by the impact of the Society for a Good Time (*Società dell’Allegria*). Its motto could well have been the expression, “Serve the Lord with gladness” (Ps 100:2), which we find in the Prologue of *The Companion of Youth*. Don Bosco himself tells us it was an oft repeated phrase of Aloysius Comollo when he was a school student in Chieri.⁷ Personal experience may well have convinced Don Bosco that there really was no conflict between religion and happiness. In all likelihood he was inwardly convinced of the view that found expression in the famous statement by Saint Philip Neri: “My children, enjoy yourselves. I don’t want scruples or melancholy. Just don’t commit sin.”⁸ In Don Bosco, too, we find melancholy and joy compared and contrasted.

But there may be more involved here. Let us consider Don Bosco’s reaction to the youthful objections presented in his *Companion of Youth* and later works in the light of his years at the Ecclesiastical College. His reaction may not be simply or directly a response to the mentality taking shape in the modern age: a mentality leavened by the Enlightenment, certain that human betterment and well-being can be achieved by breaking down the barriers to liberty posed by

⁶ *Giov. prov.*, p. 28.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5. Also see *Comollo*, pp. 23-24.

⁸ The maxim can be found, for example, in [Stefano A. Burzio, OMV], *Un mazzolin di fiori ai fanciulli ed alle fanciulle, ossia antiveleno cristiano* (Turin: Paravia, 1836), p. 243. Writing about joy, Burzio expresses himself in much the same terms as Don Bosco: “My children, you like to be happy and lighthearted, and you don’t like sadness and melancholy. You are right. I commend you. Not only I but Jesus Christ himself urges you to holy joy, to stay far away from sadness and melancholy” (pp. 222-23).

many societal superstructures and by promoting the advance of scientific knowledge on all fronts. Don Bosco does not seem to be thinking directly of the Enlightenment mentality that viewed historical Christianity as an oppressive superstructure to be done away with. He does not seem to be aiming merely to confirm in youthful minds the absoluteness, connaturality, and necessary observance of Christian values. He also seems to have in mind the rigorism that was forthrightly attacked at the Ecclesiastical College as equally responsible for modern apostasy and the decline of faith. In his *Life of Michael Magone* he writes:

I most heartily recommend simple things that do not frighten or tire [the Christian faithful], especially young people. Fasts, long prayer and similar harsh practices are either put aside or endured with reluctance and difficulty.⁹

This was meant as a criticism of rigorist pastors of souls who laid intolerable burdens on the shoulders of the simple faithful, mainly by way of sacramental penance or as a condition for absolution. Such priests discouraged and diminished the spiritual life of the people, causing them to stay away from eucharistic communion without good reason. Special care had to be taken with young people, said Don Bosco, his words on the subject fraught with his own daily educational experience and hence of pedagogical importance. More and more insistently Don Bosco reiterates that young people are fickle and need careful supervision:

It is natural for young people to be flighty and to keep changing their minds, so that not uncommonly they choose one thing today and another tomorrow; today it may be virtue to a high degree, tomorrow the opposite. Without careful guidance, an education which might have achieved success may well end up in disaster.¹⁰

Deeply convinced from personal experience that joy and the Christian life are not in opposition, Don Bosco as Christian educator is careful to dose out religious instruction and practice to young people so that they may come to share his conviction in ever more mature ways. He wants them to realize that the Christian way of life is not sad by nature, that in fact it tends to broaden into increasing joy. The boys themselves could verify this in Don Bosco within the confines of the Oratory, as well as in the biographies of holy persons such as Philip Neri, Rose of Lima, Aloysius Gonzaga, and Aloysius Comollo.¹¹ Indeed they could come to see that true joy is part and parcel of the Christian way of

⁹ Cornell, p. 134.

¹⁰ *Savio*, p. 37; cited here from SWSJB:53. The same theme appears in the biographies of Magone and Besucco: Cornell, pp. 134, 201.

¹¹ There is much anecdotal material on the simple wit and wisdom of DB, which suited a youthful milieu and the spirit of a peasant boy. As for others, DB himself draws attention to them in *Giov. prov.*, pp. 12-13: "Happy is the person who has begun to ob-

life, able to bear comparison with any pleasure that might be sought in things opposed to God's law.

Theology leads Don Bosco to formulate his assertion in peremptory terms, which certainly do reflect his own innermost conviction. He states flatly that religion is "the only source of true happiness."¹² Only "religion and the grace of God can make human beings content and happy."¹³ "Only the continuous practice of our religion can make us happy in time and in eternity."¹⁴ Just as the only "true" religion is the Catholic religion, so the only true joy must be the joy derived from knowing, loving, and serving God as he wants. Since only God can satisfy the human heart, only religion can offer true joy, drawing it from God through his own preordained means.

Notice the adjective "true," which Don Bosco also uses to designate the one and only religion and the one and only Church of Christ. With regard to happiness, the adjective "true" adequately evokes an habitual frame of mind in Don Bosco. Its meaning is akin to that of Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) in his treatise *On True Religion* and Saint Louis de Montfort in his work on true devotion to Mary. There can be no true happiness—i.e., full, lasting, and without deceit—unless we live "in grace" and act as "true" Christians in the "faithful observance" of God's precepts. Young people tend toward happiness, i.e., the joy that is manifested even in recreation and games. But true happiness is to be found only in those in whom God's grace abides.

2. *The false happiness of the wicked*

The motto, "There is no peace for the wicked," serves almost as a counterpoint to the maxim, "Serve the Lord with gladness."¹⁵

serve [God's] commandments in adolescence. This truth was known by the saints, especially by St. Rose of Lima and St. Aloysius Gonzaga... Who was more jovial than St. Aloysius Gonzaga? Who more joyous and witty than St. Philip Neri?" It would be desirable to have the testimony of young people as to their reactions to such questions from DB. E.g., did these 19th-century youths really regard Aloysius Gonzaga as an ideal that wholly corresponded to their desires and needs?

¹² Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione* (Turin: Paravia, 1855), p. 46: "Despite poverty and wretchedness, joy began to abide in the family because all were practicing religion, the only source of true happiness." This is basically a translation from *Un mari comme il y en a beaucoup, une femme comme il y en a peu* (Caen-Paris, 1853), 1869 ed., p. 34: "Malgré leur misère, la joie était dans la maison, car tout le monde pratiquait la religion, seule source d'où découle le vrai bonheur."

¹³ Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione*, p. 48.

¹⁴ Cornell, p. 230.

¹⁵ *Giov. prov.*, p. 28; see n. 6 above.

In *The Companion of Youth*, the wicked are generally those who give themselves to disordered pleasures. Their circle is pretty much the same one we find described by Saint Alphonsus, Saint Leonard of Port Maurice, Paul Segneri, and others in the milieu of Italian popular religion. Describing the end of human beings along the lines of Alphonsus's *Maxims of Eternity*, Don Bosco notes that the devil (the embodiment of all suggestions contrary to the Christian life) lets many learn religion but then acts to make sure that they do not put it into practice. These people "know that they have been created by God to love and serve him, but by their actions they seem to be seeking nothing but their eternal damnation."¹⁶ Writes Don Bosco: "If I tell a certain boy to frequent the sacraments or do a little praying every day, he tells me, 'I got other things to do. I gotta work, I gotta play.' My God! and don't you have a soul as well?"¹⁷

After the events of 1848, the meaning of "wicked" became more comprehensive. It now included the fruit of Don Bosco's new experiences in a world infiltrated by religious indifferentism and Protestantism. *The Power of a Good Upbringing* and the *Droll Tale of an Old Soldier of Napoleon* present characters from the ranks of craftsmen and laborers, shifted from France to Piedmont, who pose their objections.¹⁸ These people are inclined to give up the practice of religion, which in their lives does not link up with an adequate familiarity with Christianity. Other works present the sinister figure of the Protestant minister corrupting the faith of simple people with money,¹⁹ or profile the apostate. The bitter anti-Catholic polemics of the latter betray the unhappy life he is leading after having abandoned the true religion that he still admires and loves in his heart.²⁰ There can be no true peace for such people, says the Catholic press. "No

¹⁶ *Giov. prov.* (1885), p. 18. This text is not in the 1st ed.

¹⁷ *Giov. prov.*, pp. 33-34.

¹⁸ The source of the *Novella amena di un vecchio soldato di Napoleone* is *Papa civil, ou petites réponses à un vieux de la vieille* (Caen-Paris, 1853), from the author of *Un mari comme il y en a beaucoup*. The objections dealt with are the kind found in a very popular work by Louis Gaston de Ségur, reprinted often in Turin: *Brevi e famigliari risposte alle obbiezioni che si fanno più frequentemente contro la religione* (Turin: Marietti, 1852).

¹⁹ All the anti-Protestant LC of the first five years tend to be lively and somewhat tart in tone. Among the little works bearing DB's name or acknowledged by him as his own, we should note: *Dramma: Una disputa tra un avvocato ed un ministro protestante* (Turin: De-Agostini, LC a. 1, fasc. 19, Dec. 25, 1853) and *Raccolta di curiosi avvenimenti contemporanei* (Turin: De-Agostini, LC a. 2, fasc. 3-4, Apr. 1854). Highly polemical is [Louis Rendu], *Del commercio delle coscienze e dell'agitazione protestante in Europa* (Turin: De-Agostini, LC a. 2, fasc. 13-14, Sept. 10 and 25, 1854).

²⁰ See *Vita infelice di un novello apostata* (Turin: De-Agostini, LC a. 1, fasc. 18, Dec. 10, 1853). Among DB's explicitly known works see: *Due conferenze tra due ministri protestanti ed un prete cattolico intorno al purgatorio e intorno ai suffragi dei defunti, con appendice sulle liturgie* (Turin: Paravia, LC a. 4, fasc. 12, Feb. 1857) and *Massimino, ossia incontro di un giovanetto con un ministro protestante sul Campidoglio* (Turin: OSFS, LC a. 22, fasc. 1, Jan. 1874).

peace for the wicked,” reiterates Don Bosco. The restlessness of the former priest of the Order of Saint Camillus, Louis DeSanctis, is presented as a sincere religious search by Waldensian hagiography and biography; Don Bosco depicts it as a consequence of apostasy. Don Bosco asserts that what basically led DeSanctis outside Catholicism was the desire to give free rein to his disordered passions. What prevents him from returning to Catholicism is his entanglement in the consequences of his sin, not his involvement with another sect. He finds himself tied to a woman, no longer having the strength to restore his ties to the Catholic priesthood.²¹

Don Bosco likes to bring out the worth of “true” happiness by comparing it with the “happiness” of the wicked. Typical cases are those of the Waldensian girl Josephine, of the father of the artisan boy Peter, of Michael Magone, and of the apostate-turned-Protestant minister who meets Massimino on the Campidoglio.

The case of Josephine, as presented by Don Bosco, seems to have been partially inspired by that of Judith, another Waldensian girl, whose adventures make up an apologetic tale that Don Bosco cited in his *Religiously Instructed Catholic* and later published in his *Catholic Readings*.²² Josephine tells a Catholic girl friend that for some time she has felt drawn to Catholicism. She sees her Catholic companions “happy in this life” and confident about the future life. She no longer feels at peace in her religion. Her companions tell her that she is “in great danger of going to hell” if she does not become a Catholic. These words are “so many thorns in her heart” that only increase the melancholy she has been feeling for some time.²³ But she also fears the “thousand dangers” she will surely face if she decides to become a Catholic: “Indeed, I fear that my own father will throw me out of the house or have me put in jail.”²⁴ She would like to rid herself of her anxieties and sins, but she fears that public revelation of them will give some wisecracker the opportunity and means to torment her.

In the outlook of Don Bosco, she suffers “a good,” as Dominic Savio will a few years later. She, too, is accosted one day by the parish priest as she mopes among her happy Catholic girl friends. She is not sick. She is not the victim of any misfortune. She has no need of chestnuts or bread because “her relatives are solid proprietors.” It is on this foundation that Don Bosco builds his discourse of complete liberation:

²¹ See n. 32 of ch. III, and corresponding text (p. 36).

²² Paolo E. Barone (d. 1887), *Giuditta, ossia scene valdesi, 1845* (Turin: Baricco and Arnoldi, 1846); LC 1883; cited in *Catt. istr.*, pt. 2, trat. 19, p. 99.

²³ Bosco, *Conversione di una valdese: Fatto contemporaneo* (Turin: De-Agostini, LC a. 2, fasc. 1-2, Mar. 1854), pp. 12-14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

PRIEST: So you are a Waldensian?

LOUISE [her Catholic friend]: That is precisely what is bugging her.

PRIEST: What! Tell me about it.

LOUISE: Father, I'll tell you the situation. This friend usually comes to play with us. When she sees us so happy after our sacred services, she becomes sad and her heart is discontented.

PRIEST: Now I see the situation. You see, girls, only Catholics can have true peace of heart because only in the Catholic religion do we human beings have the true means for gaining the Lord's graces and blessings. They are the means we need to avoid falling into sin, and the timely remedies to get rid of sin should we be so unfortunate as to commit it...²⁵

Don Bosco will describe the crisis of Peter's father in similar terms. On the eve of his first communion Peter is sleeping like a little angel. His father—a drunkard, swearer, and wife-abuser—contemplates him and compares his own life with that of his son: "There must be another kind of happiness besides that to be found at the bottom of a bottle. I am envious of the contentment of my son, of his happiness. His contentment seems to be pure and unalloyed."²⁶

Upon entering the Oratory, Michael Magone continued to be a wild scamp: "He was happy provided he was only jumping around and enjoying himself without reflecting that true happiness must have its origin in peace of heart and tranquility of conscience."²⁷ He is boisterous in the playground, bored in church. Then "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."²⁸ Like Josephine, he had begun to notice that his playmates were completely content: happy at play, calm in church, and happy leaving church. He told a companion the causes of his own sadness:

"I am sad because I see my companions 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."

[The other boy countered:] "I don't understand how the devotion of others should be the reason for your sadness."

"The reason is easy to understand: my companions, who are already good, practise their religion and become better still whilst I, who am a [rascal], cannot take part, and this is the cause of great remorse and uneasiness."²⁹

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

²⁶ Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione*, p. 27. Compare *Un mari comme il y en a beaucoup*, p. 19: "Il y a donc une autre bonheur que celui qu'on trouve au fond d'une bouteille. Je porte envie à celui de mon fils."

²⁷ Cornell, p. 118.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 118-19.

Whatever basis in fact may underlie these various accounts, the approach and elaboration of Don Bosco's own discourse is clear. A comparison between the happiness of those in grace and those who are not in grace will eventually bring out what is true joy and what is false joy, because "there is no peace for the wicked." Ascetical, apologetic, biographical, and pedagogical works, though they may start off from differing situations, all bring out clearly the import of Saint Philip Neri's maxim: where there is grace, there is joy; where there is sin, there is melancholy. But Don Bosco's thrust is not just a maxim or a warning: enjoy yourselves, so long as you do not sin; scruples and gloom have no place in my house. For Don Bosco this is a thesis, a response, based on his own experience, to the basic need of human beings in his own day, who have been imbued with the Enlightenment focus on well-being. It also derives from the Augustinian themes that permeated spiritual literature from the Middle Ages on and that took on new vigor in the age of Bérulle, Pascal, Bossuet, Fénelon, and Bourdaloue.³⁰

3. *The sufferings of the just and the wicked in this life*

According to what Don Bosco depicts, the life of even the person in grace is marked by suffering. Josephine leaves the Waldensian Church and must endure misunderstanding, opposition, and persecution, just as Louis DeSanctis had to do when he left the Catholic Church. The boy Peter did not win prosperity. But "despite poverty and wretchedness, joy and peace began to abide in that house because all were practicing religion."³¹ Michael Magone died at the age of fourteen, spitting up blood (probably due to tuberculosis). Don Bosco was far from thinking that his death was a punishment for a life of vice. He might have writ-

³⁰ Louis Bourdaloue, SJ (1632-1704), may stand for all here. He was "the most Jansenist of Jesuits," imbued with Augustinianism and, like the Pascal of the *Pensées* and the *Provincial Letters*, profoundly affected by the slippage of faith, the inconsistency of many Christians, and the spread of the notion that the Christian life is tedious and unnatural. He cites the exclamations of a great saint: "Ah, Lord, you have deceived me in a nice way. When I enrolled in your army, the precepts of your Gospel message led me to expect warfare and assaults; and I was afraid my weakness would succumb before them. I imagined a road sad, painful, tedious, without rest, without enjoyment. Instead my heart has never been more content, my spirit never more tranquil and at ease. How many others have borne similar testimony! But the unfortunate thing is that people do not believe it, that they are unwilling to try it and see for themselves" (Bourdaloue, *Pensieri sopra diversi punti di religione e di morale*, on "the narrow path of salvation and what can more forcefully get us to enter it" [Venice: Baglioni, 1733], p. 25).

³¹ Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione*, p. 46.

ten what he wrote about Saint Rose of Lima or Saint Aloysius Gonzaga,³² and he did practically say the same thing in a different way. For all practical purposes, Magone kept a content and joyous heart in the midst of his afflictions, and he was taken to heaven before wickedness could corrupt his heart in this life.³³

Writing about Magone, Savio, Besucco, Cafasso, and Comollo, Don Bosco liked to stress their quest for vexatious penances. These afflictions were sought and endured out of love for Jesus, who endured so much for us, and out of a desire to ensure one's eternal salvation with a penitential life.

The mix of joy and affliction in the lives of good people did not upset Don Bosco's basic convictions. The reason may be sought in the *theologia cordis* that still survived in Don Bosco and his milieu. According to the Augustinian theology that flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a mix of affliction and disordered pleasures impregnates all being, weighing on the heart and causing it to gravitate outside its natural axis, God. In the just, however, the heart is staunch and impermeable to the bitterness emitted by earthly goods when they are held and loved inordinately. When the just embrace the cross and press it to their bosoms, on the other hand, their hearts are inundated with greater joy. God distills from the cross the honey of his divine goodness to a degree unknown—according to the plan of divine providence—insofar as other objects capable of enticing the human heart are concerned. Fitting in here is the common expression cited by Don Bosco in his *Companion of Youth*: “We see that those living in God's grace are always happy. Their hearts are content even in afflictions. Those who give themselves up to amusements, on the other hand, live exasperated lives.”³⁴ Equally in accord with the outlook of Don Bosco would be similar statements and reasonings in the works of others—Saint Alphonsus Liguori, for example:

Saint Francis de Sales, finding himself on one occasion beset on every side with tribulations, said, “For some time back the severe oppositions and secret contrarieties which have befallen me afford me so sweet a peace, that nothing can equal it; and they give me such an assurance that my soul will ere long be firmly united with God, that I can say with all truth that they are the sole ambition, the sole desire of my heart.”³⁵

St. Ignatius of Loyola said, “There is no wood so apt to enkindle and maintain love towards God as the wood of the cross.”³⁶

³² *Giov. prov.*, pp. 12, 58.

³³ Cornell, pp. 111-12 (*Magone*); and even more explicitly in *Besucco*: “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” (Cornell, p. 216).

³⁴ *Giov. prov.*, p. 23.

³⁵ St. Alphonsus, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, ch. 1, AW 6:310.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

By means of afflictions, notes Saint Alphonsus, God purifies the soul striving toward him out of love. Tribulations are necessary to reach union with him, and so they are provided by God himself.³⁷

In the writings of Alphonsus we can also find examples of the common theme that the life of the wicked is a sad and empty one:

A certain missionary of a religious Order, while in the Indies, was one day standing to witness the execution of a person under sentence of death, and already at the scaffold; the criminal called the missionary to him, and said, "You must know, Father, that I was once a member of your Order; whilst I observed the rules I led a very happy life; but when, afterwards, I began to relax in the strict observance of them, I immediately experienced pain in everything; so much so, that I abandoned the religious life, and gave myself up to vice, which has finally reduced me to the melancholy pass in which you at present behold me."³⁸

Citing the thought of the Jesuit Louis de la Puente, Saint Alphonsus says of the sweet things of life:

Though the sweet are pleasant to sense, they invariably leave behind them the bitterness of remorse of conscience, on account of the imperfect satisfaction which, for the most part, they afford; but the bitter, when taken with patience from the hand of God, become sweet, and dear to the souls who love him.³⁹

The context of the Jesuit's presentation was more ethical and ascetical. In Saint Alphonsus, Don Bosco, and their contemporaries, the pastoral concern is more evident. They are countering the criticism of unbelieving libertines that was penetrating more and more into Christian circles, even those of the common people. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the ascetical thrust of "good people" also was viewed as testimony and proof against the false joy of the "strong spirits." Saint Alphonsus's context is that of pastoral action among the people. Don Bosco's more specific concern is educational. He is a priest trying to form upright citizens and good Christians.

4. Young people and eternal salvation

Giving oneself to God early in life is one of Don Bosco's most common and frequent pieces of advice to young people. The reasons and point are clear enough. One should give oneself to God as soon as one hears his voice because

³⁷ Ibid., p. 313.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 311.

³⁹ Ibid.

there is no certainty that the Lord will repeat his effective appeals before one's death. There is no longer any opportunity for conversion after death; one's fate is sealed for all eternity. The connection between early dedication to God, life, and assuring oneself of eternal salvation is plain as day. But Don Bosco's appeal to young people goes beyond that and is even more insistent. Besides contrasting true and false solutions to the fundamental desires for joy and happiness, in his *Companion of Youth* he offers a thesis that is summed up in a biblical phrase and that he will reiterate often:

However, if God were to grant you a long life, listen to what He has to say about that: "To his dying day man will stay on the road which he chose when he was young; *adolescens juxta viam suam etiam cum senuerit non recedet ab ea.*" That means if we start out with a good life when we are young we shall remain good through our later years, and our death will be peaceful and open the gate to eternal joy. But, on the other hand, if bad habits take hold when we are young, we shall often keep them throughout life until death, a truly frightening prospect of a most dismal eternity.⁴⁰

To the yearning for happiness Don Bosco offered a reply that quickly shifts his discourse into a religious key: only religion can offer true happiness. Once in that key, he can easily insert themes that deal with salvation from devotional literature for young people. His main sources are works on Saint Aloysius Gonzaga and those that go back to Charles Gobinet, the teacher of Bishop Fénelon.

The biblical maxim (Prov 22:6) just cited above finds the same interpretation in Don Bosco that it does in Gobinet: "The salvation of a youth ordinarily depends on his youthful years."⁴¹ Gobinet explains:

It is clear in Sacred Scripture that the young person will never give up in old age the way of life he has begun. In other words, that seldom happens. First habits are imprinted deeply in the minds and hearts of young people.⁴²

⁴⁰ *Giov. prov.*, pp. 6-7: cited here from SWSJB:75. Note the *Guida angelica*, p. 6: "But if on the other hand you deviate from the straight path of virtue. . . , your bones will be filled with the vices you mistakenly followed in your youth, an all too certain token of the most unhappy eternity awaiting you in hell!"

⁴¹ *Giov. prov.*, p. 12. Charles Gobinet, *Istruzione della gioventù nella pietà cristiana* (Turin, 1831), pt. 1, ch. 7, p. 43: "Salvation ordinarily depends on the time of youth." Spiritual literature on "the great business of salvation" is abundant from the middle of the 17th century to the end of the 19th. On St. Alphonsus, see his *Opere ascetiche: Introduzione generale* (Rome, 1960), pp. 212-16. For France during the Restoration see Elisabeth Germain, *Parler du salut? Aux origines d'une mentalité religieuse: La Catéchèse du salut dans la France de la Restauration* (Paris, 1967), pp. 95-131.

⁴² Gobinet, pt. 1, ch. 8, p. 46: "Those who have pursued virtue in youth ordinarily preserve it easily throughout their lives."

We thus see what “ordinarily” means here. There is seldom a radical change in life-style.

Gobinet offers a second reason. Experience teaches us that youth is the time of the greatest temptations and struggles. Appealing to Saint Augustine, he writes:

The most violent temptations have to do with sensual pleasures. Although temptations are common to every age of life, it is certain that they are ordinarily stronger and more frequent in youth. [Hence] when one has surmounted them at that age, one later finds it very easy to overcome them during the rest of his life.⁴³

A third reason is this: “God adds his graces and multiplies his blessings to those who have lived worthily in youth, in order to keep them on the right road they took with the help of his celestial graces.”⁴⁴ On the other hand, “those who give themselves to vice in youth find it very hard to change. It often happens that they cannot break away and are damned unpardonably.”⁴⁵

Writes Don Bosco: “A life of evil begun in youth will all too easily remain the same until death.”⁴⁶

What is the cause of this almost inescapable chain that will drag a person down to eternal damnation? Wherein lies the difficulty of breaking the bonds forged in youth?

Responds Gobinet: “The difficulty lies in three things. The first is the incredible force and strength of a bad habit. Once it has struck root in a soul, it can be uprooted only with great trouble.”⁴⁷ It is not just that habits by nature “last a long time and are hard to give up.” The dogma of original sin also has something to tell us. Bad habits are those “that stick most tenaciously and are most difficult to change because our already corrupted nature finds more regret in switching to goodness than horror in remaining with wickedness.”⁴⁸ Perverse habits contracted in youth are more tenacious than other habits formed later: “Since the passions have not been moderated by virtue in this early period of life, they grow with age, giving increasing vigor to vice, reinforcing them every day, so that they end up being indomitable.”⁴⁹

Moreover, God holds back his hand more and more from people who despise and abuse his graces. Divine grace continues to diminish in their hearts, and “the domination of the devil continues to grow as sins multiply and vices

⁴³ Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 49.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 57.

⁴⁶ *Giov. prov.*, p. 12.

⁴⁷ Gobinet, p. 57.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 58.

flourish.” The soul ends up being completely under bondage to sin. Once it arrives at the full measure of iniquity, it is abandoned by God “to its eternal damnation.”⁵⁰

It is understandable why Gobinet sees conversion becoming more and more difficult with the passage of years and the deeper rooting of vices. In this connection Gobinet brings up the personal experience of Saint Augustine.⁵¹ Going back in his *Confessions* to his sinful years, Augustine attributes his youthful depravity to the idleness of his sixteenth year. He also cites other causes; his father’s lack of concern, his own scorn for his mother’s many admonitions, the bad example of his peers, and the great freedom granted him by his relatives.

These external causes fostered the process of internal perversion. At the age of nineteen he was shaken by his reading of Hortensius. But “vice and the worst inclinations had so won over his heart” that he remained in them from the age of nineteen to the age of thirty despite strong thoughts of conversion and efforts to pick himself “out of the mire.” Thus vices contracted during three years of his adolescence held him captive for twelve whole years, and he fell into “ever greater disorders.” Gobinet sums up:

As impurity leads to error and blindness, so it plunged him into the heresy of Manichaeism, in which he remained nine years. To this it added a continuing state of concubinage, in which he lived from the time of his first depravity to the day of his conversion.⁵²

After presenting the fall into vice and sin, Gobinet moves on to describe the toilsome journey toward the life of grace. The return is interpreted as purification. Sin has penetrated all the fibers of Augustine, darkening his mind, weakening his will, and burrowing into the rock-bottom core of his spirit: his heart. God’s grace went to work in the same order. Much time was needed “to heal his intellect of ignorance and error.” But that did not suffice:

His intellect was convinced, but his will did not yet surrender. As he himself tells us, evil habits had such a hold on his heart that they made him fear its emendation even more than death. He had to uproot the vices of ambition, avarice, and impurity one after the other. But even when he had given up the first two, the damnable impurity, the worst of all, still stood fast and resisted. He was so lost in it that he thought it utterly impossible ever to free himself of it, thinking it would be utterly miserable to be deprived of such infamous sensual pleasure, the true source of all evils.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 60.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 61-67. [Editor’s note: See *Confessions*, bk. 2, ch. 1-6.]

⁵² Ibid., p. 62. [Editor’s note: See *Confessions*, bk. 3, ch. 4; bk. 5, ch. 5-6.]

⁵³ Ibid., p. 65-66. [Editor’s note: See *Confessions*, bk. 6, ch. 5, 11, 15-16.]

The anxious concern, prayer, and weeping of his mother helped. So did the prompting of his better friends. But even “after strong interior movements of divine grace, the completion of his conversion required a miraculous voice from heaven intoning: *Tolle, lege; tolle, lege.*”⁵⁴

Augustine’s hymn to the God that had converted him was the most suggestive argument that Charles Gobinet presented to young people in order to confirm his theses. Don Bosco accepted the substance of those theses: i.e., that “a life of evil begun in youth will all too easily remain the same until death and inevitably lead you to hell.”⁵⁵ But Augustine’s name does not actually appear in the considerations of *The Companion of Youth* regarding salvation and its usual dependence on one’s youth. Nor is there any stress on sensual pleasures or impurity. Don Bosco restricts himself to cases that in this context may have appeared to him to be less suggestive but equally effective:

If you see people of advanced age given to the vices of drunkenness, gambling, cursing and swearing, then you can almost certainly say: these vices began in their youth—*Adolescens juxta viam suam, etiam cum senuerit non recedet ab ea.*

Then, basing himself on the *Angelic Guide*, Don Bosco writes: “One who serves the devil will be melancholy. He may try to pose as content, but his heart will always ache and say to him: You are unhappy because you are God’s enemy.”⁵⁶

Besides noting the difficulty of undergoing conversion after one has given in to depravity, Don Bosco brings up motives more directly suggested by De-Mattei and Saint Alphonsus. In his *Six Sundays* and *Companion of Youth* he notes that, quite aside from God’s reaction to the moment when iniquity reaches its peak, no one can “bargain with death...; life and death are in the hands of the Lord, and He does as He pleases.”⁵⁷ The thread of life may be cut any day, any moment. No one can be sure of being in the state of grace at the moment of death. What Scripture tells of Solomon could have happened to Saint Aloysius Gonzaga. According to the Augustinian view, if Aloysius had given in to sin in his youth, he would have hardened in his guilt, resisted graces that otherwise might have been efficacious, and the gifts of the Lord would have decreased instead of increased. If Aloysius had waited for a late age to give himself to the Lord, “he certainly would not have become such a great saint, since he died very young, and he might even not have been saved.”⁵⁸ But as Saint Robert Bellarmine suggests, more or less in the light of his theology of congruence,

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66. [Editor’s note: See *Confessions*, bk. 8, ch. 6-8, 11-12.]

⁵⁵ *Giov. prov.*, p. 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6. Cited here from SWSJB:75.

⁵⁸ *Sei domen.*, day 7, p. 31. The title of the consideration is: “St. Aloysius gave himself early to God.”

Aloysius experienced prevenient grace from earliest infancy. He was one of those called by the Lord to his vineyard at the first hour of the day. Once he came to know the Lord, he responded fully and heroically in return: "And the Lord filled him with so many graces that he became a great saint."⁵⁹

By different paths Don Bosco arrives at the same conclusion, stressing the idea that salvation ordinarily depends on the time of youth. Of Gobinet's Augustinian theology and Bellarmine's congruent theology Don Bosco might well have said the same thing that he said of scholastic systems on grace in general. He did not care whether a system was loose or strict, so long as it helped to save more souls. Another statement by Don Bosco in his *Six Sundays* deserves notice here:

All those now in hell once had the intention of giving themselves again to God, but death intervened and now they are lost forever. And in the midst of those flames they keep crying out: "Fools that we were, we have totally miscalculated": *nos insensati, erravimus* [see Wis 5:4-6].⁶⁰

The statement may seem to be too strong, too general, too peremptory. But we must see it in the same context as that of Saint Leonard of Port Maurice and his missions to the people, or of Saint Alphonsus in his *Preparation for Death*. The listener or reader is a faithful Catholic who ponders the last things, shudders, prays, and under the impetus of divine grace is devoted to Mary; but he or she nevertheless is in danger of remaining attached to the sordid pleasures of earth. Here again Don Bosco's aim is to get his young people to dedicate themselves to God early.

5. *What giving oneself to God early means*

Giving oneself to God, then, is what ensures true happiness and guarantees eternal salvation. It entails a series of divine and human interactions, as we gather from other equivalent expressions: complying with divine grace, answering God's calls, following the Lord, accepting his invitations.

Some differences may be noted. Addressing himself to sinners in his *Maxims of Eternity* and *Preparation for Death*, Saint Alphonsus speaks of "giving oneself to God" in the sense of the act or moment in which one renounces sin

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 31-32. Bellarmine's scheme is explicitly cited by DeMattei: "In ipsa pene infantia vocatus est ad vitam perfectam... Praeventus gratia Castitatis..." See *Il giovine angelico san Luigi Gonzaga* (Genoa, 1843), pp. 75, 91.

⁶⁰ *Sei domen.*, day 7, pp. 31-32. [Editor's note: See also BM 2:285. For DB's approach to theological systems, see DBLW, pp. 88-91.]

and resolves to convert to God. But in his mind this “giving oneself to God” naturally tends toward total self-giving, i.e., toward complete detachment from creatures (from disordered affections), toward complete conformity of human desires with God’s wishes, which is in fact the summit of union with God and of perfection or holiness.⁶¹

Don Bosco is addressing himself to young people. He sees their situation similar to that of the converted sinner. Giving self to God means initiating a series of choices. When it comes to later choices, such as choosing a state in life, then Don Bosco prefers to use such expressions as “following the divine call” or “following the voice of God who calls.” Giving oneself to God, then, is always making a response to a divine appeal and hence linked with the idea of “knowing God.”⁶²

Like many spiritual writers familiar to him, Don Bosco himself does not seem to have any special liking for the scholastic terminology used to describe the nature and efficacy of actual grace. He prefers to show how God reveals himself in creation, in the history of the Jewish people, in the works of the divine Savior, in church history, and in the circumstances of life. Repeating the catechism, Don Bosco says that God created us to know, love, and serve him in this world and be happy with him in the next.

It is worth noting how readily the idea of “knowing” takes on emotional coloring in the pages of spiritual writers, much as do the notions of God’s call and human responses to it. Even in one who is still a sinner, knowing good and knowing God already indicate entrance into the force field of God and goodness. Knowing evil, on the other hand, also implies some awareness of repugnance, of its incompatibility with human nature and human dignity, even though one may be under its sinister suggestive influence and in danger of being caught in the snares of sin and the devil.

The conversions of Michael Magone and the Waldensian Josephine, as well as the choice of a state in life, are the results of a process of “knowing” with various stages: illumination of the intellect by the rays of the divine sun, recall of the goal to be pursued, the attraction and interior force permitting a person to overcome all weakness and pursue unhesitatingly the path to eternal life.⁶³ In

⁶¹ See Karl Keusch, *La dottrina spirituale di sant’Alfonso Maria de’ Liguori* (Milan 1931), pp. 171-438.

⁶² A typical instance is the “Prayer to know one’s true vocation.” See *Giov. prov.* (1863), pp. 178-79; Bosco, *Il cattolico provveduto per le pratiche di pietà con analoghe istruzioni secondo il bisogno dei tempi* (Turin: OSFS, 1868), pp. 587-88. Aloysius Comollo “often asked some of his companions to pray that the Lord *would enlighten him and let him know* whether or not he was called to the ecclesiastical state” (*Comollo*, pp. 25-26).

⁶³ Cornell, pp. 121-22. Bosco, *Conversione di una valdese*, pp. 7-8. *Giov. prov.* (1863), p. 179: “If you, Mary, do not share a ray of the divine Sun with me, what light will enlighten me? If you do not instruct me, Mother of uncreated Wisdom, who will

other words, the knowledge prior to following God is readily sensed to be a sapiential knowledge of the heart as well as the mind. It is the type of knowledge Jesus hints at when he speaks to the Samaritan woman: "If you knew the gift of God..." (John 4:10). It prompts him to exclaim: "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike" (Matt 11:25). It is the knowledge that the Good Shepherd has of his sheep (John 10:14-15). Listening means listening with one's heart and whole being. It also means recognizing and acknowledging God's call, as the Psalmist urges: "Oh, that today you would hear his voice: 'Harden not your hearts...'" (Ps 95:7-8). Knowing God's grace means having a deeply affective knowledge of it, a knowledge that naturally impels us to give ourselves to God more and more and to bend our hearts ever more intensely toward the good.⁶⁴ The relationship between knowledge and heartfelt response is one of timeliness, and that is part of God's providential plan.⁶⁵

As we noted above, DeMattei appeals to Bellarmine to bring out the point that God's grace lovingly anticipates us and calls us to serve him at various hours of the day. It is the parable of the vineyard owner who summons laborers to work in it (Matt 20:1-16). Aloysius Gonzaga was privileged to be called at the first hour. The initial principles of natural, rational life in him were already "anticipated by admirable strokes of grace."⁶⁶

Aloysius recalled and often affirmed to his spiritual directors that from the first stirrings of reason, thanks to a heavenly illumination, he turned to God in the

teach me? So hear my humble prayers, Mary. Guide and settle me in my doubt and hesitation onto the right path leading to eternal life." At the age of 12, Bl. Mary of the Angels told her mother of her resolute will to remain with the Cistercians of Saluzzo, "moved by the holiness of those virgins, love of solitude, and even more by God's strong invitation" (Bosco, *Vita della beata Maria degli Angeli, carmelitana scalza torinese* [Turin: OSFS, LC a. 13, fasc. 11-12, Nov.-Dec. 1865], p. 29).

⁶⁴ On the biblical significance of "knowledge" and "knowing," see Rudolph Bultmann, *Connaitre* (Geneva, 1967). Insofar as Catholic spiritual literature is concerned, some points are brought out by Leon Reypens, "Dieu (connaissance mystique)," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 3 (Paris, 1957), cols. 883-929. But much more could be gleaned from a specific analysis of individual works: e.g., Jean Baptiste Saint-Jure, SJ (1588-1657), *De la connaissance et de l'amour du Fils de Dieu* (Paris, 1634); and the remarks of Antoine LeGaudier, SJ (1572-1622), on "knowledge of self and God" in an often reprinted work, *De natura et statibus perfectionis* (Paris, 1643; Turin, 1903). On the plane of popular religious practice one might also examine the catechetical literature on "knowing, loving, and serving God."

⁶⁵ The theme of "giving oneself to God early" pervades his first consideration in *The Companion of Youth*. It is found in DB's biographical and hagiographical writings. These are matched by the theme of "following one's vocation promptly," which is elaborated in the Introduction to the *Const.* and in biographical profiles of deceased SDBs.

⁶⁶ See n. 59 above.

fullness of love and dedicated himself to God completely. He reasonably regarded this as one of God's principal benefits and humbly referred to it as the time of his conversion.⁶⁷

Aloysius responded to God. Finding him ready and disposed, God granted him the "beautiful privilege" of purity. New responses and merits are the bases for new gifts. From purity of mind and heart the Lord led him to easy elevation of self to Him, and Aloysius found it difficult to detach himself from ecstatic prayer of union: "As Aloysius's heart was spotlessly clean, so his mind had eyes suited to discern the beauty of God's goodness."⁶⁸

If we scan Don Bosco's biographies of Savio, Magone, and Besucco in the light of DeMattei, we shall quickly realize that they reflect a very similar viewpoint. The exemplary and singular "virtues" of these youths were not simply the results of environment and education based on human factors alone. Nor were they the results of an innate youthful tendency toward the ideal. The matter is much more complex in Don Bosco's eyes. Divine and human factors intervene to produce episodes and personalities that Don Bosco does not hesitate to call holy and perfect.

⁶⁷ DeMattei, *Il giovane angelico*, p. 77.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

X

HOLINESS AS AN IDEAL FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Just as Don Bosco links the human quest for happiness with the need to give oneself to God, and to do so early in life, so he links the urge to incarnate an ideal and assert one's personality with religious values.

Here again we do well to go back to the *Life of Aloysius Comollo*, the earliest documentary source in print of Don Bosco's experiences and particularly trustworthy when it is corroborated by his own school notebooks and the *Memoirs of the Oratory*. Reading these documents, we become convinced that Don Bosco's own life ideal was incarnated in a few symbolic figures: Father Calosso, Father Banaudi, and Comollo himself, minus those elements that went against the grain of Don Bosco's own tendencies and experiences. He sublimates his friend Aloysius Comollo into an ideal of the Christian life, an "example for anyone, lay or religious," because of his virtues. Those virtues may not have been extraordinary, but in their own way they were singular and accomplished.¹ As an educator, Don Bosco liked to propose him as a model worthy of imitation, like Aloysius Gonzaga in a sense. In Comollo's case, the power of suggestion was further heightened by the fact that the testimony came straight from a devoted friend and companion of old.

In 1847, three years after the book on Comollo, Don Bosco renewed his call to holiness in *The Companion of Youth*: "Give me an obedient boy and he will be holy."² It is not an uncommon saying. Other spiritual writers had addressed the same invitation to boys and girls.³ In 1851 Leonard Murialdo even had the same exhortation to holiness for the endangered young women at the Good Shepherd Refuge. God came into the world not only to redeem us and

¹ *Comollo*, p. 81.

² *Giov. prov.*, p. 16.

³ [G.B. Isnardi], *Voce angelica, ossia l'Angelo Custode che ammaestra una figlia*, p. 40: "So put your will into the hands of your guide and let yourself be guided, if you want to please the heart of Jesus Christ and become holy" (ed. S. Benigno Canavese: Salesiana, 1889¹⁴, p. 64).

save us, but also to convert us into saints: “To all he addresses his command of love: *Sancti estote* [Be holy: Lev 20:7]. Let us then beseech him to make us saints, great saints.”⁴ In *The Companion of Youth* Don Bosco urges young people to say repeatedly the ejaculation: “Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, make me holy.”⁵ But Canon Joseph Cottolengo (1786-1842) had already urged those whom he sheltered to say a brief invocation along the same lines, and Don Bosco could well have known it: “Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, make us holy.”⁶

In 1855 came the sermon that caused a crisis in the life of Dominic Savio. The role of this boy in Don Bosco’s circle was such that I think we do well to analyze this episode more closely.

1. *Dominic Savio: the ideal realized*

Don Bosco described the whole episode in a work that became a source of reflection and resolutions for many. He writes:

Dominic...had been at the Oratory about six months when he heard a sermon on the easy way of becoming a saint. The priest stressed three points which deeply impressed the lad’s soul: it is God’s will that we all become saints; it is not hard to become a saint; there is a great reward in heaven for those who become saints. The talk fell like a glowing spark on Dominic’s heart, setting it afire with intense love of God.⁷

There is no point in trying to determine the exact month and day when the sermon was given by this preacher, whom tradition has identified as Don Bosco more by instinct than by any compelling proof. Dominic had arrived around the end of October; so the sermon would have come around March or

⁴ Armando Castellani, *Il beato Leonardo Murialdo* (Rome, 1966), 1:338.

⁵ *Giov. prov.*, p. 81.

⁶ Pietro Paolo Gastaldi (1827-1902), *I prodigi della carità cristiana descritti nella vita del ven. servo di Dio Giuseppe Benedetto Cottolengo* (Turin, 1892⁴) 2:417. Also see [Stefano A. Burzio], *Un mazzolin di fiori ai fanciulli* (Turin: Paravia, 1836), p. 16: “Every morning and evening, ask Jesus and Mary for their blessing before some image of them. Say: Jesus, my God, and Mary, my mother, bless me and make my soul holy.”

⁷ SDS:63. My remarks on Dominic Savio are largely based on the observations of Giovanni Moiola, “La santità di Domenico Savio,” in *Enciclopedia dell’adolescenza* (Brescia, 1964), pp. 721-40. Other useful comments can be found in: Renzo Titone, “Santità giovanile e normalità psichica,” in *Ascesi e personalità* (Turin, 1956), pp. 186-212; [Joseph Aubry], *Directoire pour l’année Dominique Savio: 8 décembre 1955* (Marseilles, 1954); idem, “Un tout jeune saint: Le message d’une canonisation d’adolescent,” in *La vie spirituelle* 92 (1955), 381-404.

April, during Lent or Easter, perhaps during the triduum of spiritual exercises that was customary as the first signs of spring came to the Piedmont countryside. Nor is there much point in trying to figure out what circumstance may have suggested the preacher's theme. Perhaps it was the epistle for the Second Sunday of Lent (1 Thess 4:1-7), in which Saint Paul tells us: "For this is the will of God, your holiness."⁸ Perhaps it was simply the generic theme itself, elaborated on many different occasions by Father Murialdo.

It is important, on the other hand, to remember Dominic's own condition: his own heightened predisposition toward religious values, which had been cultivated in early childhood and transplanted to the favorable soil of Don Bosco's Oratory. For Dominic, Valdocco was a milieu of city novelty, cultural elevation, and comradeship. There he fraternized with older adolescent apprentices, usually from the district, with clerics, and with younger students. All made the rounds between workplace or study place in the city and Don Bosco's house.^{8a} In mid-1855 there were fewer than a hundred boys and older adolescents. The group shared a heightened feeling of loyalty to the Church, especially right then when the laws suppressing ecclesiastical entities were imminent or already on the books and fervor had been enkindled by the proclamation of the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception. And they were under the direction of a holy priest; to them, truly an affectionate father; to the priests and parishioners of hill and dale, the respectable editor-in-chief of the *Catholic Readings*, head of a school, a man blessed by the Lord and a wonder-worker, a man from their own class and countryside.

From what Don Bosco writes later in biographies of other boys, we can guess some of the specific arguments and themes he may have used in the sermon that touched the spirit of Dominic Savio. He would have pointed out what holiness was, differentiating essential elements from accidental or extraneous ones. He would have brought out the beauty of holiness, perhaps presenting the example of one or more of his favorite saints. They included the happy saints who had great sympathy for young people, such as Philip Neri, and the angelic ones whose joyfulness was matched by vigilant concern for virtuous living. Among the latter was Aloysius Gonzaga, who was once asked in the midst of play what he would do if an angel informed him that the Lord would summon him to judgment in fifteen minutes: "He promptly replied that he would go right on playing because he was sure that such diversions were pleasing to the Lord."⁹

⁸ The Second Sunday of Lent fell on March 4, Easter on April 8.

^{8a} Editor's note: Until the fall of 1853 all the boarders, both artisans and students, worked or took their schooling in the city. Gradually DB began to set up workshops at the OSFS, starting with cobbler and tailor shops in 1853. In the fall of 1855 he began offering academic courses (*ginnasio*) at the OSFS.

⁹ *Giov. prov.*, p. 21.

On the second point, the easiness of being a saint, Don Bosco would have indicated the means whereby any youth could become a great saint. He would have pointed out the innate link between sanctity and the duties of one's state in life, the service God asks of us for our age and condition. For young people that would include joy, study, piety, purity, obedience, love of God, and love of neighbor.¹⁰

Finally, Don Bosco would have discussed the reward of holiness, evoking what he had written in *The Companion of Youth* about the great recompense waiting in heaven for those who have been virtuous on earth.

Born on April 2, 1842, Dominic Savio had just entered adolescence in 1855. Small and sickly, he nevertheless gave many indications of precocious judgment despite embarrassing shortcomings in using his intelligence, assimilating data, and maturing in his cultural and educational training. Moreover, he found himself in a milieu where education was based on elementary texts; and the texts for young people were largely devotional, ascetical, and anecdotal.¹¹

In Dominic's mind there arose the image of the hero worthy of imitation, the symbol of what he himself wanted to be: the saint, the inspired person who was close to God and blessed among human beings.¹² Thus ideal and reward stood luminously together in Dominic's mind, but the second point of the sermon seems to have faded away and been replaced by other latent elements in his adolescent conscience. His means to become an heroic saint would be mortification, prayer, and penance. He would immerse himself in God through solitude. Dominic withdrew into isolation and began to pursue his ideal. Seeing himself trying to practice the means he had envisioned, he instinctively began to measure his own capacities against those required to realize his ideal. He began to feel fearful and somewhat discouraged. Would he succeed at trying to be a saint?

¹⁰ I am obviously venturing a hypothesis based on what DB himself would propose in his biographies of Savio, Magone, and Besucco. See also his Good Night of Sept. 10, 1867, reported in BM 8:403-05. It reiterates scriptural passages found in Gobinet and *The Companion of Youth*.

¹¹ My remarks are based on book lists cited by young people for the years in question: 1854-56 (AS 38 Torino, S. Franc. di Sales 51). Here I summarize documentation that I presented in a lecture series at the theology department of the UPS during the year 1964-65. My lectures dealt with DB's biography of Savio.

¹² Here again my comments are conjectural, based on Moioli. They find some justification in DB's report of his enthusiasm, subsequent reflection, and silent isolation: "The talk fell like a glowing spark on Dominic's heart, setting it afire with intense love of God. For several days he appeared more silent and serious than usual, so that his companions and I noticed it... I suggested that he never skip recreation with his companions" (SDS:63-64). The suggestion does not necessarily imply that Dominic isolated himself physically, but the diminution of Dominic's joy does indicate that some sort of psychic isolation did occur. This is assuming that DB's account here is accurate in every detail. There are no serious reasons for doubting that it is.

Now he began to move in the realm of his dreams. Outside reality did not interest him. Like all adolescents, he was inclined to resolve his problems on his own. He did not yet feel himself an adult, but he wanted his autonomy. We can picture the stimuli that continued to come from his surroundings: the games of his companions, now insipid and meaningless to him; the whole round of scholastic activities and duties; and the daily summonses to Mama Margaret's table. These things were not really his own.

At this point the educator intervened. Although Don Bosco did not teach classes and often withdrew to the Ecclesiastical College to write, he did not lose sight of his young people. His eye was on them, especially during recreation and from the vantage point of his confessional:

For several days he appeared more silent and serious than usual, so that his companions and I noticed it. Fearing he might be getting sick again, I called him and asked what was wrong.

"Nothing," he answered. "I feel so good!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I feel a yearning, a need, of becoming a saint!"¹³

Dominic then repeated some of the things he had heard in the sermon and how they had affected him: "I never knew I could sanctify myself so easily, but now that I know I can be happy and holy too, I most willingly want it! Absolutely, I must become a saint! Tell me what to do, so as to begin." Under the prompting of the educator who had become close to him, in the presence of the man in whom he had confidence, Dominic took the first step that might enable him to overcome the break between ideal world and real world. He opened up to Don Bosco, who now appreciated the change that had taken place in the mind of this boy. Don Bosco wisely reinforced the value of the means that he had probably suggested in his sermon and added words needed to deal with the first signs of frustration:

I praised his decision but insisted he must not worry because the Lord's voice is not heard in the turmoil of the soul. I told him that first of all I wanted a steady, moderate cheerfulness. I advised him not to weaken in his duties of study and prayer, and I suggested that he never skip recreation with his companions.¹⁴

¹³ SDS:63.

¹⁴ SDS:63-64.

2. *The easiness of becoming saints*

Dominic's crisis sheds light on the value that Don Bosco saw in his assertion that it was easy to become a saint. He was not talking about taming the means so as to make easy something that was difficult. He was not watering down the ideal or suggesting second-rate versions of sanctity. The point that Don Bosco apparently wanted to bring out was that holiness consists not in doing extraordinary things but in carrying out one's proper duties. Adolescents basically must do the same thing if they want to become saints. The duties he lists for Dominic are those he suggests to Magone and Besucco: study, joy, and piety.¹⁵ Using facetious hyperbole to summarize it all for Camillo Gavio upon his arrival at the Oratory, Dominic said:

It's simple. Here we make holiness consist in being very joyful. Our only worry is to avoid sin as the great enemy of our souls which steals God's peace and grace from our hearts. We try to do our duties well and willingly pray. You can start right now and take as your slogan, *Serve the Lord in holy joy!*¹⁶

On the basis of his own reflection and experience, Don Bosco seemed to be well aware of the psychological ground on which he was working. His raw material was a still maturing personality of great fragility, one which lacked the connective tissue of solid logic and a firm will.¹⁷ He tells us this in his biography of Savio and reiterates it in his biographies of Magone and Besucco, as well as in *The Preventive System*. Thus he is pedagogically objective, considering not only the abstract value of educational means but also the selective and assimilative capacities of young people:

My advice is to be careful that we suggest easy things, lest we frighten or tire the faithful—especially the young. Fastings, long prayers, and like austerities are usually dropped after a while or carried out grudgingly and with no heart. Stick to easy things, but be faithful to them.¹⁸

Attention to the adolescent predisposition enabled Don Bosco to see the value of an ongoing education based on roots planted deeply in early childhood. With regard to the "spirit of prayer," for example, he makes this point in his biography of Besucco:

¹⁵ Explicitly in the life of Besucco: Cornell, p. 191.

¹⁶ SDS:106-07.

¹⁷ "Then you are the tailor and I'm the cloth. Take me with you and make me into a beautiful vestment for him." "I am afraid your health won't hold out under the strain of school." (SDS:50) "It is natural for young people to be flighty and to keep changing their minds... Without careful guidance, an education which might have achieved success may well end up in disaster." (SDS:53)

¹⁸ Life of Magone: BM 6:6.

It is extremely difficult to awaken in the young a taste for prayer. Their restlessness makes anything that calls for real concentration a bother and a burden. The young man who likes and knows how to pray is indeed very fortunate because the springs of divine blessings shall be accessible to him always.¹⁹

Under this aspect Don Bosco brings together things he had stated in more theologically oriented terms in *The Companion of Youth*, where he stressed the importance of giving oneself to God early in life.²⁰ Experience reinforced the conviction he had stated there in terms of the lives of Saint Rose of Lima and Saint Aloysius: “Having begun around the age of five to serve the Lord fervently, by the time they were adults they had no taste except for the things of God; and so they became great saints.”²¹

¹⁹ Life of Besucco: SWSJB:130.

²⁰ On the philological level, as we have seen, his theological solution of the question, based on scriptural passages and theories about grace, reveals to some extent the influence of Gobinet, the *Guida angelica*, and DeMattei. The biographies give more of a role to values based on personal experience and pedagogical reflection. I see no reason to assume from this any direct influence of Rousseau or others after him who stressed the importance of education in early childhood. In the spiritual literature for adolescents produced in DB’s own milieu, we can find the same attitude and the same attention to theology and real-life data.

See, e.g., Burzio’s *Un mazzolin*: “Speaking of society in general, especially in rural areas and villages, with regard to children of either sex, we can say that if things are not done before puberty, it will be too late to do them after puberty. If something is left undone at the age for solidly planting the seeds of holy fear of God in children’s hearts, where will they get it later amid all the stimuli drawing them closer to evil and farther away from that holy fear? In the world evil behavior is at home and virtue is an alien. If the hearts of children are nurtured tenderly and industriously in the holy fear and love of God, we will see the world reformed, indeed made holy.” (pp. 3-4) “Bending to goodness the first developing natural inclinations of temperament and will..., the Holy Spirit assures us of persevering in that course ordinarily until old age and of making a person happy in life as well as in death. *Adolescens iuxta viam suam etiam cum senuerit non recedet ab ea* [Prov 22:6]: *Bonum est viro cum portaverit iugum ab adolescentia sua* [Lam 3:27]...” (ibid., p. 7). Note the last maxim in a Notice published by DB in 1849 (BM 3:425; allograph extract with DB’s comments and five printed copies, done by Paravia, in AS 131/04).

In Gobinet, too, we detect experiential data amid theological presentations on fallen nature and eternal salvation: “The levity of their natural spirit at that age ordinarily makes it difficult for them to give due consideration to thoughts of their salvation. They readily take in cognitive information, but it is soon wiped away by their spirit... They pray without attention or feeling. They recite prayers without thinking of what they are saying. They speak to God with their lips, but not with their hearts” (*Istruzione della gioventù*, pt. 5, Tratt. della meditazione, art. 6, p. 444).

²¹ *Giov. prov.*, pp. 12-13.

Unlike Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Don Bosco does not write of “the little way” to holiness. He does suggest something similar, however, in describing the suggested easy ways for a boy to protect his purity. He notes that some might consider them “too trivial,” but that for Michael Magone these “trivial” means were the “path” to “an outstanding degree of holiness.”²²

3. *Valentine: the ideal frustrated*

In *Valentine* Don Bosco presents the case of a youth who is frustrated in his ideal.²³ Following his biographies of Savio, Magone, and Besucco, it is almost as if this allegory complements a long pedagogical discourse. It seems to serve as the close to a series of experiences that are interpreted in terms of one basic principle: only religion can give “true” happiness and serve as the basis for a complete education. Here is the plot.

Osnero, left a widower early, decides to place his twelve-year-old son in boarding school. Osnero is a gentleman of sceptical tendencies, an unbeliever who thinks that people can be good, upright citizens without religion. He places his son in a modish boarding school where the students wear dress uniforms with different insignia to distinguish their places. But his plan is a flop. Valentine returns home for his first vacation with failing grades and a distracted air.

To avoid further waste of time and money, Osnero appeals to Valentine’s affection for his dead mother, who had been a very religious woman, and persuades him to enter a boarding school where education is grounded on the practice of religion. Valentine turns into a good boy and even more. Around the age of fifteen, a time of youthful high ideals, Valentine feels called to the priesthood. He is influenced by recollections of his mother and has before his eyes the living symbol of what he could be. His confessor’s advice and the scrutiny of the headmaster confirm that he does indeed have a vocation to the priesthood. As the headmaster puts it: “Probity of moral conduct is revealed particularly by victory over vices against the sixth commandment, and in this matter one must put oneself in the hands of one’s confessor.”²⁴

Valentine gets a positive response, and his fund of proper knowledge is confirmed by good results in his exams. Also required are an ecclesiastical spirit, “an inclination and joy in participating in church functions suited to one’s age and

²² Cornell, p. 134.

²³ Bosco, *Valentino, o la vocazione impedita: Episodio contemporaneo* (Turin: OSFS, LC a. 14, fasc. 12, Dec. 1866). Strictly speaking, DB presents Valentine with an urge to become a priest rather than a saint. The latter urge is implicit in the need for priestly holiness. The urge for sanctity is more clear-cut in the ascetic commitment of other youths described by DB: Comollo, Savio, Magone, and Besucco.

²⁴ *Valentino*, p. 27.

occupations,” and a desire to embrace the priesthood “in preference to any other state, be it ever so more advantageous and glorious.”²⁵ Valentine is sure he is called:

I find all these things in me. My mother ardently wanted me to be a priest, and I was even more anxious than she. I was against the idea for two years, as you know, but now I feel no inclination for anything else. I will meet with some opposition from my father, who wants me to pursue a civil career, but I hope that God will help me to overcome all obstacles.²⁶

At this point Osnero steps in, revealing his own intentions and telling Valentine that his judgment is immature: “Your age makes you incapable of knowing what you are deciding to do. You should depend on me rather than on other people. I am your father. Only I can ensure your happiness, and want to.”²⁷

Osnero entrusts his son to the tutelage of an old friend of his, Mari, who has already made his way around the world. Mari sees to it that Valentine gets to know the world and its delights, but the price is a high one. His father, moreover, had not reckoned on the interior crises that would torture and demolish his son’s personality:

After leading the unfortunate Valentine to inns, games, cafés, balls, and shows, as well as on trips to different countries and cities, Mari finally manages to seduce him into the vice that Saint Paul did not even want to hear mentioned among Christians. Valentine himself saw the abyss toward which he was heading and at first felt sharp remorse. He tried several times to get to confession, but his treacherous guide prevented him. One evening Valentine wanted desperately to get to a Capuchin monastery, but Mari caused him to mistake his way and led him to a house of perversion. Valentine was so upset and remorseful that in his desperation, he was ready to jump out a fourth-story window of the inn.²⁸

Mari manages to calm the youth. The crisis seems to be over once and for all; the feelings of remorse do not last long: “Almost imperceptibly, Valentine got into the habit of bad conversation and reading.” Then comes the total reversal of his earlier ideals. Recalling the good times he had at his first boarding school, Valentine abandons himself to every sort of vice: “After six months of dissolute living, not only does he not oppose Mari, he willingly seconds his wicked resolves.”²⁹ His job finished, the perverter returns the youth to Osnero.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

Valentine's father soon realizes he has a libertine in his house. There seems to be no limit to his spending, and he soon plunges himself and his father into debt. Sent to another city to attend college, Valentine spends the allotted money in pool halls: "Despite the feebleness of age, the afflicted father took the trip to that city many times, pleading with his son to return to religion and the happy life he once enjoyed."³⁰ Valentine finally reveals himself in his true colors, accusing and condemning himself as a youth who has demolished his ideals and life and now pursues their fatal opposites:

"Father," replied Valentine, "Mari's lessons have had their effect. It is impossible for me to turn back. I know I am on the road to ruin, but I must keep going."

"Dear Valentine," said his weeping father, "listen to me. Come home and do what you like, but give up the wicked course you have set upon. This life-style of yours is leading you to dishonor, misery, and infamy, and me to an early grave."

Valentine stared at him and added, as if it were the father's fault: "Why did you block my vocation?" Then he left his father standing in the middle of the street to get a loan even larger than his earlier ones and rejoined his pitiful companions.³¹

Pursuing the moralistic themes of Don Bosco in *Valentine*, one may get the impression that this is just an allegory, a variation on the theme of indecency expounded in a youthful sermon³² and then in *The Companion of Youth: non est pax impiis*, no peace for the wicked (Is 48: 22), especially the lascivious. A person who gives himself up to vice may seem happy, but in reality he lives an exasperated life of broken-hearted remorse.

If we assume, on the other hand, that there is some factual basis for the story, then it might have caught Don Bosco's attention because it verified his own theses. In any case, his exposition reveals a fairly sound tissue of psychological observations drawn from some event and then applied to an educational story.³³

This moralistic and apologetic intent was elaborated far more completely in his youthful sermon on indecent behavior. His approach is that of the classic moral theologians on whom he drew (Segneri, Saint Alphonsus, Saint

³⁰ Ibid., p. 41.

³¹ Ibid., p. 41-42. Note the significance of the last gestures by Valentine in symbolic terms. Going against nature, he abandons his father; perverted emotion takes physical shape. He plunges himself and his father into debt, physically destroying what was the object of his father's esteem. He returns to those who are the object of his perverted friendship, not friends but bad companions, who symbolize the ongoing, effective instrument of his self-destruction.

³² AS 132 Prediche B4; see BM 16:404-411.

³³ It would also be worth checking to what extent the picture of a libertine troubled by religious remorse truly fits in with an age still imbued with habits and mental attitudes based on a long Christian tradition. Here again, it seems proper to resist the temptation to reduce everything to theological abstractions and oratorical or apologetic trifles.

Leonard of Port Maurice, Gobinet), as well as of others whom he may not have read (e.g., Nicole). He roams through the minds of his young people, picking up possible insights and objections to his theses.

Alongside his picture of the despairing youth, their daily experience may place the picture of the happy-go-lucky evildoer. This possible ideal of fortunate wickedness had cast its shadow over religious reflection in the Psalms, the book of Tobit, and the book of Job. Don Bosco dissolves the image in the larger picture of a complete religious vision against the backdrop of eternal punishment:

The very moment he thinks he is in possession, crying peace and security, *pax et securitas* [1 Thess 5:3], is the moment when God, weary of insults and injuries...cuts the thread of his days. Suddenly our sinner is swept from life to death, from time to eternity, from his sordid delights to the terrible pains of hell.³⁴

Unhappiness for all eternity is the backdrop against which Don Bosco highlights the call to salvation and to sanctity.

4. *Don Bosco and the catechetics of sanctity in his milieu*

We do well to note Don Bosco's way of presenting the theme of sanctity and perfection to young people and others. It suggests that he, through study, intuition, or unconscious assimilation, had resolved theoretical problems about the nature of Christian holiness along a certain line, one which may well have been suggested by the religious culture of his milieu. Moreover, his own way of looking at the matter usually emerges in occasional circumstances that intervene to stimulate his thinking: i.e., in the course of writing apologetic, hagiographical, catechetical, and biographical works.

As we have already seen, in apologetic writings he maintains that holiness is the fruit of the true Church only. The view of the diocesan catechism, Gerdil, Aimé, and Frayssinous finds its way into *Warnings to Catholics*, *The Companion of Youth*, *The Religiously Instructed Catholic*, and various biographies such as those of Comollo, Saint Pancras, Saint Martin, and Saint Peter.³⁵

Holiness has its source in Christ and then passes to the Church, depository of the "most efficacious means" of sanctifying souls.³⁶ Only the Catholic Church has always and everywhere had a large number of saints famous for their virtues and miraculous deeds.³⁷

³⁴ See ch. IX, sec. 4, pp. 190-95.

³⁵ *Catt. istr.*, pt. 1, tratt. 5, p. 99.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

In his *Church History* (1845), in a context far removed from anti-Waldensian polemics, Don Bosco dwells on the gratuitous work of God embodied in the holiness of the peasant Isidore: “He was one of those saints who prove how true it is that God, even in the farm fields, knows how to guide coarse, uneducated people to the sublime paths of perfection.”³⁸ It is the theological view implicit in the conclusion to his *Life of Comollo*: the drover of oxen was called to the altar, dying after a brief life distinguished by “singular and finished virtue.” The same sort of apologetic and catechetical focus can be found in the introductory pages of an anonymous work, the *Life of Saint Zita* (1853):

We can challenge the Calvinists, the Lutherans, the Waldensians, the Anglicans, and all the heretics of whatever sect to show us one of their own people as eminently virtuous as is required by Catholic doctrine and the Roman Church.³⁹

Holiness accompanied by miracle-working also flourishes in the Catholic Church alone:

Hence it is the true Church of God, the sovereign author of all holiness and miracles. Among all the heretical sects there never were, are, or will be saints or miracles. The Protestants and all heretics find here a manifest sign of their error and depravity. They all have a clear-cut character proving that the truth is not with them and that their sects are rejected by God.⁴⁰

Saint Zita is one of the many flowers of sanctity that the Catholic Church is capable of raising in every walk of life.⁴¹ Like Don Bosco’s *Warnings to Catholics*, the introduction to this book makes an appeal: “All of you who labor and suffer the distress of pain and toil, if you want to find an unending source of consolation and be happy, be saints!”⁴²

This is the beginning of the peroration on holiness to humble workers. The author imagines himself in the situation of the average person, who may think that holiness is too high an ideal, one reserved for those who might be able to do great things:

Become a saint! you may exclaim. Who can aspire to that? We would have to have the time to devote ourselves continually to prayer or to church visits. We would have to be rich in order to make lavish charitable donations. We would have to be educated in order to understand, study, and reason things out.

³⁸ *Stor. eccl.*, epoca 3, p. 217.

³⁹ *Vita di santa Zita serva, e di sant’Isidoro contadino* (Turin, 1853), p. 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9: “All the more that the life of this woman saint was abject in the eyes of the world because of poor birth and her status as a servant, so much the more was it great and illustrious before God.”

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

That is a big mistake, a dangerous illusion, my good friends. To become saints, we do not have to be rich or educated or masters of our time. Lack of occupation makes people lazy. Wealth often makes people miserly. And learning often makes people haughty.

So what do we need to be saints? One thing only. *We need the will to be saints.* Yes, you can be saints if you will it. That is all you need...⁴³

Here the anonymous author presents certain mistaken views of holiness. We can readily see that they are close to the ideas that Don Bosco strove to uproot from the minds of his young people. In the same milieu Savio, Magone, and Besucco had, each in turn, the same difficulties and reactions in the face of the ideal they wished to pursue. One familiar with school life and the attitudes that pass down to succeeding classes of students will easily recognize the verisimilitude of Don Bosco's written descriptions. Savio, Magone, and Besucco tend to indulge in prolonged prayer. They multiply their moments of prayer, church visits during recreation, their little practices of devotion (*fioretti*). Attracted by mortification, they cut down on their food and torment their sleeping hours. Don Bosco surprises Dominic Savio in bed with one blanket in the dead of winter (the temperature dropped almost to freezing in the unheated rooms of Valdocco during the night). Dominic, scolded, bursts into tears. To ensure the salvation of his soul, he wants to practice various mortifications for love of Jesus, whose earthly life was laden with suffering; but he finds them forbidden, one after another.

Writing for boys, Don Bosco says that Besucco died of an innocent indiscretion that should not be imitated. The ingenuous shepherd boy wanted to suffer with the crucified Jesus in order to become a saint, so he slept with a single blanket in the dead of winter. In all likelihood, he died of pneumonia.

Then what constitutes holiness? How did farmers, servants, and young people become saints? The preface to the *Life of Saint Zita* replies:

Laborers, farmers, artisans, merchants, servants, and young people became holy in their own respective states. How? By doing well what they were supposed to do. They fulfilled all their duties to God, suffering everything out of love for him and offering him their toil and trouble. This is the great science of holiness and eternal salvation.⁴⁴

Finally, the author makes clear that miracles are not synonymous with sanctity, though God may permit them to prove true sanctity:

In the lives of saints proposed to us as models by the Church, we will sometimes find extraordinary deeds and astonishing actions; but we must realize that

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

those deeds and actions were not what made them saints. What made them saints was their fidelity in the service of God, the carrying out of their proper duties. People can be saints without having worked miracles. With miracles and other extraordinary acts God wills to glorify his faithful servants and to give the whole world visible testimony to the holiness of the Catholic Church, whose children we are.⁴⁵

5. Don Bosco and the spiritual tradition on Christian holiness

I have already noted that Saint Joseph Cottolengo, in the same epoch and milieu, urged the faithful to ask for holiness through Mary's intercession. Children's books, such as those written by the Piedmontese Oblates Stephen Alexis Burzio and John Baptist Isnardi, urged young people to set out on the road to holiness. The mistaken notions of holiness reproved by Don Bosco and the *Life of Saint Zita* can be found substantially in the early pages of Saint Louis de Montfort's *Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, in Dom Lawrence Scupoli, and in the *Introduction to the Devout Life* by Saint Francis de Sales. Scupoli's *The Spiritual Combat* was published in Turin in 1851 in the Library of Good Books series. We possess a battered 1785 copy that once belonged to Father John Baptist Appendini, Don Bosco's friend and his professor of theology in the Chieri seminary.⁴⁶ And we have already seen that Don Bosco drew from the *Introduction to the Devout Life* to present his considerations of paradise in *The Companion of Youth* and *The Month of May*.

Many, notes Scupoli, have unthinkingly invested their ideal of perfection in penitential works, in chastisements, watching, fasting, and similar corporal mortifications. Many, especially women, fancy themselves wholly virtuous, when habituated to long vocal prayers, hearing several masses, assisting at the whole divine office, spending many hours in the church, and frequent communion.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴⁶ Lorenzo Scupoli, *II combattimento spirituale* (Turin: Davico, 1785). Donated to the Center for Salesian Studies of the UPS by the parish priest of Villastellone, where Fr. Appendini resided. On the front of the outside cover: "Ex libris Appendini Joannis Baptistae 1831." On the back of the same cover: "Ex libris Giuganino Caroli," nephew of Appendini.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pt. 1, ch. 1. Eng. trans. *The Spiritual Combat and Peace of Soul* (New York: Catholic Book, 1958), p. 7.

All those things may be useful, but they are only means to perfection rather than perfection itself. Writes Saint Francis de Sales:

The man who is addicted to fasting thinks himself very devout if he fasts, though his heart be at the same time filled with rancor. He scruples to moisten his tongue with wine, or even with water, because of his sobriety, but he makes no difficulty of drinking deep of his neighbor's blood by detraction and calumny. Another considers himself devout because he recites daily a multiplicity of prayers, although immediately afterward he utters the most disagreeable, arrogant, and injurious words in his home and among his neighbors. Another cheerfully draws an alms out of his purse to give to the poor, but he cannot draw meekness out of his heart to forgive his enemies.⁴⁸

True, living devotion...presupposes the love of God, and hence it is nothing else than the love of God. But it is not always love as such. Inasmuch as divine love adorns the soul, it is called grace, which makes us pleasing to His Divine Majesty. Inasmuch as it gives us the strength to do good, it is called charity. When it has arrived at that degree of perfection by which it not only makes us do well but also do this diligently, frequently, and readily, then it is called devotion.⁴⁹

Hence, it appears that devotion adds nothing to the fire of charity but the flame that makes it ready, active, and diligent, not only in the observance of the commandments of God, but also in the execution of His heavenly counsels and inspirations.⁵⁰

For Scupoli, perfection lies simply

in knowing the infinite greatness and goodness of God, joined to a true sense of our own wretchedness and proclivity to evil; in loving God and hating ourselves; in humbling ourselves not only before him but, for his sake, before all men; in renouncing entirely our own will in order to follow his; and, to crown the work, in doing all this for the sole glory of his holy name, with no other motive than that he ought to be loved and served by all his creatures.

Such are the dictates of that law of love which the Holy Spirit has engraven on the hearts of the righteous.⁵¹

Perfection, for Scupoli, lies in an affective cognition and a devoted, operative love. Awareness of our own "wretchedness," in this case, is the sort of awareness that produces humility. It does not have the sense of the Flemish mystics, who sought to lead the soul to total immersion in the essence of God, the supreme goal of human perfection.

⁴⁸ St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Eng. trans. (New York: Harper, 1950), pt. 1, ch. 1, p. 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵¹ *The Spiritual Combat*, pp. 12-13.

Another author to be noted here is one whose spiritual exercises were recommended by the Salesians' Second General Chapter.⁵² The Jesuit Paul Segneri the Younger (1673-1713), also known as "Segnerino," made his mark on popular preaching around the turn of the previous century even though he had a relatively short life. Indeed, he took an honorable place alongside his uncle, Segneri the Elder, the model Italian Lenten preacher. Saint Leonard of Port Maurice, Saint Alphonsus, and others utilized the *Exercises* of Segneri the Younger in manuscript. He enchanted Louis Muratori, who became his biographer and the editor of his published works:

In his mouth the word of God was the sweetest, liveliest, most penetrating thing in the world. He delighted both the educated and the uneducated. All who heard him...were inexplicably delighted by the noble clarity and vivacity...of his presentations. His face was a sermon as well, imbued with devotion and humility. So were his eyes, in which anyone could read holy modesty and singular amiability.⁵³

Among other things, Segneri the Younger proposed an examination of conscience "on the obligation of every Christian to aspire to holiness."⁵⁴ He, too, considers what holiness is and is not. It does not consist of things incompatible with one's state in life. The father of a family is not obliged to sell all his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor, although that course of action is highly laudable in itself. Nor does holiness consist of those extraordinary graces evidenced by many saints in prayer. John the Baptist, so far as we know, did not work miracles; but Christ himself canonized him as one of the greatest saints. Flights of ecstasy, miracles, copious tears, and similar extraordinary graces do not make us saints; nor does holiness consist of outlandish mortifications, penances, or devotions. We read in Segneri what we will later read in Don Bosco's advice to young people:

Many are terrified by the word "holiness" because they imagine that one cannot be holy without terrible disciplines, rough sackcloth, rigorous fasts, and extraordinary devotions. When they hear of someone doing such things, they exclaim: "Oh, he is a saint!" All that may be fine, but they are not necessary to be a saint, and they should not frighten us.⁵⁵

⁵² *Deliberazioni del secondo Capitolo generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel settembre 1880* (Turin, 1882), p. 67. I do not dwell here on considerations regarding sanctity and the means to achieve it that were proposed by authors whom DB could know: e.g., Jean Croiset, *Esercizi di pietà per tutti i giorni dell'anno*, meditation for Feb. 23.

⁵³ Paolo Segneri Iuniore, *Opere postume* (Turin: Marietti, 1857), p. 5.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Esame XI, pp. 266-71.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

The holiness to which we are obliged to aspire, then, lies in absolutely abstaining from every sort of sin, even deliberate venial sin, and in doing and enduring all that we can out of love for God, as best as we can in the circumstances.⁵⁶

This is the point brought out sharply by Don Bosco in his biography of Besucco, which contains a great many pedagogical digressions and preoccupations. Besucco goes to Don Bosco, worried by the Lord's admonition that "you can only gain entrance to Paradise by innocence or by penance." He therefore finds that he must do penance, but Don Bosco simply reiterates his customary directives: "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." Besucco objects that such things have to be endured anyway. "But if you add suffering for the love of God to what you must suffer as a matter of necessity," replies Don Bosco, "it will become real penance, it will please the Lord, and it will bring merit to your soul."⁵⁷ He also urges Besucco to perform lowly little services for the community and his companions.

All this lends solid credibility to an entry in Father Bonetti's chronicle that is to be dated around the end of 1862 or the early part of 1863. Note that Besucco himself entered the Oratory in August 1863:

At this point Don Bosco asked the cleric [John Baptist] Anfossi: "What do you think is the easiest way we can become saints?" Several voiced their opinions. Don Bosco listened and then remarked: "The easiest way is this—to see God's will in all our superiors command us and in all that befalls us in our life.⁵⁸ Sometimes it may not seem so, but that is when we must be brave and reflect, *Since I was told to do this, I'll go ahead and do it.* At other times, we may feel depressed because of misfortune or physical or moral difficulties. In such cases, we are not to lose heart but rather take comfort in the cheering thought that all was ordered to our good by Our Merciful Heavenly Father. Let us offer ourselves and our possessions to Him. It is the surest way to scale the heights of perfection. There may be some, for instance, who wish to do penance and fast although their superior advised otherwise. Let us obey, because then we shall be sure of doing God's will and climbing one step higher on the ladder of sanctity."⁵⁹

Don Bosco definitely seems to be in line with the ascetical spirituality that came to the fore after the Quietist crisis, at a time when people favored the progress of the arts and sciences rather than metaphysics and abstractionism. His

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Cornell, pp. 203-04.

⁵⁸ "and in all that befalls us in our life" was added above the line.

⁵⁹ Bonetti, *Annali III*, pp. 53-55 (AS 110 Bonetti): cited here from BM 7:152.

is the spirituality locating perfection in the exercise of virtue that conforms with the will of God, the latter being manifested primarily by the duties of one's state in life. Stress is placed on the virtues and their practice, on loving faith and operative charity, on the works required by day-to-day living. Taking no note of the Calvinist position, anti-Protestant polemics tended to maintain that these works were necessary for salvation—as if to suggest that the Reformation thinkers had totally and absolutely denied their salvific value.

Don Bosco certainly is not one of those who emphasizes or even locates perfection in loving contemplation of God, which would be achieved particularly in prayer. He champions the view that ordinary sanctity is open and accessible to all. Like other spiritual writers, he also discusses mistaken notions of holiness in the process of describing its true nature.

It might seem at first glance that Don Bosco was simply echoing commonplaces to be found in other preachers and spiritual writers. But we must resist that temptation to explain everything in terms of literary genres. Scholarly students of popular traditions have rightly called attention to the substrate of popular habit reflected in mission preachers and moralists with pastoral experience. We can say, then, that such people as Saint Francis de Sales, Segneri, Saint Alphonsus, Muratori, and the Jesuit John Croiset echo habits, customs, and convictions tenaciously rooted in the minds of ordinary people and almost impervious to clear-cut lines of reasoning.⁶⁰ In spiritual matters, as in the realm of legends and customs, their memory is selective and their reasoning process short-winded. They must be continually nurtured, educated, and corrected, at least insofar as factors in their milieu help to maintain and breed convictions based on the same mental process evident in the creation of legends and customs.

Evidencing a common touch, Don Bosco and Saint Alphonsus do not utilize constructs found in the Flemish mystics, Cardinal John Bona, OCist (1609-1674), and John Baptist Scaramelli, SJ. Don Bosco does not talk about the purgative way, the illuminative way, and the unitive way even though the notions of purification, illumination, and union are expressed. We must ask for divine light so that we may see the path that God wants us to take, says Don Bosco. He does not talk of beginners, proficient souls, and perfected ones but rather of progress, degrees of holiness, and stages of perfection. For him, as for the ascetical current in which he moves, the virtues become increasingly more solid, docile, active, open to the promptings of grace, and deeply rooted. Op-

⁶⁰ Note what is reported by Pierre Collot, *Lo spirito di S. Francesco di Sales...raccolto da diversi scritti di monsignor Gio. Pietro Camus, vescovo di Belley* (Venice, 1745^a), pt. 18, ch. 11, p. 394: "One of the stumbling blocks for those who begin to practice devotion is their indiscreet practice of austerity. On this point most people, even those of high spirit, are unsuccessful."

erational ease, which Saint Francis de Sales saw as the mark of true devotion, is also highlighted by Don Bosco. This is particularly evident when he describes the spirit of prayer, devotion to the Eucharist, and the spirit of penitence. Note the joyous spirit of Dominic Savio, for example: “What else do I need to be happy? Nothing in this world. Just to be able to see Him whom I now see by faith and adore on the altar.” With such thoughts Dominic spent his days in true happiness. Comments Don Bosco: “It accounts for his deep happiness and the heavenly bliss which shone in his face at all times.”⁶¹

The signs of one’s progress in perfection, according to Don Bosco, are delight in pious practices, ease in prayerfulness, a lively faith in the Eucharist, profound hope in heaven, blissful happiness in all one’s activities, and equanimity of spirit in all situations.

The means adopted by Magone to preserve his purity led him “to an outstanding degree of holiness.”⁶² For Don Bosco, those signs were the same ones indicating Savio’s degree of holiness and perfection.

In his earlier work on Comollo, as we saw, Don Bosco’s comments on the stages of perfection show traces of eighteenth-century Augustinianism. Says Comollo: “I feel so full of gentleness and contentment that I can neither comprehend nor explain it.” Writes Don Bosco:

So anyone can clearly see that Comollo was advanced on the way of perfection. Those feelings of tender emotion, gentleness, and contentment over spiritual things were effects of the living faith and burning love that were deeply rooted in his heart and that guided him in all his actions.⁶³

The phrase “rooted in his heart” calls to mind the language of Augustinian theology. In that language, perfection would be the complete rooting of faith, hope, and charity in the heart. The more their roots strike deep into the heart, the more the heart is illuminated by God, drawn to him, and irresistibly attracted by the power of goodness. As time goes on, however, Don Bosco’s outlook matures along the lines of those authors who interpret sanctity as the exercise of virtue, done out of love for God and in union with him and his will, in connection with the obligations of everyday life.

What distinguishes Don Bosco from authors of similar thinking is the fact that his discourse on perfection is addressed pointedly and persistently to

⁶¹ SDS:84.

⁶² Cornell, p. 134.

⁶³ *Comollo*, pp. 33-34. In another work DB brings out more clearly the connections between heart, theological virtues, behavior, and influence on others. See *Cafasso*, p. 46: “The heart of Don Cafasso was like a furnace filled with the fire of divine love, lively faith, firm hope and ardent charity. Accordingly, a single word, a look, a smile, a gesture, his very presence, sufficed to dispel melancholy, drive away temptations, and produce holy resolution in the soul.”

young people. Nor does he simply elaborate the popular view that saw any good boy as another Saint Aloysius.⁶⁴ Don Bosco's approach is based on his own concrete experience as an educator and his awareness of the attributes characterizing childhood and adolescence. He bases his approach on elements of the youthful mind and heart rightly regarded as fundamental. He wants sanctity to become the dream of his young people, the goal they pursue. He himself will help in any way he can, offering advice, encouragement, counsel, and common-sense correction. His pedagogical and theological conviction is that young people absolutely need direction, but he is also sure that these children of the common people can really be saints.

The various chronicles and diaries of the Oratory offer us episodes where we see Don Bosco at work, trying to get across the ideal of sanctity as a duty open to all. Around the end of 1862, youthful conversation on one occasion centered around the practice of penance by saints and what Dominic Savio might have done along these lines. Don Bosco replied:

I can tell you this. Some of our own Oratory boys will be raised to the honors of the altar. If Dominic Savio continues to work miracles as he has been doing so far, I have no doubt at all that, if I'm still living and able to promote his cause, the Church will permit his cult at least in the Oratory.⁶⁵

For the Good Night of October 27, 1875, Don Bosco found inspiration in the novena for All Saints that was already under way. Once again he renewed his call to holiness:

There are so many boys who are now saints in Heaven and once they were flesh and bones as we are! I will even go further: how many boys are there now in Heaven who were not only mortal like us, but who lived here in this very House, strolled through these same porticoes, prayed in the same church, and obeyed the same rules and Superiors. They became saints and are now in Heaven, as we have every reason to hope is the case of Dominic Savio, [Michael] Magone, and [Francis] Besucco, and many more. Now we must say: *Si isti et illi, cur non ego?* [If they could, why not I?] If those boys became so good, living under the same conditions as we do, why can't we do the same? Take courage, my dear boys, make every effort to persevere along the road to salvation. If we are called to endure discomforts such as cold or heat, physical ailments, or such; and even if you must force yourselves to obey, study or restrain your temperament, do so bravely, willingly, for you will merit an eternal reward in Heaven in return for every little thing you may have suffered here on earth.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ DB says this of Comollo (*Comollo*, p. 20).

⁶⁵ Bonetti, *Annali III*, pp. 53-54 (AS 110 Bonetti 4); cited from BM 7:152.

⁶⁶ BM 11:432-33. This comes from the diary of Fr. Barberis (AS 110).

The following evening, Don Bosco returned to the same basic theme and how one might attain holiness with effort but no great difficulty:

There is one thing I would like all of you to do. Ask yourselves, “What do I need most to become a saint?” Then single out the bad habit that holds sway over you and thus hinders you from this goal; or else you may single out the virtue that you need most and that would help you to attain your end...

Our Lord told a young man who wanted to save his soul: *Si vis ad vitam ingredi, serva mandata* [If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments—*Matt.* 19,17]. Note that He said first of all: *Si vis*; this means that to save our soul we first must have the *will* to save it..., wanting it earnestly and therefore working at it with determination...

But it takes effort! Yet, all those now in Heaven made this effort. Now they are happy and say, “How small the effort, how little we suffered, compared to all we now enjoy and shall continue to enjoy for eternity.”⁶⁷

Practically speaking, in his discourse Don Bosco does not distinguish between means of salvation and means of sanctification. Both are sustained by the reward envisioned. Don Bosco would present the same message to those entering the Salesian Society: *Momentaneum quod cruciat, aeternum quod delectat* [A moment’s suffering, eternal happiness].⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *Const.*, pp. 47-48. “If the observance of our rules becomes troublesome to you at times, remember the words of St. Paul the Apostle: the sufferings of this life are but for a moment...”

THE PRINCIPAL VIRTUES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Don Bosco clearly places himself in the ranks of those espousing a morality and ascetical practice of one's duties.

1. Obedience

(a) Its importance in Don Bosco's milieu

In Don Bosco's view, obedience sums up the way to holiness and salvation for young people. When they find themselves being pressured by those who exalt liberty and make fun of Christians who fulfill their religious duties, Don Bosco tells them to take a firm stand. They should assert their right to carry out their Christian duties in complete freedom, including such obligations as observing Sundays and holy days and abstaining from meat.¹ He does not hesitate to offer examples of such obedience, practiced from early childhood by both canonized saints and ordinary young people.²

¹ Bosco, *Fondamenti della Religione Cattolica*, §7: "Tre particolari ricordi alla gioventù," in *Giov. prov.* (Turin, 1851), pp. 330-32, and in subsequent editions. DB's text seems to be inspired by a Letter of Fr. Giovanni Piva published as an appendix to *Attaccamento inviolabile alla religione cattolica necessario massimamente ai tempi nostri calamitosi*, trans. from French (Genoa, 1840); published also by Hyacinth Marietti in *Scelta di ragionamenti sui bisogni del tempo in materia di Religione: tratti da diversi autori* (Turin, 1837), pp. 37-54; inserted in the Library of Good Books, a. 1, disp. 4, *Ragionamenti sopra i libri cattivi ed il parlare in materia di religione col modo di diportarsi col libertini e miscredenti* (Turin, 1849), pp. 80-94; published separately at the Oratory as well: *Un'arma di difesa ai giovani colti per conservare la propria fede* (Turin: OSFS, 1872¹, 1875²).

² Bosco, *Vita di S. Pancrazio martire* (Turin, 1856), p. 11: "By his obedience to his parents, the precise performance of his duties, and singularly punctual dedication to his studies, he was the delight of his parents and was proposed to his companions as a mod-

The context in which Don Bosco mentally frames his exhortations to obedience is primarily that of the family, urging young people first to obey their parents, and then to obey in the festive oratory and, later still, in the high school. Don Bosco speaks directly to them as their teacher, or else in support of the educational work being carried out by his Salesians in boarding schools.

The cultural atmosphere of his remarks is that of ordinary catechetical instruction and the moral theology Don Bosco learned at the seminary and the Ecclesiastical College. Christian life is the fulfillment of laws proposed to conscience. For both the faithful and their pastors, the good Christian is one who carries out his or her primary duties: learning the lessons of faith, frequenting churches and the sacraments, and showing respect for sacred traditions and persons. The civil milieu of Don Bosco is the one prepared by the absolutist administration of such sovereigns as Charles Emmanuel III (1701-1773). Many Piedmontese were imprinted with the qualities of the honest, hard-working civil official, and efforts would be made to turn this model into a social class, if not a moral standard, in politically and administratively unified Italy.³

Illiteracy and meager religious education tended to keep the religious life of the populace a heteronomous one. As we have seen, this outlook tended to be conservative and antirevolutionary, feeding a sense of reverence for the established order and calm, trusting relations between authorities and their subjects. Thus, in a religious outlook where salvation in the hereafter was vividly regarded as fundamental, faithful observance of precepts seemed to be the royal road to eternal life. People regretted that their age paid little heed to the holiness of the Church and the sacredness of legitimate authorities vested with divine powers. They were repelled by those who seemed to mock the laws and disregard scriptural injunctions to reverence and obedience: "By now there are only a few privileged enclaves safe from the ravages of unbelief, places suffused with that appealing simplicity that prompts people to follow in the footsteps of their elders."⁴ In other places many people were manifesting a deplorable sense of

el." Bosco, *Vita della beata Maria degli Angeli, carmelitana scalza torinese* (Turin, 1865), p. 8: "Docile to the loving solicitude and teachings of those dear to her and faithful to the impulses of divine grace, Mary gave a strong inclination to pious practices even before the age of seven..." SDS, p. 27: "Nature had gifted him with goodness, with a heart particularly inclined to piety. With surprising ease he learned his morning and evening prayers, and at four used to say them by himself. Even at an age when little ones liked to stray, Dominic obediently remained at his mother's side; if he did wander off, it was to find a nook or corner and more easily pray through the day."

³ On the customary behavior of the Piedmontese functionary see Guido Quazza, *Le riforme in Piemonte nella prima metà del Settecento* (Modena, 1957); Ernesto Ragionieri, "Politica e amministrazione nello stato unitario," in *Studi storici* 1 (1959-60), pp. 472-512.

⁴ *Fedele osservanza dei precetti della Chiesa con esempi adattati a ciascuno di essi* (Library of Good Books, a. 1, disp. 18: Turin, 1850), p. 4; and in LC (Turin, 1860), pp. iii-x, with the whole introduction reworked, however.

rebelliousness and deliberate opposition to the wise precepts of the Church. Hence the call was to fidelity and obedience:

You, Christian, who still regard the Church as your mother and are resolved to remain faithful to her precepts, beware lest pitiful considerations of human respect, rash reasonings, or derisive attacks on religion tempt you away from the practice of your obligations. Do not let words against reverence for religion ever tempt you to heed dangerous sophisms. Let no one seduce you with empty words (Eph 5:6).⁵

Don Bosco presses home the same lesson: "Believe me, if people see you faithfully carrying out your duties, they will have great respect for you... Never let the idle chatter of this world induce you to omit doing good or to do something evil."⁶ One gets the definite feeling that for this mentality the word "duty" was enveloped in an atmosphere of tender, respectful sacredness. It seems very likely that it met with full acceptance in the minds and hearts of both writer and reader.

(b) The principal virtue for young people

Don Bosco's view of obedience can be gleaned readily from his words and writings: biographies, ascetical and devotional works, evening talks, and occasional remarks.

It is worth noting that he brings up Aloysius Comollo as an example in both his biography of his friend and *The Companion of Youth*. Still a young child, Comollo is visiting relatives and is forced by them to stay longer than his parents had allowed him. He retreats into a corner and bursts into tears because he is being forced to disobey them even though he does not want to.⁷ The episode is highly indicative. Comollo, Father Cafasso, Don Bosco himself, and many of his boys seem to have made a cult of punctual observance of their daily schedules, although Don Bosco certainly did not seem to get upset when circumstances prompted him to act otherwise. At any rate, it is a point stressed by Don Bosco in his biographical and hagiographical writings just as much as by biographers of Saint Aloysius and other people who found holiness in the observance of school or monastery rules and schedules.⁸

⁵ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁶ *Maggio*, day 27, p. 156. DB deals frequently with observance of the divine commandments and Church precepts in his catechetical and apologetic writings. *Il cattolico istrutto* (1850) contained a section on "the Precepts of the Church" (pt. 2, tratt. 14). Like bishops elsewhere, the bishops of Piedmont stressed observance of the precepts, particularly around Lent.

⁷ *Comollo*, p. 8; *Giov. prov.*, pp. 14-15.

⁸ By way of example, *Sei domen.*, pp. 10-11: "From the age of seven he began to have his own set hours for prayer... He never missed the set schedule." Also *Cafasso*, p. 20:

Among his doctrinal pages one cannot help but note what he writes in his *Companion of Youth*. The heading of one section dealing with obedience puts the point bluntly: "The First Virtue of a Young Man Is Obedience to His Parents."⁹ Translated to the milieu of Oratory day students and boarding students, the principle is enunciated in basically similar terms: "The foundation of every virtue in a boy is obedience to his superiors. Therefore accept their will as God's will and obey them willingly."¹⁰

On the literary level we can find resemblances between *The Companion of Youth* and the eighteenth-century *Angelic Guide*. Compare the following two passages:

Let the advice and suggestions of your superiors be the guiding rule of your lives and actions. You will be happy if you do. Your days will be joyous, and all your actions will always be in good order and edifying to all.¹¹

Let the sole guiding rule of your lives and actions be the advice and suggestions of your superiors; because then your years will always be joyous and happy, and all your actions will always be in good order and edifying to all.¹²

Detached from his literary sources and speaking familiarly to youngsters on a person-to-person basis, Don Bosco urges them to let him give them a haircut and clip away their faults, to accept guidance almost blindly, to trust completely the commands of the man who truly knows them and wants only what is best for them. To him they should surrender the key to their hearts.¹³ They are to become handkerchiefs, as it were, letting themselves be folded and unfolded, squeezed in the hand or tossed in the air. In short, Don Bosco asks for complete docility, availability, and pliability. He tells his boys that obedience has penitential and sacrificial value. Instead of resorting to harsh mortifications, they should sim-

"The most marvelous thing in the private life of Don Cafasso was his exactness in the observance of the rules of the ecclesiastical Institute of St. Francis."

⁹ *Giov. prov.*, pp. 13-16; SWSJB:78.

¹⁰ *Regolamento per la Casa annessa all'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, pt. 2, ch. 3; there is a redaction in BM 4:554; original subsequent redactions in AS 025. This sort of rule formulation led to the *Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales* (Turin, 1877), where the text I cite is somewhat extended (pt. 2, ch. 8): "The foundation of every virtue in a boy is obedience to his superiors. Obedience produces and preserves all the other virtues; and if it is necessary for all, it is especially necessary for youth. So if you want to acquire virtue, begin with obedience to your superiors, submitting to them without opposition as you would to God."

¹¹ *Giov. prov.*, p. 16.

¹² *Guida angelica* (Turin, 1767), p. 41.

¹³ For an anthology of DB's texts on obedience, see Guido Favini, *Alle fonti della vita salesiana* (Turin, 1965), pp. 119-38; in connection with the heart, see Pietro Braido, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco* (Zurich, 1964²), p. 173, text and n. 50. Also see BM 7:364.

ply obey their superiors and carry out their duties.¹⁴ Obedience, after all, is the most perfect sacrifice of all, as he explained to the youthful boarders at Valdocco, urging them to obey eagerly the rules and customs of the house:

Obedience is the most acceptable virtuous act we can offer to God because our liberty, our free will, is God's greatest gift—and that is what we are sacrificing by obeying, by bending our free will to that of another. But if obedience is to please God, it must be given freely. One who obeys grudgingly or through fear of punishment cannot please God, because God does not like things done by force. As a loving God, he wants things done for love's sake.¹⁵

Obedience was the key that opened the door to heaven for Dominic Savio and then locked it again to keep the devil out.¹⁶ Dominic entrusted himself to Don Bosco as one might entrust material to a good tailor. That is why he progressed from virtue to virtue and became increasingly perfect in performing his duties.¹⁷ When obedience diminishes, on the other hand, disorder and discontent rush in to take its place.¹⁸

(c) *Theological motivations and experiential data*

We know that Don Bosco accepts and voices such formulations about obedience. He does not simply say, as does the *Angelic Guide*, that respect or

¹⁴ DB's advice to Dominic Savio, who wants to be a saint.

¹⁵ Sermon of 1858, summarized by Fr. Bonetti in the miscellany "Memoria di alcuni fatti tratti dalle prediche o dalla storia, etc." (AS 110 Bonetti 1, pp. 10-17); cited here from BM 6:637. Among the possible sources we may note Lorenzo Beyerlinck, *Magnum theatrum vitae humanae*, s.v. "Obedientia" (Venice, 1707), 5:911-22. There we find the following information: etymology, "obedientia dicitur quasi *Obaudientia*" (p. 911 B); the definition given by St. Thomas (ibid.); the various types: "Cum sit quadruplex potestas imperandi, scilicet divina, et humana, eaque cum Ecclesiastica, tum Politica, cui annectitur Oeconomica, sive Domestica; constat etiam non unam Obedientiae speciem constitui" (p. 911 F); the maxim of St. Gregory the Great, "sola virtus est, quae alias virtutes menti inserit, insertasque custodit" (p. 911 H); the object of obedience (p. 911 D); the episode where Saul, battling the Philistines, does not wait for Samuel (p. 912 A); that involving St. Maurus (p. 916 G). The section on the sacrificial nature of obedience relies on St. Gregory the Great and St. Thomas (p. 912 B). But such passages could easily be found in other works: e.g., St. Alphonsus's *True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, Scaramelli's *Dirrettorio ascetico*, and Rodríguez's *Esercizio di perfezione e di virtù cristiane*. They, among others, were recommended by SDB GC II (*Deliberazioni* [Turin, 1882], p. 68), but the etymology and episode with St. Maurus are not in these 3 works.

¹⁶ Good Night talk of May 16, 1857 (BM 5:429).

¹⁷ SDS:50-51, 53-54.

¹⁸ Good Night at the beginning of 1864 (BM 7:365).

obedience is one of the principal virtues.¹⁹ He firmly asserts that obedience is the principal virtue. This tack might be interpreted as a mere matter of literary emphasis or suggestive expediency. But then it would be difficult for us to explain why Don Bosco should insistently stress the basic importance of obedience throughout the course of his teaching and his own life.

One might also think that underlying such formulations is his intuition of some concrete reality: the conscience of a young person or little child, for example, which might only too readily focus his thoughts and his sense of guilt on acts of disobedience toward his parents and other adults to whom he is bound by ties of dependence. If that is the case, then Don Bosco's terms embody the perception of something that he never states explicitly. As far as we know, he never says that the youthful conscience, by instinct or acquired habit, tends to focus on disobedience. But, like many writers of ascetical and pastoral theology, he does call special attention to acts of disrespect and disobedience when he discusses relevant questions for examinations of conscience by children and young people.²⁰

The motivations offered by Don Bosco stem from different intuitions and from theological and pedagogical considerations. As we saw earlier, what Don Bosco sees in young people is psychic and ethical frailty. They are weak and fickle.²¹ His view is not dominated by the ancient grammarians' image of the tabula rasa, or by the image of soft wax on which education is to impress its lessons. But he does use the image of "molding," which is sometimes associated with the term "heart."²²

¹⁹ *Guida angelica*, p. 38.

²⁰ *Giov. prov.*, pp. 40-41, consideration of the divine judgment: "You had barely reached the age of beginning to know me when you began to offend me with lies, disrespect for churches, disobedience to your parents, and many other transgressions of your duties." And see the examination of conscience before sacramental confession on p. 94.

We can be fairly certain, however, that DB was familiar with what Giuseppe Frassinetti (1804-68) had to say in *Avviamento dei giovanetti nella divozione di Maria Santissima*, ch. 7: "You should distinguish yourselves in two virtues... The first...is obedience. But it is the virtue that the devil makes more burdensome for young people, and it may well be the one they most trample on. Scarcely does the glimmer of reason spark within us when we suddenly want to do what we want, and nothing grieves us more than doing the will of another. Thus the first faults committed are always acts of disobedience; and then it becomes so easy to slip that we do it numberless times. Yet obedience is a virtue we need in adolescence more than at any other age of our lives because we are still inexperienced in the things of this world; then, if ever, we need direction and guidance from people who have already gained such personal experience" (see Frassinetti, *Opere ascetiche* 3 [Rome, 1910], p. 181). The 1st editions of the *Avviamento* are prior to *Giov. prov.* As we shall see, DB made use of Frassinetti's work for his consideration of "devotion to Mary Most Holy," transcribing passages relating to purity.

²¹ Cornell, p. 201. See ch. X, n. 19, and the corresponding text, pp. 204-05.

²² See n. 13 and the corresponding text on p. 223.

The heart was a favorite focus of educators whose experience seems fairly similar to Don Bosco's. It attracted the attention of the Port-Royal educators and the Brothers of the Christian Schools (the LaSalle Christian Brothers).²³ The Jesuit John Croiset, whose *Pious Exercises for Every Day of the Year* Don Bosco utilized, wrote that the object of education was not just the mind (*esprit*) but also, and even more, the heart: "The mind is always in the service of the heart."²⁴ Once the heart is "won," the mind does not delay long in surrendering.²⁵ "The dependence is not mutual," writes Croiset. Since the mind is not as strong, it is under the sway of the heart unless passion clouds it. The corrupted heart, on the other hand, is powerful enough to force the mind to use all its stratagems and subtleties to justify blindly all its bad intentions: i.e., all its errors.²⁶ The principle, then, holds true in education:

It is not just the youth's mind [*esprit*] that should be cultivated. That would not be difficult. It can be said that the heart is the principal object of education. One must detect its errors, regulate its desires, combat its failings. The heart has more of a place in the science of morals than does the mind.²⁷

From the middle of the seventeenth century on, education focused deliberately on the ethical formation of the person. But the role of the pupil in the educational process was not merely passive or receptive. Don Bosco's images have to do with planting and careful cultivation:

As a tender plant, though placed in fertile ground, will not grow straight or will otherwise come to grief unless properly cared for, so you, my dear sons, will develop wrong inclinations unless you let yourselves be guided by those who are responsible for you.²⁸

²³ Louis Cagnet, *Claude Lancelot, solitaire de Port-Royal* (Paris, 1950); Saturnino E. Gallego Yriarte, FSC, *La teología de la educación en san Juan Bautista de la Salle* (Madrid, 1958).

²⁴ Jean Croiset, *Réflexions chrétiennes sur divers sujets de morale* (Lyons-Paris, 1823), "Des illusions du coeur," §8, 2:233-34. The 1st ed. was in 1707. Carlos Sommervogel, SJ, *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus* (1890-1900), 2, col. 1672, indicates various editions of the Italian translation, e.g. Venice 1715, Naples 1837.

²⁵ Croiset, "De l'éducation," §4, 2:329: "One must be able to know people's bents, sense their natural dispositions, and win over their hearts." That is what DB suggests also. Friendly warning and advice beforehand to a pupil "generally wins over his heart" (*Il sistema preventivo*, §1, n. 1, cited here from BM 4:381).

²⁶ Croiset, "Des illusions du coeur," §8, p. 234.

²⁷ Croiset, *Règlements pour messieurs les pensionnaires des Pères Jésuites* (Lyons: Bruyset, 1739⁶), Preface, p. 2.

²⁸ *Giov. prov.*, p. 13, cited here (with a correction) from SWSJB:78. See, e.g., Croiset, *Esercizi di pietà per tutti i giorni dell'anno* (Venice, 1826), meditation for May 12, point 2, p. 195: "What a crime to leave these youths without education! But what cruelty and wickedness to sow only bad grain in these new fields!" [Stefano A. Burzio], *Un*

Now if one considers the theological world that lies closer to the pages of *The Companion of Youth*, one has reason to think that Don Bosco might have written under the impression of ideas he could have read in the *Angelic Guide*, the writings of Charles Gobinet or Paschal DeMattei, and similar works. The *Angelic Guide* warns against cherishing one's own freedom too much. Wanting to live under their own control, human beings end up being deceived by their own free will and hence living a life of perpetual unrest.²⁹ Following the Augustinian line we saw earlier, Gobinet expresses the conviction that young people are not only tender plants but also diseased ones. The youthful intellect is darkened by ignorance. The youthful heart is inclined to unruliness, pride, inconstancy, and many other evils. The educator's work is necessary. A young person's heart is manifestly pervaded by God's spirit, and hence upright, when it is willing to be guided to goodness and takes delight in being sustained therein by someone who is already mature. A young person is manifestly upright when he or she demonstrates docility: i.e., the ability to learn, on both the notional and the emotional levels, what is conducive to piety.³⁰

Gobinet's viewpoint is certainly similar to the one we find in the pedagogical writings of Peter Coustel, the Abbé de Saint-Cyran, Peter Nicole, and Blaise Pascal.³¹ Taking all things into consideration, however, one can hardly say Gobinet differs from the view expressed by Croiset, whom we know to have been influenced by the spiritual schools of Cardinal Bérulle and Saint Francis de Sales.³² Writes Croiset: "The passions are born with us and do not remain young for long. They take advantage of the frailty of reason and the indulgence accorded to early childhood."³³ Or again: "A heart that begins to taste pleasure needs much help to be preserved from danger. There is every reason to fear for young people insofar as the world is concerned."³⁴

Education must make up for young people's lack of experience. It must teach them how to master their passions even before they get old enough to fear them. If the horror of vice does not anticipate reason, so to speak, then the finest

mazzolin di fiori, p. 74: "To you [God] has granted a very special favor, of which countless other boys and girls are deprived. They are without education, abandoned to the inclinations of a nature that, of itself, is ever inclined to evil and increasingly dragged down by bad example."

²⁹ *Guida angelica*, p. 41.

³⁰ Charles Gobinet, *Istruzione della gioventù nella pietà cristiana*, pt. 3, ch. 3 ("The third obstacle to the salvation of youth: disobedience"); ch. 4 ("The fourth obstacle: inconstancy"); pt. 4, ch. 6 ("Docility"); ch. 7 ("Obedience").

³¹ Irénée Carré, *Les pédagogues de Port-Royal* (Paris: Delagrave, 1887).

³² Pierre Pourrat, *Le spiritualité chrétienne* 4 (Paris, 1930), pt. 2, pp. 339-41. For more data, see also the dissertation of A.J. Borst, *De cultu Cordis Jesu ad mentem P. Joannis Croiset* (Rome, 1961), esp. pp. 112-15.

³³ Croiset, *Réflexions chrétiennes*, "De l'éducation," §1, p. 324.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

lessons and most salutary advice will always come too late. A good education forms the mind and controls the heart.³⁵ But one must “win the heart” if one wants to win the mind.³⁶ Croiset clearly has the whole person in view, but he is particularly concerned about intellectual and moral training; and the former is subordinate to the latter.

For Don Bosco, too, the focal point of education has to do with a person's ethical values. He pursues and watches over them in the community milieu of oratory and school life, where the main personal contacts between teacher and pupil take place in fleeting encounters in the yard and in the intimacy of the confessional. Important documentation is provided by the various diaries and Don Bosco's biographies of Savio, Magone, and Besucco. Don Bosco follows a youth step by step in his studies, his religious practices, and the community activities manifesting the good moral qualities of the boy about whom he is writing. His concern is to depict the boy's gradual growth in virtue after virtue from early childhood to his death.

The inescapable necessity of obedience stems from the fact that a guide is needed, according to Don Bosco, if the youth is to be successful. The importance of this mutual relationship is brought out by Don Bosco, Gobinet, Croiset, and Saint Alphonsus. The other side of the coin, as they see it, is the fact that the educator, like the parents, will have to render a strict account to God for the education he imparted. He ultimately will have to answer for the eternal salvation, holiness, and spirit of piety of his pupil.³⁷

In Don Bosco, as in the *Angelic Guide* and even more in Gobinet, the educational interrelationship is brought out more sharply by the differing emphasis placed on the educator's various tasks. For Gobinet, and even more for Coustel, the primary task of the educator is instruction that attracts and charms the student.³⁸ Thus the educator's role is subordinate to the clearly recognized role of the Holy Spirit, who is the principal educator. It is the Holy Spirit who prompts pupils to love goodness and let themselves be pervaded by it. The human educator plays a secondary role. At times it seems that his teaching is a necessary *occasion*, a divinely prearranged but not required circumstance, with respect to the illumination of minds and the delightful attraction of hearts.³⁹

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 327-28: “Education must forestall, so to say, reason...”

³⁶ Croiset, *Esercizi di pietà*, meditation for May 12, practices, n. 2, p. 198: “Their dispositions are dark, melancholy, pensive... One must win over their hearts to win over their minds.”

³⁷ See ch. III, sec. 3, pp. 40-43.

³⁸ With regard to Gobinet, the role he gives to sapiential instruction is rightly highlighted by Jeanne Lydie Goré, *L'itinéraire de Fénelon: humanisme et spiritualité* (Paris, 1957).

³⁹ Coustel tells us that we receive the light of reason to guide us when we are born. But this light is so obscured by original sin and pitch darkness that it cannot guide our

Don Bosco does not ignore the term “illumination,” but his mind seems to focus on elements of the will. When he asks young people to give him the key to their hearts, he seems to be thinking of their wills. He wants them to open up filially to the idea of letting their wills be guided by him. When he asks them to let him give them a haircut, to adhere to the guidelines of their educator rather than to their own criteria, we are led to think of the corpse-like obedience urged by Saint Ignatius Loyola; his followers are to submit their wills wholly to that of their superior.

The patient kindness and gentleness of the educator and Don Bosco’s persevering words of advice and counsel, which were evident already in the educators of Port-Royal as well as the Jesuits, are clearly linked with the fickleness of young people.⁴⁰ Advice beforehand is required with respect to the faults of youth. The primary reason is “the inconstancy of youth, who in a moment forget the rules of discipline and the punishments which they threaten.”⁴¹ Since the passions anticipate reason, writes Croiset, “education must anticipate reason.”⁴²

One might be led to think that Don Bosco, unlike the educators of Port-Royal or of the Jesuit schools of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, did not give much weight to theological conceptions about fallen nature. One might assume that he focuses solely on the experimental datum of “youthful fickleness,” which calls for assiduous attention on the part of the educator. Hence he does not go any further and explore the reasons behind this fickleness, or wonder whether it might be due to a greater liberty of the passions that are inclined toward evil in the absence of solidly tested and fortified virtue.

It is certainly true that Don Bosco seems more attentive to actual fact than to theological reasons. He does not seem to care much for offering motivations in one sense or the other. It is also a fact that he is clearly reluctant to offer theological elements in documents, such as his summary of the Preventive System for government minister Francesco Crispi, that are addressed to circles alien or

steps surely. In baptism we become temples of the Holy Spirit. We are enlightened by grace, which enables us to understand and love the lessons of Scripture, internal promptings, the circumstances of life, and the guides divinely assigned to us, our parents first and foremost. But given the somewhat unhealthy indulgence of parents, education by good teachers is preferable in practice to that provided at home. See *Traité d'éducation chrétienne et littéraire* (Paris, 1749), vol. 1, esp. bk. 1, ch. 1-9.

⁴⁰ Ibid., ch. 14, pp. 175-84: §7: “Tolerate their lack of diligence at studies and all their other faults with great patience”; §8: “Treat them with much gentleness”; §9: “Use exhortation rather than harshness and threats to lead them to piety and virtue.” The conviction that fallen nature manifests itself more in children, whose passions are not yet controlled by experientially tested virtue, impels the Port-Royal educator to gentleness and patient love. The same can be detected in the little tract of Croiset already cited.

⁴¹ Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo*, §1, n. 2; cited here from BM 4:381.

⁴² See n. 35 above.

even hostile to “clerical” types of instruction.⁴³ But we must also remember that he considered religious practice, and reception of the sacraments especially, as an essential basis for any successful education. A true and complete education was impossible without religion. Don Bosco was fully in agreement with Catholic educators who insisted upon the necessity of religion for a human nature weakened by sin.

In the final analysis, then, we cannot rule out or minimize the theological factor that lies at the root of the doctrinal and practical importance assigned to obedience, even though other factors of a psychophysical nature might sometimes be the most evident ones in Don Bosco’s discussions.

Elsewhere, to confirm the value of obedience, Don Bosco presents young people with reasons drawn from the Christian spiritual tradition:

To teach us obedience, our Savior, though omnipotent, was wholly submissive to the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph, practicing the humble trade of craftsman. Then, out of obedience to his heavenly Father, he died in agony on a cross... Obedience given to your superiors is the same as if it were given to Jesus Christ, Mary, and Saint Aloysius.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, awareness of human weakness, particularly of young people’s inclination to evil, is set within limits by Don Bosco’s remarks stressing the activism of his young people and the sense of trust often placed in them.

(d) Obedience and the free initiative of youth

In the matter of obedience we see clearly the complexity of Don Bosco’s attitude toward young people. On the one hand he considers the fundamental quest for happiness and reacts against the view that the Christian life is a sad, melancholy affair. He urges joy, cheerfulness, and fun on his youths. Adopting the motto of Saint Philip Neri, he encourages them to do anything that can help make them joyful. On the other hand, he puts them on guard against sin. His optimism is dimmed by fear, his confidence by trepidation, his paternal love by apprehension. Speaking in terms of ethical prospects, he warns young people that they will surely succumb to evil if they do not accept guidance. A guide is necessary until the tender plant grows into a stout tree capable of withstanding the blasts of temptation.

Looking closely, we can find the thesis summarized above, as well as others, underlying his comments in the biographies of Savio, Magone, and Besucco.

⁴³ The memorandum on the preventive system in the education of youth was accompanied by a letter dated Rome, Feb. 21, 1878. The text reproduced in *Ep.* 1719 is reconstructed from a draft preserved in AS 131/01 Crispi.

⁴⁴ *Giov. prov.*, pp. 14-15.

Even when channeled into religious ideals, the powers of youth tend to operate chaotically and give way to imprudent judgments. In all three boys Don Bosco has to moderate an inappropriate tendency to practice mortification. To all three, he must stress the importance of accepting the ordinary upsets of life as conditions prearranged by God; they are to be accepted as manifestations of God's loving will. To Besucco he has to recommend the importance of frequent communion. To Magone he has to suggest a general confession. After Magone has done that, Don Bosco has to work patiently with him in order to help him overcome inner anxieties that drive him to overly frequent confessions. Don Bosco describes the underlying impulse as "pleasure," but it may well have been due to an uneasy conscience that sought security by approaching the confessor and getting tranquilizing directives from him:

He 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 efficacious means to be free of scruples and to persevere in God's grace.⁴⁵

When the powers of youth operate in their assigned channel, on the other hand, Don Bosco follows them with complete sympathy. He stops to describe the numerous efforts of Savio, Magone, and Besucco to help their companions with their studies, their training in piety, and their search for true joy. What Don Bosco admires and offers for imitation is well regulated initiative that is under the direction of one who knows all about the youth.

The *Memoirs of the Oratory* makes clear this bipolarity of youthful initiative and the need for direction. Don Bosco describes sympathetically his industrious efforts as a boy and adolescent to do what he had to do in order to organize tranquil amusements in Becchi and then Chieri. In Becchi his mother watched over him and never tired of repeating maxims dictated by her good Christian sense. Don Bosco also takes care to note how indebted he was to Father John Calosso that his prayer life took on a more ordinary course. He reveals that he, too, found a more orderly life by wholeheartedly entrusting himself to the old priest and confiding all aspects of his life to him. Don Bosco

⁴⁵ Cornell, p. 122.

emphasizes that he, too, was forbidden to practice a form of mortification unsuited to his age. He also notes how important the choice of a good confessor was for him, and how he still felt the need for a good guide when it came to choosing his state in life. To the counsels of Fathers John Borel and Joseph Cafasso he owed many important decisions in his life.^{45a}

In his own educational practice this bipolar tension shows up with differing emphases, which may have been suggested by differing situations. For example, he seems to rely largely on the capacities of young people for goodness in the period when the hospice addition to the Oratory was a boarding house, one that offered much autonomy to its young people and stimulated their sense of personal responsibility and self-regulation. But when he comes to think of the residents of a boarding school, then he puts much emphasis on obedience as the key to order and discipline.⁴⁶

In substance, Don Bosco thinks that the most important prudential act for young people is putting themselves under obedience to a good director. Obedience plays a fundamental role in providing equilibrium for a young person, who is a tender plant in the process of growing, mending, and solidifying. Obedience plays a mediating role, standing between the command of the educator, who suggests, counsels, or orders the goals to be achieved, and the personal investment of energy and effort by the pupil along the lines dictated.

The general aim sought by Don Bosco is the good Christian, the upright citizen, and the “saint.” It is said that Saint Philip Neri’s motto was: “Give me a chaste boy and girl, and I will give you saints.”⁴⁷ Of obedience Don Bosco writes: “Give me an obedient boy and he will be a saint.”⁴⁸ In all likelihood, he was not trying to set up a comparison between the two virtues. He was simply trying to formulate a motto about obedience that would make clear its importance in achieving the ideal he held up to young people.

Don Bosco’s persistence in curbing excesses, even in Christian practice, and having the energies of young people focus on the fulfillment of their rightful duties indicates the sort of personality, spirit, and heart he was trying to develop in them through obedience. It was the sort of personality that could soar to the ideal, despite everything, but that concretely shaped them for the kind of life they would have to face subsequently.

Finally, we may ask to what extent Don Bosco’s convictions about young people’s need for a guide embody his perception of their real inner need for security at such a fickle age. Here again we have more facts than explicit statements

^{45a} Editor’s note: MO: 28-29, 36, 72, 110-11.

⁴⁶ On this point I again refer back to a careful reading of the texts indicated in n. 13, as well as of those noted in the *Indice MB*, pp. 279-80, s.v. “Obbedienza” and “obbedire.”

⁴⁷ Frassinetti, ch. 7, example 7; in *Opere ascetiche* 3 (Rome, 1910), 187.

⁴⁸ *Giov. prov.*, p. 16.

by Don Bosco. We have already examined some of the crises that Don Bosco depicted from real life, perhaps embellishing them with an interpretation of his own as well: e.g., the crises of Dominic Savio and Michael Magone. The outcome of these crises was a mutual affective relationship between Don Bosco and his boys, mutual trust between director and those being directed. Savio and Magone came to inner contentment. They felt confident and secure in their own powers and steps, which were guided and regulated by a man whom they came to know increasingly as a personality made for them and put at their service. This man viewed them as fingers of his own hand, as dear to him as himself.

Giving the key to one's heart to Don Bosco became a normal thing at the Oratory, a need, an unforgettable event in one's life. As the years went by, one recalled the signs of affection received; the kind words whispered in one's ear, the peanuts or chestnuts, a confidential prophecy of the number of years left to one's life. One recalled the signs of esteem and respect, the small or large tasks entrusted to him.

The case of Joseph Zucca is instructive. He was the boy who had invited Dominic Savio for a swim and had to retell the story because Don Bosco did not mention it in his biography of Savio. According to the records, Zucca had the lowest marks in moral conduct among the students of the Oratory: between satisfactory and unsatisfactory. Still living in Morialdo in 1928 and over eighty years of age, he recalled the good times he had at the Oratory. According to his own account, he left the Oratory in mid-1859 because he could not overcome the regret that filled his heart when Don Bosco publicly deplored his comments on the biography of his friend Savio:

He who wanted to ruin him while he was alive, now wants to demean him in death. And he does not realize that, in doing this, he only makes Dominic's virtue shine more brightly. That virtue went on to resist other temptations as well. Thus [his detractor] merely makes public his own misery, without even being asked.

Despite everything, those were good times for Zucca, and he recalled how Don Bosco used to send him on errands into the city late in the evening. He would pass the dark corners of that street on the outskirts that via Cottolengo was in those days. It was in those obscure byways that Don Bosco had been assaulted by hostile ruffians and helped by the mysterious gray dog known as Grigio. Zucca also called for the gray dog and claimed to have seen him beside Don Bosco in the refectory. Recalling these things as an old man, Zucca was clear-eyed until a few tear drops came.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Joseph Anthony Zucca, son of Baptist and Catherine, née Gillardi, was born in Morialdo (Castelnuovo) on May 4, 1843, and hence was younger than Dominic Savio. He died on November 24, 1928. In BS 53 (1929), 31, Fr. Angelo Amadei mistakenly writes that he died on the 25th and was older than Dominic. I drew the data from the parish archives of Castelnuovo. The data on his moral conduct come from autograph

These are small incidents, to be sure, but I think they may very well capture the overall impression of young people's affection, esteem, and gratefulness for Don Bosco, to whom they felt they owed any success in their lives. The feeling of being directed in their aspirations and initiatives gave them a sense of security that ultimately became warm filial thanks for the benefits they had received precisely when they needed them.

2. Purity

(a) Data on the Don Bosco's attitude from youth to adulthood

It is not of much importance to know how many times Don Bosco might have read *The Kings of France*, *Wretched Guerino*, and *Bertoldo, Bertoldino, and Casenno* in his youth, in Morialdo or other places, with children or adults listening to him. Nor is it surprising that these books would be read in Morialdo. Inherited from the late Middle Ages, they were reprinted many times and delighted the common folk. It was customary to read them all over Italy, and Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873) linked one of his characters to this practice. His charitable tailor's wisdom had grown out of the legends of the saints and *The Kings of France*, which he had read many times. It was thus that the tailor came to pass for a man of talent and knowledge.⁵⁰

Don Bosco's recollections possibly ought to be shifted somewhat: What he remembers as having occurred when he was eight to thirteen years old should be linked to the years spent at the Moglia farm and afterwards, when he was fourteen to twenty (from 1829 to 1835), when he already knew how to read better than other peasants, who were not as advanced as he in literacy skills. He

notes of DB, AS 132 Oratorio. [Editor's note: Dominic went swimming once, and this was the tale that Zucca was repeating. In the 1st ed. of the biography, DB omitted this, but Zucca compelled him to include it in later printings. See SDS 38-39; BM 6:78-80.]

⁵⁰ Andrea da Barberino (ca. 1370-ca. 1431) was the author of *Li Reali di Francia* and *Guerin Meschino*. According to Italo Borzi (*Enc. catt.* [1949], 1, col. 1190), *Li Reali* "had a vast circulation and is still read with pleasure in popular circles." According to A. Brunacci (*Dizionario generale di cultura* [Turin, 1928], 2:1469), it is "one of the most widely read and circulated books in rural areas all over Italy." There is an incomplete critical ed. by Giuseppe Vandelli (Bologna, 1892-1900). Of *Guerin Meschino* there is a rich philological study by Giacomo Osella, *Il Guerrin Meschino* (Turin, 1932). Another reader of *Li Reali di Francia* advanced for canonization is Dominic Bärbari, the Passionist who received John Henry Newman into the Church in 1845: see Federico dell'Addolorata, CP, *Il beato Domenico della Madre di Dio: passionista mistico, apostolo, scrittore (1792-1849)* (Rome, 1963²), p. 14.

could read in the stables, in the gatherings known as *trebbi*.⁵¹ And he could do this in more relaxed fashion after his stepbrother Anthony, who had been hostile to his schooling, turned twenty-one, married, and in all likelihood became a good neighbor to the little family that had moved from the Becchi farm to Sussambrino.

One would have to reread *The Kings of France* in young John's state of mind. He was in the stables, surrounded by people of every age and condition. There people enjoyed spending five or six hours in the evening, "listening, motionless, to the selections from *The Kings of France*. The poor reader used to stand on a bench so that all could hear and see." Young John must have felt like a little king amid the group of adults and his peers, who were absorbed in listening to him and day-dreaming. It was practically a sacred ceremony, beginning and ending "with a sign of the cross and a Hail Mary."⁵²

One would have to enter into the phantasmagoria of narrated episodes: Christian knights and Saracen warriors encountering one another in woods, castles, and inns, falling in love with the choicest damsels, and challenging one another to hectic, interminable duels. There are knightly and noble loves, issuing in children (one or more) from legitimate marriages or sometimes from liaisons. These offspring grow up and enter the story to carry on the epic.

The sixth book of *The Kings of France* begins with the journey of "big-foot" Bertha from Hungary to France, where she is to become the wife of Pepin. Along the way she talks things over with Elizabeth, her maid and foster-sister, whose family came from Mainz.^{52a} Bertha has heard from her mother that her future husband is a good-for-nothing brute. Wanting to study him more closely, Bertha asks Elizabeth to stay with the king the first night. Elizabeth lives up to the perfidy of her own people. She passes herself off as Bertha, who hides in the forest until the secret conspiracies are foiled.

⁵¹ On the *trebbi* in the Po Valley, see F. Coco, "Analisi storica e semantica della parola *trebbo*," in *Il mondo agrario tradizionale nella valle padana* (Modena, 1963), pp. 105-12. These nighttime gatherings of peasants in the stables were criticized by a few alarmed pastors: see Giuseppe Orlandi, CSsR, *Le campagne modenese fra Rivoluzione e Restaurazione (1790-1815)* (Modena, 1967), p. 156. In his youthful sermon on impurity DB, too, attacked possible abuses (see MB 16:599): "Ah, people, permit me this transport of zeal; vile and cowardly people...abandon sin...the frequenting of gangs, *trebbi*, and haunts..." Others found these assemblies useful for injecting religious instruction (see Orlandi, p. 599). In Piedmont there were many reprintings of a work by a rural pastor that was destined to take a place alongside *Li Reali di Francia* in the *trebbi* readings: Felice Cecca (d. 1815), *Le veglie de' contadini: Dialoghi familiari-istruttivi-morali sopra [sic] le quattro parti della dottrina cristiana ad uso, e vantaggio de' contadini, e di altre persone che vogliono approfittarne*, opera del parroco e vicario foraneo di Villafranca Piemonte (Turin: Botta, 1806; Paravia, 1854⁴; Arneodo, 1911¹¹).

⁵² MO:28, amended.

^{52a} Italian folklore regarded the people of Mainz (*i Maganzesi*) as traitors by nature.

The fourth book is about the hero Buovo d'Antona, offspring of the royal house of France. To save himself from the Mainz folk and his wicked mother and wife-killer, he wanders through the world under the false name of Augustine. But he is recognized by the old duke Sinibald of Rocca, through a stratagem of the duchess. She had been his wet-nurse and manages to recognize him for who he really is. To make sure, she has her husband invite Augustine to accept the hospitality of a bath:

"It is a custom," he said to him. "I hope you won't decline to bathe with me, even though I am old."

Buovo blushed and replied: "I will do as you please. But let us do it at night so that we can then go to bed." The bath was set for the following evening.

When evening came, Sinibald summoned Buovo into the room and both began to undress. When Sinibald had gotten into the bath, Buovo put out the light and then got in. When he was naked, the duchess, Sinibald's wife, entered the chamber. Buovo sank into the water as far as his chin and said to the woman: "What are you after? Do you want to take a bath?" The noble lady replied: "No, we do not want to take a bath. We have come to find the old and noble lineage. There is no use hiding under the water because I know you very well. I suckled you with the milk of my breast for seven years. You are the son of Duke Guidone d'Antona and the wicked Duchess Brandoria, who wanted to have you killed. You call yourself Augustine, but your name is Buovo."

There was no mistake or doubt for the duchess. On Buovo's right shoulder was the engraved mark of the French royal family. Buovo's was a little cross of blood on the skin.⁵³

In other books Rizieri and Fioravante battle Saracen warriors aplenty and bravely defend damsels in distress. Mad loves drag beautiful Saracen ladies after Christian knights. Gentle heartthrobs expand into bright flames, spawning stratagems of love between barely adolescent warriors and castle ladies who are still girls.

In his many recollections of early youth and adolescence, Don Bosco sympathetically presents *The Kings of France* to his Salesians. He says nothing indicating reservations about the circumstances of the reading or the book's content. That reading, for which he had such a large audience, probably sank into his spirit as a serene recollection. *Bertoldo*, like *The Kings*, was available only in complete editions, as far as we know. It was filled with witticisms based on popular humor: vulgar, fanciful, true to life, and sound. We are told that Don Bosco recommended the reading of this work to scrupulous sisters, and that should not seem strange. The common people readily delighted in depictions of brawny

⁵³ *Li Reali di Francia* (Venice, 1781), bk. 4, ch. 43, pp. 323-24.

knights in armor, with spears and head crests, taking broad swipes with their swords, entering castles, and spending their time in luxurious halls with ladies and girls dressed in multicolored brocades. The common people dreamed of a life that seemed far better than their lives in the fields. On the screens of their imagination they pictured gold strongboxes, rooms, and beds that did not have the stench of their manure or sweat. In *The Kings of France* and *Wretched Guerino* they found confirmation of some of their ideals: the triumph of justice and religion over injustice and sacrilege.⁵⁴

The text of *The Kings* contrasts sharply, however, with what one finds in the books that Don Bosco claims to have read in the seminary. Those books belong to an asceticism of the Catholic Reformation, a reaction against declining morals that have made their way even into the sanctuary.

In his *Life of Aloysius Comollo*, Don Bosco describes the behavior of his new Aloysius Gonzaga for the edification of his readers. From early childhood on, he fled persons of the opposite sex. As a seminarian, he would not even look directly at his female cousins, differentiating them by their voices and shadows. He gladly let them leave the seminary parlor, breathing a sigh of relief.⁵⁵

In his *Six Sundays* and *The Companion of Youth*, Don Bosco presents Aloysius Gonzaga. He never looked directly even at his mother, would not permit the servants to dress him, would not let the tip of his toes be seen when he got out of bed, and fled in dismay or ran off to scourge himself when he was invited to dance.

In *The Companion of Youth* we are told of a pious youth who is asked why he is so careful about his glances. He replies: "I have resolved not to look at the features of any woman in order to save my eyes for my first look, if I prove worthy, at the most beautiful face of Mary, the mother of purity."⁵⁶

Going through the streets of Turin to school, Dominic Savio would not look around. Questioned by a companion about this, he gave the same reply offered by the pious youth just mentioned. Dominic was so careful about

⁵⁴ This is the usual interpretation offered by those engaged in studying folklore and critically examining such popular texts. See article by Italo Borzi in *Enc. catt.* 1, col. 1190.

⁵⁵ This, at least, is what we read in DB's *Comollo*, pp. 34-35: "He was often visited by some of his female cousins from Chieri. It was a grave vexation to him insofar as it meant dealing with members of the opposite sex. Barely saying what courtesy required, he would politely tell them to visit him as little as possible and then take his leave from them. Asked several times whether his female relatives (whom he treated with such reserve) were big or small or extraordinarily beautiful, he replied that from their shadows they seemed to be big; otherwise he knew nothing about them, since he had never looked at their faces directly. A fine example, worthy of imitation by anyone aspiring to the priesthood!" The point to note in connection with what we are analyzing here is the final exclamation by DB.

⁵⁶ *Giov. prov.*, p. 53.

looking around, writes Don Bosco, that he often returned home with a headache.⁵⁷

Don Bosco speaks of purity in superlatives. It is the angelic virtue, the one most precious to the Son of God. Jesus Christ chose a virgin to be his mother, a virgin to be his guardian, and a virgin to be his favorite disciple. Those who maintain this virtue are the immaculate ones of Revelation (14:4), “who follow the Lamb wherever he goes.”⁵⁸

Boys who want to preserve their purity will avoid going around with bad companions. They will flee persons of the opposite sex, even their sisters and female cousins. Getting near them is like putting fire near straw. The devil is a shrewd philosopher and knows the distinctions. He makes a boy forget that a girl is a cousin and sister, so that he sees only a person of the female sex.⁵⁹

(b) Cultural and literary derivations

It might seem that what Don Bosco has to say about this subject is due to some sort of hidden linkup with Jansenist pessimism.⁶⁰ Taking a closer look, however, we must be wary of suggesting ties that are debatable even on the literary and philological levels. As far as I can see, the principal sources for Don Bosco on the theme of purity are almost all authors who had nothing to do with Jansenism,

⁵⁷ SDS:79-80: “He would never stare at girls, controlling his eyes on his way to and from school. Sometimes, though his friends were lost in gaping at exciting sights in a public street show, it turned out that Dominic had not even noticed it. One boy angrily yelled at him, ‘What are your eyes for if you don’t use them to look at things like these?’ ‘I’ll use them to see the face of Our Blessed Mother, if by God’s grace I am worthy of heaven,’ was the immediate answer.”

On his headaches, we have the report of a companion, Giusto Ollagnier, in AS 9/160. On his street behavior DB offers a bit more detail in an earlier passage (SDS:60): “Dominic’s daily route to school and back, so dangerous for country lads who move to the city, was a real exercise in virtue. Ever obedient to his superior’s advice, he made sure he kept himself from anything that was not fit for the eyes or ears of a Christian.”

⁵⁸ Typical texts are: the youthful sermon on impurity (BM 16:404-11; AS 132 Prediche B4); *Maggio*, days 25-26, pp. 144-54; the sermon notes for retreats given to Salesians in Trofarello (1869) and subsequently (autograph ms. of DB, AS 132 Prediche E4; MB 9:985-94). See also *Indice* MB, pp. 36-37, s.v. “Castità” and “Purità.” Relevant texts are gathered and systematically presented by Braido, *Il sistema preventivo*, pp. 289-312.

⁵⁹ Good Night talk of July 5, 1867, the day before the vigil of the Oratory’s celebration of the feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga: see BM 8:381.

⁶⁰ I do not mean here to minimize the presence of Jansenism among the various elements that had some impact in Piedmont, especially on the religious behavior of people in the 18th century. I simply want to caution against a certain readiness, even today, to attribute to Jansenism spiritual attitudes whose causes are far more remote and, in differing degrees, at the root of spiritual attitudes to be found even in the Anti-Jansenists.

who, in fact, were committed to its downfall. It is from Saint Philip Neri, not from Coustel or Nicole, that Don Bosco derives his admonition not to touch one another. It applies to boys dealing with boys, and even more in the case of boys dealing with girls. From Philip Neri (by way of Joseph Frassinetti to *The Companion of Youth*) comes his warning not to deal familiarly even with female relatives, as we just saw above. Philip Neri is the Renaissance saint who already breathes the anxieties of the Catholic Reformation.⁶¹

As I noted in the previous volume,^{61a} the Jesuit Anthony Foresti (1625-1692) is Don Bosco's source for the maxim: *abstrahere ligna foco, si vis extinguere flammam*. We must remove ourselves from temptations (alcohol, women, etc.) to put out the flame of sin.

The devotional and ascetical literature that offers Aloysius Gonzaga as an example, idealizes him, and rhetorically rhapsodizes about him is certainly not Jansenistic. It seems to me that Don Bosco owes much to this literature on Aloysius for his material and psychic attitude. It finds expression in his *Six Sundays* (in honor of the six years Aloysius lived in the Society of Jesus), in the *Company of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga*, and in his reading of hagiographical profiles by Croiset, Virgil Cepari, Anthony Cesari, and the Oratorian Charles Massini (1702-1791), despite the accusation of Jansenism made against him.⁶²

Perhaps a Jansenistic mentality might underlie the admonitions against the opposite sex. As a commentary on the pious boy who never wanted to look at a woman, one might offer the words of Cardinal John Bona in his *Guide to*

⁶¹ Rightly, it seems to me, some are reacting against the interpretation of the 16th-century Italian spirituality of St. Philip Neri, Bonsignore Cacciaguerra, CO (1494-1566), Lawrence Scupoli, and others as an indulgent spirituality—because it urged frequent communion, for example. There is a danger of simply taking over the polemical and generalizing interpretation of Anthony Arnauld (1612-94) and those in the 17th century who were reacting against devout humanism, Molinism, and casuistry. On this topic see Innocenzo Colosio, "Irrigidimento e austerità della spiritualità italiana del Cinquecento in opposizione al Rinascimento," in *Rivista di ascetica e mistica* 32 (1963), 286-97.

^{61a} DBLW:63.

⁶² I have given a summary description of these connections in *Valori spirituali nel "Giovane provveduto" di San Giovanni Bosco* (Rome, 1960), pp. 36-40. Croiset and Cepari, along with Cesari, are sources for DB's "Cenni sopra la vita di san Luigi Gonzaga"; he cites them and the Church historian Matthew Henrion (1805-62) in *Sei domen.*, p. 22. Massini was kept in mind for the various *Lives* of the Popes and perhaps also for DB's *Church History*. His double set of lives of the saints (*Raccolta delle vite de' santi per ciascun giorno dell'anno*, 13 vols. [Rome, 1763]; *Seconda raccolta, che contiene l'appendicea delle vite de' santi*, 13 vols. [Rome, 1767]) was reprinted several times in Piedmont (Turin, 1767; Ivrea, 1815; Turin, 1831). For Massini's connections with Jansenism, see Enrico Dammig, *Il movimento giansenista a Roma nella seconda metà del secolo XVIII* (Vatican City, 1945).

Heaven. I transcribe them here from a copy belonging to Father Joachim Berto, Don Bosco's secretary:

Woman was made by God to be man's helper. Through the wickedness of the serpent, she put on the character of an enemy. In her everything is a wound, everything is fire, everything is homicide. Her voice, her eyes are much more deadly than any tiger or other wild beast. Oh, if your salvation is precious to you, flee her presence and conversations with her. The human race was driven out of paradise because of her, and she still retains this behavior of hers.⁶³

For the episodes about Saint Aloysius and Comollo in their behavior toward women, one could offer this comment by the same author:

We hear many excuses offered every day: necessity, custom, good intentions. But immense evils are hidden under the semblance of goodness. Out of it begin to appear a few harmful liberties, careless conversations, little loose gestures, immodest acts of carelessness, frequent gifts of trifles, and certain merry ways wherein modesty gradually...gives way and is set aside. All these steps are taken gradually. One who would blush in shock at the mere footprints of a female, comes to look at wanton nudity and stare lasciviously.⁶⁴

But in *The Companion of Youth*, Don Bosco's source for the devout youth determined, if he should be worthy of it, to look first on no one else's face but Mary's in heaven and for Aloysius Gonzaga's determination not to look at his mother is actually Frassinetti, a well-known follower of Saint Alphonsus who suffered much from the accusations of excessive benignism that Genoese rigorists made against him:

Our own Father Charles Hyacinth had such a horror of impurity that once, seeing a female dressed indecently, he had a strong urge to vomit. One day he said: "I have resolved not to look at a female face, saving my eyes to look first (if I be not unworthy) at the beautiful countenance of the Mother of purity, Mary Most Holy."⁶⁵

⁶³ Giovanni Bona, *Guida al cielo* (Mondovì, 1853), ch. 5, p. 54.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

⁶⁵ Giuseppe Frassinetti, *Avviamento dei giovanetti nella divozione di Maria Santissima*, ch. 7, example 5; in *Opere ascetiche* 3 (Rome, 1910), 187. Charles Hyacinth of St. Mary (Marino Sanguineti in the world) was born in Genoa on Sept. 5, 1658, and died on Apr. 23, 1721. The episode mentioned by Frassinetti is found in the *Memorie dell'umile servo di Dio, divoto di Maria P. Carlo Giacinto di santa Maria, agostiniano scalzo della provincia di Genova* (Rome: Bernabò, 1728), collected by Fr. Hyacinth of St. Mary of the same religious order, pt. 3, ch. 6: "Observance of his religious vows and of the specific rules associated with their reform" (p. 192): "Speaking once with me about a fair lady of high reputation in the city, he said he was not curious to look at her. When the opportunity offered itself, he would look only at her face. He added: 'I am resolved not to look at the features of a woman, having decided to save my eyes to look first (if I be not

The only difference, obviously, is that in this source the pious youth is really a mature Augustinian friar, a venerable servant of God who walked the streets of proud Genoa in the middle of the seventeenth century. Don Bosco may have made a mistake; or else, like many other pious writers, he permitted himself a slight adaptation to his audience.

There is no need, then, to bring into the picture Jansenism or anti-Jansenism. We are dealing with the common mentality that pervaded hagiographical and homiletic literature, the literary production of minor and major authors, above and beyond even the boundaries between Catholics and Protestants.⁶⁶ This literature obviously seeks to move people's feelings and imprint convictions, to give stimuli that will operate at the right moment to resist evil successfully. Hence they do not present fine shadings of cases. They do not care to present circumstances where there is no sin *per se*, where there is no collapse of reserve and modesty, where the body and sex are perfectly decent.

It would be all too easy, but unfair, to accuse this literature indiscriminately of rigid abstractionism. For devout literature does not offer scholastic tracts. Its books often seek to implant convictions and lead people to an ideal type of moral behavior, a kind desired by the popular mind as well.

unworthy) at the most beautiful countenance of the mother of purity, Mary Most Holy.” This biography (a copy of which is in the Valdocco library) goes on to narrate an incident that is also in biographies of St. Philip Neri and DB: “When a certain woman, apparently immodest, approached holy communion on one occasion, he was so taken with the urge to vomit that only a miracle kept him from doing so, as he confided to a priest who was a close friend of his” (ibid.). Among Charles Hyacinth's counsels to confessors, we find a comment that indicates the same outlook found in Bona's *Guida al cielo*: “Do not trust the spirit of women at all, not at all. Be wary of teaching them to practice mental prayer. Teach them two things, and let all their holiness consist of them: to restrain their wrath and control their impatience; and not to lose sight of their housework, their art and profession.” As did many in his day, he was reacting against the prayer of quiet and idle devotion. The major prayer and contemplation for women is “work.”

⁶⁶ Indicative of the behavior either approved or criticized are the various books for confessors such as: *Brieve, chiara e pratica istruzione per gli confessori di terre e villaggi intorno alle cose che più ordinariamente accadono nell'amministrazione del sacramento della penitenza... composta da un fratello missionario della Congregazione del P. Pavone* (Naples, 1726, and several reprintings); Leonardo da P. Maurizio, *Direttorio della confessione generale* (Rome, 1737; reprinted by Marietti, among others, Turin, 1840); St. Alphonsus, *Il confessore diretto per le confessioni della gente di campagna* (Venice, 1764; reissued often by Marietti as well). On the behavior patterns of the Piedmont countryside we find details that are somewhat useful regarding the milieu of DB and his students in the *Istruzioni semplici che possono servire di metodo di vita cristiana e di ammaestramento per la buona educazione dedicate alle giovani figliuole d'ogni classe devote di Maria SS.ma* (Turin: Ferrero-Vertamy, 1846³). Note that the next year we find Ferrero associated with Speirani, the printer of DB's 1st little works. Also note here that ch. 6-7 of pt. 2 of the last mentioned work instruct youths on giving guidance to their own sisters between the ages of 8 and 10, and offer instruction to both boys and girls charged with tending heifers.

(c) *Don Bosco and the morals of his time*

We cannot adequately measure and evaluate the ideal behavior that books sought to inculcate, nor can we adequately measure the literature for which Don Bosco was a spokesman, if we do not take into account the moral behavior of real life and its evolution.

We do find a general evolution in Piedmont and Europe from an agricultural and handicraft phase (when Don Bosco came to work in Turin) to an industrial phase. Indeed Don Bosco, along with a high percentage of the boys in the hospice addition to the Oratory, is proof of the twofold phenomenon of rising industrialism and its correlative urbanization.

We cannot overlook the impact that these two facts could have on people's morals and outlook. Don Bosco and many others experienced the transfer from an agricultural milieu to city life. They moved from an environment close to nature, where many phenomena of life were under the eyes of everyone: in farm houses, fields, and stables. Little children could see their mothers nursing newborn infants. Older children joined the adults in taking care of heifers and calves. In the open atmosphere of Mother Nature amid the hills of Monferrato, and despite the crude morals of many, the phenomena of maternity could still be somewhat sacred things, the renewing touch of the Creator at work close to them.⁶⁷ This sense of the sacred was certainly not disturbed by the recitation, twice a week, of the joyful mysteries of the rosary: how "the Angel Gabriel announced to the Virgin that she was to conceive and bear our Lord Jesus Christ"; how "the Holy Virgin, having learned that Saint Elizabeth was pregnant, set off immediately...to visit her and stayed with her three months"; and, finally, "the time for her to give birth having come, in Bethlehem the Virgin Mary gave birth to our Redeemer in the middle of the night, between two animals in a manger."⁶⁸

Already in those days language was becoming more attentive to new sensitivities. The cities moved faster than the countryside and hill country. Only a few decades ago it was still possible to hear the mysteries of the rosary announced in the terms just cited. Adopting more reticent formulas already in use elsewhere, Don Bosco shows that he is attuned to the new sensibility. But in 1862 he could

⁶⁷ Here I only want to bring out a few psychodynamic factors at work in rural areas that relate in some way to my remarks on DB. The books cited in the previous note and documents in diocesan archives dealing with rural parishes also bring out many negative elements, coarse matters, and moral disorders.

⁶⁸ I quote here from *Orazioni all'uso della Congregazione del Seminario di Torino sotto il titolo della Beata Vergine Immacolata* (Turin: Briolo, 1782), pp. 21-22. The formulas are unchanged in later editions: e.g., *Orazioni giornaliere ad uso del Seminario di Torino* (Turin: Pomba, 1819), p. 33. But they can also be found in other devotional books, some of which I cited in *Valori spirituali nel "Giovane provveduto,"* p. 112.

still write as follows with regard to Blessed Catherine de Mattei of Racconigi: "Not having sufficient milk and unable to pay for a wet nurse, her mother was forced to place the poor baby in her brother's arms so that he might carry her around to women capable of supplying it."⁶⁹

Dress fashion was changing. Even during the Restoration women's dresses, those of the nobility especially, had blatantly low necklines, even though the skirts still went down to the feet. As new fashions came in, women's dresses became shorter, first in cities and then in country areas.⁷⁰

But in matters of sexuality, too, the dynamics of the human psyche display unexpected reactions from age to age and from place to place. Despite the warnings of moralists against immodest adult looks, even at babies,⁷¹ despite all Don Bosco might write about custody of the eyes, and despite the careful concern of Dominic Savio and Michael Magone to control their glances, one can say with good reason that their sensibility could tolerate representations of angels in open, fluttering dress, such as those we see on the cover of *Il Galantuomo* for 1855 or the covers of Magone's copybooks that we still have today,⁷² more than their sensibility could tolerate representations of truly female adolescents.

In the nineteenth century, marriage was postponed to an older age. Don Bosco's brothers, Anthony and Joseph, married at the ages of twenty-one and twenty respectively; and they married women of their own age. They exactly embody the local custom of the time, which lasted far into the century. In large towns and

⁶⁹ Giovanni Bosco, *Cenni storici intorno alla vita della B. Caterina De-Mattei da Racconigi* (Turin: OSFS, 1862), p. 8.

⁷⁰ There are excellent works on the history of dress, which need not be cited here. Instead I choose to cite a comment on country dress, framed in ethical and religious terms, in the *Istruzioni semplici* (Turin, 1846), pp. 27-28: "In this season [summer], because of the heat, many girls refrain from wearing the so-called *giubbetta* or *giusta-corpo* [in a footnote: *brassiera* in the Piedmontese dialect], and they may even take off their neckerchief, which is definitely indecent; don't imitate such an immodest practice." The author reminds readers that their bodies were consecrated to God at baptism. [Editor's note: The *giubbetta* was a woman's jacket with long, loose sleeves, covering the upper body from neck to waist.]

⁷¹ Apparently, the moral casuistry on immodest looks at babies was elaborated around the beginning of the 17th century. Philippe Ariès detects the influence of the Jansenist spirit (*L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* [Paris: Plon, 1960], pp. 109-10). The *Istruzioni semplici* recommends to young people some discreet behavior to be inculcated in younger siblings (8 to 10 years old) who are supposed to watch the babies in the family: "They should not engage in or permit indecent amusements with the babies they are watching. They should not permit them to go naked, since this greatly offends the Lord... When babies have some dire needs, they should immediately hand them over to their mother or grandmother, never attending to those needs themselves" (p. 91).

⁷² AS 123 Magone. One is reprinted in *Don Bosco: Opere e scritti editi e inediti 5* (Turin, 1965), 216.

cities, however, the age for marriage rose to somewhere between twenty-two and twenty-five, when military service was over and regular work had been found.⁷³

Another fact of importance in the second half of the century was the rapid growth of boarding schools for students and artisans. The student population grew, and trade education for minors assumed large proportions. In urban areas especially, the climate of liberty nurtured by political events prompted students to dissociate themselves from customary morals. Customary morality could hold out in provincial and rural areas, which were under the moral control of older people and the clergy.

Vocabulary underwent change also. Certain terms, such as “purity” and “chastity,” were dear to Don Bosco and he used them frequently prior to 1870. But they began to attract ridicule in some circles, under the pressure of the press and lively anticlerical language.⁷⁴ On the other hand, the terms “morality” and “good behavior” increasingly took on the sense of chastity, modesty, continence, and other similar qualities more or less dissociated from the morality of the confessional. When the Regulations for the Salesian houses and the deliberations of the general chapters speak of morality, chastity and its related virtues are almost always meant.

What was the effect of the new environmental conditions on young people? What might happen in the prolonged period of school life or the longer interval before marriage? What aspects of young men and their life might have repercussions on adolescents housed in the same educational setting? And, finally, what resolutions might all this prompt in their educators? Father Lemoyne tells us:

Only toward the end of his life, realizing that the knowledge of evil had steadily increased among boys who had been victims or spectators of immoral deeds as children, did [Don Bosco]— on two or three occasions—reluctantly reveal the terrible consequences of impurity.⁷⁵

Thus new realities influenced him, evoking new evaluations and approaches from him. We must not forget that the 1880s were a period when anticlericals and even the church authorities of Turin had their eyes on the Oratory. Everything at the Oratory “had” to go right and be proper.

⁷³ Francesco Martinengo, CM (1826-1903), *Il gran passo raccomandato ai giovani e alle giovinette cristiane e anche un poco ai loro genitori* (Turin: Salesiana, 1877), p. 182: “You are not to speak to her or let her know anything. Speak to her parents or have someone speak for you... Have them asked for their daughter when you will be 25 or 26 and earning at least 4000 lire as a salary. This is the way to proceed honorably; and if it is to succeed, it will succeed. That is much easier and better than romancing.”

⁷⁴ I need only cite as an example the epithet “black sack,” a favorite anticlerical designation used in the *Gazzetta del popolo*.

⁷⁵ BM 7:54.

(d) *Circumstances affecting Valdocco*

Special problems were posed by the topographical location of the Valdocco Oratory. In his *Christian Vademecum*, Don Bosco reiterates an old admonition to parents: they should not let babies sleep in their bed; nor should they let brothers and sisters sleep in the same bed because grave disorders may result.⁷⁶ It is not improbable that Don Bosco was prompted to include this admonition in his work because of all he might well have known about the wretched, ill-famed quarters of Valdocco and Vanchiglia in the period prior to the unification of Italy. When the cholera epidemic broke out in 1854, boys were taken from wretched hovels where mother, father, grandparents, and numerous children occupied the same room. The only possible division was the grouping of the children in a corner on the same straw mattress or bed of leaves. That is what Brother Peter Enria (1841-1898) tells us about his own family of impoverished immigrants from San Benigno Canavese.⁷⁷ Don Bosco's mind, then, could easily latch on to dismal anecdotes, such as the one narrated by Fa-

⁷⁶ Bosco, *Porta tecco cristiano, ovvero avvisi importanti intorno ai doveri del cristiano acciocché ciascuno possa conseguire la propria salvezza nello stato in cui si trova* (Turin: Paravia, 1858), p. 25. This 1st ed. does not have DB's name on the frontispiece, only at the conclusion of the preface. Among the various parts that make up the work, we should note the "Ricordi generali di S. Filippo Neri alla gioventù" (pp. 34-36), which were very well known in Piedmont, often reprinted, and assimilated by DB: "Be happy...; don't treat your body delicately...; avoid bad companions...; don't put your hands on someone else, even in fun." They were suggested to Magone as a way of protecting purity (Cornell, p. 133).

The recommendation, aside from being made in some synods, is offered by St. Charles Borromeo. His *Ricordi, ossia ammaestramenti generali per ogni ceto di persone ma specialmente per i padri e le madri di famiglia, i capi di bottega e lavoranti* was printed as an appendix to his biography by Giovanni Pietro Giussano (*Istoria della vita, virtù, morte e miracoli di Carlo Borromeo* [Milan, 1610]; Eng. trans. by H.E. Manning, 2 vols. [London, 1884]), and they were often reprinted separately in Piedmont. To cite one ed., aside from the comments of St. Charles in the *Porta tecco: La famiglia cristiana, ovvero ammaestramenti e regole del viver cristiano per ogni stato di persone secolari, proposti da S. Carlo Borromeo* (Novara, 1839; Turin: Armonia, 1861 [Library of Good Books]). The good Christian moralist, however, has nothing to repeat about the custom permitting people of the same sex (poor people) to sleep in the same bed. The *Istruzioni semplici* recommends delicacy, to young people obviously: "Be very careful in getting into and out of bed, avoiding nudity insofar as possible, and indecent ways of lying in bed. You are to use even greater care when you have to lie in the same bed with a sister or female friend" (p. 28).

⁷⁷ Peter Enria was the eldest of five brothers whose mother had died. He tells of the events surrounding the cholera epidemic in his deposition for the beatification process of DB. He gave his deposition on Jan. 27, 1893. The autograph document from which I draw (AS 110 Enria, quaderno 2, pp. 3-5) is to be dated from a few months to two years earlier. [Editor's note: See "Peter Enria Remembers," trans. Michael Ribotta, SDB, *Journal of Salesian Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Fall 1992), pp. 93-108.]

ther Segneri about a brother and sister who ended up together in vice and, before falling into the hands of divine justice, ended up in the hands of human justice and were condemned to capital punishment.⁷⁸

For a long time, moreover, Valdocco was on the extreme edge of the city, on a slope of fields and gardens leading down to the Dora River. One had only to go up to the second or third floor of the house, look through breaks in the bushes and low walls, and see what was going on down at the river about a thousand feet away. Thus there was some reason for the strict precepts about bathing in the Regulations for the Festive Oratory. Going swimming or standing and watching those who were swimming was strictly prohibited and considered among the worst offenses that members of the Oratory could commit.⁷⁹

The practice still went on, however, even when the Oratory was walled in and housed both younger students and older trade students. In the heat of summer, when Don Bosco was away for the spiritual exercises at Saint Ignatius's Shrine above Lanzo, or writing books at the Ecclesiastical College, or going around preaching or begging alms, younger and older boys would scale the north wall, cross the little channel of water known as the *bealèra* that irrigated the gardens, and head down through the Molassi district to the Dora River. There they would indulge in what Don Bosco called "swimming parties," stripped down to their bare skin.⁸⁰

That explains why Don Bosco reacted so energetically against this practice. One can readily imagine that his mind might conjure up not only moral disorders, but some terrible incident fatal to body or soul that would end up in the hands of the press or the public authorities. He could well picture the responsibility he might bear, or the troubles that might ensue for the Oratory and its director.

Tradition records an incident that took place in July 1862, when Don Bosco was at Saint Ignatius's Shrine. Several older boys escaped the vigilance of Father Alasonatti and headed for a swimming party in the Dora River. While they were in the water, they suddenly felt sound whacks on their backs. Taken aback, they looked around but saw only a soldier swimming nearby. They asked him,

⁷⁸ Segneri, *Il cristiano instruito* (Turin: Marietti, 1855), pt. 1, ragion. 13, §13, p. 143.

⁷⁹ *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per gli esterni* (Turin: Salesiana, 1877), pt. 2, ch. 5, p. 34 (as I already noted, the 1st redactions would be those of 1852-53). The regulations on swimming are all autographs of DB: see 026/1, p. 21. The dangers of swimming "around Turin" are noted by DB in SDS:74. Alarms about the "frequency of calamities to members of the populace who swim in the rivers" occur in *Letture di famiglia* 4 (1845), 245.

⁸⁰ DB always links the dangers of drowning and immorality. But besides that, there is such testimony from not very distant times about the practices of the very poor children of the urban periphery and countryside.

but he knew nothing about it. In the meantime, Don Bosco sent a letter to Father Alasonatti about four ravenous wolves going around the Oratory in lambs' clothing. When he returned to the Oratory, he seemed to be well informed about everything. He said that his "telegraph" had informed him of what was going on, and that a smack had intervened to teach the incautious youths a solemn lesson.⁸¹

As time went on, the Dora River ceased to be a serious problem. Houses began to congest the area around 1870. A new neighborhood was taking shape.⁸² The river no longer held the same attraction for boarding students, and responsibility for the boys of the festive oratory was not felt as keenly.

The problems of the residents came to be felt more seriously, however. There were between six and seven hundred youths ranging in age from twelve to eighteen. Not all of them came from good families, nor were all of them of angelic behavior or the best intentions. The documents inform us that the problems of vigilance and "assistance" sometimes became acute. There was a more pressing need to prevent conversations, acts, reading material, and friendships that could cause "disorders": i.e., what could be defined theologically as sins against modesty, reserve, or chastity, with the added danger of scandal. And this vigilance had to be implemented in the common dormitories, the playground, the workshops, and obscure corners.

(e) Educating young people in purity

We can understand how the problem of purity touched Don Bosco closely and vividly, from the time it arose in his own adolescent conscience to the days when he was an educator of youths and director of pupils at the Valdocco Oratory. The vividness of the problem is clear from his insistence on the point. In his dreams purity is frequently and repeatedly symbolized by a white lily, which is assailed by the tomcat of hell or thrown to the ground by the trunk of the hellish elephant. Or else it is carried in full bloom to the throne of Mary and placed in her hand as a symbol of triumph by Dominic Savio, who appears in a vision of heaven.⁸³

From his own experience Don Bosco might have been led to ponder what Saint Alphonsus wrote in his moral theology: the majority of those in hell,

⁸¹ BM 7:134-38.

⁸² At the start of this century, however, there were still fields behind the Oratory as far as the Dora. A few houses were going up on the street along the embankment and along corso Principe Oddone, which parallels the Turin-Milan railway line.

⁸³ See *Indice* MB, p. 365, s.v. "Purità attraverso i sogni."

indeed all of them perhaps, are damned because of impurity.⁸⁴ Purity evokes from him terms and descriptions that might well seem to be lyrical flights of vivid emotion, designed to arouse wonder and implant mental habits that will spring to life at the moment of temptation. In all likelihood, that is precisely what they were for Don Bosco and all those who had assimilated them from the same books and culture that Don Bosco served to express.

Purity readily becomes a synonym for innocence, for the state of grace. The Jesuit Joseph Anthony Patrignani (1659-1733), biographer of seventeenth-century adolescents and youths in the Roman Seminary, states the point emphatically: "Innocence and purity are the two virtues that can be considered twins. They are so similar that it is a mistake to try to distinguish them."⁸⁵ A

⁸⁴ St. Alphonsus, *Theologia moralis*, bk. 3, tr. 4, §413, in *Opere morali* (Turin: Marietti, 1846) 1:456: "Utinam brevius aut obscurius explicare me potuissem! Sed cum haec sit frequentior atque abundantior confessionum materia, et propter quam maior animarum numerus ad infernum delabatur: imo non dubito asserere, ob hoc unum impudicitiae vitium, aut saltem non sine eo, omnes damnati quicumque damnatur." He has similar statements in *Homo apostolicus*, tr. 9, punct. 1, §1, in *Opere morali* (Turin: Marietti, 1848) 3:178. Perhaps for this reason St. Leonard of Port Maurice, in discussing general confessions, especially during mission weeks, suggests that the confessor move forward quickly when the penitent is well-disposed: "Ask him first about his state, age, and occupation. Start with the sixth commandment, asking first about sins committed in childhood and then about obscene thoughts, words, and deeds. But do this step by step as his responses provide openings for you and in accordance with my suggestions" (see *Direttorio della confessione generale*, "Dialogue between confessor and penitent" [Turin: Marietti; 1840], p. 56).

Noteworthy as well are the bluntly stated convictions of St. Leonard in his own popular missions: "Now I know what you are going to reply: that when you say that impurity is only a small evil, the least evil that a person may commit, you are not speaking absolutely but comparatively, comparing it to far worse sins that are committed in a day's time. But what is that reply worth?... If you tarnished your soul only once in this manner, I would say that you are fortunate in your losses. But I doubt that this *one weakness* is one, as the sea is one even though it collects numberless streams. 'One weakness' means that you began to defile yourself with countless indecent acts every day once you had reached the age of reason around 7 or 8, and that you will not stop even when you are old and decrepit... Indeed, I have no doubt that any one of you...enslaved to this accursed vice, between indecent thoughts, words, and deeds one day after the next, certainly ends up committing 10 mortal sins a day...as many as 300 a month, more than 3,000 a year, perhaps, and hence more than 30,000 in 10 years. Add to the sins you yourself commit those committed by people to whom you have taught this wickedness: those you have put on the road to evil and those who have learned how to do evil from your example. God's justice will add all of them to your account. Who, then, can correctly total up such vast numbers? And this huge total of wicked acts is what you call 'only one weakness?'" (*Istruzioni catechistiche per le sante missioni*, instr. 13, in *Opere complete* [Venice, 1868] 4:202,204).

⁸⁵ Giuseppe Antonio Patrignani, *Vite de alcuni nobili convittori stati e morti nel Seminario Romano segnalati in bontà* (Turin: Marietti) 2:167.

standing motto of Don Bosco was that all good things come along with purity: *Et venerunt omnia bona pariter cum illa* (Wis 7:11). He likes to say of purity what Scripture says of wisdom:

The Holy Spirit tells us that all good things come to us with the virtue of purity: *venerunt omnia bona pariter cum illa*. In fact, those who have the good fortune to be able to talk with those souls who preserve this precious treasure discover in them a tranquillity, peace of heart, and contentment that surpass all earthly goods. You will find them patient in misery, charitable to their neighbor, peaceable in the face of injuries, resigned in sickness, attentive to their duties, fervent in prayer, and eager for the Word of God. In their hearts you detect a lively faith, firm hope, and burning charity.⁸⁶

As the picture of purity seeks to be alluring, so the picture of impurity seeks to evoke horror and disgust. The youth given over to lust is loathsome, discontent with himself, often punished by God with illnesses, eaten away by tuberculosis, melancholic, bilious, and irritable under a feigned mask of gaiety. Finally, he often provides the awesome spectacle of a despairing death that is the prelude to punishments in hell.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *Maggio*, day 26, p. 152. See also the 1881 dream of S. Benigno (BM 15:148), of which there is an autograph draft by DB (AS 132 Sogni), and *Giov. prov.* (Turin, 1878), p. 29: "the most beautiful of the virtues," introduced in this ed. Of this consideration we have an autograph by Fr. Bonetti, revised by DB (133 Giovane Provveduto). The text draws its inspiration from DB's own *Maggio*. More frequent is the maxim, *Erunt sicut angeli in coelo* ("They [will be] like the angels in heaven": Matt 22:30), which seems to serve as the inspiration for the literature on Aloysius Gonzaga as model, and the literature on purity in general. Deserving of mention among various works is that of Claude Arvisenet (1755-1831), *La virtù angelica: Operetta utile specialmente alla gioventù* (Turin, 1852, Library of Good Books, a. 4, disp. 81). There we find extensive treatment of the virtue and its worth, as well as precautions to be taken in order to preserve it; the ideas and terms are substantially those nurturing the popular spirituality of DB's milieu.

⁸⁷ See the already cited youthful sermon on impurity, MB 16:599: "Just scour the countryside and visit the city squares, and you will see persons in the prime of life, who might have been the honor of their families, . . . consumed and wasted by this vice, disgraced, and turned into the dregs of society. I do not even mention all the families who, on account of this vice, suffer from bitter arguments, disagreements, and the most serious and calamitous hardships." This point, one of the dominant themes in *Valentino*, already found expression in DB's consideration of impurity in *Maggio*, day 25, p. 146: "If you go to families and ask the reason for so many arguments, so many miseries, so many lost inheritances, many have to reply that the reason was the abominable vice of impurity. If we ask doctors who visit private homes and the public hospitals, they can tell us how many go to their grave in the prime of life. Oh, if their ashes could speak from the grave, they could give us very useful warnings."

For similar considerations see Arvisenet, ch. 10, pp. 35-36: "In this blind state one does not see the ugliness or ignominy of one's own sins, nor does one advert to the obvious danger of being lost that one is in." Carlo Ferreri, *Corona di fiori a Maria*

In Don Bosco's day, as in the days of Coustel and Gobinet, people took the long view. They looked ahead to eternal salvation, which was ordinarily associated with the first inclinations of early youth. They were concerned about the reformation of Christian moral behavior and the complete solidification of young people so that they might withstand heresy and the assaults of unbelief. If there was any area where education should forestall the first encounters with temptation, it was in the matter of purity; because in this matter youthful passions are particularly prone to disordered pleasures. Instilling a horror of the vice of impurity in early childhood meant preparing youths for the time when they would find themselves "at a more dangerous age."⁸⁸

(f) *Overcoming temptations*

What about the interpretation of juvenile problems associated with purity (i.e., symptomatology) and educational measures? In these areas Don Bosco evidently had assimilated much of the rich arsenal elaborated in earlier centuries, which came down to him through writers of moral theology (Joseph Anthony Alasia [1731-1812], Saint Alphonsus, Frassinetti) or of spiritual works for young people (Gobinet, Croiset, DeMattei, Cesari).

Symptoms of problems with purity were temptations. They were the products of suggestion by the devil, excited by bad thoughts and stimulated by outside factors such as conversations, reading materials, involvement with

santissima (Turin, 1857³), pp. 145-46: "Be on guard, my son, and detest impurity. Remember that it darkens the mind, corrupts the heart, and sweeps human beings from celestial ideas of their destiny to the vile mud of this earth. It is this despicable vice, which so degrades a child of God, that gave birth to heretics and spawns unbelievers every day... How many we see in their prime who are so blinded by their obscene behavior that they forget God and themselves. They will have a pitiful end!"

Charles Gobinet, *Istruzione della gioventù* (Turin, 1831), has a strong chapter on indecency or impurity, with terrifying examples: pt. 3, ch. 8, pp. 184-206. Among his imitators deserving of mention, besides Arvisenet, was Hubert Humbert, *Istruzione cristiana per la gioventù utili ad ogni sorte di persone*, 7th French ed. corrected and reprinted by order of the abp. of Besançon (Venice-Asti: Zucconi-Massa [180...]); 3d Turin ed. (Paravia, 1843).

⁸⁸ It is the lament of Osnero's dying wife, who is leaving her 12-year-old son just when he has more need of her: Bosco, *Valentino, o la vocazione impedita* (Turin, 1866), p. 7. This conviction, shared by Gobinet and all those in his tracks, can also be found in St. Leonard Murialdo. He considers the problem of young men who leave school with their "education completed." Around 1874-75, he noted that there was little reason to hope for perseverance among the graduates "because they leave at the most critical age of life, between 18 and 23." See Aldo Marengo, CSJ, *Contributi per uno studio su Leonardo Murialdo educatore* (Rome, 1964), p. 227, footnote.

friends, games, and public spectacles “where nothing good is to be found and one almost always learns something bad.”⁸⁹ We find a sample of the way Don Bosco notes and presents bad thoughts in *The Companion of Youth*, which partially transcribes material from the *Angelic Guide*.⁹⁰ But we may also find documents more relevant to our interest here. For example, we possess confidential letters from young people to Don Bosco, letters written in various circumstances. One of them comes from an eighteen-year-old cleric, who was born in a hamlet not far from Becchi. Dated December 13, 1858, the letter tells of a favor received through the intercession of his saintly friend who had died the previous year, Dominic Savio:

For several months I had been spending unhappy days. I was sad, melancholic, and assaulted by countless sinful thoughts and fantasies. I tried everything to rid myself of them, but to no avail. I was beginning to believe that I had been abandoned by God. I could not eat during the day nor sleep at night. Everything was a cause of new sadness for me. I don't know how my state could possibly have been more deplorable. One evening, more tempted than usual, I paced my room without the slightest thought of going to bed. Then, oppressed by some unknown force, I threw myself on the bed. Soon I jumped up again, almost frantic, and sat down at my little desk. Without knowing why, I opened the drawer and my hand found a little crucifix. It was a souvenir of Dominic Savio that I jealously kept. I gripped it in both hands, fell to my knees, and uttered this exclamation: “My friend, you see my anguish. If you can do anything with God, please get me freed from this antechamber of hell.” At that point I broke into a flood of tears. I recited some prayers and, after a short time, went to bed. I spend the most tranquil night. In the morning I felt the urge to seek out my confessor. When I had done that, my heart regained the peace it had lost.⁹¹

A successful inquiry might well reveal that the minds and hearts of the boys in Valdocco operated in accordance with the movements indicated in the passage just cited. Don Bosco could know this concretely from confidences he heard

⁸⁹ *Giov. prov.*, pp. 26-27.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*: “Staying away from occasions of sin, scandalous conversations, and public spectacles will be of great help in preserving you from temptations... Try to keep yourselves busy at all times. When you don't know what to do, decorate little altars and arrange images or little picture cards.” *Guida angelica*, pp. 58-59: “I earnestly urge you to stay far away from bad companions, scandalous conversations and places, and public spectacles... When you don't know what to do, decorate little altars or make little picture cards.”

⁹¹ AS 9/160 Savio (These testimonies were largely utilized by DB for his biography of Savio). One would have to examine the underlying letters: AS 115 (best wishes to DB for his name day or other occasions) and 126 (letters to DB).

or drew out both inside and outside the confessional. In his youths the psychophysical tension was profoundly modified by religious convictions and the lessons they were taught. It was regulated, expanded, or compressed within the channel of love of God, one's state of grace, and one's own eternal salvation. The overcoming of this tension could come precisely after an increase of conflicting emotions, after prolonged anguish and compression, when some religious factor intervened forcefully to reestablish psychodynamic equilibrium. The supportive role of the surrounding environment, of Don Bosco's own person in particular, must have played a basic role in providing such balance.

But Don Bosco also must have sensed the precariousness of this inner equilibrium in young people. In his *Christian Vademecum* he offers a long series of cautions and this justification for them: "We have plenty of spurs to evil inside ourselves without having to go outside and look for them."⁹²

Education in purity—the strengthening and maturing of the "angelic virtue," if you prefer—was ultimately reduced to two things: preparation and preservation. Preparing meant anticipating the irruption of evil, keeping watch over the passions and their natural inclination to sensual pleasures. First and foremost, it meant opening one's heart to grace by means of prayer, religious instruction, and the use of the sacraments.⁹³ The campaign for earlier communion for children relied heavily on the desire to protect purity as well, and hence to implant deeply a sense of adhesion to the Church and lifelong practice of religion.

The educational tradition of which Don Bosco was a part did not fear familiarity with the subject of male-female relationships so much as untimely early familiarity.⁹⁴ This was the reason behind the flights suggested: from idleness, bad

⁹² Bosco, *Porta teco cristiano*, p. 44.

⁹³ Strengthening innocence beforehand with communion was the main reason behind the protests against indiscriminately delaying first communion until the age of 12 or 13. See Frassinetti, *Compendio della teologia morale di S. Alfonso M. de' Liguori* (Genoa, 1867³), pp. 201-02: "The admission of children to holy communion." On the level of popular ascetical practice, see Louis Gaston de Ségur, *La Santissima Comunione* (Turin: OSFS, 1869), p. 50.

⁹⁴ One of the recommendations made by Nicole, Coustel, and Charles Rollin is that educators not wound the innocence and simplicity of children with their words or actions. Coustel, considering the weaknesses of parents for their children and being generally pessimistic about the educational abilities of most parents, states his own preference for wise tutors and boarding schools. Among the educators and educational experts who fall between the traditional Catholic current and Rousseau, we should note Jean-Baptiste Blanchard (1731-97) as well known in Turin circles. His work, *L'école des mœurs*, had been translated into Italian and was often reissued (see ch. XIV, n. 51). He writes: "Give them a few general precepts on decency and modesty. Then give them more serious ones when they first begin to be attracted, however slightly, by the enticements of the world or the promptings of the passions—even if it be only through a slightly less de-

companions, dirty conversations, evil gatherings, and even one's workplace if vice reigned there. The aim was to preserve young people from the spurs of passion and from the kinds of knowledge that might come to them too early, when they were still tender plants, thus triggering the mechanisms leading to seduction and depravity.⁹⁵

Little cautions that might be useful for Oratory youths, day students, and adolescents on vacation were offered by Don Bosco in his *Christian Vademecum* and *Regulations of the Oratory for Externs*:

Do not go wandering the streets, especially at night, because, aside from the grave dangers to which you are exposing yourself, you might be suspected of having some sinister project in mind.⁹⁶

In church, act with modesty and concentration. Don't ever set up meetings there. Don't cast curious glances at persons of the opposite sex. Don't smile, nod, or talk to them.⁹⁷

At carnival time be careful not to let yourself be carried away by the torrent of licentiousness and profligacy: no masks, disguises, or attendance at nighttime gatherings.⁹⁸

cent word or manner of expression. Distancing them thus even from the sight and appearance of evil, you will distance them even more from the reality of it. Keeping them on guard about their manner of speech, you will make them even more wary of doing something that is less good. Insofar as the attentive tutor sees the knowledge of evil growing in his pupil, he will double his concern and effort. He will implement all his prudence to fortify his pupil in advance by means of precepts and examples more apt to keep the pupil attached to virtue. He will picture for his pupil the detestable spectacle of the dangerous vices that reign in social affairs but he will do this in a cautious and merely sketchy way. Thus, entering the world, his pupil will not so easily be taken by the objects he encounters because he has already been given solid information. At the sight of evil he will know perfectly well how to guard himself against it" (Blanchard, *La scuola de' costumi* [Milan, 1817] 1:39-40). In substance, Blanchard seems to offer a good theoretical treatment of the practical approach used by DB, and of the practical suggestions that he repeatedly imparted.

⁹⁵ This raises again the whole topic of acquaintance and initiation. According to the terms used by DB, the process should be such that the pupil is able to perceive the goodness or badness of thoughts, words, and deeds. Note, e.g., what he writes in *Giov. prov.*, p. 24: "One of you might say: I know the disastrous consequences of bad conversations, but what am I to do? I find myself in a school, a shop, a trade, a job where I have to work, and people carry on bad conversations."

⁹⁶ Bosco, *Porta teo cristiano*, p. 44.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* One can discover what sort of things lay behind the warnings of DB and others about popular feasts. Abundant information, relevant for 19th-century Piedmont as well, can be found in Giuseppe Pola Falletti-Villafalletto, *Associazioni giovanili e feste antiche* (Turin, 1939-42), 3 vols.; idem, *La Juventus attraverso i secoli* (Milan, 1953).

Avoid all that is obscene or against religion because Saint Paul tells us that wicked conversations are the ruin of good moral behavior [1 Cor 15:33]. All of you should always stay far away from theaters, both daytime and nighttime ones. Avoid taverns, cafés, gambling dens, and similar dangerous places.⁹⁹

Have a great horror of sins against purity. Be very careful to avoid the occasions of such sins. Promptly dispel any wicked thought against purity. Don't stop for a single moment to ponder or gaze at anything contrary to chastity and decency. Even in the most hidden places, remember that God is present, sees all our actions, and penetrates the most secret thoughts of our hearts.¹⁰⁰

Admonitions valid for all can also be found in *The Companion of Youth, Bible History*, and his biographies of Comollo, Savio, Magone, and Besucco.

As I noted above, "assistance" assumed major importance among the boarders, given their large number. Insofar as possible, this was to be extended to vacation periods as well. The boys were put under the charge of their parish priests, who were requested to provide a certificate of good conduct.¹⁰¹

In the years when boarding schools came to the fore, Don Bosco had harsh words for the vacations that the students spent at home with their families. He called them "the devil's vintage," his incisive and peremptory phrase. He surely was thinking of his boys whose vocation to the priesthood or Christian practice (as in the story of *Valentino*) crumbled quickly during vacations.¹⁰²

One might wonder whether Don Bosco, prompted by these painful experiences, ended up preferring education in a boarding-school environment that reduced the amount of time spent back home with the family and in one's native area (some anticlericalism being found everywhere by this time). But it could also be the case that the influence worked from the opposite direction. Enconced in the fortress environment of the school, Don Bosco might have projected gloomy lights on the family environment and social milieu of his young people, attributing to them effects that found their causes, at least partially, in the education of the boarding school. The fact is that the latter is readily

⁹⁹ *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per gli esterni* (Turin, 1877), p. 35.

¹⁰⁰ Bosco, *Porta teo cristiano*, p. 43.

¹⁰¹ See *Ep.* 141. Copies printed in various years with comments by DB or others are preserved in AS 131/04.

¹⁰² See *Indice MB*, pp. 469-70, s.v. "Vacanze." Vacations are "the devil's vintage" (BM 12:258), "omnium malorum officina" (MB 14:795). DB's fears and warnings substantially dovetail with those of the Jesuit Alfonso Muzzarelli, *Il buon uso delle vacanze proposte già a giovani scolari*, 4th Turin ed. (Marietti, 1841), a copy of which is in the Valdocco library; with [Carlo Ferreri], *Regole di vita e buone massime per la gioventù studiosa* (Turin: Paravia, 1840), pp. 53-56; and with the *Guida angelica*, which has a section on the "evil effects of vacations and practical instructions on how to spend them devoutly" (pp. 35-37).

presented as an earthly paradise, a blessed place.¹⁰³ For some, however, it could be a gilded cage.¹⁰⁴ And for others, wittingly or unwittingly, it could foster a growing sense of evading discipline that might explode into undesired manifestations during the summer.

We must realize, however, that much traditional thinking is to be found in this arsenal of convictions, interpretations, and solutions. Don Bosco assimilated that thinking and gave it new expression, enriching it with his own personal resources in an environment that led people to attribute a highly important role to religious factors in solving problems that were classified as problems of purity.

But we can also find notable differences. In Don Bosco's day sacramental practice had a prominence that it could not have had in the seventeenth-century period of Coustel and Gobinet. The religious consciousness of Don Bosco's time was reacting against the exaggerated rigorism blamed on the poisonous influence of Jansenism, and it was confronting the socioreligious problems posed by the Risorgimento and industrialization.

The flight from idleness of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was very different in character from the kind Don Bosco proposed and implemented. In the confined circle of the Port-Royal schools, the flight from idleness took the form of study, quiet walks, recitations, and theatrical performances that were not meant to be merely means of learning. In the Jesuit schools, competitive approaches played a large role: literary compositions, performances, recitations, and religious practices promoted by student groups and fraternities. The Port-Royal educators had no confidence in competition because they felt it gave rise to disordered passions.

Don Bosco brought with him his personal experiences as a farm boy and industrious student. He brought along his extroverted, versatile temperament that

¹⁰³ See Francis Besucco's letter to his godfather in Cornell, p. 209: "The greatest of these favours was to send me to this house where nothing is lacking for my soul or my body." The original (preserved in AS 123 Besucco) says exactly: "It might even be possible for me to manage to thank you for the favor you have done me, after my having gone to school for so long in your house, that I learned many fine things which are of great help to me in this respected Oratory, [a word or phrase omitted?] again by you for having found me this boarding school, in which one learns much and which is of great benefit to the soul. Now I am ever increasingly grateful to the Lord for having favored me so greatly over others, and I am sure that I should correspond to this divine grace."

¹⁰⁴ DB urged Dominic Savio and John Massaglia to spend some of the fall vacation at home with their families. Dominic answered for both: "We know our parents are anxious to see us, and we love them and would be glad to go, but we also know that while a bird in a cage has no freedom it is safe from the hawk. Out of its cage, it can fly around all it likes, but it can also fall into hell's snare!" "However," DB remarks, "I judged it best...to send them both home for a few days." (SDS:110.)

he had vested in many skills. He knew how to play the part of tailor, smith, bookbinder, musician, versifier, writer, magician, and acrobat. Don Bosco does propose traditional ways to overcome idleness in such works as *The Companion of Youth* and *The Month of May*. They included decorating little altars and arranging images and little pictures. But his preference is to transform such efforts into less incidental occupations that will be useful in the future: various jobs, music bands, singing lessons, recitations centered less on competition than on helping to advertise and promote the school. Such recitations would show the worth of the poor children of the common people that Don Bosco had gathered together, and thus they recited before such people as Ferrante Aporti, Father John Anthony Rayneri, and Amadeus of Savoy, the duke of Aosta.

At times the hard-working residents of the Valdocco house became noisy and boisterous. More than a few people, including Monsignor Cajetan Tortone and Father Mark Anthony Durando, did not understand and disapproved. Lucido Maria Parocchi (1833-1903), who was to become archbishop of Bologna and cardinal protector of the Salesian Society, found himself amid bustle and hubbub in the sacristy of Mary Help of Christians Church. "*Non in commotione Dominus* [1 Kgs 19:11]," he said to himself disapprovingly. If Don Bosco really had the spirit of piety, he should not and would not permit such disorders.¹⁰⁵ But even this "externalism," if you will, could have had symbolic value for Don Bosco. Involving the whole boy, such things helped to dispel the possible tension of the boarding-school environment. They intervened to help overcome the problem of puberty, or what he would call the problem of youthful purity. Nevertheless, we would like to have a few explicit statements from Don Bosco, a little theorizing alongside the facts. But the expressions we have at hand sometimes seem to be quite disconnected from the facts to which we would like to relate them. Generic terms often take on their meaningfulness by being explicitly or habitually related to specific situations. Although such terms as "temptation," "bad thoughts," "bad conversations," and "bad companions" are generic, we can often tell quite easily where Don Bosco's discourse is heading: in the direction of modesty, reserve, and purity in the proper sense.

More than once we would like to see generic terms and conventional connections replaced by more appropriate ones that related specifically to diverse categories of people: e.g., adolescents, mature young men, clerics, boarding students, engaged people, and married people. What Don Bosco suggests to the thirteen-year-old Magone scarcely differs materially from what he recommends to Angelo Piccono (1848-1913) and his fiancée shortly before their

¹⁰⁵ Confidential statements of Card. Parocchi to Msgr. John Baptist Lugari, promoter of the faith, Rome, Nov. 26, 1900, ms. copy of Msgr. Lugari, in AS 160/9.

wedding.¹⁰⁶ What is the reason for the general nature of Don Bosco's language? Why, at least, is that the only kind we have in the documentation that has come down to us?

Don Bosco's role as educator, rather than as pedagogue or hygienist, may have had an impact on the quality and quantity of his exhortations. He made a serious effort to express himself in comprehensive terms with regard to certain matters, and to avoid suggestive or hypnotic words. This was particularly true in the matter of purity. In the Preface to his *Bible History*, he states his aim as follows: to "enlighten the mind so as to make the heart good"; to avoid "ways of speaking that might evoke less pure concepts in the fickle, tender minds of young people"; and to put together a course in bible history that would contain the most important information in the holy books but would not be in danger of arousing less suitable ideas, so that one "could give it to any young person and say: take and read."¹⁰⁷ Of Noah, then, Don Bosco simply says that he got drowsy after drinking wine, not realizing its strength, and was ridiculed by Ham (Gen 9:20-27).¹⁰⁸ Sodom and Gomorrah were burned for offenses described simply as "wickedness" and "enormous sins" (Gen 19).¹⁰⁹ The vengeance wreaked on the Shechemites was provoked by "an extremely serious offense" against Dinah, who had gone to a feast of theirs out of curiosity (Gen 34).¹¹⁰

Although he is somewhat more concrete and explicit with his own Salesians, even in their case he does not get beyond delicate, somewhat evanescent, and fairly allusive terms. That, at least, is what we gather from our sources: i.e., handwritten outlines or notes taken by Fathers Bonetti, Barberis, Berto, and others.

This being the situation, our historical reconstruction and interpretation can be led astray by the type of documentation we possess, which today strikes us as occasionally feeble and almost cryptic. Thus we might be tempted to say that Don Bosco and his age, for some incomprehensible reason, did not know or confront the problems associated with the sexual maturation of young people.

In the next section, then, I should like to examine a couple of aspects of this whole matter, attempting to offer an interpretation based on Don Bosco's expressions as they relate to the language and usage of his own Piedmont milieu.

¹⁰⁶ Cornell, p. 133; *Ep.* 1349, letter to Angelo Piccono, Turin, Sept. 4, 1875: "I want to thank you and your fiancée for inviting me to bless your nuptials... I will not fail to pray to the Holy Virgin, Help of Christians... But remember that only the practice of religion can bring happiness to your new state." Notice that the letter does not contain definite counsels. DB was courteously declining the invitation to bless their nuptials because he had prior commitments elsewhere.

¹⁰⁷ Bosco, *Storia sacra per uso delle scuole* (Turin, 1847), p. 7.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

(g) *Specific educational problems between puberty and marriage*

We noted above the testimony of Father Lemoyne that Don Bosco, in his later years, noticed a steady increase in wickedness among his boys and hence decided to speak out more clearly about the evil of sins against the sixth commandment.¹¹¹ What did Don Bosco have concretely in mind? What was he trying to allude to, and in what terms?

Would he have spoken in general terms about the evils produced by indecency? Would he have reiterated the usual talk about divine punishments? Would he have insisted on describing the time of the flood, when the ways of all flesh on earth had grown corrupt (*omnis quippe caro corruerat viam suam* [Gen 6:12])? Or kept telling about the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah,¹¹² and of sinners consumed by wickedness? Or would he have been more concrete and alluded to bad habits, such as masturbation?

Is it reasonable to assume that Don Bosco would have wittingly or unwittingly ignored a reality, an educational problem, which was the subject of treatment and discussion by moralists, doctors, hygienists, and educators?

Don Bosco's *History of Italy* may have drawn material here and there from Joseph Pomba's *Popular Encyclopedia*.¹¹³ Several copies certainly were to be found at Valdocco. The point is that the *Popular Encyclopedia* also has an article on "onanism, masturbation, manual excitation, voluntary pollution, solitary sexual pleasure." It says: "These terms do not need to be defined. In and of themselves, they indicate the base vice, condemned by both divine and human laws, that is a real pestilence among adolescents and young people."¹¹⁴ The en-

¹¹¹ See n. 75.

¹¹² It is the text he cites in his youthful sermon on impurity: BM 16:405-06; and in *Maggio*, day 25, p. 145.

¹¹³ Bosco, *Storia d'Italia* (Turin, 1855), p. 436: "The year 1714 is also memorable for three important deaths: that of Louis XIV, king of France; the death of the queen of England, named Anne; and, finally, for the death of the queen of Spain, named Maria Louise, daughter of the duke of Savoy." Compare Cesare Balbo, "Italia (Storia politica, civile e letteraria dell)," 7th period, §24, in *Nuova enciclopedia popolare* 7 (Turin, 1846), 829: "Three important deaths took place in the year 1714; that of Louis XIV, who was succeeded by the boy Louis XV, so that France continued to be governed by the duke of Orléans as regent; that of Anne, queen of England...; and that of Maria Louise of Savoy..." The only variant with respect to the separately published *Sommario della storia d'Italia* is the semicolon after 1714, which becomes a comma in the *Sommario*. A more careful comparison of DB's text and the various redactions of Balbo leave open the hypothesis of Fr. Caviglia: i.e., that DB might have had before him the text of the *Sommario* in the *Enciclopedia* and in separate editions, such as (e.g.) that of 1852 (Turin: Pomba, 9th ed., based on the 3rd of Lausanne). See Caviglia's observations: 3 (Turin, 1935), 564-65.

¹¹⁴ *Nuova enciclopedia popolare* 10 (Turin, 1848), 76.

cyclopedia, then, makes clear that we are not dealing with rare or secret matters but with things that are well-known and have already been studied. Its description of the harmful results of this practice, especially when it becomes habitual, are based on a fairly well known book by a Swiss Calvinist doctor, Simon Andrew Tissot (1728-1797), who had also taught at the University of Pavia.¹¹⁵

The *Encyclopedia* has something very similar to say about chlorosis, an abnormally yellow color in adolescents.¹¹⁶

The treatment of masturbation is in a medical and hygienic key. Adolescents with this vice are to be considered sick people. As causes, concomitants, and effects, the clinical discussion brings in things that in themselves have no necessary connection with masturbation, that are simply associated with puberty under the right circumstances: e.g., paleness, loss of weight, melancholy, the desire to be alone, weakening of vision, and so forth. Cited as possible results are such diseases as epilepsy and dementia, when it seems that masturbation absolutely cannot be part of their genealogical tree. It is blamed for tuberculosis, which in those days did readily afflict the nonimmunized poor young people who were moving from rural to urban areas.¹¹⁷

Religious sentiment invokes the Old and New Testaments as well as divine and human laws that rightly condemn this sinful habit. We get the impression,

¹¹⁵ Ibid: "The first symptoms appearing in the person who indulges in masturbation are paleness of the face, emaciation, difficulty in digesting, sadness, irascibility, love of solitude, languor of the eyes, frequent palpitations, and weakening of memory. If attention is not paid to these symptoms and remedies are not applied by parents or those in charge of the education of the young people, the symptoms become more serious and imposing: a total languor, almost total loss of memory, weakening of eyesight and intelligence, lead-colored circles around the eyes, indifference to everything around the masturbator, an incapacity for any generous sentiment, ennui toward life, disturbed and sleepless nights, incessant palpitations, leukorrhoea in females and chronic blennorrhoea in males, involuntary nocturnal pollutions at first accompanied by some satisfaction but then without the knowledge of the patient, frequent indigestion, and chronic gastroenteritis. Finally, the lives of these poor creatures are often cut short before they attain adulthood. Frequent consequences of masturbation are: epilepsy, melancholy, hysteria, dementia, chronic inflammation of the lungs and spinal cord, and ultimately, tuberculosis, tabes dorsalis, and death. Many of these poor creatures do not succumb, however, and manage to reach a certain age. But in them aging occurs prematurely, all vigor of mind and body is spent, and they seem to be more like shadows from the grave, condemned to make amends for their violation of the laws of nature with countless privations."

¹¹⁶ *Nuova enciclopedia popolare* 3 (Turin, 1843), 30. Other headings also are of interest with respect to the topic: e.g., "donna," "melanconia," "polluzione," "pubertà," "tisi."

¹¹⁷ For general orientation and for evaluations of the 19th century as well, one may profitably consult tracts on medicine and hygiene: e.g., Azzo Azzi, *Trattato d'igiene* (Milan, 1952), p. 1129.

then, that consciousness of divine punishments for sin led even doctors and hygienists to see causal connections between things that are actually independent or merely concomitant. But the point I want to bring out here is that this vice that plagued young people was very well known: and the suggested prophylaxis shows that there was extraordinary agreement among medical doctors, hygienists, educators, and moralists.¹¹⁸ The *Popular Encyclopedia* goes on to say:

To prevent this vice from taking root in youngsters, they should be watched continually by the vigilant eye of the person in charge of their education. Malicious adolescents should never be left alone or for long with innocent children. Try to tire out their bodies with exercise. Permit them adequate sleep but not too much. Their beds should be firm, and they should not loll around in bed. Keep them away from bad reading material. When you discover that children or adolescents are prey to this vice, begin by admonishing them with sound reasons. Point out the horror of their fault and, especially, the fatal consequences it can have for their health. From then on, the unfortunate creatures of whichever sex should be objects of your most attentive surveillance. They should be told that they will never be left alone. These curative measures should continue for several months: i.e., until there is reason to believe that the vicious habit has been abandoned. If words of advice and warning prove to be fruitless, resort to severer punishments, using force to prevent the poor creatures from bringing on their own ruin. In some youngsters, however, the violence of this habit turns into an irresistible impulse and gradually numbs their intelligence; they become deaf to any attempts at persuasion. In such cases, they should be forced to wear a chastity belt at night so that they cannot touch their genitals: and they should not be left alone for an instant during the day. Kindred measures that might be implemented to stop this impulse would be long, tiring walks, cold baths, a vegetable diet, abstinence from all fermented liquor, rye bread or unrefined bread. Above all, make sure the patients sleep on a table or very firm mattress and take their final refreshment well before they go to sleep, continuing these attentive measures until you have sound reason to believe that the cure is complete.¹¹⁹

Don Bosco, too, wants his young people to have constant attention and someone present. The eyes of the educator must be ever vigilant. They should never be left idle, lest the devil set to work on them. They should be admonished with sound reasons and urged to take walks. The wine should be moderate and adulterated with water. The daily schedule should be Spartan, involving early

¹¹⁸ A problematic similar to that of Italy is reflected in: Meret, *Documents pour une histoire de l'éducation sexuelle* (Paris, 1957); A. Plé, OP, "La masturbation: Réflexions théologiques et pastorales," in *La vie spirituelle: Supplément*, May 1966, pp. 258-91.

¹¹⁹ *Nuova enciclopedia popolare* 10:76-77.

rising and going to bed around 10:00 p.m. Rising was at daybreak, the time favored by rural habits that were retained by many even when they were living in cities.

The authoritative Piedmontese hygienist Lawrence Martini (1785-1844) writes in terms that are even closer to those of Don Bosco:

To forestall or prevent the evil, it is more useful to maintain this life-style: Separate the youth from anything that might corrupt him. Causes of corruption are obscene books, lewd pictures, dirty conversations, and the bad example of companions. Take great care to choose virtuous tutors, religious families. The poison is often domestic. Careful measures should be even greater in boarding schools. Insofar as possible, keep the different ages separate. Never let the students out of your sight. Whenever there is good reason to suspect that someone is infected with this vice, get rid of him immediately. This is a contagion that quickly spreads. Its mere whiff is deadly. Any delay can have fatal consequences. Have the youths avoid idleness. They should never be alone or indolent. They should not stay in bed, except to sleep. As soon as they wake up, they should get up and apply themselves to their studies. The time allotted for relaxing the mind should be spent in bodily exercises. An active life is the best antidote for vice.¹²⁰

Warding off vice (warding off corruption of the heart and darkening of the mind) and treating it with an active life-style were practical principles with which Don Bosco could agree completely. They suited his temperament and his spirituality, the latter being averse to idle devotion and mere religious psychologism.

There was also the problem of instruction. Hygienists and doctors were not very enthusiastic about it, ranging from suspicion to prudent caution. Pomba's *Popular Encyclopedia* says: "The harmful effects of this habit were depicted by Tissot in such a way as to render his book dangerous. After the first shiver of disgust, it ends up giving an allure to the vile passion it would have the reader hate."¹²¹ Writes Martini: "With every intention of doing good, some instructors became innocent causes of irreparable evil. I would give Tissot's book to someone already caught in the vice, but not to anyone who was still untainted by

¹²⁰ Lorenzo Martini, *Emilio, o sia del governo della vita* (Milan, 1829), pp. 404-05. It had already been published in Latin: *Aemilius, seu de tuenda valetudine* (Turin, 1820). The next year Hyacinth Marietti published an edition with the Italian on the facing page, done by Christopher Baggiolini. There was a copy in the Valdocco library. On Martini, see Giovanni Battista Gerini (1859-1916), *Due medici pedagogisti: Maurizio Bufalini e Lorenzo Martini* (Turin, 1909). Under the entry "Igiene," the *Nuova enciclopedia popolare* 7:98, mentions Martini and the hygienist Turina: "Names dear to Piedmont, whose new treatises are daily in the hands of the young student population."

¹²¹ *Nuova enciclopedia popolare* 10:76.

it.”¹²² And he comments: “To forestall such a pernicious vice, the greatest prudence is needed. It must be opposed and fought without an inkling and, if I may say so, insidiously.”¹²³

Here we have another proof, in this case stated explicitly, of the reticence we can encounter, much to our dissatisfaction, in educators like Don Bosco and Leonard Murialdo, who were used to speaking to young people and whose remarks were taken down by priests and clerics trained in the same sensitivity. Don Bosco seems to be resolutely attached to Saint Paul’s admonition that the vice not even be mentioned among Christians (Eph 5:3).¹²⁴

We have still another document that lets us explore further Don Bosco’s possible familiarity with the phenomena of puberty and their interpretation as unhealthy, morally sinful, and punished by God. It is made up of conversations on the right way to live and keep healthy, and it appeared in the *Catholic Readings* for 1854-1855. In it we find a conversation between a young man named Richard and a friend of his who is a medical doctor. The doctor has all the signs of being a good mentor. I think it is worth reproducing as much of the conversation as is relevant to our topic here:

RICHARD: In my grammar year [around the age of twelve or thirteen], I won first prize. When I look at the medal now, I feel like cursing. That medal was my last good fortune. After that, nothing good has happened in my life. In the middle of my humanities year, I lost the desire to study. I was employed in the printing shop of a gentleman who prides himself on printing up decent, useful material, but I was dismissed... Everything is going wrong for me, and I don’t know how it will end. At home they rant at me and remind me of my early years; at the shop they rant at me. My life is as lonely as it possibly could be... Even my confessor no longer knows my affairs, since I abandoned him three years ago.

DOCTOR FRIEND: Son, I will speak in confidence to you as a trusty friend. From your face I know something of the source of your unhappiness. Is it all right if I speak to you as an old acquaintance and a son?

R: Oh yes, talk to me like a close friend.

DF: In the middle of your humanities year, you began to suffer more and more from discontent, melancholy, a tendency toward solitude, and disgust with innocent pastimes. Then came cold shudders, listlessness at work, fierce irritation

¹²² Martini, *Emilio*, p. 404. The work he has in mind is: Simon André Tissot, *L’onanismo, ovvero dissertazioni sopra le malattie cagionate dalle polluzioni volontarie* (Venice, 1785³; 1st French ed.: Lausanne, 1760); there were further editions throughout the 19th century: Milan (1870), Florence (1890), etc.

¹²³ Martini, *Emilio*, p. 404

¹²⁴ See *Indice* MB:211: s.v. “Impuri, impurità”; *Maggio*, day 25, p. 144.

at every opposing word, indifference to things of the spirit and matters of piety, remorse and more remorse, and ultimately despair about ever being cured of your ills.

R: How do you know all these things? Are you reading my insides, or has someone revealed my life to you?

DF: I readily recognize these things from your brief remarks and your looks. I will also tell you that in the middle of your humanities year you began to grow thin and to experience digestive problems, heart palpitations, tremors, weakened vision, headaches, and general weakness. Am I right or not?

R: I can't deny what you are telling me. But so many truths move me to resentment.

DF: My son, in your early years you had bright hopes. You were cherished by your parents and teachers, and you took great pleasure in your studies. How did you gradually turn into an imbecile? You know the answer yourself. You had an alert intelligence; now your memory fails you and sometimes you don't understand the simplest things. You are embarrassed when you talk.

Once you held your head high and your eyes sparkled. Now your head is bowed and mortified. Sometimes fears come over you; and you don't know whether they are fears of God, human beings, or yourself. This is the first time I am seeing you, but from your features I recognize your bitter misfortune. Are you crying?

R: Ah, that detestable companion! I have cursed him hundreds of times, and yet...

DF: You see, I guessed. Who knows, perhaps your coming to me is an act of mercy from the Lord.

R: That villainous companion taught me how to act against the virtue of modesty.

DF: Poor Richard! Your misfortune pains me to the bottom of my soul. Sins against holy modesty are truly horrible. You must listen to me. How is it with that miserable companion of yours?

R: He died a year ago.

DF: The Lord may have pardoned him. But do you know what illness he died of?

R: He became thinner and thinner. Then he was in bed for a month, then he could no longer get out of bed. They say he was taken by consumption... O my God! And to think that I taught the wicked practice to one of my little sisters when she was five and a half years old, and she died last year at the age of only eight. I am filled to the brim with remorse.

DF: Your poor little sister! She may not have realized the great wrong she was doing. God will have shown mercy on her.

R: I recall the death of my sister with bitter tears. For some time she suffered from fits of coughing and choking, and what doctors called a lingering fever. The medicines were of no use. When she was close to death, she used to kiss a little picture of the Madonna with great affection. A good priest came to attend her. I know my sister cried a lot. In her weak voice she begged my mother's pardon for the vexations she caused...¹²⁵

In the unfolding of this instructional conversation we can detect the symptomatology of nineteenth-century hygienists who followed Tissot, and of moralists who followed Segneri and Saint Alphonsus. It is not a matter of mere impressions and conjectures. Indeed the author expressly cites several medical doctors, basing his remarks on their authority, personal experiences, and types of therapy. Mentioned by name are James Louis Doussin-Dubreuil (1762?-1851), Charles Francis Bellingeri (a well-known Turin doctor, 1789-1848), and even Tissot, who is the source for a terrifying episode. Readers familiar with Tissot's name would be reminded of his most well-known work, which dealt with onanism. But such terms as "onanism," "masturbation," and "solitary vice" are never used in the conversation printed in the *Catholic Readings*. The usual expression throughout the piece is the general one, "acts against the virtue of modesty."

Now between nineteen and twenty, Richard confides to his doctor friend that he struggled with this evil for months and years. With great difficulty he has managed to disentangle himself from it, the struggle having gone on between the ages of fifteen and eighteen. Now he is well again. Like someone who has reached shore safely and watches others struggling in the slimy waters of a swamp, he is thinking of some of his friends and of his sole surviving sister, who is now around fifteen or sixteen. He has the impression that she is displaying the same symptoms he once had. He wants to help his friends and especially her. His mentor advises prudence:

Innocence of behavior is such a delicate thing that it should never be tarnished by useless conversations. It is better to speak to your friends in general terms, exhorting them to be good and to fear and respect the presence of God. But if it is obvious to you that a companion of yours needs warnings, then speak to him more privately as I did with you. Often you young people do better at advising each other than do teachers and serious adults...¹²⁶

¹²⁵ *La buona regola di vita per conservare la sanità: Conversazioni popolari* (Turin: Salesiana [S. Pier d'Arca], 1883), pp. 83-86. The Foreword is signed: P.B.S. The 1883 printing is identical with the 1st one of LC 2 (1854-55), in two fascicles: Oct. 10-25 and Feb. 10-25.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

With regard to the youth's sister, his mentor says:

Speak in general about holy fear of God and horror of sin. Then add that your own cure and contentment came after speaking with someone who frightened you about sins against holy modesty; that infinite troubles await anyone who does not respect it; that many single girls, too, have gone to their graves before their time for failing to appreciate wherein the true decorum of a Christian daughter lies. Stress the fact that the person with whom you have spoken has read of and seen many desolating consequences of a few offenses against God. Then urge your sister to straighten out her affairs with God and frequent the holy sacraments. And you yourself should give her good example in the future.¹²⁷

We can see that the innocuous term “modesty” could serve here as a screen for more precise meanings that the customary practice of that age readily managed to perceive in the context where it was used.

We should also note that this work, *The Virtuous Way of Life*, was not a forbidden book for Oratory youths, at least in the years when it was published. In those years the boarders included students, seminarians, and apprentices. Surviving lists of books that students certified as their own in 1855-1857 assure us that some did possess sets of the *Catholic Readings* for a whole year. That would include Dominic Savio, who declared that he possessed the entire set for 1855.¹²⁸ And a second printing of *The Virtuous Way of Life* was published in Sampierdarena in 1883.

* * * *

Another delicate problem, about which we can glean little from Don Bosco, is that of youthful first loves. Practically the only thing we find from him is the general recommendation that men and women, boys and girls, should not hang around together:

Flee familiarity with persons of the opposite sex, however wise they may appear to be. Never permit yourselves the slightest liberty with them that might even slightly offend against modesty or proper reserve.

Never be alone with a woman, especially in any place that is not open to the view of others.

Don't take trips with persons of the opposite sex. Don't escort them to festivities in neighboring villages, to dances, or to other dangerous occasions.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 96-97.

¹²⁸ AS 9/132 Savio; AS 38 Torino-S. Franc. di Sales, 36.

¹²⁹ Bosco, *Porta teo cristiano*, p. 41. But such suggestions can be found to some extent in all of DB's writings, starting with *Comollo*. There is no point here in citing similar statements by St. Philip Neri, Gobinet, the *Guida angelica*, Arvisenet, Frassinetti, et al.

Here again in this case we have brief maxims and general expressions. One useful point of reference does show up: his allusion to festivities in neighboring villages. Despite his many years of urban living, we note, Don Bosco's book still refers to a rural milieu. His silence about youthful reactions to the first stirrings of love would seem to contrast sharply with what we know about him and what he says about himself: i.e, his ability to discover the most secret thoughts and sentiments of his peers (in his childhood) and of young people. This might seem strange if we did not find plausible motivation for it in his explicit resolve to say nothing that might upset minds and hearts and tarnish the clear mirror of gracious virtue.

First loves could have presented themselves to him, as to anyone in his milieu, in the popular terms of *The Kings of France*, for example. There was the love of Drusiana, daughter of King Herminion and still a young child, for Buovo d'Antona a robust and handsome knight of sixteen. There was the love of Charlemagne, a fugitive in Spain under the pseudonym of Mainetto, for Galerana, daughter of the Saracen king who was his host. Thinking of her, he found his heart beating faster and his face reddening.

On this subject Don Bosco could have been familiar with Frassinetti's remarks in his work introducing young people to Marian devotion, which served as a source for *The Companion of Youth* and was reprinted at Valdocco after 1870:

If you feel in your heart the first stirrings of affection for some creature because your eyes find her exterior to be beautiful and graceful, for the love of Mary expel that affection from your heart because it can do you far more harm than you may suspect. Perhaps my advice may seem strange to you right now because you don't understand the reason for it. But it is well-known that your age is not yet capable of understanding all the reasons. And precisely because young people cannot yet comprehend all the reasons for things, they have to defer to the counsels of an older person who has more experience of the world. I understand the reason and see it as clear as day. As you grow older, you too will understand it and see it clearly. If you now do what I tell you, you will thank God in later years that he provided you with this advice through me. Yes, I repeat, don't develop affection for creatures because of the beauty and gracefulness they present to your eyes, particularly if they are members of the opposite sex. Do this out of love for Mary. Believe what I tell you, and that I am not deceiving you.¹³⁰

Don Bosco does not seem to have had these kinds of half-unspoken arguments, which might appear a bit naive. To his warnings he does not add justifications that center around a pledge of future knowledge that young

¹³⁰ Frassinetti (see n. 93), ch. 7; in *Opere ascetiche* 3:183. Salesian editions: Turin: OSFS, 1873; S. Pier d'Arena, 1878.

people might like to have right now. But he, too, suggests that young people rely on the knowledge that has been gradually doled out and the warnings often reiterated to them. On June 30, 1862, he is reported to have spoken the following to his Valdocco collaborators:

We must forewarn our boys against the time they will be seventeen or eighteen. "Look," we should tell them, "you will soon face a dangerous crisis; the devil will try to ensnare you. To start with, he will tell you that frequent Communion is good for children, not for adults, and that once in a great while is quite enough for you. Then he will do his best to keep you from sermons by making you feel bored with God's Word." ... Years later, when we meet them again as mature men and we ask, "Do you remember what I once told you?" they will agree that we were right. This reminiscence will do them good.¹³¹

Don Bosco is talking explicitly about the crisis of religious practice, but it is obvious that he is also thinking of the rest: i.e., according to his outlook, the sin that is the true cause of youthful melancholy and the abandonment of Christian practice.

In his *Christian Vademecum* we also find a few brief admonitions for young men who are preparing for marriage in the near future:

If you find yourself at an age when your best interests suggest that you take a wife, take care not to be persuaded by licentiousness or any disorder. In choosing a spouse, give more consideration to virtue and good morals than to riches and other temporal considerations. Entrust the success of this matter to God. Go to confession and communion for this intention and aim. Consult virtuous, prudent, disinterested persons. In the meantime, maintain the most reserved behavior, equipping yourself with the desired dispositions for receiving the sacrament of matrimony.¹³²

In these few lines, if you will, one can find a brief summary of the material expounded in tracts on falling in love. Such tracts were available, and some of them were well-stocked arsenals of theological advice and authority.¹³³ But it

¹³¹ See AS Ruffino 9, p. 79; reproduced in expanded form in BM 7:123-24 as coming from Fr. Bonetti's chronicle.

¹³² Bosco, *Porta teco cristiano*, p. 46.

¹³³ See, e.g., Girolamo Dal Portico, CMD (1696-1752), *Gli amori tra le persone di sesso diverso disaminati co' principj della morale teologia per istruzione de' novelli confessori* (Lucca, 1751). It has more than 770 pages of detailed casebook moral theology dealing with lovemaking between young men and women, both those intending to get married and those not. The following are intended for the common populace: Anastasio Furno da Costigliole d'Asti, OFM, *Il pregio della cristiana mondezza contro gli amori profani ed altre libert  mondane proposto in considerazione a' fedeli* (Vercelli, 1776); Antonio Bresciani, SJ (1798-1862), *Avvisi a chi vuol pigliar moglie* (Turin: Marietti, 1844); and in *Opere* (Rome: Civilt  Cattolica, and Turin: Marietti, 1865), 2:277-328.

is also true that Don Bosco's comments remain fairly general. Marriage is presented as something calculated at one's desk, as it were, a product of the young man's initiative. At a certain point in his life, it seems, he decides to get involved with a family, with a woman. He sets about loving her and being loved by her, and they then mutually bind themselves to the rights of lifelong marriage.

Pastoral and moral theology obviously started from the presupposition that marriage was one and indissoluble. The whole complex of sentiments between a man and a woman, both before and after their wedding day, was supposed to reflect this characteristic of marriage in analogous terms.¹³⁴ Feelings of love that might arise in adolescence were presumed to be unstable and ephemeral. They were not approved, and upright young people were to restrain and reject them. The only bud of affection was to be the one that could be cultivated and preserved for a lifetime. Even this love had to be watched before marriage, so that it would not lead to premature, disordered impulses that might later compromise the solidity of the sacrament. Even after marriage the wife was urged to be retiring, so that she might preserve herself for her own husband and not expose herself and others to emotions that could undermine the stability of the marriage bond of one or more families.¹³⁵

Precise and peremptory were the tones favored by popular catechetical and moral works in particular: e.g., Segneri's *The Instructed Christian*, Cajetan da Bergamo's *The Apostolic Missionary in the Pulpit*, and its version in miniature, Don Bosco's *Christian Vademecum*. These works sought to make the faithful realize that licit affections operated in three areas only: love between spouse and spouse, love of parents for their children, and love of children for their parents. Other kinds of affection, including that between brothers and sisters even, had to be very careful. Indeed, pastors of souls breathed easier when a certain physical and emotional distance was maintained between brothers and sisters, because the devil was no mean philosopher and could induce people to forget certain distinctions. In the nineteenth century this type of literature, at least in Don Bosco's milieu, does not seem to have given up formulations and viewpoints that had already found expression in the previous century.

¹³⁴ In Jansenist morality this is noted by Heinrich Klomps, *Ehemoral und Jansenismus: Ein Beitrag zur Überwindung des sexualethischen Rigorismus* (Cologne, 1964). But the view of the author seems to be too narrowly focused. The Jansenists were not the only ones to mistrust the concupiscence bound up with the sexual instinct. Nor are they the only ones to resent matrimony as a duty (*generatio prolis, remedium concupiscentiae*), hence as orderly obedience to divine wishes and the divine calling. I tend to share the observations raised to the author by Joseph Fuchs in *Gregorianum* 46 (1965), pp. 658-59.

¹³⁵ The material presented by Ariès in *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* dovetails with Italian catechesis (Segneri, St. Leonard of Port Maurice, et al.) and, in particular, Piedmontese catechesis: Felice Cecca, *Le veglie dei contadini* (Turin, 1806); Stefano Alisio, *Istruzioni teologiche pratico-morali sulle quattro parti della dottrina cristiana* (Turin: Cassone and Magnaghi, 1845³), 2 vols.

Physical and emotional distance was to be maintained between engaged couples, even as between brothers and sisters. Once the engagement was official, there could be brief meetings at the home of the future bride, possibly under the vigilance of the parents; but no kissing and complete respect for each other's person were the norms laid down by popular moralists. It was then necessary to hasten the day of marriage lest the lit flame turn into an uncontrollable fire.¹³⁶

The things to be learned about married life by the couple were divided into two clear-cut parts: lessons from parents and lessons from confessors, spiritual directors, and pastors. Information about conjugal behavior in accordance with the sacrosanct laws of nature was to be provided by parents when marriage was imminent.¹³⁷ The warnings about bad companions given by moral theologians and pastors of souls were also designed to safeguard the kind of information that fell within the competence of parents or those who replaced them in exercising strict rights and duties vis-à-vis children.

It was an ideal morality. Other kinds of documentation could bear witness to the fact that life never ran an ideal course. The registers of the Turin cathedral indicate the number of so-called "hospital children," whose baptismal records give no indication even of the mother.¹³⁸ Documents on popular traditions can show to what extent boys and girls did or did not heed catechetical prescriptions about dances and other common forms of entertainment during festivities for patron saints, carnivals, and long winter evenings. The exclamations of preachers about love-making must not have been sheer rhetoric or mere

¹³⁶ Dal Portico, ch. 9, §6, p. 711: "While the formal engagement justly entitles the couple to greater displays of mutual esteem and affection, it does not take away the danger of their moving on to less chaste desires... [The confessor] should be even more [sure] to forbid their kissing..."; Alisio, pt. 4, istr. 24, 2:534: "It is a bad custom to formalize the engagement months and years before the nuptials... Precisely because you have already contracted an engagement with that girl, you should no longer visit her, except in case of necessity and in the presence of her parents, so as not to expose yourself to the danger of being tempted more severely by the hellish enemy and committing a more serious sin."

¹³⁷ Worth noting, I think, is a work by Robert-François Daon (1679-1749), which was translated into Italian and published anonymously by one of DB's bookseller friends: *Guida pratica delle anime nella strada della salute per servir di supplemento alla Guida pratica de' confessori secondo le istruzioni di S. Carlo Borromeo, e la dottrina di S. Francesco di Sales* (Turin: Paravia, 1831), esp. ch. 17-18, on young people who have not yet chosen a state of life and those who choose to embrace the state of matrimony: "When those who are to get married are children with a family, their parents can talk to them and give them the information they need for their own good" (p. 67). According to Waldensian sources, it seems that pastors (at least in those Alpine areas) were accustomed to watching over the new spouses. If they noticed uneasiness in the young bride the day after the wedding, they would make an effort to obviate possible problems. See Jacques Maranda, *Tableau du Piémont sous le régime des rois* (Turin: Guaita [1803]), ch. 8-13.

¹³⁸ This was my impression in examining the *Liber baptizatorum*.

book-learning; they must also have been scolding people for indulging in a practice of which they disapproved.

A strong prop for this ideal moral behavior was marriage at an early age. When that prop was removed, the problems of youthful and adolescent love provided another reason and alarm signal for reexamining the principles and methods used in sex education.

Finally, we should not overlook the feminist movement, which began to surface in Italy in the final decades of the nineteenth century. The dignity of the human person and its underlying reasons began to be spelled out, highlighted by political events and aspirations for freedom and human dignity. Women began to feel more vividly the need for greater dignity in education, work, civil activity, and the home. The feminist movement started from sociopolitical and cultural roots in particular; but obviously, new stirrings of emotional values made their impact felt in turn, and new methods of education were tried in order to respond to new needs and demands.¹³⁹

By the end of the nineteenth century greater attention was being paid to the possible advantages of coeducational schools and schools that might also serve to initiate students into the mysteries of sex life. It was a far cry from the days when people prized Louis Parravicini's *Giannetto*, which had offered grammar-school children lessons on the five senses, the hands, the feet, the face, and the spiritual faculties of the human being. People wanted to see a rethinking of texts at the level of elementary education as well.¹⁴⁰

By that time we are far beyond the whole set of problems that are to be properly attributed to Don Bosco, according to the documents we have. In the last ten or more years of his life, his special concern and focus were the Salesians who had to be trained. And behind them came the adolescents of his boarding schools, who formed the majority of students being educated by Salesians.

In the pastoral effort of Don Bosco, the religious element was certainly basic and indispensable. It found expression in a horror of sin and a fear of divine punishment in this life and the next. It also entailed the perception that life was a holy and sacred thing. But we have every reason to believe that he also gave a very large place to gentleness and tender, loving care (*amorevolezza*), which he readily linked up with youthful fickleness. We do not know much about his actual way of dealing with adolescent sinners in the confessional.¹⁴¹ We can

¹³⁹ F. Pieroni Bortolotti, *Alle origini del movimento femminile in Italia (1848-1882)* (Turin, 1963).

¹⁴⁰ M. Carnel, *La coeducazione e l'evoluzione storica della pedagogia femminile* (Milan, 1937). As an example of a pedagogical work favoring sex education in the schools: Marino Venturi, *L'insegnamento sessuale: Sua pratica attuazione nelle scuole* (Florence, 1913).

¹⁴¹ Nazareno Camilleri, SDB (1906-73), *Confessori educatori: La confessione, il confessore, il penitente* (Catania, 1953). Basing himself on the MB, he gathers good material suggestive of DB's outlook as confessor.

imagine that he showed a great capacity to uncover and pinpoint sins, sometimes to the great surprise of the penitents themselves. We can also imagine that his language was delicate and sensitive: words suited to the concrete capacities of the youth in question; words of incentive and encouragement. As house director, he promised and delivered uncompromising severity when the sins became punishable crimes. The ones he found intolerable were stealing, cursing, and scandalous immorality: i.e., ones that had external repercussions on the surroundings.¹⁴²

He, too, greatly feared that vice could spread easily and fatally if it were not stemmed. He did not want ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing. When he found them, he firmly got rid of them. The purity of young people and all people was very close to his heart. The most fervent prayers he would have people say at the consecration of the Mass, the moment that religious sensibility felt to be the most important, were prayers for holy purity. More than any other virtue, purity was the virtue that made people dear to the Son of God. It was the virtue for which Don Bosco reserved his dearest symbols and protectors, from the days of his very first work as an educator: the Virgin Immaculate, potent mother; Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, ideal and protector; and our guardian angel, patron and stimulus to remind us of the presence of God.¹⁴³

¹⁴² See the testimony of Frs. Cagliari, Rua, John Baptist Anfossi (1840-1913), and Leonard Murialdo in BM 4:393-98; and that of Fr. Berto in *Positio super introductione causae [J. Bosco]* (Rome, 1907), p. 564.

¹⁴³ See the facts and teachings highlighted in *Indice MB*, pp. 364-65, s.v. "Purità."

XII

PRAYER, SACRAMENTS AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

1. Devotions and observances in the Turin countryside and Asti uplands in the first half of the nineteenth century: introductory remarks

Considering the way in which Don Bosco's activity developed and the area from which he preferred to draw his young students and Salesians, according to the Valdocco records, we know where to focus our exploration of relevant religious practice; i.e., prayer life, reception of the sacraments, and religious observances. We should concentrate on the Turin region, the Montferrat region of Asti and Casale as far as the Po hills, the upper and lower Langa, and certainly the arc extending from Mondovì to Cuneo, Saluzzo, Pinerolo, Susa, Lanzo, Ivrea, Biella, and Vercelli. This region, comprising profoundly distinct local groupings in terms of socio-economic bases and religious habits, provides the environmental elements for an interpretation of Don Bosco's mentality and the developing course of religious practice at Valdocco, not only up to the events of 1848 but also through the whole process of Italian unification and the worldwide diffusion of Salesian works. But if we want to glean the primordial environmental elements that Don Bosco assimilated in early childhood, in Chieri, or at the Ecclesiastical College, then our attention must turn mainly to the Turin countryside and the Asti uplands.

I must admit right away that it is not easy to represent a way of life, a milieu, a pattern of behavior that has never been the object of historiographical study even though it was the seedbed of factors that certainly served as a formative web and spawned important personalities: Father Cafasso, Don Bosco, Bishop John Baptist Bertagna (1828-1905), Sister Mary Henrietta Dominici (1829-1894), and Cardinal Lawrence William Massaja, OFMCap (1809-

1889). Those figures emerged out of the mass and became focal points and promoters of the very religious life that had nurtured them.¹

Nor is it easy to point up the more vital links with urban areas such as Chieri, Turin, and Asti, which in turn produced figures of considerable spirituality whose influence did not fail to flow back to the rural areas as well.²

Testimony such as that we have about Brigid Savio has all the air of being the surviving traces of the possible documentation regarding a custom that was widespread at the time and is still not wholly extinct in her region. She was a dressmaker in a country area and the wife of a smith. In the course of eight to ten years, she changed residence four times within a radius of about twelve miles. Passing in front of the rural church of Morialdo, Brigid bade her little son Dominic, four or five at the time, to make the sign of the cross and say a little prayer. At home Dominic learned to say morning and evening prayers and grace before meals. He learned to serve Mass and he helped the priest with the choir when eucharistic benediction was held in the little church.³

Besides being a recommendation made to the faithful by priests and catechists, taking off one's hat and making the sign of the cross in front of a church must have been a widespread and deeply rooted custom. Going to the city, however, one could see that it was not observed by all. Father Francesia records that around 1854-1857 Don Bosco's boys, almost all of them from villages or the countryside, stood out because they made the sign of the cross and took off their caps when they passed in front of an icon of the Virgin Mary that stood between the Oratory and the schools of Father Matthew Picco (1812-

¹ A list of saints and servants of God, with bibliographical information, can be found in Eugenio Valentini, SDB, "La santità in Piemonte nell'Ottocento e nel primo Novecento," in *Rivista di pedagogia e scienze religiose* 4 (1966), 297-373. For further bibliographical data, see DBLW: 122: "Secondary Sources and Related Reading."

² In this connection I need only mention the Ecclesiastical College of Turin, the University of Turin, and the seminaries. Professors of those institutions (Fr. Amadeus Peyron, Thomas Vallauri [1805-97], John Anthony Rayneri, Fr. Francis Faà di Bruno [1825-88], Fr. Louis Guala [1775-1848], and Fr. Joseph Cafasso) undeniably influenced the priests who became pastors of souls in the province or preachers in great and small pulpits (John Baptist Giordano [1815-77], Louis Nasi [1821-96], William Alasia [1794-1875], Charles Ferreri, et al.).

³ The facts come from DB's biography of Savio and from depositions at the processes for beatification and canonization, which are supported by parish birth and death records for Dominic Savio, his nine brothers and sisters, and his parents. The Savio genealogical tree has been reconstructed by Michele Molineris, SDB: see S. Giovanni Bosco, *Vita di San Domenico Savio, allievo dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales* (Turin, 1963), pp. 138-39.

1880) and Professor Charles Joseph Bonzanino (d. 1888). In the continued practice of this habit was seen the moral influence of Don Bosco.⁴

In the families of young John Bosco, Aloysius Comollo, Dominic Savio, and John Massaglia, the practice was to say morning and evening prayers together. The Moglia household recited the rosary together. But it is not possible to determine how widespread this practice was. Nor is it possible to determine how common and still operative in the nineteenth century was the practice of interrupting work in field or shop when the bells pealed for the Angelus three times a day.⁵ Given the present state of informational data, we cannot legitimately hazard overall evaluation of other facts and religious observances either: e.g., the daily performance of the exercises of the good Christian (morning and evening prayers). These matters escaped the inspection of pastors themselves, whose attention and surveillance were concentrated on the observance of the Sunday precept, the Easter precept, Lent, and instruction for the children.

From the documents we get the impression that the religious element was really dominant in the region of Turin and Montferrat, that it truly impregnated the life of the individual and the community.⁶ But to what extent did this religious observance respond to an inner need or merely reflect thoughtless adherence to prevailing customs? To what extent was it the product of external conditioning as opposed to a deeply felt inner urge? Or is there perhaps the risk of transposing problems that really came up later, when one seeks to test the sincerity and solidity of the faith that guided and nurtured customary behavior?

⁴ Giovanni Battista Francesia, SDB, *D. Giovanni Bonetti, sac. salesiano: Cenni biografici* (S. Benigno Canavese, 1894), p. 25: "It was consoling for us to hear people saying behind our backs: 'There go Don Bosco's boys! They are the only ones who take off their caps in front of Mary.'" Is it possible that the "only" is merely the way Fr. Francesia recalls it?

⁵ These practices were recommended by little books of catechetical instruction and popular piety. Among them I would note the *Ricordi* of St. Charles Borromeo, which were published in widely varying redactions in Piedmont and other areas. E.g., *La famiglia cristiana, ovvero ammaestramenti e regole del viver cristiano*, which was published several times in Piedmont (see ch. XI, n. 76, p. 245). There were Salesian editions: *Ricordi di S. Carlo Borromeo, arciv. di Milano, per ogni stato di persone* (S. Pier d'Arena: S. Vincenzo di Paoli, 1878³), where the reference to the Angelus is on pp. 16-17.

⁶ I refer my readers to the *Status ecclesiae* reports, generally prepared on the occasion of pastoral visitations and preserved in the archives of the respective diocesan chanceries, sometimes in copy or draft form in the archives of the individual parishes as well.

2. *Religious observances and data on spiritual aristocracy among the common people*

To begin with, it is certain that among the populace there were individuals and groups in whose lives religious practice was a basic and indispensable factor.

One indicative document among many is the autobiography of Sister Mary Henrietta Dominici (née Catherine Dominici). Born in 1829, she spent her childhood and adolescence in Carmagnola with her maternal uncle, the parish priest of the Borgo Salsasio district. On March 26, 1839, at the age of nine and a half, she was admitted to first communion.⁷ On November 19, 1850, she entered the Sisters of Saint Anne. In that interval her confessor and spiritual director in Carmagnola was an Oratorian priest. He led her to weekly confession and communion around the age of eleven or twelve, and from there to frequent communion during the week and even daily communion. As she recalled: "I felt ever increasingly drawn to the practice of internal and external mortification, especially on days before communion."⁸ It seems, however, that her confessor alternated these urgings to frequent or daily communion with restraints, which did not necessarily dovetail with her own feelings of fervor: "When I felt somewhat cold and little inclined to receive holy communion, he wanted me to receive it more often or even every day; but when I burned with desire to receive it, then he would decrease my number of communions or, at the very least, not increase them."⁹ Worth noting are her comments on the daily meditation on the passion of Jesus Christ, which her confessor advised her to make for at least half an hour:

⁷ *Vigilia eroica... Pagine autobiografiche di suor M. Enrichetta Dominici delle Suore di S. Anna e della Provvidenza* (Rome, 1951), Introduction and notes by S.P. Morazzetti, p. 75. The nun recalls a detail that seems indicative of the education given to children: "I was afraid of not bringing the proper preparation to the reception of communion. Hence I did not want to accept the two communions that I was permitted to make by the good priest who taught me doctrine. I told him frankly that I wanted to make only one communion that year, without offering him any reason. When that good servant of God recounted my words to my good uncle, then a priest, it made him laugh heartily, since my behavior seemed to him to contradict the ardent longing I had earlier shown in approaching the holy banquet."

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94. On her own initiative, prompted by self-criticism, fear of divine punishment, and love, she had already given herself the obligation of going to daily Mass (p. 81). Her attention was focused on two poles: God and her own inner fervor. She writes: "My fervor sometimes was transient, sometimes lasted for whole days. In the latter case I forgot about my usual diversions, wholly abandoning myself to that bit of sweetness which the Lord made me experience in the things of God. Then I would stay longer in church after holy Mass..." (p. 82).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

Without asking him for any instructions and without having been taught by anyone how to meditate, I said yes and thought I kept my word. I seemed to meditate continually. At the time it did not take much effort to stay recollected and united with God even in the midst of the most distracting occupations. A burning fervor accompanied me everywhere. When I had to leave the house, I went through the streets without noticing anything. I seemed to move with great speed as if carried by others, so readily did my body devote itself to its own functions. Later on, I did not even use a book to recollect myself. Although I was careful to stuff my pockets with them before I left the house for church, where I sometimes remained four or five hours at a time, especially on feast days or Sundays, it often happened that I never opened even one of them. The time spent before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament passed like a flash of lightning, and I would have chosen to stay there forever if other duties had not called me elsewhere.¹⁰

At this point we might ask ourselves whether the case of Sister Domini­ci might not well serve as an example of the religious life that many other young girls may have led (e.g., members of the Mornese group or the Daughters of Mary), gravitating around some well-guided religious center in city parishes or parishes of outlying towns in the hill country or plains. For these nuclear groups, life at home, quiet time in church before the tabernacle, and their group meetings could serve as forges enkindling the flame of religious fervor. And the focal points of that fervor, in all likelihood, were: God, who was to be adored and thanked; Jesus, who was to be loved; one's own soul, which was to be assiduously cultivated and protected from becoming lukewarm; and charity, which was to be shown to everyone, both inside and outside the home. We might also ask ourselves whether these nuclei of spiritual aristocracy are not to be regarded as the forges of Christian practice in families that continued the old customs, zealously maintaining the sense of God, veneration for his will, a horror of sin, and faithful observance of divine and church precepts.¹¹

We might also ask whether we should not view these nuclei as one of the elements that produced the explosive Catholic movement in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the case of these elements, it is true, we cannot easily measure their radiating and activating role in the mass, where religious factors tend to lie below the surface as little more than elements of folklore, more or less deeply rooted and capable of resisting the developing and changing course of customary behavior as a whole.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Besides biographies of the various saints and servants of God, valuable sources for further work could be the hundreds of obituaries of priests, nuns, and lay people, some published and others unpublished, which often provide indirect information on their relatives as well. There are also the brief profiles of young students of both sexes in which one finds not only hagiographical commonplaces but also letters and facts with some solidity: e.g., the *Souvenirs du Sacré-Coeur de Turin* (Turin: Marietti, 1845).

3. *Genuine religious practice amid folklore and superstition*

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the admonitions of pastors in rural areas do not appear to go beyond those voiced in the preceding century. They center mainly on Sunday and holy day observance, which obviously was the high point of the community's religious practice.¹²

On Sunday or feast day morning, at daybreak or quite early, a Mass was celebrated in both parish churches and rural ones. It was the women, mainly, who attended these early morning Masses; they then went home to do the indispensable chores. They readily returned to the "main Mass," which the parish priest celebrated and the men in the community attended as well. The homily and an occasional popular hymn broke the silence. It was a common practice to celebrate Mass first and then follow with a sermon explaining the Sunday Gospel. (This practice was followed in Valdocco while Don Bosco was alive.) On more solemn feasts the people, or at least the choir singers, performed the sung parts of the Mass, using the *Missa De Angelis*. The men usually stayed in the back of the church. They came farther forward in churches where there were side aisles half hidden by columns. If the sermon immediately followed the Gospel, some of the men engaged in conversation with their friends outside the door until the end of the sermon, entering in time to fulfill their Sunday obligation. During the sermon others rested their elbows on the side altars, put down their heads, and remained more or less absorbed or somnulent. Still others simply sat in the empty confessional boxes. Young men winked at one another, chatted and cast knowing glances at their friends or girls. Some of the women exchanged silent or whispered greetings, asked for a reasonable amount of information, and tried to quiet babies by distracting them with their rosaries or letting them nibble on bread or fruit. At the center of this ring of undevout practices and tenuous devotion was the mass of quieter

¹² The general description I offer here obviously takes in divergent particular practices. It is based, as a rule, on the biographical documentation mentioned and the various *Status ecclesiae* reports. It is not a matter of local customs. Similar or identical practices have been noted for other areas. For the observances and devotions of the populace in the region of Modena, see Giuseppe Orlandi, CSsR, *Le campagne modenese fra Rivoluzione e Restaurazione (1790-1815)* (Modena, 1967), pp. 114-44. Also see Ernest Sevrin, "La pratique des sacrements et des observances au diocèse de Chartres sous l'épiscopat de mgr Clausel de Montals (1824-1852)," in *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France* 25 (1939), 316-44; idem, "Les offices religieux au diocèse de Chartres sous mgr Clausel de Montals (1824-1852)," *ibid.* 28 (1942), 196-216. There is also some mention in Paul Droulers, SJ, *Action pastorale et problèmes sociaux sous la monarchie de Juillet chez mgr d'Astros* (Paris, 1954), pp. 83-84, 89-90. On the beliefs, superstitions, and customs of Piedmont and Sardinia in the 18th century, see Nicomede Bianchi (1818-86), *Storia della monarchia piemontese* 1 (Rome, 1877), 317-434.

and more recollected people, in whom the flames of genuine piety burned unseen.¹³

The afternoon began with meetings of societies or confraternities (men and women) in some corner of the church or in the sacristy. Fairly widespread were those of the Blessed Sacrament, the rosary, the Flagellants, and those who assisted the dying.¹⁴ They were the cross and the support of the local clergy in organizing traditional religious feasts; supplying beeswax, lamp oil, and the bread to be distributed to the poor on particular anniversaries (the bread of “charity”); celebrating prayers of indulgence; and taking care of the solemn accompaniment of Viaticum. Periodically or weekly the societies met to discuss financial reports, distribute assignments, and consider measures to be taken by, or imposed on, the parish priest and the local authorities.¹⁵

The afternoon continued with the teaching of Christian doctrine to boys and girls, who either had or had not yet received communion and confirmation. Priests or women did this teaching in the church or sacristy. After that, the community met once again in the church. Recitation of the rosary in common ordinarily took place, followed by the chanting of vespers. If it was not done by the men and women in attendance, it was done at least by the priest celebrant, other priests and clerics who might be present, and a few more educated laymen. Boys and girls were often in the front row, or even in the sacristy or the sanctuary, so they were under ecclesiastical control. The older and younger men were again in the back, as they had been in the morning, either inside the church or outside it. They were waiting for the end of vespers and the priest’s instruction (a moral sermon or catechism lesson for adults) so that they might show respectful concentration at least when the bells announced benediction with the Blessed Sacrament.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, pastors of souls in Piedmont had much the same worries that Louis Anthony Muratori had expressed in his work on proper, well balanced Christian devotion.¹⁶ They, too, deplored the fact that the Sunday of the rural peasant and craftsman tended to become a day of boredom, if not of misconduct. As the local priests saw it, these people, weary from their labors during the week, readily tended to occupy the day in such a way that

¹³ All these details are brought out by Felice Cecca, *Le veglie de' contadini cristiani* (Turin, 1806), pp. 116-20, on respect for the Church. For a parallel treatment see Orlandi, pp. 124-25.

¹⁴ Giuseppe Martini, *Storia delle confraternite italiane con speciale riguardo al Piemonte* (Turin, 1935).

¹⁵ It is rare that parish archives or parish files in diocesan archives do not have some material on disputes or points of friction with confraternities, as well as with local authorities and private individuals over matters of money, ownership, or custom.

¹⁶ [Muratori], *Della regolata divozion de' cristiani* (Trent ed. [=Naples], 1748), ch. 21 (“Feast Days and Their Devotions”), pp. 256-80.

they would do nothing worthwhile. After taking part in church services with impatience or indifference, they went off to public inns and canteens and spent the rest of the day there chatting, playing, and drinking with their friends. Those who did not go off to a tavern and who had not gotten priestly permission to do some urgent work in the fields tended to stand idly at their doorways when the weather was fine. Adolescent boys and girls bantered with one another or entertained themselves with interminable evenings of dancing and gay amusements. Younger children tended to continue their ordinary daily work, wandering through the fields in search of nests or fruits.¹⁷

As Muratori had written, “civil, decent” people tended to fret, not knowing what to do on Sunday and looking forward to the recommencement of their labors.¹⁸

To their warnings against the desecration of holy days, parish priests, mission preachers, confessors, and catechists readily joined criticisms of the chronic ignorance of those men who would not enter a church and thereby refused to be instructed in the holy word of God, or those who stood around bored in church and showed no desire to learn anything. Against such people were hurled threats of divine punishment both in this life and the hereafter.¹⁹

There were also seasonal practices and practices associated with specific circumstances. It was customary to have prayers and Masses said for the dead. Pastors of souls warned peasants not to load down their heirs with more obligations than they could handle. But they also urged piety and gratitude. By means of alms and the celebration of Masses, people could help the deceased whose worldly goods they had inherited.²⁰

The practice of the Christmas crib was known. At the very least, a candle or some sort of light was lit before a statue or picture of the Nativity while the

¹⁷ Cecca, pp. 151-58, on the 3rd commandment. Also see the following: Francesco Bernardi, *Istruzioni morali sopra le quattro parti della dottrina cristiana* 3 (Turin, [1796]), 385-98; Stefano Alisio, *Istruzioni teologiche pratico-morali sulle quattro parti della dottrina cristiana* (Turin, 1824²), 3:259-84; Erasmo da Valenza, OFM, *Il cristiano istruito sopra i dieci comandamenti di Dio: Dialoghi* (Carmagnola, 1833), pp. 87-107; Michele Piano, *Istruzioni dogmatiche parrocchiali* 3 (Milan, 1856⁶), 97-116. Piano was the vicar general of the Alba diocese around 1830 and a reformer of the royal schools in that city.

¹⁸ Muratori, p. 267.

¹⁹ Such were the views expressed already by the models of the late 17th century, who were still regarded as authorities in the 19th century: e.g., Paul Segneri, Bossuet, and Bourdaloue. But there were some who protested this approach and urged priests to purify the popular mind of such images of God, a God of lightning and thunder ever ready to unleash omnipotent revenge: “Is there not a love more worthy of the human heart, a filial love that would make us fear to offend God as a child would fear to offend a loving father?” See Jean Martin-Félix Orsières, *Il vero curato* (Turin, 1852), p. 38, who preferred to have priests follow St. Francis de Sales and Fénelon (pp. 37, 42).

²⁰ Cecca, pp. 123-24 (on the holy Mass).

novena was being celebrated in church. During the triduum of Holy Week, Tenebrae was chanted when that was possible. In parishes everywhere the sacred tomb was prepared on Holy Thursday. On Holy Saturday people washed their eyes as soon as the bells pealed the Resurrection. For the feast of Saint John the Baptist in June, fires were lit on the hillsides.²¹

People invoked Saint Rocco and Saint Christopher when they went on trips, Saint Isidore the Farmer for a successful planting, and Saint Lucy for the preservation of their sight. When peals of thunder shook the house, it was customary to light a candle or lamp and place it in a remote corner of the room until the danger had passed.²²

There was no criticism against the practice of observing the moon and its phases in connection with certain rural labors: e.g., planting, trimming or felling trees, and decanting wine. It was all right for peasants to do the clothes-washing by the light of the full moon or dying moon, the task of laundering being a periodic one shared by several families. It was even all right to keep an eye on the moon when planting greens and vegetables or setting hens to brood, and to keep for winter the eggs laid under the full moon of August.²³

Other practices were not all right and were severely criticized as patent superstitions. It was superstitious to believe that the way to put out a conflagration at once was to throw into it a hen's egg that had been laid on Holy Thursday. Superstitious were the secret practices performed on the evening of the Epiphany to learn whether a girl would be married that year and would be lucky.²⁴ A shameful superstition was to believe that by carrying on one's person the Prologue of John's Gospel, written on virgin paper, one would unfailingly be kept safe from lightning, sudden death, robbers, and assassins. People were superstitious if they believed that by performing certain devotions to Saint Ursula every day, they would see an apparition of the martyr and the eleven thousand virgins three days before their own deaths.²⁵ Another pointless practice was turning around and retracing one's steps a bit if one tripped on a stone, in order to exorcise the danger of having a serious fall that day. Equally pointless was taking care not to cover or suffocate a fire when a future bride was present, for fear that the love would die and the girl would be without a husband

²¹ Many of these traditions are recalled by Giuseppe Pola Falletti-Villafalletto (see ch. XI, n. 98, p. 253). With respect to the practices of Holy Week, see Pietro Stella, "Il triduo sacro nella pietà popolare italiana del Sette e Ottocento," in *Rivista liturgica* 55 (1968), 68-83.

²² These practices, including the candle or light during a storm, are not yet extinct in Montferrat.

²³ See Cecca, p. 137 (on superstition).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135; Piano, 3:65 (superstition).

²⁵ Cecca, pp. 136-37, where he comments on other instances of superstitious or senseless behavior.

for the entire year.²⁶ It was superstitious to take the hooting of the screech owl and the baying of dogs as signs announcing someone's imminent death.²⁷

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the religious life of the countryside seems to have been taken up with this complex soul of its own, a mixture of faith and credulity, devoutness and indifference, fearful respect for the divine and the other-worldly combined with a liking for drinking, dancing, playing, and lovemaking. It would be a mistake to think that it all came down to customary behavior that could easily be uprooted and replaced. There can be no doubt that many matters, which in the abstract could not be classified as religious, combined with authentically religious elements to form one single mass. They could serve as a protective cover for genuinely religious behavior and practice. Faced with a crisis, however, they might serve to shake, transform, or dissolve the supporting structures of religious thought and practice as well.

4. *Methods of religious practice proposed to the faithful*

Amid this whole complex of customary behavior, we also find a series of detailed practices, for individuals and groups, being inculcated by ascetical and devotional manuals. There were practices for every year, every month, every week, and every day. They took the form of suggested rules of life for bishops and priests, craftsmen and peasants, nuns and women of the world, boys and girls, students and domestics.

In Piedmont there were norms laid down by such figures as Saint Charles Borromeo, Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Leonard of Port Maurice, Saint Alphonsus Liguori, Blessed Sebastian Valfré (1629-1710), the Jesuits John Croiset and Francis Nepveu (1639-1708), the Barnabite Charles Joseph Quadrupani (1740-1806), and the Oblates Stephen Burzio and John Baptist Isnardi.²⁸ From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries these rules of life reiterated a

²⁶ Ibid., p. 135; Alisio, 3:201.

²⁷ Alisio, 3:201; *Istruzioni semplici che possono servire di metodo di vita cristiana* (Turin, 1846), p. 10. See also the heading on "popular errors and prejudices," regarding the screech owl, in *Lecture di famiglia 2* (1843), pp. 165-66.

²⁸ On St. Charles Borromeo, see ch. XI, n. 76, p. 245. The "rule of life that Francis de Sales prescribed for himself as a law student in Padua" can be found in *Opere 1* (Venice, 1735), 598-604. St. Leonard of Port Maurice gives norms of life for religious women in his *Manuale sacro*, which can be found in his *Opere complete 1* (Venice, 1868), 235-353. St. Alphonsus wrote and published various rules of life: for a Christian, a secular priest, a nun seeking holiness; they can be found in *Opere ascetiche 1* (Turin: Marietti, 1844), 853-904; 2 (1847), 856-64; 4 (1847), 362-74. These may be found in the Eng. ed. of his works prepared by Eugene Grimm, CSsR, and published by the Redemptorists: "A Christian's Rule of Life" in *Preparation for Death* (Brooklyn, 1926), pp. 407-59; "Rule of Life for a Secular Priest" in *Dignity and Duties of the Priest* (Brooklyn,

fairly uniform scheme: a spiritual retreat every year; a monthly day of recollection, which might come down to a meditation on the eternal maxims and making a good confession and communion as if for the last time in one's life; and keeping Sunday holy by attending one or more Masses and taking part in other religious services such as sermons, catechetical lessons, processions, vespers, and benediction. Readers were urged to "hear" Mass every day, if possible, in the certainty that God would bless their spiritual and temporal affairs. Every day they were to perform the morning and evening exercises of a good Christian, to say the Angelus three times, to make the sign of the cross and pray for the eternal rest of a departing soul when the church bell tolled the news, to say grace before meals, and to say the rosary individually or in common. All these rules of life inculcated the practice of saying ejaculations: e.g., "God's will be done," "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul."

Many of them suggested a bit of spiritual reading every day. Around the start of the eighteenth century, these manuals began to suggest the practice of saying three Hail Marys after evening prayers, in honor of Mary's purity and to ask for her maternal help.

From elementary school through university, many of these practices were collective and obligatory for attending students. They were implemented at school between 1822 and 1847 at least. Outside of this time-period and class of people, however, it is impossible to determine exactly the extent to which these

1927), pp. 427-35; "Rule of Life for a Religious That Desires to Become a Saint," ch. 24 of *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ* (Brooklyn, 1929), pp. 694-718.

For Jean Croiset see, in particular, *Orazioni cristiane, ovvero tutti gli esercizi ordinari del cristiano* (Venice, 1766). The rule of life by Nepveu can be found in *La giornata del cristiano santificata colla preghiera e colla meditazione* (Turin: Marietti, 1844), pp. 319-26. Bl. Sebastian Valfré's *Avvisi agli ecclesiastici e secolari* (Biella, 1836) was also published separately and included in various ascetic and devotional works (see, e.g., ch. XI, n. 76). In Piedmont, Marietti and others published the work of Carlo Giuseppe Quadrupani, *Documenti pratici e morali per vivere cristianamente* (Turin, 1795). About 50 printings are indicated by Giuseppe Boffito, *Scrittori barnabiti* 3 (Florence, 1934), 228-31. Stefano Alessio Burzio, *Memoriale cristiano, ossia indirizzo pratico di vita cristiana con un breve esercizio per la s. confessione, comunione e messa tratto dal Mazzolin di fiori ai fanciulli ed alle fanciulle* (Turin: Marietti, n.d.), is also worth noting. Of Isnardi, see his *Breve regolamento di vita da tenersi da una figlia, che esce di educazione ed entra nel mondo*, included in *Voce angelica* (Pinerolo, 1835), pp. 72-77. There were also the *Regole di vita per un giovanetto* and the *Avvisi alle figlie cristiane* by St. Vincent Mary Strambi, CP (1745-1824), bp. of Macerata and Tolentino. DB put out an edition of the *Avvisi* (Turin: Paravia, 1856 [see AS 112 Fatture, Paravia]). The *Regole di vita* was published in the Library of Good Books as an appendix to Louis Abelly, *Indirizzo per procurare utilmente la salute delle anime*, dedicated to the St. Vincent de Paul Society (Turin: Botta, 1850), pp. 271-77. I cannot cite the countless list of such rules of life for ladies and gentlemen, converted sinners, penitent women, and so forth.

recommended exercises were actually put into practice, perhaps also under the stimulus and direction of spiritual directors and parish priests.²⁹

But there were patterns that tended to be general, and we find many of them solidly implanted at the Oratory. As we might well imagine, Don Bosco had made law and local custom a part of Valdocco life. Law, obviously, prescribed certain practices. Custom adopted practices suggested by the diocesan catechism (formulas for morning and evening prayers and for prayers before and after communion) or by devotional manuals (prayers for the stations of the cross or devout attendance at Mass).

5. Socioeconomic factors affecting religious practice

On the basis of our present knowledge, we cannot offer precise and detailed evaluations of this whole complex of customs. But we can safely regard certain facts as symptomatic, and they may serve as a solid basis for suggesting some features.

Even in the Turin and Asti regions, female participation in religious practices seems to have been higher than male participation. Thus, data from other studies of religious communities manifesting this sort of dimorphism may also be indicative for the communities under study here.³⁰ Priests relied more on women than on men for early religious education at home and for catechetical instruction given in church. They also counted more on women for the observance of religious practices by the family at home and outside it: the daily exercises of the good Christian, respect for sacred things, repression of cursing and swearing, participation in the sacraments (at least during the Easter season), care of the sick and dying.

The conservative tendency of tradition in the Turin and Asti countrysides was also fostered by people's status as land "owners" or "holders." Migration was not a relevant phenomenon. Insofar as it did exist, it mainly meant moving around within a given local area. Ownership of small holdings or various forms of sharecropping prevailed, reducing the risks of instability.³¹ Farm stewards or managers, such as the Boscos in Morialdo, owned their own livestock and even their own little farm plots. Life gravitated around the civil and religious

²⁹ Here again one may be pointed in the right direction by hagiographies, obituaries, and autobiographical writings. [Editor's note: See, e.g., MO:71-72.]

³⁰ Besides the works cited in n. 12 above, see Giorgio Candeloro, *Il movimento cattolico in Italia* (Rome, 1961), pp. 226-28 (a Marxist interpretation).

³¹ Germana Muttini Conti, *La popolazione del Piemonte nel secolo XIX* 1 (Turin, 1962), esp. pt. 2, ch. 2, and pt. 3, ch. 2, §10, on the growth and social mobility of the Piedmontese population. Pier Luigi Ghisleni, *Le coltivazioni e la tecnica agricola in Piemonte dal 1831 al 1861* (Turin, 1861), whose study of the dynamics of agriculture offers interpretive data on population dynamics.

core, the town or village. Ordinarily the parish priest, with his moral authority, played a dominant role.

In general, the clergy were sound and fairly well united by monthly meetings held to discuss practical moral issues. To be sure, there were parish assistants, chaplains, and free clerics living off some benefice who were less than eager or competent.³² But there were also worthy clerics, some of whom were venerated as saints.³³ In the first half of the nineteenth century, after the Restoration of 1814-1815, primary and secondary education in the province had been entrusted to the clergy for the most part, to the laity only by way of exception. The schools of Carmagnola and Chieri had a great reputation. In those regions the prestige of the clergy does not seem to have been undermined by scandals involving priests or brothers during the Revolution. Nor does the socio-religious milieu seem to have been greatly disturbed by the budding nucleus of intellectual reserve, open criticism, disobedience, and even derision. This nucleus was ordinarily made up of lay sectors of the middle class: doctors, druggists, lawyers, notaries, and so forth.³⁴

Given the low cultural and educational level of the populace, the communities as a whole were heteronomous. Hence there were good grounds for the appeals, voiced especially from the middle of the century on, to enlist young men in the ranks of the clergy; a region without a priest was a body without a soul, bound to become a citadel of Satan.³⁵ But the popular mind must also have felt a need for the priest. In country areas around Turin, there was probably some repetition of the same phenomenon recorded for other places where religious practice had been abandoned: the freethinkers themselves, out of regard for the dignity of their region, asked the bishop to send them a worthy, zealous, charitable, educated priest.³⁶

Many priests really did measure up to what was expected of them. Few were the areas where their efforts did not produce a kindergarten, a collection of elementary schools run by nuns, a charitable institution for the poor, the sick, the

³² A complaint that sometimes surfaces in the reports of parish priests regarding the *Status ecclesiae*. A common evil, as one can find in Orlandi (see n. 12), pp. 188-90.

³³ For example: John Baptist Rubino (1776-1853), priest at Morra (Cuneo); Stanislaus Donaudi (1761-1850), vicar general of the Saluzzo diocese; Louis Craveri (1781-1850), vicar general of Fossano; Louis Balbiano (1812-84), assistant pastor in Avigliana. Many others are considered by Canon Tommaso Chiuso (1846-1904), *La Chiesa in Piemonte* 4 (Turin, 1892), 28-34.

³⁴ One indication of this comes from works of popular apologetics, which draw examples from these categories of people as the adversaries to be refuted. In the same vein see Giovanni Bosco, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato ed un curato di campagna sul sacramento della confessione* (Turin: Paravia, 1855).

³⁵ This is a variant of the apologetic thesis elaborated in the 18th and 19th centuries regarding the role of the clergy and of religion in the progress of nations.

³⁶ Noted by Sevrin in his article, "Les offices religieux," pp. 212-15; see n. 12 above.

convalescent, and the old. Such establishments prompted the community to gravitate around the parish priest, thereby bolstering feelings of loyalty to the Church to some extent, as well as awareness of God, respect for sacred things, and faith in the hereafter. The latter, at least, took concrete form as a desire for eternal happiness and fear of purgatory and hell.

6. *Religious observances in crisis in Turin and Piedmont from 1850 on*^{36a}

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the picture of religious practice had profoundly changed. One readily perceptible symptom among many is the changed attitude of pastors of souls. In Turin, as elsewhere, they were no longer

^{36a} Editor's note: 1850 marked a turning point in Church-State relations in the kingdom of Sardinia on account of the Siccardi Laws passed by the Parliament and signed by King Victor Emmanuel II that year and the following. These laws abolished the right of sanctuary and most of the privileges of clerics accused of civil crimes; gave the government veto power over certain ecclesiastical legacies; and—of particular interest for the discussion in this section—drastically reduced the number of civilly recognized holy days (on which manual work was forbidden), to just six. See William Roscoe Thayer, *The Life and Times of Cavour* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 1:120-21. It was his vehement resistance to these laws that led the government to arrest Abp. Fransoni and banish him.

Author's note: In all of the Catholic countries, holy days of obligation were also civil holidays during the Old Regime (when only Sundays were otherwise days free of work). The number of holy days, their establishment, and their suppression were regulated by agreement between the civil government and the Holy See; each diocese also celebrated certain days as local feasts of obligation. Many of them were unilaterally suppressed in Piedmont under the Napoleonic government (1801-15). The 1st article of the Constitution of 1848 made Catholicism the state religion, but following the principle of liberty, freedom of religion was also recognized ("tolerated") for other faiths. Holy days were officially recognized, but the State no longer compelled their observance by individual Catholics. Consequently, after 1848 such observance (including the avoidance of servile work) began to fall off noticeably. Then, as mentioned above, even the official recognition was reduced to six days in 1850.

Author's note: Among the holy days of obligation in the Turin archdiocese were the Holy Name of Jesus (Jan. 19), Corpus Christi, the Sacred Heart, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Birth of St. John the Baptist (June 24), Sts. Peter and Paul (June 29), the Assumption (Aug. 15), the Holy Name of Mary (Sept. 12), All Saints (Nov. 1), the Immaculate Conception (Dec. 8), and Christmas (Dec. 25).

Editor's note: As a comparison, in the British colonies of America just before the American Revolution, the few Catholics (Bp. John Carroll in 1790 estimated there were about 35,000 in a total population of just under 4,000,000) were supposed to observe 34 annual holy days of obligation. Observance was problematic, given the scarcity of priests (numbered at 24 in 1785), the requirements of employers, and the anti-Catholic culture. See USCC, *Holy Days in the United States: History, Theology, Celebration* (Washington: USCC, 1984), p. 14.

complaining about such moral problems as the profanation of Sunday by carousing, merrymaking, and lovemaking. They now saw that the root causes were far more dangerous. The Revolution had made its own way. It was no longer merely a matter of a political crisis or a crisis of authority. Now there was a profound crisis of religious belief as well. The throne had been shaken; and with it, religion as well. Lamennais's cry of alarm at the start of the century was now a general cry: the heresy of the century was *indifferentism* in matters of religion. By that pastors meant disaffection with religious practice as an indication of estrangement from the Church and religion, from the values recognized as essential for humanity, and from the true sources of happiness, justice, and order.

In 1849 the bishops of Piedmont had tried to pinpoint the pathogenic germs of the problem. They saw the bad press as the main cause of the terrible evil, and the prelude to future evils. The bad press had to be combatted, snatched from the hands of the faithful, and neutralized, now that ecclesiastical censorship had been abolished and freedom of the press legally inaugurated. We can understand why so many pamphlets and pastoral letters against bad books should appear around 1850.³⁷

After that date, however, the wave of indifferentism seemed to spread and break everywhere, even as far as small towns and rural areas. During the exile of Archbishop Fransoni (1850-1862) and the administration of vicars general, urban pastors found themselves with new parochial inhabitants and new neighborhoods populated mainly by people from the provinces. The feeling that morality was impossible without religion made religious and civil authorities of one mind in promoting works of social welfare, even religious ones. The charitable works initiated and sustained by the "charity of good people" proved that the "proprietary" classes did have a concern for the "poor and abandoned" class, at least in terms of charity and as a matter of public morality and education.

But that did not solve the problem of religious decline. A sense of disquiet pervades almost every letter and circular issued by the vicars general of Turin and its archbishops: Louis Fransoni, Alexander Riccardi, Lawrence Gastaldi, Cardinal Cajetan Alimonda (1818-1891).

In 1868, a few months after the installation of Turin's new archbishop, Alexander Riccardi di Netro, the bishops of Piedmont gathered to draw up a program of united action. Their joint pastoral letter of February 25, 1868, focused on the abandonment of religious practice as the cause behind total abandonment of the faith. A serious symptom was the profanation of Sundays and holy days.³⁸ The pastoral complaints center not so much on the aban-

³⁷ See ch. IV, sec. 8, and ch. VII, sec. 3.

³⁸ The fight for the sabbath rest in France anticipated Italy's by a good 20 years. Pastoral attention focused especially on the religious value of Sunday as a day set aside for God and worship. Church tradition there used Sunday as its focus for religious instruction

donment of Mass as on the violation of the sabbath rest. People were working on Sundays and holy days “as much as, or even more than, on weekdays in the big cities, and nowadays in small towns as well.” All sorts of businesses were open, as were workshops and factories, to some extent at least:

One could hear and see the manual labor going on inside. Carts clattered through the streets as on every other day, transporting goods from the railroad or from public or private warehouses. Some trades will be quiet on other days of the week; but on Sunday, precisely because it is Sunday, they are not, because they choose to profane it in despite of religion.³⁹

Old excuses were dredged up, wrote the bishops: “the rapid multiplication of interests and concerns, the necessity for continual work, the conditions of the day requiring feverish work to increase the sources of public wealth.” They were nothing but excuses:

and appeals to undertake charitable works. Pastors, however, were certainly not unaware of the human “advantages” accruing from the sabbath rest for productivity and the overall progress of society. Around 1840, there were those who did come to advocate freedom and the possibility of Sunday being “consecrated to work”: see Droulers (see n. 12), p. 217. Right around the time that Fr. John Vianney arrived in Ars, “Sunday was being profaned by servile works, as it still is in much of France, and presently is, alas, in Piedmont” (Lorenzo Gastaldi, *Cenni storici sulla vita del sacerdote Giovanni Maria Vianney* [Turin: OSFS, 1872³], p. 35).

A society dedicated to the observance of Sunday, the Opera delle feste, was established in Turin, too, in 1859. The president was Count Caesar Trabucco of Castagnetto (1802-88); vice president, Don Bosco; secretary, Fr. Francis Faà di Bruno. Board members included Joseph Migliasso, merchant; John Bovero, shoemaker; Peter Marietti (1820?-90), printer and bookseller. In its program we read: “Two classes of people are especially called to this great religious work. The first class takes in merchants, craftsmen, and all those who profit from manual labor. They are urged to vow solemnly to observe Sunday in a public way, preferring to disadvantage themselves rather than burden their consciences with servile works. The second class takes in wealthy people and proprietors. They are urged to turn their backs on all considerations of human respect and to give the benefit of their earnings and purchases to those who prove themselves to be Christians on Sunday, thereby rewarding the righteous craftsmen and merchants who have not sold their own consciences. This is a religious work that everyone can perform, without harm to anyone; and it has become a duty in our present circumstances. With great sorrow, and motivated solely by love for our faith, we raise a cry of alarm and propose to put a stop to this most grave offense against God. Our weapons will not be force or the sword, but gentleness and prayer” (*Opera delle feste* [Turin: Marietti, (1859)], p. 4). This society manifested the typical attitudes of intransigent Catholicism, which sought to organize *real* Italy in structures independent of *legal* Italy. In 1860 the Opera della feste had 370 members: 230 men, 140 women; 100 merchants, 270 consumers. See the report of the secretary at the general meeting of May 17, 1860, in Méthivier, *Il settimo giorno, ossia il gran bene dell'osservanza della domenica* (Turin: Speirani, 1861), p. 112.

³⁹ *Lettera dell'episcopato piemontese, 1868* (Turin: S. Giuseppe nel collegio degli artigiani, 1868), p. 25.

The most affluent and industrious cities in the world offer us the example of strict observance of the Sunday and feast day rest, which is quite different from the example we offer; and they do not think that hurts their greatness one bit, as in fact it does not.⁴⁰

Here the underlying intuition was that periodic rest could help rather than hinder production. In their present quandary, however, Catholic authorities in Italy, lacking the perspective of the eighteenth century, did not manage to re-examine the religious observance of Sundays and holy days in the light of the new economic conditions and the agrarian crisis that was swelling the tide of migration. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the profound dissension between legal Italy and real Italy was already a fact. The realm of economics was developing within the coordinates of liberalism, even though it was affected by the forces of Catholicism and nascent socialism.⁴¹ The cry of ecclesiastical authorities was almost exclusively one of alarm, protest, and tenacious defense of the “seventh day.”

The joint pastoral letter of 1868 was one of protest and alarm. In it the bishops of Piedmont did not focus on the new economic conditions, which entailed work necessities and conveniences at odds with prevailing religious custom and practice. They did not consider the fact that large segments of the populace, transplanted from rural areas to the city, no longer were pressured by their milieu to follow certain observances, if for no other reason than to escape the censure of their acquaintances and, above all, the parish priest. Though they certainly knew it, the bishops did not bring out the fact that immigration to the city did not naturally lead to insertion into the parish body. Many who now came to the city, such as Don Bosco's Bartholomew Garelli,^{41a} became anonymous faithful. They participated at Mass and religious functions because they were urged by some inner call or attracted by the air of celebration that religious

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ On the measures taken from 1742 on, see *Raccolta di scritture concernenti la diminuzione delle feste di precetto* (Lucca, 1748); Enrico Cattaneo, “L'evoluzione delle feste di precetto a Milano dal secolo XIV al XX,” in *Archivio Ambrosiano* 9 (1956), 71-200.

As early as 1845, historian-statesman Cesare Balbo was thinking of migration and foreseeing beneficial effects for Italy in his *Meditazioni storiche* (Turin, 1858⁴), med. 17, §8, p. 348. At the session of May 31, 1853, Camillo Cavour called Parliament's attention to the LaPlata colonies. Their development could be important and useful for the kingdom of Sardinia. The debate about migration grew heated after 1860. Should it be left to personal choice, regulated by the government, or repressed? The phenomenon was a cause of concern because of the agricultural crisis and people's abandonment of rural fields. See Fernando Manzotti, *La polemica sull'emigrazione nell'Italia unita* (Rome, 1962).

^{41a} Editor's note: Garelli, an immigrant from Asti, was the boy with whom DB began the work of the festive oratories on Dec. 8, 1841, about a month after DB had taken up residence in Turin. See MO:187-95.

feasts had even in cities. In short, the bishops did not focus on the repercussions of industrialization and urbanization on the religious life of individuals and entire communities.

All now acknowledged the “moral decadence of the nation,” even those who might well be inclined to conceal it because they were the principal cause of it.⁴² Along with it went an “absence of faith” and the “corruption of upright behavior.” One of the prime causes of all that was the panoply of wicked doctrines propagated by books, newspapers, and the press in general and imbibed by “inexperienced youths, the common people, and people of every class.”⁴³

The bishops were right about the impact of the press. Everywhere there was a thirst for instruction and learning. It was hoped that even the most remote villages might share in the benefits of learning and culture. The schools were divided by the sex of their pupils, with men teaching in boys’ schools and women in girls’ schools (except in the kindergartens and the elementary schools of certain remote villages). In those who knew how to read, the thirst for learning translated into the reading of newspapers, novels, and stories. In many people the reading of *La Gazzetta del popolo*, *L’Opinione*, and the works of Aurelio Bianchi Giovini (1799-1862) and Angelo Brofferio probably aroused much the same sentiments and interest as did *The Kings of France*. Reading fervent pages about the sacred destiny of Italy, the divine power guiding the nation’s fate, and the martyrs who had given their blood and their lives for their country, people could readily feel the thrill of religious sentiment whether they were craftsmen, industrial laborers, small merchants, or students. The words went beyond mere rhetoric to some sort of vague religiosity. So readers were also prone to accept the protests against pro-Austrian clergy and anticlerical jibes, which tended to foster greater popular independence even in the face of appeals to observe the sabbath rest.⁴⁴

⁴² *Lettera dell’episcopato piemontese*, pp. 4-5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁴ It is not completely hopeless to try to explore the subject today and find documentation. In the Salesian milieu we have the case of two brothers, Joseph and Dominic Bongiovanni. Joseph died a Salesian. Dominic (1842-1903) became a secular priest, a curate at St. Alphonsus in Turin. Their father was a poor farm “steward” with practically nothing. Their mother, Mary Davite, was an immigrant, a native of S. Salvatore Monferrato. At an early age the brothers lost their mother, and their father remarried. Between the ages of 11 and 13, they attended the municipal schools around Porta Palazzo, which were run by the Christian Brothers. Joseph, his brother recalled, “was noted for his lively imagination on all subjects. This was the result of his constant reading of any book that came into his hands. The books were generally cheap novels loaned to him by certain companions.” Dominic, too, read such books and recalled how he “was filled with fury...and implacable hatred against religious orders, not understanding why they were allowed to go on living in freedom.” It was in that period that the laws sup-

It was not without reason that the bishops of Piedmont feared the press: "Even here in Italy there isn't a writer notorious for irreligion and immorality whose works, however despicable, are not published these days." Books and periodicals were put out on display where anyone could lay hold of them or buy them, so that they were bringing ruin to young people and hard-working craftsmen.⁴⁵ This evil cancer would continue to spread, warned the bishops:

It will wipe away all awareness of God and his eternal, inviolable laws; it will draw Christian worshippers away from the churches and the sacraments; it will grow and fill cities and smaller areas with bad habits, leaving the chaste marriage bed empty and populating the houses of vice.⁴⁶

Once the cancer had sunk into people's hearts, who could expect to uproot it and heal the wound? The bishops expressed their "intense sorrow" over the loss, not of earthly substances but of souls, which were plunging from spiritual prosperity into spiritual poverty and death.⁴⁷

Another cause of corruption was theatrical productions. They "corrupted people's minds, violated proper conduct, fostered denial of God, sowed doubt about everything in people's hearts, and looked for models of virtue in the ruins of depravity." In the plays offered the populace, wrote the bishops, churches, altars, sacred ornaments, and the most august mysteries of religion were "reviled with mocking banter and parodied with obscene words and shameful acts, so as to demolish whatever traces of religion and morality might still remain in

pressing religious communities were drawn up. See Francesia, *Memorie biografiche di salesiani defunti* (S. Benigno Canavese, 1903), pp. 14-15.

The two brothers also went to popular plays or spectacles: "Having no opportunity to go to those productions with a little more polish, they avidly attended the popular spectacles held on the meadows of the Citadel or some other area of Turin. Spectacles about bandits or gangsters often alternated with spectacles about the fearsome Inquisition. The aim was to make a vivid impression on the popular mind to convince them that depriving professed religious of their houses would be just revenge for their fictional crimes." With regard to the reading, however, Dominic Bongiovanni said: "My brother read and felt no trace of offense or resentment, as if he were a boat gliding through muddy waters and coming out spotless." With regard to the theatrical productions, Dominic says of himself: "I went to them and found my whole life in them because I had no one to keep me away from them" (Francesia, pp. 15-16).

⁴⁵ *Lettera dell'episcopato piemontese*, p. 11. Dominic Bongiovanni says about *Il Fischietto*: "In those days a very popular journal was one with pictures, the latter popularly known as 'cartoons.' Being the only one around, it was also much in evidence among common laborers. The cartoons, its jokes, its cheap slanders, its simple but saucy verses, and its little tales about ministers, deputies, and senators were read by the common people with what I would call almost malicious delight" (Francesia, p. 17). Thus the quasi-liberal *Fischietto* helped to foster socialism.

⁴⁶ *Lettera dell'episcopato piemontese*, p. 13.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

people.” Thus the theater was completing the “demoralization” of people’s hearts.⁴⁸ The bishops added a customary note:

Can there be any good reason to justify those fathers and mothers who take their sons and daughters to the theater? Are they not afraid to bring them back home, filled with enticements to vices they had never imagined before and with seeds of corruption that will in time bear their deplorable fruits?

To such theatrical presentations one could apply the remarks of Rousseau in his Preface to *La Nouvelle Héloïse*: “No upright heart of man or maid will rise from the reading of this volume without first having the reins of decent behavior broken and the subtle poison of impurity seeped within.” When people go to the theater and witness scandalous actions in particular, they cannot help but come out “far less religious, far less faithful in carrying out their obligations, and far less properly behaved than before.”⁴⁹

The anguished cries of the bishops of Piedmont echoed those of the French clergy, much of the rest of Italy, Pope Gregory XVI, and Pope Pius IX. They also gave authoritative voice to what was being written in the Catholic press of Turin, Milan, Genoa, Venice, Rome, Naples, and elsewhere.⁵⁰ In Turin, alongside the voices of other Catholic organs (*L’Armonia*, *La Campana*, *La Buona settimana*, *L’Apologista*, *L’Ateneo religioso*, various almanacs, etc.), on the lowly popular level was also heard the voice of Don Bosco’s *Catholic Readings* and *Gentleman’s Almanac*. Don Bosco’s tones and emphases, by turns calm and cautious, vigorous and angry, peremptory and defiant, can be properly appreciated and explained only when viewed against the backdrop of prevailing clerical and Catholic opinion.⁵¹

His *Catholic Readings* included pieces by the Capuchin friar Charles Philip of Poirino (d. 1872), Monsignor Louis Gaston de Ségur, Father James Isidore Mullois (1811-1870), and John Mary Huguet, dealing explicitly with the holy

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 17-18; see n. 44 above.

⁴⁹ Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes* 2 (Paris, 1964), 6: “Jamais fille chaste n’a lu des Romans; et j’ai mis à celui-ci en tête assés décidé pour qu’en l’ouvrant on sait à quoi s’en tenir. Celle qui malgré ce titre, en osera lire une seule page, est une fille perdue: mais qu’elle n’impute point sa perte à ce livre; le mal étoit fait d’avance.” The 1868 letter of the Piedmontese bishops alluded generally and incorrectly to “the conclusion that the Geneva philosopher drew about reading one of his famous books.”

⁵⁰ Examples of pertinent papal documents are Gregory XVI’s encyclical *Mirari vos* (Aug. 15, 1832) and Pius IX’s encyclical *Qui pluribus* (Nov. 9, 1846). Some data on the growing realization of the problem posed by indifferentism to Catholic pastoral activity can be found in: P. Richard, “Indifférence religieuse,” in *DTC* 7:1580-94; and P.A. Liégé, OP, “Indifférence-Indifférentisme,” in *Catholicisme* 5, cols. 1504-09.

⁵¹ On the kind of “challenge” put forth by DB, see pp. 209-10. In particular, see the final and highly polemical conversations (trat. 29-42) of *Cattolico istr.* Challenge and defiance also mark *Severino, ossia avventure di un giovane alpigiano* (Turin, 1868).

observance of Sunday and feasts, fulfillment of Church laws, Lent, confession, and communion.⁵² Father Charles Philip and Monsignor Ségur still viewed Jansenism as the remote cause behind the fading vigor of the faith and its practice.⁵³ As they saw it, the long abstinence from the bread of the Eucharist had

⁵² [Carlo Filippo da Poirino, OFM Cap], *Trattenimenti intorno al sacrificio della s. messa* (LC 2 [1854], fasc. 11-12); idem, *Trattenimenti intorno al ss. sacramento dell'Eucaristia* (LC 3 [1855], fasc. 19-22); idem, *Trattenimenti morali intorno ai riti e alle cerimonie della s. messa, coll'aggiunta di un metodo per udirla con frutto* (LC 4 [1856], fasc. 8-9); idem, *Il cielo aperto mediante la comunione frequente* (LC 7 [1859], fasc. 6 [1865⁴]); idem, *Il cielo aperto mediante la confessione sincera* (LC 8 [1860], fasc. 8 [1903⁷]); Luigi de Ségur, *La santissima comunione* (LC 20 [1872], fasc. 7 [1908¹⁵]), of which there were other editions: Florence (1863, 2d Florentine printing) and Modena (1870, 21st Italian printing, based on the 40th of Paris); idem, *Ogni otto giorni* (LC 26 [1878], fasc. 7); idem, *Venite tutti a me* (LC 27 [1879], fasc. 6 [1894⁴, 1905⁴ (sic)]); Isidoro Mullois, *La domenica al popolo* (LC 4 [1855], fasc. 1). Marc-André Hugué, *L'estistenza reale di G. Cristo nel SS. Sacramento* (LC 11 [1863], fasc. 7).

The following might also be mentioned: "Il lavoro ne' giorni festivi," dialogue, in Bosco, *Raccolta di curiosi avvenimenti contemporanei* (LC 2 [1854], fasc. 3-4), pp. 41-45; *La pasqua cristiana* (LC 5 [1857], fasc. 1); [Arnaud-Bernard Duquesne (1732-91) and Giuseppe Riva (1803-76)], *Breve esposizione delle epistole ed evangelii delle domeniche e feste del Signore con preghiere e riflessioni ad uso del popolo cristiano* (LC 5 [1858], fasc. 11); *La quaresima cristiana* (LC 5 [1858], fasc. 12); *Della fedele osservanza dei comandamenti della Chiesa* (LC 8 [1860], fasc. 5); V.D. Olivier, *Astinenza dal lavoro nei giorni festivi* (LC 9 [1861], fasc. 5); Leonardo da P. Maurizio, *Il tesoro nascosto, ovvero pregi ed eccellenze della s. messa* (LC 8 [1859-1860], fasc. 12 [1884⁴, 1930]); Gaetano Costamagna, *La santificazione delle feste in esempi* (LC 23 [1875], fasc. 2-3 [1883⁴]). At the start of sec. 8 of this chapter, I shall mention works by Frassinetti: see nn. 68-70. I do not offer episodes and considerations given in *Il Galantuomo*. Like similar almanacs, it also had a calendar indicating religious feasts.

⁵³ C.F. da Poirino, *Il cielo aperto... comunione*, pp. iv-v: "Hit with Church anathemas and combated by the champions of Catholic theology, Jansenism fell in a brief space of time. But it left vestiges of its brief sojourn in the rigorism that mistakenly equates the counsels with the commandments and useful dispositions with the ones that are wholly sufficient. This rigorism prejudiced the minds of many into thinking that it was extremely difficult to receive communion worthily and avoid the danger of sacrilege. Forgotten was the wise maxim of St. Francis de Sales that one had to go to communion frequently in order to learn how to receive communion well. And what was the result? The result was that many stopped going to the Sacrament that is the life and strength of souls and the generator of holiness, while many others went only rarely. Thus they lacked nourishment for their piety and support in their frailty. Their faith languished and their unrestrained passions gave way to libertinism, which is accompanied by unbelief and indifference in matters of religion. This first showed up in France..." Ségur, *La santissima comunione*, p. 3: "My intention is not to enlighten unbelievers but to bolster the piety and confidence of all those Christians who are already in the habit of nourishing themselves on this heavenly food...and to make crystal clear to them the nonsensical nature of Jansenist prejudices that still persist and keep them away from the Eucharist all too often."

caused the overall crisis of faith. Their books of questions and answers, written in a plain but clear popular style, sought to instruct the populace and foster their love for the divine treasures that sustained faith. Father Charles Philip's work on the Mass sought to tackle the difficulties associated with the use of Latin. The ancient language was a luminescent cloud helping to surround the awesome mystery with respect; it was an instrument required to maintain and testify to the unity of the Church in time and space.⁵⁴ He deplores the fact that church ceremonies, for many who attend them, are reduced to "an unknown language, a closed book, and a series of fine scenes of unknown point and purpose." This evil, alas, afflicted many Christians in whom the faith was not wholly extinguished:

They go to the public prayers of the Church and the august sacrifice out of sheer habit. They feel no holy emotion at all. Instead they are obviously bored and inattentive. They are often prompted to go so far as to abandon these rites, to the terrible detriment of their souls.⁵⁵

Thinking also of Protestant proselytism, the good Capuchin lamented "the unhappy time of licentiousness and heretical frenzy."⁵⁶ In his catechetical and apologetic work on confession, Don Bosco echoed the complaint about "calamitous times." It was a time when the faith was being "doggedly attacked," and those concerned with the plight of souls were feeling the sting.⁵⁷ Don Bosco's admonitions readily echo popular sentiments. He warns against the mistaken notion that one may derive greater benefits by working on Sundays and holy days.⁵⁸ He, too, tells his youths and common readers of the blessings God lavished on the peasant Isidore, who assiduously attended even daily Mass; and he depicts the unfortunate plight of craftsmen who worked on Sundays for the sake of material gain, even quite recently.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ C.F. da Poirino, *Trattenimenti morali*, p. 168.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Bosco, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato ed un curato*, p. v.

⁵⁸ Bosco, *Raccolta di curiosi avvenimenti*, pp. 41-45.

⁵⁹ *Stor. eccl.* (Turin, 1845), pp. 217-20; *Giov. prov.*, p. 86. A case of a craftsman who suffers misfortune is cited in the previous note. Another case is given in *La forza della buona educazione* (Turin, 1855), p. 52: "But divine providence came to Peter's aid, proving to him that profit made on Sundays only ruins the labor of his whole week. Here is the story. This craftsman was the victim of a fire, then of bankruptcy. Two of his children died and his wife was ill for over a year. So he was forced to relinquish his workshop to others, becoming a simple employee instead of the owner." The interpretation of misfortune as a punishment for profaning Sunday with servile work is common in popular writings of the day: e.g., those of Méthivier and Costamagna cited above in nn. 38 and 52. The sad case of a shoemaker is reported in an article entitled "Funeste conseguenze per la profanazione delle feste," in *La buona settimana* 18 (1873), pp.

In the 1850s especially, Don Bosco also had Protestant proselytism on his mind. He often warns about it in connection with the sacrament of penance and its reception. The immediate occasion for his *Conversations* dealing with the subject seems to have been the little work by the apostate priest Louis DeSanctis against auricular confession. Don Bosco reacted sharply, spurred even more, perhaps, by his own experience as a priest-educator who relied heavily on confession as an educational tool:

Here we have the reason why they direct all their weapons against this salutary practice. The Catholic distanced from confession and abandoned to self moves from abyss to abyss. Like a frail plant without shelter, exposed to the blasts of the wind, he or she succumbs to the most deplorable excesses.

In the popular and peremptory vein of this work, Don Bosco insists that religion and morality survive so long as confession does. Where confession has been abandoned, unbelief and misconduct take its place. Facts prove that when people attend confession frequently and in an exemplary way, most of them hardly know how to commit sin.⁶⁰

7. Signs of renewal in religious practice

Despite the alarm of Catholics and euphoria of aggressive anticlericals, the reality of the situation was complex and uncertain. There were signs of hope for all. Everything seemed to be crumbling, yet everything seemed to be rising anew. Old-time habits of Sunday and holy day rest seemed on the wane, but other devotions and practices were assuming enthusiastic proportions: May devotions, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, perpetual adoration of the Blessed

55-56. One could add hundreds of examples from *Il Campanone*, *L'Apologista*, *L'Armonia*, and the Library of Good Books.

The theme of the "advantages" of observing the sabbath is a variation of the more general theme on the advantages of religion. St. Leonard of Port Maurice deliberately chose to speak of the fortunes or misfortunes of those attending Mass, which depended on their attentiveness: "Grandeur and the righteous thing are two strong forces for moving the human heart. But what is useful not only moves the heart but also carries the day almost always, despite people's resistance. Even supposing you care little about the excellence and necessity of the holy Mass, how can you not appreciate the benefits it brings to the living and the dead, sinners and the just, in life, at death, and even after death?" (*Il tesoro nascosto*, ch. 1, §8, in *Opere* 2 [Venice, 1868], 332). St. Joseph Cafasso urged preachers, in trying to get people to flee from vice and practice virtue, to touch "those [chords]... that are most likely to affect our minds in human affairs: i.e., what is useful, profitable, and easy" (*Istruzioni per esercizi spirituali al clero* [Turin: Canonica, 1893], p. 211.)

⁶⁰ Bosco, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato ed un curato*, pp. 83-84. On pp. 112-22: "Appendice sul libro intitolato *La Confessione saggio dogmatico storico*," referring to a book by DeSanctis.

Sacrament, First Friday devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the celebration of jubilee years and centenaries (e.g., that of Saint Peter in 1867 and of the battle of Lepanto in 1871). There were Catholic Congresses, Eucharistic Congresses, and Marian Congresses. In countless ways the spark of fervor was being enkindled in broad segments of the faithful.⁶¹

In 1858 May devotions were held in at least twelve churches of Turin from 5:00 A.M. to late evening. The results drew enthusiastic comments from the Catholic press:

The word of God, proclaimed by zealous priests, was heard once or twice a day with edifying concentration. The confessional boxes were crowded and the eucharistic banquet, especially at the end of the month, was attended as much as, or more than, in Paschaltide. With the month over and devotions concluded in all the other churches, one would have thought that the populace would be satiated. But at the closing services in Holy Martyrs Church, which were delayed to last Sunday, the communions were so numerous and the attendance of the populace so great from dawn till nighttime that one might have thought there had been no other May devotions in Turin.⁶²

The same was reported to have been the case in other cities, such as Genoa, Milan, and Savona: "The Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our mother, has truly been destined by God to conquer, besides all the other heresies, the terrible indifference that today freezes hearts and closes them to grace."⁶³

The following year attention was drawn to the huge number of communions received by children in Holy Martyrs Church on Thursday, March 17, the feast of the Holy Childhood:

More than 800 boys and girls received holy communion, which was dispensed by Bishop [John Anthony Odone] of Susa. The sermon was preached by the zealous Canon [Eugene] Galletti [1816-1879]. Though a great preacher, he knew how to put himself on the level of the little ones and bring them up to the heights of divine concepts. The music was genuine, tender, and joyful. As befitted such a feast, it was sung by the boys trained by the Christian Brothers.⁶⁴

⁶¹ See my effort at synthesis in my article, "L'Eucaristia nella spiritualità italiana da metà Seicento ai prodromi del movimento liturgico," in the anthology *Eucaristia: Memoriale del Signore e Sacramento permanente* (Turin, 1967), pp. 141-82. Here I try to bring out what relates more directly to DB.

⁶² *La buona settimana* 3 (1858), p. 189.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-03.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 4 (1859), p. 104. Further reports are given in the following years. The feast was usually celebrated around the Epiphany, and various devices were used to attract the attention of children and adults. In their presence, e.g., names were chosen for those who were to be baptized in mission lands. I cannot say for sure to what extent DB was involved in the initiatives of the Holy Childhood movement. Printed at Valdocco was the

The battle for eucharistic fervor was now joined. It was linked to the promotion of frequent confession on a monthly or even weekly basis. The time was one of patriotic and religious fervor on many fronts throughout Europe, as we see in the final reflections of Romanticism.

Attendance at the sacraments was much in evidence. According to statistics published in an appendix to the Turin liturgical calendar for 1876, 94% of the Catholics obligated to go to Mass on Sundays and holy days fulfilled the precept in 1874. Catholics in the city itself numbered 210,000, including infants, and outside the city numbered 423,000; thus the total for the archdiocese was 633,000, of whom about 436,000 were of age and condition sufficient to attend Mass. In Turin itself, the number attending Sunday and holy day Mass was 110,000; outside Turin, 300,000; for a total of 410,000. On weekdays the number attending Mass in Turin was 22,600; outside Turin, 55,700. Thus, the total number hearing Mass on weekdays was 78,300: i.e., about 18% of the Catholics bound by the Sunday precept.

The percentage of Catholics bound to Easter communion was estimated at two-thirds of the total Catholic population. Within the prescribed time, 86,970 in Turin were estimated to have fulfilled their Easter duty; outside Turin, 245,000. Outside the prescribed time, 11,200 were estimated to have fulfilled the precept. Thus, the total number fulfilling their Easter duty was 343,170 or 81.3%.⁶⁵

Were, then, the fears of the clergy and the Catholic press well-founded? Was the decline in religious practice serious enough to justify extremely alarmist warnings?

Quite aside from theological motives and the whole complex of causes viewed as basic to the situation, intervening facts and unexpected events had shown that the predicted decline was indeed under way and spreading more and more, despite all the feverish and conscientious initiatives to provide religious life with new resources. The high percentage of attendance probably did

Brevi discorsi detti nel triduo fattosi per la festa della Santa Infanzia dal sac. D. Carlo Fogliano nella chiesa dei santi Martiri in Torino, seguiti da alcune notizie intorno all'organizzazione di detta opera ed ai suoi vantaggi (Turin: OSFS, 1865). On the back cover: "sold for the benefit of the new church being constructed in Turin at Valdocco under the title of Mary Help of Christians."

⁶⁵ *Il palmaverde: almanacco universale per l'anno 1875* (Turin, n.d.), p. 487: population of the city, 217,806; of the surrounding vicinity, 505,034; of the province, 972,986.

Calendarium liturgicum archidioecesis taurinensis...servandum anno bisextili 1876 (Turin: Marietti, n.d.), pp. 84-85. The absolute figures given there for the population of Turin in 1874 (220,410) dovetail pretty much with other statistical sources: see Giuseppe Melano, *La popolazione di Torino e del Piemonte nel secolo XIX* (Turin, 1961), pp. 165-82 (census figures for 1871 and 1881).

not delude pastors of souls. They could readily note a factor that escaped the statistics: i.e., the disaffection of many who still continued to go to church and the sacraments. Their alarms turned precisely on this point, serving to forewarn researchers about the possible time lag between people's disaffection (which might be far advanced) and statistics on their observance of Church precepts (which might be high compared to their full, loyal adherence to the Church in reality). Moreover, differences and rivalries between towns and villages were fading out, and such things had once helped to bind the faithful more closely to their own local church bell tower.^{65a}

In Turin, which was the particular focus of Don Bosco's attention, there was no lack of priests and lay people busily involved in the production and promotion of good books, newspapers, flyers, and all sorts of popular devotional and instructional aids. Various parishes had organized workshops where gentlemen and ladies fashioned clothes for the poor or sacred vestments. For those participating in the group and its labors, the core moment was the period of prayer and religious instruction. Finding its inspiration in the work of Father John Joseph Gaume (1802-1879), it was also called the "catechism of perseverance." Newly established or revitalized were parish groups of the Daughters of Mary and committees to promote sanctification of holy days, atonement for blasphemy, and perpetual adoration. Organizations already existing by mid-century gradually took on new vigor: the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, and the Holy Childhood Association. Oratories for young students and artisans (of the lower classes especially), high schools, and hospices continued to be relevant institutions that were supported by both clergy and laity.⁶⁶

^{65a} Editor's note: The parish church, and particularly the grandeur of its bell tower, was a mark of local pride and even of rivalry between villages. The term *campanilismo*, derived from *campanile*, means "local patriotism" or "parochialism."

⁶⁶ I cite a few examples of the renewal movement in the Catholic life of Turin. Lorenzo Pampirio, *Elogio funebre del teol. Maurizio Arpino, fondatore e primo curato della parrocchia dei SS. Apostoli Pietro e Paolo in Torino* (Turin, 1887): "In his new parish church he promoted instructional and catechetical lessons, arranged for the celebration of sacred services, inaugurated devotional practices, sponsored sacred missions and extraordinary preaching services, and saw his zeal reciprocated by increased attendance on the part of the people, revitalized frequenting of the sacraments, repentance on the part of sinners, and the exemplary activity of societies devoted to the Blessed Sacrament and prayers for the souls in purgatory... From there he was able to expand his beneficial influence into families, schools, shelters, charitable organizations, and even jails and prisons with their hapless inhabitants. He founded the Society of Mercy (*Opera di misericordia*) to provide service and help to poor sick people in their own homes. He founded the Crèche organization to shelter nursing infants. He promoted the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, those for Catholic male and female workers, and others that seemed to meet the needs of his time and his parishioners. At the same time he labored

Between religious fervor and social action there arose societies for mutual aid, laborers, sports, good reading, and music.⁶⁷ All entailed catechetical instruction and renewed resolves: to remain loyal to the faith in this time of struggle, to overcome considerations based solely on human respect, and to make sure that irreverent reading matter or works hostile to religion did not get into one's own home and family. Catholics were closing ranks and striving to regenerate their own energies and resources.

In the matter of religious practice, parishes were not the only focus. An important role was also assumed by such churches as Our Lady of Consolation and Mary Help of Christians. They helped to attract fervor at a time when the local parish no longer seemed to be the center of attention or attachment for broad segments of the populace, as we have already noted. This was particularly true for many transients as well as permanently established immigrants.

The solemn spectacle of May devotions in such nonparochial churches as Our Lady of Consolation, Mary Help of Christians, and the church of the Sisters of Adoration attracted many people. They could enjoy the delights of a good sermon, choir singing, organ music, candle lights, and solemn ceremony. People who might otherwise have withdrawn completely from urban religious life came to such churches, heard the sermons, and then decided to go to confession and communion.

Thus, to some extent religious practice continued to find expression in traditional attitudes and gestures, and to some extent was revitalized in reacting to new stimuli. Among the latter factors were urbanization and industrialization under the aegis of liberal capitalism. But we must also note other factors:

as a devoted and effective consoler of the sick, father to orphans, and benefactor of the poor..." Such testimony about priests could be amply increased from biographies of Canons John Baptist Giordano, Paul Bergher (1812-88), and Louis Nasi and of Frs. Francis Faà di Bruno, John Ignatius Vola (1798-1858), Hyacinth Carpano, and others. The complex tissue of Turin life in the second half of the 19th century is brought out clearly by the biographies of Marchioness Barolo, Sr. Mary Louise Clarac (1817-87), Count Charles Cays, and railwayman Paul Pius Perazzo.

Also informative is the chapter on new devotions in the parish of St. Thomas in Francesco Maccono, OFM, *La parrocchia e il convento francescano in Torino* (Casale Monferrato, 1931), pp. 297-316.

Some readers may find useful the devotional schedules of several Turin churches as given in *L'indicatore delle feste per l'anno 1862* (Turin: Marietti, n.d., a beneficio dell'Opera delle feste). They may see the Excursus at the end of the chapter, p. 361.

⁶⁷ The same *L'indicatore* for 1862 offers a "list of pious societies, companies, associations, and confraternities existing in Turin" on pp. 99-104. It lists 19 societies, 24 companies, and 5 confraternities. The list of new associations established in Turin in the latter half of the 19th century would be a long one: e.g., the *Società promottrice cattolica* (noted in *La buona settimana* 16 [1871], p. 120); the *Circolo della gioventù cattolica B. Sebastiano Valfrè*; *Unioni Cattoliche Operaie*; *Opera del danaro di S. Pietro*. For Perazzo's participation in them, see Mariano Manni, *Il servo di Dio Pio Perazzo* (Turin, 1929), pp. 69-93.

the movement for national unity; the desire to fight for the defense and triumph of religion; the determination to show respect for the Pope and other Church pastors, who were God's representatives and the trustees of the means of salvation; and the inner urge to make reparation, in any way possible, for the offenses committed against God and Jesus Christ, the latter being loved and worshipped in the Blessed Sacrament. More clearly in the second half of the century than in the first half, religious practice was linked not only to the parish but also to other religious organisms. They might be old or new, educational or charitable, centered around prayer or the active life.

8. *The campaign for frequent communion*

In this general atmosphere the lively campaign for frequent communion went on, linked, of course, to the promotion of confession and spiritual direction. A work that caused a great stir was the Italian edition of Monsignor Ségur's work on holy communion (*La santissima comunione*). In 1861 Pius IX distributed copies of it to the Lenten preachers of Rome. The Catholic press hastened to report what the Pope had said to them: "This little book from France has already done much good. It should be given to all children when they receive their first communion."⁶⁸

In Don Bosco's more immediate circle of influence, Father Joseph Frassinetti in Genoa enthusiastically echoed the message. Ségur's ideas and the official papal approbation of them provided a perfect opportunity for Frassinetti to resume a battle that he had been waging for some time and that had cost him more than one fight. He was strongly in favor of frequent communion for the simple faithful, not only during the week but even daily.

In 1864 Don Bosco's *Catholic Readings* published a sixty-four-page booklet on virginity and eucharistic communion that was addressed to the faithful: *Two Hidden Joys* by Joseph Frassinetti, prior of Saint Sabina in Genoa.⁶⁹ The following year, in a new edition of Frassinetti's *Compendium of Moral Theology*, an added appendix addressed especially to confessors and parish priests a fervent appeal for frequent communion.⁷⁰

What, he asked, had dissuaded pastors in the last few centuries from allowing frequent and even daily communion? A whole series of false notions or convictions, he replied. People thought that eucharistic communion should be re-

⁶⁸ Frassinetti, *Due gioie nascoste: Proposta agli amanti di Gesù*, in *Opere ascetiche* 3 (Rome, 1910), 253, note which borrows from the *Archivio dell'ecclesiastico*, fasc. 1 (Florence, 1864), p. 81.

⁶⁹ LC 12 [1864], fasc. 10. There were other editions, e.g., Turin: Salesiana, 1909⁸.

⁷⁰ Frassinetti, *Dissertazione sulla comunione quotidiana*, in *Opere ascetiche* 4 (Rome, 1912), 1-29, and in his *Compendio della teologia morale* (Genoa, 1867³), pp. 404-32.

served for the perfect, for those already so strong that they would benefit from the piercing rays of the divine sun rather than being burned by them. But that was a mistaken notion of the Blessed Sacrament. Jesus in the Eucharist was the divine food for wayfarers, the medicine for every member of the faithful in need of it and for the sick and the weak in particular. The imperfect were the ones who should receive the food of the Eucharist with trust and frequency, thus responding to Jesus' appeal: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened" (Matt 11:28).

What could priests demand of the simple faithful? A higher degree of holiness than priests themselves possessed as they ascended the altar every day to offer the holy sacrifice and partake of the divine victim? Why use a double standard? They should be fair and grant the bread of the Eucharist to the faithful, lest the latter faint on their journey through such calamitous times. They should heed the remark of Jesus, who said he came to heal the sick, not those who were well (Mark 2:17).

Frassinetti examined the arguments used to support restricted access to the Eucharist on the basis of Church tradition. He probably had Anthony Arnault in mind, but he expressly cites Archbishop John Marchetti's (1753-1829) anti-Jansenist criticism of Fleury's *Church History*. Rigorists often argued that the primitive Church could grant daily communion to the faithful because it was an age of fervor and holiness. Leaning on Marchetti, Frassinetti granted that such was the case. But the first age of Church life was probably no more fervent or holy than our own. Alongside the holy lived the weak, not just in the third and fourth centuries when Christians who offered incense or handed over the sacred scriptures abounded, but even in the first century. To realize that, one need only read Saint Paul's complaints about the Galatians and Corinthians.

The Council of Trent had exhorted Catholics to live such upright lives that they could approach the sacred banquet every time they attended Mass. Hence fervent faithful were permitted to eat the bread of the Eucharist whenever they were worthy of it. Both rigorists and benignists agreed on this basic principle, but they disagreed about the criteria to be used in determining the spiritual worthiness of the faithful. That battle had gone on for a long time, but now the proponents of frequent communion were beginning to prevail. At this point in the doctrinal and pastoral struggle, however, much stress was placed on the judgment of one's confessor or spiritual director. This typifies the spirituality of the age. Spiritual heteronomy of that sort was regarded as normal and necessary by such figures as Mary Henrietta Dominici, Dominic Savio, and Paul Pius Perazzo. More than one priest in Turin, moreover, made a profound impression on people by being a finely tuned spiritual director: e.g., Joseph Cafasso, Felix Carpignano, CO (1810-1888), Mark Anthony Durando, CM, and John Anthony Genta (1809-1888). In an era when parish structures were coming apart, then, spiritual direction associated with the eucharistic appeal became a way of anchoring people securely to the Church.

Theological reflection and popular devotional literature stressed the *ex opere operato* aspect of the Blessed Sacrament in discussing its effect on communicants with respect to Church loyalty. Loyal adherence to the faith and Christian fervor were fruits produced by the Sacrament of its very nature. But in terms of psychology and sociology, I do not think it is amiss to say that the effects of faith and fervor derived legitimately from the various causes that I have already described to some extent.

Frassinetti's book was a timely one. It dovetailed with feelings and yearnings that had gradually surfaced in the religious awareness of the clergy and the laity and that were already somewhat evident in the reactions against rigorism and the "disasters" of the French Revolution in the first half of the nineteenth century. Both clergy and laity were ever aware of the deep respect one should show for the Eucharist. Furthermore, there was a strong desire to atone for the outrages inflicted on the Eucharist by the "wicked" of every stripe, and to do so with acts of love and fervor. When they approached the holy banquet and received Jesus into their own hearts, Mary Henrietta Dominici and many others kept one eye on their own degree of fervor. Did they feel interior warmth or coldness? Could the dignity of the Eucharist be tarnished by disputes with their neighbor or by their failure to carry out their own daily duties?

One indication that the ideas of Ségur and Frassinetti dovetailed with these new feelings and urgencies is the fact that their little works went through many printings. In all likelihood, the new pastoral directions were responsible for this.

Besides being the age of Mary, then, the period could also be called the age of frequent confession and communion. Never before, perhaps, had the clergy found themselves so overloaded with confessions several times a week in parish churches, other sanctuaries, male and female religious orders. They had to make themselves available for the most disparate anniversaries and for a clientele that easily maintained monthly or even weekly confession.

If we can trust the statistics compiled by pastors and rectors of churches, we have the following figures for 1874: weekly or even more frequent communion in Turin, 38,500; in the rest of the archdiocese, 66,500; for a total of 105,000, i.e., 25% of the Catholics obligated to receive communion (who made up two-thirds of the total number of Catholics). Receiving communion once a month were 74,000, i.e., 18% of the obligated Catholics; one, two, or three times a year besides their Easter duty, 18,500, or 4% of the obligated Catholics.⁷¹

It was clearly a time of fervor, accompanied by the rise of numerous pious exercises and devotional associations as well as the revival of Third Orders and the wearing of scapulars. Vigilant and attentive pastors of souls, such as Archbishop Lawrence Gastaldi and Bishop Jeremiah Bonomelli, could feel some

⁷¹ *Calendarium liturgicum... 1876*, p. 85.

anxiety about the situation. They feared that such devotion might get out of hand and lose itself in excesses. If it did not concentrate on God and Jesus, it might dry up and stagnate like a tree with far too many branches.⁷² Fervor might degenerate into rootless sentimentalism nourished by little or no sense of the divine. Already there were symptoms that religiosity was assuming new attitudes and directions in the era presaging Modernism, an era that extended beyond the arc of Don Bosco's own life. The preliminary signs were already evident. Eucharistic communion, a public act now enacted by masses of people, signified the Christian presence in a society undergoing renewal. Approaching communion in all sorts of Congresses (Marian, Eucharistic, Worker, and Catholic), people felt like confessors of the faith and heroic warriors in the great battle, exalted rather than crushed by the masses.⁷³

9. *Practices of piety in Valdocco*

What about religious practice in Valdocco? What rhythms did it follow? Where did it find its nourishment? To what extent did it respond to the pressure and urgencies of its milieu?

There can be no general answer to these questions. The development of practices in Valdocco was certainly conditioned by general developments in the

⁷² The expressions are taken from two pastoral letters of Bp. Bonomelli: *Il culto religioso: Difetti-abusi*, Lenten pastoral for 1905; *Sentimentalismo e formalismo in religione*, Lenten pastoral for 1902; cited in my article, "L'Eucaristia nella spiritualità italiana," pp. 177-79 (see n. 61 above). Abp. Gastaldi repeatedly called for devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Eucharist. Around 1877 he began to be apprehensive about popular fascination with miracles and devotional sentimentalism. By way of example, I cite from one of his pastoral letters on the education of girls (Mar. 1, 1877): "Education which is limited to cultivating the religious sensitivity of girls, which seeks to inculcate delight in the *sentimental* practices of the faith, which is content with oratorical decorations, images of the Blessed Virgin nicely dressed, lighting, altar ornaments, the pomp of sacred functions, hymns, the fragrance of incense, sermons, and all the things that delight the fancy and arouse heartfelt sympathy; but which does not go further to consider the act of sacrifice, abnegation, humility, and forgiveness for love of Jesus, can never be called Christian education except in the most imperfect sense. It will never make girls truly Christians, truly imitators or followers of Jesus Christ" (Gastaldi, *Lettere pastorali* [Turin, 1883], p. 369). On the disagreements between DB and Gastaldi regarding the miracles of Mary Help of Christians, see BM 14:410-26. There we also find reference to Gastaldi's reaction to the publisher Binelli, who had reissued the *Mistica città di Dio* of Maria d'Agreda (1602-65).

⁷³ This was the state of mind of such militant Catholics as Paul Pius Perazzo, promoter of daily eucharistic adoration, and Count John Baptist Paganuzzi (1841-1923), president of the *Opera dei Congressi*. Of the latter, see his words that I cited in "L'Eucaristia nella spiritualità italiana," p. 165, n. 72.

religious practices of Turin and Piedmont. But it was also influenced by its own specific factors, which I have already noted more than once: e.g., the distinctions between externs and interns, students and artisans, clerics and other youths, educators and pupils, adults and adolescents, newcomers and old-timers in the house.

The extern oratory brought Turin natives and immigrant youths to Valdocco. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to determine the exact percentages of city youths and provincial youths, or of those from Montferrat, Canavese, Biella, and other areas. In this respect, research on the intern situation is more fortunate. Much personal and sociological data can be better pinpointed on the basis of various registers. Compared to the life of the city, the life of the Oratory, and of the intern oratory in particular, dovetails more with that of the Cottolengo Institute (home of the *Tommasini* ^{73a}) and other similar institutions. It was a protected citadel, immunized in many respects. Various radiations and meteors got through to it only after passing through the atmosphere created by Don Bosco and his co-workers. Political and religious happenings in the city ordinarily were viewed in Valdocco from Don Bosco's standpoint, which is precisely the standpoint we are trying to bring out in this volume. There were interactions with the city and its influences, to be sure: directives from the archdiocesan chancery, the presence of diocesan clergy at the Oratory, participation in feasts, and so forth. But we must not overlook the very basic and special interaction between the Oratory and provincial life. Many boys were drawn from the province and continued to gravitate there periodically or permanently. But when will it be possible for us to undertake any large-scale study of how the boys educated at Don Bosco's school turned out? What concrete results can we hope to arrive at today?

Insofar as Valdocco religious practice is concerned, the interaction with the province meant that the religious life of the intern oratory was helped by the fact that many youths found practices similar to those they had left behind, or rediscovered them once again; and Don Bosco definitely wanted to foster them.⁷⁴

^{73a} The "Tommasini family" were boys who aspired to the priesthood and lived at the Little House of Divine Providence. This informal junior seminary was founded by St. Joseph Cottolengo in 1841 under the protection of St. Thomas Aquinas; the first, carefully chosen group numbered 12. In the first 95 years of the program's operation, 1988 boys took part and 735 of them became priests, mostly in the archdiocese of Turin or in other dioceses of Piedmont. See *La Famiglia dei Tommasini nella luce del suo 1° centenario* (Pinerolo: Cottolengo, 1949), pp. 273-343.

⁷⁴ This intention is brought out by Fr. Lemoyne with regard to liturgical and devotional chant: see *Indice* MB:53-54, s.v. "Canto gregoriano." It is implicit in biographies that describe what boys and clerics did on vacations at home. See DB's biographies of Colmollo, Savio, and Besucco; Lemoyne's biography of the Salesian cleric Joseph Mazzarello (1832-68); Bonetti's biography of the pupil Ernest Saccardi (1850-66). On serving Mass see MB 9:708-09.

For both externs and interns, the fundamental code of practices of piety at the Oratory was Don Bosco's *Companion of Youth*. It applied to all: adolescents and adults, laymen and clerics.⁷⁵ There were other books of obligatory use, such as the catechism and other scholastic texts, as well as books for private use as spiritual reading and meditation. Some are mentioned incidentally, in Don Bosco's biography of Dominic Savio, for example: the *Imitation of Christ* and Saint Leonard of Port Maurice's *Hidden Treasure of the Mass*. Some were recommended in *The Companion of Youth*: the *Introduction to the Devout Life* by Saint Francis de Sales, the *Preparation for Death* by Saint Alphonsus, and *Jesus to the Heart of the Young Man* by Father Joseph Zama-Mellini.⁷⁶ Finally, others are indicated in the surviving lists of books declared by the youths in the years 1855-1857, and in the various invoices from publishers (Speirani, Paravia, and Marietti) that show books purchased in quantity and presumably used at the Oratory: e.g., *Jesus at the Heart of Devotion to Mary* by Father Alexander Teppa, CRSP (1806-1871), *Chaplet for Mary Most Holy* by Father Charles Ferreri, and books of devotions such as *The Christian's Daily Prayer Book* or *The Garden of Devotion*.⁷⁷

I think we can say in general that at the Oratory and the hospice attached to it the religious life promoted by Don Bosco took shape as a system of common practices and spontaneous usages by groups and individuals.

In all Don Bosco inculcated the morning and evening exercises of the good Christian. Those presented in *The Companion of Youth* are almost entirely those prescribed or suggested by the catechism of the Turin archdiocese and other dioceses of Piedmont.⁷⁸ In the first five years of the Oratory residence, the morning

⁷⁵ We learn this not only from the tradition but also from the lists of books declared by boys at the Oratory (AS 38, Torino-S. Franc. di Sales 51).

⁷⁶ They are mentioned in the Savio-Massaglia letters, which were inserted in the 2d ed. of *Savio* (Turin, 1860), pp. 100-04; SDS:111-13. See also *Giov. prov.*, p. 18; SWSJB:79.

⁷⁷ See n. 75 above.

⁷⁸ See *Giov. prov.*, pt. 2, pp. 76-84: "Particular exercises of Christian Piety: Morning and Evening Prayers":

"(a) A good boy, upon awakening, should make the sign of the cross and offer his heart to God, saying: 'Jesus, Joseph, and Mary, I give you my heart and my soul.'

"(b) Then get out of bed and dress with the greatest modesty.

"(c) St. Aloysius Gonzaga did not want even his feet to be seen bare because he regarded modesty as a clear mirror that would be clouded by a single breath.

"(d) While you dress, you can say: 'Angel of the Lord, my guardian by order of God's merciful providence, watch over me today...'

"(e) As soon as you dress, kneel before an image of the crucified Jesus or the Blessed Virgin and recite the following prayers:

"(e) [*sic*] 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.'

"(f) 'My Lord and my God, I give you my whole heart. I adore you, I love you, with

prayers ("I adore thee, O my God," "Our Father," etc.) were recited before attendance at Mass. Like student assemblies, the Mass was to be attended in silence. Its most important moments were to be followed with the help of meditations proposed by *The Companion of Youth*, with perhaps a hymn or two interjected here and there. Father Francesia recalled that in those years (1850-1858?) some boys would go to the sacristy before Mass to have Don Bosco hear their confessions. In church the other boys waited in prayer, or at least in silence, sometimes up to half an hour. Don Bosco came to the altar when he had fin-

my whole heart. I thank you for having created me, made me a Christian, and preserved me during this night...

(g) 'Our Father who art in heaven... Hail, Mary, full of grace... I believe in God, the Father Almighty... Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope...'

(h) 'The commandments of God are ten: 1. I am the Lord, thy God... The commandments of the Church are five: 1. To attend Mass every Sunday... Act of faith: I firmly believe that you are God, who reward the good and punish the wicked... Act of hope: My God, because you are omnipotent, merciful, and faithful, I hope... Act of love: My God, I love you above all things... Act of contrition: Mercy, O Lord, I am heartily sorry for having offended you...' Having finished your prayers, go to your parents to hear their orders...'

Compendio della dottrina cristiana ad uso della diocesi di Torino: Breve catechismo (Turin: Paravia, [1844]), p. 9: Preliminary lesson: What a Christian must do every day:

"(a) Q: What should a good Christian do immediately upon awakening in the morning? A: Make the sign of the cross, saying, 'In the name of the Father, etc.'"

(b) *Guida angelica* (Turin, 1767), p. 9: "Practical exercises for the morning... Upon awakening, devoutly invoke several times the most holy names of Jesus and Mary. Get up promptly because idling in bed is very harmful for the body, which will languish in its humors, and even more harmful for the soul, which will be exposed to countless diabolic illusions. Having made the sign of the cross, dress with the utmost modesty."

(c) *Ibid.*: "St. Aloysius Gonzaga would not even tolerate his legs being seen bare, modesty being a wholly clear mirror that could be dimmed with a single glance."

(d) *Ibid.*: "While you dress, say some devout prayer, e.g., *Veni Sancte Spiritus...*"

Compendio della dottrina cristiana, p. 6: The Christian's daily morning prayers: "Angel of God, my guardian by order of God's merciful providence, watch over me today..."

(e) *Compendio*, p. 5: "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen."

(f) *Ibid.*, pp. 5-7: "I adore Thee, O my God, and I love Thee with my whole heart. I thank Thee for having created me, called me into Thy Church..."

(g) Our Father, who art in heaven... Hail, Mary, full of grace... I believe in God, the Father Almighty... Angel of God...

(h) The commandments of God's law are ten. First, I am the Lord, thy God... The commandments of Holy Mother Church are five. First, to attend Mass every Sunday... The sacraments are seven: Baptism... Act of faith: I firmly believe that you are God... Act of hope: My God, because you are omnipotent, merciful, and faithful, I hope... Act of love: My God, I love you above all things... Act of contrition: Mercy, O Lord, I am heartily sorry... In the name of the Father..."

ished the confessions.⁷⁹ More than once, we know, Don Bosco's clerics were late in arriving at their seminary and were admonished by their professors. There was not much checking on the participation of the boys or even the seminarians. Entries by Don Bosco and remarks by monitors of both groups convince us of that.⁸⁰

DB's *Companion of Youth* was revised when the archdiocesan catechism was. I omit reference to the texts of other catechisms. In the 19th century efforts were under way to unify the catechism in Italy. In the meantime, the compendium of Bp. Michael Casati of Mondovì (1699-1782), also adopted in Lombardy and Venice, was adopted in several dioceses. In 1905-12, a revised and expanded edition of Casati's catechism became the *Catechism of Pius X*, first for Rome and then for Italy as a whole.

DB offers a detailed description of Sundays and feasts at the Oratory in the early days in MO:266-69. There is important documentation on practices of piety (AS 232). Between 1913 and 1916, old-time Salesians (e.g., Frs. Francis Cerruti [1844-1917] and Julius Barberis) went to work to codify the genuine tradition. The result was the manual *Pratiche di pietà in uso nelle case salesiane* (Turin, 1916); for a later edition, based on the Italian ed. of 1948, see *Practices of Piety for Use in Salesian Houses* (New Rochelle: Salesiana, 1953).

⁷⁹ Here I transcribe a complete passage that also sheds light on what I will write about frequent communion farther on: "Hitherto [1854-56], holy communion was regularly frequented every Sunday and holy day, but its use during the week had not yet been introduced. It can and should be said that this beautiful gift which wrought, and will continue to work, such great benefit in every house of the [Salesian] Society, through frequent communion, had its beginnings in that era. A few began to receive holy communion on Thursdays as well, and then went on, with the consent of their confessor, to receive it one day or another, and soon daily. At that time there were two priests in the house: Don Bosco and Fr. Alasonatti. The latter said the Mass for the artisans, most of whom still went off to work in Turin. Don Bosco said the Mass for the students. When Don Bosco came down for Mass, he often found a goodly throng of boys wanting to go to confession so that they could go to holy communion. We would then begin the prayers, recite the rosary, and finish. DB still was hearing confessions. The only disturbing thing about such a delay, which would seem impossible at other times when priests and Masses were abundant, was the thought that we would get to school a bit late. At the time, you see, all our schools were in the city insofar as high schools and classes in philosophy and theology were concerned. Quiet and patient because they were happy to receive holy communion, the boys used to get to receive communion before Mass. Then they heard Mass tranquilly, and at its end left the church, with barely enough time to grab their portion of bread and their books and nibble a bit of food as they headed for school. Sometimes our teachers had reason to complain about our lateness, but we were not bothered at all by the inconvenience endured to receive holy communion." (Giovanni Battista Francesia, *D. Giovanni Bonetti, sacerdote salesiano: Cenni biografici* [S. Benigno Canavese, 1894], pp. 29-30)

⁸⁰ See AS 132 Oratorio 13, weekly roll book presented by the cleric Stephen Vacchetta for 1853-54: "I noticed that on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, not all got up at the same time to have breakfast, and not all went to school at the same time." Why does he make no mention of Mass? Was it not obligatory, perhaps? The roll book has to do with students presumably, or does it include clerics as well? On the roll books and

As I noted earlier, in this period (the 1850s) the number of boys grew from a little over a dozen to more than one hundred. With the increase in Valdocco residents and the number of Don Bosco's co-workers, it was only natural that disciplinary procedure should take shape as well. The counsel of daily Mass would become a general norm, with morning prayers and the recitation of the rosary becoming a part of the community Mass. Much the same happened elsewhere.⁸¹

One of the suggested methods for devout assistance at Mass was the recitation of the rosary accompanied by meditation on the mysteries of Christ and Mary. In the previous century various catechisms, including that of the Turin archdiocese, already suggested this.⁸² In an epoch of Marian fervor, the private practice of reciting the rosary became a public practice. One advocate of the rosary during Mass in Piedmont was Don Bosco's Dominican friend, Bishop Thomas Ghilardi of Mondovì. France offered the example of Father John Mary Vianney, the Curé of Ars, who had introduced the practice into his parish.⁸³ By the second half of the nineteenth century, Vianney had become a symbol, a beacon of hope, and a banner for the Catholic clergy. There were many lowly and humble priests like him living in areas that seemed to be arid and sterile. Like him, they were poor and frugal, with few sources of sustenance.

Vacchetta, see BM 4:342-43, 357; and BM 5:9-10. At that time, it seems, daily Mass was not the custom in all Catholic private schools. See, e.g., Francesco Cacciari, CRSP, *Vita del giovinetto Agnello Maria Rossi [1841-1857] di Fratta Maggiore, alunno del PP. Barnabiti nel collegio di S. Giuseppe a Pontecorvo in Napoli* (Naples, 1858), p. 26. Rossi was a student of the Barnabites from Nov. 1850 until his death. From 1854 on, in order to go to communion frequently, he had to resort to getting up earlier than his fellows and serving the Mass of some priest. Ordinarily, the usual interval for student use of the sacraments was once a week.

In the Sardinian States, Mass was obligatory for students every school day. Every student was obliged "to have his devotional book and read it during the celebration of the holy sacrifice, kneeling devoutly" (see *Regolamento per le scuole fuori dell'Università*, tit. 4, ch. 1, §1, nos. 134-35, in *Raccolta degli atti del governo* 12 [1822] [Turin, 1845], 544).

⁸¹ In Turin, with the Tommasini, at Murialdo's School for Young Artisans, and in educational institutes run by nuns.

⁸² *Compendio della dottrina cristiana*, pt. 4, lez. 5: "Catechism for those who have received first holy communion and for adults," §2, p. 113: "Q: What is the best way to practice heartfelt devotion [while assisting at Mass]? A: Do these four things. 1. From the start unite your intention with that of the priest, offering up the holy sacrifice to God for the ends for which it was instituted. 2. Accompany the priest in every single prayer and action of the sacrifice. 3. Contemplate the passion and death of Jesus Christ, heartfelty detesting the sins that were its cause. 4. Make spiritual communion when the priest is receiving communion... Q: If a person cannot do all that during Mass, can he or she recite the rosary or other prayers? A: Yes, because that does not prevent a person from attending the awesome sacrifice with attention and devotion."

⁸³ See Stella, "L'Eucaristia nella spiritualità italiana," p. 156 (see n. 61 above).

But they worked and prayed sincerely, hoping for a revival of religious practice and fervor through God's help, the power of the Eucharist, and devotion to Mary.⁸⁴ Don Bosco's tenacious devotion to the recitation of the rosary was rooted in the same state of mind, and it is reflected in other religious leaders in Italy, France, and Spain: e.g., Louis da Casoria, John Mary Vianney, Frederick Ozanam, Anthony Mary Claret, and Mother Mary Michael Desmairès of the Blessed Sacrament (1809-1865).

In Don Bosco's case we must not overlook data deriving from his experience as an educator. Indicative is testimony provided by Father Lemoyne regarding Don Bosco's view of prayer said aloud in common:

Someone once remarked: "Wouldn't it be better to let the boys say their prayers privately and thus get them used to mental prayer?" His reply was: "Boys are so made that unless they pray together aloud they don't pray at all! Though they may be distracted while praying aloud, the mere fact that they are busy pronouncing the words keeps them from chatting with their companions: moreover, even their mechanical recitation of words serves to keep the devil away."⁸⁵

We may connect these viewpoints and evaluations to others that Don Bosco expressed in his biography of Francis Besucco. There is every indication of the reliability of Lemoyne's testimony when we read such comments as the following:

It is extremely difficult to awaken in the young a taste for prayer. Their restlessness makes anything that calls for real concentration a bother and a burden. The young man who likes and knows how to pray is indeed very fortunate because the springs of divine blessings shall be accessible to him always.⁸⁶

Vocal prayer in common, including prayers said during Mass, seems to be motivated more by psychological observation than by liturgical reasons. When

⁸⁴ See Lorenzo Gastaldi, *Cenni storici sulla vita del sacerdote Giovanni Maria Vianney, parroco d'Ars* (Turin, 1879), pp. 5-6: "My desire is to exhibit the virtues of this servant of God and to show that he was the most perfect model one could desire of a parish priest. Ecclesiastics, especially parish priests, have much to learn from the life of this saintly priest and reason to rejoice that in our own time God adorned the clergy with such a splendid ornament." The first edition was in LC 11 (1863), fasc. 3-4.

Here are a few curious facts. The trade mart of Felix Borri in Turin also sold these items: (a) buffalo-horn snuff boxes with pictures of Pius IX, the Curé of Ars, and images of Mary and the saints in miniature, L. 5.50 each; (b) tiny opera glasses with photo reproductions of Our Lady of Spoleto (the Help of Christians), Pius IX, and the Curé of Ars, as "decorations for watch chains," L. 1 each, postage paid. See Gastaldi, *Memorie storiche del teologo Giovanni Ignazio Vola, sacerdote torinese* (LC 13 [1865], fasc. 4), pp. 213-14.

⁸⁵ BM 6:94.

⁸⁶ *Besucco*, p. 113-14; cited here from SWSJB:130.

he is reflecting on prayer at least, Don Bosco does not seem to advert to the value of communitarian prayer as a sign. He is thinking of the fickleness of young people, of his own adolescents and young commoners in particular. Their condition was quite different from that customarily found in institutes and congregations for students in the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. In those earlier days the adolescents constituted something of an aristocracy. Moreover, it was a time when custom and devout literature fostered individualism: i.e., interior piety based on private conversation with God. By the middle of the nineteenth century the spiritual thrust was toward collective manifestations and demonstrations. But the latter still continued to utilize the forms of expression adopted by individual piety in an earlier day: i.e., pious exercises, now elevated to means of communitarian expression as a substitute for a venerable liturgy that made its presence felt only through Latin, a language that was scarcely comprehensible at best.

The context of Don Bosco's remark, as transcribed by Father Lemoyne, seems to have been his experience with adolescents of the festive oratory and intern population. He may also have been thinking of the young men of the city and countryside, knowing that they only too readily might adopt the male habit of rejecting certain attitudes of devoutness and silent attention. The fact is that Salesian educational houses came to prefer the custom of communal recitation of vocal prayers by adolescents and young men, both in church and elsewhere; and that was certainly in line with Don Bosco's own bearings. Training in mental prayer was entrusted to moments and exercises chosen freely by a youth himself, in circumstances both foreseen and offered by the rules and customary practices.⁸⁷

Don Bosco was always sympathetic toward religious practices sponsored by groups that had voluntarily arisen under his auspices, encouragement, and control. He approved the introduction of visits to the Blessed Sacrament at the Oratory, which took place when students and artisans had stopped work or study to take a little recreation in the courtyard. He himself assigned little devout practices (*fioretti*) during the novenas before major feasts. He favored and encouraged the decoration of little shrines in the common dormitories during the month of May. He described the inner Marian and eucharistic fervor of petition.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Besides the pages that DB devotes to the prayer and devotion of Savio, Magone, and Besucco, see the comments on the devotional initiatives of boys at the Oratory and their efforts at meditation and spiritual reading in the following works by Francesca: *Bonetti*, pp. 16-57; *Memorie... salesiani defunti* (S. Benigno Canavese, 1903), pp. 25-33, on the pious works of Joseph Bongiovanni at the Oratory; *Memorie biografiche del sacerdote Celestino Durando* (S. Benigno Canavese, 1908), pp. 13-16, 27-31.

⁸⁸ E.g., DB tells how "Peter" used to interrupt his play at the Oratory to go to church and "make a quiet visit to the Blessed Sacrament, recite five decades of the rosary, and make the stations of the cross... Some of his buddies were also given to devotion and

Those were the lines of direction along which he hoped to see the individual piety move and a “taste” for prayer develop.

10. Confession

As I have already indicated, confession was a pillar of nineteenth-century religious practice. Its importance in preserving and consolidating the Christian faith was pointed out. It was a most important factor in interior transformation, healing the wounds of sin, ensuring greater divine aid, and increasing faith and charity. The campaign for frequent communion, as we noted above, also promoted more frequent sacramental confession; the suggested maximum was once a week for those, even simple faithful, who wanted to progress on the road of fervor. This was really nothing new. The teaching of Don Bosco, for example, is that of the common catechism on various points: i.e., the five components of confession (examination of conscience, sorrow for one's sins, firm purpose of amendment, confession of sins, performance of prescribed penance); the qualities of the minister (bound to the seal, judge, teacher, healer, father); the dispositions of the penitent and proper attitudes before, during, and after confession (humility, sincerity, brevity, firm resolve, careful daily examination of conscience, prayer, and so forth).⁸⁹

followed his example. Thence came the practice, still observed today, of reciting five decades of the rosary after benediction of the Blessed Sacrament [on Sundays]. Only those who want to do so take part, without any obligation, while the majority of boys play games in the courtyard” (Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione* [Turin, 1855], p. 63). During the same period, in Turin the practice of eucharistic benediction came to be exercised during the week and even daily. See Gastaldi, *Memorie storiche del... Vola*, pp. 36-37: “One can hardly estimate the incalculable benefits that have redounded to religion and the sanctification of souls from this holy practice, which has been introduced in Turin, of offering benediction of the Blessed Sacrament every evening in almost every church. What would be more desirable than that this holy practice be introduced into every city and village!” One gets the impression that the service attracted a satisfying number of devout participants.

⁸⁹ See *Indice* MB, pp. 89-93, s.v. “Confessionale,” “Confessione,” “Confessore.” In summary form DB's catechesis on the matter is to be found in the following works: *Giov. prov.*, pp. 93-98 (practical way to approach the sacrament of confession worthily), reworked in the 1863 ed., pp. 115-28 (compare SBPB: 38-42); *Maggio*, days 21-22, pp. 124-33 (Confession and the Confessor); *Conversazioni tra un avvocato ed un curato; Il cattolico provveduto per le pratiche di pietà* (Turin, 1868), pp. 371-436. But his most lively and personal pages are in his biographies of Savio, Magone, Cafasso, and Besucco, which should be combined with various testimonies about DB: in the MO and various diaries (of Bonetti, Ruffino, et al.). A good selection of texts can be found in Domenico Bertetto, SDB (1914-88), *San Giovanni Bosco, maestro e guida del sacerdote* (Colle Don Bosco, 1954), pp. 102-209. Also useful is the doctoral dissertation by Salvatore Strano, *Don Bosco e la confessione frequente dei giovani* (Acireale, 1960).

The singularity of confession at Valdocco lay especially in the fact that Don Bosco, as confessor, also tended to be the father, friend, confidant, guide, and ideal of his youths in ordinary day-to-day life. Many would approach his confessional with the same simplicity, confidence, and affection they felt when they approached him in playground to listen to him or simply be near him. With those who felt some uneasiness, because they were seldom at the festive oratory or involved in intern life, for example, Don Bosco used the same tactics he described using with Bartholomew Garelli in 1841. When his penitents did not know how to begin, he would ask them how many brothers they had and whether they had had breakfast that morning. By gradually touching their hearts at the vulnerable points, he would break the ice and open the way to confession based on more serious, deliberate questions.⁹⁰ Some took advantage of the opportunity and asked Don Bosco to keep on with his questions, or else they simply poured out everything in a rush of words. When they wanted Don Bosco to keep going, he would sometimes bring up facts that astonished his young penitents. With eyes wide open, they would murmur their assent, admitting that they had offended God with the sins mentioned by Don Bosco.

Don Bosco was a rapid confessor. It was a quality that he himself saw as a meritorious one in Father Cafasso as confessor.⁹¹ It was also recommended by moral theologians and pastors of souls experienced in popular missions: e.g., Saint Leonard of Port Maurice.⁹² Speed, moreover, had become a necessity now that large numbers of people were frequenting confession more often.

There is no doubt that problems could result from a father-son relationship of intimacy and confidence, but this does not seem to have happened in Don Bosco's case. Rather, that sort of relationship fostered a very special sort of spir-

⁹⁰ BM 3:106, and esp. BM 7:123-25, which comes from the diary of Fr. Bonetti.

⁹¹ *Cafasso*, p. 40: "It is to be noted also that the conferences of Don Cafasso were not mere abstract studies or the result of book knowledge only, but were based on practical experience. He taught the method of hearing the confessions of the faithful fruitfully, and he himself spent several hours daily in the confessional and made careful observation of the results of the advice which he himself gave. He did all this with such skill, or rather with such piety, learning and prudence, that one would be at a loss to say which was the greater—the advantage obtained by those who listened to his conferences, or the consolation of those who had the good fortune of having his spiritual direction. From this profound learning, great experience and, we must add, a special gift from God, he had acquired a marvelous facility and quickness in hearing confessions. A few words, and sometimes just a sigh from the penitent, were sufficient to let him see the state of his soul. He did not speak much in the confessional, but what he said was clear, exact, theologically correct, and adapted to the needs of the penitent, so that a long discourse would not have produced a better effect."

⁹² Leonardo da Porto Maurizio, *Direttorio della confessione generale in cui si porge sufficiente lume sì a' confessori, come a' penitenti per farla compitamente, e con facilità e brevità* (Turin: Marietti, 1840). The title says it all.

itual cohesiveness, which was surely one of the aims envisioned by Don Bosco in trying to carry out the supreme goal of Christian education and lead his boys surely on the road to eternal salvation. His relationship of total confidence with them, both inside and outside the confessional, helps to explain his rapid style as a confessor at the Oratory. But we should not overlook the functional role he gave to the relationship of confidence with respect to the Christian life of his boys. Note his recommendations to confessors of adolescents in his *Life of Michael Magone*:

When you have gained their confidence, prudently find out whether all their confessions in the past were well made. I say this because celebrated, experienced authors in both the field of morals and ascetics, and especially a celebrated author who merits 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 well the state of his conscience 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 modesty.⁹³

Don Bosco, then, was explicitly certain that youngsters, even at the age of seven, could know the gravity of sins and their guilt.⁹⁴ We might be a bit astonished by his remark on “certain serious sins of which little is made.” Don Bosco did not alter his statement in subsequent editions, even though it might seem obscure or even contradictory. Did he think that a kid could make two contradictory moral judgments at the same time, judging that an action was a serious sin and simultaneously of little note? Such an hypothesis seems too out of line with the sort of theology and catechesis assimilated by Don Bosco. Or was he thinking of the psychological process triggered before, during, and after the sinful act?⁹⁵ Did he mean that at the moment of committing the sin the

⁹³ Cornell, p. 124. The text remained unchanged through 3 eds. during DB's lifetime (1861, 1866, 1880).

⁹⁴ That is just about what we find already in Leonard of Port Maurice. In a general confession he would have the confessor omit questions about the chief mysteries of the faith and such things, moving directly to sins against the sixth commandment: “Confessor: Now, please tell me, have you ever failed to confess a sin out of shame or fear? Or have you ever kept silent about a sin because you were doubtful whether it was one? Penitent: Yes, Father, this is the thorn that has pricked my heart in every confession... C: Okay, let me straighten things out. To start from the beginning, do you recall having committed any impure act when you were six or seven years old? P: Yes, Father, over and over again. That is precisely the sin I have never confessed properly. Oh, how much grief it has caused me!” See *Direttorio della confessione generale*, pp. 62-63.

⁹⁵ These hypotheses are put forward by Leonard of Port Maurice in *Direttorio della confessione generale*, pp. 30-35: “Instructions for making a general confession quickly and easily,” §6.

youth was aware of its gravity but then, pondering the problem of confessing it, for various reasons decided the matter was of little importance? Pondering the problem of going to confession, did the youth feel innerly divided, submit his act to his own inner court of appeal, and then absolve himself by judging it a matter of little consequence?

Don Bosco might well have feared such feelings of dividedness. He found wisdom in the practice suggested by the diocesan catechism. It told youngsters to confess doubtful sins as well. It did not mention the distinctions and debates of theologians because that would not have helped children and might have led to the formation of false or erroneous consciences.⁹⁶

So Don Bosco encouraged youngsters to open themselves to their confessor with the fullest frankness and confidence, telling him about everything that was bothering them. This was the advice of catechisms and books of Christian practice. Nothing should be concealed from one's confessor. He was the physician to whom one should tell everything that might help him to prescribe the right cure. To put it in psychological or psychoanalytic terms, Don Bosco and the theological or pastoral authorities on whom he based his views sensed

⁹⁶ *Compendio della dottrina cristiana*, "Catechism for those who have made first communion and for adults," pt. 4, lez. 6, §6, p. 123: "Q: What does sincere [confession] mean? A: It means we must declare our sins as they are, without excusing, exaggerating, or minimizing them; we must confess certain sins as certain, and doubtful sins as doubtful." *Giov. prov.* (Turin, 1863), p. 126: "Sincerity [in confession]. We should manifest our sins frankly and without excuses. We should avoid talking too much or making others the cause of our sins. We should confess certain sins as certain, and doubtful sins as doubtful." Cornell, p. 120: "[Right now] I don't want to enter into matters of conscience. I'll just tell you what to do to put everything right. So listen: if your conscience does not worry you concerning the past, just make a good confession, relating what you have done 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."

Among the norms which DB gave to the Salesians in 1870, Lemoyne reports the following: "Never stray from the catechism... We must not think ourselves more learned and prudent than the holy bishops who compiled it. E.g., the catechism tells us that doubtful sins should be confessed as doubtful, and certain sins as certain. Theologians maintain that doubtful sins need not be confessed, but do young people really know what a doubtful sin is? No! They are likely to include under doubtful sins ones of which they have no doubt but of which they are ashamed. So we get sacrileges and all the rest" (MB 14:838-39). This basic approach was implicitly inculcated in the *Pratiche cristiane, ossia orazioni quotidiane... ad uso degli scolari delle scuole cristiane della città di Torino* (Turin: Marietti, 1834), p. 103: "Whenever in danger of sinning, when assailed by a wicked or impure thought, say right away: 'Jesus and Mary, help me to overcome this temptation.' Similarly, when you know you have committed a sin or are not sure, say right away: 'Jesus and Mary, help me to make an act of contrition right now, and a good confession as soon as possible.'"

the therapeutic value of a general confession for adolescents and of confessing doubtful sins. But it is clear that he, like moral theologians and pastors of souls, was mainly concerned about the person's spirit from a religious standpoint. He was thinking of the state of grace they had to acquire, nurture, and fortify.

We should not overlook the further possibility that Don Bosco's view of youthful value judgment was tinged somewhat by his own mental picture of them as he wrote. He could envision boys congregated around the confessional in a more or less recollected mood. In their youthful fickleness they might be thinking more of the sin they had committed at this school, where they were being trained to a life of piety that they may not have known before; they might not give any thought at all to earlier sins and situations in their lives. They might even be instinctively and unconsciously reluctant to remove the stone placed over the doorway to the pranks and immodesties of an earlier day, which had been committed in the surroundings of their native home and its now remote circumstances.

It certainly would be a mistake to judge that Don Bosco was concerned with the full material integrity of the penitent's admission of sins in a Jansenistic way; that he prescind from the element of subjective knowledge and awareness, or saw sin just as much in deeds committed in invincible ignorance or under the sway of disorderly passions. It is something very different to ask young people to confess their doubtful sins also, so as to prevent them from putting certain sins in that category and thus doing harm to themselves.

Besides the teachings he heard at the seminary and the Ecclesiastical College and his own experience as confessor, his personal experience as a penitent probably lay behind his teaching about confession. As an adolescent, he had bared every secret of his life to Father John Calosso. He openly asserted that this had brought him fundamental advantages for his own interior life. So he told his Salesians in his *Memoirs of the Oratory*, almost certainly because he felt that it would serve them well as an example and a witness. The initiative back in those earlier years, 1829-1830, may well have come from Father Calosso; it may well have dovetailed with the inner urgencies of young John Bosco.⁹⁷ If Father Calosso did hear his general confession, as it seems he did, then he was doing the same thing that Mary Henrietta Dominici's confessor (an Oratorian) would do a few years later in a nearby religious milieu.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ MO:36. The term "general confession" does not come up as such, nor does he speak of the past. My treatment here is an hypothesis based on our knowledge of the pastoral approach presented so far and on the statements of DB, whose main intention was to stress the importance of total confidence between penitent and confessor: "I bared my soul to him. Every word, thought, and act I revealed to him promptly. This pleased him..."

⁹⁸ Mary Dominici was around 11 or 12 years of age. See *Vigilia eroica*, pp. 95-96: "At this time I also decided to make a general confession, something which I had nev-

Going back over the notions expressed by Don Bosco about theological and pastoral matters, we find that ordinarily his opinions are to be found in Saint Alphonsus, Charles Francis Lhomond, Charles Emmanuel Pallavicino, SJ (1719-1785), and the *Angelic Guide*.⁹⁹ Charles Gobinet thought that, as a rule, a young person should make a general confession when first resolving to set out on the pathway of piety. Gobinet offers various reasons that are fairly close to the ones we find in Don Bosco:

Confession is a sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ to wipe out the sins of Christians and restore them to God's grace, so there can be no doubt that it is a not only useful but necessary means to acquire virtue and health, a process that must begin with purgation from sins. Now for this means to benefit you, I would suggest that you begin with a general confession covering your whole life—for three reasons.

er done before... I thought it would last ever so long, and I was surprised to find that in about 15 minutes it was all over... That confession was a source of peace and tranquillity for me. Only once do I recall having doubts about one sin which I had confessed but which, I feared, I had not told as it really was. I expressed this fear to my confessor. He strictly forbade me ever to go back over past things again. That made me feel very good, maintaining my peace and tranquillity of soul so well that I have never in my life felt any real uneasiness about my past confessions. I say 'real' uneasiness because fleeting fears have beset me many times, but I think nothing of them. God be praised for everything!"

⁹⁹ See the following, e.g., St. Alphonsus, *Homo apostolicus* (Turin, Marietti, 1844), tract 21, punct. 3, §1: "Questioning uneducated people"; punct. 4: "Dealing with boys, adolescents, and girls," pp. 638-44, 648-50; Lhomond, the whole of *Metodo da tenersi nell'ascoltare le confessioni dei fanciulli*, included in Domenico Moro, *Il sacerdote cattolico tenuto ad ascoltare le confessioni* (Ivrea, 1832), pp. 125-82. On the meaning of *fanciulli* (children) here, Lhomond indicates (p. 125) that he means young people "from the first dawning of reason to its complete use, usually anywhere from 16 to 18 years of age." Worth noting is his suggestion for dealing with a "child" who relapses into a serious sin: "You will come across cases where they are in the habit of frequenting the sacraments while they maintain the habit of serious sin. In such cases you must go back with them from communion to communion until you find one made properly, i.e., after a test of sufficient proof to build a solid foundation on it. Then go back over their whole past life from that point on, without upsetting them or criticizing the confessor who absolved them too easily" (*ibid.*, pp. 175-76). Lhomond's work, cited anonymously in French (*Méthode pour confesser les enfants*) is among those suggested for instruction by the Salesians' GC II (*Deliberazioni* [Turin, 1882], p. 68). See Carlo Emanuele Pallavicino, SJ, *Lettere sulla pratica maniera di amministrare il santo sacramento della penitenza*. In the first letter see esp. the following sections: "Skill in discovering the evil of the penitent" (nos. 17-23); "Practical use of discretion in passing judgment on youths of age" (no. 67); "Advice for the general confession of recidivists" (nos. 93-95). See also [Pallavicino], *Il sacerdote santificato nell'attenta recitazione del divino uffizio, nella divota celebrazione del ss. sacrificio, nella retta amministrazione del sacramento della penitenza* (Nice, 1844), pp. 192-99, 270-72, 313-17. In the *Guida angelica* (Turin, 1867), see the brief section on "general confession and settlement of life" (pp. 32-33).

First, because it is often the case that earlier confessions were invalid: for instance, when you concealed a mortal sin, which happens all too often with youngsters; or when confessions were made without sufficient preparation, sorrow for sins, or firm purpose of amendment. In both of those situations, a general confession is necessary.

Second, even when your preceding confessions do not seem to be null and void, you have reason to have doubts about them for the many defects they ordinarily have, due to the negligence of penitents who go to confession with meager preparation, almost no sorrow, and often no firm purpose of amendment. A general confession makes up for those defects, giving your conscience assurance when it is well made.

Third, even when unnecessary, it will always benefit you in three respects, one having to do with yourself, one with your confessor, and the third with God...¹⁰⁰

Once the confession was made in reassuring terms, Don Bosco did not want boys to go back and dig up the past again. They were to look ahead to the future and ponder how to be good and holy.¹⁰¹ As the tide of frequent confession

¹⁰⁰ Gobinet, *Istruzione della gioventù* (Turin, 1831), pt. 2, ch. 6, p. 103. These counsels can also be found in other books of similar inspiration. See, e.g., [Hubert Humbert], *Istruzioni cristiane per la gioventù... per ordine di monsignor arcivescovo di Besanzone*, 3d Turin ed. (Turin: Paravia, 1843), ch. 21, §3 p. 112; Pierre Collet, *Lo scolaro cristiano* (Milan, 1844), ch. 8, §1, no. 8, pp. 176-82.

¹⁰¹ See, esp., Cornell, pp. 195-97. It seems that Fr. Cafasso was not much in favor of repeated general confessions. Reports about his teaching indicate his negative reaction to the practice of general confessions attributed to rigorists. See Luigi Nicolis di Robilant, *Vita del venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso* (Turin, 1912), 1:359-62.

In the search for ways to revive and give roots to popular religious practice, the practice of general confession in the context of parish missions and retreats seemed very appropriate. It was noted by a French priest, Joseph Melchior Goirand, who fled to Piedmont during the French Revolution and settled in the diocese of Aosta: "I have noticed that in trying to urge loads of people to approach the communion table, which is the approach of missionaries in France, you see many fine spectacles of fervor; but it is more appearance than reality. Fruits gathered before they ripen are of short duration. The method we have used in the valley of Aosta for retreats strikes me as much more apt for real conversions. We have few people who pass muster, but we try to build a solid foundation by getting those people to make good general confessions as the basis for future confessions. All too often, confessions have no solid foundation because they are based on confessions that were null and void. . . You discover this fact when you know how to question penitents prudently about marriage, injustice, and sins of impurity in particular. Ah, how many sins lie buried in these matters; or, at the very least, how many sins lie voluntarily forgotten for want of satisfactory examination of conscience!... The great benefit of retreats or missions does not lie in striking conversions, which usually are of short duration, but in the revalidation of many confessions" (letter to the rector of the Aosta seminary, June 8, 1827, in Pierre-E. Duc, *Le clergé d'Aoste du XVIII^e siècle* [Turin, 1881], p. 81.

became increasingly obvious after 1860, Don Bosco began to urge moderation.¹⁰² Do not overdo it. Do not make the mistake of expecting moral improvement solely from the fact of frequenting the sacrament more and more. Saint Philip Neri used to recommend weekly confession.¹⁰³ Stick to that. If you fall into serious sin and have to go to communion, go to confession. But if you tend to keep falling into the same sins, you should concentrate on a firm purpose of amendment because you will not derive any greater benefit from more frequent confession. Here Don Bosco seems to lose his usual measure. In lack of sorrow for sin and a firm purpose of amendment he sees the termites that ruin confessions, the congenital defects associated with youthful fickleness. He comes to a clearly serious judgment that reminds us of Peter Nicole, Louis Bourdaloue, Saint Leonard of Port Maurice, and others who stressed the limited number of those who would attain salvation. In 1861 we hear Don Bosco saying:

I will do my best to impress the importance and need of good confessions upon all and as often as possible. In fact, more people are eternally lost through bad confessions than in any other way because even the worst people occasionally do go to confession. There are very many, however, who make bad confessions.¹⁰⁴

Thus, Don Bosco seems obsessed with the fear that boys in confession will be assailed by shame, keeping quiet or lying when their consciences accuse them of immodesty or impurity.¹⁰⁵ He sees in this the hand of the devil: "The devil chokes them to keep them from speaking when they should; he makes them blush to the point of losing their heads so that they no longer realize what they are doing. A false shame then overwhelms them and leads them to perdi-

¹⁰² BM 7:56: words of DB in 1864.

¹⁰³ See *Maggio*, day 24, p. 142: "St. Philip Neri encouraged Christians to go to confession every week and to communion even more often if their confessor so advised." See also [G.B. Isnardi], *Voce angelica* (Pinerolo, 1835), ch. 5, art. 1 ("Maxims of various saints"), pp. 68-69: "Hear the fine reminders of St. Philip Neri... 14. Go to confession often, at least once a week or every two weeks, and go to communion as your confessor advises." Almost the same advice appears, with no mention of the name of Philip Neri, in *Pratiche cristiane... ad uso degli scolari*, p. 102.

¹⁰⁴ BM 6:534. Around 1862 DB said: "To hear the confessions of young people, you must hang around them, get close to them, know them well, and study their dispositions. When they go to confession, we must first make their examination of conscience for them, know how to put things together. One has this complaint or this defect, another has a different one, because youths keep their silence, indeed they do, and very easily too" (AS 110 Ruffino 9, p. 63).

¹⁰⁵ One gets the impression, however, that this mind-set was shared by many of the other educators, moralists, and writers I have mentioned: Gobinet, St. Leonard, St. Alphonsus, Segneri, and so forth.

tion.”¹⁰⁶ This is the monstrous perversion of the sacrament’s true nature, its aim of peace and reconciliation, that can occur. When he speaks that way, Don Bosco is thinking of the youths in front of him. He wants to impress them forcefully with the fact that they should be honest and sincere; that they do everything properly in order to receive as much benefit as possible from a well made confession.¹⁰⁷ This also accounts for his emphasis on the seal of confession. No one will ever be able to know what a penitent tells his confessor in the confessional. The Lord has even intervened miraculously to protect this splendid prerogative of auricular confession.¹⁰⁸

Talk about making good confessions, sometimes combined with exhortations to weekly confession, leads Don Bosco from the aspect of *ex opere operato* (the efficacy of the sacrament in itself) to that of *ex opere operantis* (its efficacy in a particular penitent). He dwells on the intrinsic efficacy of the sacrament when he discusses the necessity of confession and the usefulness of frequent confession. When the sacrament does not prove to be fruitful, however, it is a sign that penitent and confessor should focus their attention on the penitent’s subjective dispositions. The absence of proper dispositions blocks the efficacy of the sacrament. Thus Don Bosco clearly anchors himself to the rock of principles used by Jansenists and rigorists in order to promote the interior improvement of the penitent; but Don Bosco seems less intransigent and never loses his flexibility. He never loses sight of the purifying power that the sacrament possesses by its very nature. It is precisely on that certainty that he bases his insistence on weekly confession.¹⁰⁹

With regard to more frequent reception of that sacrament, Don Bosco does not focus on the required dignity for receiving the purifying blood of Christ; nor does he muse dramatically about the co-responsibility of the confessor, depicting those who absolve unworthy penitents and thus play the role of the wolf instead of that of the good shepherd. To get across the usefulness of regular confession, Don Bosco focuses on the dispositions of the penitent. Sometimes he stresses sin-

¹⁰⁶ From his narrative of a “dream” of May 2, 1861 (BM 6:535).

¹⁰⁷ This is a cliché of preaching, particularly after Trent. It does not mean that Segneri, St. Leonard, and DB did not know from experience that young people were overtaken by shame, particularly with respect to sins against the sixth commandment. Besides the works cited in n. 96 above, see Segneri, *Il cristiano instruito* (Turin: Marietti, 1855), pt. 3, ragion. 12: The great evil of maliciously concealing sins in confession (on shame and concealment in confession in general), pp. 698-709.

¹⁰⁸ Explicit comments to confessors by DB can be found in Cornell, p. 197: “Never let them 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...” Many stressed this point in the 1860s.

¹⁰⁹ BM 7:56.

cerity and the need to overcome shame; sometimes he stresses sorrow for sin, firm purpose of amendment, and the need for perseverance.

The above considerations should help to give proper weight to statements of Don Bosco that might seem too elementary, polemical, and peremptory.¹¹⁰ His urgings to frequent confession in order to ensure one's holiness and salvation are followed sooner or later by reminders of the dispositions required of the penitent for a good and fruitful confession.

A very distinctive additional element surrounding penitential practice in Valdocco was the panoply of charisms and extraordinary gifts displayed by Don Bosco in trying to effect a thoroughgoing inner transformation of his boys. He never concealed the disgust he felt when he sensed that the person speaking to him was in sin.¹¹¹ It was the same sort of malaise felt by Saint Philip Neri and Father Charles Hyacinth of Santa Maria.¹¹² In the confessional this malaise, combined with other factors, may have been behind certain sudden and seemingly drastic solutions. When a penitent was too bashful or inhibited or defensive to confess a sin, especially one against the sixth commandment, Don Bosco became overloaded with tension. As in dreams, his sense of the devil's presence reached its peak. He would tell his youthful penitent that there was a monkey on his back trying to choke him.¹¹³ The boy would let out a scream and, gripped by fear, blurt out his complete confession of sin.

¹¹⁰ Cornell, p. 195: "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." In "The Preventive System" we read: "Frequent confession and Communion and daily Mass are the pillars which ought to support a system of education from which we wish to banish threats and the whip" (BM 4:383, no. 4). These remarks of DB are to some extent part of the polemics against the Waldensians and the more general Catholic battle against sacramental heresies after Trent, and to some extent a reaction against the Enlightenment outlook that, in DB's day, was promoting laicization of the school system in Piedmont in terms favored by liberalism: i.e., parental freedom to request religious instruction, or not to, and to provide for the religious education of their children in general. On the polemics waged by *La Civiltà Cattolica*, see *Indice generale della Civiltà Cattolica (aprile 1850-dicembre 1903)* (Rome, 1904), pp. 189-92, s.v. "Pedagogia."

¹¹¹ See *Indice MB*, p. 315, s.v. "Peccato (orrore al)."

¹¹² Pietro Giovanni Bacci, CO, *Vita di S. Filippo Neri 2* (Monza, 1851), bk. 2, ch. 13, §10, p. 73. Giacinto di S. Maria, *Memorie dell'umile servo di Dio, divoto di Maria P. Carlo Giacinto di santa Maria, agostiniano scalzo* (Rome, 1728), p. 192.

¹¹³ See, e.g., Bonetti, *Annali 1860-1861*, pp. 45-47 (AS 110 Bonetti 2). Ape, bear, and satyr were favorite symbols of the shame that induces penitents to keep silent and that was viewed as a temptation from the devil. See, e.g., the work of Valerio Ballardini da Venezia, OFM Cap, *Prato fiorito di varii esempi* (Venice, 1605), bk. 1, ch. 15, ex. 6, which is entitled: "The devil was seen on the shoulders of a woman who was bemoaning one of her sins but was unwilling to confess it," pp. 116-17. Note also

Widely believed and circulated was the notion that Don Bosco could read the innermost secrets of a person's conscience. Some chose to put the notion to the test. From the reports that have come down to us, they heard him rattle off sins of theirs that they no longer even remembered. Others approached Don Bosco with the innocent trust of a child and asked him to absolve them of any sins he was aware of in them. These facts, too, must be regarded as elements of Don Bosco's role as confessor.

Elsewhere I have gone into the episode of young Charles, which was narrated more than once by Don Bosco.¹¹⁴ Charles had died after making a sacrilegious confession, and his funeral preparations were already in progress. But when his priest-friend called his name, God's mercy allowed him to reawaken to life, make a good confession, and thus escape eternal damnation. Don Bosco filled with emotion as he told that story to his boys, who realized that the priestly wonder-worker had been Don Bosco himself. All of them felt the urge to make a good confession, feeling that they were living on blessed soil and that a bad confession would entail a terrible risk. At the diocesan hearings for the beatification of Don Bosco, Father Francis Dalmazzo (1845-1895) gave his testimony. As a student in Pinerolo, he had heard people speak of Don Bosco's holiness. When he got to the Oratory, he heard Father Dominic Ruffino (1840-1865) tell the story of how Don Bosco had resuscitated a young extern of the Oratory and heard his confession. Sooner or later everyone in Valdocco came to be familiar with the extraordinary charisms of Don Bosco as they related to the secrets of their own consciences and their eternal salvation.

11. *Frequent communion*

When Catholic theological and devotional literature refers to frequent reception of the sacraments, it is obviously alluding to auricular confession and holy communion. The linkage is habitual in Don Bosco's mind and work as well. Like many others of his time, Don Bosco makes clear that confession and commu-

Francesco Antonio Biamonti, *Serie di meditazioni, prediche ed istruzioni ad uso delle sacre missioni* 3 (Milan: Pirotta, 1844), Catechismo 16, pp. 270-71: "a black hand, black as that of a bear, came out of the wall and grabbed the throat" of a penitent who kept silent about a sin out of shame. Similar examples are cited by Beyerlinck and other compilers of sermon material such as Tobias Lohner, SJ, Abp. John Dominic Mansi (1692-1769), and John Baptist Mattioli (17th c.). On them see Giuseppe Cacciatore, CSsR, "La letteratura degli 'Exempla,'" in S. Alfonso de' Liguori, *Opere ascetiche: Introduzione generale* (Rome, 1960), pp. 239-83.

¹¹⁴ Testimony of Fr. Francis Dalmazzo during the diocesan process for the gathering of information concerning DB's sanctity (Jan. 16, 1893), at 32m (copy in AS 161/1 A, pp. 70-72). See also Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco and the Death of Charles*, trans. John Drury (New Rochelle: Don Bosco, 1985).

nion are the pillars, two essential elements, of the Christian life.¹¹⁵ It is only when devotion to Mary is presented in terms of the same metaphor that confession takes a back seat and the two pillars become the Eucharist and devotion to Mary.¹¹⁶

Eucharistic communion ideally links up with confession and the sacrifice of the Mass: with the sacrament that restores people to the state of grace and renders them fit for the eucharistic banquet on the one hand, and the Mass with its crucial moment when the presence of Christ is effected under the appearances of bread and wine. Don Bosco, however, lived at a time when people's minds had to some extent dissociated communion from the Mass.¹¹⁷ In his *Month of May* there are distinct treatments of the Mass and communion. In the former he focuses on the Mass as a sacrifice; in the latter, on the Eucharist as food. In both we find the same general religious awareness of the real presence in the most holy and divine sacrament.¹¹⁸

Don Bosco's mental frameworks reflect those of his milieu. Here again he is a spokesman for the common doctrine of popular religious life and practice. With respect to the Eucharist, then, we again do well to dwell on a few of the more characteristic elements.

¹¹⁵ See n. 110 above.

¹¹⁶ See ch. VII, sec. 3-4, pp. 146-69. [Editor's note: One might also refer to the Dream of the Two Columns in *Don Bosco's Dreams*.]

¹¹⁷ In the final decades of the 19th century especially, such practices as receiving communion to make reparation and attending First Friday Mass in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus tended to foster the trend toward eucharistic communion outside the Mass. Some pastors of souls and theologians had reacted against this tendency in the 18th century, giving rise to a complicated web of polemics. The Jansenists, e.g., lined up against devotional communion using hosts that had not been consecrated at the Mass one was attending. Some also maintained that for the integrity of the sacrifice some of the people present at the sacrificial act had to receive communion. See Stella, "L'Eucaristia nella spiritualità italiana," pp. 150, 162-63.

¹¹⁸ *Maggio*, days 23-24, pp. 134-44. DB's consideration of the Mass borrows a bit from *Giov. prov.* and cites St. Leonard of Port Maurice, apparently making liberal use of the latter's *Il tesoro nascosto nella santa messa*. DB's consideration of eucharistic communion borrows from St. Alphonsus's *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ* (ch. 18, pp. 566-74). In turn, *Maggio* served as the pattern for considerations of communion in other works, some bearing DB's name and some not. See the following by way of example: *Angelina, o la buona fanciulla instruita nella vera divozione a Maria santissima* (LC 8 [1860], fasc. 3), pp. 62-68; *Pratiche devote per l'adorazione del S. Sacramento* (Turin: OSFS, 1866), pp. 12-21; *Giov. prov.* (1873), pp. 112-14, compiled by Fr. Bonetti and revised by DB (see AS 133 *Giovane provveduto*); Bosco, *Nove giorni consacrati all'augusta madre del Salvatore sotto al titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice* (Turin, 1870), pp. 54-61, compiled by Fr. Bonetti from DB's outline (see AS 133 *Nove giorni*) and also drawing inspiration from Ségur, *La SS. Comunione*, LC ed. (Turin, 1869); *Piccolo Catechismo, ossia compendio della dottrina cristiana ad uso dell'arcidiocesi di Torino coll'aggiunta delle orazioni* (Turin: OSFS, 1875), pp. 337-39.

Don Bosco has been acclaimed as a promoter of frequent communion for young children.¹¹⁹ In all truth, however, to this moment I am not aware of documentation that would enable us to spell out the exact relationship between the practice established and promoted by Don Bosco himself and the practice of his milieu. Consider, for example, the practice promoted by the Christian Brothers in their elementary schools for children and their evening classes for adults. With their priest chaplains, they could have exercised quite an extensive influence on the behavior of the city and the surrounding region, much more than Don Bosco might have exercised at a time when he had few houses (up to 1870) and his labors were confined mainly to his *Catholic Readings* and personal relations with other priests in the care of souls. Neither, to my knowledge, do we have sufficient data on the practices of other oratories, groups, and individuals. There were Father John Cocchi and his group, Father Leonard Murialdo, the Barnabites, and the Vincentians. The latter groups included such fine educators as Fathers Alexander Teppa, CRSP, and Francis Martinengo, CM; both of them were friends and contemporaries of Don Bosco, equally dedicated to spreading popular literature and devotional works. Martinengo, for example, was the editor-in-chief of *La Buona settimana* and the *Strenna di Don Mentore*. So leaving aside the question of Don Bosco's precise role as a forerunner in his milieu, we can certainly say that his overall activity made him one of the active promoters of sacramental practice and more frequent sacramental participation by all strata of Catholic society.

The evolution of his own practice can be seen in its broad outlines from sporadic testimony of a general sort and the guidelines he himself sets forth in his writings at various periods of his life.

In *The Companion of Youth* (1847), he extends a general invitation to approach the sacraments and does not rule out daily communion.¹²⁰ He cites Saint Aloysius Gonzaga as an example of a youth who went from weekly to daily communion. His earliest *Regulations of the Oratory for Externs* (circa 1852) offer the general advice that one should not let a month go by without going to confession and communion.¹²¹ This was the practice in the schools of the kingdom of Sardinia and the general course suggested by Charles Gobinet.¹²² The rec-

¹¹⁹ Giacomo Bellia (1834-1908), "La prima comunione dei fanciulli," in *Atti del congresso eucaristico tenutosi in Torino nei giorni 2-6 settembre 1894* (Turin, 1895), 1:207-08. [Editor's note: Fr. Bellia, an archdiocesan priest, had been a student at the Oratory in the 1840s and early 1850s.]

¹²⁰ *Giov. prov.*, p. 62.

¹²¹ *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per gli esterni* [Turin, 1877], p. 37: "I advise all the youths of the Oratory to do what the diocesan catechism says, i.e., to go to confession every two weeks or once a month."

¹²² The practice in Piedmont is attested to by [Carlo Ferreri], *Regole di vita e buone massime per la gioventù studiosa* (Turin: Paravia, 1840), p. 33: "In some congre-

ommendation of weekly or even more frequent practice is to be found in *The Month of May* (1858), and it is attested to in the various diaries and chronicles that record Good Nights from 1859 on. In 1861 Don Bosco recommended weekly communion to his boys during vacations.¹²³ But from his biography of Dominic Savio we learn that by 1855-1857 he was encouraging some youths to daily communion, while keeping to confession once a week.¹²⁴ Judgment as to the proper frequency in receiving communion is always to be left to one's confessor. This is the same principle we have seen applied concretely in the case of Mary Henrietta Dominici, and again in her case it was applied by her confessor. It was also used by Frassinetti and his school of pastoral thinking in Genoa, one of whose disciples was Father Dominic Pestarino (1817-1874) of Mornese, cofounder of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Don Bosco seems to have had fewer fears than Murialdo about publicly promoting communion in specific circumstances. His boys in Valdocco, like those of the School for Young Artisans, used to head for the communion rail in helter-skelter fashion. Murialdo, however, feared that such general invitations might cause some interior constraint and prompt sacrilegious communions.¹²⁵ His awareness of his own school's milieu and its particular characteristics may have been behind these scruples. The number of his young artisans was far below that of the youths in Valdocco, and Murialdo may have felt that this would affect the attitudes of his boys in avoiding or frequenting communion. This may account for his differing pastoral tendencies.

Perhaps the most characteristic doctrinal feature in Don Bosco's discourses and writings is Jesus' loving and pressing call to all: *Venite ad me omnes* ("Come to me, all": Matt. 11:28).¹²⁶ He summons all to eat his holy flesh with trust and confidence. He offers his body that was sacrificed for all human beings: *corpus, quod pro vobis tradetur* ("my body, which will be given up for you": 1 Cor

gations the last Sunday of the month is set aside for general communion." Also see Gobinet, *Istruzione della gioventù*, pt. 2, ch. 9, p. 112.

¹²³ BM 7:140.

¹²⁴ SDS:83-84. To my knowledge, the first to examine DB's evolving ideas about frequent communion was Fr. Albert Caviglia. See his appendix to *Opere e scritti 4* (Turin, 1943), 347-63.

¹²⁵ Aldo Marengo, *Leonardo Murialdo educatore* (Rome, 1964), pp. 9, 195. In 1857 there were 157 artisans, in 1871 about 200. In the latter year we hear Murialdo's fervent but apprehensive comment: "For some time we have noticed that only about 50, always the same ones, frequent the sacraments. More than half approach the sacraments only on the most solemn feasts." He addresses a fervent invitation to "everyone, everyone." At Valdocco, out of about 800 boys, during May 1867 (a time of great fervor), only about 70 boys received daily communion (BM 8:350-51). We cannot really deduce much from the fragmentary data.

¹²⁶ It appears in *Misericordia*, pp. 105-06; then in *Maggio*, p. 140.

11:24, the words of institution at Mass). The Eucharist is the bread of life *qui de caelo descendit* ("which comes down from heaven": John 6:33).¹²⁷

Uneasy feelings might well spring from the religious mentality that had become typical in the era of the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic response to it. That mentality was deeply imbued with a sense of sin and anxiety over the sacred. Don Bosco's eye was drawn to such inner stirrings as they might arise in a boy like Francis Besucco. Under the influence of his parish priest in Argentera, Besucco might well have nurtured a lively sense of his own unworthiness—whenever the privilege was allowed him—to receive the God he had so many times offended.¹²⁸ Don Bosco kept such objections in mind, at least in his popularizing works. I am not worthy, not prepared, too weak. Don Bosco's reply is based on the Council of Trent and the authority of the saints. Saint Francis de Sales, for example, wrote that communion was made precisely for the weak, so that they might become strong by partaking it.¹²⁹

His argumentation proceeds quietly and calmly just as a brief catechism explanation would, satisfying a person in need of nothing more than that. For his written works Don Bosco seems to borrow directly from Saint Alphonsus, even though the latter's thoughts already circulated in the works of other authors who looked to him for their inspiration: e.g., the Savoyard Father Joseph Mary Favre (1791-1838) and Charles Philip of Poirino, OFM Cap. Saint Alphonsus, in turn, had been inspired by a disciple of Saint Philip Neri, Bonsignore Cacciaguerra, who was reacting against Renaissance behavior but had high hopes for the benefits of frequent communion. The common objections to frequent communion and replies to them can be found in Cacciaguerra's own work.¹³⁰ It is to Philip

¹²⁷ *Maggio*, p. 140; SDS, pp. 33-35.

¹²⁸ Cornell, pp. 198-201. This sort of passage raises the whole problem of documentary criticism. The dialogue between Besucco and his superior replays the objections and responses offered impersonally in DB's *Month of May*. So is the dialogue a fictitious construction for pedagogical purposes?

I offer the hypothesis I think probable. Without vouching for every word of the dialogue in the biography, I think it likely that at the Oratory Besucco felt some "apprehension" (DB's word) at the contrast between the practices counseled by his parish priest and godfather on the one hand, and those suggested to him by DB on the other. This would be an extreme case with respect to DB's tendency to base himself on formulas already assimilated. The passage in the Besucco biography, in turn, served at the basis for a few pages in *Angelina, o l'orfanello degli Apennini* (Turin, 1869), pp. 61-62. I would also note the fact that the dialogue on communion in the rough draft of the Besucco biography is wholly in DB's handwriting (AS 133 Besucco 1, pp. 50-51).

¹²⁹ See BM 6:185. The well-known maxim of St. Francis de Sales is in pt. 2, ch. 21, of the *Introduction to the Devout Life*. It is also mentioned by St. Alphonsus, *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, ch. 18, §3, no. 5, pp. 581-83.

¹³⁰ Bonsignore Cacciaguerra, CO, *Trattato della ss. comunione* (Padua, 1734), bk. 3, pp. 94-173. The whole section seeks to counter the objections to frequent communion: "Some say, we are not worthy..." (p. 96) "Others say, we are arid, dry, and abstain because we don't feel in our hearts the devotion required for such a great sacrament" (p. 99).

Neri and the tradition stemming from him that Don Bosco owes his frequent maxim: "Saint Philip Neri encouraged Christians to go to confession once a week and to communion even more often, following the advice of their confessor in the matter."¹³¹ Cacciaguerra and Saint Alphonsus were thinking of the decline in Catholic practice and the danger posed by the Protestant Reformation. In other words, they were pondering the danger of apostasy and the scandal given by tepid faithful to those who were sincerely looking for religious enrichment in the Reformation.

Don Bosco's preoccupations were basically the same. He was aware of Protestants and their proselytism, although he thought that apostasy was always the result of religious and moral deterioration. Even more than Saint Alphonsus, however, he was taken up with anticlericalism, the derision of the "libertines," indifferentism, apostasy, the abandonment of the sacraments, and the "battle" being waged against the Church. Here again we must also keep in mind his experience as an educator. He was thoroughly convinced of the fickleness of young people, which he saw as the root of daily faults and slips. It was with good reason, then, that he was as firm and as strict as the Jansenists in insisting on the dispositions needed to receive the sacrament of the Eucharist fruitfully. Exhortations to approach communion and emphasis on the proper dispositions might seem contradictory, but they are actually complementary. The call to the Eucharist stems from the deep-rooted faith of Catholic piety in the efficacy of that sacrament, which brings us the very author of life. Equally parts of Catholic religious practice are the sense of the sacred and the concern for predispositions to ensure the efficacy of grace. Don Bosco used its ascetic language and its symbols to express himself. In his *Companion of Youth* he notes that when Saint Aloysius Gonzaga grew up, "he went to communion every day, but always with angelic fervor and the utmost recollectedness."¹³²

What was the explanation for the distaste for spiritual things? When Don Bosco is thinking of the argument over frequent communion or of the negligence of young people, he does not hesitate to say that it is due to far too infrequent reception of holy communion.¹³³

Another matter that linked Don Bosco to Ségur and Frassinetti was his attitude and approach to first communion. He, too, urged that it be granted to children as early as possible. It was the only logical thing to do. The invitation to communion went out in all directions. Extended to the weak, it was to be extended to those of tender years as well. Cardinal Thomas Gousset (1792-1866), Gaume, Frassinetti, and other moralists protested loudly against the fairly general practice of granting first communion to youngsters around the age of

¹³¹ See n. 103 above.

¹³² *Giov. prov.*, p. 62.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

twelve or thirteen.¹³⁴ The practice had the sanction of synods, but now its negative aspects were being pointed out. Such a delay deprived young people of sacramental nourishment precisely at the age when they needed it the most. Children had to be brought to God early in life; hence they also had to be brought to the Eucharist early. As Don Bosco put it in 1877: "When a boy can distinguish between Bread and bread and shows sufficient knowledge, give no further thought to his age, and let the Heavenly King come to reign in that happy soul."¹³⁵ One also had to anticipate the needs of youngsters in time, fortifying them against the assaults of the devil and their own passions. Evil could make its way into the minds and hearts of children much earlier than we might suspect. Paul Segneri, SJ, Saint Leonard of Port Maurice, and catechists everywhere had driven the point home to parents: without realizing it, their less innocent remarks and actions could make them the murderers of their own children's souls.

The campaign for early first communion focused attention on the ability of young children to know the significance of the eucharistic bread. The appeals of the new moralists indicated their awareness of a new situation. Kindergartens and elementary education had spread even as far as rural areas. The number of young children capable of some discernment at a relatively early age, as compared with those of an earlier day, had risen.¹³⁶ But synod norms of the preceding cen-

¹³⁴ L. Andrieux, "L'âge de la première communion pour les enfants ayant atteint l'âge de la raison, du concile de Trente au XX^e siècle," in *Revue pratique d'apologétique* (1911), pp. 721-44. For the Piedmontese milieu see Domenico Bongioanni, *Quando si debbano e quando si possano ammettere i fanciulli alla prima comunione* (Turin: Salesiana/Artigianelli, 1894). [Editor's note: Bongio(v)anni had been a student at the Oratory in the 1850s and early 1860s before becoming a priest of the archdiocese.]

¹³⁵ Bosco, "The Preventive System," BM 4:383, no. 7. DB's phrase echoes that of Frassinetti, *Compendio della teologia morale* (Genoa, 1867), no. 266, p. 338: "Communion can be given to children, provided that they know how to distinguish the bread of heaven from earthly bread."

¹³⁶ The fact is noted by Bellia, p. 204: "In the days when there was little education and no kindergartens, when corruption had not inundated the world and spread even among young children, it might well have seemed prudent to delay communion to a somewhat later age. In our day there is widespread education and young children are quite precocious; at the same time corruption wreaks havoc on their souls. To delay giving them holy communion by reason of their age alone is to prevent Jesus from taking possession of their little souls and to give the world and the devil free play to wreak havoc!... How beautiful and precious are the little angels when they come out of the kindergartens, usually run by the good nuns or women like them!" See the similar comment of Bongioanni, p. 58: "Since today we often find many children who have reached the age of reason at eight or earlier, the parish priest is gravely bound to pass them, all other things being equal and as required, of course."

The same principles prevailed in pastoral preparation for first communion. The value of the Eucharist as fortifying nourishment was underlined. This aspect came to be further emphasized toward the end of the 19th century as external pressure from anti-

tury were still in force in the middle of the nineteenth century. Turin had to wait for the Gastaldi Synod (1873) for a revision of the prescriptions set down by the Costa Synod (1788). Even in the final decade of the nineteenth century, the latest synod norms in Asti were those of the Caisotti Synod (1785).

But how many people still adhered to the older synod norms? Consider the cases of young John Bosco, Mary Henrietta Dominici, and Dominic Savio. Might they not be considered indicative? After all, in the first half of the nineteenth century they were admitted to first communion before they were eleven. Moreover, the general practice back in the eighteenth century need not have been intransigent and heedless but rather suited to circumstances. John Opstraet (1651-1720), a Louvain theologian known as a rigorist and Jansenist, urged pastors of souls to show great flexibility. As a rule, children in school were to be admitted to first communion between the ages of eleven and thirteen; but special cases were not to be ruled out. The important thing was that the Eucharist be given only to children who demonstrated their capacity to know and appreciate the divine bread. Some might be able to do that at the age of seven or eight: "*Nihil obstare videtur, quo minus aliqui ex illis anno octavo, aliqui nono, aliqui decimo, primam communionem accipiant*" ("Nothing seems to hinder some of them from receiving first communion in their eighth year, some in their ninth, some in their tenth").¹³⁷ Opstraet suggests various signs that might indicate whether first communion should be granted. Inner dispositions and external behavior, whether more public or more private, would tell much: e.g., an innocent, blameless life, good habits, obedience to parents, love of prayer, avoidance of bad companions, innocence in matters of modesty and purity especially, and a tendency to undertake little mortifications.¹³⁸ Comparing them

clericalism and awareness of mass desertions by the working classes grew. Note the striking contrast between the above comments of Bongiovanni and Bellia on the one hand, and those of Regnault around the beginning of the 19th century. Regnault wants to impress upon children receiving first communion that they must not repeat the betrayal of Judas or profane the adorable body of Christ. While little children might look like angels, more than a few of them might well be demons: "I will not stop at this frightening truth, my dear children. I will apply these oracles to the circumstance in which you now find yourselves and say that while many young people are called to make their first communion this year at the solemn feast of Easter, only a few of them will be among the chosen. In other words, only a few of them will receive first communion with all the required dispositions" (Regnault, *Instructions pour la première communion* [Avignon, 1816], p. 10).

Among the societies organized by Catholics in the latter half of the 19th century, there was also one to promote first communion: the *Opera per la prima comunione*. See *La buona settimana* 5 (1860), 191.

¹³⁷ Johannes Opstraet, *Pastor bonus, seu idea, officium et praxis pastorum* (Vicenza, 1769), p. 333: "Children who have preserved their baptismal innocence."

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 336-37: "Children who have lost their baptismal innocence through evident sins."

to Opstraet, we find a different emphasis in Don Bosco, Ségur, Frassinetti. While they consider the child's inner dispositions, they give much greater weight to the fact that the child knows enough to differentiate the bread of the Eucharist from ordinary bread. It was along that line that the campaign in favor of earlier first communion, at the age of seven or even five, actually unfolded.

12. Devotions, pious exercises, liturgy

A life of piety undergirded by pious exercises went on in Valdocco as in other places.¹³⁹ This is clear from the various practices we know of: confession and communion; devotion to one's guardian angel; novenas in honor of Saint Aloysius, Saint Joseph, Saint Francis de Sales, Mary Immaculate, and the Sacred Heart; May devotions and Christmas novenas; spiritual retreats at midyear; acts of reparation for the sins committed at Carnival time; interest and involvement in indulgenced exercises; prayers and offerings on behalf of the dead. At the Oratory as elsewhere, the central pillars of the liturgical year were Christmas (along with Advent and the Epiphany), Easter (preceded by Lent and Holy Week), the Ascension, and Pentecost. The mysteries of the Lord's life were already solidly grounded in those central events. They were pondered daily in the rosary and in the reading of ascetical books. They were considered in Bible history and Church history, the lessons of which were covered in school classes or Sunday courses of instruction.¹⁴⁰

The overall significance and meaning of the Advent and Lenten liturgies were certainly known, since in fact they were explained in the catechism. Attention was rightly focused on the Sunday gospels, which readily lent themselves

¹³⁹ Analyzed by Caviglia, 4:310-39. For successive additions to *Giov. prov.*, see Pietro Stella, *Valori spirituali nel "Giovane provveduto" di San Giovanni Bosco* (Rome, 1960), pp. 6-17. It is useful to compare it with other manuals of the same genre. Consider, e.g., Giuseppe Riva, *Manuale di Filotea* (Milan, 1831¹, 1865¹⁶; Bergamo, 1904; etc.). The 1904 ed. added to its predecessors: Prayer to St. Joseph for the dying, indulgenced by Leo XIII; Prayer to St. Joseph after reciting the rosary in the month of October, indulgenced by the same Pope; Prayer to the Holy Family. A *Raccolta di orazioni e pie opere alle quali sono annesse le S. Indulgenze* had some 50 printings in Rome and other places. It was the source for hundreds of devotional books (including *Giov. prov.*, *La chiave del paradiso*, and *Il cattolico provveduto*) and the model for numerous anthologies (e.g., *Il tesoro delle sante indulgenze ad uso del popolo*, LC 6 [1858], fasc. 3). This avidity for indulgences was an index of popular religiosity in that era, reflecting people's sense of neediness and their search for useful things. It was also a reaction against scholarly opposition in the age of Jansenism and the Enlightenment (Muratori, Vincent Palmieri, CO [1763-1820], the Synod of Pistoia, etc.).

¹⁴⁰ DB was wont to give Sunday lessons in Church history; see BM 8:58. He was succeeded by Fr. Michael Rua. On the whole schedule of instruction see the Excursus, p. 361.

to explanations of a moralistic character.¹⁴¹ Helping to focus attention on Christmas was the novena, with its pious practices and popular hymns. Christmas could be considered one of those feasts where people noticed less the noise of the restless world and the flood of irreligion in a “calamitous” age. The faithful felt closer together, gathered around a God who had become a human being to save all. The evil depicted to the religious mind was the evil of any and every age: our enslavement to sin and Jesus’ coming to liberate us from it.

The penitential sense of Lent was brought home by fast and abstinence on Fridays and Saturdays. The practice of Lenten sermons was still in vogue in urban and rural churches. It was the favorite time for parish missions and retreats. There were the traditional popular features of Thursday, Friday, and Saturday in Holy Week: e.g., preparing Christ’s tomb, as noted earlier. Still in use was the practice of distributing communion tickets to the faithful to certify their fulfillment of the Easter precept.¹⁴²

Some of these things were part of life in Valdocco. Others were part of the surrounding milieu, their impact being felt in the festive oratory or the intern school on days of religious joy or sorrow.

One Lenten practice that deserves to be highlighted is the stations of the cross. The formulary incorporated by Don Bosco in his *Companion of Youth*, which came to serve as the basic text for the exercise in all Salesian houses to some extent, may well have been the one most widely known in Piedmont. It may have been more widely used than the formularies composed by Saint Leonard of Port Maurice and Saint Alphonsus.¹⁴³ In spirit they were the same, of course, gathering the faithful around the suffering Jesus to weep for their own sins and the sins of those responsible for all the suffering endured by one

¹⁴¹ A good model of the approach is the *Dignity and Duties of the Priest* of St. Alphonsus. The AS preserves many uncatalogued notebooks of sermons and lessons by various Salesians. The moralistic emphasis, it seems to me, prevailed by far over dogmatic, apologetic, or polemical emphases.

¹⁴² These practices were sometimes discussed in such Turin papers as *La buona settimana* and *L’Ateneo religioso*.

¹⁴³ Here is an incomplete list of works that contained this formulary: *La via del paradiso* (Turin, 1792), pp. 198-214; *Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis* (Turin, 1794), pp. 481-509; *Giardino di divozioni ad uso del cristiano* (Ivrea, 180...), pp. 222-55; *La giornata del cristiano santificata colla preghiera* (Turin, 1844), pp. 302-12; Fulgenzio M. Riccardi (d. 1805), *Il cristiano in chiesa* (Turin, 1845), pp. 137-60. Except for the last work mentioned, the above works went through many printings. For Leonard of Port Maurice, see Ildeberto Schmidt, OFM, “Bibliografia di S. Leonardo da Porto Maurizio,” in *Archivum franciscanum historicum* 40 (1949), 208-75, completed by Benedetto Innocenti, OFM, “Supplemento alla bibliografia di fra Ildeberto Schmidt,” in *Studi francescani* 24 (1952), 228-39. For St. Alphonsus, see M. DeMeulemeester, CSsR, *Bibliographie générale des écrivains redemptoristes* 1 (Louvain, 1933): data on the stations of the cross can be found on pp. 115-16.

who deserved so much love. Following him on his pathway of sorrows, the faithful did not feel like the Jews or the relatively indifferent Roman soldiers. They felt more like his own disciples, who deserted him out of weakness or actually betrayed him. At bottom the stations of the cross sought to touch the wellsprings of love. The faithful saw themselves as responsible for the disgrace and misfortune of their beloved, who in this case was quite a special being:

Consider how Pilate condemned Jesus, Who was most innocent, to death on the Cross, and how He willingly submitted to this sentence, to deliver you from eternal damnation.

O Jesus, I thank Thee for so much love, and I beseech Thee to cancel the sentence of everlasting death, which I have deserved by my sins, so that I may be made worthy to enjoy eternal life.¹⁴⁴

The causes of the heavy wood of the cross that bore down on Jesus' shoulders and of his three falls are our sins, our relapses, our acts of ingratitude. Every act of Jesus, idealized in the stations of the cross, has prefigurative and retaliatory implications. Our countless lapses into sin were mirrored in the countless sufferings of Jesus. We have committed acts of impurity and gluttony; Jesus was stripped of his clothing and afflicted with gall and myrrh. The balanced retaliation is felt and lived once again in the devotion. After the comparison between the sufferings of Jesus and our own sinfulness, we move on to relate the sufferings of the Son of God to what we ourselves shall choose to do. Or better, we ask Jesus to do whatever is desired. The image of his most holy face remains imprinted on Veronica's cloth: "O Jesus, grant me the grace of cleansing my soul from every stain and of imprinting upon my mind and heart Thy most sacred Passion."¹⁴⁵

Jesus is nailed to the cross in the presence of his afflicted mother. The nails go through his hands and feet: "How immense was the cruelty of His enemies! How great the love of Jesus for us! O Jesus,...nail my will to Thy Cross; I firmly resolve never more to offend Thee..."

Jesus is laid to rest in the new tomb prepared for him: "O Jesus, I thank Thee for all Thou hast suffered for me, and I beg of Thee the grace to prepare my heart to receive Thee worthily in Holy Communion and to make my soul Thy dwelling forever."¹⁴⁶

The stations of the cross stop at the tomb. They do not go further, to the resurrection, as theological arguments might well have wished. After all, Christ did not stop at the tomb. Our faith would be vain if the infamy of the cross had been the last word. But the stations of the cross is an exercise deriving from the experience of popular preachers. For Saints Leonard of Port Maurice and Alphonsus, for Passionists and Redemptorists, it took its place alongside mission

¹⁴⁴ *Giov. prov.*, pp. 126-37; SBPB:156-74 at 159.

¹⁴⁵ SBPB:164.

¹⁴⁶ SBPB:169, 172.

weeks and retreats as a powerful weapon for unhinging the hearts of sinners and hurling them at the feet of a confessor. It could impress on their hearts and lips not only a firm purpose of amendment but also an attitude of sincere humility, making them beat their breasts and ask God to work the needed transformation in them.

Thus, since the stations of the cross was not tied up with contingent events, with specific moments in the struggles or triumphs of the Church, it could hold up better than some other pious exercises. It could survive and endure as a practice that touched deep inner needs: conversion, religious reflection based on the representation of events, and emotion rooted in the greatest mystery that could occur among human beings, i.e., the death of the God-Man.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart in the form of a “chaplet” (*coroncina*) was linked to more recent preoccupations. The sense of personal sinfulness and compunction is amalgamated with a sense of displeasure over collective faults. As in Saint Alphonsus’s *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament*, the sense of sin and guilt is mindful of the outrages inflicted on Jesus by heretics, nonbelievers, and bad Christians.¹⁴⁷ The starting point in the devotional exercise is the consideration of some quality in the heart of Jesus, the symbol of unlimited and multivalent love: most lovable, humble, desirous of suffering, patient, in love with our souls, and athirst for our salvation. Next comes a consideration of how little known and appreciated those qualities are. We note the outrages Jesus suffers at the hands of others. Our own sense of guilt fades as we join Jesus and take sides with him. When we see his love for souls, even sinful souls, go unrequited, each of us is prompted to exclaim: “I grieve to see Thee ungratefully repaid, and I will endeavor to console Thee for the many insults Thou receivest in the most Holy Eucharist from heretics, infidels and unworthy Christians.”¹⁴⁸ Contemplating the heart of Jesus, which thirsts for our salvation, we prostrate ourselves and humbly adore the love that drove it to the ineffable sacrifice of the cross, a sacrifice that is renewed daily on the altar at every Mass. Then we express our shock at the way the world acts:

Why are not our hearts all aglow and overflowing with gratitude at the sight of so much love? For the future, dearest Lord, I promise to do all within my power to console Thee for all the offences Thou receivest in this mystery of Thy love from heretics, infidels and unworthy Christians.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ *Giov. prov.*, p. 104; SBPB:175-77 at 175: Prayers for “Visits to the Blessed Sacrament,” based on St. Alphonsus: “I pay my homage this day to Thy most loving Heart and this I intend to do for three reasons... secondly, in reparation for all the insults Thou hast received from Thine enemies in this Sacrament...” The original specifies the “enemies” as “unbelievers, heretics, and bad Christians.”

¹⁴⁸ SBPB:178.

¹⁴⁹ SBPB:180.

The acts of ingratitude lamented by Jesus in his appearance at Paray-le-Monial coincided with what Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690) could see around her. The tepidity of some of her sister nuns and of France as a whole was clear. The seeds of dechristianization were being sown just as efforts were under way to put teeth into the reforms of Trent and move beyond the Huguenot crisis. The religious indifference of the nineteenth century deeply disturbed all committed Catholics. The devotional exercise to the Sacred Heart, suggested in *The Companion of Youth* and used at the Oratory, was made up of prayers from the eighteenth century to a large extent; but it fully dovetailed with the atmosphere of combat in which Don Bosco lived and worked.

The Mass brings us right to the innermost core of Catholic spirituality.¹⁵⁰ Interwoven with pious exercises (e.g., the rosary) and popular hymns, it evoked in the boys of Valdocco much the same sentiments that it evoked in the common people. After all, they had come from that populace and most of them would rejoin it as adults.

In 1863, pupils in the elementary school of Mirabello were attending Mass one day. During the elevation of the host, they saw the child Jesus in its place. Confusion and amazement ensued,¹⁵¹ akin to incidents reported in various anthologies of eucharistic miracles compiled by such people as Lawrence Beyerlinck, Nicholas Laghi, Charles Gregory Rosignoli, and Valerio Ballardini of Venice.¹⁵² The episode may be considered typical, as may the multiplication of hosts on various occasions to satisfy all the youngsters desiring to go to communion. In Valdocco as elsewhere, attention focused on the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. In part this was an extension of the reaction against eucharistic heresies; in part it was a reaction against contemporary unbelief.¹⁵³ At the consecration, particularly at the

¹⁵⁰ See *Indice MB*, pp. 253-55, s.v. "Messa."

¹⁵¹ BM 8:191-93.

¹⁵² Laurent Beyerlinck, *Magnum theatrum vitae humanae* 3 (Venice, 1707), 426-29, s.v. "Eucharistia: Apparitiones...quoad veritatem Corporis"; Nicola Laghi (d. 1612), *I miracoli del Santissimo Sacramento* (Venice, 1594), p. 134: "While a priest was celebrating Mass, Mary appeared and gave him her Son. While celebrating Mass, a priest saw the host transformed into a baby, and Mary and the angel Gabriel adoring him." On p. 136: "A boy reports having seen Christ in the hands of the priest." Carlo Gregorio Rosignoli, SJ, *Maraviglie di Dio nel divinissimo sacramento e nel santissimo sacrificio* (Turin, 1704), pp. 26-28: "An apparition of Christ restores peace to a heart troubled by scruples"; Valerio Ballardini da Venezia, *Prato fiorito di varii esempi* (Venice, 1605), bk. 1, ch. 20, example 18, pp. 212-13: "King William of Scotland saw a wondrous vision of the Blessed Sacrament." DB himself recounts a similar episode in *Giov. prov.* (p. 103): "A venerable servant of God was visiting the Blessed Sacrament and saw him in the form of a baby holding a wreath of roses in his hand..."

¹⁵³ This is noted by DB under the section "Regard for Miracles" in *Notizie intorno al miracolo del SS. Sacramento avvenuto in Torino il 6 giugno 1453 con un cenno sul quarto centenario del 1853* (Turin: De-Agostini, 1853), pp. 5-6.

elevation of the host, all knelt and bowed. For a moment the flightiness of youth was stilled, concentrating on a reality in which they believed and with which they were deeply impressed. What *The Companion of Youth* has to suggest for the elevation of the host is worth noting. Its sentiments focus solely on the fact that Jesus is truly alive and present on the altar:

In all humility I prostrate myself and adore you, O Lord, and I firmly believe that you are present in this sacred host. What a grand mystery! A God comes down from heaven to earth for my salvation! May the most holy and divine Sacrament be praised and thanked always.¹⁵⁴

That moment revived sentiments that would prompt the boys to pursue other religious observances during the day: visits to the Blessed Sacrament, for example, and taking off their caps when passing a church as a sign of respect, especially when they knew the Blessed Sacrament reposed there.

Don Bosco did not overlook the sacrificial aspect of the Mass, however. Indeed he seeks to focus the attention of his boys on it in his presentation of the Mass. Rather than being a meal or banquet, the Mass is depicted as a representation or renewal of the mystery of Gethsemane and Calvary. Like most authors of devotional works, Don Bosco invites his readers to picture Jesus journeying toward the place of crucifixion, shedding his blood to the last drop, and being raised up on the wood of the cross. For the elevation of the chalice, the following prayer is suggested:

My Lord Jesus Christ, I adore the blood you shed to save my soul. I offer it to you in memory of your passion, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. Receive it as expiation for my sins and on behalf of the needs of the Church.¹⁵⁵

Readers then ponder the great value of the Mass, the great treasure that lies hidden in the eucharistic sacrifice, which is celebrated every day in the presence of innumerable angels and saints. They ponder its value as a cultic act of adoration, petition, thanksgiving, and expiation. To this is contrasted the indifference of many and the notion that one Mass more or less does not matter.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ *Giov. prov.*, p. 89.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹⁵⁶ Leonardo da Porto Maurizio, *Il tesoro nascosto*, ch. 1, §1: "It must demand great patience of you to hear the noxious words of some libertines, who sometimes spout scandalous propositions that smack of atheism and poison piety: 'One Mass more or less doesn't really matter. It's a great deal to hear Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation. That priest's Mass is like Holy Week Mass; when he appears on the altar, I head out of the Church'" (in *Opere complete* 2 [Venice, 1868], 327). Here we find arguments and the general mentality favoring participation in more Masses, even in one and the same day.

Don Bosco thinks of all the boys who deliberately allow themselves to be distracted. They stand around, looking here and there, “without reverence, attention, modesty, respect.” Almost echoing the words of Saint Leonard of Port Maurice, he exclaims: “Ah, again and again those boys renew the sufferings of Calvary, causing grave scandal to their companions and dishonor to religion.”¹⁵⁷ Quoting the tireless apostle of the Tuscan and Roman countryside, he concludes: “As for myself, I think that if there were no Mass, at this point the world would have already sunk under the weight of so many iniquities. The Mass is the powerful support that keeps the world on its feet.”¹⁵⁸

Like many priests of his time, Don Bosco appreciated and inculcated Gregorian chant. The simple fact that it was the chant of the Church, at a time of great devotion to the Church and the Pope, would have been enough to extend the same feeling to church music and liturgical chant.¹⁵⁹

Don Bosco also loved and encouraged popular hymns, however. At his invitation Silvio Pellico composed *Angioletto del mio Dio*. Both inside and outside church such hymns as *Luigi, onor dei Vergini* and *Lodate Maria* were sung. Like Saint Alphonsus and Blessed Francis Faà di Bruno, Don Bosco published a series of hymn anthologies in his appendices to *The Companion of Youth* and as separate volumes.¹⁶⁰ He gladly encouraged music by Father John Cagliero, Mae-

¹⁵⁷ *Giov. prov.*, p. 85. The same thing is to be found in *Maggio*, day 23, p. 137.

¹⁵⁸ Leonardo da Porto Maurizio, *Il tesoro nascosto*, ch. 1, no. 7, p. 332: “As for myself, I think that if there were no holy Mass, at this point the world...” Also reported in Bosco, *Nove giorni* (Turin, 1870), day 7, pp. 69-70, but as cited in *Maggio*.

¹⁵⁹ See *Indice MB*, pp. 53-54, 271-72, s.v. “Canto gregoriano” and “Musica.” In 1858 a series of articles on sacred music appeared in *La buona settimana*. They deplored, among other things, “the bad habit of many organists of transporting to their organ keyboard arias, melodies, and duets of theatrical works! So many more sins in church! Many Christians go to certain churches, Masses, or other functions simply to enjoy once more the pieces they applauded on the stage. Standing upright, they look around distractedly and chatter away at one another...” Such were the reasons that later prompted Pius X to set forth norms for sacred music.

¹⁶⁰ *Scelta di laudi sacre ad uso delle missioni e di altre opportunità della Chiesa* (Turin, 1879³); the Preface is signed by DB. *Arpa cattolica, o raccolta di laudi sacre in onore di Gesù Cristo, di Maria Santissima e dei Santi* (S. Pier d’Arena, 1881); *Arpa cattolica... in onore di Gesù Bambino colla novena del S. Natale e per la Santa Infanzia* (S. Pier d’Arena, 1881); *Arpa cattolica... sulla passione, sulle feste principali del Signore e sui novissimi* (S. Pier d’Arena, 1882); *Arpa cattolica... in onore dei S. Cuore di Gesù e del SS. Sacramento coi salmi ed inni che si cantano nella processione del Corpus Domini* (S. Pier d’Arena, 1882); *Arpa cattolica... in onore di Maria Santissima* (S. Pier d’Arena, 1882); *Arpa cattolica... in onore dei santi e sante protettori della gioventù con gli inni per le feste dei medesimi* (S. Pier d’Arena, 1882). The various editions of the *Arpa* have the same Foreword signed by DB, which is substantially the same as the one in the *Scelta di laudi sacre*. It indicates the sources from which the hymns were taken, one of which was Francesco Faà di Bruno’s *Lira cattolica* (Turin, 1869³).

stro John DeVecchi, Father James Costamagna (1846-1921), and Brother Joseph Dogliani. It was expressionist music, suggestive in the vein of the poetry of John Berchet (1783-1851) and the picturesque evocations of the Induno brothers, Dominic (1815-1878) and Jerome (1827-1890). The music of Cagliero and DeVecchi is designed to stimulate fantasy: the rumble of broadsides at Lepanto, the bugle sounds of the Venetian galleons and Muslim vessels. Besides awakening visual imagery in its singers and listeners, this music would have them feel like participants in the triumph of Mary and the subsequent triumphs of the Church. Such hymns as the majestic *Tu es Petrus* and the pulsating tones of *non praevalerunt* (see Matt 16:18) brought people to their feet to swear their loyalty, even unto death, to Peter, his Chair, and his successors in the battle against the enemies of religion.¹⁶¹

The sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians filled with music and vibrated with the voices of boys and men. In the crowd gathered within its precincts, amid the odor of incense and the dim light of candles, a dream-like atmosphere was created. Indelible impressions were stamped on the minds and hearts of many. Sooner or later, in the innermost depths of their own spirits or in public contests, they would stand up for the ideals that they had assimilated there under the influence of Don Bosco, prophet of the new age.

13. Devotions at the Oratory

One recent writer has noted that the nineteenth century marked the height of liturgical decadence, at least in recent centuries, and of burgeoning private devotions.¹⁶² It was a general phenomenon that found enthusiastic promoters; but there was also resistance to private devotions in Church circles and among the educated. In the whole area of devotions and pious exercises, Don Bosco's attitudes and behavior were fairly complex, even though he was inclined to favor devotions. In 1860 he was given co-responsibility for the Giaveno minor seminary, which was repopulated with boys and clerics from Valdocco. This new nucleus sought to introduce practices they had assimilated in their original

¹⁶¹ The "Tu es Petrus" sung at St. Peter's in Rome in 1867 was the inspiration for the antiphon "Sancta Maria" by Cagliero; see Bosco, *Rimembranza di una solennità in onore di Maria Ausiliatrice* (Turin, 1868), pp. 26-29. The hymn "Saepe dum Christi," presented May 24, 1870, was announced as follows on the cover of Bosco, *Nove giorni* (Turin, 1870): "The hymn during solemn vespers by Fr. Cagliero for 300 voices [sic!] with orchestra. The composer's aim was to depict with musical notes the famous battle of Lepanto and the victory of the Christians with the aid of Mary Help of Christians."

¹⁶² See Salvatore Marsili, OSB, "Storia del movimento liturgico italiano dalle origini all'Enciclica *Mediator Dei*," appended to Odon Rousseau, OSB, *Storia del movimento liturgico* (Rome, 1961), pp. 263-369.

home.¹⁶³ Some people objected that Don Bosco was introducing too many religious practices, that the seeds of Jesuitism were being sown in a diocesan seminary. Don Bosco defended his own conduct and that of his protégés in Giaveno. To the rector of the seminary he wrote:

As regards the reason given me yesterday why the Oratory and the Giaveno junior seminary should not be considered as one and the same unit—namely, to avoid the possibility that the staff will be labeled “Jesuit” and the teaching “Jesuitical”—I feel duty-bound to ask you not to be taken in by this sort of twaddle. Both the good and the malevolent know very well that those two words are hallmarks of a sound moral education.¹⁶⁴

At the same time he was wary of the incursion of new pious exercises, whether sponsored by pious societies or not. He was not in favor of “leaving off some practices of piety in favor of new ones.” He seems to have been thinking of all the aspects of city life that somehow had an impact on Valdocco, and he may also have been thinking of the criticisms voiced about his educational system. Consider this remark, for example:

For instance, some would like to set up the Association of the Sacred Heart of Mary. I approve of the Association and would like to introduce it, but since it would hurt the St. Aloysius Sodality which is now struggling to hold its own, let us put such projects aside, excellent though they may be, and try just to foster devotion to Our Lady.¹⁶⁵

Again, in 1868, he personally eliminated sections of Father Bonetti’s biography of a boy named Ernest Saccardi. Notice his reasons:

I have read your book and like it very much. I have already given it to the printer and you will soon have the proofs. I thought it best to edit out what could lead readers to accuse us of going overboard in practices of piety, or to think that lack of recreation gravely affected Saccardi’s health. I also deleted the *Corona Quotidiana* [Daily Garland]. It is an excellent thing, but it might be considered excessive on top of everything else.¹⁶⁶

But Bonetti had simply taken his inspiration from Don Bosco’s biographies of Magone and Besucco. Those biographies were replete with chapters on the devotional life of the boys in question. Moreover, the *Life of Michael Magone* had an appendix dealing with “a pious practice carried out daily by Michael Magone,” and the *Life of Francis Besucco* had an appendix on his devotion to the

¹⁶³ See BM 6:425-26; BM 7:86-87.

¹⁶⁴ Letter of DB to Fr. John Grassino (1820-1902), rector of the Giaveno seminary, sent from Turin, Sept. 3, 1861; see BM 6:593.

¹⁶⁵ Diary of Fr. Ruffino, Sept. 6, 1860; see BM 6:420.

¹⁶⁶ DB to Fr. Bonetti, Turin, July 1, 1868; see AS 131/01 Bonetti; BM 9:145; *Ep.* 670.

blessed Crucifix of Argentera. Did Don Bosco's thinking undergo some sort of change or evolution? Did he sometimes feel that he had gone far enough and should not go further? Or did he simply want to hush up things that might have harmed his institution if they were known to a wider public?

What is certain is that, even after 1868, there was a place for pious exercises, devotional practices, and pious societies at the Oratory and his other houses. Artisans and students introduced special practices in honor of Saint Joseph, whose role as the guardian of Jesus and Mary won him in 1870 the title Patron of the Universal Church.¹⁶⁷ Boys and clerics could join the Association for Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.¹⁶⁸ Father Joachim Berto was in charge of an association devised by Frassinetti, *Il giardinetto di Maria* [The Little Garden of Mary].¹⁶⁹ At the Oratory as elsewhere, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus grew noticeably in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Besides Don Bosco, Father Bonetti was particularly active as a promoter of this devotion.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ From the very start the church of Mary Help of Christians had an altar dedicated to St. Joseph. Lorenzone's painting followed the classic outlines of popular religious images (see Alberto Vecchi, *Il culto delle immagini nelle stampe popolari* [Florence, 1968]). Under the group composed of the Virgin, the baby Jesus in her arms, and St. Joseph at their side, we see the Oratory. The holy trio is sending down a shower of roses on the Oratory, the roses symbolizing heavenly blessings for devotees of the sanctuary and the inhabitants of DB's house. DB offers his own description in *Maraviglie*, pp. 125-26. We should also recall the Company of St. Joseph, which was promoted among the artisans of the Oratory. A "St. Joseph's Library for Artisans" was set up (around 1883, thanks to the initiative of coadjutor brother Andrew Pelazza? [1843-1905]). DB offered words of encouragement on the bindings of the books: "I cannot but urge you to prefer recreation of this sort, which will prove not only pleasurable but useful to you." In 1882 there began the serial publication of some reading material in the format of the *Catholic Readings* but under the aegis of the *Accademico Giuseppino*. The materials were addressed to the "worker-reader" by the anonymous "Accademico giuseppino" (Pelazza?). I would also note that from 1867 on there were various LC titles promoting devotion to St. Joseph by DB, John Mary Huguet, SM, Innocent Gobio, CRSP (1814-74), Francis Martinengo, CM, and others.

¹⁶⁸ AS 275, which contains the personal file of each SDB, also has a few pages of enrollments in the Association for Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

¹⁶⁹ On the Oratory *giardinetto* (which at the end of the century also included the flowers on the balcony of DB's little room), see AS 38 Torino-S. Franc. di Sales and AS 115 (letters of best wishes to DB), s.v. "Giardinetto."

¹⁷⁰ See Bonetti, *Il Cuor di Gesù nel secondo centenario della sua rivelazione* (LC 23 [1875], fasc. 6-7). It is difficult to determine exactly when the Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus began to prosper in SDB houses as well. But especially in houses of formation for aspirants to the Salesian Society, novices, and clerics, one can find old *quadranti* with the names of those who pledged to honor Jesus Christ in that way. I might mention two little works here: *Viva Gesù! Piccolo manuale della pia associazione della Guardia d'onore al sacro Cuore di Gesù, coll'appendice sulla sacra lega di riparazione ed i*

Don Bosco's approach was cautious and free-wheeling by turns. There was a proliferation of pious exercises and pious associations. We can see Don Bosco's devotional bent and his general attitude. He was not close-minded. Rather, he wanted to accept, and adapt himself to, those forms of religious practices and piety that were needed in the class of people with whom and for whom he was laboring.

14. Yearly retreats and the monthly Exercise for a Holy Death

Spiritual exercises for young students were prescribed by the school laws of 1822. Stipulated times were the periods of preparation for Christmas and Easter.¹⁷¹ Don Bosco, too, promoted such retreats at those times.¹⁷² Thus the practice of spiritual exercises in his educational institutions was grounded on a tradition and a set of regulations that had governed his own life as a student in Chieri. For the first years of the Oratory, Don Bosco seems to have preferred to hold the Christmas triduum in a city church, and the midyear retreat, which ended with fulfillment of the Easter precept, at the Giaveno minor seminary.

The retreat might last three days or six days, even for young people, in the latter case extending from the evening of Friday before Palm Sunday to the morning of Holy Wednesday. The basic components were the same in either case: meditations, instructions, communal vocal prayers of lengthier duration than on ordinary days, and silence. The meditations, pretty much standardized since the eighteenth century, dealt with such themes as the supreme end of the human being, the divine plan of salvation, the saving work of Jesus Christ, and the crucial moments of human life with respect to eternal salvation. The Ignatian derivation was patent. Various sermon anthologies for such exercises (by, e.g., Charles Ambrose Cattaneo, Paul Segneri the Younger, and Francis Anthony Biamonti) had such meditations or at least some allusions to the classic themes of the Ignatian exercises: the end for which we were created; the fall of the angels and of our first parents; actual sin, death, judgment, and hell; Jesus our redeemer; the passion and death of the God-Man; the clash between the good and the wicked—the former under the standard of Christ, the latter under the standard

biglietti-zelatori della 4^a serie per il Clero (Turin: OSFS [1886]); *Viva Gesù! Appendice sul modo di stabilire ed organizzare la pia associazione della Guardia d'onore nelle case d'educazione* (S. Benigno Canavese, 1885).

¹⁷¹ The Easter retreat began on the evening of the Wednesday before Palm Sunday and ended on the Wednesday of Holy Week with communion. See "Regolamento per le scuole fuori dell'Università," tit. 4, ch. 1, §1, no. 142; §2, no. 164, in *Raccolta degli atti del governo* 12:345,549. A triduum with morning and evening sermons, and chanting of the Christmas novena, was prescribed for Dec. 22-24; see *ibid.*, pp. 548-49.

¹⁷² See *Indice MB*, pp. 163-64, s.v. "Esercizi spirituali."

of Satan. Implicit but very much present was the conviction that human beings were free to choose sides. Once made aware of the end assigned to them by God, they could join the party of the good and look forward to eternal life or join the wicked and expect eternal damnation.¹⁷³

The classic Ignatian exercises were deeply imprinted with the personal experience of the converted Saint Ignatius Loyola. In broad outlines they depict what Ignatius saw as a sure way to lead sinners back to God or to trigger decisions that would be crucial for a person's whole life.

The kind of exercises adopted by Don Bosco represented an adaptation to various sorts of people who, for various reasons, were not in a position to concentrate on meditation. Such exercises had been worked out mainly by pastors of souls, whose experience lay with the religious piety of the common people, or even with more educated priests and lay people who were incapable of, or inexperienced in, prolonged meditation. Those exercises fitted in well with the whole effort of popular religious education in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries.¹⁷⁴

The meditation was now preached. The essential theme was provided by eternal truths or maxims: e.g., the end of the human being and the Last Things. The retreatants were invited to reflect on their personal sins, on the awesome power of every human being to refuse to serve God in whatever state of life, to say to the Lord: "I will not serve" (Jer 2:20). Human beings could turn their backs on their omnipotent and merciful Father and spurn all his favors, including the price of redemption from the bondage of Satan paid by Jesus when he shed his blood on the cross. Preachers sought to penetrate the minds and hearts of their listeners, to take advantage of their innermost search for well-being and happiness. Their message was that sin was the cause of unhappiness in this life and the next.

This meditation scheme was not based solely on people's sense of guilt. It was not designed solely to arouse compunction in those guilty of mortal sin. The aim was to shake up every listener, inducing in all a sense of fear on account of sin and eternal damnation. Who could claim to be without sin? Sermons played on the fact that all, both preacher and listener, needed repentance and expiation. In popular preaching the theme was sometimes translated into a symbolic action. The preacher scourged himself, or prostrated himself before the

¹⁷³ The authors mentioned in the text are among those recommended by the 1880 GC (*Deliberazioni del secondo capitolo generale*, pp. 67-68). See Also DB's sermons and instructions in AS 132 *Prediche*.

¹⁷⁴ The features of popular preaching are brought out well by Ludovico Antonio Muratori, *Della regolata divozion de' cristiani* (Trent [Naples], 1748), ch. 11, pp. 130-32; by Muratori again in his Prologue to Paolo Segneri Iuniore, *Opere postume* (Turin: Marietti, 1857), pp. 5-6. But by the 19th century this sort of focus was a commonplace. See, e.g., Guglielmo Alasia, *Guida ai venerandi sacerdoti del clero secolare nel sacro ministero delle missioni e spirituali esercizi da dettarsi al popolo nelle parrocchie rurali* (Turin: Marietti, 1864).

crucifix, burst into tears, and left off preaching. The feeling of compunction was multiplied as the audience gave way to emotional feelings, exclamations, the chanting of penitential hymns, and personal reflection.¹⁷⁵

The sense of disregarded or violated duty was further elaborated in instructional lessons. Depending on the exact nature of the participants, priests reviewed the duties of adults, farmers and craftsmen, parents, children, priests in charge of souls, and consecrated religious.

Meditations and instructions were based on themes that would lead the retreatants to kneel before a confessor and beg pardon for their sins. Thus, for example, there might be a meditation on the Prodigal Son or God's mercy and instruction on confession. People audited the books of their own consciences, acknowledging in the confessional the sins they had committed throughout their lives or in a more limited period of time.

Essentially, then, the retreats were designed to lead people to conversion. Wittingly or unwittingly downplayed were points that might dampen anxiety over one's guilt or the fear of dying in God's disfavor. The fear/love dynamics of the process were not to be compromised.

It is for this reason, I think, that spiritual retreats along the lines adopted by Don Bosco focus on the theme of the death of the sinner: the uncertain moment of death, the terrible judgment afterwards, and the eternity of the despairing damned. They then culminate with themes impelling listeners to go to confession and holy communion. Sermons on heaven, God's merciful love, and Mary were meant to stimulate conversion and a firm purpose of amendment. Allusions to Christ's resurrection and its relationship to the Christian's life or death must be sought in sermons on hell and its eternal punishments. More dramatic and powerful, such sermons would be more likely to uproot attachment to sin, prompt conversion, and lead to confession. Listeners were led to ponder the benefits they renounced by soiling themselves with sin.

In the early days of Don Bosco's priestly experience we find that retreats for young people were scheduled in December, in the final days of the year or shortly before Christmas.¹⁷⁶ In 1849 they most likely followed the format indicated in the program printed by Paravia. Most of the youthful participants were probably artisans or apprentices. There were two Masses: one at 5:30 A.M., the other

¹⁷⁵ In his sermons Leonard of Port Maurice indicates the exact point where the preacher should lay hold of the penitential whip. Segneri also made use of it. The end of the 17th century was a time of anxious searching and religious agitation for individuals, and for individuals among the masses. Among Catholics it was an era of great popular missions, among Protestants the era of Pietism. See some references to this situation in Stella, "Il triduo sacro nella pietà popolare" (see n. 21 above).

¹⁷⁶ See BM 3:424.

at noon. There were only three sermons, of which two were instructions and one was a meditation.¹⁷⁷

The program informs us that the first instruction was in dialogue format, and the information is of some interest. The dialogue form of preaching was, at that time, a genre in use among the common people. Not used for homilies or meditations, which were supposed to focus attention on fundamental dogmatic truths, the dialogue format was reserved for instructions and examinations of conscience. Some preachers specialized in playing the role of the catechist, oth-

¹⁷⁷ The kind of schedule proposed by DB is similar to the one used for the common populace and for exercitants who came together for sermons and common exercises and then went home to eat and sleep. See, e.g., Alasia, *Guida ai venerandi sacerdoti*, pp. 63-64: "Schedule of functions. Morning. 6:15 A.M.: Mass; *Veni Creator Spiritus* at the Postcommunion. 7:00 A.M.: Meditation, Mass. 10:00 A.M.: Mass; Litany of the Blessed Virgin at the Postcommunion. 10:30 A.M.: Sermon or instruction; *De Profundis*, with the prayer *Fidelium, Deus*. Afternoon. 2:15 P.M.: Hymns. 2:30 P.M.: Dialogue or catechism, *Magnificat*. 3:30 P.M.: Instruction or sermon. 4:30 P.M.: *Miserere* in mission tone, blessing of the venerable [preacher]."

There was a briefer schedule for the hill country and areas where people lived far away from the church: "Morning. 9:00 A.M.: Mass; *Veni Creator* at the Postcommunion. 9:30 A.M.: Meditation, Litany of the Blessed Virgin. 10:30 A.M.: Sermon or instruction, *De Profundis* with the prayer *Fidelium, Deus*. Afternoon services as above."

Quite similar is the schedule for students in *Distribuzione del tempo solita praticarsi da chi fa gli esercizi spirituali, sotto la direzione de' PP. Chierici Regolari di San Paolo, Barnabiti* (Milan, 1723). On pp. 15-24 we find a rule of life for maintaining the fruits of the retreat. It contains the usual recommendations for properly respecting one's soul: avoid mortal sin even more than death; avoid dirty talk, impure books, and bad companions; avoid idleness and spurn human respect; choose a regular confessor; go to confession every two weeks and to communion as your spiritual director advises.

As a typical schedule for "closed" retreats given to upper-class and middle-class lay adults, we have the retreat given at Mount Olivet (Pinerolo) in 1861. It bears resemblances to the schedule given to SDBs by DB: "Morning. 5:00 A.M.: Rising. 5:30 A.M.: Meditation points given in chapel. 6:00 A.M.: Meditation in one's room. 7:00 A.M.: Reflect and write down the fruits. 7:30 A.M.: Spiritual reading and coffee time. 8:00 A.M.: Mass. 8:30 A.M.: [Divine] Office and points for meditation. 9:30 A.M.: Meditation in one's room. 10:00 A.M.: Reflect and write down the fruits. 10:30 A.M.: Instruction in chapel. 11:30 A.M.: Lunch. 12:00 noon: free time

"After lunch. 1:00 P.M.: Litany of the Saints in chapel, rest period. 2:30 P.M.: *ad hoc* reading from [Jean] Gerson. 2:45 P.M.: Vespers and points for meditation. 3:30 P.M.: Meditation and personal reflections in one's room. 4:15 P.M.: Spiritual reading. 4:30 P.M.: Matins and points for meditation. 5:30 P.M.: Meditation and reflection in one's room. 6:15 P.M.: Instruction in chapel. 7:15 P.M.: Supper. 7:45 P.M.: Free time. 8:45 P.M.: Litany of the Blessed Virgin in chapel. 9:00 P.M.: Ordinary examination of conscience, bed." See *Ouverture d'une retraite spirituelle au Mont Olivète* (directed by Rev. P. Saraceno, SJ, Mar. 9-17, 1761), p. 3, ms. Archivo Cays, at the UPS. A brief description of the retreats at St. Ignatius Retreat House in Lanzo is provided by Maurizio Marocco, *Il santuario di S. Ignazio di Lojola presso Lanzo* (Turin, 1870), pp. 92-94.

ers in playing the role of the person in need of catechism lessons. The instruction readily lent itself to a semiserious form of presentation. The would-be pupil might be a man more inclined to frequent a tavern than a church, to abuse his wife and children rather than lead them in family prayers. The pupil could be a gossiping farm woman or an ambitious lady about town, a brawling young spendthrift or a conceited, libertine student, a Lutheran outdebated by the catechist about the Church and the sacraments, or someone with little desire or interest in entering a confessional. Such dialogue instructions appealed to the young folk, and adults rather liked them too. They came and sat themselves down, trying to give the impression that they were there more for the entertainment than for any learning. And despite the uncertainty and perplexity of pastors, such dialogue instructions remained popular in rural areas right into the twentieth century.¹⁷⁸

The monthly Exercise of a Holy Death grew out of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius. John Croiset, SJ, became an advocate of the monthly exercise in France. He reasoned that many people could find one day a month to ponder spiritual matters in solitude whereas they could not spare several days at a time to make a complete retreat.¹⁷⁹

Around the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Jesuit Joseph Anthony Bordoni promoted the Exercise of a Holy Death in Turin. Bordoni's *Discourses* were Canon Joseph Cottolengo's favorite source for his own sermon material. In 1719 Bordoni even founded a pious society devoted to the practice. It was formed in the Church of the Holy Martyrs, which was entrusted to the Jesuits' pastoral care. At that time it was a weekly practice, and it included a sermon of a catechetical or moral nature.¹⁸⁰ From the directories of the Turin province of the Jesuits, we learn that there was always a Jesuit in charge of the pious society until the Jesuits were suppressed. The last moderator in the eighteenth century was Father George Rulfo (1713-1793), a native of Mondovì, whose talks on a holy death to the noble Company of Humility were published in Turin in

¹⁷⁸ Alasia, *Guida ai venerandi sacerdoti*, p. 23: "Priests do not share the same unanimous view about the advisability or suitability of the dialogue format. Some find it unsuitable in a holy place because the exposition of practical cases sometimes arouses laughter in the audience, and they feel this is out of place in church. In answer one might say that if such outbursts are brief and kept within decent limits, there is nothing irreverent about such brief laughter as the preacher arouses in his listeners. Indeed it is a good indication that people are listening with attention, interest, and pleasure. So the momentary lapses in respect may be abundantly compensated for by the benefits one derives from an uneducated audience..."

¹⁷⁹ Pierre Pourrat, *La spiritualité chrétienne* 4 (Paris, 1930), 338-39.

¹⁸⁰ See the remarks in the Preface to Giuseppe Antonio Bordoni, SJ (1678-1742), *Discorsi per l'esercizio della buona morte* 1 (Venice, 1764), 3-8.

1783-1784. Also reprinted several times were the sermons of Charles Ambrose Cattaneo, a Jesuit of Milan, under the specific title *Exercise of a Holy Death*.¹⁸¹

The monthly Exercise of a Holy Death as designed for young people was a variant of the monthly retreat, of the religious practices prescribed monthly by Piedmontese school legislation or suggested by local practices embodied in ascetical books.¹⁸²

Regulations provided that young people were to go to confession every month. In some “congregations” (i.e., religious associations of students in a given school), the last Sunday of the month was fixed for general communion.¹⁸³ One of the books suggested for daily attendance at Mass was *The Christian’s Daily Prayer Book*, which included a “Rule of life extracted from Father Nepveu’s *Christian Conduct*.” Among other things it suggested the monthly exercise of preparing for death:

Choose one day a month to prepare yourself for death, and apply yourself seriously in all your actions as if you were going to die that day. Go to confession and communion. Examine yourself on whatever might cause you affliction at the point of death. Make acts of resignation, thanksgiving, lively faith, hope, trust, contrition, love of God, and so forth. Call upon the crucified Jesus, Mary, your Guardian Angel, the saint you are named after. And when you go to bed, imagine that your bed is your tomb.¹⁸⁴

There is no talk of a sermon because Nepveu’s rule relies on personal initiative. But the same impulse that led to spiritual retreats with sermons also added a sermon to the monthly Exercise of a Holy Death. This sermon encouraged reflection on some virtue or vice in the light of one’s last crucial moments of life on earth.

A characteristic prayer introduced into Don Bosco’s *Companion of Youth* and Oratory tradition was the Litany for a Holy Death. It was given an indulgence by Pope Pius VII, but it had already been in circulation by the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁸⁵ Prayers of petition were addressed to the Lord in one’s status

¹⁸¹ Cattaneo is suggested in general terms to the SDBs as a meditation text; see *De-liberazioni del secondo capitolo generale*, p. 67.

¹⁸² [Carlo Ferreri], *Regole di vita e buone massime per la gioventù studiosa*, pp. 29-38.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁸⁴ *La giornata del cristiano*, p. 324. The piece is suggested by Ferreri, *Regole di vita*, p. 13.

¹⁸⁵ See Oreste Gregorio, “Introduction” to St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Apparecchio alla morte e opuscoli affini*, in *Opere ascetiche* 9 (Rome, 1965), lxxi. In the editions of *Giov. prov.* prior to 1873, we find the following introductory statement: “Prayer for a Holy Death. Composed by a Protestant girl who was converted to the Catholic religion at the age of 15 and died at the age of 18 in the odor of sanctity” (1847 ed., p. 140). We find something of the same sort in Fulgenzio M. Riccardi, OFM, *Il cristiano in chiesa*

as a sinner. One's sins were not recalled in abstract terms as the absence of certain virtues. Instead they were viewed as so many abuses of God's gifts to us, of the senses and the powers of our soul, which were now subject to the penalty of death and the final sufferings. This sort of picture is the favorite one presented in popular sermons and meditations on death by such figures as Cattaneo, Rosignoli, and Saint Alphonsus. Enlisting people's fantasy and imagination, it was an effective approach in some respects. On the whole, however, it was distressing. After each evocation of our final moments before death and the accompanying torment, one implored: "Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me." In the context, however, the ejaculation prompted fear and trembling rather than any feeling of trust or confidence. The supplicant felt that he or she lay prostrate at the feet of the awesome, majestic judge. There was no thought of the mystery of the Christian soul, a soul now reliving in itself the mystery of Christ's death and glorious resurrection. There was no suggestion of a child who is finally reaching the home of his Father, or of a wandering pilgrim who finally feels close to the homeland so eagerly sought for. Behind death lurks the specter of a terrible condemnation. Even the Litany of a Holy Death seeks to arouse conversion and a salutary fear of sin.

15. *The taste for prayer and sincere devotion*

At this point we do well to pause and consider some of the features of prayer as promoted by Don Bosco. To begin with, it is easy enough to detect the stress on prayer as petition in his catechetical and devotional writings. His hagiographical writings, on the other hand, tend to focus on the taste for prayer evinced by saints and pious young people.¹⁸⁶ Of Saint Martin of Tours he writes:

Martin was a good boy. Even as a child he knew enough to befriend well-brought up youngsters and to avoid those whose actions and words betrayed their dissoluteness. He found great pleasure in conversing with fervent Christians. Even though he had not yet been baptized, he participated in practices of piety with a ready will. He often went to the church of the Christians; and

(Turin: Paravia, 1845), p. 165: "Litany for a holy death, composed by a girl who was born a Protestant, converted to the Catholic religion at the age of 15, and died at the age of 18 in the universal esteem of sanctity." Was it, in DB's mind, an implicit prod to holiness? The indulgence was granted May 12, 1802; see [Telesforo Galli], *Raccolta di orazioni e pie opere* (Rome, 1844), pp. 274-75.

¹⁸⁶ Indicative is the consideration of "St. Aloysius as a model of prayer," which oscillates between "ask and you shall receive" and the "elevation of the mind to God." The latter predominates when DB's text more closely follows the model of Paschal De Mattei.

at the age of ten, against his parents' wishes, he insisted on becoming a catechumen.¹⁸⁷

He writes in a similar vein of Blessed Catherine de Mattei of Racconigi:

At the age of five her devotion was already admirable. She took the greatest delight in stopping to pray before a little image of Mary in her house. Catherine grew up with these fine dispositions and was her parents' consolation. She loved to stay by herself at home so that she could more easily raise her heart to God. From the window or door she could look at the serene sky covered with stars, or the earth adorned with flowers, or trees laden with fruit. Then she would lift her mind to God and say: "How good the Lord is! Since he created me in his image and likeness, that is a sign that he thinks of me too."¹⁸⁸

Aloysius Gonzaga, Aloysius Comollo, Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, and Francis Besucco acquired an extraordinary taste for prayer at early ages. It continued to grow, enriched by fresh favors from the Lord and made manifest by signs of the degree of perfection they had attained.

Going back to the literary sources, we find that Don Bosco's pages on the prayer of petition display terms reminiscent of scholastic tracts or works on moral and ascetical theology. We are reminded, for example, of the moral theology of Saint Alphonsus, or of his ascetical treatise on prayer: *The Way of Salvation and of Perfection*. In the latter we find a sound, well-balanced reaction against the prayer of quiet, whose advocates at the end of the seventeenth century had gone so far as to downgrade the prayer of petition as defective, as indicative of a lack

¹⁸⁷ Bosco, *Vita di san Martino, vescovo di Tours* (Turin, 1855), p. 11. His text is based liberally on that of Jesuit Giampietro Maffei (1536-1603), *Vite di diciassette confessori di Cristo* (Turin: Marietti) 2, "Vita di san Martino, vescovo," ch. 1, p. 4: "...When he was still ten, against his parents' wishes he secretly went to church and insisted on becoming a catechumen."

¹⁸⁸ Bosco, *Cenni storici intorno alla vita della B. Caterina De-Mattei da Racconigi* (Turin, 1862), p. 8. On this point DB's text depends on Antonio M. Balladore (1818?-1903), *Vita della B. Catterina De-Mattei da Racconigi* (Savigliano, 1847), p. 2: "Growing in this cultivation of prayer and delighting in solitude, she found everything a reason for turning her heart to God. Every time she looked out the door or the window and saw a serene sky or a star-studded night, or the earth adorned with flowers and the fruit trees, her soul ascended on high. Often pondering the providence of the Lord, she roused herself to endure poverty by saying: 'God thinks of me, too, whom he created in his image and likeness.'" A bit more removed are the texts of Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola (1469-1533) and of Canon Peter Hyacinth Gallizia (1662-1737). Like Pico, Balladore underlines Catherine's love of solitude, which Pico saw as a sure "nurturer of prayer." Gallizia writes that in this respect Catherine was "anticipated [in grace] by the blessings of the Lord." DB stresses Catherine's initiatives and their "benefits" (that might suggest imitation): i.e., an "already admirable" devotion, the "greatest delight" in prayer, and the "consolation" of her parents.

of trust in the boundless goodness of God. Saint Alphonsus stresses the value of petitioning as an act favored by God himself, for it disposes the supplicant to conform his or her own will to that of God and thus links the person to the chain of graces that will lead to eternal salvation. Within this overall perspective Saint Alphonsus retains or recovers the good he sees in the prayer of quiet, highlighting the maxim that had become famous: the person who prays will certainly be saved, the person who does not pray will certainly be damned.¹⁸⁹ His opinion is echoed by Don Bosco in his *Companion of Youth*, sermons, and talks.¹⁹⁰ For him the prayer of petition is an effective instrument in getting spiritual and temporal favors. Saint Alphonsus's statement helps to underline the importance of prayer in achieving salvation. But in Don Bosco's statements it is no longer overlaid with the various theological motivations presented in *The Way of Salvation*.

It might seem that we are confronting two wholly autonomous doctrinal and practical nuclei. When Don Bosco adverts to need and necessity, he sees prayer as petition. He himself prays and he urges others to pray, certain that the Lord will intervene. He promotes prayer in church, sure that "everyone who asks, receives" (Matt 7:8).¹⁹¹ When he wants to ask for extraordinary favors, be they conversions or cures, he relies on prayer. He even urges tepid or unbelieving souls to petition in prayer, even if only mechanically. Perhaps he sensed that the fire of faith and prayer had not gone out in the hearts of contemporary unbelievers; the embers needed only to be stirred. Don Bosco also took note of the utilitarian bent in human beings. It might seem less noble, but it was also very effective. Saint Leonard of Port Maurice had stressed it in his treatment of *The Hidden Treasure of the Mass*. The sense of usefulness, then, was pleasing to God and might help to lead a person to purer religious sentiments.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ St. Alphonsus, *The Way of Salvation and of Perfection* (Brooklyn: Redemptorist, 1926), pt. 1, ch. 1, pp. 15-16. On prayer and St. Alphonsus's theories of grace, see J.F. Hidalgo, CSsR, *Doctrina alfonsiana acerca de la acción de la gracia actual eficaz y suficiente: Ensayo histórico-expositivo* (Rome, 1954).

¹⁹⁰ *Giov. prov.* (Turin, 1851), p. 332 (and successive editions); Bosco, *Avvisi ai Cattolici* (Turin, 1853), p. 28 (and successive editions of *Fondamenti della cattolica religione*); BM 9:98 (dream of hell: 1868).

¹⁹¹ *Misericordia*, p. 103; *Giov. prov.*, p. 16.

¹⁹² Leonardo da P. Maurizio, *Il tesoro nascosto*, ch. 1, §8, p. 332 (see n. 59 above).

DB is also thinking of the ascetical and educational "benefit" to be derived. He is not content, e.g., with mere meditation: "Let everyone do it always, but get down to practice and end with a resolution to reap some benefit, avoid some fault, or practice some virtue" (MB 9:708). Prayer, like faith, must ultimately be concretely operative. Here we see differences, not only with the prayer of quiet, but with that of the Protestant believer, who makes no firm purpose of amendment but simply begs God to effect his conversion, watch over him, transform him, and guide him.

Even in the prayer of petition, however, there was something that went deeper. Underneath the grace or favor sought in prayer lay something accruing from one's colloquy with God: i.e., a relationship with the sacred and the transcendent.¹⁹³ It would help us a great deal if we had some autobiographical document from Don Bosco akin to those of Mary Henrietta Dominici or Thérèse of Lisieux. Such a document might help us to appreciate how deeply a feeling for the divine had penetrated his mind and heart. But Don Bosco seems to evade any inquiry of that sort. He seems to have been pleased with the way Dominic Savio handled the matter and answered his questions about it:

Innocence of life, love for God, and the desire of heavenly realities had so changed Dominic's soul that he could be said to be all absorbed in God. Sometimes he would stop playing, gaze off into the distance, and begin walking alone. On being asked why he had left the game, he would reply: "Those distractions keep coming over me, and heaven seems to open above me, and I have to walk away so that I won't say things the boys may laugh at." ... These ecstasies came upon him in the study hall, on his way to and from school, and in the classroom itself.¹⁹⁴

Did Don Bosco shun the idea of revealing his own interior life? Or was it that he, unaccustomed or unattracted to mystical literature, lacked the expressive and interpretive resources of people like Saints Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross? Such questions will be examined a bit more closely in chapter XV.

What is clear is his admiration for his best young people and their taste for prayer. His appeal to all the others is also explicit. He does not hide his feelings from those who are restless and inattentive in church, who spend their time there squirming around before the Blessed Sacrament.¹⁹⁵

He had his reasons for saying that it was a stroke of good luck when youths knew how to pray. It was a knack acquired in early childhood and nurtured by faithfulness to God.¹⁹⁶ In saying such things, Don Bosco apparently was thinking of the necessity of giving oneself to God early in life: "Train a boy in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not swerve from it" (Prov 22:6). It is also quite possible that a sociological consideration was intermixed with this theological and psychological conviction. Remember his persistent stress on the sad and calamitous nature of the times. If young people always needed to root themselves in a taste for religious realities because of their fragility and

¹⁹³ DB brings this up in connection with the prayer of *elevatio*: "By prayer I mean everything that elevates our affections to God" (MB 9:708).

¹⁹⁴ SDS:117-18. For Dominic's behavior in church see SDS:115.

¹⁹⁵ *Regolamento per le case della società di S. Francesco di Sales* (Turin, 1877), pt. 2, ch. 4: Behavior in church. See also the Good Night talk on Sept. 11, 1876 (BM 12:321).

¹⁹⁶ Cornell, p. 201.

fickleness, this was even more true in such an age. Religious spirit and practice were particularly vulnerable in an era and atmosphere of revolution, of uprooting and radical change. Thus there were many reasons why Don Bosco could not be satisfied with mere custom and habit. Associated solely with a given milieu, they could easily be uprooted. It was not enough that his boys would go to confession and communion. He wanted them to go “willingly,” to derive personal pleasure from those experiences. We find such statements in a series of reminders that have been attributed to him with good reason: “You should not think you have a sincere devotion until you go willingly to confession and communion and find real pleasure in good books and good companions.”¹⁹⁷

We would have to explore the exact import of such expressions as “sincere devotion,” a “taste” for prayer, and the “spirit of prayer.” Don Bosco offers no definitions. The terms are obviously connected with similar formulas used by others we have noted above: the “true devotion” of Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Louis de Montfort; the “true” perfection and holiness of Saint Alphonsus, Paul Segneri the Younger, and Don Bosco himself. It is also somehow connected with Pascal’s *esprit de justesse* as a quality or capacity of the soul. The “taste” for prayer suggests an appetitive quality, one that leads almost naturally and spontaneously to a real enjoyment of prayer. Don Bosco repeatedly notes that the taste for prayer is a sign of virtue and perfection. Letting his attention dive very deeply, he finds in this taste for spiritual things the guarantee that the divine is truly rooted in the minds and hearts of his young people.¹⁹⁸ As I have already noted, moreover, he also looks elsewhere to authenticate this taste in the whole life of a youth: i.e., in obedience, docility, purity, and fraternal charity. This is not the sort of “sentimentalism” denounced by Bishop Bonomelli, for example.¹⁹⁹ With his insistence on a real taste for prayer, Don Bosco shows that he is in tune with the spirituality of fervor and its apologetic aspects that so characterized Catholic religious practice in Italy at the end of the nineteenth century. For Don Bosco, too, the content and supplication of prayer are for the Church and the Pope as well as for one’s own salvation. People pray that the Lord may sustain them in their struggles and ensure their victory over evil. For Catholics of the end of the century, communal prayer was a sign of strength and a symbol of hoped-for success. Don Bosco does not so clearly explicitate that em-

¹⁹⁷ “Ricordi,” appendix to *Germano l’ebanista, o gli effetti di un buon consiglio* (LC 10 [1862], fasc. 11), p. 77. The *ricordi* close with an exhortation to “true and constant devotion to Mary... If you have it, I expect that one day you will say: *Venerunt omnia mihi bona pariter cum illa* [All good things came to me along with her (Wis 7:11)].” The latter was a customary saying of DB.

¹⁹⁸ See ch. X, nn. 61–63, and the corresponding text, pp. 216–17.

¹⁹⁹ *Sentimentalismo e formalismo in religione*, Lenten pastoral for 1902, in Geremia Bonomelli, *Attraverso i nostri tempi: Lettere pastorali ritoccate* (Milan, 1910), pp. 281–342.

phasis, but he is alert to the educational value of well done communal prayer: "Prayer should be a manifestation of faith inviting bystanders to praise God."²⁰⁰ Good praying by his young people was to attract people to the Oratory or the local parish, to serve as an example, to win delight and praise for the educational system of the Salesians.²⁰¹

How were his people to win youths to the spirit of prayer and a taste for the sacraments and pious practices? In "The Preventive System" he urges them to "bring out the beauty, the grandeur, and the holiness of the Catholic religion, which offers means...so easy and so useful for civil society, the attainment of peace of heart, and the salvation of one's soul."²⁰² Once again we hear the themes of personal salvation, easy holiness, and the satisfaction of basic human needs and desires. The somewhat abstract cast of Don Bosco's remark here might lead some readers to assume erroneously that he is talking abstractly about the beauties of Christianity or the delights of piety. That is not the case, as we know from his preferences in catechetical and historical exposition. The "moral lesson" was not to be added to facts and events; it was to be woven into the exposition or narrative itself.²⁰³ The Christian ideal, the beauty and holiness of religion, was to be woven into hagiography, Bible history, and Church history. The attractiveness of religious practice would, in fact, be incorporated into his treatments of Saint Philip Neri and Saint Aloysius and his biographies of Comollo, Savio, Magone, and Besucco. Presented with the fully realized ideal, youths would know what it meant to be a useful member of society, to attain peace of heart, and to win eternal salvation. Like Saint Leonard of Port Maurice and Father Cafasso, Don Bosco seeks to trigger the mainspring of his listeners' hearts by presenting conceptions of usefulness as well as ideal beauty and holiness. He offers a line of thinking that his raw youths can readily grasp.

16. *Religious associations*

The convergence of various elements meant that the tendency of Don Bosco himself and his milieu to foster associations would also take tangible forms in the religious and educational activities of Valdocco and the Salesian Congregation. We are familiar with Don Bosco's own propensities, and he himself tells

²⁰⁰ MB 9:708.

²⁰¹ MB 9:708-09.

²⁰² "The Preventive System," BM 4:383, no. 4, trans. amended.

²⁰³ Note the advice given by DB to Lemoyne: "Remember that this is a biography; therefore any moral must be woven into the narrative rather than offered apart" (BM 9:351; letter from Turin, Nov. 3, 1869, AS 131/01 Lemoyne; see *Ep.* 786). This is the criterion that DB sought to incorporate into his own historical and hagiographical writings. We may assume he also tried to do the same thing in his Sunday talks on Church history.

us of his initiatives as a young boy and teenager. He was the leader of various ad hoc groups in Morialdo. He headed and promoted the student Society for a Good Time in Chieri. He was at the hub of activities in the Chieri seminary and the pivotal point of deep friendships. Then he became the leader of Turin's street kids.

In the realm of Turinese catechetical activities and oratory initiatives, we know that the tendency to form associations crystallized around two figures: Father John Cocchi and Don Bosco. Don Bosco's organizational bent took in both the educators and the youths. Their educators first formed the Guardian Angel Congregation. Later, a small band of clerics and youths pledged to perform pious practices. In 1854 the first group of "Salesians" came into being. Finally, Don Bosco laid the foundations for the Society of Saint Francis de Sales.

But the educational web of the festive oratory was woven of many different strands. Directorial functions were divided between ecclesiastics and lay people. The "cooperators" of the Oratory performed diverse functions that may or may not have been provided for in the Regulations. Once the Society of Saint Francis de Sales was established, both Salesians and non-Salesians took part in its educational labors.

In line with the Regulations, the Oratory divided its managerial roles among many, including catechists, teachers, assistants, and patrons. The last-mentioned category reminds us of the work of the French *Patronages* and the initiatives of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society.²⁰⁴ The patrons of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales pledged themselves to join in the task of protecting the youthful apprentices who frequented the Oratory.²⁰⁵ The patrons were to follow the moral and Christian formation of the youths as they served their

²⁰⁴ On the *Patronages* movement in France and work on behalf of young farmhands and manual laborers, see Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Les débuts du catholicisme social en France (1822-1870)* (Paris, 1951), pp. 549-604. In Paris this sort of work on behalf of young apprentices began in 1834 with three boys. By 1852 the number being helped was about 4,000; see *Bulletin de la Société de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul* 4 (1852), pp. 21-24. As I note above, the movement was also spreading in Italy, especially in the duchy of Genoa and Rome, more slowly in Piedmont.

²⁰⁵ *Regol.*, pt. 1, ch. 13, p. 26: "1. The patrons and protectors have the very important responsibility of placing the most impoverished and abandoned boys with an employer, and of making sure that apprentices and artisans who frequent the Oratory are not with employers who might jeopardize their eternal salvation."

Lecture e consigli ad uso dei membri delle associazioni di carità, per un membro della Società di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli, traduz. dal francese (Genoa, 1855), pt. 2, ch. 3: "Works related to the patronage of children," §2 "The patronage of apprentices," p. 131: "This system has three basic elements. First, to place boys with people who give every evidence of being trustworthy in religion and business. Second, to visit them... Third, to bring them together for instruction on Sundays and feast days in suitable locales..." See also nn. 232-35 below.

apprenticeships with craftsmen or in various workplaces. Thus group organization at the Oratory tended to spread its influence outside into the home, the family, and the workplace.

To oratory boys Don Bosco offered the Company of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, which did not impose many obligations. The obligations were, in fact, a codified version of the religious principles to be found in *The Companion of Youth*; so we may say that they were the product of Don Bosco's own personal reflection.²⁰⁶ Taking their inspiration from Saint Aloysius, the members were to be careful in fulfilling the duties of a good Christian: "Saint Aloysius from early childhood was so exact in performing his duties, so fond of prayer, and so devout that when he went to church people flocked to see his modest demeanor and his recollection."²⁰⁷ Members were also urged "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, Saint Aloysius received them every week, and as he grew older, more often."²⁰⁸ Third, the members were to "flee from bad companions as from a plague, and be very careful to avoid improper conversation."²⁰⁹ Once again the example of Aloysius was cited: "Saint Aloysius not only shunned such talk, but showed such modesty that no one even dared to utter an unseemly word in his presence."²¹⁰ Fourth, the members were to "practice the greatest charity toward their companions, readily forgiving any offense. Saint Aloysius repaid insults with friendship."²¹¹ The remaining regulations were:

²⁰⁶ In AS 133 Compagnia S. Luigi we find the authentic document of canonical establishment. The Regulations (ms. partly in DB's handwriting) was endorsed by Abp. Frasoni, Apr. 12, 1847. Passages cited are from BM 3:148-50. These Regulations would be published in *Sei domen.* (S. Pier d'Arena, 1878), pp. 48-58 (but with addenda), and in subsequent editions.

²⁰⁷ *Giov. prov.*, pt. 1 [sec. 1], art. 5 ("The reverence proper in church"), p. 16: "When St. Aloysius went to church, people flocked to observe him, and all were edified by his modesty."

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, "Sei domen.," day 4, p. 62: "Reception of the sacraments of confession and communion, which are the two most effective means for overcoming..." *Ibid.*, day 6, p. 65: "He spent three days in preparing himself to receive communion, and three days in thanksgiving after receiving communion."

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, day 3, p. 61: "Grant, St. Aloysius, that I may shun those companions as if they were the plague, whose pestilent talk would aim at the ruin of my soul." See also *ibid.*, day 7, p. 68 (3 additional days were offered for those making a novena).

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, day 3, p. 60: "Whenever dirty talk got into a conversation, no one would pursue it once Aloysius joined the group."

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, day 5, pp. 63-64: "Not only did [Aloysius] have the soul of charity toward his neighbors. He had the marvelous knack of enduring their faults... Those who scorned him more were the ones he loved more."

5. Have the greatest respect for the house of God. Urge others to practice virtue and join the Company. To show his love for his neighbor, Saint Aloysius volunteered to nurse the victims of a plague and thereby sacrificed his own life.²¹²
6. Be very diligent in your work and in the fulfillment of your other duties; promptly obey your parents and superiors.²¹³
7. When a member falls sick, all the others should pray for him and also give him material assistance according to their means.

These regulations make it clear that this Company fitted nicely into the traditional mold of such associations, even though their actual formulation goes back to earlier writings of Don Bosco. The aims proposed to the young members are essentially those of the Company of Saint Aloysius that had been founded in Bergamo by a former Jesuit, Louis Mozzi de' Capitani (1747-1813), and then promoted elsewhere.²¹⁴ It also shows affinities with a company of the same name founded around the end of the eighteenth century by Father John Baptist Rubino in Morra (Cuneo) and then carried to other cities of Piedmont.²¹⁵ Like them, Don Bosco's Company had as its general aim the exercise of virtue in imitation of Aloysius Gonzaga.²¹⁶ In the religious outlook of the

²¹² Ibid., day 5, p. 64: "When a plague broke out in Rome, he got permission to serve the plague victims."

²¹³ Ibid., pp. 13-16: "The first virtue of a young person is obedience..."

²¹⁴ On Mozzi, see the article by Silvio Civildini in *Enc. catt.* 8, col. 1506. The *Regole e statuti della Compagnia di S. Luigi Gonzaga* were first published in Bergamo in 1795. For influence on the Cavanis brothers, see Francesco Saverio Zanon, *Compendio della vita dei servi di Dio P. Anton'Angelo e P. Marcantonio conti Cavanis* (Venice, 1927), pp. 70-86; on relations with Pavoni in Brescia, see pp. 233-34.

²¹⁵ [Giambattista Rubino], *Il modello e protettore della gioventù S. Luigi Gonzaga, con le regole della Compagnia sotto l'invocazione del medesimo santo* (Carmagnola, 1815), pp. 10-11: "Several Companies under the patronage of St. Aloysius have been founded in Italy, Switzerland, Bavaria, Germany, and elsewhere... But this one for young people, governed by the rules herein given, began in the parish of Morra, in the old diocese of Alba, in 1793. There young people devoted to St. Aloysius came together for practices of piety in his honor, beginning on the Sunday consecrated to the Most Holy Name of Mary (Sept. 15) in that same year." We are also told that other Companies were founded in Fossano, Diano d'Alba, Novello, and Monforte (pp. 12-13). For membership in the Morra Company, one had to be 11; the required age was 10 in the Fossano Company (p. 162).

A company for adult men and women also existed in the church of St. Philip, adjacent to the Chieri seminary.

²¹⁶ *Regol.*, p. 45: "The purpose that the members have in mind is to imitate this saint in those virtues compatible with their own state in life, and to invoke his protection during their lives and at the moment of their deaths." [Rubino], ch. 1, p. 161: "The aim of this Company is... to progress on the pathway of virtue and Christian piety under the example and patronage of that angelic youth, St. Aloysius Gonzaga."

time, “virtue” meant a religious conception of certain duties that had to be carried out: for God, oneself, and one’s fellow human beings.

Harkening back to the relevant tradition were such items as the name of the Company and the designation of the lay director as “prior.”²¹⁷ Also traditional were specific activities, such as performing services for sick members.²¹⁸

The internal dialectic of Don Bosco’s own projects displays interaction. At first it was the festive oratory that provided stimulus and initiative for other efforts. The Regulations for the Festive Oratory served as the basis for a similar document covering the hospice addition, and the latter then influenced other codifications leading up to the *Regulations for the [Salesian] Houses*. The festive oratory provided the boarding students and artisans with the Company of Saint Aloysius, which initially included most of the youths but was restricted to younger boys when other associations arose.²¹⁹

After 1855-1856 came influences from the other end. It was now the intern component that gave impetus and initiative to the festive oratory. From the interns came the Company of Mary Immaculate, the Company of the Blessed Sacrament (with its altar boy contingent), and the Company of Saint Joseph among the artisans. The last Company then split into separate associations for adolescents and young men.

The Oratory took in these associations. Insofar as possible, it drew on the intern student members for catechists to teach the externs, at least on Sundays and holy days. But just as new needs gave rise to new associations, so new purposes spurred and maintained further associational differentiation. This was true, at least, in receptive environments, and particularly so among the interns.

The Company of Mary Immaculate and the Company of the Blessed Sacrament arose out of entreaties made by the educator that were taken seriously by groups of more committed and enterprising youths. Don Bosco’s stress on the importance of frequenting the Eucharist around 1855-1856 did not evoke the response he had been hoping for. But a day when no one came to the altar rail to receive communion did prompt Dominic Savio, Joseph Bongiovanni, and others to form a company. Amid the atmosphere of the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception, its specific name was to be the Company of Mary Immaculate.²²⁰

²¹⁷ The Morra Company was also headed by a prior elected each year. See Rubino, p. 164.

²¹⁸ The Morra Company chose four members to take on the specific task of visiting the sick. See Rubino, pp. 17-18.

²¹⁹ On all these matters, see *Indice* MB, s.v. “Compagnie religiose,” pp. 82-83.

²²⁰ The most extensive elaboration of these data on the Company of Mary Immaculate is Caviglia’s study, *Savio Domenico e Don Bosco*, in *Opere e scritti* 4:441-64. He discusses in detail the role of Dominic Savio in founding the Company, working out its rules and pursuing its activities. Here I point up some connections with activities already

Also urgent was the need for educational infrastructures. Don Bosco's troupe of available educators around 1855 was pretty sparse: e.g., Father Victor Alasonatti, the seminarian Michael Rua, Mama Margaret, and Joseph Buzzetti. Youngsters flocked out of the Oratory, crammed with wise exhortations, to head for school or work in widely disparate locales. They felt a need to prolong the presence of their educator in some way and to offer him more help. The Company of Mary Immaculate had this aim in view as well, at a time when the Society of Saint Francis de Sales was barely conceived. For some years the new Company was a secret one, hoping thereby to heighten its influence on the surrounding milieu. The boys enrolled in it were carefully selected in advance. The members looked after boys who especially needed some sort of help: newcomers, wild characters, slow learners, and so forth. In short, the Company of Mary Immaculate repeated some of the experiences that could be witnessed in other schools, those of the Jesuits, for example.²²¹ This secrecy, however, prevented the Company from fully achieving the devotional purposes that it initially set for itself: to provide for eucharistic communion in turns and serve as a reminder to those around them. Thus, thanks to the encouragement of Don Bosco and the initiative of the cleric Joseph Bongiovanni, the Company of the Blessed Sacrament came into being. Its specific goals were to promote reception of the sacraments, eucharistic devotion in general, and altar boy service at sacred functions.²²²

The anticlericalism that now pervaded Piedmont forced the educators to step in and defend the members of the new Company, who were given the contemptuous label of Bongiovannists.²²³ Don Bosco stoutly promoted their work and repeatedly highlighted its educational function. The boys would see their

going on at the Oratory. A "patron" was a member of the Company of Mary Immaculate who took charge of a "client" or young person in need of special help (p. 464). A "patron," as noted in a different context, was one who undertook to assist a young apprentice of the Oratory.

The rules of the Company of Mary Immaculate almost echo those of the Company of St. Aloysius in speaking about certain matters: e.g., obedience, fulfillment of one's duties, charity toward others, forgiveness of offenses against oneself, and patient tolerance of one another. For the rules of the Company of Mary Immaculate, see SDS:99-102.

²²¹ On the vicissitudes of the Company of Mary Immaculate, see *Indice MB*, p. 83. For comparable groups in Jesuit educational institutions, see P. Kellerwessel, *Geschichte der Marianischen Kongregationen* (Vienna, 1930); Emile Villaret, SJ, *Les congrégations mariales* (Paris, 1947). The most famous and feared Marian group around the start of the 19th century was the Congregation or Sodality of Mary Help of Christians, which was defamed even in the novels of Eugène Sue (1804-57). It distinguished itself by aiding Pius VII when he was a prisoner in Fontainebleau.

²²² AS 133 Compagnia SS. Sacramento: DB's handwritten draft of the rules [1857]; see BM 5:629-30, appendix 21.

²²³ See BM 9:207; conference to SDBs on Dec. 28, 1868.

best peers privileged to serve at the altar and wear cassocks as they performed almost priestly functions. Here was a visible antidote to the feelings of antipathy for the clerical state that they might have imbibed from their native milieu. At the same time it was an enticement to one of the ideals that Don Bosco hoped to arouse in them.²²⁴

Thus the companies became an integral part of Don Bosco's educational system, compensating for possible deficiencies in personnel, needed assistance, and penetration into every area. That was not their only function, however. They also helped to intensify religious values on the community level and in the personal life of active members. By comparison with similar associations, such as various Marian sodalities or the Company of Saint Aloysius founded by Rubino, those founded or sponsored by Don Bosco took on specific value by virtue of the kind of educational setup of which they were a part: i.e., the festive oratory and intern complex—their basic nature, looseness, and serenity deriving from Don Bosco's own personality.

Also worth noting are the centralization of the companies and their closeness to projects not under Don Bosco's charge. Their respective rules correlate with those of the Oratory, the hospice addition, and the Salesian houses. The direction is centripetal. They do not open out to other environments, as did the Company founded by Rubino and other associations in Turin and Piedmont. Don Bosco was aware of those other associations and followed them to some extent; but he did not accept them as such because they were linked to other founders, or simply because he did not want to overload the superstructures created at Valdocco.

As a result, his associations rarely meshed with others. Consider his Mutual Aid Society, for example. Established in 1850, it was still flourishing in the latter years of the century amid numerous worker societies. We may assume it was inspired by the various mutual aid societies that began to appear after 1822. But its life falls wholly within the confines of the Company of Saint Aloysius as organized in the extern oratories of Valdocco and Porta Nuova. Indeed the rules restricted his Mutual Aid Society to members of the Company of Saint Aloysius.²²⁵

²²⁴ See the recollections of Fr. Francesia in his biography of Fr. Bongiovanni, *Memorie biografiche di Salesiani defunti* (S. Benigno Canavese, 1903), pp. 48–49. Also see DB's important circular to SDBs, Jan. 1, 1876: "I believe that these associations deserve to be called *the key to piety, the safeguard of morality, and the mainstay of priestly and religious vocations*" (BM 12:15; AS 131/03 Circolari ai Salesiani). Also see the index of the *Ep.*, s.v. "Compagnie," 4:615.

²²⁵ On DB's Mutual Aid Society, see AS 134 (published writings of DB). See, in particular, *Società di mutuo soccorso di alcuni individui della Compagnia di San Luigi eretta nell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales* (Turin: Speirani e Ferrero, 1850). See also BM 4:52–56. For already existing societies, see Emilio R. Papa, *Origini delle società operaie: Libertà di associazione e organizzazioni operaie di mutuo soccorso in Piemonte (1848-1861)*

The most conspicuous interaction was with the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. It had taken a foothold in Rome in 1836, and in the kingdom of Sardinia, at Nice, in 1844.²²⁶ In Turin the first chapter of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society was established in 1850, being incorporated with the central office in Paris in July.²²⁷ Its first members were practicing Catholics who were associated with the Ecclesiastical College, Fathers Louis Guala and Joseph Cafasso, and the retreats at Saint Ignatius in Lanzo.²²⁸ Ideally they seemed to be linked to the already extinct and much maligned *Amicizia Cattolica*.²²⁹ In 1855 there were eight chapters in Piedmont, all dependent on the Turin council. Six were in the capital itself: those of the parishes of the Annunciation, the Holy Martyrs, Saint Maximus, Our Lady of Consolation, and the Blessed Sacrament, and that of Saint Francis de Sales (at the Church of the Visitation). One was in Alessandria, and another was the first in Nice.²³⁰ The duchy of Genoa had twenty-three chapters, six of them in Genoa and two in Piedmontese areas (Novi and Ovada). In Sardinia there was a chapter in Sassari. Savoy had thirteen. In Italy the Sardinian States had been the most responsive to Saint Vincent, surpassing even the Papal States. There were twenty-five chapters in the Papal States, thirteen of

(Milan, 1967); Gian Mario Bravo, *Torino operaia: Mondo del lavoro e idee sociali nell'età di Carlo Alberto* (Turin: Einaudi, 1968). Also see n. 119 of ch. IV in this volume.

I am not sure about the relationship between DB and a *Pia unione provvisoria sotto l'invocazione di S. Francesco di Sales* to check the spread of irreligion. Lemoyne offers us its basic "statement of purpose" when he records the events of 1850 (BM 4:120-22). The projected scheme there reflects and perhaps copies documents of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

²²⁶ For an historical outline and further background, see the following works: *Manuale della Società di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli* (Genoa, 1854), pp. 417-20; Albert Foucault, *La Société de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul: Histoire de Cent ans* (Paris, 1933); Gabriele DeRosa, *Storia del movimento cattolico in Italia* 1 (Bari, 1966), 154; Franco Molinari, "Le conferenze di S. Vincenzo in Italia nel secolo XIX," in *Spiritualità e azione del laicato cattolico italiano* 1 (Padua, 1969), 59-103; Duroselle (see n. 204), p. 756.

²²⁷ On the date of incorporation, see *Bulletin de la Société de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul* 2 (1850), 197. There is a brief comment in *ibid.* 3 (1851), 139: "In Turin the Lord designed to bless persevering effort. What had seemed impossible eight years earlier became a reality, thanks to the initiative of our zealous confreres in Genoa."

²²⁸ This founding (but placed in 1852) is described in Nicolis di Robilant, *Vita... Cafasso* 2:293. Another version, with the initiative attributed to Fr. Robert Murialdo, is given by Castellani, *Il beato Leonardo Murialdo* 1:387-88.

²²⁹ So we learn from the *Rendiconto generale dal 15 dicembre 1853 al 31 dicembre 1854* (Turin: Speirani e Tortone [1855]), p. 7, which tells us that at the time the president was Count Charles Cays, and the secretary was Louis Galleani d'Agliano. On the active role of the Aglianos in *Amicizia Cattolica*, see Candido Bona, IMC, *Le "Amicizie" Società segrete e rinascita religiosa (1770-1830)* (Turin, 1962), p. 650 (index).

²³⁰ *Tableau des Conférences: Etat au 1^{er} février 1855* (Paris [1855]), p. 21. The Turin Council was established in Nov. 1853 (see *Bulletin* 5 [1853], 376), the Superior Council for the Piedmont chapters in Mar. 1856 (see *Bulletin* 8 [1856], 108).

them in Rome. In the summer of 1854 the members of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society distinguished themselves in offering generous assistance to cholera victims in Turin and other places.²³¹

In inspiration the Saint Vincent de Paul Society was wholly independent of Don Bosco; but in Turin it came out of the same religious atmosphere, that of Piedmont under French influence. Its many projects included the propagation of good books, catechism lessons for children, assistance to the poor, and sponsorship of young apprentices. The Turin chapters were obviously tied very closely to those in France and Belgium. The Italian *Bulletin* of the Society, founded in Genoa in 1855, included news of the French branch and thus increased the possibility of exchanging experiences.

From the very beginning the members of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society tended to link their own efforts with all those who, prompted by the Romantic concern for education, sought to promote popular education, agricultural schools, and help to convicts and ex-convicts.²³² Their spirituality of charity found

²³¹ Striking testimony comes from the SDB coadjutor brother Peter Enria, whose family was decimated by cholera (AS 110 Enria). Also eloquent is the *Rendiconto generale* cited in n. 229 above. We read, e.g.: "The extraordinary catastrophe of the cholera epidemic furnished the Society with an opportunity to experience better how these blessings help to infuse spirit even into the weak and prodigiously to multiply our forces... Venturing into the task with only 200 lire in funds, which soon grew to a higher amount through donations, the special committee was in a position to look after the primary and most urgent needs of cholera victims in the parish of Borgo Dora. Gradually, municipal charity increased the fund to 2,995.10 lire, so that the committee was later able to extend its help to other parishes and visit 430 families between Aug. 27 and Nov. 30." This is followed by detailed data on cash funds and subsidies of bread, flour, mear, firewood, and extraordinary help. Then come data on aid to families and young orphans, apprentices helped by patrons, patrons for communion, chimney sweeps instructed, laborers assisted in job-hunting, assistance rendered to the sick and the dying, books loaned and distributed, and other items distributed (clothing, blankets, bedding, crucifixes, medals, etc.). Members alive in Dec. 1854: 220. Deceased in 1854: Silvio Pellico, Joseph Provana of Collegno (b. 1785), and Maurice Lucerna of Rorà.

On its ordinary work on behalf of young people we read: "In the past year [the Society] regularized its work of patronage vis-à-vis boys from the families being helped. It sought to promote their attendance at catechism lessons on Sundays and holy days, either in their own parishes or in suitable oratories. It pursued a similar effort among the poor chimney sweeps of the Val d'Aosta, who are an object of special concern and attention to the Society. Every Sunday it brings them together in the Oratory of St. Martin in Porta Palazzo, seeking to provide them with suitable religious instruction from worthy priests." Note how the differing initiatives, when seen from different outlooks, focus on St. Vincent de Paul, DB, Fr. Cocchi, Murialdo, or whomever.

²³² On the Society of Patrons for Ex-convicts, we find some comments in the Rome periodical *L'educatore* 1 (1847), 89-91. The group was also in Turin (*ibid.*, p. 90). See also [G. Vammy], "Alcune idee sul patronato dei liberati dal carcere," tradotta da un francese, in *Letture di famiglia* 2 (1843), 137-39, with note by Ilarione Petitti di Rore-

its special inspiration in the figure of Vincent de Paul. Charity toward all, pondered and assimilated by the members, was translated into patience and gentleness, particularly with the poor and needy children of the slums.²³³

There was every reason to foresee interaction between the Saint Vincent de Paul Society and the oratories for poor young people in Turin. Surviving documentation reveals that subsidies were distributed to Don Bosco's oratories and that of Saint Martin in the Molassi district.²³⁴ Thus the two projects, independent of each other, did have connecting links: not only Father Cafasso and diocesan organisms but also the benevolent assistance of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society and its members. The latter included devout Christians of the upper and middle classes.

It hardly seems fortuitous, then, that in February 1855 a fascicle of the *Catholic Readings* should propose rules for a "Saint Vincent de Paul Society for young men in the arts, trades, and business," one that ordinarily would not accept for membership university students or members of the professions.²³⁵

to; C. Biollè, "Patronato pei liberati dal carcere della provincia di Milano," in *Letture di famiglia* 4 (1845), 150-51. As the respective biographies inform us, work was done in this area by Fr. Cafasso, the Murialdo cousins, and Fr. Hyacinth Carpano.

²³³ Here I cite thoughts shared by DB, too, from *Letture e consigli ad uso dei membri delle associazioni di carità*, pt. 2, ch. 3, §2, p. 134: "Gentleness goes farther than violence"; pp. 135-36: "There is nobody who does not like children for a moment or so. But it is a heavenly vocation and virtue to keep on loving them in spite of their faults; to love them while correcting the flaws in their character and tending the hidden, deeply hidden, seeds of virtue in them; to love them while choosing to be their guide. One not so disposed will never be of use as a patron...will never have the simple affability needed with children, the gentle familiarity without condescension that inspires their confidence and revelations from their hearts. Without these prerequisites a person will never be able to nurture in them the fine qualities we admire in children so much: affectionate attachment to their superiors, frankness, and love of truth. Nothing around them escapes their keen gaze, and they will certainly not love anyone who does not make a commitment to love them."

²³⁴ Administrative reports of Count Cays, 1862-64, ms. notebooks, partly Cays's (Cays Archive at UPS). Jan. 28, 1863: to the OSFS, 10 lire; to the Oratory of St. Martin, 15 lire; Swiss chimney sweeps project, 18 lire. Feb. 11, 1863: to the Guardian Angel Oratory, 3 lire; Conception Oratory, 6 lire. Feb. 18, 1863: 100 bread tickets for the Val d'Aosta chimney sweeps, 10 lire. Feb. 15, 1863: Swiss chimney sweeps, 10 lire; St. Aloysius Oratory, 10 lire. Mar. 4: OSFS, 10 lire; Val d'Aosta chimney sweeps project, 100 lire; Swiss chimney sweeps, 30 lire; hospital project, 15 lire. Apr. 15, 1863: St. Salvatio Oratory, 18 lire; hospital project, 15 lire. Apr. 29, 1863: subsidy for catechism lessons at Holy Martyrs, 50 lire; at Conception, 50 lire; at St. Maximus, 50 lire; at St. Salvatio, 50 lire...

²³⁵ *La buona regola di vita per conservare la sanità* (LC 2 [1855], fasc. 23-24, Feb. 10 and 25), pp. 240-44: "1. Our St. Vincent de Paul Society for young men in the arts, trades, and business fields is exclusively dedicated to charitable works and sound morals. 2. Generally it will not accept for membership lawyers, doctors, or university students... 3. The society is to be divided up into sections. Eight will suffice to compose a section. There can

Around that period two chapters of Saint Vincent de Paul came into being, but we do not know the exact dates. One was at the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales in Valdocco, the other at the Oratory of Saint Aloysius in Porta Nuova. The members were older adolescents and young men: artisans, students, and some of the seminarians housed by Don Bosco.²³⁶ Assessing dues and deriving subsidies from more affluent chapters of the society, the chapters of the two oratories undertook charitable works in poor areas of the city's periphery (in Borgo Dora and Moschino especially), encountering no little difficulty and hostility.

The evolution of the Valdocco Oratory brought about certain changes in its chapter. By 1870 the idea of interns going out to work in neighborhoods was no longer looked upon with favor. The members were mainly extern workers and youths who attended the festive oratory. The latter came to be the majority.

The boarding school, on the other hand, tended to foster the four companies (with varying fortunes). The companies ended up becoming classic components of the Salesian educational system in Italy and other countries: in the festive oratories, the high schools, and similar projects. Less successfully associated with those companies at Valdocco was the *Giardinetto di Maria*, whose statutes Father Berto drew up on the basis of those proposed by Frassinetti.

The companies were primarily designed to be "religious" ones and to nurture piety, as we see clearly from Father Berto's descriptive title of a pamphlet on the Company of the Blessed Sacrament: "Food for Piety."²³⁷ Here piety was understood in the broad sense as active Christian living. It entailed "duties" toward God and one's neighbor. Nourished by the sacraments, one would grow strong in virtue; and this would translate into the "practice of charity" toward others.

be no more than 30 members in a section. In the same city and town there can be several sections divided up here and there... 5. But members thus enrolled can continue to belong to the society until they reach the age of 40. After that age they are to become honorary members, and advisers in serious situations. There can be very young aspirants to membership, who will be accepted as members when they reach the age of 15... 10. Each week individual members will give one or two pennies, as the section decides, to the secretary-treasurer, which will be used to help needy youngsters..."

²³⁶ AS 38 Torino-St. Franc. di Sales has minutes of the meetings of the chapter of St. Francis de Sales (associated with the St. Vincent de Paul Society) for 1858. The enumeration presupposes earlier minutes. Fr. Lemoyne alludes to the testimony of John Villa (1836-1929), who gave a deposition at the information-gathering process for DB. Villa said that the Mutual Aid Society, instituted in 1850, was still around in 1856. The following year, adds Lemoyne, the society was transformed into a chapter associated with the St. Vincent de Paul Society. See BM 4:55.

On the vicissitudes of the equivalent chapter at the St. Aloysius Oratory, see Castellani, *Murialdo*, 1:495-96.

²³⁷ [Gioachino Berto], *Alimento di pietà: Compagnia del SS. Sacramento eretta nei collegi ed istituti salesiani. Manualletto pei confratelli* (Turin: Salesiana, 1909^o).

The religious companies that arose in the high school milieu remained fairly similar to traditional ones. By comparison with religious associations of the eighteenth century, those of Don Bosco framed devotional life in terms of essentials and a religious life that stressed the “fulfillment of duties” and sacramental practice. By comparison with religious associations of an earlier day (e.g., confraternities, sodalities, and congregations), the “apostolic” or charitable element was more explicitly accepted by Don Bosco’s companies; but its application was largely restricted to life within the school environment. The essential cast of devotional practice and the means used to grow in “virtue” gave Don Bosco’s companies more flexibility than, say, the *Giardinetto di Maria* proposed by Frassinetti.

The note of responding to the times was evident in the educational and apologetic thrust of Don Bosco’s organizations. As we saw above, Don Bosco expected the Company of the Blessed Sacrament to purify the image of the priest in the minds of his youngsters, ridding them of anticlerical prejudices that they might have picked up from their home milieus. The response to the times was particularly evident, however, in the Company of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, the Mutual Aid Society, and the chapters associated with the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. These associations had aims of active charity and social assistance that related them more explicitly and consciously to their milieu. They became a source of energy radiating influence on the world of family life and work. And since they were linked to the whole complex of works under Don Bosco’s direction, through his person they received nourishment and stimulation from the most disparate sectors of civil and religious life.

As a whole, these projects were components of an effort that preceded social awareness in the strict and proper sense. When the society promoting Catholic Congresses (*Opera dei Congressi*) in Italy came on the scene, the Salesian companies and associations retained traces of Don Bosco’s own attitude and approach. They kept their juridical autonomy and their independence of action. While they were open to outside suggestion and inspiration, very weakly in intern settings, their deepest roots were in the family stock that had produced them. Their life and vitality unfolded in terms of these roots.²³⁸

²³⁸ Here I would like to point up the sense and importance attributed to catechetical instruction.

Obvious was its value in helping the faithful to grow in true religion and morality. It was clearly important in preserving people from dechristianization and leading the Church toward its expected triumphs. Thus instruction provided the rationale for such “religious observances” as the teaching of Christian doctrine to children, the catechism of perseverance for adults, and Sunday instruction for all the faithful. Partially the heir of 18th-century rationalism, the 19th century attributed importance to reason and enlightened faith. As I noted earlier, however, it tended to provide data and knowledge

EXCURSUS

Devotional schedules of some Turin churches 1862

Holy Martyrs: Weekday Masses every half hour until 11:30 A.M. Sunday and feast day Masses from 5:30 A.M. until 11:00 A.M., then at noon. Parish Mass at 10:30 A.M. Last Mass on weekdays at 11:30 A.M., on Sundays and feasts at noon. Explanation of the gospel at 11:00 A.M., then benediction, then last Mass. Christian doctrine for boys and girls: 4:00 P.M. in winter, around 5:30 P.M. in summer. Instruction around evening. Benediction on weekdays at 9:00 A.M., during triduums or novenas at the Heart of Mary altar; daily in the evening before the Angelus. Benediction on Sundays and feasts: 11:45 A.M., in the evening after the sermon or instruction. Christmas novena: 4:00 P.M.: rosary, sermon, prophecies, benediction. May devotions: 6:00 P.M.: rosary, chanting of Lauds, sermon, litany, benediction; recitation of Lauds begins on the last day of April and ends on the first Sunday of June (*L'indicatore*, pp. 30-31).

Our Lady of the Angels: Sunday and feast day Masses every half hour from the Angelus to 10:00 A.M., then at 10:30 A.M. and 11:45 A.M. Weekday Mass-

to the heart as well as the mind. That should warn us against attributing merely intellectual value to the "doctrine" imparted in 19th-century catechetical instruction.

Rather than expressions such as "penetrating the Christian mysteries," DB, too, wittingly or unwittingly preferred other expressions more obvious to the popular mind: e.g., "becoming educated" (*istruirsi*) in the divine mysteries, learning and teaching the truths of faith. But we would certainly be mistaken to think that DB and his contemporaries envisioned a "knowledge of Christian truth" that did not entail, along with clear understanding, penetration of the truth into the depths of the heart where it would affect the emotions and one's whole way of living.

Working up DB's *Maraviglie*, Fr. Barberis wrote or copied the following sentence about St. Gregory Thaumaturgus (ca. 213-ca. 270): "Then Gregory asked...for time to steep himself better in the sacred mysteries" (AS 133 *Maraviglie*, a. 2, p. 8). The notion of "steeping" oneself in the sacred mysteries is an appealing one today, suggesting that we have to immerse ourselves in the reality that is Christian truth. But DB corrected the phrase as follows: "Gregory asked...for time to become better instructed in the sacred mysteries" (*ibid.* and *Maraviglie*, 1868 ed., p. 51). His version might seem to be the poorer one. But we must remember that in the mind of DB and his contemporaries, instruction, if considered merely notional knowledge, was only one phase of "knowing" God, Jesus, the Church, true religion, the world, salvation, and so forth.

es every half hour from the Angelus to 10:00 A.M., then at 11:00 A.M. Parish Mass at 10:30 A.M. Explanation of the gospel at 11:00 A.M. Last Mass on Sundays and feasts at 11:45 A.M., weekdays at 11:00 A.M. Lenten sermon at 11:00 A.M. Catechism: winter at 2:00 P.M., summer at 4:30 P.M. Catechism for adults: winter at 4:30 P.M., summer at 5:00 P.M. Instruction: winter at 5:30 P.M., summer at 6:00 P.M. Benediction on Sundays and feasts at 11:30 A.M., and in Lent before the sermon: at 4:00 P.M. in winter, and at 6:30 P.M. in summer. Benediction on weekdays around nightfall. February 22: St. Margaret of Cortona, patroness of the Third Order established here. March 19: St. Joseph, spouse of Mary. June 13: St. Anthony of Padua. August 2: titular feast of Our Lady of the Angels with evening procession. August 16: St. Roch, patron of the Third Order established here. October 4: St. Francis of Assisi, founder of three orders. October 19: St. Peter of Alcantara. December 8: the Immaculate Conception of Mary. From December 16: Christmas novena; 5:30 A.M. Mass, discourse, and benediction; 11:00 A.M., Mass, benediction, and another Mass; 4:00 P.M., chanting of prophecies and benediction. December 31, last day of the year: Benediction around evening, with chanting of the *Te Deum* (*L'indicatore*, p. 44).

Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco. Weekday Masses at sunrise and at 7:45 A.M. Sunday and feast day Masses at 6:00 A.M., 7:00 A.M., 9:00 A.M.; a half hour later in winter. Presentation of Church history at 9:30 A.M. Weekdays during Lent, 5 weeks, catechism from 12:30-1:15 P.M. for boys only. Private catechism at 8:30 P.M. May devotions: rosary, reading or sermon, and benediction at 7:00 P.M. Christmas novena at 6:00 A.M. The six Sundays preceding the feast of St. Aloysius, devotions at 10:00 A.M. (*L'indicatore*, p. 74).

Oratory of St. Martin at Porta d'Italia. Sunday and feast day Masses at 8:30 A.M.; gospel explanation within Mass; catechism afterward. Vespers, sermon, benediction around nightfall. On the last Sunday of every month there is a special evening service for the atonement of blasphemy. May devotions, sermon, and benediction at nightfall. During Lent there is catechism daily at noon. Association for chimney sweeps: from mid-October to the end of May there is a 10:30 A.M. Mass on Sundays and feasts, with catechism and special instruction, for chimney sweeps (*L'indicatore*, p. 76).



THE SALESIANS AS A NEW BREED OF RELIGIOUS FOR THE SALVATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

1. Socioreligious problems of the clergy

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the situation of the clergy seemed to have become completely the opposite of what it had been in the preceding century. In the eighteenth century people lamented that priests were too numerous, poorly chosen, and badly employed.¹ When the clergy was viewed as a whole, distinguished religious and priests of high moral prestige seemed to have disappeared. Where were such figures as Saints Paul of the Cross, Leonard of Port Maurice, and Alphonsus Liguori and Blessed Sebastian Valfré? There was grumbling about lazy clerics who spent the day lounging in parlors or accompanying gentlemen in their carriages.² Diocesan synods in rural areas censured

¹ Besides manuals of Church history dealing with the 18th century, on Piedmont see Guido Quazza, *Le riforme in Piemonte nella prima metà del Settecento* (Modena, 1957). For the second half of the century, there is retrospective documentary value in the works of Jansenists, Jacobins, and other rebellious spirits. See, e.g., Gaspare Morardo, *Del culto religioso e de' suoi ministri* (Turin, 1799); idem, *La Chiesa subalpina l'anno XII della repubblica francese* (Turin, 1802). But that does not cover the whole range of examples that show up in the documentation of the Turin state archives (sec. I, Mat. eccl., Vescovadi e la serie Regolari). The following are useful on France and the cultural perspective: Pierre Sage, *Le "bon prêtre" dans la littérature française d'Amadis de Gaule au Génie du Christianisme* (Geneva-Lille, 1951); Paul Broutin, "La piété sacerdotale au début du XIX^e siècle," in *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 20 (1939), 158-80.

² See the untitled memorandum of Victor Amadeus II to the Holy See in 1722 (Secret Archives of the Vatican: Secretariat of State, Nunciature to Savoy, mazzo 303, f. 30): "All we find in Turin are more than 500 priests appointed to serve penitents or confraternities. They have nothing to do except celebrate Mass every morning and then spend the rest of the day in playing games or serving as agents in private homes. There are parishes in Piedmont where these sorts of vagabond priests have a patrimony of up to 40, 50, 60, 70, or 80 *scudi*, barely three of which serve the Church..." For other documentation on the period of Victor Amadeus II, see Franco Venturi, *Saggi sull'Europa illuminista: 1. Alberto Radicati di Passerano* (Turin, 1954), pp. 73-74.

priests for ascending the altar to celebrate the awesome sacrifice of the Mass after handling work tools in fields and barns, bargaining over the price of animals, or arguing with farmhands.³ People complained about the mass of clerics without high ideals. Bishop Michael Casati of Mondovì and Bishop Paul Maurice Caissotti of Asti (1726-1786) dismissed their seminarians *en masse*, hoping to give reality to the reforms of Trent. They would start over with the formation of their clergy, unencumbered by traditions of laxity.⁴

The regular clergy were of even greater concern. This was especially true in an atmosphere of jurisdictionalism, which detected the long arm of the court of Rome, and under the pressure of Enlightenment utilitarianism, which saw friars and monks as useless or even harmful to civil society. The cloister and the vow of obedience were viewed as monstrously constricting, the vow of chastity as antinatural, and poverty as an empty word.⁵

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Catholic conscience had revived its faith in the essential importance of both the secular and regular clergy. Ideals had come back to life, but even the most cursory statistics indicated

³ *Acta synodi dioecesis vercellensis primae, quam... Johannes Petrus Solarius... episcopus sanctae vercellensis ecclesiae et comes habuit anno a Christo nato 1749* (Turin, n.d.), p. 111: "Verum tantum hodie quorundam inolevit temeritas, religionisque contentus, ut propriam dignitatem, et honorem clericalem parvipendentes non venerationem aliis afferant, sed scandalum; moribus pessimis imbutos se cum non mediocri animarum pernicie demonstrent, et laicis occasionem prebeant excusandi quae agunt mala, quod a clericis similia fieri videant. Alii enim recitato festinanter officio et missa praepropere celebrata, magnam diei partem transigunt in officinis, in quas otiosissimi hominum convenire solent; alii publicis in tabernis dies, et noctes etiam aleis ludunt; alii spectaculis, et choreis omnibus delectantur, atque intersunt; alii secularibus negotiis implicati praedia conducunt in vaccino stercore semper immersi, in aratris, ligonibus, tatillis, pecoribus curam omnem suam ponentes et de nulla re magis, quam de majore annonae pretio et minore quam possunt eroganda operariis conductis mercede solliciti; alii nobilium et divitum bona procurant quotidie ruribus obequitantes; alii delicati perofficiose mulieres observant; potatores alii in cauponis, et criptis vino se ingurgitant, ut jam vix appareat in quo hujusmodi clerici a malis laicis distent. Ab his vero quid unquam boni capiat populus aut a quomodo peccandum potius non provocetur? Nam etsi non desint, sunt enim multi, qui vitam clerico dignam agant, tamen plus a paucis malis destruitur, quam a multis bonis aedificetur." Similar complaints and warnings can be found in synodal decrees of Turin (1729), Asti (1731), and Saluzzo (1750).

⁴ Lorenzo Mongardi, *Ne' funerali di Michele Casati, vescovo di Mondovì* (Mondovì, 1783); Lorenzo Antonio Canale, *Ne' funerali di sua eccellenza rev.ma monsignore Paolo Morizio Caissotti di Chiusano, vescovo d'Asti* (Asti, 1787); and [Gaetano Donaudi], obituary of Bp. Caissotti in *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques*, May 22, 1787.

⁵ See, e.g., the Enlightenment-inspired works of Albert Radicati di Passerano (1698-1737), Charles Anthony Pilati (1733-1802), and Peter Giannone (1676-1748).

a sharp decline in the number of priests.⁶ The lack of sufficient priests was what many noticed now. Wrote Frassinetti in 1867: "This is the great need of the day. Every year large numbers of priests die, and few new ones are ordained." He cites figures. In the archdiocese of Genoa, for example, 247 priests died in the decade 1856-1865, but only 85 were ordained:

This is a fact of the most serious nature. If workers in the field are missing in such large proportions, the harvest can only be greatly reduced. Many parishes have but one priest. He is often old and sometimes sickly. How can we promote attendance at the sacraments in such cases? They are the fountains of grace, but they will remain fairly inaccessible to the majority of the faithful insofar as they are difficult of access.⁸

It was not a merely local situation. It took in all of Italy and was frighteningly evident in France.⁹ The faith was languishing, losing its power to influence. Even those who recognized only its ethical value were concerned. François Guizot (1787-1874) and Louis-Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877) took an interest in seminary education in France.¹⁰ In Italy it was a concern for such people as Rosmini, Gino Capponi (1792-1876), Raphael Lambruschini (1788-

⁶ Liborio Rossi (1824-91), Oblate Missionary of Rho, *Procuriamo alla Santa Chiesa dei preti e buoni preti* (Turin: OSFS, 1876²), p. 146: "In almost every diocese the number of deaths exceeds by half the number of newly ordained, and by two-thirds in some. Who cannot see how miserably we will end up at that rate?"

⁷ Frassinetti, *Compendio della teologia morale di S. Alfonso M. de' Liguori* (Genoa, 18673), p. 680; published in *Opere ascetiche* 3:103. In a footnote Frassinetti gives the statistics for every year from 1856 to 1865 and adds: "On the average, 9 priests are ordained each year and 25 die. Note, however, that the diocesan chancery can provide the exact number of newly ordained priests but not the precise number of those who die. Sometimes it is not informed of all the priestly deaths in the archdiocese. So we can be sure that no more than 85 priests were ordained in the decade, but we may also assume that probably more than 247 priests died."

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ On Tuscany see Piero Barbaini, *Problemi religiosi nella vita politico-culturale del Risorgimento in Toscana* (Turin, 1961); pp. 221-48 offer statistical data, but mainly relating to the problem of religious vocations. Statistical data and some attention to sociological data can be found in Xenio Toscani, "Indicazioni sul clero bergamasco, sulla sua estrazione sociale e su talune condizioni pastorali nel sec. XIX," in *Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia* 21 (1967), 411-53.

For France see Christianne Marcilhacy, *Le diocèse d'Orléans au milieu du XIX^e siècle: Les hommes et leurs mentalités* (Paris, 1964): pp. 119-35 present and elaborate on statistical data for approximately 1850; pp. 218-73 deal with the origin, formation, mentality, and pastoral activity of the clergy.

¹⁰ They are cited by Félix Dupanloup, *L'educazione*, trans. Clemente DeAngelis (Parma, 1868), bk. 5, ch. 7-8, which deal with minor seminaries: 1:423-67.

1873), and Bettino Ricasoli.¹¹ In Piedmont a book by Father William Audisio (1802-1882) on clerical education got a favorable reception.¹² Camillo Cavour himself spoke about the formation of the clergy in a parliamentary session on May 21, 1853.¹³

In the decade 1869-1878 we find the following figures for Turin. The number of deceased priests included 419 archdiocesan priests, 80 from outside the diocese, and 57 regulars. Ordained in that period were 215 secular priests and 9 regulars. Thus, a total of 224 priests were ordained and a total of 556 died.¹⁴

In 1797 the population of Turin numbered 90,613; there was one priest for every 72 inhabitants. In 1879 the population numbered around 220,500; there was one priest for every 314 inhabitants.¹⁵

The faith seemed to be languishing, and hopes for the future were less rosy:

How sad that this numerical loss of priests is occurring precisely when there is a greater need for the priest's labors. In few ages has the eternal struggle between good and evil been more vigorous and hard-fought than it is today. Today society is divided into two huge camps, two vast armies. One has the cross for its standard, and it fights for truth, justice, faith, and God. The other has the triangle of socialism and the cup of sensuality on its standard, and it fights for untruth, injustice, freethinking, and atheism.¹⁶

¹¹ Barbaini, p. 222.

¹² Guglielmo Audisio, *Educazione morale e fisica del clero, conforme ai bisogni religiosi e civili* (Turin: Stamperia Reale, 1846). It was widely used elsewhere as well. There was a Parma edition in 1848 (see Barbaini, p. 223). Deriving inspiration from Audisio was Almerigo Guerra, a professor at the Lucca archdiocesan seminary.

¹³ Almerigo Guerra (1837-1900), *Le vocazioni allo stato ecclesiastico quanto alla necessità e al modo di aiutarle* (Rome, 1869), p. 9, which cites the *Atti ufficiali del Governo*, no. 528.

¹⁴ See *Calendarium liturgicum archidioecesis taurinensis... servandum anno 1879* (Turin, n.d.), p. 90, which gives statistics for each year in the decade 1869-78. On Jan. 1, 1873, Abp. Gastaldi issued a mournful pastoral letter on the education of the clergy. He, too, had statistics at hand: "In the past year more than 40 diocesan priests went to their heavenly reward, but we ordained only 14 new priests!!! What do you have to say about that, beloved brethren and faithful? What will remain of the clergy a few years from now if you do not come to our aid, if you do not provide us with all the means whereby to furnish this archdiocese of a half-million souls with all the priests, and I mean worthy priests, that it needs?" (Lorenzo Gastaldi, *Lettere pastorali, commemorazioni funebri e panegirici* [Turin, 1883], p. 246).

¹⁵ *Calendarium liturgicum archidioecesis taurinensis... servandum anno bissextili 1880* (Turin, n.d.), p. 90.

¹⁶ Guerra, p. 10.

The causes of the phenomenon were probed. It now seemed that social corruption had found its way into families, especially urban families. Wrote Almerigo Guerra, a friend of Don Bosco: "In the cities families of ancient stock and faith are, I would not go so far as to say nonexistent, but certainly rare."¹⁷ To nurture the few priestly sprouts around, one would have to snatch "the baby boy from his mother's knee."¹⁸

The case narrated by Don Bosco, of a certain Valentine whose vocation was crushed and perverted by his own father, was not an isolated one.¹⁹ Guerra recalled a similar case:

A good boy, being educated in the house of good people, developed a desire to embrace the priestly state. Returning to his own family, which was not wicked but was caught up in modern ways, he found his resolution ridiculed. Instead of being a priest or at least donning clerical garb, he ended up a miserable wastrel, riddled with vices, who went to his grave at an early age.²⁰

The public schools were seen as one cause of the decrease in priestly vocations. No longer were limited numbers of boys to be found there under the supervision of a God-fearing teacher. Corruption, it was said, could now spread easily and unhindered. Teaching was entrusted to nonbelievers, thus paving the way for a wasted generation that would, in its turn, generate more corruption.²¹ Other causes were enumerated. Almost everywhere the Church had been stripped of its holdings. Bishops and seminaries were no longer able to underwrite the education of poor seminarians.²² The gap between rich and poor had widened. Poor families, reduced to impoverishment by capitalism, were no

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁹ *Valentino* is also cited by Guerra (p. 117). Guerra is not stingy in his praise of DB: "a most worthy man" (p. 25); "a man of God" (p. 54); "a man who has spent himself for years in the education of young boys and seminarians" (p. 157); "most commendable Fr. J. Bosco" (p. 239). DB wrote a thank-you letter to Guerra on June 6, 1869: "I got your book, *Le vocazioni allo stato ecclesiastico*, and I sincerely thank you for it. It is truly and wholly written in line with my own thinking, and I certainly hope it will find its way into the hands of educators of young people. The only regret I have is the gallant allusion to my own poor person..." (*Ep.* 756). The priest from Lucca wrote various pieces for LC, including *Cenni storici intorno al giovane Ezio Gherardi di Lucca* (Oct. 1863).

²⁰ Guerra, p. 20.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

²² Note the following comment, e.g., by Abp. Gastaldi in a pastoral letter on seminaries dated Jan. 12, 1878 (*Lettere pastorali*, p. 409): "Between 1867 and the present, the Turin seminary has lost more than half of its revenue. Despite the best efforts of its students to contribute financially every month, the tightness of their financial situation in most cases prevents them from meeting even half of what it takes to maintain them."

longer in a position to send on for seminary study those sons who manifested an inclination in that direction.²³ As Guerra saw it, the sparse number of vocations to the priesthood was due to “the prevailing irreligion and indifference..., the common disorders in families, the bad schools or those at least overcrowded, and the growing poverty of the middle and lower classes.”²⁴

In such a situation one had to hope and pray, and also work zealously. It was no time for an asceticism of sloth, wrote Frassinetti: “In matters of importance we must certainly trust in God and hope that he will provide; in the meantime, however, we cannot fail to do all we possibly can.”²⁵

The general remedies were obvious. To combat the general decline of faith in society and the family, the basic remedy was to promote a general rechristianization, to foster faith within the family, to undertake the moral and religious instruction of boys and girls, to sponsor schools, shelters, and places of recreation. Wrote Frassinetti:

Let us support all the new religious orders and congregations of men and women that have been brought into being by divine providence in such large numbers to deal with our present needs. Insofar as we can, let us provide them with resources and personnel.²⁶

The protection of God could be felt. In the upsurge of Catholic institutions, people could detect the inexhaustible richness of the Creator. In such difficult times the clergy had to be united as never before. The secular clergy would have to overcome its instinctive reservations about the regular clergy, sublimating such reservations with transcendent motives and purposes. Jesus Christ and his Vicar on earth would have to be the unifying center of all clergy: “From Christ will come the grace of the call to the priesthood, and in him will be concentrated the response to that call.”²⁷

The recruiting, training, and selecting of priestly candidates presented many problems. Looking at the social provenience of the clergy, people noticed that now there were extraordinarily few “vocations” from the nobility and, in particular, the middle classes. In the eighteenth century it had been a mark of distinction for the nobility to have a few members of the family in the clerical state. It was considered an honor and a privilege by the upper middle class as

²³ Guerra, p. 21: “It is no longer the time when there were plenty of families well enough off to maintain a son in the seminary without too much hardship. Today those revenues have been destroyed and the seminaries are impoverished. Even private holdings have been upset by public levies and tend to be concentrated in the hands of a few, with the result that the size of the impoverished class has grown.”

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁵ Frassinetti, *Sulla deficienza delle vocazioni allo stato ecclesiastico: Lettera... al professore D. Almerico Guerra* (Oneglia, 1870²), p. 25.

²⁶ Frassinetti, *Compendio della teologia morale*, p. 683.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 684.

well. Already by the end of that century the relative proportions of clerical provenience were undergoing change. In seminaries the dominant group was made up of sons of small rural landowners, from the hill country especially. Bishop Felix Dupanloup of Orléans (1802-1878) expressed his puzzlement, and Italian translations carried his message into Italy. He noticed that sons of the field and the workshop did not lose their native crudity. He was afraid of a general lowering of ecclesiastical culture and a consequent reduction in the effective evangelization of the upper and middle classes. His Italian translator noted that for some time the Church had been inundated with priests deriving primarily from the lower classes: "If someone is to blame for that, who is it? What have been the consequences or what will they be in the future?"²⁸ The Church had been affected by the basic fact: she had to recruit and select new priests from the social classes that were still offering candidates.

Could those classes offer the Church the most spontaneous and unselfish vocations, the best talents, the most worthy people who would exert the most influence on the upper classes of society? Would the priesthood gain greater respect, authority, and decorum through such representatives?²⁹

Bishop Dupanloup did not conceal his own preference for middle-class vocations. He cited remarks by Francis August Saint-Marc Girardin (1801-1873) to the effect that the Church and society faced new dangers in that the minor seminaries were being filled with boys from the poor, uneducated classes. The Church should not recruit her ministers too much from the upper stratum of society or too much from the lower stratum:

Not too much from the upper stratum because boys reared in the ways of affluence do not adapt well to the simplicity of the priestly life; not too much from the lower stratum because then you do not get the bearing and behavior of well-educated men. Refinement was not to be regarded more highly than virtue. But if the Church was to exercise its proper influence on the world, the virtue of its ministers could not be crude or barbaric.³⁰

Thus, greater stress was being placed on the human and social factor in education, in conjunction with factors in the home environment, than on the effectiveness of education itself and the supernatural power of God's call. The various classes were seen as quasi-eternal social factors, practically impervious to progress or change. There was no appreciation of the social progress of the popular classes and the consequent refinement of behavior and outlook.

The nature of minor seminaries in the middle of the nineteenth century posed other problems. They generally were not restricted to boys desiring to be-

²⁸ Note by the translator, Fr. Clemente DeAngelis, in Dupanloup 1:463.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Dupanloup 1:462.

come priests. The advantages of the setup were obvious. Boys could work toward a mature choice without inhibitions or constrictions. The Church did not mind the idea of using its seminaries to train young people who would later be fine, upstanding faithful in civil society.³¹ But the concomitant risks could not be discounted. The economic subsidies provided by minor seminaries could stimulate the ambitions of families and of young men who had no aspirations for the priestly state, thus exerting a negative influence on the training of future priests.³²

Some of these problems surfaced at Valdocco too. Don Bosco was very favorably disposed toward young boys who had inclinations to become priests. But he despised and denounced as theft the calculating of those who hoped to get an education with the help of Don Bosco and his benefactors but had no intention of embracing the priestly state. After 1874, when the Salesian Society was clearly structured as a religious congregation, he was not even tender toward those clerics who became Salesians to get a free education but intended from the start to become members of the diocesan clergy.³³

He had no complaints or recriminations about the social provenience of clerics, however, and with good reason. After all, he had been one of those rural boys who had entered the seminary with the help of rural chaplains and parish priests. Now he was dedicating his whole life to the education of the lower classes. Walking through the streets of Turin, he did not conceal his peasant features. As one witness described him:

God fittingly endowed him with a strong, well-formed body of slightly more than medium height. A moderate pace and a simple bearing bespoke his thoughtful, tranquil mien, so unassuming as to give no clue to his real worth. If I may be allowed the comparison, I would say that the slight sway in his walk suggested that good friend of the farmer—the ox—whose meekness, strength, and constancy in pulling the plow through rough and rocky soil he seemed to imitate.³⁴

There were those who detected the typical somatic features of the peasant in him. Albert DuBoys (1804-1889) saw in him the primitive type of the Pied-

³¹ See esp. Dupanloup 1:451-55, which objects to applying the phrase “destined for the priesthood” to the boys in minor seminaries.

³² Enrico Bindi, a professor at the Pistoia seminary and later bishop of the same diocese, had harsh words for the low level of seminary studies in 1849: “So that is why all those weary of the spade settle down to be priests. It is a much easier way to make at least a lira a day! But I don’t want to rehearse a story that is all too well-known and common...” See Barbaini, p. 223.

³³ Good Night talk reported in the diary of Fr. Barberis; cited here from BM 12:324. But there is also the case of the Cuffia brothers, who abandoned the Congregation: see *Indice MB*, p. 535.

³⁴ Testimony of Fr. Louis Chiapale, himself a former Salesian, given to Fr. Lemoyne: BM 6:1-2.

montese peasant, not entirely erased but rather modified “by the civil manners of good Italian society and by a true nobility of feeling due to his high-mindedness.”³⁵ Caution, sobriety, dedication to work, endurance, and the circumspection of the Piedmontese peasant showed in Don Bosco. He had confidence in his own social class. It had provided him with friends and models (e.g., Aloysius Comollo and Joseph Cafasso), with top-notch collaborators (e.g., John Cagliero, James Costamagna, and Angelo Savio), and with disciples of lofty moral nobility (e.g., Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, and Francis Besucco). In 1873 Don Bosco offered a prophecy:

The time has come...when the poor will evangelize 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” [see Ps 113:7-8].³⁶

Joseph Frassinetti was of the opinion that henceforth vocations were to be drawn from rural towns and areas, “because it is there that religion has so far suffered only minor damage and hence that faith still wields great influence.”³⁷ In Valdocco people did not hesitate to offer reasons for this fact, reasons ranging from the geophysical to the theological, reasons that may have been inspired by reminiscences of the Virgil and the Bible learned at school. The balmy air of the countryside, similar to that of creation in its first days, nurtured people of simple habits and of strong, sincere faith.³⁸

But what would happen when the air of the city swept over the rural lowlands and hillsides? That question, it seems, never invaded the pastoral

³⁵ *Don Bosco e la Società Salesiana*, trans. Giuseppe Novelli (S. Benigno Canavese, 1884), p. 216.

³⁶ Prophecy sent or addressed to Pius IX, autograph draft of DB in AS 132 Sogni 2; cited here from BM 10:56.

³⁷ Frassinetti, *Sulla deficienza delle vocazioni*, p. 8.

³⁸ *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti negli anni 1883 e 1884*, (Turin, 1885), p. 58: “Where vocations to the priesthood should abound most they are lacking, because in families of means today we do not find the sort of education likely to produce vocations. If a city boy expresses the desire to become a priest today, he is sternly rebuked. Even his mother will try to nip the idea in the bud. And if God cannot find his little Samuel in the city [cf. 1 Sam 3], he will go looking in the countryside for him. In the countryside the air is finer and purer, as balmy as on the first days of creation. There you will find people of simple habits, upright hearts, and strong, sincere faith. There God has more reason to say: *deliciae meae esse cum filiis hominum* [“I found delight in the sons of men”: Prov 8:31]. His delight is truly there, and he often prefers to choose his ministers from among the forgotten men of the countryside.”

But in what proportions did aspirants and novices come from the countryside, towns, and cities? Unfortunately, as yet we do not possess any sociological study of the question.

preoccupations of the nineteenth century. The mindset of Don Bosco and his collaborators was grounded on a secure intuition: the certainty that the regeneration of the clergy was to be effected by drawing youngsters away from the spade and the hammer.

The final decades of the nineteenth century cannot help but impress those studying the growth of clerical and religious vocations. There were high hopes for the diocesan clergy, although they were still trying to restore the balance between annual deaths and new ordinations.³⁹ The Jesuits took a great leap. From 1853 to 1884, the term of Peter John Beckx (1795-1887) as Father General, their numbers worldwide went from 5,209 to 11,480; and their impact on Church education was steadily growing.⁴⁰ The Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul were growing rapidly.⁴¹ The Salesian Society was also growing rapidly and having a real impact. In 1870 there were 61 professed and 41 novices. At the death of Don Bosco in 1888, the Society had 773 professed and 276 novices. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians had 139 members and 50 novices in 1881 when Mother Mary Mazzarello, the first superior general, died. When Don Bosco died in 1888, there were 390 professed members and 99 novices.⁴² But the full turnover of persons who had been tested in the Salesian Society as aspirants, novices, and professed under perpetual and temporary vows was much larger. It amounted to almost three thousand.⁴³ That fact

³⁹ In 1884 the number of priests in Italy was 76,381. In the previous five years the number of newly ordained was 5,045; the number of deceased, 11,047. See the incomplete but sufficiently indicative data of Giuseppe Bertolotti, *Statistica ecclesiastica d'Italia* (Savona, 1885), p. xci.

⁴⁰ Roger Aubert, *Il pontificato di Pio IX*, Italian trans. (Turin, 1964), pp. 688-89, n. 365.

⁴¹ Annibale Bugnini, "Figlie della Carità," in *Enc. catt.* 5, cols. 1261-64.

⁴² These data come from the directories of the SDBs and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. With respect to the SDBs, in 1888 those with perpetual vows constituted 87.7% of all those professed, those with temporary vows 12.3%. Of the total number of members, the novices represented 35.7%. As I noted in DBLW: 163-64, the high percentage of professed with perpetual vows was due to the fact that the majority made perpetual vows right after their novitiate. The lowest percentage of novices in relation to professed occurred in 1911. The total number of professed was 4,091. Those with perpetual vows constituted 71.8% (3,065), those with temporary vows 28.2% (1,026). The novices (432) constituted 9.6% of the total membership.

⁴³ The archival registers for novices and aspirants are incomplete for the years prior to 1870. From the start of the Salesian Society to 1888, the total number of novices was around 2000. This estimate is based on the fact that, from 1870 on, the average number of those who prolonged their novitiate by one or more years ran between 20 and 40. Of the total number, approximately 50% professed. While DB was alive, the rate of defection ran between 10% and 20%. To the novice figures one must add about 1000 aspirants who did not go on to the novitiate. The rate of perseverance for aspirants is still lower, their names being found in the catalog of the Salesian Society.

is impressive. Quite obviously, it was due first and foremost to Don Bosco and his ability as a leader, believer, and tenaciously enterprising organizer. But much was due as well to the needs of the milieu and to the welcome given to the new kind of religious presented by Don Bosco and other promoters of his institutions.

2. Salesians for the regeneration and salvation of society

In various respects, as we saw in volume I, the Salesian Cooperators are to be numbered among those forces tending to move beyond political conflict, the mentality of class struggle, and the whole atmosphere of “struggle and victory.”⁴⁴ In an embryonic and barely conscious way, they foreshadow the cooperation of diverse factions in an ideologically pluralistic society. We saw the roots of this in Don Bosco’s own outlook. By nature and training he was ready to look to others for sympathy, interest, and possible involvement in his own labors and projects. All that must be considered important in trying to delineate the features of his institutions. Indeed, his talks to and about his Cooperators were in no way independent of those he gave to his Salesians or transmitted through them. His plans are grandiose, if not utopian, as we see in his words of January 1877:

The second undertaking we wanted to start was the Association of Salesian Cooperators. It has hardly come into existence and it already numbers many members. Its aim is mutual assistance: spiritual, moral, and also financial. We shall see its vast growth. Soon enough masses of people and entire cities will be united by the Lord into a spiritual bond with the Salesian Congregation. Financially, the association is to be totally autonomous, except in matters subject to the Holy Father’s spiritual authority. Of course, we shall carefully avoid any clash with episcopal or civil authorities... I do hope that by responding to God’s will, we shall live to see the day when entire cities and nations will differ from us Salesians only in the fact that their people will live in their own homes. If the Cooperators now number one hundred, they will soon be thousands and thousands, and if they number one thousand, they shall become millions. However, we must admit only those who qualify. I hope this is what God wants of us.⁴⁵

Equally comprehensive figures for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians would be in order.

It is worth noting that in those days DB and his followers were able to attract the attention of so many individuals.

⁴⁴ See DBLW:234-58.

⁴⁵ Conference to SDBs of Jan. 6, 1877, reported in the diary of Fr. Barberis; cited here from BM 13:61.

In enlisting Cooperators, Don Bosco got into initiatives that might well have seemed paradoxical to the confessional mentality of the time. He, a son of the Church and of the common father, the Vicar of Christ, was proposing to Pius IX a reversal of functions. The Pope would be a Salesian Cooperator, hence under the authority of the rector major of the Salesians.

He already had news for the Salesians: "Even the mayor of Magliano, the wealthiest man in town and an avowed liberal, has asked to become a Salesian Cooperator, calling it a God-inspired association. Many others have followed his example..."⁴⁶ Don Bosco also sent membership certificates to the empress of Austria and to Jewish men in Nice and Milan. Constantine Leonori and Albert DuBoys describe the sympathetic good wishes of Julio Roca (1843-1914), the president of Argentina, for Don Bosco and his Salesian missionaries.⁴⁷ We see being presented a type of Salesian who responds to the sympathies and interests of people belonging to the most diverse social classes. Don Bosco and his publicist friends got beyond the tight juridical problem of the Salesians within the political and ecclesiastical frameworks.⁴⁸ We know how tenaciously Don Bosco upheld the principle that individual Salesians were not to renounce their civil rights or their obligations to society as citizens. Fears of suppression arose in him whenever the urgings or imperatives of Church authorities forced him to assume traditional terms and approaches of the religious life. In Rome to defend his kind of novitiate, which we shall consider further on, he voiced his political fears in 1874:

We cannot have a house of studies apart from the other schools because the government will want to know right away what authorization we have for that teaching. It will be closed immediately or else put under the laws governing public education, which would be the same thing.⁴⁹

After the missionary expedition of 1875 especially, Don Bosco no longer focused solely on Salesian relations with the Italian government but on relations with contemporary society. Indeed, the horizon of the Salesians was no longer restricted to Italy alone.

In publicity material we see a clear attempt to present Don Bosco as a renewer of the gospel leaven, as a revitalized example of the ancient friar, one who

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Costantino Leonori, *Cenni sulla Società di S. Francesco di Sales* (Rome, 1881), p. 58; DuBoys, p. 201.

⁴⁸ I examined those problems in DBLW:133-79.

⁴⁹ Comments of DB on a summary of the observations made by the consultor Fr. Raymond Bianchi, OP (1831-85) sent to him by the S. Cong. of Bishops and Regulars; autograph draft in AS 023. DB expresses the same ideas in a memorandum on a letter of the abp. of Turin dealing with the Salesian Society: see BM 10:365. Also see n. 186 below.

could meet new needs and win public esteem and affection, thus meriting his rightful place in society. Society, noted the writer Father Anthony Belasio, was undergoing progress. Capitalism was crushing the lower classes. The common people were acquiring ever increasing strength and dignity. Democracy was being proclaimed, and its “growing vigor” could be seen.⁵⁰ Thus the times called for a new religious congregation, a democratic congregation that would be in the people and of the people:

Accessible to the people, it would go hand in hand with the people, making common cause with them and helping them to gain honestly all the advantages offered by a progressive civilization. Hard work would mark this congregation, which had been organized for the people’s benefit. The people would see it as a society of generous friends sacrificing everything for them. What is needed is a congregation incorporated into the people, living a single life with them, pumping its apostolic blood into all the veins of the larger body and its blood to bring into being a society regenerated to new life. This congregation is the Salesian [Society].⁵¹

Here we can see where people tended to locate the novelty of the Salesian Society. Just as Don Bosco, a son of the common people, by native disposition and sympathy had gone out to poor children to give them dignity, so the Salesian Society, prompted by the same native disposition and concerns, was seeking to insert itself into the popular stratum, indeed into all of society, as a way of contributing to progress and social justice. To a society that pictured religious as lazy, useless individuals, Don Bosco presented his Salesians at work by the side of the common citizen, by the side of the needy in particular. The Salesians, predicted Belasio, would penetrate all of society as the early Christians had done:

Once upon a time Tertullian told the pagans: “You do not want us because we are Christians, and we have already filled the ranks of your armies... Yes, we have already filled your chanceries. We do business with you in the marketplace and fraternize with you in all things, except that we leave the temples of your idols to you alone.”

In like manner the Salesians will say: “You no longer want friars or religious of any congregation at all. We will come to get degrees in your universities in order to defend the most precious patrimony of the human race: the truths that bring salvation. We will be artisans in your shops, and we shall show how to work as faithful servants of the great Father of all. We will be called as conscripts into your regiments and teach respect for virtue and religion to those who only

⁵⁰ Antonio Belasio (d. 1888), *Non abbiamo paura! abbiamo il miracolo dell’apostolato cattolico di XVIII secoli e le sue sempre nuove e più belle speranze* (Turin: Salesiana, 1879), p. 59.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

know how to curse them. Yes, we want to mingle with you everywhere, leaving to the enemies of religion only the dens of iniquity.”⁵²

The Salesians have plunged into a society in the full swing of progress. And they should say in lively tones: “Brothers, we too run with you,” and with amiableness and affability call them to a halt, as much as to take a rest and entertain them with a certain air of novelty.⁵³

Amid the hyperbole and the intermingled expressions of defiance and fraternity we can detect a consistent nucleus. The Salesians and their sympathizers readily voiced the conviction that “society was undergoing transformation.”⁵⁴ They surely were to be viewed by public opinion as people who were entering the fray to lessen social ills and cooperate effectively in the further progress of the people. To be sure, the Salesians were not democratic in the structure of their religious society, which was highly centralized and stamped with a moderate presidentialism.⁵⁵ They were democratic in the kind of activity they proposed to carry

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 102

⁵⁴ Leonori, p. 3.

⁵⁵ The articles of the Rules or Constitutions governing the Society underwent a fairly complicated process of development. The earliest formulation known to us (1857-58) reflects the Oratory experience and the structures established in the first regulations. It also reflects the influence and inspiration of other bodies, as I have noted on various occasions, e.g., other oratories, the Charitable Society for Poor and Abandoned Youths founded by Fr. John Cocchi and others in Turin in 1850, Rosmini's Institute of Charity, the Schools of Charity founded by the Cavanis brothers, the Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians), the Redemptorists, the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, and the Society of Jesus. DB may also have had in mind the rules of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Also strongly influencing DB's first formulation of the Constitutions (AS 022/1: see BM 5:635-45) was his concern about civil law and his group's place in diocesan structures. In this formulation we already find two distinct chapters on “[Internal] Government of the Congregation” and “Other Superiors” (ms. pp. 12-14; BM 5:641-43).

On the government of the congregation (the latter term sometimes changed to “society”), we find the following: “1. The congregation shall be ruled by a chapter composed of a Rector, Prefect, Economist, Spiritual Director or Catechist, and three [‘three’ corrected from ‘two’ in ms.] councilors. 2. The Rector shall be appointed for life. He has the right to propose or reject the admission of postulants and to assign duties to the members as regards both spiritual and temporal matters.”

Norms are laid down for the vicar of the Rector Major, who is to be designated secretly by the Rector himself and who will govern temporarily upon the Rector's death. Norms are also laid down for the election of the individual members of the chapter (council) and their assumption of their functions. “The Rector shall determine the duties of the other superiors according to the need [‘need’ corrected from ‘rule-plan for the youths admitted’]. They shall stay in office for 3 years” (“Other Superiors,” art. 1,11, ms. p. 14).

The Rector and the other members of the chapter were to be elected by a limited number of voters. Electors of the new Rector were to be the members of the chapter itself, plus the Rector's vicar and those directors of houses who could take part in the

out and actually did carry out: i.e., working for the education of young commoners. In presenting the Salesians at work, familiarly and good-naturedly by the side of young people, the aim was to depict a new type of religious with a new kind of civil worth as priest or religious: no longer aloof from society or displaying a provocative inertia and uselessness. In the concrete, the immersion of the Salesian in society largely meant bringing together boys in need of education and assistance and working with them in a suitable environment. That environment would almost always be a religious house.

The motto of the Salesian Society, “work and temperance,” summoned the individual members to personal asceticism and commitment. Before public opinion, however, it was also a witness and an apologetic demonstration.⁵⁶ The firm

election, which was set for the eighth day after the Rector’s death. The newly elected Rector had the authority to choose the prefect and the spiritual director. According to a first draft, he could also choose the economer. In a revision of the text, the economer and the three (two) councilors were to be designated by the college of electors through a plurality of the votes. In a third revision of the text, the authority to choose the economer and the three councilors was entrusted to “the professed members of the congregation found in the house where the Rector lives, i.e., the motherhouse” (DB ms.).

Thus the Rules fix the “offices” of the chapter members and specify the manner of elections, but they do not specify in which cases the chapter (council) governs collegially with a deliberative vote.

A period of adjustment followed (1859-74). The various Italian and Latin formulations show the effects of later developments and the actual experience of the congregation as it moved toward becoming a true and proper clerical congregation with papal authorization. There was a clarification of its relationship with the Holy See and with local church authorities, both with respect to the exercise of jurisdiction and its pastoral contribution (especially the education of the poorest young people). With respect to its internal government, we find a clearer distinction of structures, functions, and terminology. The superior chapter (general council) was differentiated from the chapter (council) of the “motherhouse.” Prerogatives and faculties were assigned to the Rector Major and to the other members of the superior chapter, the latter functioning either collegially as a group or in dependence of the Rector Major for specific matters. There is also clearer specification of the nature, prerogatives, periodicity, and powers of the general chapter.

So we come to the approved Constitutions (AS 022/18). On the government of the Society, they have various sections: “VI. Religiosum Societatis regimen [relations with the Pope, who is the highest superior, with the S. Cong. for Bishops and Regulars, and with individual ordinaries]; VII. Internum Societatis regimen; VIII. De Rectoris Majoris electione; IX. De cæteris Superioribus; X. De singulis domibus.”

In *Excursus A* following this chapter (p. 448), I treat of the government of the Society in greater detail and make a few comparisons to other congregations.

⁵⁶ See the respective headings in the *Indice* MB, pp. 228-30, 449. See esp. BM 13:245: “Always remind all our Salesians of the motto we have adopted: ‘Work and Temperance.’ These are the two weapons with which we can overcome everyone and everything.” This passage is from a letter of DB to Fr. Joseph Fagnano (1844-1916), Sampierdarena, Nov. 14, 1877: *Ep.* 1653. Also see nn. 59-64 below.

desire to have a congregation that was manifestly industrious indicates Don Bosco's sensitivity to his times. It also points up an element that he wanted to be a mark of his Salesian Society. Wrote Albert DuBoys:

If Don Bosco, following the example of Saint Vincent de Paul, founded an active rather than a contemplative society, it was not because he and his followers did not appreciate the sublime ideals of the sons of Saint Bruno or the daughters of Saint Teresa and Saint Clare. It was because at this time the most urgent and necessary task was to create religious communities that could dedicate themselves to the welfare of humanity and render more visible, tangible services to human society. Despite the temporary prohibition of nuns from hospitals and schools for the poor, we find a certain inclination, even among non-Catholics and indifferent people, to give their just due to charitable associations such as the Ladies of Calvary, the Little Sisters of the Poor, the Brothers of Saint John of God, and even the religious orphanages.⁵⁷

The Saint Vincent de Paul Chapters enjoyed great popularity (but great unpopularity in anticlerical circles). So did the Sisters of Charity, who typified the modern nun. Thus people were instinctively ready to compare Don Bosco not only with Philip Neri, but also with Vincent de Paul, a saint who had been honored, respected, and praised even during the French Revolution.⁵⁸ In this view of Don Bosco as another Vincent de Paul, we can detect a deeply rooted hope that the social revolution of the late nineteenth century would rank Salesian works among those deserving respect and support.

Don Bosco himself pinned his hopes on that conviction: "I have told you this only to show you that even bad people appreciate those who work hard for genuinely unselfish motives. This is what people think of us, so let us try not to be any different than they see us."⁵⁹ He reiterated the same basic viewpoint many times:

Our times call for action. The world has become materialistic, and so we have to go out of our way to make known the good that we are doing.⁶⁰

Today the world wants to see things being done. It wants to see priests working, teaching, and helping poor, destitute youths in hospices, schools, workshops, and so on.⁶¹

⁵⁷ DuBoys, pp. 223-24.

⁵⁸ See the following by way of examples. Nino Pettinati, "Torino benefica," in *Torino* (Turin, 1880), p. 855; *Le Figaro*, Aug. 13, 1879, cited in Leonori, p. 56; Marcelo Spinola y Maestre, *Don Bosco y su obra* (Barcelona, 1884), pp. 54, 58. [Editor's note: Spinola (1835-1906), a Salesian cooperator, was titular bp. of Melos when he wrote. He was eventually named abp. of Seville and cardinal. He was beatified in 1987.]

⁵⁹ BM 11:153-54.

⁶⁰ BM 13:96.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Cardinal [Camillo] DiPietro, the bishop of Albano, has offered us his seminary, indicating that an abundant harvest awaits us. He knows that we are not looking for money but just for hard work.⁶²

Now—besides praying, which is never to be neglected, one must be engaged, actively engaged in work, if we are not to court disaster.⁶³

A person who does not know how to work is not a Salesian.⁶⁴

In 1878 Don Bosco wrote down a supernatural message for Pope Leo XIII, which echoed the same themes: “Our times need new religious congregations. By their steadfast faith and undertakings they must wage war on the idea that human beings are only matter. Worldly-minded people despise those who pray and meditate, but they shall have to believe what they see.”⁶⁵

In an age when Church people had not yet managed to get beyond an asceticism of hiddenness, Don Bosco took note of the importance of publicity—not an empty publicity but one grounded on facts that everyone could see for himself. In an age when many Catholic initiatives were content to act upon individuals, helping the poor and the sick door-to-door or quietly running educational institutions, Don Bosco saw the value of having a broad and deep impact on public opinion.⁶⁶ One gospel maxim took on special meaning, and he loved to repeat it to priests and clerics: *vos estis sal et lux mundi* (see Matt 5:13-16).⁶⁷

As we shall consider further on, Don Bosco also needed enterprising Salesian workers, ready for hard labor and available for the most disparate tasks. This,

⁶² BM 13:59-60.

⁶³ BM 14:427-28. From 1873 on, Italian Catholic Congresses insisted that prayer was not enough (see DBLW:236). DB used the argument to promote his Salesian Cooperators. Note his talk to Cooperators in S. Benigno on June 4, 1880: “In another time it was enough to unite around holy practices of piety; society, still full of faith, followed the voice of its pastors. Today times have changed. Besides offering up fervent prayers, we must work, and work tirelessly if we do not want to witness the complete ruin of the present generation” (BS July 1880, p. 12). Also see his talk in Borgo S. Martino on July 1, 1880: “Once upon a time it was enough to come together for prayer. But today there are so many means of perversion, especially harmful to young boys and girls, that we must also come together on the field of action and do things” (BS Aug. 1880, p. 9).

⁶⁴ MB 19:157.

⁶⁵ AS 132 Sogni 1 (DB autograph draft), cited here from BM 13:380.

⁶⁶ See Aubert, p. 685, n. 363. But Aubert rightly warns us to be on guard against exaggerated criticism of the 19th-century clergy as being too zealous about individuals and too forgetful of the importance of influencing ideas and institutions.

⁶⁷ Priests are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (BM 5:432). Every word of the priest, wherever and to whomever, should be the salt of eternal life (BM 6:210). SDB clerics should be the salt of the earth; members of the Salesian Society should have the salt of piety and learning to guide souls to goodness and virtue, and with their example they should be a light to others (BM 10: 487, 495-96).

too, would affect the kind of prayer that Don Bosco upheld for his religious and the mix of qualities that would determine the suitability of a Salesian candidate.

His propensity to plunge in and make use of common needs to project his own personality and work was also manifested in his relationship with the clergy. As we have already seen, the oratories of Turin for commoners helped to supplement the inadequacies of parishes to absorb the masses of young people. Extending beyond the limits of parish and diocese, such initiatives as the *Catholic Readings*, high schools, hospices, and the publishing of school texts and devotional books were designed to meet common needs. Like the Jesuits, Vincentians, Sulpicians, and Marists, Don Bosco offered seminaries qualified personnel for the education of seminarians. To bishops and seminary rectors he proffered the kind of spirituality, industriousness, and ecclesiastical dignity that he had implemented in Valdocco. In turn, he also assumed he would be enrolling Salesians among the seminarians and even among the diocesan personnel that ran the seminaries.⁶⁸

While not working out any systematic theory of the matter, Don Bosco actually did offer a type of coordinated effort and exchange of resources that stood outside existing civil and religious structures. His aim and activity were quite different from what he had experienced in his own seminary days, when a respectful distance had been maintained between nobility, bourgeoisie, and common people as well as between seminary superiors and seminarians.

In short, then, Don Bosco did not present the social novelty of the Salesians in terms of class conflict but in terms of the civil progress of the people. He did not present himself and his followers as the long arm of the aristocracy or the bourgeoisie, or as the tool of the capitalist class. His dimension was radically religious and ethical. He saw the renewal, regeneration, and salvation of society as primarily a work of education; and he was not the only one to see and act in those terms. In contemporary France there were zealous promoters of *patronages* and other initiatives on behalf of young people. An outstanding example was Father Joseph Timon-David (1823-1891), who shared the conviction that without religious upbringing the whole process of education was doomed to failure, or at least not to be considered “true” education.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Before the Constitutions were definitively approved, the Salesian Society could well seem like an association of ecclesiastics and laymen, not all living a common life. Residential bishops might also view with favor the idea that their own seminarians had systematic training with DB in Turin. Among the more characteristic cases after 1874 might be mentioned those of Canon Francis Rebaudi and Fr. Anthony Pagani, respectively director and prefect of the seminary of Magliano Sabino, who had been novices in 1879 and 1880.

⁶⁹ For the work of Timon-David in the context of French social Catholicism and the *patronages*, see Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Les débuts du Catholicisme social en France*

Just as he tried to dissociate himself from the political struggle in the 1850s, so in his later years Don Bosco seems to stand outside the sociopolitical struggle. As Father John Semeria (1867-1931) of the Barnabites put it in 1903:

In the eighteenth century the clergy were far too removed from the common people. They formed a superior caste, to which the common people had no ready access. Born of the common people, Don Bosco wanted to be right in the midst of the lower classes so that he might know their needs and assuage their sufferings.

The congregation he founded was to be composed of clergy and lay people. The latter were not designed to serve the former exclusively. The coadjutors were to work together with his clergy in perfect harmony for the common goal of saving souls. While his priests offered instruction, his lay members prepared the material for life. For in this world there will always be intellectual laborers and manual laborers, not divided by hate but rather united by holy, mutual love.

Alongside the workshop of the artisan Don Bosco wanted the classroom of the student. He was not an exclusivist. He brought together in perfect harmony those who would grow up to be leaders and those who would grow up to be common laborers. They would treat one another then with mutual love instead of indulging in envy or class conflict.⁷⁰

This testimony from Father Semeria may be regarded as the echo of a conviction that had been rooted for decades in the minds of Salesians and those who knew and appreciated their work.

3. *The sense of family*

The connective tissue of the Salesian Society, as it came across to members and nonmembers, was largely the result of the first experiences. All the early members had lived with Don Bosco for some time. Almost all were adolescent students in Valdocco. They had Don Bosco as their confessor and spiritual fa-

(1822-1870) (Paris, 1951), pp. 561-67. For personal relations and similarities of viewpoint between DB and Timon-David, see Eugenio Valentini, "La pedagogia spirituale di Timon-David," in *Orientamenti pedagogici* 2 (1955), 35-42; idem, "Le compagnie nel pensiero di Timon-David," in *Compagnie Assistenti* (1957), pp. 173-78.

⁷⁰ Conference given in Turin, Apr. 8, 1903, and recapitulated in the *Atti del III congresso internazionale dei Cooperatori salesiani* (Turin: Salesiana, 1903), p. 12; part of it also in Giulio Barberis, *Il venerabile D. Giovanni Bosco e le Opere salesiane* (Turin: SAID, 1910), p. 48.

ther. From him they got crucial suggestions about the direction of their own lives and private confidences for their ears alone. To some extent they all were given some little task of importance that made them feel loved and favored amid the crowd. Don Bosco himself was fully aware of the novelty of this approach and loved to point it out to his sons:

All other congregations—Don Bosco remarked—were bolstered at their start by highly educated and talented individuals who joined and assisted their founder, thus becoming co-founders. Not so with us. Our first Salesians were all pupils of mine. This has put a weighty, relentless burden on me for some thirty years, but it is a blessing because, all being formed by me, they were imbued with my principles and methods. In other congregations, the founder's assistants eventually and unavoidably brought in some differences which ultimately proved fatal to their congregation. Being adults and set in their ways, they could not normally be expected to shed the old Adam completely. Thus far no aristocrats or men of vast wealth or scholars have entered our Congregation, so that everything we have learned and accomplished has been of our own doing. One who has not given serious thought to the nature of a congregation or religious order cannot appreciate the importance of this viewpoint, but let one investigate the causes of the growth and decline of religious orders or the source of the splits which plagued so many of them, and he will find that it happened because there was no homogeneity from the very start.⁷¹

From the peculiar nature of the first Salesian nucleus came a specific kind of family cohesiveness. It was almost a patriarchy, not of nobility or bourgeoisie, however, but of children from the common classes dominated by the superior figure of Don Bosco and all impregnated to some extent by elements of his own temperament and ideals.

Everyone knew how to do everything, or at least was open to that possibility. There was no task entrusted to lay confreres that priests and clerics were not ready to take over if their help was needed. They all found it perfectly natural to follow the example of their father, who readily donned different hats as occasion demanded: tailor, carpenter, music teacher, juggler, proofreader, preacher, author, confessor, celebrant of the Mass, and so forth. In general, then, all members tended to display interior availability and practical versatility. To attentive and benevolent scrutinizers these qualities revealed a spirit of abnegation carried to its utmost limits.⁷²

⁷¹ Statements of DB to Fr. Barberis, recorded in the latter's diary for May 17, 1876; cited here from BM 13:159-60.

⁷² Spinola, p. 58: "In the Salesian Society as set up by Don Bosco, we do not find the rigid austerities undertaken by the Capuchins, the children of St. Teresa, or the Carthusians. The Salesians are not commanded to go barefoot, to wear coarse wool, to undertake long fasts, to scourge themselves constantly, or to practice daily vigils. But the

The emphasis placed on craft labors meant that lay confreres had good reason to immerse themselves in Don Bosco's family, and with the proud feeling that they had their own worthwhile contribution to make. The religious dispositions assimilated in that milieu made it easy for lay people to fit into the Salesian Society with their own general or specific functions. The majority of them could be viewed as individuals ("privileged souls," wrote Don Bosco in an 1880 circular) who, if they had a chance, would willingly "withdraw from the world the more easily to ensure the salvation of their own souls." Don Bosco wanted individuals willing to engage in any kind of work: laboring in field, garden, kitchen, or bakery; cooking meals, doing housework, or performing secretarial tasks.⁷³ Like Father Louis Pavoni (1784-1849) in Brescia and Father John Leo LePrévost (1803-1874) in Paris, he wanted his lay confreres to mingle with the civilian population.⁷⁴ Given a climate no longer favorable to monastic institutions and given the anticlerical atmosphere of various milieus, Don Bosco came to feel that in some circumstances "lay people are freer to do good, and able to do more good, than priests are." He reminded his Salesian brothers (coadjutors) that lay people "were a great help to the apostles and other sacred ministers" and that "the Church has always made use of the good faithful to further the welfare of the people and the glory of God."⁷⁵ Don Bosco's preference for civilian dress for the Salesian brothers, and also for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians between 1872 and 1877, reveals his inclination to move beyond traditional emblems that might now tend to arouse antipathy and repulsion. Such a choice would also tend to highlight the internal, substantive values of religious consecration. Chapter deliberations specified that coadjutors

were to show themselves to be good religious in word and deed always and everywhere, both inside and outside their houses. For it is not dress that makes a religious but rather the practice of religious virtues. More prized by

spirit of abnegation is carried to its utmost limits..." And on p. 89: "The Salesian is a man of abnegation and humility, who lives like a dead man without imagining that he is dead, who does good while imagining he does nothing, and who sacrifices himself without noticing or even being aware of it."

⁷³ Undated circular to recruit coadjutors: see BM 14:302.

⁷⁴ On direct relations between DB and the project of Louis Pavoni, see Pietro Braido, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco* (Turin, 1955), pp. 97-100. Leonard Murialdo was in direct contact with LePrévost and the *Patronages des apprentis* in Paris: see Castellani, *Il beato Leonardo Murialdo* 1:828-31, and Charles Maignen, *Vie de Jean-Léon LePrévost, fondateur de la Congrégation des Frères de Saint-Vincent de Paul* (Bruges-Tournai, 1923), 2 vols.

⁷⁵ *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale della Pia Società Salesiana, tenuti in Valsalice nel settembre 1883-86* (S. Benigno Canavese: Salesiana, 1887), p. 17.

God and human beings is a religious dressed as a lay person but fervent and exemplary than a religious dressed in a distinctive habit but tepid and negligent.⁷⁶

A close look reveals that the novelty of the Salesian coadjutor resided not so much in his dress or occupation as in his inclusion as a layman in the typical family instituted, permeated, and dominated by Don Bosco. Many good laymen, be they youths or adults, could quickly feel at ease in the Salesian household. They could sense that they were part of the family, treated familiarly as brothers of all and helped by clerics and priests in their tasks as sweepers or printers. In church or at table, in courtyard or dormitory, they would find themselves rubbing shoulders with churchmen and notice that the latter treated them with the same familiarity displayed between clerics and priests themselves. This affection, industriousness, and joviality, evident during shared moments of daily work, did not finish when coadjutors and Salesian clerics assisted at the sacrifice of the Mass, which was celebrated by one of their own, or when they knelt in the confessional to receive absolution from a priest and brother of theirs who had been consecrated for that function with the sacrament of holy orders.⁷⁷

Everyday life provided a concrete interpretation of the disposition recommended to coadjutors: "Always and everywhere they are to show respect for their superiors and priests, regarding them as fathers and brothers with whom they are to live in the bonds of fraternal charity and form one heart and one soul."⁷⁸

4. *The charism of wondrous deeds and results*

Among the factors involved in the growth of the Salesian Society, the typical nineteenth-century sense of messianism was of no little importance. In patriots it was the sense that God's providential designs for Italy were finally becoming a reality; Italy was becoming a sovereign, united country. In Catholics it was the feeling that God was stepping in to aid the Church by rearing up ever new forces to fight the battle against hell and its powers.

People were vividly aware of Don Bosco's dream at the age of nine, of his subsequent prophetic dreams, and of the ongoing outburst of wondrous works centering around Don Bosco, the Oratory, and Mary Help of Christians. These were the solid roots of the conviction that in this "calamitous time" God

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Significant anecdotes are presented by Eugenio Ceria, *Profili di 33 coadiutori salesiani* (Colle Don Bosco, 1952). Very enlightening are the letters of SDB coadjutors: e.g., those of Frederick Oreglia (AS 275) and Peter Enria (AS 112 Malattie: exchange of letters on DB's illnesses. Enria was his infirmarian or nurse.).

⁷⁸ *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale*, p. 17.

had sent a man named John Bosco to bring comfort to good people and sow confusion among the wicked.⁷⁹ The sporadic statements of his friends and supporters make clear that they were applying to Salesian accomplishments the common supernatural criteria of Catholic tradition. The miracles, prophecies, and wondrous growth of Salesian works despite daily obstacles proved that God was protecting Don Bosco and his institutions. The supreme guarantee, however, derived from the goals that the Salesian Society had set for itself: i.e., the glory of God and the salvation of souls. It was the same psychological mechanism that prompted people to exclaim *non praevalerunt* and proclaim confidently that Mary Help of Christians would stamp out all heresies and triumph over the serpent of hell.⁸⁰ Despite the power of the opposing forces, Don Bosco and his work were triumphing. His enemies were falling in confusion and defeat. On May 14, 1862, Don Bosco said:

My dear sons, we live in troubled times. It may almost seem foolhardy to try setting up a new religious community in this unhappy hour when the world and hell itself are jointly doing their utmost to destroy existing orders. But never mind. I have sound reasons—not mere probable ones—that it is God’s will that our Society be born and grow. In the past, many attempts were made to foil it, but they failed totally. Not only that, but those few who more obstinately opposed it paid dearly for their trouble.⁸¹

One of the wonders Don Bosco alludes to frequently is the quantitative and qualitative growth of the Salesians, which in 1862 had been little more than a dream and a desire:

Who knows but that the Lord may wish to use this Society to achieve much good in his Church! Twenty-five or thirty years from now, if the Lord continues to help us as he has done so far, our Society may count a thousand members in different countries engaged in such tasks as catechizing the poor, sheltering

⁷⁹ Much material could be adduced here: e.g., the BS and the already mentioned works of Belasio, Leonori, D’Espiney, DuBoys, and Spinola. We also have the many written and printed comments, in prose and verse, for DB’s name day (AS 115). The literature of SDB devotion obviously followed this line. See, e.g., the meditation on “Don Bosco as God’s envoy” (“1. His divine mission. 2. His supernatural credentials. 3. Resultant practices”) in Domenico Bertetto, *San Giovanni Bosco: Meditazioni per la novena, le commemorazioni mensili e la formazione salesiana* (Chieri-Turin, 1955), pp. 59-64. For the argument based on “prodigious expansion,” see Guido Favini, *Alle fonti della vita salesiana* (Turin, 1965), pp. 22-25.

⁸⁰ See ch. VII, sec. 3-4.

⁸¹ Chronicle of Fr. Bonetti reproduced in BM 7:102-03. Note this basic affirmation: “Yet these are not the reasons which make me entertain high hopes for our Society. There are more important ones, the greatest being the sole goal we have set for ourselves—God’s greater glory and the good of souls” (BM 7:103).

homeless boys, teaching, and writing and spreading good books—all united in supporting, like true Christians, the Roman Pontiff and all sacred ministers. How much good will be accomplished!⁸²

With the passing years the dream turned into reality and evoked ever new bursts of religious enthusiasm from Don Bosco. On January 30, 1871, he was moved to say:

Our Society's remarkable growth is truly a miracle, considering these evil times, the widespread turmoil and the relentless warfare directed against the faithful... It is obvious that God's finger is here and that Our Lady is protecting us. Monks have been exiled and we respond by changing garb. We shall carry on in priestly robes, and should this too be forbidden, we shall use civilian garb and continue to do good. We shall even grow beards if we must, because these things cannot keep us from doing good. Freemasonry is against us en masse, everyone hates us and persecutes us, yet we are tranquil and at peace because of God's help.⁸³

Everyone felt that the ever increasing reputation of the Salesians and the ever growing number of students were quite inexplicable. The psychosocial factors got lost and the religious mind tended to reduce everything to the great struggle between good and evil. The vigorous fight of the wicked seemed merely to multiply the forces of good. On January 27, 1876, Don Bosco noted the growth in membership this way:

If you seek my true appraisal of our present situation, let me assure you...that I am satisfied. Our membership is growing so steadily that, were it not for my full trust in God, who will let things prosper, I would be frightened—as indeed I am in part—to see the Congregation growing almost too rapidly.⁸⁴

His thoughts turned to Mary, the humble handmaiden of God, through whom God did great things: “Truthfully, the wonders for which the Lord intends to avail himself of us poor Salesians are great indeed. You yourselves will marvel and be astounded to see how much you were able to accomplish in the world's sight for the good of mankind.”⁸⁵ Like a prophet who is no longer his own person, he invites his listeners to see Don Bosco and the Salesian Society as one and the same thing:

⁸² BM 7:103.

⁸³ Minutes of the 1871 general conference of the SDBs. See BM 10:462-63. [Editor's note: These conferences were usually held each January until they were supplanted by the triennial general chapters in 1877.]

⁸⁴ Minutes of the 1876 general conference of the SDBs. See BM 12:59.

⁸⁵ Conference of Jan. 27, 1876. See BM 12:64.

I have already summarily jotted down various items concerning the Oratory from its beginnings until now... I see this work as very useful to those who will follow after us and as redounding to God's greater glory. Hence, I shall strive to continue writing. This matter brooks no opposition from Don Bosco or anything else. Since Don Bosco's life is bound up with that of the Congregation, let us speak of him. Many things must be heralded unto God's greater glory, the salvation of souls, and our Congregation's broader expansion, because—let us say it here among ourselves—other religious congregations and orders have had inspirations, visions or supernatural happenings in their beginnings which gave a thrust to their start and secured their establishment, but for the most part they were limited to a single happening or, at best, just a few. With us the story is different. We may say that nothing has happened which was not known in advance. Our Congregation took no step that had not been suggested by some supernatural occurrence, and approved no change, improvement or expansion that was not prompted by God. That is why I think that Don Bosco does not matter in this regard. What do I care if people talk well or ill of these things? What does it matter to me if people judge me one way or another? Let them say what they will and speak as they will. Let them talk. It matters little to me, and I shall be not one whit more or less than what I am now before God. But God's interventions must be made manifest.⁸⁶

We get the definite impression that Don Bosco, as the years rolled along, dropped all discretion about the supernatural nature of the Salesian Society and the witnessing signs. In 1882, the year after the publication of D'Espiney's work (*Don Bosco*), we find the Preface of the Proceedings for General Chapter II of the Salesians saying: "The spread of our Society in Europe and [South] America is surely a sign that God is blessing it in a special way."⁸⁷

Countless pieces of testimony tell us that Salesians shared this basic conviction. From it they drew strength when their enthusiasm was put to severe test. Young men under thirty found themselves establishing Salesian houses with co-workers of little ability and boys of sometimes dubious character. The surrounding milieu often had its share of people who did not wish them well. Such men as Fathers John Bonetti, Paul Albera, Dominic Ruffino, and Charles Baratta (1861-1910) knew days of sorrow and gloom that revealed the many thorns buried in Don Bosco's arbor of roses.⁸⁸ Like Don Bosco himself, his Salesians grew accustomed to proclaiming the glories of their Society and the

⁸⁶ Conference to directors of SDB houses, Feb. 2, 1876. See BM 12:52. [Editor's note: In part, DB apparently is alluding to his autobiographical *Memoirs of the Oratory*, which he was writing at that time, under orders from Pope Pius IX.]

⁸⁷ *Deliberazioni del secondo Capitolo generale della Pia Società Salesiana, tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel settembre 1880* (Turin: Salesiana, 1882), p. v.

⁸⁸ Dream reported to the SDBs in 1864; reproduced in BM 3:25-27.

triumphs of God and Mary Help of Christians. They tended to bury their sharp thorns under the anesthetizing blanket of faith, tireless work, and shared fraternal enthusiasm. Despite “much inexperience and lack of preparation,” despite the prophets of gloom and doom, the Salesian Society continued to work, grow, and arouse enthusiastic support. In part that was due to

their calm certainty that God was with them. In Don Bosco the certainty grew out of the knowledge that he was a branch on the Vatican vine, on the divine vine, and in his Salesian sons it came from seeing the peace and assured certainty of their father.⁸⁹

5. *Salesian religious principles and practices*

(a) *Ascetical and charitable aims*

There is no doubt that Don Bosco had the conviction that the Salesian Society was to be a new religious congregation dedicated to the active life, ready to meet the needs of the day and capable of a favorable reception even from those opposed to the Church. Sometimes Don Bosco seems to be wide awake and on his guard, fearing that efforts are being made to undermine the organism he has created and lovingly nurtured as a gift from God for the benefit of the Church and the world. At other times he seems to operate under the common assumptions of his milieu and calmly to reiterate teachings of accepted, almost axiomatic value. So we find theoretical and practical cases where Don Bosco is alert and critical, and others of the same sort where he seems wholly undisturbed and unaffected.

⁸⁹ Paolo Lingueglia (1869-1934), *D. Bosco e il Papa: Commemorazione di D. Rua* (Parma, 1912), pp. 20-21. In this “attachment to the Pope,” Lingueglia sees one of the factors providing DB and the SDBs with security in thought and action (pp. 18-19): “I, myself a follower of Don Bosco, would certainly not say that [the SDBs] have lacked or are lacking personnel with sound, well-rounded religious and secular education. But the fact remains that the life of this Society founded by Don Bosco is more one of hard work than of contemplation, much less one of simple speculation. The ongoing concerns of a flourishing festive oratory, student body, or institute are not such as to nurture the quiet atmosphere for higher studies and long, serene treatises. For people dedicated to that kind of life and work, the main need is intellectual and moral certainty that they are working on the true track. They could not give themselves fully to their occupations, as they should, if they had doubts, uncertainties, and doctrinal debates about following this or that opinion as the more proper one. Their operational energy would be too distracted. A person cannot work without a serene mind and a tranquil heart. That serenity of mind and tranquility of heart is what Don Bosco was aiming for when he insisted on the full adhesion of his own person and his followers to the directives of the Pope.”

Theoretical problems about the nature of the religious life seem to have intruded very little on Don Bosco's thoughts. How did it differ specifically from the life of the ordinary faithful? On the basis of what criteria might it be considered a pathway of greater perfection?

Spelling out the advantages of the religious life, Don Bosco bases his remarks on a text attributed to Saint Bernard that could be found in Saint Alphonsus's *True Spouse of Jesus Christ*: the consecrated religious *vivit purius, cadit rarius, surgit velocius, incedit cautius, irroratur frequentius, quiescit securius...*⁹⁰ Don Bosco's exegesis starts with the assumption that the life of the lay person is full of danger and diabolical traps, far more so than that of life in the cloister. On that basis Don Bosco also grounds the preeminence of the religious life over that of the priest living in the world to care for souls; the latter needs a much sturdier virtue to avoid succumbing to the disordered enticements of the flesh. In a religious congregation the frailty of the individual is bolstered by the communal virtue of all those living in the community. The priest religious can be morally certain that his superior, whom he trusts, knows him well and will entrust him with a sacred ministry suited to his capabilities.

In various contexts that are never wholly or even satisfactorily linked, however, Don Bosco uses identical or similar terms to describe the life of the or-

⁹⁰ "...lives more purely, falls more rarely, rises more quickly, walks more carefully, upon him the dew of heavenly graces falls more frequently, reposes with greater security." See the Introduction to *Const.*, "Spiritual Advantages," pp. 18-22. We possess the complete rough draft written by DB in a very tortured style; see AS 022/101. The basic plan of the spiritual retreat given in Trofarello in 1868 centers around the same arguments, which expound the maxim *vivit purius, cadit rarius...* See AS 132 Prediche E4; MB 9:986-88; and excerpts published in Francis Desramaut, *Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life*, trans. Roger M. Luna, SDB (New Rochelle: Don Bosco, 1979), pp. 299-302.

There was a small work taken almost literally from what St. Alphonsus wrote: *Sentiments de St. Thomas d'Aquin et de Saint Alphonse de Liguori sur l'entrée en Religion* (Lyons-Paris, 1864). Through DB's good offices, Count Prosper Balbo (1824-94) translated it: *Sentimenti di S. Tommaso d'Aquino e di S. Alfonso Maria de' Liguori intorno all'entrata in Religione* (S. Benigno Canavese, 1886). But DB's version is closer to the Alphonsonian original (*The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, pp. 41-60) than to the French. Like St. Alphonsus, DB cites St. Bernard's *De bono religionis*, which deals, properly, with the *Homilia in illud Matthaei* 13:45: "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls," no. 1 (ML 184, cols. 1131-34). But St. Alphonsus would have taken much of his opinion from the exegesis and examples of Carlo Gregorio Rosignoli, SJ, *La saggia elezione, ovvero avvertimenti per fare la buona elezione* (Turin, 1673²), pt. 1, ch. 15: "A living portrait of the religious state," pp. 174-83. On Alphonsus's use of Rosignoli, see Giuseppe Cacciatore, "Le fonti e i modi di documentazione," in St. Alphonsus, *Opere ascetiche: Introduzione generale* (Rome, 1960), p. 211. In the context of Rosignoli, St. Bernard's opinion is useful especially to show the superiority, in the abstract and in practice, of the religious state over the secular state, either as a lay person or as a clergyman. Thus Rosignoli brings together the literature which from time to time has been used to defend and uphold the rationale and even the preeminence of the monastic and conventual life.

dinary Christian, the priest, and the professed religious. The Christian is “received into the bosom of Holy Mother Church” and henceforth belongs only to Jesus the Savior, to “his merits, his passion, his glory, and his dignity.”⁹¹ The Christian, in other words, is consecrated by baptism. Embracing the ecclesiastical state, the cleric is consecrated to God, becomes God’s portion, and embraces a state of greater perfection (as Don Bosco describes it in his *Life of Aloysius Comollo*⁹²). Taking the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, the religious consecrates himself wholly to God. When the first Salesians took vows for the first time on May 14, 1862, Don Bosco indicated that he, too, had taken the vows: “Well, as you were making your vows before me, I too was making them in perpetuity before this crucifix. I offered myself in sacrifice to the Lord, ready to bear anything for his greater glory and the welfare of souls, particularly the souls of the young.”⁹³ Consecration is seen in terms of sacrifice. Imitating Jesus Christ, the religious as immaculate victim sacrificially offers up his own will, his own goods, and his own life. Don Bosco also liked to depict the preeminence of the religious state by pondering and describing the fortunes of the Church. After Christ had ascended into heaven,

his apostles, his disciples, spread the evangelical counsels everywhere, populating the deserts of Egypt and Palestine with monks. Then arose the followers of the Rules of Saint Augustine, Saint Basil, Saint Benedict, and the other religious orders that God has brought into being to meet the needs of his Church. Under divine impetus, then, various institutes have arisen in response to the needs of specific ages: institutes with cultic aims, institutes for the purpose of individual or communal spiritual perfection, and institutes with charitable aims. The Salesian Society is dedicated to the last-mentioned aims. Brought into being by God, it has sought to meet the needs of a time calling especially for the education of poor, destitute young people.⁹⁴

The aim of the Salesian Society is related to Jesus Christ and Christian perfection in these terms: “to have them perfect themselves by imitating the virtues of our Divine Savior, especially in the exercise of charity toward poor boys.”⁹⁵ That is precisely what Don Bosco could read in the Constitutions of the

⁹¹ *Maggio*, day 9, p. 61.

⁹² *Comollo*, pp. 11-12: “From earliest childhood Comollo...was obedient, wholly given to devotion, and prompt to render any services permitted him in church. All that was a good sign that the Lord wanted him to strive for a state of greater perfection. He consulted his spiritual director on the matter many times, and the latter replied that he, insofar as he could tell, felt that God had called him to the priestly state. With this [Comollo] was very happy.”

⁹³ Chronicle of Fr. Bonetti, in BM 7:102.

⁹⁴ Retreat in Trofarello (Sept. 1868): MB 9:346-47.

⁹⁵ “...perfezionare se medesimi imitando le virtù del nostro Divin Salvatore specialmente nell’esercizio della carità verso i giovani poveri.” These are the words of the

Schools of Charity set up by the Cavanis brothers: *propriae perfectioni studere, Christum Dominum imitando* (“to strive after their own perfection by imitating Christ the Lord”). Don Bosco goes on to say: “Jesus Christ began first by doing and then by teaching; so, too, shall the members begin by perfecting themselves in the practice of virtue, both interior and exterior, and by acquiring knowledge; then they shall devote themselves to the welfare of their neighbor.”⁹⁶ Utilizing an accommodative interpretation of the first verse of the Acts of the Apostles, Don Bosco spells out the relationship between the quest for personal perfection and the practice of charity toward one’s neighbor. Such an interpretation was also the basis for the Rules of the Vincentians and the Constitutions of the Schools of Charity.⁹⁷ But his legislative mind does not want to rule out the notion that

earliest redaction of the Constitutions (see AS 022/1). From *perfezionare* to *Salvatore* is in Fr. Rua’s script; DB added *specialmente... poveri*. Fr. Rua’s text is closer to that of the Schools of Charity. Apparent are some elements of DB’s way of thinking and expressing himself. He does not codify the general aim of the Salesian Society in terms of ministry, apostolate, or mission. He formulates it in terms of the “exercise of charity”: i.e., in terms of the theological virtue that is manifested best in caring for the needy. But the idea of the apostolate as associated with the priestly ministry, or better, priestly zeal, is not alien to DB’s vocabulary. See, e.g., *Cafasso*, p. 42: “Don Cafasso’s Apostolate in the Prisons.” On “charity” as often equivalent to almsgiving and “concern for the poor” (*souci des pauvres*) even back in the 17th century, see Jacques LeBrun, “France (17^e siècle),” in *DSP* 5, col. 929. Also worth reading in this connection are two sections on “The Service of God Through Action” and “Active Charity and Spiritual Perfection” in Desramaut, pp. 219-23.

To combat pauperism and beggary and to further the “moral” elevation of the people, a huge network of charitable institutions came into being from the 17th century on. See the following works by way of examples: Léon Lallemand, *Histoire des enfants abandonnés et délaissés: Étude sur la protection de l’enfance aux diverses époques de la civilisation* (Paris, 1885), on p. 435 of which he alludes to DB as a magnificent example of what can be accomplished by individual initiative, despite all the obstacles posed by Italy specifically in this period; idem, *Histoire de la Charité*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1905-1912); Louis Prunel, “Les Pauvres et l’Église,” in *Dictionnaire apologétique de la foi catholique* 3 (Paris, 1921), cols. 1655-1735, which refers to DB in col. 1731; Liese, *Geschichte der Caritas* (Freiburg, 1922); Gustave Neyron, *Le Christianisme en action: Histoire de la Charité* (Paris, 1927), which refers to “les Patronages de Dom Bosco” on p. 184; Eduard Winter, *Der Josefismus* (Berlin, 1962), pp. 176-92.

⁹⁶ This is art. 2 of the Constitutions: AS 022/1. See BM 5:637, no. 2.

⁹⁷ *Regole ovvero costituzioni comuni della Congregazione della Missione* (1658), ch. 1, s. 1., pp. 9-10: “Jesus Christ...began first to do, and then to teach... The little Congregation of the Mission desires...1. To work for one’s own perfection, *doing what is possible* to practice the virtues that this Sovereign Teacher deigned to teach us by word and example.” The oldest redaction of the SDB Constitutions has something written by Fr. Rua that DB crossed out: *per quanto è possibile* (“as far as possible”).

Constitutiones Congregationis sacerdotum soecularium Scholarum Charitatis (Venice, 1837), pp. 14-15: “Congregatio Scholarum Charitatis ad hunc finem praecipue instituta est, ut scilicet erga juvenes, non tam praeceptoris quam patris officia exercere suscipiat.

the exercise of charity may be an instrument of perfection. Offering clarification in that sense is a gloss subsequent to 1874: *Sanctificatio sui ipsius, salus animarum per exercitium caritatis en finis nostrae Societatis* (“The sanctification of oneself and the salvation of souls through the practice of charity: this is the object of our Society”).⁹⁸ Don Bosco’s concern is that of the Cavanis brothers: no one is to be dedicated to works for which he is unprepared. When he discusses this, Don Bosco has in mind the problem of the soul’s salvation:

Before sending someone to preach, teach, or lead, his superior measures his capabilities as a mother does those of her little bird in the nest. She does not provoke it to fly until she sees it furnished with strong wings, for she is afraid that it may not be able to escape the claws of the falcon or that it may fall to the ground helplessly. So a superior does not give a mission to someone until he sees that he has strong enough wings to avoid losing himself and others. Before going out to preach custody of the eyes to others, for example, he must possess it to a high degree himself. Otherwise he will not only not be heeded but also reproached with the words: *Medice, cura te ipsum* [“Physician, cure yourself”: Luke 4:23]... Also indispensable is knowledge of the things required for carrying out his own duties...⁹⁹

Some of the expressions in the Constitutions, which ought to have been formally impeccable, might well have aroused displeasure. A meticulous jurist might not be pleased with the statement that the Salesian Society was composed of “priests, clerics, and laymen.”¹⁰⁰ Would it not have been more correct to say that it was composed of ecclesiastics and laymen? In strictly juridical terms, are not priests clerics also? And why make a distinction between interior and exterior virtues?¹⁰¹ To be perfectly correct, virtues should be considered qualities of the soul. Apparently, however, those expressions did not bother the censors of Turin and Rome. Nor did they bother the committee of cardinals, who found matters in the Constitutions presented by Don Bosco that were more deserving of censure in their eyes.

Ejus alumnorum itaque munus erit. 1° Propriae perfectioni studere, Christum Dominum imitando qui prius coepit facere, postea docuit. 2° Pueros et juvenes paterna dilectione complecti, gratis educare...”

⁹⁸ Gloss on a copy of the *Regulae seu Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii* (Turin, 1874), AS 022/21, p. [3]; published in MB 10:994.

⁹⁹ Retreat in Trofarello (Sept. 1868), in MB 9:347. The marginal notes in the *Regulae* cited in the previous note reflect the same order of ideas. Indeed, as a gloss on art. 2 DB wrote: “2° Itaque si faciunt aliter quam alios doceant, illis dicitur: *medice, cura te ipsum.*”

¹⁰⁰ So phrased in art. 1 of the SDB Constitutions.

¹⁰¹ The “interior virtues” were even forgotten in the Latin ed. published in Turin in 1873, p. 8: “*Iesus Christus coepit facere et docere, ita etiam socii incipient externarum virtutum exercitio, et scientiarum studio se ipsos perficere; deinde aliorum beneficio strenuam operam dabunt.*”

(b) *Practical training and formation for Salesian life*

Rome was not pleased with the fact that the Salesian Constitutions said nothing about a novitiate year.¹⁰² In March 1874, Don Bosco responded to such demands and put in a letter a series of articles concerning the trial period of a novitiate. It was to entail practical training in the charitable activities of the Salesian Society: study, day and evening schooling, catechism lessons for boys, and helping out in more difficult cases. The novices, “omnes...non leve experimentum facturi sunt de studio, de scholis diurnis et vespertinis, de catechesi pueris facienda, atque de assistentia in difficilioribus casibus praestanda.”¹⁰³ This article merely codified more than a decade of practical experience in Valdocco, where someone who joined the congregation or at least agreed to help Don Bosco was given various duties as needs and possibilities dictated.

Here we have one of the clearest points of dispute between Don Bosco and the partisans of traditional Church discipline in its post-Trent form. Persons with experience of the religious life, such as the Vincentian Mark Anthony Durando, were very doubtful about the efficacy of a novitiate that did not isolate new recruits and work deliberately and directly on the inner consolidation of every individual. Reported Durando:

The success, or rather the future, of any congregation depends on its beginnings. If now in fact there is no separation between young clerics and others, if there are no fixed norms for each group, if the Congregation has no distinct novitiate, house of studies, and specific norms and rules by which to form its aspirants in the spirit of the institute, we cannot hope that it will either succeed or last.¹⁰⁴

Archbishop Gastaldi, who had experienced the religious life in Rosmini's Institute of Charity, would later offer sharp criticism of Don Bosco to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars:

In my opinion, Don Bosco is very much in error in this matter of a novitiate. I would think that all those who intend to take vows in a congregation should be trained specifically for two years in humility and self-abnegation, and that in order to attain full self-indifference, which is the substantial characteristic of a religious, they should apply themselves to special ascetical exercises, as is usually done in religious orders, especially in the Society of Jesus.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Something noted by the Vatican consultor Raymond Bianchi, no. 26: “Novitiates are totally lacking in the Constitutions”; published in *Torinese: Sopra l'approvazione delle Costituzioni della Società Salesiana* (Rome, 1874), p. 34. See also MB 10:939.

¹⁰³ *Regulae Societatis S. Francisci Salesii* (Rome, 1874), §14, art. 8, p. 35. See MB 10:912-13.

¹⁰⁴ BM 6:422.

¹⁰⁵ Private letter to the Card. Prefect of the S. Cong. of Bishops and Regulars, Turin, Apr. 20, 1873. The original is in the archives of the S. Cong. for Religious and Secular

In his turn, Don Bosco stated that it would be unsuitable and inopportune for his institute to have a novitiate setup which was separate from the life of professed members and in which crucial value was not placed on the practice of the very works that a candidate would be doing for the rest of his life as a member. His was not a congregation of people dedicated to prayer or penance primarily but one of educators. How could the teaching capabilities of novices be evaluated if they were not actually tried out? In truth, Don Bosco was afraid that these future teachers of his would, in the novitiate, get more used to a life of comfort than a life of work; that they would develop inclinations to laziness rather than to the desired practice of interior and exterior virtues. Above all, Don Bosco had operated successfully that way so far. His novices worked like other members, prayed with them, and learned from them how to proceed in prayer, in virtue, and in their conduct as assistants and teachers. For Don Bosco, who started from concrete experience, the novitiate was to be a bit like an apprenticeship.¹⁰⁶ To top matters off, a statute firmly stipulating that novices should not be used as assistants and teachers would stifle the outward thrust and spread of the Society precisely when the “needs of the day,” serving as the voice of God, urged it to keep moving ahead.

In this case tradition made its weight felt, as did the experience of prelates in the Roman Curia who dealt with religious congregations. Dozens of other religious constitutions besides that of the Salesians were on their desks.¹⁰⁷ The Salesian Society was brought into line with existing discipline. Its novices would have a separate house, be under the discipline of a master, and be tested substantially on the virtues of religious.

Institutes: posiz. T. 91. The version cited here from BM 10:324 reproduces the one cited in *Torinese: Sopra l'approvazione*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁶ Reply of DB to “Summary of earlier observations transmitted to Fr. John Bosco about the Constitutions, tendered in the year 1873.” No. 16 of the Summary says, among other things: “Of singular concern and importance is the gathering of the novices in a novitiate house, their complete separation from the professed, their *sole* occupation with spiritual exercises alone *without their being able to be applied to the works of the Institute*” (italics in the original). See *Torinese: Sopra l'approvazione*, pp. 38-39; MB 10:942.

DB replied: “It is not noted in the Constitutions, but [the novitiate] is there. Thirty years of testing guarantee us good results... With regard to not applying the students to the works of the Institute, that is not possible because our basis is that the students always are tested in teaching catechism, offering assistance, etc.; but always in such a way that they can pursue their own studies, as has been done up to now. But an article will be added to spell out the way in which they are to do their studies” (AS 023, autograph draft of DB).

For more information on DB's views concerning a regular novitiate, the reader may refer to Excursus B at the end of the chapter, p. 451.

¹⁰⁷ The list of institutes (more than 130) that addressed themselves to Rome between 1821 and 1861 is provided by Pietro Bizzarri, *Collectanea in usum Secretariae S. Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium* (1885²), pp. 808-14.

Practical training in the specific works of the Salesian Society would serve as a preliminary test or “first test” for aspirants.¹⁰⁸ Novices would be permitted to teach catechism to boys on Sundays—under the direction of their master and in their own house.¹⁰⁹

The Salesian Society gradually turned to this discipline even during Don Bosco’s own lifetime.¹¹⁰ With the passing years fewer novices were needed, as Don Bosco had once needed them, to act as assistants and teachers in the various houses.¹¹¹ But the lessons of the novice master retained the basic orientation

¹⁰⁸ *Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii*, §14, art. 1, orig. approved ms. AS 022/18, p. 25: “1. Socius quicumque tria probationis stadia facturus est, antequam absolute in Societatem accipiatur. —Primum probationis stadium novitiatum praecedere debet, et appellatur aspirantium; secundum est Novitiatum proprie dictus; tertium est tempus votorum triennialium.” See MB 10:986.

Text published in Turin in 1874, p. 41: “1. Socius quisque tria probationis stadia facturus est, antequam in societatem recipiatur. Primum probationis stadium tyrocinii tempus seu *novitiatum* praecedere debet, et appellatur aspirantium; secundum est tyrocinium ipsum, seu Novitiatum proprie dictus; tertium est tempus votorum triennialium.” Notice the additions and changes in the published text: *quisque*; *tyrocinii tempus seu novitiatum*; *tyrocinium ipsum, seu*. AS 022/21a and 022/21b and a copy of the Turin edition of 1874 in the archives of the S. Cong. for Religious and Secular Institutes, through crossings out and ms. comments, restore the printed text to fidelity to the original approved ms. (preserved in Turin) and the authentic ms. copy (preserved in Rome). Here I might also make mention of the “scruples” of Card. Joseph Andrew Bizzarri (1802-77), the specialist on religious constitutions for the S. Cong. of Bishops and Regulars. DB expressed to him his thanks and indebtedness for the approval received, but the cardinal demurred and said thanks was really owed to Pius IX. DB realized that the cardinal himself had been tormented by scruples about the matter. See MB 10:800.

¹⁰⁹ *Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii*, §14, art. 12. See MB 10:988.

¹¹⁰ This is evident from the deliberations of the superior chapter (=general council) and the various general chapters. Much was due to Fr. Julius Barberis, who was largely in charge of the formation of clerics. Wholly devoted to DB, Barberis helped to inculcate the same sort of devotion in his charges. Inclined to devout, methodical asceticism, he had a tangible influence on the structures of the first SDB houses of study. See Alessio Barberis, *Don Giulio Barberis, direttore spirituale della Società di San Francesco di Sales: Cenni biografici e memorie* (S. Benigno Canavese, 1932). It would be worth examining his interventions in the various general chapters (AS 04) and his reports on individual novices (AS 22).

¹¹¹ We see surfacing two factors: the desire to conform to existing Church discipline on the one hand, and the difficulty of altering intramural SDB discipline on the other. Worth noting are DB’s comments at a meeting of the superior chapter on Feb. 23, 1885. After calling for a reading of the two decrees of Pius IX about the novitiate from around 1848, DB observed: “With respect to the novitiate house, rigidity in the manner of setting it up had to be slackened to some extent. Popes Pius IX and Leo XIII told me as much. Indeed Pius IX was personally interested in having a committee of prelates duly set up. To form a novitiate house, we only need two or three novices gathered here, even though another 50 novices may be scattered around here and there in other

of Don Bosco, as we see from the *Vademecum* of Father Barberis.¹¹² Much emphasis was placed on the qualities of Salesian educators. Novices were urged to be ready to undertake any and every kind of teaching activity: with academic students or artisans, in more dignified-looking surroundings and in more humble and difficult surroundings.¹¹³

Of more marginal critical interest was the precise philosophical and theological orientation of the Salesians. Their Constitutions, following the lead of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, asserted that Saint Thomas Aquinas would be their common teacher.¹¹⁴ Here we have a vestige of the Thomism professed in the philosophy and theology taught at the University of Turin and at other

houses out of necessity, because then they are not materially in the novitiate house only because of urgent work and were not placed definitively in the places where they find themselves. In this way it is easy to set up novitiate houses in the other Salesian provinces of Italy as well" (see MB 17:656-57). This very broad interpretation could not be based on authoritative jurists, much less on the practice overseen by the S. Cong. of Bishops and Regulars. DB appeals to guidelines received from Pius IX and Leo XIII. His trustful and daring behavior is also evident with respect to the length of the novitiate. Fr. Joseph Vespignani (who was already a priest) and Fr. Charles Cays (a nobleman) were professed after a few months. The profession of the latter was attacked by Abp. Gastaldi. By order of the S. Cong. of Bishops and Regulars, and despite DB's explanations, his profession had to be done over again after the proper term of months required for the novitiate by the Constitutions. Nor did matters go easily for the erection of a novitiate house in Marseille. Both cases are discussed in detail in the MB; see *Indice* MB, pp. 278, 526.

¹¹² Giulio Barberis, *Vade mecum degli ascritti salesiani* (S. Benigno Canavese: Salesiana, 1901). It deals successively with such topics as the following: the advantages of religious life over life in the world; the advantages of the active religious life over the contemplative religious life; the advantages of a religious life dedicated to the education of young people over other forms of religious life; the up-to-date relevance of an educational congregation seeking the "transformation and regeneration of society" (p. 21); and the providential appearance of DB as God's apostle for the salvation of young people. The relevance and suitability of the Salesian Society in meeting the needs of the day are proved by several factors: "...the complete agreement of the Catholic episcopate in praising and supporting it, its astonishing spread in such difficult times, and the requests from all sorts of persons and places, so that even if there were a hundredfold more members, there would be suitable situations and places in which to place them, to the immense glory of God and welfare of souls. And why? Because it is the work of God, because it meets the needs of the day, because it is visibly protected and supported by our Lady, and because it is destined to save young people and society in our day. So if you feel inclined to embrace this great and useful work, do not hesitate for a moment..." (pp. 36-37).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 346, 416.

¹¹⁴ *Const.*, §12, art. 3, pp. 34-35: "Our master shall be Saint Thomas and those other authors who are commonly held in higher esteem for catechetical instruction and the explanation of Catholic doctrine" (Eng. 1957, art. 166).

Costituzioni...degli Oblati di Maria Vergine, pt. 1, ch. 2, art. 1, §2, no. 8, p. 20: "Their master is St. Thomas..."

schools under government authority.¹¹⁵ But the Salesian Society was not the Dominican Order or the Society of Jesus. As a very new institute, it did not have a school of thought or tradition to defend. So among the Salesians we find the same disentanglement from scholastic systems that we found in Don Bosco's training at the Ecclesiastical College. From the texts of Canon Joseph Rebaudengo (1775-1858), Father Angelo Serafino (1802-1887), and Father John Francis Molinari (1816-1893), used in the Turin seminary that was attended by the first Salesians,¹¹⁶ they moved to the texts of the Jesuits John Perrone, Hugo von Hurter (1832-1914), and Francis Xavier Schouppe (1823-1904), and the Oblate Frederick Sala (1842-1903), thus shifting from Augustinianism to Thomism to Molinism.

The orientation in moral theology did not create any major problems. The Salesians followed the benignist line that came to prevail in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The texts used were that of Fathers Peter Scavini (1791-1869) and John Anthony DelVecchio and Alphonsian ones such as those of Father Joseph Frassinetti and Cardinal Thomas Gousset, whose writings were recommended respectively for the practical examination on confession and completion of one's studies in moral theology.¹¹⁷ In line with Don Bosco's own

¹¹⁵ *Costituzioni di Sua Maestà per l'Università di Torino* (Turin, 1772), tit. 3, ch. 1, art. 2-3, pp. 35-36. Tommaso Vallauri, *Storia delle università del Piemonte*, 3 vols. (Turin, 1845-46).

¹¹⁶ Giuseppe Rebaudengo, *Institutiones theologicae in quinque partes pro scholastico quinquennio tributae*, 10 vols. (Saluzzo, 1840-43); Angelo Serafino, *Praelectiones theologicae, de Trinitate, de angelis et de homine* (Turin: Officina Regia, 1845-46), one-vol. ed.; idem, *Praelectiones theologicae*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (Turin: Speirani 1853-55); Giovanni Francesco Molinari, *Praelectiones de Ordinis sacramento quas ad suos auditores habuit Joannes Franciscus Molinari* (Turin: Speirani, 1865-66).

¹¹⁷ *Deliberazioni del quinto Capitolo generale della Pia Società Salesiana, tenuto in Valsalice presso Torino nel settembre 1889* (S. Benigno Canavese, 1890), p. 5: "For textbooks in theology, we will keep using for now Del Vecchio for moral theology and Perrone for dogmatic theology. In the meantime and by way of experiment, for dogmatic theology Sala will be used at the Oratory, Hurter at Valsalice, and Schouppe at Marseille... As preparation for the examination in confession, every priest will study Gousset, *Manuale compendium moralis theologiae*. All are advised then to complete these studies in moral theology with Frassinetti."

The works mentioned are the following: Pietro Scavini and Giovanni Antonio Del Vecchio, *Theologia moralis universa ad mentem S. Alphonsi de Ligorio* (Milan, 1882¹³); Giovanni Perrone, SJ, *Praelectiones theologicae*, 9 vols. (Rome, 1835-42), which went through many editions (see Carlos Sommervogel, *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus* 6, cols. 558-60); Federico Sala (an Oblate Missionary of Rho who later became a bishop), *Institutiones theologiae dogmaticae*, 4 vols. (Milan, 1880); Hugo Hurter, SJ, *Medulla theologiae dogmaticae* (Innsbruck, 1870, 1894⁵); François-Xavier Schouppe, SJ, *Elementa theologiae dogmaticae* (Brussels, 1861, 1864⁴); Thomas-M.-Joseph Gousset, *Manuale compendium moralis theologiae iuxta principia S. Alphonsi* (Milan, 1859²). On Frassinetti, see n. 7 above.

predilections, the Salesian mind was drawn to focus on the basic problem of benefiting individuals and groups. Such benefits would result from an infectious benevolence spurring penitents to committed immersion in their Christian "duties."

As was true in the case of the novices, efforts were gradually made to put better order into the philosophical and theological studies of Salesians, which were to be carried out in suitable places under the guidance of responsible teachers. Fewer and fewer Salesians followed the course of such men as Fathers Francis Bodrato (1823-1880), John Baptist Baccino (1843-1877), and Angelo Piccono: coming with a teaching or law degree and then completing the necessary philosophical and theological studies for ordination in one to three years. But the older image of the Salesian persisted for a long time during the lifetime of Don Bosco. One could find the Salesian cleric who was taking his own courses in philosophy and theology while helping out with high school boys, teaching all sorts of subjects, and supervising games in the courtyard. This injected into the whole educational process a tone of youthfulness, freshness, immediacy, and looseness that readily attracted boys to the Salesian educational family and won their loyalty.

(c) Vocations, vows, and eternal salvation

We find in Don Bosco, interwoven among teachings of mainly Alphonsian inspiration, a pastoral effort to gear boys toward religious or priestly vocations. The locales of this pastoral effort were Valdocco first and foremost, other Salesian institutions, and occasionally seminaries of the province and other areas. The culminating moment in the educational process was the choice of a state in life. Academic students ordinarily made this choice while they were still teenagers, toward the end of high school (fifth-year *ginnasio*). Artisans might make their choice around the same age or at a later stage, even as grown men.¹¹⁸

The process of vocational preparation revolved around two poles. The first pole was the whole complex of psychological and emotional factors that drew young people to Don Bosco and his activities. Their ties of affection with him were nurtured. So was their sense of obligation to the one who had welcomed them with open arms and helped them, rescuing them from a milieu in which

¹¹⁸ This remark on young students applies in the abstract. In concrete reality one must remember the adult vocations (the Sons of Mary) who were moved rapidly from elementary studies to the study of philosophy and theology. Their vocations were already given direction from the time when their parish priest or some other priest directed them toward DB. See, e.g., the obituaries of Frs. Michael Unia (1849-95), Anthony Morra (1863-1940), and Anthony Rebagliati (1859-1927). There were also those who knew DB while they were seminarians: e.g., Frs. Henry Foschini (1861-86), Charles Bonini (1863-1935), and Francis Cottrino (1864-1939).

they had no means to pursue academic studies or learn a trade. These sentiments of gratitude and obligation served as the bases for nurturing a desire to remain with Don Bosco always, to stay at the Oratory and become Salesians. In the minds of the boys, Don Bosco and his Salesians would become a life-ideal and a symbol of success and security.¹¹⁹

The second pole was made up of religious and transcendent elements. In young people who felt drawn to remain with Don Bosco, the idea of giving oneself to God early was translated into an attraction to the priestly or religious state. Or a desire to become a priest that had existed in a youth even before meeting Don Bosco might turn into the possibility of becoming a Salesian and the determination to do so. The notion of giving oneself to God early in life would take on a note of obligation. When the right moment came, one had to face the responsibility of choosing a state in life. Giving oneself to God and choosing one's state in life converged as the duty to "heed God's call," in the knowledge that on that choice would depend the rest of one's life here and hereafter.¹²⁰

The boys in Valdocco were confronted with the choice of either living upright lives in the world or giving themselves completely to God in the religious or priestly state.¹²¹ A high percentage of them chose to pursue a religious vocation. Don Bosco suggested that a sign of their possible vocation was already

¹¹⁹ It is a point consistently brought out in the obituaries of SDBs who had some personal contact with DB, from Fr. Rua to the youngest boys in 1887-88. DB himself drafted a letter for the cleric Joseph Cagliari (1847-74) in which he described the growth of Cagliari's attachment to the Salesian Society as if the latter were writing the letter to Abp. Riccardi. Cagliari then copied the letter, dated Nov. 6, 1869: "I am firmly determined to join the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales. I came here as a young boy, and had I not received moral and material assistance, I would not have been able to pursue my studies. I therefore feel deeply attached to the place and to the persons who gave me intellectual and moral nourishment. Don Bosco has always left me free to stay or go. Physically and morally I have always belonged to this Congregation, though I never committed myself to it as I do now through this letter" (autograph draft of DB, AS 131/01 Riccardi; *Ep.* 788; cited here from BM 9:357).

¹²⁰ DB sums up his pastoral line on vocations in his "Spiritual Testament." To youths who show inclinations to adopt the SDB life, conferences are to be given at least twice a month: "In these conferences, talk about what a boy should do or avoid in order to be a good Christian. *The Companion of Youth* provides the main arguments on the subject. But do not talk to them about our rules in particular or about vows or about leaving home or relatives. They are matters that will enter their hearts without any specific discussion of them. Hold to the great principle: one must give oneself to God sooner or later, and God calls blessed the person who begins to dedicate himself to God in his youth. *Beatus homo cum portaverit jugum ab adolescentia sua* [Lam 3:27] (see *Giov. prov.* pt. I [sec. 1], art. 3, p. 12). So the world with all its charms, relatives, friends, and home must be given up and left forever, sooner or later, out of love or necessity" (see AS 132 Quaderni 6; MB 17:263; also BM 5:256-57; BM 12:67-69, 182, 233-34).

¹²¹ See DB's instructions at the retreat held in Lanzo in 1875: MB 11:573-80.

to be found in the fact that they were at the Oratory or attending a conference for all the aspirants, novices, and professed members.¹²² To those seeking

¹²² "I am of the opinion that merely the fact that you have all been called here, brought together for this retreat, is a sign that the Lord wants to draw you to himself in this very place, this very Congregation. I consider the mere fact that you are here as a sign of your vocation; not the only one, but a true sign" (Conference of DB to professed SDBs, novices, and aspirants at the start of the school year, Oct. 30, 1876, MB 12:560).

On the percentage of vocations coming from SDB houses, we have a significant statement of DB to the members of the superior chapter at the start of 1875. He had been pondering the scarcity of vocations while hearing confessions, and in his thoughts was transported to his room, where he began to study old registers. A mysterious voice urged him to continue in order to find a solution. "As I continued to think and to thumb through old registers in obedience to the order given by that mysterious voice, I noticed that of the many boys in our schools who study for the priesthood hardly 15 out of every 100—that is, not even 2 out of 10—ever receive the cassock because they leave the seminary for family reasons, or to take the examinations for college, or they change their minds as so frequently happens during the last year of high school. On the other hand, among the adults, nearly all—that is 8 out of 10—receive the cassock; they succeed in less time and with less effort" (BM 11:21-22).

So according to DB himself, up to 1874, 15% of young student alumni managed to reach clerical investiture. Statistics on the boys of Valdocco verify the truth of his statement and indicate we should properly estimate the value (i.e., the *promotional* character) of other data: e.g., the data offered in n. 106 above; the data in BM 5:264-68; and the data which DB offered Canon Clement Guiol (1817-84) in a letter of July 31, 1878 (BM 13:562-63; *Ep.* 1801). The latter item is worth citing here: "This year alone some three hundred of our students will enter a seminary upon finishing their high school courses. Here is the breakdown: Salesian Congregation 80; Foreign Missions 20; Religious Orders 15; Diocesan Seminaries 185; total 300" (BM 13:562-63).

The relative data for 1879 are as follows: priest members with perpetual vows 109; priests with triennial vows 1; perpetually professed coadjutors 73; triennially professed coadjutors 26; perpetually professed clerics 71; triennially professed clerics 66; students with triennial vows 1. The total of professed was 347. In 1878 there were 142 novices. Of them 60 professed: 31 took perpetual vows right away, 29 triennial vows.

In 1878-79 there were 148 novices: 7 priests, 59 coadjutors, 81 clerics, 1 student; 46 of these had been novices the previous year; 86 were residing in Valdocco, 11 in Nice, and the rest in various SDB houses. In 1878 the fifth-year of high school in Valdocco had 38 students. Only three of these entered the novitiate; the most well-known would prove to be Anthony Aime (1861-1921), who would become the SDB provincial in Colombia. Of the 148 novices, 71 professed within the year: 3 priests, 23 coadjutors, and 45 clerics; 50 took perpetual vows, 21 triennial vows; 38 continued their novitiate, 16 of these having already prolonged it from 1878. Another 12 of these later professed: 6 coadjutors, 5 clerics, 1 student. Overall, then, of the 148 novices, 83 (56.1%) professed, 39 (26.4%) died as SDBs, and 44 (53.0% of the 83 who professed) later left the Congregation.

Readers should note the following points about DB's comments in his letter to Canon Guiol. It should not be assumed that all 300 attended high school in SDB houses. DB's use of the term "youths" should be taken in a very broad sense. Of the 81 clerics in the novitiate, only one (Michael Olivero) was a holdover from the preceding year. And

clearer criteria for deciding whether they were called to the religious or priestly state, Don Bosco usually offered the criteria that we find summarized in *Valentine*. Upright behavior, necessary knowledge, and an ecclesiastical spirit are signs of a vocation: "Upright behavior is particularly evident in victory over the vices against the sixth commandment, and for that one must rely on the opinion of one's confessor." In the matter of knowledge, one must rely on the judgment of one's superiors and the outcome of school examinations. By an ecclesiastical or priestly spirit Don Bosco means the tendency to take delight in those church functions that are compatible with one's age and occupations. The fourth criterion, already implied in the third, is "the inclination to this state of life, prompting a person to embrace it in preference to any other state, even one more replete with advantages and glory."¹²³

Aids in making a good choice are prayer, recollection, and the advice of prudent people, especially one's confessor. In an age when everyone breathed to some extent the air of utilitarianism, anticlericalism, and hostility to the consecrated religious life, exhortations to mistrust one's own relations and family take on particular significance: *Inimici hominis domestici eius* ("one's enemies will be those of his household" [Matt 10:36]). Don Bosco also invokes Saint Thomas. When we are choosing our state in life, family relatives are enemies, not friends. Becoming inhuman, they would rather see us go to hell with them than attain salvation without them: "When your parents or other people in authority try to dissuade you from the path to which God invites you, remember this is a time to practice the great counsel of the gospel message that we should obey God rather than human beings" (see Acts 5:29).¹²⁴

At this point Don Bosco interjects strong doses of specifically Alphonsian teaching. It is a message that he wanted delivered to anyone who had come to sense a clear call to the religious life or the clerical state. In the Salesian family, then, it was a message delivered to aspirants, novices, and professed members in colloquies, conferences, and monthly or annual retreats.¹²⁵

when DB says some returned to their bishop or diocese, this might simply mean that they returned to their native home or region. Certainly DB was trying to get across to Canon Guiol that a SDB novitiate in Marseille would be useful to all: dioceses, religious orders, and missions.

¹²³ Bosco, *Valentino, o la vocazione impedita* (Turin, 1866), pp. 27-29. The same theme frames his 1875 instruction in Lanzo; see MB 11:573-74. See also BM 11:277-86; BM 12:68; and ch. X, sec. 3, in this volume, pp. 206-07.

¹²⁴ *Giov. prov.* (Turin, 1878⁷⁵), p. 77 (the instruction on choosing a state in life is missing in earlier editions); Turin, 1885¹⁰⁵, p. 75.

¹²⁵ See the abundant material given in the *Indice MB*, s.v. "vocazione," pp. 490-94. Besides pages of *Giov. prov.* and *Valentino*, specific treatment of vocation is to be found in DB's biographies of Comollo, Savio, Magone, Besucco, and Cafasso, among others. The Introduction to the Constitutions of the Salesian Society also contains com-

By the very fact of being called, one has a special divine invitation, the gift of a divine call.¹²⁶ For such a person ordinary life in the world cannot and should not have the value it has for the average Christian. The “world” should not hold any illusory or dangerous attraction for the one called. Happy or sad experiences in one’s life as a simple believer matter not. Once one feels the call or has already started to follow one’s vocation, the world is to be regarded as a snare, a danger, a trap.

The images of ecclesiology and mariology now recur in conjunction with the theme of religious and priestly detachment from earthly things. Like the Church, the Congregation is symbolized by Noah’s ark. The world is the flood seeking to submerge everything, “a stormy sea on which malevolence and

ments of the theme, which were drawn up by one of DB’s coworkers (Fr. Albera?) and then checked by him personally; see AS 022/101.1. Accompanying books for young people included the following works that merit notice here: Giuseppe Zama-Mellini, *Gesù al cuore del giovane* (Rome, 1833; Turin: Marietti, 1834), and subsequently, *L’entrata nel mondo, ovvero consigli ad un giovinetto che lascia la scuola per abbracciare uno stato* (LC) (Turin, 1869); Francesco Martinengo, *Il gran passo raccomandato ai giovani e alle giovinette cristiane e anche un poco ai loro genitori* (LC) (Turin, 1877; 6th thousand printed 1911); St. Alphonsus, *Opuscoli relativi allo stato religioso e lettere sul medesimo argomento* (Turin: Salesiana, 1885); *Sentimenti di S. Tommaso d’Aquino e di S. Alfonso Maria de’ Liguori intorno all’entrata in religione* (S. Benigno Canavese, 1886; Turin: SEI, 1921: new ed. rev. according to the Code of Canon Law). Published after DB’s death but following the same line were such works as the following: Stefano Trione, *Felicità sconosciute: Lettere ed esempi sulla vocazione religiosa* (LC) (Turin, 1891, 1896³); Carlo M. Vigiotti, *Una vocazione tradita: Memorie storiche* (Turin: Salesiana, 1891).

¹²⁶ Note DB’s talk to the aspirants, novices, and professed on Oct. 30, 1876, which echoes the Introduction to the Constitutions and the strong influence of St. Alphonsus; see BM 12:409-14. Here is a pertinent excerpt (BM 12:410): “As for all of you gathered here, were you to ask me if your vocation is to remain in the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, I believe that I can answer affirmatively. Yes, all of you are called to the Salesian Congregation, to the priesthood and to the religious life. I can assure you in God’s name that all of those who made their profession were undoubtedly called. Before accepting them I made it a point to know them thoroughly, and by admitting them I proved beyond doubt that I was convinced of their worthiness for this great calling... What of those who are only novices or aspirants? I believe I can say the same thing, and I can prove it. How? Holy Scripture says that the whole world is under the evil one and is enslaved by lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life. Now the Lord wants us to save ourselves...and to love Him alone. Is not the world a great obstacle to this love? It certainly is. Consequently, does one act rightly or wrongly by resolutely forsaking the world in order to give his attention to God? Undoubtedly he makes the right decision, just as you have done... The mere fact that God led us here and that we followed Him is a clear sign that He Himself opened to us this path of salvation. Feeling an inclination for the Salesian life is already a sign of vocation. Who instilled this feeling in us? ‘Every worthwhile gift, every genuine benefit,’ says St. James the apostle, ‘comes from above, descending from the Father of the heavenly luminaries.’ [Jas. 1,17]”

wickedness are carried everywhere in triumph.”¹²⁷ Being in the Congregation is like being in Peter’s boat: safe with Christ though tempest-tossed in the Sea of Galilee.

The Church had been depicted as the citadel of Zion, and Mary as a “tower of ivory.” The world, on the other hand, was a plain open to all sorts of incursion and devastation. Now, in a similar vein, the religious person living in the Congregation is depicted as a person “in a fortress guarded by the Lord.”¹²⁸ Idolatry and sin had been depicted as the dark recesses of Satan’s kingdom and the chains of hell. With respect to the religious life, these same images are applied to life in the world in general. There the enemy of the human race exercises his wickedness against human beings with three weapons: earthly pleasures or satisfactions, temporal goods (wealth especially), and the abuse of freedom. How can we possibly free ourselves from those terrible chains that the devil tries to lock on us so that he may drag us to damnation? Only the religious life “can provide us with the means to combat those three formidable enemies.”¹²⁹

This is the genre of devotional and ascetical literature, and it seeks to dismiss from the mind of listener or reader any terms or distinctions that might water down the point of the discourse or undermine its persuasive power. The aim is obviously to stir the mind and heart, to fortify the resolve to strike even deeper roots in the soil where one has begun to take root. The person is urged to cut the rope that ties his boat to the shore of the world rather

¹²⁷ *Const.*, pp. 3-4: “Entrance into Religion. The enemy of the human race exercises his malignant power against man... ‘All that is in the world,’ says the Apostle St. John, ‘is the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life’ [1 Jn 2:16]. How are we ever to free ourselves from these dangerous chains with which the devil ceaselessly tries to bind us and drag us to perdition? Religion alone can furnish us with the arms... With the vow of chastity [a Christian] renounces every sensual satisfaction; by the vow of poverty he frees himself from the heavy burden of 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 one who leaves the world to join a religious congregation is compared to those who at the time of the flood saved themselves in the ark of Noe... ‘Providentially,’ writes St. Lawrence Justinian, ‘God has concealed the grace of the religious state, because if its happiness were known, all would forsake the world and hasten in crowds to embrace it.’”

See St. Alphonsus, *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, ch. 2, pp. 44, 52: “...in the world there is nothing but the *concupiscence of the flesh*... In religion, by means of the holy vows, these poisoned sources of sin are cut off. By the vow of chastity all the pleasures of sense are forever abandoned; by the vow of poverty the desire of riches is perfectly eradicated; And by the vow of obedience the ambition of empty honors is utterly extinguished... Hence, also, St. Laurence Justinian says that ‘God has designedly concealed...’”

¹²⁸ *Const.*, p. 3.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

than simply untying it. He should abandon the world quickly, or at least quickly overcome the temptation to loiter in the world any longer than is required by the demands of love of neighbor.¹³⁰ Less pessimistic considerations of earthly reality and homely life, which might come to the mind of reader or listener, are quickly blunted. They are regarded as diabolic temptations designed to weaken a person's fervor and make him indifferent to the grace of a religious vocation granted by God.

The religious life is a study in contrast:

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 all men leaving the world and taking the cloister by storm, in order to enter and live there for the rest of their earthly days.¹³¹

There are both spiritual and temporal benefits in the religious life. The religious abandons one house and gains a hundred, abandons one brother and gets a thousand; *vivit purius, cadit rarius, surgit velocius, incedit cautius, irroratur frequentius, quiescit securius, moritur confidentius, purgatur citius, remuneratur copiosius*.¹³² And if the Lord permits him to be tempted by the devil, he should confide in his superiors, convinced that "to the counsels of superiors is pledged the word of Our Savior, Who assures us that their replies are as though given by Himself: 'He who hears you, hears me.'" ¹³³

The doctrine of predestination is also brought into play in this matter. Don Bosco basically accepts it as it is expressed by Saint Alphonsus. God assigns a path to each individual. Following that assigned path, the person will find sal-

¹³⁰ *Regole* (1877), in the section "Promptness in Following a Vocation," pp. 9-10 (not in the 1875 ed.): "Hence it is that St. Jerome gives this advice to one who is called to leave the world: 'Hasten, I beg you, and cut rather than untie the rope that holds your boat fast to the shore.' The Saint means that just as one who finds himself bound in a boat which is sinking would attempt to cut the rope rather than untie it, so also one who finds himself in the midst of the world..." (Eng. p. 10). See St. Alphonsus, *Opuscoli relativi allo stato religioso*, opusc. 1, §1, in *Opere ascetiche* 4:399: "Hence it is that St. Jerome gives this advice to one who is called to leave the world: 'Hasten, I beg you, and cut rather than untie the rope that holds your boat fast to the shore.' The Saint means that just as one who finds himself bound in a boat that is about to sink would attempt to cut the rope rather than untie it, so also one who finds himself in the midst of the world..." Also see Rosignoli, *La saggia elezione* (Turin, 1673), pt. 2, ch. 5, §1, p. 260: "Jerome, too, cries out to his Paulinus, who was hesitating... 'Hurry, I beg you, and cut rather than untie the rope of your boat that is in trouble'..." The Jerome text, quoted in Latin by DB, Alphonsus, and Rosignoli, is found in Migne, PL 22, col. 549.

¹³¹ *Const.*, p. 3.

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 18-22.

¹³³ *Regole* (1877), pp. 41-42 (Eng. pp. 52-53), in the section "Doubts about Vocation" (not in the 1875 ed.).

vation more easily. Outside that path the individual has no right to the graces provided for by God in his ordinary plan of salvation.¹³⁴

Don Bosco's is not a rigid predestinationism, but it is and remains predestinationism. For him, as for Saint Alphonsus, human freedom is not constrained or destroyed.¹³⁵ Don Bosco maintains that human beings can always freely choose. All are left with the hope that they can attain salvation, at least with the extraordinary help of the Lord. But Don Bosco tells his Salesians bluntly that a person who leaves the religious life runs the grave risk of losing his own soul for all eternity and causing the ruin of others.¹³⁶ It is not a question of principle but a matter of fact:

¹³⁴ We have the rough draft of the section "Importance of Following a Vocation," which first appeared in the Introduction to the *Regole* 1877 ed. (Eng. pp. 4-7). The allograph text read as follows: "The Lord, in creating man and placing him in the world, establishes for him the path he ought to travel so that he may be saved. On that path, i.e., in that state, he scatters the flowers and the graces *necessary* for his eternal salvation" (italics added). DB crossed this out and wrote instead: "God, most merciful and infinitely rich in graces, at the time he creates each man, establishes for him a path, by pursuing which he can *very easily* secure his eternal salvation" (p. 4, italics added). DB was always careful to talk about easiness and avoid the term "necessity."

See St. Alphonsus, *Opuscoli relativi allo stato religioso*, opusc. 1, in *Opere ascetiche* 4:396: "It is clear that our eternal salvation depends mainly on our choice of a state in life. Fr. [Louis of] Granada [1505-88] refers to the choice...as the *main wheel of one's whole life*... That is, as Cornelius a Lapide [Cornelius van den Steen, SJ, 1567-1637] explains, God gives each person his own vocation and chooses for him the state in which he wants him saved. This is precisely the decree of predestination described by the Apostle: *Quos praedestinavit, hos et vocavit; et quos vocavit, hos et iustificavit...illos et glorificavit* (1 Cor 7:7)." Also see Rosignoli, *La saggia elezione*, pt. 1, ch. 2, p. 9: "He spoke...like that wise and holy man, Fr. Louis of Granada, when he referred to the choice of a state in life as the universal rule and the master wheel of one's whole life..."

¹³⁵ On St. Alphonsus, see J.F. Hidalgo's, *Doctrina alfonsiana* (cited in ch. XII, n. 189). Useful on the teaching of DB is Domenico Bertetto, "Il pensiero e l'azione di San Giovanni Bosco nel problema della vocazione," in *Salesianum* 15 (1953), 431-62.

¹³⁶ See BM 11:277-79. We find the same conviction in the Introduction to *Regole* (1877), p. 7 (Eng. p. 6): "The divine calls to a more perfect life are indeed special and very great graces, which God does not grant to all. Good reason has He, therefore, to be indignant with those who despise them... The punishment of the disobedient [person] will begin even in this mortal life, in which he will always be discontented. For this reason, [Louis] Habert, the theologian [1636-1718], wrote, '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." The section comes from St. Alphonsus, *Opuscoli* 1, in *Opere ascetiche* 4:397: "Divine calls to a more perfect life are certainly special graces... Thus, the theologian Habert wrote, 'Not without...'"

Rosignoli also has a section on "the rejection of the right choice of a state in life as grounds for condemnation" (*La saggia elezione*, pt. 1, ch. 2, §3, pp. 17-22).

Certainly, theoretically speaking one may still be a good Christian outside the Congregation, and anyone who leaves the Congregation may still be saved. But believe me, I can tell you quite frankly that this is true in theory more than in actual fact. I am really convinced that very few people who leave a religious Congregation may be saved.¹³⁷

Don Bosco readily fostered the impression in the minds of his religious that one who abandons the Congregation is a deserter, practically predestined to an unhappy life in time and eternity. Cases such as that of Saint Camillus de Lellis, who repeatedly tried to become a Capuchin, could bolster his conviction that Saint Camillus was not destined for that type of life. The Lord kept him away from it with illnesses so that he finally set about carrying out his own proper mission. Analogous cases, such as that of Father Louis Guanella (1842-1915, a Salesian for three years, a director, and a member of the first general chapter, now beatified), caused him anguish but did not dissuade him from his conviction that abandonment of the Salesian Society, of which one had become a part by vows, was a betrayal and a sign of reprobation. To the religious life he applied the gospel maxim about followers of the kingdom: those who put their hand to the plow and then look back are not fit for the kingdom of heaven.¹³⁸

In the last analysis, we have here a dogmatic nucleus of predestinationism that reflects the scholastic mentality of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The problem of vocation is seen as one's free-choice involvement in the divine plan of salvation. God's call, recognized by various signs, morally demands one's free participation.

Don Bosco's literary genre is not that of scholastic tracts but that of ascetical and devotional works. His words are designed to persuade, or to give deeper roots to convictions already held. In interpreting them, we must not forget the value placed on rhetoric in the moral and ascetical preaching of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Composition based on the canons of rhetoric also happened to dovetail, by intuition or design, with the plain, common sensibility of his readers or listeners. The sharp contrast of terms and the minimization of other elements that might attenuate the persuasive force of the message should not be interpreted as tendentiousness or doctrinal falsehood.

One gets the impression, nevertheless, that Don Bosco tends to give real-life merit to what could be merely a literary contrast. As he sees it, the life of a person who leaves the Congregation really has all the signs of distress, if not of actual desperation. It really does seem that one who abandons the Salesian Society, in Don Bosco's eyes, is walking away from the path of salvation assigned to him by the Lord. Hence Don Bosco's way of thinking does prove to be very

¹³⁷ BM 11:279.

¹³⁸ Introduction to *Regole* (1877), p. 8 (Eng. p. 7).

rigid, even if he does not express a rigid predestinationism in scholastic terms along the lines of the theologian Louis Habert. Indeed it may even be possible to find in Saint Alphonsus a treatment of grace and human freedom that is not only more ample but also more nuanced than any in the discourses and scanty written pages of Don Bosco.¹³⁹

By way of compensation, however, Don Bosco offers us a pedagogical process rich in nuances and gradations. He does everything he can to give those living in the Congregation all the human and transcendent elements that will guarantee contentment for their personalities in an atmosphere of work, joy, accomplishment, and affirmation on both the individual and community levels. As for those leaving the novitiate or asking to be dispensed from vows, he wants them to be offered as much help as possible. They are to be separated from the life of the community as quickly as possible, but in such a way that they do not leave the Salesian house and reenter the world without job qualifications or the means of sustenance required by their social position.¹⁴⁰

At this point we do well to recall his teaching on vows and the religious life as one's consecration to God. Don Bosco's theological teaching on vows obvi-

¹³⁹ In a circular of May 15, 1921, Fr. Paul Albera strives to offer a less distressing exegesis of DB's thinking: "In the precious piece that serves as an Introduction to our Constitutions, it is true that he picks up the sentiments of St. Alphonsus regarding a religious vocation. Hence, at first glance, he seems to inculcate the teaching (prevalent in the era of the holy doctor) that each person is absolutely predestined to a certain state in life, *outside of which he runs the grave risk of not having the graces necessary for his salvation* [italics in the original]. But looking closely, we note that those pages are not for a person who still has to choose his proper vocation but for one who has already made that choice. They are not meant to point out the road that should be taken but to keep on that road someone who is already travelling it... It is obvious that a person who turns away from the state of perfection that he embraced in the full light of his liberty as the more perfect way must be deprived of the greater graces he would have received by persevering in it, and hence must find it more difficult to be saved." The highly debatable argument of Fr. Albera does at least bring out the mentality being fostered: a person who leaves the Congregation puts his own salvation at greater risk than if he had remained in the religious life. It is also true that the Introduction to the Constitutions is primarily addressed to the professed. But these things were to be explained as far back as the novitiate; and the teaching found therein on the importance of choosing one's state in life is the same one we find in *Giov. prov.* and DB's Good Night talks to all the boys.

¹⁴⁰ Directives embodying DB's concrete experience can be found in his "Spiritual Testament": "Always show the utmost consideration for the one leaving. Let sacrifices even be made so that he may part in harmony and friendship with the Congregation. But ordinarily, further relations should be no more than those with any good Christian. Don't offer him hospitality except in the case of real and recognized need, and then only temporarily. When a member leaves us, he is to be helped to find some kind of occupation, or at least some job where he can earn an honest living" (AS 132 Quaderni 6; MB 17:263-64).

ously has its roots in Scripture and scholastic theology, even though his writings present it in an ascetical key and show the influence of Alphonsus Rodríguez, Saint Alphonsus Liguori, and Lawrence Beyerlinck. Of its very nature, religious profession tends to be perpetual. It is sacrilegious to take back from God something that has been given to him. Human activity is rendered perfect and similar to divine immutability when it is modulated in terms of a solemn promise made to God.¹⁴¹

Despite these teachings, the fact is that we find vows to be very tenuous in the Salesian Congregation, whether they be triennial or perpetual ones. As we have seen, the dropout rate does not seem to have been affected in any significant way by the fact that perpetual profession was urged soon after the novitiate around the years 1877-1878.¹⁴² When those who took perpetual vows right after the novitiate were the majority, the number of those leaving the Salesian Society tended to be just about the same as it was when those who professed triennial vows were in the majority.

So what value did perpetual profession have in the minds of Salesians? What was the impact of the ascetical exhortations I have tried to sum up briefly? What value did they have for Don Bosco himself? As we have seen, the first drafts of the Constitutions stipulated that vows were to last so long as an individual intended to remain in the Congregation. Later the Constitutions stipulated that there were to be obligatory perpetual vows after one or two periods of triennial vows. Even then Don Bosco, while urging perpetual profession and fidelity for life, went on to say that temporary vows could be discontinued by a dispensation from the Rector Major, and perpetual vows by a dispensation from the Pope.¹⁴³

In theory, for Don Bosco religious vows were certainly what he clearly said they were many times: a consecration to God and a bond with the society.¹⁴⁴ His flexibility in practice should not lead anyone to suspect any theoretical peculiarities. It simply manifests him as an educator who is sensitive to changes of mind, changes in circumstances, and the appropriateness of providing a change

¹⁴¹ Introduction to *Const.*, p. 24: "He who feels unable to keep them them ought not to take them, or at least he should defer his profession as long as he does not feel in his heart a firm resolution that he will keep them. Otherwise he makes to God a foolish and faithless promise which cannot but displease Him, 'for,' says the Holy Spirit, 'an unfaithful and foolish promise displeaseth him' (Eccl. 5:3)." The rough draft of this section on vows is wholly written by DB (AS 022/101, pp. 4-5). The concepts and citations of St. Anselm, St. Bonaventure, and St. Thomas are in Rodríguez, *Esercizio di perfezione e di virtù cristiane* (Turin: Marietti, 1828), pt. 3, tr. 2, ch. 3, no. 2; ch. 4, no. 1, 4; ch. 9, no. 3; pp. 135-36, 137, 140, 167-68.

¹⁴² See DBLW:165-66, 173. Also see n. 122 above.

¹⁴³ See *ibid.*, pp. 152-53.

¹⁴⁴ *Indice MB*, s.v. "Voti religiosi," pp. 495-96.

of life-style for individuals without creating dangerous inner traumas and upsetting religious discipline.

To the Salesians, however, he speaks in terms that he does not use with others. He talks about the Salesian Society as a seer and prophet. In so doing, he tends to link closely the problem of the individual to the problem of the community. The person joining Don Bosco becomes part of a divine plan. Like Don Bosco, individual Salesians are chosen and predestined to be instruments of God's glory and the salvation of souls. Hence the earthly family they leave behind is also an object of divine predilection. On it will descend heavenly blessings from one generation to the next.

(d) Obedience, chastity, and poverty

It is only natural that Don Bosco, feeling the urgency and importance of giving ascetical formation to his Salesians, should seek inspiration in the writings of others. And it is hardly surprising that his choice should be the writings of Saint Alphonsus Liguori and Rodríguez's *Esercizio di perfezione e di virtù cristiane*. In religious houses and Turin's Ecclesiastical College, the latter book was a classic text for spiritual reading.¹⁴⁵ Don Bosco did what other preachers did when he was putting together a piece for oral delivery or the printed page. He inserted sentences and comments taken directly from his favorite authors.

But this injection of new sources is not so overwhelming as to squelch the cultural patrimony assimilated earlier. We can readily verify this with respect to obedience and purity-chastity, which are assigned major roles. For young people obedience is the first of the virtues, and so it is for Salesians as well.¹⁴⁶ For young people chastity is the most beautiful and precious of the virtues; possessing it, they possess all the other virtues. The same holds true for Salesians.¹⁴⁷ Said

¹⁴⁵ See the list of texts used at the Ecclesiastical College for spiritual reading in Nicolis di Robilant, *Vita... Cafasso* 1:223.

¹⁴⁶ "Obedience is the sum total of spiritual perfection" (BM 7:417). "Obedience is the key to all other virtues" (BM 9:419; see also BM 15:15). Obedience "is the virtue that takes in all the others" (MB 10:1058). "In a congregation obedience is everything" (MB 10:1059). "A steady obedience is the life of a religious congregation" (BM 12:332). Obedience "is the foundation and support of every virtue" (MB 17:890).

¹⁴⁷ "As I see it, chastity is the virtue that is the basis of all the virtues which are to serve as the practical foundation of the whole religious edifice...the virtue so precious that it has come to be called the angelic virtue. I may be mistaken, I don't know, but I think that one who possesses it can be sure of having all the others; and that one who does not possess it cannot really possess any of the others. In the latter case, all of them must be dimly present at best, and they will soon disappear" (MB 11:581). "Chastity...is the foundation and hub of all virtues... Without it a priest or a cleric is utterly nothing; with it he is all and holds all treasures in his hands" (BM 12:6). "Where there is chastity, there

Don Bosco: give me an obedient boy and he will be holy. The same saying holds true for Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians: give me an obedient religious and I will make him or her holy.¹⁴⁸

The expressions are identical; only the object of Don Bosco's action has changed. But that is enough to make us realize that we are at a new point. The germ may be recognizable in its more elementary embodiment, but now it is in an adult and highly differentiated being.

Some might find it alarming that Don Bosco addresses the same exhortations to Rua, Cagliero, Bonetti, and Durando when they are grown adults that he did when they were his youthful pupils and penitents. It might seem that Don Bosco continued to treat adults as adolescents and to nurture them with an adolescent spirituality. This impression might be bolstered by the fact that Salesians and boys led the same school life, sharing the same vocal prayers in common, the same schedule for meals and periods of recreation. Furthermore, mature Salesians were called together, along with the youngest high school recruits, to hear conferences by Don Bosco on the Congregation's development. But the most elementary norms of exegesis dictate that we avoid the temptation to draw lazy or superficial conclusions.

* * * *

Obedience, writes Don Bosco in *The Companion of Youth*, is the foundation of every virtue. He writes in equivalent terms in the Introduction to the Constitutions, and he says the same thing in his conferences. The difference does not lie solely in the fact that in the Introduction to the Constitutions he dresses up the idea in a maxim from Saint Jerome that he might have found in Rodríguez: *In obedientia summa virtutum clausa est.*¹⁴⁹ In *The Companion of*

too are all the other virtues, because chastity attracts them all. Without chastity all other virtues are non-existent. Chastity must be the pivot upon which all our actions revolve" (BM 12:163). Chastity is "the queen of virtues, that virtue which safeguards all others" (BM 12:342). Chastity "is the loveliest, most resplendent and, at the same time, the most delicate of all the virtues" (BM 12:413). Chastity is the "mother of all virtues, the angelic virtue" (BM 13:622).

As Fr. Amadei noted (MB 10:675-76), what the SDB Constitutions say about chastity at one point ("the virtue dearest of all to the Son of God") reflects what is written in the Constitutions of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary: "the virtue very dear to the Son of God."

¹⁴⁸ MB 10:1037; BM 16:153.

¹⁴⁹ Introduction to *Const.*, p. xx: "Obedience,' says Saint Jerome, 'is the foundation of every virtue,' *in obedientia summa virtutum clausa est.* 'All religious perfection, says Saint Bonaventure, 'consists of the practice of obedience,' *tota religionis perfectio in voluntatis nostrae subtractione consistit.* 'The obedient man,' says the Holy Spirit, 'conquers all his vices,' *vir obediens loquetur victoriam* (Prov. 21:28). Saint Gregory the Great concludes that obedience leads to the possession of all other virtues and likewise preserves them all:

Youth obedience is the principal and primary virtue for theological and psychological reasons: without a guide young people are like tender plants without support; they cannot grow straight. In the Introduction to the Constitutions and his conferences to Salesians, the primacy of obedience is suggested by reflection on the nature of the religious life in general and the ideals of Salesian life in particular.

It was not hard for Don Bosco to find opinions suited to his way of thinking, since he accepted the nature of the religious life as something hinging on the relationship between superiors and members. This very elementary and basic structure was to be found in the religious life of the Benedictines, the Franciscans, and the Jesuits as well as in the religious life that Saint Alphonsus urged on the nun who was seeking holiness. With Saint Alphonsus, Don Bosco could urge on Salesians the maxim of Saint Gregory the Great regarding the monastic life: *Obedientia caeteras virtutes in mentem ingerit et custodit*. With the Franciscan Saint Bonaventure he could say: *Tota religionis perfectio in voluntatis nostrae subtractione consistit*. For that very reason, the maxims on the primacy of obedience take on a different meaning when they move from Don Bosco's talks to boys to his talks to religious.

Salesian religious obedience takes on a very specific meaning of its own in the light of the works that Don Bosco sought to carry out and their specific pressure on him. Obedience might make good monks and friars, but he needed obedient religious to set up schools in Trinità (near Mondovì), Marseilles, and Buenos Aires. He needed Salesians who would be ready and available, already experienced educators, and anxious to do elsewhere what they had done,

'*Obedientia caeteras virtutes in mentem ingerit et custodit*' (*Morals*, I, 35)." Cited here from SWSJB:274; compare Eng. 1957, p. 25.

The rough draft is wholly a DB autograph (AS 022/100, pp. 5-6) and has a few curious variants: "Obedience is the sum total of all the virtues, says St. Philip N[eri]. All [religious—*added above the line*] perfection consists in the practice of obedience..."

St. Jerome's opinion is in Rodríguez, pt. 3, tr. 5, ch. 1, no. 10, p. 311: "So writes St. Jerome: *O felix et abundans gratia; in obedientia summa virtutum clausa est: non simplici gressu hominem ducit ad Christum*. O happy and abundant grace of obedience, which takes in the sum total of all the virtues... (Hier., in *reg. mon.*, c. 6)." This *Regula monachorum* is a spurious work. The cited passage is in Migne, PL 30, col. 411.

The opinion of St. Bonaventure is in St. Alphonsus, *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, ch. 7, sec. 3, p. 154: "*Tota religionis perfectio in voluntatis propriae abdicatione consistit*," which comes actually from a little work, *Speculum disciplinae* (pt. 1, ch. 4, no. 1) by Bernard of Besse (a 13th-century chronicler who served as St. Bonaventure's secretary), on which St. Bonaventure collaborated. *Opere ascetiche* (Rome, 1935), 14/1:174.

St. Gregory's opinion is in Rodríguez and in St. Alphonsus. Rodríguez cites *bk. 35 mor. ch. 10*; Alphonsus cites *Mor. bk. 35 ch. 22*. DB's citation (*Moral. 1,35* in the rough draft) was *Moral. bk. 35*. Correct is Rodríguez's citation: *Moralia in Iob* bk. 35, ch. 14 (elsewhere 10), no. 28 (Migne, PL 76, col. 765). In the sermon outlines for the spiritual retreat in Trofarello the citation *Moral. bk. 35* was changed in MB 9:988 to *Moral. 1,35*.

or seen done, in Valdocco. Thus the obedience desired by Don Bosco was aimed at having Salesians in oratories and schools, on the periphery of Buenos Aires or in horseback around Patagonia, in the regular routine of the school in Lanzo or that of the seminary in Magliano Sabino. The undertakings defined the kind of Salesian that Don Bosco wanted.

This explains Don Bosco's choice of certain texts from Saint Alphonsus's *True Spouse of Jesus Christ*. Don Bosco did not want or need cloistered religious consecrated to the praise of God. He did not intend to form monks whose spirituality would be centered around choral prayer and chant. He needed religious with a deeply rooted sense of God and a sincere, intelligent desire to be active members of the Salesian educational setup. That is why, for example, he borrows the story of Saint Dositheus from Saint Alphonsus:

Listen to this incident in St. Dositheus' life. A noble, conscientious youth who greatly feared God's rigorous judgment at the end of life, he became a religious to prepare himself for death. Poor health would not let him follow community routine, such as rising at midnight for Matins or subsisting on the common fare. He decided to make up for these deficiencies by most promptly and diligently carrying out the most menial monastery chores that the superior entrusted to him. At his death five years later, Our Lord revealed to the abbot that Dositheus had received the same reward given to the hermits St. Anthony and St. Paul. When the abbot disclosed this to his monks, they were skeptical. "How could a man," they asked, "who never fasted, and who was reared in gentle comfort, receive the same heavenly reward as those who for fifty, sixty and more years had borne the austerities, penances, privations, and rigors of religious life? What have we gained over Dositheus with all our toil and hardships while he had an easy time looking after guests?" Through the abbot the Lord replied, "You do not know the true worth of genuine obedience. Within a short time, through this virtue, Dositheus earned more heavenly merits than those who sacrificed and toiled hard."¹⁵⁰

Obedience was the main virtue not only because the common ascetical teaching said so but also because Don Bosco saw it as such in the functioning of his institutions. Wittingly or unwittingly, he saw the wisdom of giving new resonance to the convictions he had stirred in the hearts of Rua, Cagliero, and Bonetti as adolescents. They were no longer tender little plants, but obedience continued to be the prime virtue for them. To them, too, applied the exhortation to obey out of faith rather than out of mere sympathy.¹⁵¹ These ad-

¹⁵⁰ Chronicle of Fr. Bonetti (AS 110), cited in BM 7:417-18. The story is found in *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, ch. 7, sec. 3, p. 157.

¹⁵¹ Conference of Sept. 25, 1875, in BM 11:332-33: "11. It must be observed that until now obedience has been more on a personal than on a religious basis. Let us avoid this serious error. Never obey just because this person or that one is giving the command,

monitions would prepare them for the moments when sympathy might not be enough to ensure obedience to commands from superiors who were not Don Bosco. In the company of Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, he used a handkerchief to make the same point he did with his boys. He pulled it out, tossed it in the air, and crumpled it in his fist. That was how a superior should be able to use his sons.¹⁵² Such was an indication of the qualities he required in addition to obedience: flexibility, availability, versatility, and the willingness to go wherever one was sent by his superior, as did the servants of the centurion in the Gospel (see Matt 8:9). In this way people would be astounded to see Salesians building their nests happily on a bare crag as well as in a leafy tree.¹⁵³

General elements taken from such writers as Rodríguez and Saint Alphonse, together with more specific elements belonging to Don Bosco, combined to foster complete availability both in the realm of charitable action and the area of personal formation. Letting Don Bosco “behead” you might be a metaphorical way of describing obedience as presented in the traditional degrees used by Rodríguez and John Baptist Scaramelli: forming judgments in such a way as to act in conformity with the projects assigned by one’s superiors; conforming one’s own way of judging things to that of one’s superior; conforming one’s own sentiments to those of one’s superior.¹⁵⁴ Obedience tends to create a spiritual consanguinity, a “family,” wherein one can recognize one and the same tone and type in educational work and other activities. Whether the Salesian is doing ordinary school teaching, working alone on a mission given to him by his superiors, or dealing with emergency situations, he is to act as a Salesian so that he can be recognized as one of the new religious whom Don Bosco has launched into the world. Don Bosco makes the point in words of high praise for the Jesuits:

It is my very great desire that our Congregation increase and multiply the sons of the Apostles. But it is my even greater desire that these members be zealous ministers of the Congregation: worthy sons of Saint Francis de Sales as the Jesuits have been worthy sons of Saint Ignatius Loyola. The whole world, and especially all the wicked whose satanic hatred wanted to see that holy seed die out, has found itself in a state of astonishment. Persecutions and the most horrendous carnage do not disturb these magnanimous Jesuits. They are split up so that one no longer knows anything about the other. Yet at great dis-

but for reasons of a higher order, because it is God who commands us, no matter through whom His order is given.”

¹⁵² See BM 3:294; BM 4:295; BM 6:7-8; BM 13:150-51.

¹⁵³ The imagery comes from Spinola (see n. 58), p. 99.

¹⁵⁴ BM 4:295. Giovanni Battista Francesia, *Memorie sulla vita di D. Giovanni Paseri [1849-1925], sacerdote salesiano* (Genoa-Sampierdarena, 1932²), p. 32.

tances from one another, they carry out to the letter the rules dictated by their first superior, just as if they were still living in community. Where you find a Jesuit, I maintain, there you will find a model of virtue and holiness. There you find preaching, the hearing of confessions, the proclamation of God's word. And what's more, it is precisely when the wicked think the Jesuits are done that they increase in number and bear more fruit in souls.¹⁵⁵

It is obvious that letting oneself be "beheaded" or treated like a handkerchief does not mean giving up one's intelligence. Using practical little cases, Don Bosco makes clear that complete obedience does not mean one has to run to one's superior for every sweep of a broom. That, of course, is very circumspect talk.¹⁵⁶ Far more venturesome is what Don Bosco actually does. He entrusts "to boys, one could say, tasks that might have struck fear in the hearts of grown men."¹⁵⁷ Unpublished and almost buried in oblivion is the story of Father John Bonetti, who was sent to direct a minor seminary before he was thirty. His few letters to Don Bosco in 1869 reveal a man collapsing under the weight of higher responsibility; and he was literally the rose arbor of the Salesians.¹⁵⁸ He would later become the promoter of Don Bosco's beatification process. Another writer reminds us of Father Charles Baratta, who was sent to Parma as director at the age of twenty-six and who "for a long time at first wept tears of discouragement and fear, and did the same when the school of religion had been established and he found himself surrounded by difficulties."¹⁵⁹ It is clear that the obedience demanded by Don Bosco was such as to test one's spirit of initiative and inner solidity and to confront it with situations entailing great hazards.

* * * *

Chastity, the queen of the virtues, was in no way dethroned. Don Bosco regarded it as thoroughly necessary for Salesians. All its noble titles are confirmed. It is the angelic virtue, the virtue dearest to the Son of God. Possessing it, we possess all the other virtues. The vow of chastity completes one's religious consecration to God in the fullest sense; without it a priest is nothing.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Conference of Jan. 12, 1873, in MB 10:1062.

¹⁵⁶ Conference of Feb. 3, 1876; in BM 12:63.

¹⁵⁷ *Lingueglia* (see n. 89), p. 20.

¹⁵⁸ E.g., in his letter of Apr. 6, 1869 (AS 126/2): "I am a poor devil of a priest! I will need to be put, for a few years at least, into the depths of some fearsome prison." In another letter of Aug. 23, 1869, he writes: "What is this! In our houses, especially in our Turin house, there is balm for every wound, relief for every misery, and comfort for every tribulation. But for me and me only, who have been begging for mercy and pity for so long, there is nothing but refusal and nay-saying? This is just too painful for me! You want me to live a life of unhappiness. You are trying to assassinate my soul!!!"

¹⁵⁹ *Lingueglia*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁰ See n. 147 above. On chastity and consecration, see BM 13:616-17.

The reason for Don Bosco's insistence on this virtue is not to be sought in the traditional ascetical theology for religious that he found in Rodríguez, Saint Alphonsus, and others. It is not to be found in the "Aloysian" heritage cultivated at the Oratory: i.e., the example of the angelic Saint Aloysius and the example of the other pious youth who would not look at a woman's face because he wanted to contemplate the face of Mary for all eternity, if he was deemed worthy to do so.

Nor does the anticlerical climate of the day explain Don Bosco's insistence on this virtue, even though it might add a special emotional charge to his desires and admonitions. He and his charges were living in "calamitous times," as he made quite clear:

Today's world is just as the Savior described it: "The whole world is in the power of the evil one" [1 John 5:19]. People want to see and judge everything. Over and above its perverse judgment on matters concerning God, the world often exaggerates things and very frequently maliciously invents them. But if it can luckily base its judgment on facts, you can imagine the uproar, the clamor it makes!¹⁶¹

Don Bosco's fears were all the more well-founded because the Oratory was an open house that could be considered everybody's. Its goings-on could be known and reported by those who frequented it for the sake of the boys it sheltered as well as by those whose business brought them to its workshops or bookshop. But the reason for Don Bosco's insistence on chastity lies in the great importance he attributed to moral and religious education. If he jealously watched over the moral values of his young people, then he had all the more reason to want such values in his educational assistants.

Don Bosco pointed up the necessary connection, seeing a certain equation between the morality of his Salesians and that of their students: "Pupils' morality will improve in proportion to its brilliance in the Salesians. Boys take what they are given and Salesians can never give to others what they do not themselves possess."¹⁶² And we already know what came under that term in the language of the day: ethical values in general or such specific virtues as modesty, reserve, virginity, chastity of mind and body, chastity in thought and deed.¹⁶³

The educational relationship demands solid qualities in the educators. In his Congregation Don Bosco could find a place for individuals who lacked

¹⁶¹ Circular letter to SDBs, Feb. 5, 1874, in BM 10:496.

¹⁶² *Capitolo generale della Congregazione salesiana da convocarsi in Lanzo nel prossimo settembre 1877* (Turin: Salesiana, 1877), p. 8 (in AS 133 Capitolo generale: DB autograph draft). The text in full went into the *Deliberazioni del Capitolo generale della pia Società Salesiana, tenuto in Lanzo-Torinese nel settembre 1877* (Turin: Salesiana, 1878), p. 50. See also BM 13:180.

¹⁶³ See ch. XI, sec. 2(e), pp. 247-50.

patience or influence with young people. He kept Father Joachim Berto by his side as his loyal secretary and tireless copyist. But he was determined not to accept those who proved to be weak in the matter of chastity. "Rather than have such sins committed in the Oratory, it would be better to close it!"¹⁶⁴ His reaction was sometimes instinctive and almost violent, as if he felt that he was being personally attacked by an assassin. Thus, scandal-mongers horrified him: "Were it not a sin, I would choke them with my own hands."¹⁶⁵ He awoke with a start from dreams involving sins against modesty and was often disturbed for days. His views on the vow of chastity are expressed unemotionally but pointedly in the first three articles of the Salesian Constitutions dealing with the matter:

1. He who dedicates his life to the assistance of destitute youth should certainly make the greatest effort to enrich himself with every virtue. But the virtue that he should especially foster and which he ought to keep ever in view, the angelic virtue, the virtue that of all others is dear to the Son of God, is the virtue of chastity.
2. He who has not a well-grounded hope that he will be able, with the help of God, to preserve the virtue of chastity in word, in deed, and in thought, ought not to be professed in this Society, for he will find himself repeatedly in danger.
3. A bad interpretation is sometimes put upon words and looks, even when indifferent, by youths who have already been victims of human passions. Therefore, the greatest care must be taken when speaking or dealing with youths of any age or condition whatever.¹⁶⁶

In talking about the religious vocation, Don Bosco tended to weave his discourse around the images of the stormy sea and the waters of the flood. The religious life was an ark of salvation on the ocean of the world. These images do not recur in his treatment of chastity because they are inadequate. One who boards the Congregation but lacks chastity will find himself endangered by every trial. It is better for him to get off because the ship is not made for him.

We must not forget the psychodynamics of the youths who populated Salesian houses at the time. Theirs was a background of traditional religion and ethics, but they were being exposed to factors of decompression. They belonged to a lower class on the move, due to migration, urbanization, social mobility, and even the evolution of sexual conceptions themselves. They were also being pres-

¹⁶⁴ BM 5:106.

¹⁶⁵ BM 10:31.

¹⁶⁶ *Const.* (Eng. 1957), art. 34-36. These articles are substantially the same in the oldest redaction of the Constitutions; see AS 022/1. p. 12. Here are a couple of divergencies of some note: "2. He who is not sure about preserving this virtue... 3. Great care, therefore, in talking or dealing with boys of whatever age or condition."

sured by the most disparate kinds of propaganda that were undermining traditional behavior to a greater or lesser degree. This atmosphere necessarily affected the Salesians because they, too, were sons of the common people.

On the subject of chastity Don Bosco's mind seems to be caught in the tension between principles and feelings that were set at odds by day-to-day life. This shows up right away with regard to his youngsters. In his *Companion of Youth* he told them that he wholeheartedly loved them all. He kept that statement from his first edition of the book to his last,¹⁶⁷ and he also used it in some of his letters.¹⁶⁸ He reminded them of Jesus, who "called children to him, kissed them, and gave them his blessing."¹⁶⁹ But in concrete life this idealization is minimized. Don Bosco did not allow himself or anyone else to kiss or embrace the young students.¹⁷⁰ Don Bosco tells them that he loves them all equally, like the fingers of his own hand. We can see the well balanced and influential educator in the alternation between joyous playfulness and very serious talks, between recreation, work, and prayer. We can also see this educator in the very fabric of his "Good Night" talks.

But when he focuses on his Salesians, he is afraid. His mind seems to be overtaken by evils he read about in Anthony Foresti, SJ, as a seminarian:

*Otia, segnitie, somnus, caro, faemina, vinum
Prosperitas, ludus, carmina, forma, puer.*¹⁷¹

He warns Salesians: "Youth is a very dangerous weapon of the devil against persons consecrated to God."¹⁷² He is afraid that loving tenderness will be misinterpreted as sugary sentimentality or morbid affection. In 1875 he declares that until then he never even imagined that there could be a grave danger to the chastity of an educator consecrated to God:

It is not enough to shun familiarity with persons of the opposite sex. I tell you we must also shun familiarity with persons of the same sex. First and foremost, there must never be tender friendships with your own confreres... I reached the age of fifty without ever being aware of this danger, but subsequently I was forced to reach the conclusion that this very serious danger does indeed exist.

¹⁶⁷ *Giov. prov.*, p. [7]. In the 1863 ed. and later ones we find: "I love you wholeheartedly."

¹⁶⁸ See, e.g., his ceremonious and affectionate letter to Joseph Roggeri from Turin, Oct. 8, 1856, *Ep.* 146.

¹⁶⁹ *Giov. prov.*, p. 11.

¹⁷⁰ *Indice MB*, s.v. "bacio," p. 30. Also see the sections on morality among the SDBs and morality among the students in *Capitolo generale...da convocarsi in Lanzo*, pp. 7-9; *Deliberazioni*, pp. 44-47, 50-53. There we find reflected the discipline now required by the community life of the school.

¹⁷¹ See DBLW:63.

¹⁷² BM 9:443.

Not only does it exist; it is a pressing danger that should put us very much on our guard.¹⁷³

Don Bosco's insistence on chastity, then, is mainly motivated by educational considerations. These exigencies give a new and specific sense to the terms found in Saint Alphonsus, Rodríguez, and the "Aloysian" literature. They also explain what Don Bosco says to Salesians about chastity:

What must distinguish us from all others and be the hallmark of our Congregation is the virtue of chastity.¹⁷⁴

What must distinguish our Congregation is chastity, as poverty characterizes the sons of Saint Francis of Assisi and obedience the sons of Saint Ignatius.¹⁷⁵

With respect to women, we find in Don Bosco a tension similar to the one evident with respect to young people. The dearest, most sacred, and most long-standing relationship in his own life was with his mother. He seems to operate easily and comfortably in it. He has a delicate appreciation of his obligations to the women, whether older or younger than he, who helped him in the course of his life. He gratefully recalled Mrs. Lucy Matta, who had housed him during his adolescent years in Chieri.¹⁷⁶ He himself gave shelter in Valdocco to mothers of seminarians and priests. He used sober terms of filial affection in his letters to Countess Callori, Countess Girolama Uguccioni (d. 1889), Marchioness Fasari, Susan Prato Saettone (1800-1882), and others.¹⁷⁷

In women he appreciated dedication to charitable works and faith. He did not want people to make fun of them by calling them "sentimentally pious ladies [*beatelle*]." ¹⁷⁸ Father Lemoyne tells us that he treated Ann Moglia as a sister, although he did not care to babysit her and did not want her at his side as the godmother when he served as godfather for John Louis, the youngest child of Nicholas and Dorothy Moglia.¹⁷⁹ He did not have a sister at home, although he might have had one. Teresa, a child of Francis Bosco's first marriage, had been born on February 16, 1810; but she died two days later. If John Bosco had had a sister, the psychodynamics of his emotional life would certainly have been influenced accordingly. There were girls of his own age around him. In Sussambrino, for example, Rose Febbraro took care of the cows when he was im-

¹⁷³ MB 11:583.

¹⁷⁴ BM 12:162-63.

¹⁷⁵ Testimony of Fr. Julius Barberis in *Taurinen. beatificationis et canonizationis servi Dei Ioannis Bosco... Positio super introductione causae* (Rome, 1907), p. 714.

¹⁷⁶ MO:67-68. Desramaut, *Les Memorie I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne* (Lyons, 1962), esp. pp. 296-97.

¹⁷⁷ See the respective headings in the *Indice* MB and the index of the *Ep.*

¹⁷⁸ BM 2:116.

¹⁷⁹ BM 1: 154-55. Also see DBLW:13-14.

mersed in study.¹⁸⁰ As an adolescent with his heart already set on a vocation to the priesthood, he lived under the watchful eye of a devout mother.

With women his behavior was easy and in line with the etiquette of the day. By instinct and upbringing he was on the alert to avoid anything that might foster malicious impressions.¹⁸¹ The core of his temperament and the dynamics of his personality are brought out in sudden outbursts and calculated gestures, as well as in other ways. He jumps out of the chair when a female barber begins to lather his face, himself having thought it would be done by the male barber who owned the shop. He expresses impatience with a Salesian who does not know how to protect himself in a crowd of people. He turns down a lady's invitation to ride alongside her in her carriage.¹⁸² With the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and their oratory girls he is sensitive and tactful, speaking seriously or jokingly in the quiet, measured tone that was usual for him. Extant bits of testimony tell us that in Chieri he spoke to girls of the oratory in the courtyard as he did with boys in Valdocco, telling spirited jokes and offering little comments on the salvation of the soul to each and all.

Yet a certain apprehension is evident. Working on a religious core, it prompts prayers and firm resolutions. On a breviary marker he had written the admonition: *Longe fac a muliere viam tuam et ne appropinques foribus eius* ("Keep your way far from [an adultress], approach not the door of her house" [Prov 5:8]).¹⁸³ He was heard to whisper: *Pepigi foedus cum oculis meis* ("I have made an agreement with my eyes" [Job 31:1]).¹⁸⁴ He recalled the old maxim he had read in Foresti: *Abstrahere ligna foco si vis extinguere flammam* ("Remove the wood from the fire if you want it to die out").¹⁸⁵ Even in 1881 he was still reciting the admonition he had picked up in a sonnet at the seminary: *Donne e danno*.¹⁸⁶

Again in this area one may suspect that Don Bosco's attitudes were a product of Jansenist spirituality. The influence of Jansenism certainly cannot be ruled out, but one must also remember the remoter origins of customs and at-

¹⁸⁰ BM 1:178.

¹⁸¹ For light on contemporary local custom, one would have to examine biographies, diaries, memoirs, and letters. Among the hagiographical profiles similar to DB's, it is worth noting the one of Fr. Cafasso in Nicolis di Robilant's *Vita*, 1:148-60. On DB's serene behavior with his nephews and nieces, see Giuseppina Mainetti, FMA, *Madre Eulalia Bosco, pronipote del Santo* (Colle Don Bosco, 1953), pp. 10-39.

¹⁸² BM 5:104-05. Various anecdotes in *Taurinen. beatificationis et canonizationis*, pp. 674-728. Also in Lemoyne, *Vita di San Giovanni Bosco* (Turin, 1943) 2:206-09. The episode with the female barber is mentioned by Fr. Angelo Savio and reported in Bonetti, *Annali II*, pp. 36-37 (AS 110 Bonetti 3).

¹⁸³ BM 2:406.

¹⁸⁴ BM 5:107.

¹⁸⁵ BM 7:55.

¹⁸⁶ *Taurinen. beatificationis et canonizationis*, p. 708 (testimony of Fr. Cerruti).

titudes regarding women. There can be no doubt that the more conscious influence on Don Bosco came from elements that did not derive from Jansenism. They shared with Jansenism only the fact that they embodied the same sort of Counter-Reformation reaction to “paganizing” humanism.

* * * *

With regard to poverty, Don Bosco’s attitudes and behavior reveal the influence of his own native temperament and the conviction that he is to be an instrument in carrying out God’s designs. We see a persistent tendency to be thrifty and temperate. If he knew straitened circumstances as a child, he seems to go overboard as a priest in being stingy with himself. It is said that he dressed like a poor curate, his clothes clean but heavily patched and his shoes worn through.¹⁸⁷ That may well explain why Don Bosco never got Salesians who, like him, would be satisfied with reheated soup and mixed samples of wine:

I had hoped that everyone in my house would be satisfied with just bread and soup and maybe a dish of vegetables. I see that I was unrealistic. My ideal was to found a congregation which, at my death, would be a model of frugality. I am convinced that it was simply not feasible. Countless reasons gradually forced me to adopt the fare of other religious orders: soup, two courses, and dessert. Even the Holy See would have withheld approval if I had imposed too austere a fare. Yet even now I still think that one could live as I did in the early days of the Oratory.¹⁸⁸

This sense of frugality, acquired in the course of his family upbringing, gives added force to his own picture of the rich priest, the priest attached to money, and the religious who lacks for nothing. He is aware of the often well-founded gossip about priests and friars. His own thoughts and talks focused on the motifs of Christian asceticism and their concern with evangelical poverty. He had not renounced everything like Francis of Assisi to embrace Lady Poverty. But, like Francis, he wanted freedom of mind and spirit where riches were concerned. He wanted what the ascetical literature of his day called detachment from earthly treasures.

But again we find a tension here: between his personal sense of detachment and the need for resources to promote the providential works of which he felt himself to be the instrument.

Don Bosco is not like Saint Joseph Cottolengo, who threw surplus funds out the window to challenge divine providence. He would have preferred to see the fountain in the Oratory gushing twenty-franc gold pieces, and he would have

¹⁸⁷ This is a point that crops up frequently in testimony for the beatification process. See *ibid.*, pp. 679, 681, 685, 687, 689, 693, 699, and 705, etc.

¹⁸⁸ BM 4:134.

known what to do with them. But Cottolengo did not always throw money out the window. When he did, it was to teach those around him to trust in divine providence.

Cottolengo went through the streets of Turin, knocking on the doors of public officials and the affluent. That was normal for him: to act as if everything depended on God on the one hand, on his own industriousness on the other hand.¹⁸⁹ It was just as normal for Don Bosco to follow in his footsteps, since Cottolengo's Little House of Divine Providence stood near the Oratory as a stimulus to imitation. We see the same tension in Don Bosco with regard to money that was there in Cottolengo. He wanted only what was barely necessary for himself, but all he could get to expand his Oratory, his Congregation, and his educational goals.

For the Christian, Don Bosco had written: "You are not in the world solely to enjoy pleasure, to get rich... Your end is to love your God and save your soul."¹⁹⁰ He tacitly admitted that pleasure and wealth could be decent aims, but he told his Salesians that they had embraced the religious life not to find ease and enjoyment but rather to imitate Jesus Christ, who was born in a manger and died naked on the cross. The elements to shape a religious who would be poor and detached from earthly things came, once again, from Saint Alphonsus, Alphonsus Rodríguez, and the Constitutions of the Schools of Charity founded by the Cavanis brothers. But there is also his view of the instrumental nature of money and other "earthly things" in furthering the aims of his Congregation and ultimately the aims preordained by God for His glory and the welfare of souls. He tells his Salesians: "Always remember that what we have it not our own, but belongs to the poor. Woe to us if we do not make good use of it!"¹⁹¹

This same sense of religious usefulness gives a specific twist to traditional ascetical notions about trust in divine providence, conformity to God's will, and sincere, prompt, and total detachment from earthly goods.

Money seemed to burn a hole in Don Bosco's pocket, unwilling to settle there. He had no trouble figuring out how to use it. The number of youths in his house and Congregation always exceeded the funds in his budget, and works already under construction had eaten up whatever sums he had hoped to obtain from public and private sources. Both temperament and religious conviction

¹⁸⁹ On "divine providence" in the spirituality of Cottolengo, see Vincenzo DiMeo, SDB, *La spiritualità di S. Giuseppe Benedetto Cottolengo nei suoi scritti e nei processi canonici* (Pinerolo, 1959), pp. 147-90.

¹⁹⁰ *Giov. prov.*, p. 32: meditation on the end of human beings. It comes from St. Alphonsus, *Maxims of Eternity* (pp. 387-88). The wording there is slightly different: "You did not come into this world for the sake of enjoyment[,] to become rich and powerful, to eat, drink, and sleep like irrational animals, but solely to love your God and work out your eternal salvation."

¹⁹¹ BM 5:450.

prompted him to plunge into an ever increasing number of projects. He itched with money in his hand and laid down this principle for his Salesians: "Lucrative investments are an affront to divine providence which, in marvelously prodigious ways, has always come to our aid."¹⁹² Don Bosco could well say that in an interim stage between capitalism and socialism, when private contributions were still possible and readily available. With a feel for public opinion, Don Bosco did not want to offend his benefactors in any way: "The strictest economy is to be observed in construction or building repairs. Beware of luxury, ostentation, or stylishness."¹⁹³ He lamented instances where the semblance of luxury diminished the generosity of those who were ready to give.

The vicissitudes of the Church with respect to poverty also provided reasons for fear and convincing admonitions. The dark shadow of monasteries and convents that had fallen into ruin because of taste for luxury and ease cast its pall over Salesian houses and worried Don Bosco. Religious thought and history had established a connection between decadence and disregard for evangelical poverty. With good reason Don Bosco offered this prediction:

So long as the Salesians and the Daughter of Mary Help of Christians devote themselves to prayer and work, practice temperance, and preserve the spirit of poverty, the two congregations will do great good. But if they are unfortunate enough to relinquish their fervor, take refuge from hard work, and come to love the easy life, their day will be over. They will be on a downward slide toward collapse and ruin.¹⁹⁴

He said it more than once:

Our Congregation is looking forward to a bright future prepared for it by divine providence, and our glory will last as long as our rules are faithfully observed. Once we allow comfort and ease to undermine our way of life, it will be the end of our pious Society.¹⁹⁵

For that would be the sign that the Salesians were using what divine providence sent them for their own comfort rather than for the practice of charity.

(e) *Manifestations*

The manifestation (*rendiconto*) is one of the elements revealing Don Bosco's efforts to transform his own experience into a religious institution.¹⁹⁶ The

¹⁹² "Spiritual Testament": MB 17:258. See SWSJB:349.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ MB 10:651-52.

¹⁹⁵ "Spiritual Testament": MB 17:272. See SWSJB:363.

¹⁹⁶ See Pietro Brocardo, *Direzione spirituale e rendiconto* (Rome, 1966).

personal manifestation of one's practice of the religious life to one's superior was to be a natural fruit and postulate of this "family life." Don Bosco brings it up in his Introduction to the Constitutions, viewing it from the standpoint of the superior, who must manage everything for the welfare of the individual and the entire community: "Confidence in superiors is one of the things that especially contributes to the smooth functioning of a religious congregation and to the peace and happiness of each member."¹⁹⁷ This would explain why he took pains in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, which he was writing at the same time, to make clear how he "promptly" placed all his adolescent thoughts and actions in the hands of Father Calosso: "I bared my soul to him. Every word, thought, and act I revealed to him promptly... From then on I began to savour the spiritual life."¹⁹⁸ He could have said the same about Father Cafasso, who was to him a father, director, confessor, and inspired adviser.

For Don Bosco the educator, the highest ambition was to have boys such as Dominic Savio and Francis Besucco who kept no secrets from him and spoke to him of matters of conscience even outside the confessional. That was the supreme proof of trust and the best indication of a shared communion of life. Obviously he would look for the same thing with his Salesians. In the earliest redaction of the Constitutions we find this communion of thought and emotion codified in the section on obedience and a comment on the manifestation of conscience: "7. Let everyone have full confidence in his superior and harbor no secrets from him, fully opening his heart to him whenever he should be asked to do so or he himself feels it necessary."¹⁹⁹

Thus the following practice came to be established at the Oratory. Don Bosco was the regular confessor of practically everybody. One could also say that he was the confidant of all and that he, as their religious superior, was the one to whom all Salesians were inclined to reveal everything. The formula of the Constitutions echoed that of the Schools of Charity.²⁰⁰ The doctrinal her-

¹⁹⁷ *Regole* (1877), p. 23 (Eng. p. 45). The section on the manifestation is introduced in this edition. The rough draft, AS 022/101.1, is an allograph revised by Fr. Barberis, who made additions, and then by DB.

¹⁹⁸ MO:36, corrected.

¹⁹⁹ AS 022/1, p. 10; BM 5:640.

²⁰⁰ *Constitutiones Congregationis sacerdotum soecularium Scholarum Charitatis*, ch. 4, "The Vow of Obedience," art. 7, p. 29: "Liberam quisque sui ipsius, rerumque quibus concessum fuerit utendi dispositionem, prompto ac laeto corde Superiori relinquat, nihil ei clausum, nec conscientiam quidem propriam tenendo, sed de ea saepe rationem reddat..." But DB's whole chapter reflects the corresponding one of the Cavanis brothers. DB: "1. ...Our Divine Redeemer...has assured us that He came not to do His own will, but that of His heavenly Father... 5. Let each one then look to his superior as to 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..." (BM 5:639-40). Cavanis: "1. Dicente Christo Domino Salvatore Nostro: *non veni facere voluntatem meam* [Jn 6:38]:

itage which supported the Salesian manifestation of conscience came from Rodríguez, who deals at length with the *conto di coscienza* (“account of one’s conscience”).²⁰¹

Don Bosco sums up Rodríguez’s arguments for the usefulness and necessity of the practice under five heads. First, the manifestation is nothing new. Second, it is useful for the self-improvement of the religious. Third, it is useful for the purification and improvement of the soul. Fourth, it is useful for bodily health as well, since superiors will be knowledgeable enough to give their subjects duties suited to their abilities and personal inclinations. The fifth reason derives from Rodríguez but more specifically reflects the nature of the Salesian Society. The Salesian apostolate means its members must walk on dangerous ground, *super aspidem et basiliscum* (“upon the asp and the viper”: Ps 91:13). This sort of intense apostolate, notes Don Bosco, must be matched by an uncommonly solid interior life. He is convinced that his envisioned panoply of means can provide such an interior life by supplying a “contemplative life.” Maximum confidence between superiors and members is useful and necessary “for the welfare of our Congregation, especially since we have little in the way of contemplative life” and must “teach, preach, catechize, assist, and hold classes in prisons, hospitals, and schools.”²⁰²

But the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars would scrutinize and vivisect Don Bosco’s manifestation. Roman practice now was no longer to allow the manifestation of conscience in new religious orders. The viewpoint had been prompted by the experience of female congregations in particular. Life in

etc. libenter omnes sinceram obedientiam pro ejus amore profiteantur... 2. Superiorem itaque, quicumque sit, veluti Patrem reverentur, eique integre, prompte, hilariter, et cum humilitate debita obediant... 6. Firma semper pia consuetudine nihil petendi nihilque recusandi, si forte tamen quis arbitretur aliquid sibi esse vel nocivum vel necessarium...”

²⁰¹ DB autograph, in AS 132 Prediche G2. See Rodríguez, *Esercizio di perfezione*, pt. 3, tratt. 7, ch. 1-3, pp. 462-82.

DB begins with sections from ch. 2 (“The Faithful Friend”) and then goes back to ch. 1 (“The Matter Considered in the Lord”). The reasons come from ch. 1: 1. Such a thing was practiced by the ancient monks. 2. It is recommended to us by St. Ignatius and necessary for our benefit. 3. Our direction is interior for the most part. 4. Without it our superiors cannot make good use of us. 5. Nor can they provide for the welfare of religion. 6. This account of conscience is specially needed in the Company [i.e., the Society of Jesus]...

²⁰² Rodríguez, pt. 3, tratt. 7, ch. 1, no. 6, p. 466: “If our institute were such as to keep us enclosed in our cells and going to choir or the refectory, there would be no need for such openness or accounts of conscience. But in the Company the members must and do adapt to a wide variety of flavors, as they say, and must be trusted implicitly by their superiors, who send them out into the world among believers and unbelievers, sometimes alone and for a long period of time. Hence it is necessary that their superiors know very well what is inside each individual member, so as not to expose that member or the Company to danger.”

the cloister could dangerously cramp the personalities of individual nuns. Manifesting matters of conscience to a mother superior could trigger enormous spiritual anxiety in a nun who, with or without good reason, expected despotic oppression rather than spiritual help from her superior.²⁰³

This was all the more true since the common teaching on spiritual direction was that one's spiritual director was to be informed as well of sins and matters for confession. French influence brought to Turin the *Manual of Piety for the Use of Seminarians* that was a product of the Saint-Sulpice school. Direct citation of its detailed suggestions to seminarians will indicate how ticklish and wide-ranging was the material to be entrusted to one's spiritual director. First of all, one had to provide one's spiritual director with an overview of one's actions in general:

Actions here include: 1. bad actions, including mortal sins, venial sins, and imperfections; 2. good actions, both ordinary and extraordinary; 3. indifferent actions, such as meals, conversations, visits, walks, etc.

1. With respect to the first article, [the seminarian] should indicate the faults into which he has fallen, which ones are the most usual, what efforts, if any, he has made to correct them, and what means he is using for that purpose.
2. What his evil inclinations are, whether due to intemperance, amusements, vanity, impurity, gossip, and what he is doing to overcome them and root them out.
3. What his predominant passion is, the one most often triggering his actions...
4. What imperfections he recognizes in himself: e.g., talking too much, neglecting his duties, making hasty judgments...

Second, the seminarian had to discuss his daily exercises with his spiritual director:

1. The seminarian should tell his director if he ordinarily gets up promptly and dresses modestly and devoutly; how he says his prayers, prepares for meditation...
2. How he attends holy Mass, whether he is attentive...
3. How he uses his time in study, class, conferences...
4. How he benefits from his private examination of conscience...²⁰⁴

The seminarian was also to discuss his observance of the rules, his attitudes and practices in frequenting the sacraments, his various devotions, inclinations, conflicts, dispositions, and employments. Special material was suggested by such

²⁰³ Brocardo, pp. 140-42. Also see Juan Maria Lozano, "Las Constituciones escritas por santa Maria Micaela de Santísimo Sacramento para sus 'Adoratrices,'" in *Esclava del Sacramento y de la caridad santa Maria Micaela de S. Sacramento* (Madrid, 1966), pp. 151-213.

²⁰⁴ *Manuale di pietà ad uso dei seminaristi* (Turin: Marietti, 1872³), pp. 260-64.

events as his entrance into the seminary, ordination times, vacations, days of recollection, and retreats.

Directories of the same sort had been elaborated for nuns, priests, and lay people in the most varied circumstances of life.

Roman practice now was inclined to permit an obligatory manifestation only with respect to the external forum and matters that might affect the discipline and government of the religious community.²⁰⁵ The traditional “account of conscience” was viewed as substantially oriented toward the Christian perfection of the individual. In many communities, whether religious or not, the task of spiritual direction (and the associated “account of conscience”) was entrusted to someone other than the disciplinary superior. The practice of seminaries, female institutes, and even of lay members of the faithful was that the spiritual director should also act as the ordinary confessor.²⁰⁶ This was, in fact, the practice of Don Bosco himself, who had Father Cafasso as his spiritual director and confessor. It was also the practice of clerics, priests, and laymen at the Oratory both before and after the establishment of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales.²⁰⁷

Rome, then, differentiated an account of a disciplinary nature from one having to do with spiritual direction. Despite clarifications and counterarguments from Don Bosco, the article in the Constitutions as approved made the manifestation nonobligatory, declared it useful, and restricted its subject matter to the “exterior life,” “exterior infidelities” committed against the Constitutions, and “progress in the virtues.” But the initiative was left to the individual member:

Let everyone place the fullest confidence in his superior. Hence, it will help the members to give, from time to time, an account of their exterior life especially to their principal superiors. Let everyone, therefore, manifest to his superiors with

²⁰⁵ The article on the account of conscience drafted by the Sisters of Adoration in 1861 was changed to the following by Rome: “They may manifest to their superior their progress in the virtues and their external transgressions of the Constitutions”; see Lozano, p. 169. The *Summary* of the observations on DB’s proposed Rule made by Consultor Bianchi notes: “The manifestation of conscience (p. 13 [of the 1873 ed. of the *Regulae*], no. 6) which is prescribed *is not permitted*; at most it can be allowed as *optional* and restricted solely to the external observance of the Constitutions and progress in the virtues” (italics in the original). See *Torinese: Sopra l’approvazione delle Costituzioni*, p. 38; MB 10:941.

²⁰⁶ See the *Manuale di pietà ad uso dei seminaristi*, pp. 253-54: “This exercise of spiritual direction entails revealing in all simplicity our complete conduct and inner dispositions to the person we have chosen to guide us on the path to perfection and salvation, so that this person may be in a position to offer us suitable advice. This should indicate clearly enough how spiritual direction differs from confession, even though the same priest may serve in both functions. Strictly speaking, confession has to do with the admission of our sins only, whereas spiritual direction has to do with all our conduct...”

²⁰⁷ On DB’s choice of Fr. Cafasso as his guide in spiritual and temporal matters, see MO:165-66, 180, 182 and the *Indice* MB, p. 520.

simplicity and readiness the acts of unfaithfulness he has outwardly committed against the Constitutions, and also his progress in virtue, so that he may receive from them counsel and comfort, and, if necessary, suitable admonitions.²⁰⁸

Once the statute on the obligatory manifestation of conscience was struck down, Don Bosco strove to institutionalize what was still licit and to alter as little as possible the already prevailing practice among his Salesians.

With respect to the sacrament of penance, the Constitutions as approved stipulated that each member was to go to confession weekly “to confessors approved by the local ordinary, who exercise this ministry among the members with the permission of the Rector [Major].”²⁰⁹ In Salesian houses the custom was to go to confession to the director, who was ideally pictured as the authorized representative of Don Bosco in whom one was to place the same confidence that one did in their common father. Rome apparently did not take this custom into consideration, so Don Bosco was able to restore a bit more to house directors than had been actually granted them in the Constitutions. With a simple notice appended to the 1875 Directory of members, for example, a custom was transformed into the norm:

For the smooth running of the Congregation, the preservation of unity of spirit, and imitation of the example of other religious institutes, a director or regular confessor is established for those who belong to the Society.

In Turin: Fr. John Bosco; his substitute, Fr. Michael Rua. In the other houses: the director of each house; his substitute, the prefect, etc.²¹⁰

Thus was firmly established a bit of what Don Bosco had spelled out orally during the 1873 retreats:

1. The director is the natural confessor of those who belong to the Congregation. God has given him the task of helping them in their vocation. For the

²⁰⁸ The citation is from the 1907 bilingual ed. in Latin and Italian, p. 97 (Eng. art. 47, adapted to conform to the cited Italian text). Compare it with the approved original *Regulae*, ch. 3, art. 4 [AS 022/18, p. 5]: “Superioribus suis unusquisque externas contra constitutiones infidelitates nec non profectum in virtutibus simpliciter ac sponte aperiet, ut ab iis consilia et consolationes et si opus sit, convenientia monita accipiat.” 1874 Turin ed., p. 11: “Superioribus suis unusquisque *in constitutiones exteriora commissa*, atque etiam profectum in virtutibus simpliciter ac sponte aperiet, ut ab iis consilia et consolationes, et, si opus fuerit, convenientia monita accipiat.” The 1875 ed., p. 9, and the 1877 ed., p. 58, of the *Regole*: “Thus it will be of *great* benefit for members to give a face-to-face account of their exterior lives to the major superiors of the Congregation. Each member should manifest, with simplicity and *promptness* [willingly!] external faults against the rules and also his progress in virtue, so that he can get counsel and comfort or, if he does so afterward, pertinent admonitions.”

²⁰⁹ *Regulae*, ch. 13, “Practices of Piety,” art. 2.

²¹⁰ *Elenco generale della Società di S. Francesco di Sales* [Turin, 1875], p. 14.

boys as well, he is the ordinary confessor, so that he may become aware of vocations and, if possible, instill in them the spirit of the house. Full freedom of conscience is to be accorded in the choice of a confessor, but all those who manifest signs of a vocation should be directed to him... No one should fear to confess to the director. He is a father, who cannot help but love and sympathize with his sons.

2. The Rector Major is the extraordinary confessor. When he visits a house, first its director and then the other members of the Pious Society should reveal to him the state of their consciences; then the boys should do the same thing. But first it should be the members of the Pious Society always. The spirit of the house should be transmitted from the Rector to the directors, and from them to the others. During his visits the Rector Major should always strive to strengthen the bonds between the members and their director...²¹¹

The status quo was not wholly maintained after 1875. Confession continued to be oriented around the absolution of sins. In all likelihood it was also a time and place for spiritual direction, as current practice already suggested. The manifestation became a monthly obligation.²¹² Don Bosco noted more than once that it was not for the director to take the initiative with regard to the internal forum of conscience.²¹³ The superior could inquire about observance of the Constitutions, but it was up to the member to bring up his progress or decline in virtue. The latter topic and the approach to it in the manifestation had been outlined in nine points, in almost obligatory terms, in the Introduction to the Constitutions (“The principal points with which the manifestation *should* deal are...”) and then in the deliberations of General Chapter I.²¹⁴

The fact is that Don Bosco always sought maximum frankness and openness from his sons and dependents. He suggests that they have the same sentiments which Saint Francis de Sales urged on his Sisters of the Visitation: those of a child who shows mama all “the scratches, bruises, and stings of the wasp.” He, too, calls happy “those who practice sincerely and devoutly this ar-

²¹¹ MB 10:1094; BM 10:485 has part of this text.

²¹² Introduction to the *Regole* (1877), p. 23 (Eng. p. 45): “It is therefore established that at least once a month everyone should confer with his superior.” See also the *Deliberazioni* of GC I (Turin 1878), distinzione 3, ch. 2, “Practices of Piety,” art. 3, pp. 49-50.

²¹³ BM 11:331: “During the Manifestations, however, be very careful not to enter into matters of conscience. Those things must be kept totally apart. The Manifestation must deal only with exterior things because we have to avail ourselves of the things that are confided to us in any case. Should we, instead, enter into matters of conscience, mixing Manifestation with confession, we would create trouble for ourselves.” See also MB 17:266.

²¹⁴ *Deliberazioni del [primo] Capitolo generale*, p. 49. Introduction to the *Regole* (1877), p. 24, italics added (Eng. p. 46).

ticle, which contains a portion of the holy spiritual infancy so much recommended by Our Lord and from which proceeds and by which is preserved true tranquillity of mind.”²¹⁵

Don Bosco prefers to speak from the standpoint of their superior and father. He tends to stress the gifts of counselling that the Lord gives superiors, hoping to instill in members a sense of docility and faith so that they may hear the voice of their superior as the voice of God. Direction and confession are to lead dependents forward on the road to perfection through a father-son relationship. They also are meant to further the aims of the Society, which needs a united spirit and the proper investment of effort by one and all.

The desired unity was safeguarded in practice insofar as the roles of director and confessor were combined in the religious superior. But what would have happened if the Holy See had forbidden religious superiors to be the ordinary confessors of their own subjects? How would unity of direction and spirit been safeguarded? To whom would spiritual direction have been entrusted in fact, or at least appropriately?

Don Bosco did not consider solutions for such questions. He seemed preoccupied with safeguarding the centralized structure of the Salesian Society, and his tendency was to maintain the customs and practices that had arisen out of his experience as an educator in Valdocco. The problem of spiritual direction was not even posed in adequate terms. The terminology is uncertain. The 1875 notice states that the director of each house is the “director and regular confessor.” The adjective “spiritual” is not added to the term “director,” perhaps because in the still unsettled terminology of the Salesian Society the term “spiritual director” also was applied to the catechist of the festive oratory, the man who regulated the boys’ practices of piety under the aegis of the director.²¹⁶

In the realm of practice we find explicit and pressing invitations to put one’s complete trust in the director of the house, even with regard to one’s personal

²¹⁵ Introduction to the *Regole*, pp. 24-25 (Eng. p. 47): “Ogni mese ognuno scoprirà il suo cuore sommariamente e brevemente al superiore, e con ogni semplicità e fedele confidenza gli aprirà tutti i segreti con la medesima sincerità e candore che un figliuolo mostrerebbe a sua madre le sue graffiature, livori e punture, che le vespe gli avessero fatto... Felici saranno quelli...” Note the Italian ed. of St. Francis de Sales, *Costituzioni per le Sorelle religiose della Visitazione*, art. 24 (“The Monthly Account of Conscience”), in *Opere* 5 (Venice, 1769), 457-58: “Ogni mese le Sorelle scopriranno il loro cuore sommariamente, e brevemente alla Superiora, e con ogni semplicità e fedele confidenza gli apriranno tutti i segreti, con la medesima sincerità, e candore, che un figliuolo mostrerebbe a sua Madre le sue graffiature, livori o punture, che le Vespe gli avessero fatte... Felici saranno quelle, che praticheranno ingenuamente e divotamente questo articolo, il qual in sé ha una parte della sacra infanzia spirituale tanto raccomandata da Nostro Signore, dalla quale proviene, ed è conservata la vera tranquillità dello Spirito.”

²¹⁶ *Regol.*, pt. 1, ch. 3, p. 7: “The catechist or spiritual director. 1. The spiritual director has the role of participating in and directing sacred functions; hence he should be

progress in virtue. But we do not find statements about the objective usefulness of spiritual direction as such, hence about the usefulness of a spiritual director, whether or not he be the director of the religious house. The nine points to be covered in the monthly manifestation could be considered matters pertaining to spiritual direction. One responding to Don Bosco's invitation could therefore use the manifestation to scrutinize his progress or decline in virtue and get spiritual direction. One could also use the manifestation and the sacrament of penance as complements, or seek spiritual direction in the sacrament of penance itself. Contrary to what we find in the *Manual of Piety for the Use of Seminarians*, however, the documents of the first Salesian generation leave no methodical directory regarding the interior life of the individual. Jesuit and Sulpician influences did not go that far.

(f) *Practices of piety*

The conviction that the Salesian Society was to be a new kind of congregation comes out clearly in various ways, as I have noted, more than once. It is brought out by comparisons and contrasts with religious orders struck down by the laws of suppression. It is also brought out by comments that people of the late nineteenth century value work, seek the advancement of the lower classes, and look with sympathy on those who will collaborate in that effort. Salesians were not vowed to choral prayers but educational work, among boys in particular. Their society was not designed to take in penitents withdrawing from the dangers of the world but rather men of solid virtue, particularly with respect to chastity. Work would be the sackcloth of the Salesians. Their penance would come down to enduring heat, cold, hunger, thirst, misunderstanding, and fatigue.²¹⁷ They were to be ready to undertake whatever work was required by their educational aims. Total openness of mind and heart to one's Salesian superiors was a goal based on the same sort of reasons to be found in the Jesuits. The novitiate was a time for gaining practical experience and growth in virtue, but also in educational work. This clear awareness is already in the earliest redaction of the Constitutions, where we find the following basic statement about practices of piety:

The active life toward which our congregation tends makes it difficult for its members to perform many exercises of piety in common. They shall therefore

a priest..." Also called "spiritual director" was the member of the superior chapter who at that time was also called "catechist general."

²¹⁷ *Const.*, ch. 13, p. 39 (Eng. art. 189): "Let each one be ready, when it is necessary, to endure heat, cold, thirst, hunger, fatigue, and contempt, whenever this may contribute to the greater glory of God, the spiritual good of others, and the salvation of one's own soul."

supply for these by giving one another good example, and by fulfilling perfectly the general duties of a good Christian.²¹⁸

The high compression of the Salesian under a heavy workload logically led to a decompression with respect to communal exercises of piety. Don Bosco was certainly familiar with the practices of Barolo's and Cottolengo's institutes. He was personally acquainted with the routine of the Chieri seminary, the Ecclesiastical College, and the local diocesan clergy. For his Salesians he wanted to establish the "adequate minimum" of practices in common, here again adamantly resisting outside pressures. Father Mark Anthony Durando in Turin and other censors in Rome did not share his quest for such a frugal practice of exercises in common and for such a generic spectrum of duties being left to the individual member.²¹⁹ They feared all this would undermine the spirit of the institute, relying on a fundamental premise that Don Bosco himself avowed elsewhere and also incorporated into the Introduction to the Constitutions:

As food nourishes and sustains the body, so the practices of piety nourish the soul and strengthen it against temptation.²²⁰

As our body declines and dies when deprived of food, so does our soul when we do not give it the nourishment it needs. The word of God is nourishment for the soul...²²¹

The practices of the good Christian common in Piedmont and incorporated in *The Companion of Youth* became the concrete practices of the Salesians. There

²¹⁸ AS 022/1, p. 15. The chapter on "practices of piety" was added wholly by DB to this copy of the Constitutions written by Fr. Rua. See BM 5:644.

²¹⁹ Fr. Durando noted that the Constitutions presented by DB did not contain a "method or plan" for formation in piety (MB 6:724). In 1864, Carmelite consultor Fr. Angelo Savini (1816-90) found art. 4 and 7 of ch. 14 inadequate and too general: "4. Every day there will be no less than an hour of prayer, between mental and vocal... 8. Every year each member will make the spiritual retreat, which will end with the annual confession... A mere hour a day of prayer between mental and vocal seems little, and it would also be well to specify the number of days set aside for the spiritual retreat, which is not mentioned" (see MB 7:626). The earliest redaction of the Constitutions is even more sparing: "Each one shall make no less than ['no less than' added above the line] a combined half hour ['at least' crossed out] of ['vocal' crossed out] prayer—mental or at least vocal—every day unless prevented from so doing by calls of the sacred ministry" (BM 5:644, no. 3, adapted slightly). Nothing else was added. But the copy presented to Rome goes on to say, "In that case, he shall supply for it by offering ejaculatory prayers as frequently as possible and by directing to God with more fervent devotion the labors which hinder him from performing the prescribed exercises of piety" (Eng. 1957, art. 153). The earliest redaction does not have norms on the annual retreat. In 1873, consultor Fr. Raymond Bianchi found unsuitable the faculties granted to the Superior General regarding the duration of the retreat: see *Torinese: Sopra l'approvazione delle Costituzioni*, p. 36.

²²⁰ Introduction to *Const.*, p. 32 (Eng. p. 41). The rough draft is wholly a DB autograph: see AS 022/101, p. 10; cited here from SWSJB:279.

²²¹ *Giov. prov.*, p. 18; SWSJB:80.

would be no shake-up or loss in this respect for the oratory boys who would choose to remain with Don Bosco. His *Companion of Youth*, a methodical way of life and an anthology of practices of piety, would remain a manual of piety for Salesians as well. Boys used to the morning and evening prayers of their local parishes would not have to learn new ones peculiar to Don Bosco's house or institute. In the early period the Salesians used the same practices of piety that their boys did: morning and evening prayers, grace before and after meals, the rosary and the Angelus, weekly confession and communion, the monthly Exercise of a Holy Death, and annual retreats.

We notice that from the very beginning the Salesians' practices of piety were influenced by the educational institutes they ran. Boarding school life meant that they performed various practices with their students: e.g., morning and evening exercises, daily and Sunday Mass, and the Exercise of a Holy Death. The date of the annual spiritual exercises was influenced by the autumn school vacation, so it ordinarily was set for September.

After 1870, as the Salesian Society spread beyond Piedmont, we note a tendency toward cohesiveness. The superior chapter and the general chapters made efforts now and then to provide for unity in vocal and mental prayers, establishing texts for meditation, retreats, sermons, hours of adoration, and catechesis.²²² The general chapter of 1877 and the Introduction to the Constitutions specify a plan for the monthly Exercise of a Holy Death. The Italian *Companion of Youth*, which went into French and Spanish translations, was carried to America as well. With their own educational system and network, the Salesians could and did spread their own set of prayers, exercises, and practices of piety. The earlier concern to adopt the common exercises of the good Christian gave way to a more conscious effort to maintain unity in their spiritual life and practice. This, after all, is the period when Don Bosco was deeply concerned about the problem of unity and when environmental concerns prompted him to create his Union of Cooperators with its motto: *Vis unita fortior* ("United strength is stronger").

Thus the Salesians came to be differentiated from other institutes by their exercises of piety and devotions as well. Not only did they propagate devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to Saint Joseph; they also were apostles of devotion to Mary Immaculate and Mary Help of Christians. Not only did they establish daily Mass in their schools, but also the recitation of the rosary during the Mass. Not only did they promote a monthly retreat, but also the monthly Exercise of a Holy Death.

So we see a gradual reversal in the relationship between the Salesians and the common practices of piety of the good Christian. The Salesians were not much ready to learn or pick up things in the places where they went. Instead they

²²² *Deliberazioni del secondo Capitolo generale* (sec n. 87), pp. 67-69.

brought their “practices of piety” with them, setting up religious companies, associations dedicated to Mary Help of Christians, and devotions for Mary in the month of May that tended to culminate with the feast of Mary Help of Christians. In their festive oratories they tended to teach the prayers before and after communion that they had learned in Piedmont or in some Salesian house.²²³ Within the Salesian religious community itself we find one and the same method for the monthly Exercise of a Holy Death, meditation, and retreats.

Various nineteenth-century factors behind the burgeoning of extraliturgical devotions also had an impact on the prayer practices of Don Bosco’s sons. In this respect the Salesians were closer to the mendicant orders and post-Trent religious congregations than to the Benedictines. The Dominicans promoted the rosary. The Mercedarians promoted devotion to Our Lady of Mercy; the Servants of Mary, devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows; the Redemptorists, devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help. In their spiritual exercises the Jesuits promoted preparation for a holy death and various devotions: to the Guardian Angel, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, and Saint John Berchmans.

The dogmatic and socioreligious factors accounting for the rise and spread of private practices and personal or communal devotions also affected Salesian piety. The latter may have been grounded on a liturgical base, but it also had a wide and varied complement of devotions. It was, after all, a time of social change, liturgical decadence, and disconnectedness of private worship from the parish. Don Bosco and his Salesians, moreover, were influenced by the same psychological factors that gave rise to different devotional emphases in various religious orders and congregations.²²⁴ He sent out his missionaries with the injunction to spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians.²²⁵ He felt that he and

²²³ Thus the “Acts before Communion” of the Turin Catechism were translated into French and Spanish: “Mon seigneur Jésus-Christ je crois d’une foi très vive que vous êtes réellement présent au saint Sacrement, avec votre corps, votre sang, votre âme et votre divinité...” (Bosco, *La jeunesse instruite* [Turin-Paris, 1876], p. 144); “Señor mío Jesucristo creo con viva fe que estás realmente presente en el Santísimo Sacramento, con vuestro Cuerpo y Sangre, con vuestra Alma y Divinidad...” (Bosco, *El joven instruido* [Turin-Nice-Buenos Aires-Montevideo, 1879], p. 124). GC II explicitly prescribes that “the prayers before and after communion are to continue to be said in common, as they are found in *Il giovane provveduto*” (*Deliberazioni*, p. 60).

²²⁴ DB himself insists on this in his draft for GC I: “The prayers, hymns, books, and rules of vocal or instrumental music, or of Gregorian chant, are to be uniform in all houses insofar as that is possible... Every house director shall retain the usages of the motherhouse, preserve their memory, and keep them in effect in the house entrusted to him”: *Capitolo generale...da convocarsi in Lanzo*, pp. 17-18 (autograph ms., AS 132 Capitolo generale). The proposal became a directive in 1877 (*Deliberazioni*, p. 55) and 1880 (*Deliberazioni*, p. 60).

²²⁵ Reminders to the first missionaries in Nov. 1875, published in Cesare Chiala (1837-76), *Da Torino alla repubblica Argentina* (Turin, 1876), p. 60; later in BM

his Salesians were meant to be instruments for spreading that particular devotion. This devotion and the various other practices noted in this section were to differentiate his Salesians from other congregations and guarantee the homogeneity of the Salesian spiritual organism in the world. They would indicate that Don Bosco and his sons had their own proper function in the spiritual and devotional life of the Church.

* * * *

Besides the Exercise of a Holy Death, the retreats merit specific attention among the various practices of Salesian piety.

After the Restoration, the presence of the Jesuits had a strong impact on Piedmont. In Turin a restoration of the Ignatian Exercises through the ranks of the Society of Jesus was initiated by Father John Philip Roothaan (1785-1853), then Superior General of the order.²²⁶ Despite the presence of the Jesuits in Piedmont during the middle of the nineteenth century, the prevailing forms for both laity and clergy were retreats that gave a large role to reflection guided by preached meditations and instructions. Renowned preachers to the clergy were Canon John Baptist Giordano and Fathers Hyacinth Compayne (1773-1848), Charles Ferreri, and Joseph Cafasso. Every diocese had designated places for retreats to be given to the clergy. There was no obligation to attend them once a year, but priests were urged to attend them frequently.²²⁷

Meditations focused on "eternal truths," whereas instructions focused on "ecclesiastical duties." The envisioned aim was a renewal of one's interior life and one's priestly resolves. Priests reviewed their lives as ministers of the holy sacrifice, the sacraments, and charity to the flock entrusted to their care. The aim was a reform of life in both individual and community terms. The whole set of sermons, individual reflections, and conversations were meant to abet this reform and renewal.

This system was carried over to Salesian life. The retreats took their inspiration partly from Don Bosco's experience and partly from the local situation.

11:365. But we have a rough draft in one of DB's notebooks (AS 132 Quaderni 5) and a copy with DB's signature (AS 132 Missioni 1).

²²⁶ Joseph de Guibert, SJ, *La spiritualité de la Compagnie de Jésus: Esquisse historique* (Rome, 1953), pp. 460-64, 537-39.

²²⁷ When he was bishop of Saluzzo, Lawrence Gastaldi sent priests a circular (June 8, 1868) urging them to make a retreat and reminding them of the obligation to make one every four years. Some interesting information can be found in Nicolis di Robilant, *Vita... Cafasso* 2:273-308, where we read of the spiritual retreats at St. Ignatius for clergy and lay people, and of missions for the populace. Detailed norms drawn up by Fr. Louis Guala for directing the retreats at St. Ignatius were published by Giacomo Colombero, *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso* (Turin, 1895), pp. 367-79. Guidelines of the topics usually treated at such exercises are the posthumous publications of Fr. Cafasso: *Istruzioni per esercizi spirituali al clero* (Turin: Canonica, 1893); *Meditazioni per esercizi spirituali al clero* (Turin: Scuola Missionaria, 1923).

Instructions dealing with clerical duties were replaced by ones dealing with their duties as religious: their religious vocation, vows, practices of piety, and duties as educators.²²⁸ With themes and cases borrowed from chronicles of Salesian life as well, the sermons were meant to trigger personal reflection that would lead to individual and religious “reform” of a specifically Salesian variety in particular.

Don Bosco was happy to preach the retreats. At the very least he would end group reflection in the evening with a Good Night talk. He would put the seal on individual resolutions by suggesting community resolutions in his “souvenir” sermon, which derived from the closing sermon used by Lenten and mission preachers to the common people.²²⁹ Like the Ignatian Exercises, the Salesian retreats reflected concrete experience. The former focused on human beings insofar as they recognized themselves to be sinners in a direct relationship with God, creation, the fall, and redemption. The Salesian exercises reflected concerns having to do with the religious life and the vocation of educator. More than the Ignatian Exercises, the Salesian ones touched upon religious community life and the concrete situation of individuals in that community. They also embody an annual encounter of religious brothers, since they tended to be held on the level of the provincial community.

The retreats depended heavily on the preacher. The one preaching the instructions had to be a man of experience, since his instructions were meant to be based on practical cases. To those examining their consciences, he was to propose facts that would serve as warnings or stimulate rethinking and new resolve on the part of each and all.

Just as the Ignatian Exercises ran the risk of degenerating into sterile psychological techniques, so the Salesian retreats could degenerate into rhetoricism, moralism, and the mere technique of alternating sermons and practices of piety. Rhetoricism loomed when the whole affair seemed to come down to nice but vacuous sermons, moralism when the instructions came down to cases out of tune with dogma and the spiritual needs of the retreatants. The intrinsic power of the preaching could be undermined when the meditations and instructions were not in harmony, and hence failed to give a unified thrust to individual and communal resolutions.

²²⁸ A model of the retreats preached to SDBs can be found in DB’s outlines for the retreat at Trofarello in 1868 (AS 132 Prediche E4; MB 9:985-94). The general outline was certainly not new. See, e.g., Agostino da Fusignano, OFM (1717-1803) *Esercizi spirituali alle monache* (Venice, 1844). Some idea of the “Ignatian” exercises preached can be found in Guglielmo Audisio, *Compendio delle lezioni di eloquenza sacra* (Turin: Marietti, 1887⁶), pp. 242-54.

²²⁹ See the ceremonial for the closing ceremony (and for the Mass for the deceased) in Guglielmo Alasia, *Guida ai venerandi sacerdoti del clero secolare nel sacro ministero delle missioni e spirituali esercizi da dettarsi al popolo nelle parrocchie rurali* (Turin: Marietti, 1864), pp. 57-61.

The presence of the superior also had to harmonize with the elements provided by preachers and retreatants. The evening sermonettes, colloquies, and reminders played a role that was substantial for Don Bosco. They were meant to foster the real, effective unity of the Salesian body and its cohesion with Don Bosco, their head and animator.

In the dynamics of the retreats, there was also a real place for the explosion of communal joy at the end of the “souvenir” sermon.²³⁰ Don Bosco and the first Salesians found it inconceivable that a cycle of spiritual exercises would end without a communal expression of joy. It was like the joy of the Christian people on Easter Sunday, after the days of mourning and meditating on the mysteries of the crucified Christ. The psychological affinity might seem farfetched, but it was not without a sound basis. The meditations and instructions of the retreat did lead to personal reflections on sin, the death of Christ, confession, and communion. Thus they did trigger reflection on the mysteries of Holy Week. After their immersion in sorrow, a repentance sealed by confession, and a renewed acknowledgment of their religious vows, the Salesians, who were sons of the common people, could not help but let their spirits give way to an explosion of collective joy.

* * * *

Meditation and spiritual reading deserve a few comments here. As communal practices, they were introduced around 1879 when efforts were being made to put order into the religious life of novices and professed members.²³¹ Communal spiritual reading lasted about fifteen minutes and meditation about thirty minutes.²³² Much of the communal meditation was made up of a public reading, which was designed to induce reflection and a quick turn to religious thoughts and practical resolutions. For meditation the preferred texts were those of Venerable Louis de La Puente, SJ (1554-1624), Saint Alphonsus (*Preparation for Death, The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*), and possibly the

²³⁰ According to Guala's directory, however, on the morning of departure the director of the retreat was to be careful to prevent “the first outbursts of chatter” and strolling in the corridors. See Colombero, p. 378.

²³¹ Indicative is the testimony of Fr. Paul Albera: “In the beginning the only thing we did in common every day was spiritual reading with a few words from Don Bosco, who urged on us devotion to the Eucharist, devotion to Mary, and practice of the virtues proper to our state in life. Later, meditation was made in common. Finally, in 1877, a regular novitiate was begun in Turin” (actually the novitiate had already been around a few years). See *Taurinen. beatificationis et canonizationis ven. servi Dei J. Bosco... Confutazione delle accuse formulate contro la causa* (Rome, 1922), p. 303.

²³² *Regulae*, approved orig. ms., ch. 13, art. 3, AS 022/18, p. 22: “Singulis diebus unusquisque praeter orationes vocales saltem per dimidium horae orationi mentali vacabit, nisi quisquam impediatur ob exercitium sacri ministerii...” Nothing is laid down about spiritual reading. There is a reference to it in the 1877 ed. of the Introduction, p. 37 (Eng. p. 42).

Jesuit Fabius Spinola (1593-1671). Used for spiritual reading were Rodríguez, and Saint Alphonsus's *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*.²³³

Used for the novices, besides Alphonsus's *Preparation*, was *The School of Jesus in His Passion* by the Passionist priest Ignatius del Costato of Jesus (1801-1844). This little work was an emotional description of the various moments of the passion. It was similar to Saint Alphonsus's *Reflections and Affections on the Passion of Jesus Christ* and the Italian version of a work by a Portuguese Augustinian, Thomas of Jesus (1530?-1582): *The Sufferings of Jesus*.²³⁴ There were thirty-one meditations in *The School of Jesus*, one for each day of the month, which reviewed the phases of Christ's passion from the time he left his mother to his death on the cross. Each meditation had three points, some fruitful resolve to be taken, and an example. The style was direct and immediate, shifting naturally from a picture of the suffering Christ to some ascetic resolution. The example was probably quite congenial to Don Bosco's way of thinking and sometimes very pertinent to Salesian life. Thus, the meditation of the fifth day concludes with the example of Philip Neri, who managed to remember the suffering Jesus amid his many occupations and distractions:

Saint Philip Neri led some boys to an open area to play innocent games. He started them off and then withdrew to read or ponder an aspect of Jesus' passion. He had a booklet containing the story that he always carried with him. What is stopping you from withdrawing now and then, at least in your heart, to cast a look of love and compassion on Jesus in his passion?²³⁵

The norms of the Constitutions regarding practices of piety in general applied to spiritual reading and meditation in common as well. Those who could not perform them with their confreres at the set time were not obliged to

²³³ Minutes of GC I (AS 046/1877, Quaderno 3, p. 116) reported in BM 13:199. The meditations of Ven. Louis de La Puente, SJ, were praised by his confrere Secondo Franco, who was expressly invited to the general chapter. Someone remarked that de La Puente was "arid, not stimulating" at various points. Franco then stressed the importance of assimilating de La Puente's introduction, which taught the way to meditate properly. Fr. Julius Barberis compiled the minutes. For the years prior to 1870 there are valuable data in the biographies of such figures as Frs. Alasonatti, Bonetti, and Durando. Here is just one bit of testimony from Fr. Francesca in his *Memorie biografiche di salesiani defunti* (S. Benigno, 1904), p. 35: "One evening we were doing meditation on a page of... St. Alphonsus's *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*. At one point the saint notes that the Lord is in the habit of permitting a devil to maltreat the body of those servants he calls to holiness. It seemed to me that this was the case with a friend [Joseph Bongiovanni, afflicted with a boil, who died in 1869]. When the reading stopped, I turned to him with a feeling of admiration or pity, I'm not sure which, offered him the book, and whispered, 'That is your case'..."

²³⁴ Tomaso di Gesù, *Travagli di Gesù* (Venice, 1735). The edition I cite here was in the Valdocco library and is now at UPS.

²³⁵ Ignazio del Costato di Gesù, *La scuola di Gesù appassionato aperta al cristiano con la quotidiana meditazione delle sue pene* (Genoa, 1848³), p. 48.

carry them out on their own. They were supposed to make up for that by more frequent ejaculations and more intense dedication of their other labors to God. The general chapters confirmed this approach.

Instead of putting stress on communal or literal fulfillment of community practices, then, the Salesians put more importance on their fulfillment in some way or on the need for prayer and union with God every day. That certainly reflected the outlook of Don Bosco, who considered prayer to be the nourishment of the soul. He also viewed meditation, sermons, and spiritual reading as spiritual food. These practices, then, were not viewed mainly as communal ways of praising God. They were seen as food for the soul, hence as highly individual and personal matters. This would explain why Don Bosco does not depict practices of piety as congregational ways of showing love and honor for God or bring out the value of Salesian prayer for the Church. Such ecclesial values were attributed to the celebration of the Mass and the recitation of the breviary; the similar value of Salesian “practices of piety” was at best implicit.

The Alphonsian theme of prayer, in general, as a guarantee of salvation, Don Bosco brought out particularly with respect to the monthly Exercise of a Holy Death: “It is my belief that the salvation of a religious may be said to be assured, if he approaches the holy sacraments every month and puts his conscience in order, as if he were really to depart from this life to eternity.”²³⁶ Convictions assimilated as a youth and then preached to young people became the pivotal points of the simple spirituality Don Bosco preached to his Salesians. The salvation of one’s own soul and the souls of other people was the motivation behind all his activity as priest, educator, and religious entrepreneur, and it became the motivation for practices of piety as well:

Therefore, my sons, if we truly value our Congregation, if we want it to grow and to prosper for the welfare of our own and our neighbors’ souls, let us be very careful never to neglect our meditation, our spiritual reading, our daily visit to the Most Holy Sacrament, our weekly Confession, the Rosary of Our Lady, and the minor mortification on Friday. Although any single one of these practices does not seem to be of great importance, they will add considerably to our training in Christian perfection and our striving for salvation.²³⁷

²³⁶ Introduction to *Const.*, p. 44.

²³⁷ Introduction to *Regole* (1877), p. 37 (Eng. pp. 44-45). In the 1875 ed., p. xxxiv: “So if we love the honor of our Congregation and desire our soul’s salvation, we will observe our rules and be exact in the most ordinary things because those who fear God should not overlook anything that might contribute to His greater glory”; cited here from SWSJB:279.

(g) *Common life*

The fact that the Salesians, given the nature of their Society and its work, could not carry out many practices of piety in common made clear the reality of their “common life.” In the relevant chapter of the Constitutions, Don Bosco set forth the general structure of his Salesian Society: “All the members shall live together, bound only by the ties of fraternal charity and the simple vows, which so unite them as to make them one in heart and soul in order to love and serve God.”²³⁸

Don Bosco clearly took his inspiration from the formulation of the Constitutions drawn up by the Cavanis brothers, which declare in the chapter “On the Institute and the Form of the Congregation”: “All live in common, bound by the ties of the simple vows and of fraternal charity, and in fact united among themselves by the link of a single vocation.”²³⁹ In their Constitutions the term *vita communis* is the preferred one, and it was the one generally used in juridical and ascetical writings about religious orders and congregations. Here again we find reference to the “bond of simple vows” and “fraternal charity.” Don Bosco obviously absorbed traditional terms, and we can readily catch the resonances of a term like “fraternal charity” in a place like Valdocco. There all felt filially bound to Don Bosco and many had lived as friends and brothers from adolescence on.

Finally, we can readily ascertain the sense of the term “bond” that is used to characterize their common life. Rather than being constricting, it was a factor of cohesion and active stimulation. To use another image, for Don Bosco the common life served as a connective tissue even though he himself did not put it that way. Don Bosco preferred to use elements offered by his religious tradition, deriving the value of the common life from Christian charity. This gave a specific sense to the fraternity in which his spiritual sons ideally were to live. The notion of loving and serving God with one heart and soul seems to echo the “one heart and soul” that characterized the life of the first Christians as depicted in the Acts of the Apostles.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ AS 022/1, p. 7; BM 5:638, no. 1.

²³⁹ “Omnes communem vitam ducunt, simplicium votorum vinculo adstricti, et fraternae charitatis nec non uniformis vocationis nexu inter se colligati” (*Constitutiones Congregationis Sacerdotum soecularium scholarum Charitatis*, p. 16).

²⁴⁰ Acts 4:32. The incorporation of this expression into the phraseology of the Salesian Society also had an immediate precedent in DB’s own books and what he stressed there. See, for e.g., his *Stor. eccl.*, p. 34: “Q. What was the life of the first Christians like? A. All of them were so united that, as Scripture puts it, they formed one single heart and soul. They had no poor among themselves because those who had land or property sold it and laid the money at the feet of the apostles so that they might distribute it to each and every person as needed.” Close to this passage is one in Loriquet, *Storia ecclesiastica*, pp. 13-14: “Q. What was the life of the early Christians like? A. The whole multitude of new believers had, as Scripture puts it, one single heart and soul. No individual kept for himself anything he possessed. They shared all things in common. There

These basic ideas on the common life persist in the Introduction to the Constitutions. The vows are a bond, indeed, “a tie of conscience” uniting members with their superior.²⁴¹ In line with the mental frameworks of the day that he had assimilated, Don Bosco adds the note of authority to the note of cohesion: “In religious institutes each individual is a member of a great family which has for its head Jesus Christ, represented in the person of the superior.”²⁴² The note of family was stressed in an addition to the 1877 edition. Embracing the religious life, one “leaves one home and acquires a hundred...leaves one brother and gains a thousand.”²⁴³

By the time Don Bosco formulated these points (1875-1877), however, the situation of the Salesian Society had changed a great deal. The life of the institute was no longer the complicated mess of earlier days when religious lived with others who might be “extern” members. No longer was there much danger of police harassment or of dispersal. Formal approval of the Constitutions had come in 1874, and the Salesians now regarded themselves as true religious. They were seeking to establish their rightful place among the many orders that had added luster to the Church. Adaptation and conformity to traditional religious forms would be brought out in all that Don Bosco said by way of allusion or explicit deliberation.

At this stage, then, the term “common life” was instinctively linked in Don Bosco’s mind and the Salesian outlook with its consequences for domestic economy as well as for practices of piety. This mental shift was not so surprising. It is evident in the general chapters of other orders and congregations and, in general, in councils, synods, and constitutions of the post-Trent period.²⁴⁴

were no poor among them because those who possessed houses and assets sold them and laid the money at the feet of the apostles so that it might be shared out to all as might be needed.”

See also DB’s *Vita di San Pietro* (1856), p. 82: “All had one single heart and soul to love and serve God the Creator.” The context here seems to depend a bit on two works: Luigi Cuccagni (1740-98), *Vita di S. Pietro 2* (Rome, 1781), 31-32 (“sons of one single Father...a certain Joseph, nicknamed Barnabas by the apostles”); Antonio Cesari, CO, *San Pietro capo della Chiesa* (Turin, 1851), ragion. sesto, pp. 106-07 (“one single family...”).

The Christian life is described in the same terms in DB’s biographies of St. Paul, St. Pancras, and the early Popes.

²⁴¹ *Const.*, p. 23. The first rough draft is a DB autograph.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 16. The first rough draft of this section is also a DB autograph.

²⁴³ *Regolae* (1877), p. 15 (Eng. p. 18). This is Fr. Barberis’s text corrected by DB. See the interleaved 1875 ed., p. xi, AS 022/101.2.

²⁴⁴ See, e.g., this passage in the *Regole, ovvero costituzioni comuni della Congregazione della Missione* (1658), ch. 1, art. 11, p. 26: “In honor of the common life, which Christ our Lord chose to lead in order to adapt to others and thus win them more easily to God his Father, all, insofar as possible, shall observe uniformity in everything, regarding it as

With the same frame of mind, then, Don Bosco outlines his plans for the first general chapter, which was to convene in Lanzo:

The common life is the tie that sustains religious institutes and preserves their fervor and observance of their rules. Without a common life disorder ensues. Chapters 2 and 4 of our Constitutions set forth our common life with regard to food, dress, and habitation. Hence we get these questions:

1. Can members keep as their own books, drinks, foodstuffs, room furniture?
2. What exceptions may be permitted to superiors, to the sick?
3. When a Salesian changes his domicile, can he take with him trunks, books, pieces of furniture, and the like?²⁴⁵

Here see see that Don Bosco did not linger over the broad theological perspectives of the common life. He enunciates its basic aim and then plunges into little details.

Historical and theological considerations were treated in detail in the official proceedings of General Chapter I. The history of Christianity is examined in terms of the common life. We are told that the first Christians were of one heart and soul, sharing their lives and goods in common. As the fervor of charity waned, this communion of goods came to be maintained by small but fervent groups: canonical clergy first, then religious. In the Church the latter were to commit themselves to detachment from earthly goods so as to respond as perfectly as possible to Christ's invitation to form one reality in him. Communion of property in the religious life facilitates one's personal journey to perfection and enables the individual member to dedicate his or her life to the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

the guardian of good order and holy union. In like manner they shall shun singularity as the root of envy and divisiveness...not only in food, dress, bedding, and similar things..." We do not find, however, a common grouping of norms s.v. "common life." One must check out a variety of headings such as: *de disciplina regularium; de observantia votorum; de paupertate; de religiosae vitae officii; de quotidianis exercitationibus*. St. Alphonsus, in *La vera sposa di Gesù Cristo* (Turin: Marietti, 1847), which was familiar to SDBs of the 19th century, deals with the common life in the chapter on poverty: "Since mention has been made of the *Community life*, I must make a few reflections on this point. It is certain that all the cares and disquietudes of [religious], all the annoyances that they frequently experience, and all the obstacles that hinder them from advancing to perfection usually arise from the possession of personal property, and from the desire of preserving and increasing it" (*The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, pp. 260-61). This passage and the considerations added in the same context are the only texts indicated s.v. "vita comune" in the Italian ed.'s *Indice delle cose più notabili, Opere ascetiche* 4:884.

²⁴⁵ *Capitolo generale...da convocarsi in Lanzo*, p. 4. As I have already noted, we have DB's autograph of this document in AS 133.

The historical picture is really a rather deficient interpretation of facts and events, but it does enable people to grasp the intimate connection between the religious life and the vital, life-giving wellsprings of Christianity. Indeed Don Bosco's historical picture may be considered the outcome of a body of literature that had upheld the rationale of the religious life over the centuries. His picture does derive rather directly from the *Ready-to-hand Library* of the Franciscan Lucius Ferraris (1687-1763).²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ Lucio Ferraris, *Prompta bibliotheca* 8 (Genoa, 1769), 494-95, s.v. "Vita communis."

"Vita communis in primitiva Ecclesia servabatur ab omnibus Fidelibus, quorum erat cor unum, et anima una, et illis erant omnia communia, ut *expresse habetur Actor. cap. 4, n. 32*, ibi: *Multitudinis autem credentium erat Cor unum, et anima una, nec quisquam eorum, quae possidebat, aliquid suum esse dicebat, sed erant illis omnia communia.*

"Primi enim illi Fideles possessiones, et substantias suas vendebant, et dividebant illa omnibus, prout cuique opus erat, et ut ab Apostolis disponebatur, nihil proprii sibi retinentes, et omnia communia habentes: *Actor. c. II, n. 44 et 45* ibi: *Omnes etiam, qui credebant, erant pariter et habebant omnia communia. Possessiones, et substantias vendebant, et dividebant illa omnibus prout, cuique opus erat.* Et id totum refertur in *c. Dilectissimis 2 et c. Scimus 9 caus. 12, 1*, ibi: *Scimus vos non ignorare, quod hactenus vita communis inter omnes Christianos viguit.*

"Hoc vitae communis genus frigescente Laicorum fervore in Clericis continuavit, ex quo nomen Canonicorum effluxit promiscue a Clericis usurpatum: Canonici etenim dicuntur Clerici in fraternitate, prout certe erant omnes Clerici in primitiva illa Ecclesia, ut erudite more suo observat Eminentissimus Petra *tom. I, Comment. ad Constit. 2, Paschalis II, n. 3...*"

Deliberazioni del [primo] Capitolo generale della Pia Società Salesiana (Turin, 1878), Distinzione II, "Common life," pp. 23-24:

"La vita comune fu tenuta da Gesù Cristo coi suoi Apostoli e dagli Apostoli introdotta nella Chiesa.

"Tra i primi fedeli, dei quali era un sol cuore ed un'anima sola, tutte le cose erano in comune, siccome sta registrato negli Atti degli Apostoli (cap. IV, vers. 32): *Multitudinis autem credentium erat cor unum et anima una, nec quisquam, eorum quae possidebat, aliquid suum esse dicebat, sed erant illis omnia communia.*

"Essi vendevano le loro possessioni e le loro sostanze, e poscia ne dividevano il prodotto a ciascuno secondo il bisogno, come dagli Apostoli disponevasi, non ritenendo nulla di proprio (*Actor. c. II, vers. 44,45*). *Omnes etiam qui credebant erant pariter, et habebant omnia communia. Possessiones et substantias vendebant et dividebant illa omnibus, prout cuique opus erat.*

"La vita comune fu anche generalmente osservata in tempi posteriori, come ricavasi da un antichissimo canone ecclesiastico: *Scimus vos non ignorare, quod hactenus vita communis inter omnes Christianos viguit.*

"Tal genere di vita, che prima praticavasi da tutti i Cristiani, raffreddandosi il fervore nei laici, continuò negli Ecclesiastici, i quali furono anche chiamati *canonici*, perché vivevano insieme come fratelli sotto un *canone*, ossia una regola fissa; e così par certo vivessero tutti gli Ecclesiastici nella primitiva Chiesa (V. Car. Petra tomo I, Com.)..."

Like the *Ready-to-hand Library*, the Acts of the Salesian General Chapter move quickly to practical applications, seeking “uniformity in direction and administration, in scheduling, dress, linen, food, board, and furniture.”²⁴⁷

The applications are very specific and concrete. For the sake of a common life, a “customary” is prescribed, which is to establish the manner of dress for each province. General norms are laid down for food, daily schedule, and the style of clothing. The term “community” is introduced. When a major superior comes to a house, he is to be invited to celebrate the community Mass.

Here and there the aims to be sought after are made explicit: to “maintain the proper running of the Congregation” and to “preserve unity of spirit.”²⁴⁸ There is a desire to solidify the Salesian Society and bring out its special character, but there is also a desire to make clear that Salesians are religious. Hence various practices of other orders are adopted, such as reading at meals and writing annually to the Superior General on a specific festivity.²⁴⁹ Once again we find two sentiments: awareness of being *new* religious called into being to meet new needs in society and the Church, and awareness of being *religious*, who want to fulfill their vocation as such. Cognizance of other religious orders explains certain prescriptions and the stress placed on them: “To ensure the smooth running of the Congregation and its unity of spirit, and *to follow the example of other religious institutes*, a regular confessor is established for those who belong to the Society.”²⁵⁰

We can thus get a fairly clear picture of Don Bosco’s attitude and approach after the formal approval of his Constitutions. He makes every effort to conform the Salesian Society to existing religious orders. He and his immediate co-workers find their inspiration in traditional writings and in the extant and operative practice of their own day. They gradually root the Salesian Society in the soil of post-Trent religious congregations, which were then being actively promoted by the Holy See, many bishops, and numerous priests and lay people. In the process of this integration, the sense of Salesian life being a life “in common” would play an important role. The many members were to be joined together “in one heart and soul.” Once that goal was accepted, means were sought to attain it. The partial adaptation of Salesian discipline to that of existing religious orders would be one important means used to achieve the goal.

²⁴⁷ *Deliberazioni del Capitolo generale*, pp. 25-43.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28: “At least once a year, on the occasion of the feast of St. Francis de Sales, all the confreres shall write to the Rector Major, and another time to their own provincial.” On reading at meals, see p. 25.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

6. *The image of the Salesian in biographies and obituaries*

If we examine biographical and hagiographical profiles, we can again detect continuity in the motifs used by Don Bosco in his own writings of this sort. Themes of a hagiographical cast in his *Life of Aloysius Comollo* and his *Six Sundays* are echoed in later biographies of deceased Salesians, the latter writings being largely composed by others and then revised by Don Bosco. The prologues of these biographies make clear that they spring from the same impulses that had prompted Don Bosco to write his biographies of Comollo, Savio, and Cafasso. Human beings live by imitation. The good or bad example of one person has always been the source of great virtues or vices practiced by others. Pondering the deeds of virtuous people, Saint Augustine felt a growing desire to be a better person. Driven by a desire to emulate them, he asked himself: "If they...were able to endow themselves with such fine virtue, why should I not be virtuous as well? Were they of a different nature than I? *Si iste et ille, cur non ego?* [If they, why not I?]"²⁵¹

Biographies of Salesians were obviously meant to be another way of pondering the religious ideals that could be attained in the company of Don Bosco. Introducing this approach into Salesian life, Don Bosco was merely using one of the didactic tools offered by Christian tradition and by the practice of other religious orders. Thus his biographies always follow the ascetical presuppositions that underlie the selection and elaboration of data.²⁵² A "vocation," for example, is always depicted as a divine call to which one responds. One chooses the priestly life and the religious congregation because one has been called by God. When God's call comes, one comes to know the world as it really is and perceives its falsehood and emptiness.²⁵³ One chooses a life of seclusion from the world because one senses the risks and dangers of secular

²⁵¹ Preface to the *Letture amene ed edificanti, ossia biografie salesiane* (Turin: Salesiana, 1880), p. 3. The Latin question can also be found in SDS:24.

²⁵² See, e.g., *Biografia dei chierici salesiani Pietro Scappini e Carlo Trivero* (Turin: Salesiana, 1880): "The Lord disposed that..." (p. 4); "After mature consideration he realized that the world was not for him and felt strongly led to give himself entirely to God, not just as a cleric but as a religious... He asked and was permitted to don the clerical habit in this very Salesian Congregation, in whose schools he had been educated for many years, even though authoritative persons tried every means to dissuade him from his resolve" (p. 6); "Great as had been his efforts to find out the state to which the Lord had called him and then to prepare himself properly to follow that call, great as had been his efforts to know and practice the rules of the Congregation during his year of testing [the novitiate], even greater were his efforts after his profession; he then strove mightily to solidify himself more and more firmly in the vocation to which the Lord had called him" (p. 15).

²⁵³ Such was the case with the youth Clement Benna. See "Confratelli chiamati da Dio alla vita eterna nell'anno 1879," appendix to the *Elenco generale* (1880), p. 62.

life.²⁵⁴ One embraces a religious vocation “to be sure of one’s own salvation.”²⁵⁵ Those who finally make their way to the Oratory feel like sailors who reach shore after crossing a treacherous sea.²⁵⁶ Once safely inside the walls of a religious house, some will echo the conviction of Dominic Savio: It is better to stay safe in one’s cage than to venture out where a hawk might pounce on one, to remain at the Oratory than to go home on vacation to one’s family.²⁵⁷ Some will also contrast the priestly calling of the secular clergy and that of religious clergy. Fleeing the “unhealthy atmosphere of the world,” they will choose to give themselves wholly to God as priests in a religious order. For they imagine that they will lose their souls if they become secular priests.²⁵⁸

The feelings of some about their religious profession are those described by Saint Alphonsus and presented by Don Bosco in talks and in his Introduction to the Constitutions. Making his profession, Joseph Giulitto (1853-1876) “felt reborn and rebaptized, and vowed to be holy.”²⁵⁹

The comments of the biographer and, even more, the conduct of his subject bring out the common teaching about the priesthood and the active religious life of both priest and lay religious. The lofty dignity of the priesthood is both alluring and awe-inspiring.²⁶⁰ It makes us realize our human wretchedness and the need to prepare ourselves for it with prayer, mortification, purity of conduct, and study.²⁶¹ The priesthood is a special kind of consecration: “He who embraces the clerical state sells himself to the Lord, and must henceforth set his heart on nothing in the world except what can redound to the greater glory of God and the advantage of souls.”²⁶² The priest has his dignity wherever he may be. He is a priest “at the altar, in the confessional, among his young people; in Turin or in Florence; in the houses of the poor or in the palace of the king and his ministers.”²⁶³ His service to the glory of God and the salvation of souls is merely a consequence of that fact. The motto *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle* is

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

²⁵⁵ Such was the case with cleric John Arata. See *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti negli anni 1883 e 1884* (Turin: Salesiana, 1885), pp. 22-23.

²⁵⁶ “Confratelli chiamati,” p. 79.

²⁵⁷ SDS:110. See *Biografie... 1883 e 1884*, pp. 28-29, on John Arata.

²⁵⁸ So thought Peter Scappini: *Biografia... Pietro Scappini e Carlo Trivero*, p. 6.

²⁵⁹ Bonetti, *Un fiore salesiano, o breve biografia di D. Giuseppe Giulitto* (LC) (Turin, 1878), p. 77.

²⁶⁰ Summary of a conference by DB in MB 9:343-44.

²⁶¹ Fr. Giovanni Battista Ronchail, in appendix to the *Elenco generale* (1879), p. 60; Fr. Vincenzo Reggiori, in *Biografie... 1883 e 1884*, p. 58.

²⁶² *Cafasso*, p. 13.

²⁶³ Words that DB is reported to have said to Premier Bettino Ricasoli in 1866. Around this was woven a conference by Eugenio Ceria, *Don Bosco prete* (Rome 1928), revised under the title *Don Bosco, modello del sacerdote cattolico* (Milan, 1929).

merely one way of expressing it. And the ultimate aims are eternal salvation, the glory of God, and holiness.

In the biographies of deceased Salesians, we find the same characteristics that were brought out in Don Bosco's biographies of Dominic Savio and Father Cafasso. In an 1885 work, the writer notes:

We would agree with Saint Philip and Saint Francis de Sales in saying that holiness cannot be true if it entails things so difficult and extraordinary that few would be able to attain it. No, holiness means doing well all the things one is supposed to do. But if anyone were to assume that one could attain that goal with a minimum of effort and a momentary resolve, we say that is definitely not the case.²⁶⁴

Don Bosco uses the terms "holiness" and "perfection" as equivalent. To grow in holiness or perfection is to ascend to God. Holiness means the possession of charity, the latter being the fulfillment of the law and "the totality of Christian virtues." Negatively, it is the absence of sinfulness; positively, it is the possession of charity. In both its positive and its negative aspects, holiness shows up and grows in and by practice, which means avoiding voluntary faults and displaying all the virtues.²⁶⁵

The same virtues show up in the biographical comments on Salesians, Dominic Savio, Father Cafasso, Canon Cottolengo, Saint Philip Neri, and Saint Vincent de Paul. Particular stress is placed on obedience, chastity, industriousness, piety, and zeal for the salvation of souls. The latter, then, would mean zeal in fulfilling the tasks of a Salesian educator.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ *Biografie... 1883 e 1884*, p. 29.

²⁶⁵ *Cafasso*, pp. 33-34, 49. Though not explicitly formulated, the teaching evidently echoes things that go back to Pseudo-Dionysius but that were altered significantly over the centuries. Proceeding through the various degrees of holiness, the soul draws closer to God. These degrees or levels are attained ascetically through the cooperation of human nature with divine grace.

²⁶⁶ "Brevi cenni sulla vita del canonico Giuseppe Cottolengo," in the little work attributed to DB, *Episodi ameni e contemporanei ricavati da pubblici documenti* (LC 12, fasc. 3, May 1864 [Turin: OSFS], pp. 47-59. Some allusions also in *Stor. eccl.*, pp. 385-86. The 1868 eulogy of St. Philip Neri stresses his priestly zeal for the salvation of young people. We have the autograph draft and a second redaction with autograph comments by DB (AS 132 Prediche F4). With some retouching the text was published in MB 9:214-21. On Vincent de Paul, see John Bosco, *The Christian Trained in Conduct and Courtesy According to the Spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul*, trans. Silvester Andriano, ed. Margaret L. MacPherson (Paterson: Salesiana, 1956). The Preface contains expressions that DB was wont to use with priests and seminarians. E.g., Vincent was *sal et lux*, which is what Francis de Sales said of the bishop of Saluzzo, Juvenal Ancina. Note also this passage: "Saint Vincent was like a flaming torch chosen by God to spread the light of truth among educated and ignorant alike. He was like a man of low condition raised by God to sit with princes in order that the example of his heroic virtues might bring a spiritu-

Clerical novices willingly made the sacrifices required to alternate their study of philosophy and their practice of piety with stints of teaching young people. The Blessed Sacrament exercised an irresistible attraction. Like Dominic Savio, Caesar Peloso (1860-1878) spent hours absorbed in prayer after he had received Jesus in the Eucharist.²⁶⁷ Father Joseph Giulitto spent whole hours before the Blessed Sacrament, usually from 5:00 to 6:00 P.M., and again before he went to bed.²⁶⁸ As those long sojourns gave Dominic Savio feelings of the greatest happiness during the course of the day, so they gave Father Giulitto his unbounded filial confidence in God:

He feared no mishaps because he was convinced that no evil could befall those who entrust their lives wholly...to Jesus. That was the source of the joviality, serenity, and almost constant smile on his lips that made him dear to all.²⁶⁹

Giulitto had the text of Rodríguez at his fingertips. He knew chapter and verse: "He could quote the main texts to you, citing the examples, comparisons, and wise rules of perfection."²⁷⁰

Other Salesians were models of zeal and wore themselves out with their labors: e.g., seminarians Peter Scappini (1858-1879) and James Delmastro (1861-1879), Father John Baptist Baccino, and the coadjutor brother Charles Tonelli (1842-1879). Tonelli was one of those people who could do everything. He was never idle during the day, and he never missed communal meditation.²⁷¹

The whole scene is dominated by the figure of Don Bosco himself: friend, confidant, wise counselor, father, and inspired prophet for all.²⁷² Besides little anecdotal details, it is he who gives a particular cast to the various biographical profiles and obituaries. It is he who wins and radiates sympathy against the backdrop of the Congregation and the boys who give life to workshop, classroom, and courtyards. Amid many clichés we can pinpoint elements that are highlighted so as to bring out the image of the new religious that Don Bosco tried to get across to his members and the world: the religious educator, willed into existence by God to meet the new needs of Church and society.

al renewal to France and to all Europe. God grant that St. Vincent's charity and zeal be kindled in priests and that they be tireless in saving souls" (BM 3:269).

²⁶⁷ *Elenco generale* (1879), p. 72.

²⁶⁸ Bonetti, *Un fiore salesiano*, pp. 79-80.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

²⁷¹ *Elenco generale* (1880), pp. 41-47 (on coadjutor Charles Tonelli) and pp. 71-86 (on James Delmastro). [Editor's note: See also Antonio Papes, "Il profilo biografico di Giacomo Delmastro (1861-1879)," in RSS 10 (1991), 155-72.]

²⁷² One would have to review somewhat all the biographies and mortuary letters dealing with the SDBs of the first generation. Among the elements of their vocation there is constant reference to their affection and esteem for DB.

EXCURSUS A

Some details on Salesian government

Here I shall simply summarize what has to do with the top government of the Salesians in Don Bosco's lifetime, following the approval of the Constitutions. There remains the article that the Society is governed by the superior chapter (*tota Societas Capitulo superiori subijcitur*), composed of the Rector, prefect, economer, spiritual director or catechist, and three councilors (VII, art. 1).

Right away the powers of the Rector Major are specified in detail: "He is the Superior (Moderator) of the whole Society; he can choose his domicile in any house of the Society. Everything having to do with offices, persons, personal and real property, spiritual and temporal things: everything is subject to him. Hence it is the function of the Rector to accept or not accept members into the Society; to assign to each individual those things having to do with either the spiritual or the temporal; which things he may do on his own or by delegation. But he shall have no authority to buy or sell, insofar as real properties are concerned, without the consent of the superior chapter" (VII, art. 2). He does not remain in office for life, but for twelve years, and he can be reelected (VII, art. 5).

The duties (*uffici*) of the chapter members remain fixed by the Constitutions. To the Rector Major is left the authority to give special mandates to the various members. Designation to the offices fixed by the Constitutions is taken away completely from the Rector Major and assigned to the general chapter. The members of the superior chapter stay in office for a period of six years and can be reelected (X, art. 2). Collegial deliberative authority is extended to various matters: "The councilors are to participate in all deliberations having to do with the acceptance, dismissal, or admission to vows of any member; with the opening of a new house; with choosing the director of any house; with contracts for the sale or purchase of real property; and finally, with all those things of major importance for the sound running of the Society in general. If, in tabulating secret ballots, which have the force of authoritative decision-making, the majority is not favorable, the Rector shall put off the decision" (IX, art. 2). Thus, relating VII, art. 2, and IX, art. 2, we find that the majority of votes strictly binds the Rector Major with respect to the sale and purchase of real property. With respect to the other matters noted above, the Rector is authorized to put off a final decision so long as he has not reached an agreement with the majority.

The approved Constitutions endow the general chapter with the nature of a universal representative assembly of all the professed (with specifications I do not mention here), and they assign the authority to review the Constitutions themselves—not in an subversive way, however, and with the necessary approval of the Holy See.

From the approval of the Constitutions to the death of Don Bosco (1874-1888), we see their application, specification, and interpretation (either by authority or as a result of actual Salesian life in practice). One point in General Chapter I (1877) is worth noting here. Toward its conclusion the chapter members drafted a decree that would refer the formulation of decisions to the superior chapter and that also sought to assign it the authority to add whatever might seem advisable. Don Bosco “wanted” to have this authority assigned to the Rector Major and offered three reasons: (1) If the authority were given to the superior chapter, it might seem that the aim was to leave out the Rector Major; (2) to give the authority to the Rector Major was implicitly to give it to the superior chapter by virtue of the terms fixed in the Constitutions; (3) the practice of the Roman Curia was to send to the Rector Major documents relating to the whole Salesian Society (BM 13:211-212, 218, which draw on minutes drawn up by Fr. Barberis: AS 046/1877). What surfaces here is the mentality of Don Bosco and the sense he gave (and thought he could give) to the relationship between the Rector Major and the superior chapter.

This relationship seems analogous to the sense then being given to the relationship between the Roman Pontiff and an ecumenical council. Appealing to an ecumenical council had a Gallican ring; indicating the Pope as the subject of supreme authority also implied the (relative) authority of the episcopal body of which the Pope was the head. The atmosphere here was that of Vatican I. The problem of collegiality did not resonate as did the problem of the Pope’s prerogatives “over the Church.” There was still some fear of conciliarism and Gallicanism. We must remember that the theology texts being used at the Oratory were those of Perrone and others of similar bent. The manual of canon law which Father Berto used as the basis for petitions, with the assistance of Don Bosco as well, was that of Marie Dominic Bouix, SJ (1808-1870). It is cited, among others, in the *Elenchus privilegiorum seu facultatum et gratiarum spiritualium quibus potitur Societas S. Francisci Salesii* (S. Benigno Canavese, 1888), pp. 3,5,7, and *passim*. Bouix was known for his determined neo-ultramontanism.

It is helpful to compare the government elaborated by Don Bosco with that of institutes known to him. The Charitable Society for Poor and Abandoned Youths was made up of priests and laymen, and it was run by a board of directors composed of two priests and two laymen. The board had directive and consultative powers with respect to an administration, which in turn was made up of a rector, vice rector, economer, treasurer, and secretary. This ad-

ministration had direct, immediate charge of the house of charity opened by the society. The rector, a priest if at all possible, was the superior of the house. The Rule states: "He is to be like a father to the boys, regarding them as his sons. He is to have the task of accepting and admitting them into the house..."

The Schools of Charity established provincial structures governed by a superior. Each province developed in its area as a sovereign state and formed an independent congregation, one which adopted the Rules of the Cavanis brothers as its own.

The Oblates of the Virgin Mary had a Rector Major for life as their supreme organ of government. He could choose his domicile for himself, and he had absolute authority over the houses and the "subjects" of his congregation. The Rule established six consultors, who were to be elected by the general chapter and who were to be consulted every month by the Rector regarding more important matters of the congregation—especially regarding the election of local rectors, visitors, and masters of novices; the erection of new houses or abandonment of one already in existence; the dismissal from the institute of "subjects" already admitted; and similar matters (*Costituzioni e regole della Congregazione degli Oblati di Maria Vergine* (Turin, 1851), pt. 2, ch. 1, §1, art. 7). The Rector needed the "deciding" vote of his consultors only when it was a matter of admitting "subjects" who had not received the subdiaconate (pt. 2, ch. 1, §1, art. 4).

In the Institute of Charity, too, supreme rule was given to a superior (*Preposito generale*), not to a council.

I might also note that, even though they had an equal decision-making vote in various matters, the members of the Salesian superior chapter also had the filial attitude toward Don Bosco that I shall mention in the text. Don Bosco certainly nurtured this father-son approach, but he also was careful to encourage free and sincere expression of opinion by the collaborators who shared responsibility with him for the Salesian Society.

EXCURSUS B

Don Bosco's thinking about the novitiate

To Archbishop Gastaldi, Don Bosco wrote the following on November 23, 1872: "One evening Pius IX had me explain at great length the reasons why, in my opinion, I considered this new Congregation to be willed by God. I gave him all the answers he wanted. He then asked whether such a Congregation could possibly survive in this day and age among people who want to suppress such institutions. 'How could you have a house of studies and a novitiate?' he asked. I told him what I had said to you only a few months earlier, namely that I did not intend to found a religious order for penitents or converts who needed moral reform. My intent is to gather boys and adults of long-proven morality for eventual admission to our Congregation. 'How can you succeed in that?' interrupted the Holy Father. 'I have succeeded so far,' I replied, 'and I hope to continue as regards the postulants we admit to our Society.' We draw our applicants from boys educated and trained in our houses—country boys who have usually been selected and recommended by their pastors because of their good moral qualities. Two-thirds of them eventually return to their homes. Those we keep are trained in studies and piety for a period of four to seven years, and even after such a lengthy preparation only a few are admitted to the novitiate. For example, this year one hundred and twenty boys completed their rhetoric course in our houses; of these, one hundred and ten entered the clerical state, but only twenty remained in our Congregation, the rest being directed to their ordinaries. Once admitted to the novitiate, our postulants have to spend two years here in Turin, with daily spiritual reading, meditation, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, examination of conscience, and a brief nightly talk delivered by me, rarely by others. This applies to all postulants alike. Twice a week there is a conference expressly directed to the postulants, and once a week there is a conference for all members of the Society. Learning of this, the Holy Father felt quite satisfied..." (see BM 10:307-08; *Ep.* 1018). Also see Don Bosco's memorandum in response to the letter of Archbishop Gastaldi to the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars: BM 10:364-66.

It is not easy to check how well Don Bosco's little "directory" of numbers matches objective facts. What is certain is that the printed directory (*Elenco*) of the Salesian Society for 1873 lists only 92 novices. Two were priests: Damian Gosio and Secondo Merlone (1844-1886). There were 28 qualified students, 28 coadjutors, and 34 clerics. New novices numbered 61, whereas 31 were con-

tinuing from the previous year. Only 16 died as Salesians, of whom 11 came from the hill country, Montferrat especially. One, the coadjutor Joseph Viola (1850-1909), came from Turin.

The youngest of those who persevered was 17 (Lawrence Giordano [1856-1919] from Ciriè); the oldest was 48 (Bartholomew Mondone [1824-1907] from Roascio). The average age was 23.

Of the student and ecclesiastical novices, 18 had attended school at the Oratory (including Father Merlone). In the school year 1871-1872, 17 of them had attended fifth year of high school (*ginnasio*), first or second philosophy. The three classes had a total of 110 students. So 15.9% entered the novitiate, to which group we may add Michael Fassio (1853-1936), who attended that same fifth year of middle school and later became a Salesian. Of the 17 Valdocco students, only four died as Salesians: the clerics Gregory Buzzini (1855-1873) and James Piacentino (1852-1876) and Fathers Thomas Calliano (1853-1899) and Moses Veronesi (1851-1930). Thus the perseverance percentage was 23.5%.

On the importance Don Bosco attributed to the novitiate, it is worth quoting what he had to say as apostolic visitor to the Conceptionists in Rome (1876-1877): "The Conceptionists' main problem...is that they have never had a regular novitiate. They have rules for a novitiate, very good rules, but they were never implemented. Candidates with serious moral problems have kept entering the Institute—and still enter it—as long as they can produce a letter of recommendation from a pastor. It's simply impossible for a congregation to operate in this manner and survive. We ourselves were able to dispense with a regular novitiate because we never took in strangers, only boys we had known over a number of years, boys, who, as it were, grew up beneath our gaze. But now that outsiders are beginning to come to us, we too must have a regular novitiate if we want to survive" (BM 12:364). See Eufrazio M. Spreafico, CRSP, *P. Luigi M. Monti, fondatore dei religiosi Concezionisti* (Rome, 1940), p. 173.



THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF DON BOSCO

1. Foreshadowings of the Preventive System in Don Bosco's Writings (1844-1877)

Among the documents presenting Don Bosco's ideas on the education of young people, an important place goes to "The Preventive System."¹ Don Bosco himself tells us that it is the "indicator" of all that he intended to elaborate more fully, a sketch of the educational system actually operative in Salesian

¹ "Il Sistema Preventivo" was first published in the commemorative and promotional piece *Inaugurazione del Patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza Mare: Scopo del medesimo, esposto dal Sacerdote Giovanni Bosco, con appendice sul Sistema Preventivo nella educazione della gioventù* (Turin: Salesiana, 1877), pp. 23-33. The French ed. of this same work came out the same year: *Inauguration du Patronage...* (Turin, 1877). So did a bilingual ed. with facing Italian and French texts. There are allusions to the Italian text and the French version in two letters of DB to the director in Nice, Fr. Joseph Ronchail: Varazze, Mar. 23, 1877, and Turin, Apr. 1887; see *Ep.*, 1569, 1576. The same year, "The Preventive System" was republished with slight changes in the *Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales* (Turin: Salesiana, 1877), pp. 3-13. Between the "Sistema Preventivo" and pt. 1 of the *Regolamento* itself there are several "general articles" (pp. 15-17) that the table of contents (p. 99) presents as an unnumbered section of the little treatise on the Preventive System.

We do not have a DB autograph ms. of the *Inaugurazione*. We do have an allograph (AS 133 *Inaugurazione* 1); another ms. with facing Italian and French texts and DB's corrections (AS 133 *Inaugurazione* 4); two copies of the Italian ed. with notes by DB and eight folios that are partly Fr. Berto's and partly DB's (AS 133 *Inaugurazione* 2.3). Another set of documents is preserved with the *Regolamenti* mss. (AS 026). On the Preventive System, 026/42: (1) "Regole generali per quelli che hanno la direzione," autograph ms. of DB, two folios; (2) "8° Dovendo a costoro dire parole di biasimo," DB autograph ms., one folio (see *Regolamento per le case*, "general articles," p. 17); (3) "Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della Gioventù," allograph ms. with DB's corrections,

houses.² Clearly Don Bosco saw it as a sort of final summing up of his personal experience and reflection. And if we peruse the many documents he left, we shall find a whole series of elements that were later coordinated in the Preventive System.

His *Life of Aloysius Comollo* suggests that young seminarians should be classified in three categories. On his deathbed Comollo tells his friend John Bosco to maintain courteous relations with those who are neither good nor bad, to avoid bad seminarians, and to make friends with those who are good.³ Don Bosco also notes that Comollo's own upbringing was noticeably influenced by his uncle, the provost of Cinzano. His uncle "loved him tenderly" and managed at the right time "to sow the seed of many rare and singular virtues in his heart."⁴ The biographical treatment seems designed to bring out that Comollo, like Aloysius Gonzaga before him, responded to God's favors at the right moment. But the provost of Cinzano's "tender love" does not lead to the enunciation of any basic pedagogical principle: i.e., loving kindness. The

four folios. The best existing ed. so far is Giovanni Bosco, *Scritti sul sistema preventivo nell'educazione della gioventù*, ed. Pietro Braido (Brescia, 1965), pp. 291-99. It contains the text of the *Regolamento* (without the "general articles") with the principal Italian and French variants of the text published in the *Inaugurazione*. [Editor's note: A definitive and comprehensive critical ed. was published in RSS 4 (1985), 171-321.]

² Bosco, *Inaugurazione*, p. 23; *Regolamento per le case*, p. 3.

³ Comollo, p. 63: "Finally, be careful with whom you deal, with whom you associate. I'm not even thinking about members of the opposite sex or lay people, who are an obvious danger for us and should be avoided. I'm talking about our clerical companions and even seminarians. Some of them are bad, some not bad but not very good either, and some really good." This section can be found in DB's 1839 autograph, "Sickness and Death of the Young Seminarian Aloysius Comollo, Written by his Companion S[eminarian] John Bosco" (AS 133 Comollo 1). The subdividing of boys into three categories can be found in *Giov. prov.*, p. 21: "There are three types of companions. Some are good; some are bad; some are not all bad, but neither are they good."

In SDS:41 we read: "If he saw a classmate who was attentive, obedient, and regularly knew his lessons, who did his work and won the teacher's approval, he quickly made friends with him; but one who was disobedient, talked back, neglected his work or was foul-mouthed and swore he firmly avoided. With those who were plain lazy and thoughtless he kept on speaking terms but was never close."

The classification then appears in the "General Rules" (General Articles) prefaced to the *Regolamento per le case*: "Si ritenga che i giovanetti sogliono manifestare tre sorta di [*i giovanetti...sorta di revised from vi sono tre*] caratteri ovvero indoli diverse [*diverse above the line*]: Buona, ordinaria, difficile o cattiva..." [AS 046/42.1]; "4. I giovanetti sogliono manifestare uno di questi caratteri diversi. Indole buona, ordinaria, difficile, cattiva" (*Regolamento per le case*, p. 15; see Eng. ed. of Regulations, art. 105). Note that in successive reworkings the *tre sorta* becomes four types. DB's ms. is on the back of a letter sent to him by Dominic Varetto from Genoa, Apr. 13, 1877.

⁴ Comollo, p. 16. Note that Fr. Joseph Comollo, his uncle, was fairly old when he intervened in the upbringing of Aloysius Comollo. He died at the age of 75 on Jan. 1, 1843.

Life of Aloysius Comollo was not meant to be an educational novel in the style of *Émile*. In his 1844 edition Don Bosco addresses himself to fellow seminarians; to young people in general in later editions. He is writing as a hagiographer who wants to offer his readers a model they may imitate.

In his *Church History* (1845) and *Bible History* (1847), Don Bosco already is involved with the problems of popular education. His concerns are mainly ethical and religious. In his *Church History* he is indignant that some authors are ashamed “to speak of the Popes and the most clear-cut facts relating directly to the Catholic Church.”⁵ He bemoans all the space given to polemics,⁶ the failure to consider the “capacity of young people,”⁷ and the plethora of “completely profane or civil data that are dry or uninteresting.” Besides information for the mind, he wants the heart to be moved in such a way that it will derive spiritual benefit as well.⁸

His pedagogically based concern for the capacity of young people is more obvious in his *Bible History*. Citing Father Augustine Fecia, an educator, Don Bosco notes that in the educational process the enlightenment of the mind is an intermediate stage.⁹ In composing his *Bible History*, says Don Bosco, he was consistently guided by the principle of enlightening the mind in order to “make the heart good.”¹⁰ He chose the dialogue format as the most suitable one because “a story can be understood and retained by the fickle mind of a youth.”¹¹

In his *Companion of Youth* (1847), the fickleness of the youthful mind is compared to a “tender plant.” The latter will root badly and end up disastrously unless “it is cultivated and guided up to a certain size.”¹² That is why it makes sense for young people to obey, respect, and trust their parents and oth-

⁵ *Stor. eccl.*, p. 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁹ In his *Storia sacra* (Turin: Speirani and Ferrero, 1847), p. 7, DB alludes to the programmatic introduction of Fr. Fecia to a new journal on primary education: “Sac. Fecia nell’Educatore Primario, Prog.,” i.e. “Programma.” But the theme of enlightening the young mind does not seem to appear in the text to which DB may be alluding: Agostino Fecia, Introduction to *L’Educatore primario: Giornale d’educazione ed istruzione elementare* 1 (1845), fasc. 1 (Jan. 10), pp. 1-2. There is something in another article cited by DB in his Preface to *Storia Sacra*: “V. Varrelli Educat. Prim. Vol. 1°, p. 406.” This is certainly Vincenzo Garelli, “Dell’insegnamento della Storia Sacra col mezzo di tavole,” in *L’educatore primario* 1 (Aug. 30, 1845), pp. 404-07. In the 1853 ed. of DB’s *Storia sacra*, the two citations are botched even more: Fecia becomes Feccia (p. 4) and Varrelli is replaced by F. Aporti (p. 5).

¹⁰ *Storia sacra*, p. 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹² *Giov. prov.*, p. 13.

er superiors.¹³ Youths who attend some oratory are advised to have a “filial trust in the director.”¹⁴

In the *Regulations of the Oratory for Externs* (1852), we read that the director is ever to act as “friend, companion, and brother of all.”¹⁵ He is to be like a father with his own sons, watching over them and correcting them when necessary.¹⁶ Thus the father-son relationship, which Don Bosco saw as basic to the educational process, is here expressed in terms of the director’s role.

Religious observances and recreational activities are interwoven in the same set of rules and thereby reveal their function. The director and his co-workers are to use them to inculcate in young people “love for God, respect for sacred things, reception of the sacraments, filial devotion to Mary...and everything that constitutes true piety.”¹⁷ The director himself must lead the way “in piety, charity, and patience.”¹⁸ Juxtaposed in this document, charity and patience will later be linked on the basis of Paul’s assertion that “love is patient” (1 Cor 13:4). In the *Regulations of the Oratory for Externs*, then, we learn that religion is both a tool and an aim of education; that charity is a fundamental quality of the educator; that there must be trust between the director and his boys, a trust modelled on the father-son relationship; and that the educator must strive to “win the hearts” of his charges.

In a fairly early work, *The Christian Trained in Conduct and Courtesy* (1848), we read of some of the qualities that should typify a priest who exercises his ministry among the common people. Gentleness is as necessary with them as with suspected heretics and perverse people:

Francis de Sales [was] tangible evidence of this truth, for that good bishop...won more converts by his gentleness than by his learning. In fact, Cardinal [James] du Perron [1556-1618] once remarked that he was able to convince Protestants, but it took Francis de Sales to convert them!¹⁹

Saint Vincent de Paul urged his Vincentians to “be gentle to the poor,” for he was “convinced that by kindness alone could any result come from holding rural Missions.”²⁰ Some people have a smiling, affable way about them that pleases everybody. From the very start “they seem to offer you their heart and

¹³ Ibid., pp. 14-16.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁵ *Regol.*, p. 5.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁹ *Christian*, p. 46.

²⁰ Ibid.

ask for yours.”²¹ The sweetness of strong people who can master themselves and resist temptations to weakness and self-indulgence is

like rivers that run serenely, noiselessly, but are always full of water...while those who let themselves be blown about by every gust of anger and passion...are like torrents that make a great roar but whose power is spent when they overflow their banks.²²

Priestly gentleness of Saint Vincent de Paul’s sort finds its inspiration in that of Christ, the teacher who offers the same invitation to everyone: “Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart.”²³

Statements about the irreplaceable role of religion as an element of education can be found in Don Bosco’s promotional circulars, his *History of Italy*, and various little works written between 1855 and 1860. Don Bosco asserts what many Catholic publicists and educators of his time assert: “Religion alone can initiate and achieve a true education.”²⁴ Young people must be educated properly, and that can only be done on a religious basis: “If young people are educated properly, we have moral order; if not, vice and disorder prevail.”²⁵ Such categorical statements can also be found in *The Power of a Good Upbringing* (1855).²⁶ *Valentine* (1865) presents the picture of a father who is an unbeliever; but bitter experience teaches him that there can be no true education without religion.

Again and again Don Bosco stresses the importance of religion. It is absolutely necessary as both means and end if people are to have and retain a sense of ethics.²⁷ In his *Life of Francis Besuccho* he writes:

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

²¹ Ibid., p. 48.

²² Ibid., p. 50.

²³ Ibid., p. 47, citing Matt 11:29.

²⁴ “Esercizi spirituali alla gioventù: Avviso sacro” (Turin: Paravia, 1849). See copy in AS 131/04 and published version in BM 3:425.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione* (Turin: Paravia, 1855), p. 48: “Only religion or the grace of God can make a human being content and happy.”

²⁷ But, as I have already pointed out, he is after something more: eternal salvation, not just an ethical sense. That can be found only in the true religion. DB tends to polarize every value around that of religion, and specifically around those of which the Catholic Church is the trustee. He also tends to give negative value to everything that seems to go consciously against the Catholic Church. The formula “reason, religion, and kindness” takes on a specific axiological sense when it is related to DB’s apologetic concerns and his tendencies toward what we today would call integrism.

Communion; and I believe that I am not exaggerating if I assert that morality is endangered when these two elements are missing.²⁸

This is the first time in his writings that Don Bosco brings up “systems of education,” and we must not overlook the apologetical and polemical framework when he makes such pedagogical statements. Many of his biographies (e.g., of Besucco, Savio, Comollo, Magone, Saint Martin, Saint Pancras, and Saint Peter) do assert that holiness is possible only in the true Church of Christ. His words about the confessional practices of Oratory youths are not to be dissociated from his apologetics on behalf of confession as a bulwark of faith and morality against the onslaughts of the devil and of the sects. His sense of combat, his sensitivity to the insidious snares of the evil one, give a particular tone to his pedagogical statements and his interpretation of educational experiences.²⁹

The work that inaugurates Don Bosco’s presentation of his own experiences as an educator is his *Power of a Good Upbringing*. There we meet the director of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales as catechist, counselor, and confidant of young Peter. He still lingers in the background without any clear profile. It is the biography of Dominic Savio that brings actual persons and events into sharp focus. Writing in the first person, Don Bosco presents major moments in their relationship. Such a moment was their first meeting, and we see the educator “winning the heart” of his pupil:

Early on the morning of the first Monday of October I saw a boy coming toward me with his father. His bright smile, his joyful and respectful manner called my attention to him.

“What’s your name?” I asked. “Where do you live?”

“I’m Dominic Savio. I live in Mondonio. Fr. Cugliero, my teacher, told you about me.”

Taking him aside, I asked him about school and what he had been doing. Our mutual trust was immediate. I recognized in this boy a soul in full accord with the spirit of God. I was not a little astonished to consider the achievements which divine grace had already worked in so young a boy.³⁰

Their mutual trust was immediate. So great was it that Dominic felt ready to speak out for himself and take the initiative:

After we talked for some time and I was about to call his father, Dominic asked, “Will I do, Father? Will you take me to Turin to study?”

²⁸ Cornell, p. 195. The ms. on Besucco at the Oratory is not wholly due to DB, but the phrase cited is in his hand in the rough draft (see AS 133 Besucco 1). Unfortunately, Caviglia’s posthumous vol. 6 (Turin, 1964) does not take this into account.

²⁹ See n. 27 above.

³⁰ SDS:49.

“Well, you seem to have good stuff in you.”

“Good stuff? Good for what?”

“Good for a lovely vestment to give the Lord.”

“Then you are the tailor and I’m the cloth. Take me with you and make me into a beautiful vestment for him.”³¹

Here we notice that Don Bosco’s exhortations in *The Companion of Youth*, to give oneself to God and become his vestment early in life, have been recast in the form of a dialogue. Among the aims of Dominic’s vocation in Valdocco, the religious element clearly attracts the liveliest attention. It is certainly the main aim in the mind of his pupil. Don Bosco managed nicely to adapt his talk to the desires and needs of this particular boy, whom he knew already to be singularly affected by God’s grace.

Paternal and filial trust also entail some role for “reason” in the educational process. When Dominic feels irresistibly attracted to the ideal of holiness and suffers from this longing, Don Bosco is there to question his student and probe his heart. He does not destroy or water down the ideal. He offers his approval and encouragement, persuading the youth to put more balance into the means he uses toward the goal envisioned. The reader is encouraged to share Don Bosco’s viewpoint, and the biography thus becomes an application of the principle that the educator should offer valid motivations to his students.³²

The indispensable role of religion is brought out again in Don Bosco’s *Life of Michael Magone*. Joy that is not based on religious practice is ephemeral and pointless. Don Bosco seeks to replace that sort of joy with authentic, bedrock values.³³

We see the pedagogical considerations of an early period, announced soberly in the 1845 Preface to Don Bosco’s *Church History*, taking increasingly fuller form in later documents such as his biographies and various editions of rules. The growth of his institutions and the multiplication of his collaborators prompted or compelled Don Bosco to play the role of founder and father and to give more solid form to his teachings.

Valuable as a codified testament of these precepts is the set of confidential “reminders” Don Bosco gave Father Rua in 1863 when he sent Rua to be the director of the school at Mirabello. These reminders reflect the whole range of Don Bosco’s preoccupations as father, educator, and priest concerned for the salvation of souls.³⁴ Subsequent growth of the Salesian Society prompted

³¹ SDS:50. [Editor’s note: The reader should note the play on words in Italian: *stoffa* means both “stuff” in general and “cloth” or “fabric” in particular.]

³² SDS:67-70.

³³ Cornell, pp. 118-22.

³⁴ Rough draft in AS 131/01 Rua; published in BM 7:316-19 with slight changes; also in *Ep.* 331.

Don Bosco to turn the reminders into a set of precepts and exhortations entitled “Confidential Reminders for Directors.”³⁵ Their purport is given in the preamble to his 1863 reminders: “I speak as a loving father who opens his heart to a most dear son. Please accept these suggestions in my own hand as a token of my love for you and as an expression of my fervent desire that you win many souls for the Lord.” Here we have Don Bosco affectionately expressing his chief loves: for God and for souls.³⁶ Like Saint Teresa and Father Cafasso, he advises: “Let nothing disturb you.” It is the gospel exhortation: “Do not let your hearts be troubled” (John 14:1).³⁷

The religious backdrop is clear and unconcealed. Father Rua is not to make decisions without first raising his heart to God. He is to take care of his physical and “moral” health, celebrating Mass and saying his breviary, making a meditation every morning and visiting the Blessed Sacrament in the course of the day.

Charity and loving kindness (i.e., demonstrated love) are mentioned explicitly in the “Confidential Reminders”: “Let charity and patience be with you constantly in commanding and correcting. Act in such a way that all your words and actions let people know you are seeking the welfare of souls.” In his 1876 text,^{37a} love and fear are no longer contrasted: “Strive to make people love you if you want to make them fear you.” Don Bosco also offers some specific suggestions for quickly winning the confidence and heart of a pupil:

Spend as much time as possible with young people and try to whisper some kind words into their ears. You know the kind I mean. Do this when you think there is a need. This is the great secret that will make you master of their hearts...

You may ask me what sort of words exactly. I mean the kind that once upon a time were spoken to you yourself. For example: “How are you?” “Fine.” “And your soul?” “Okay.” “You have got to help me with a major job. Will you?” “Yes, but what?” “To make you good.” Or: “To save your soul.” Or: “To make you the very best of our boys.”

³⁵ A DB autograph redaction is in the DB museum at Valdocco. There are other mss. with DB glosses, additions, etc., ranging from 1864 to 1875 and including lithographed copies, in AS 131/02. There is another 1886 lithographed ed. (AS 131/02). [Editor’s note: An annotated critical ed. was published by Francesco Motto, RSS 3 (1984), 125-66.]

³⁶ God—God’s glory to be more exact—shows up right near the start of the preamble: “Since divine providence has wished that a school be opened in Mirabello for the spiritual well-being of its youngsters, I feel it is conducive to God’s glory to appoint you as director.”

³⁷ See *Cafasso*, p. 49: “The saying of St. Teresa—‘Let nothing disturb you’—was familiar to him.” In the first draft, “1st. ‘Let nothing disturb you’” is a DB marginal addition. The *Ricordi* had begun with: “1st [corrected later to 2nd]. I recommend to you to avoid mortification in eating...”

^{37a} *Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori salesiani* (Turin: [OSFS], Dec. 24, 1875).

With the more dissolute: “When are you going to begin?” “Begin what?” “To be my consolation.” Or: “To behave like Saint Aloysius.”

To those who are more reluctant to frequent the sacraments: “When do you want us to break the horns of the devil?”

Don Bosco has similar advice for dealing with one’s helpers and co-workers:

Try never to order them to do things beyond their capacities. Never give them repugnant commands. Try as much as possible to support their own inclinations, choosing to give them assignments you know will please them...

If you do have to give them difficult or repugnant assignments, say something like the following: “Could you do this or that thing?” Or: “I have an important task. I don’t want to burden you with it because it is difficult, but I don’t have anyone who could perform it as well as you. Do you have the time and the stamina? Do you have some other occupation that would prevent you?”

Experience indicates that such approaches, used at the right moment, can be very effective.

Obviously, these are practical applications of the principle of “winning the heart” of student or co-worker. Don Bosco offers concrete examples of the words that might be whispered to someone. He is obviously relying on his own personal experience with his boys. For them religious and moral terms, even the simple word “soul,” were enough to trigger the dynamics of their mind, heart, and affections.

The correlation of love and fear in education recurs in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* (1873-1876). The ideal teacher and educator presented to his Salesians is one of his old teachers at the school of Chieri:

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.³⁸

The *Memoirs of the Oratory*, like the biographies of Savio, Magone, and Besucco, helps to show us Don Bosco in action “winning the hearts” of young people, using the simplest and most direct means of common language. We see him, for example, in action with Bartholomew Garelli on December 8, 1841. The youth is embarrassed in the sacristy of Turin’s Church of Saint Francis of Assisi, roughly treated by the sacristan because he does not know how to serve Mass. Don Bosco frees him from his position of inferiority and from whatever inhibition he may feel: “What’s your name?... Is your father alive?... And your mother?... Can you read and write?... Have you made your first com-

³⁸ MO:84.

munion?... If I were to teach you catechism on your own, would you come?" The *Memoirs* allows us to watch Don Bosco internally reaching out to young people standing on the threshold of their personality, allows us to catch him offering them his heart and asking for theirs. His approach is respectful and sensitive, suggestive and alluring, somewhere between a plea and a confidence. Pleased if the youth would accept his priestly service, Don Bosco notes that he spoke to the orphaned youth with as much "loving kindness" (*amorevolezza*) as he could.³⁹ It is the term he will choose by preference in "The Preventive System," after it cropped up tentatively in some of his other writings.⁴⁰

Once the Oratory was founded, the evening dismissal on Sundays after services was almost a ritual. It made clear the affectionate ties between Don Bosco and his boys. Don Bosco accompanied them as they left church singing hymns and chattering.

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 known as the Rondò...

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.⁴¹

The songs were sacred hymns, as Don Bosco recalls it, given the milieu of simple people with a tenacious religious tradition. At the Rondò they "ended with a solemn rendition of 'Praised for ever be [the names of Jesus and Mary].'"⁴²

The *Memoirs of the Oratory*, then, brings us right to the threshold of "The Preventive System." The latter would be a succinct presentation of Don

³⁹ MO:188-89.

⁴⁰ *Misericordia*, p. 75: "The loving kindness with which God welcomes the sinner is the first and main reason we ought to thank him"; Cornell, p. 124 (giving recommendations to confessors): "Lovingly receive every class of penitents but especially the young." Note also DB's talk to members of the superior chapter and directors on Feb. 4, 1876, in Fr. Barberis's diary and BM 12:68: "Show a lot of loving kindness to our boys. Let this loving kindness be a trait of all superiors without exception."

⁴¹ MO:269.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Bosco's educational method, one contrasting with the "repressive system." It would be grounded on the three factors of "reason, religion, and loving kindness"; and "preventive assistance" would serve as the fulcrum of the method.

2. *The Preventive System in Don Bosco's cultural context and milieu*

At this point we do well to note the relationship between Don Bosco's views and those of his milieu with respect to cultural, pastoral, and pedagogical matters. As we have already seen, ascetical literature frequently voices sentiments of affection toward its young readers. The author of *The Companion of Youth* was not the only one to say that he loves young people with his whole heart. Indeed we find such sentiments in the *Angelic Guide*, which directly inspired Don Bosco's own work.⁴³ The remarks on using gentleness with unbelievers and simple folk in Don Bosco's *The Christian Trained in Conduct and Courtesy* are borrowed from Joseph Ansart and keep the same sense in the framework of a hagiographical and pastoral discourse.⁴⁴ The comments of Don Bosco on the qualities required of the director of a festive oratory can substantially be found in the Regulations of the Milan Oratory of Saint Aloysius, which served as his source of inspiration.⁴⁵

⁴³ To the "miei cari" of DB corresponds "o diletissimi" in the Introduction to the *Guida angelica* (pp. 5, 7). Protestations of affection can also be found in Egidio Iais, *L'amico dei fanciulli, ovvero libretto d'istruzione e di preghiera* (Turin: Marietti, 1847), pp. xiii-iv: "My dear children, all my life I have had the greatest love for all of you..."

⁴⁴ Joseph Ansart, *Lo spirito di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli* 1 (Genoa, 1840), 183-84: "St. Francis de Sales was palpable proof of this truth because that prelate, though most able..."; p. 184: "Make yourself affable in the assembly of the poor..."; p. 189: "We see some people who please everybody with their smiling and friendly ways, and from the very first moment they seem to offer you their heart..."; pp. 191-92: remarks on the gentleness of the strong person and the angry outbursts of the fickle. Also see nn. 19-23 above and the corresponding texts.

⁴⁵ *Regole dell'Oratorio di S. Luigi eretto in Milano il giorno 19 maggio 1842 in Contrada di S. Cristina n. 2135*, pt. 2, ch. 2, cap. 1, art. 2, p. 17: "The prefect is, as it were, the father of the large family of confreres." In that oratory the director was the chief superior, but he had no obligation to intervene in the oratory itself. The prefect was the immediate superior of the boys and their educators. These *Regole* use the term "Cooperators," which DB also adopted.

The general aims of the two oratories are expressed in very similar terms: *Regole dell'Oratorio di S. Luigi*, p. 7: "Aim of the Oratory. The aim is to gather them here on feast days and thus remove them from the dangers of idleness and bad companions so as to sanctify the holy day, instruct them in their religious and societal duties, and thus form upright citizens and honest artisans"; *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*,

Through these documents we enter the vast field of ascetical and pedagogical writings that voice the same preoccupations, lines of thinking, and forms of action which we find in Don Bosco the educator. We can only take a look at some of the authors who are considered classic by common opinion or by virtue of the influence they exercised. And then we shall look at a few of the writings closer to Don Bosco, coming out of the same milieu or circulating in Catholic educational institutions in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

We have no indication that Don Bosco had read the Port-Royal educators: e.g., Nicole, Lancelot, and Coustel. But it seems legitimate to review some of their dominant themes because they inspired Saint John Baptist de la Salle, Lasallians such as Brother Agathon, FSC (Joseph Goullieux, 1731-1798), and more or less independent educators such as Fleury, Fénelon, Bossuet, and Rollin, some of whom were fairly close in spirit to Don Bosco.⁴⁶

Unlike later promoters of mass public education, the Port-Royal educators did not envision huge crowds of students. Their theology told them that the number of the elect was limited, and their pedagogical schemes were framed in the context of seventeenth-century life. Their vision was focused primarily on the teacher in the bosom of a family or in schools run by religious orders and open to fairly limited groups of students. In such a situation it was easy and at times almost obligatory for the teacher to be ever at the pupil's side. Educators were led to see themselves as the solid prop of tender plants which, left to themselves, would surely incline toward evil. The dogmas of original sin and saving redemption lay at the heart of Port-Royal pedagogy, assuming specifically Augustinian forms.

But the Port-Royal approach was gentle and patient, not peevish and rough. The educator was not a tamer of wild beasts but a good shepherd, bending down to the little lambs with kindness and charity. Teachers must know how to put up patiently with the bitter fruits of weak, corrupt nature. Even more important, they must make every effort to strengthen and fortify the tender shoots planted in the human heart by God's paternal goodness. In the religious pedagogy of Port-Royal, then, we find basic elements of Don Bosco's own system existing in germinal form and expressed in a more highly theological framework. We find the notion of helpful presence and assistance. We also find the notion of patient, paternal, reasonable charity that will induce stu-

pt. 1, AS 026/1, p. 1: "Aim of this Oratory. The aim of this festive oratory is to gather young people here on feast days and entertain them with decent recreation after they have attended the sacred services of the Church... On feast days...young people are especially exposed to idleness and bad companions."

⁴⁶ Frate Emile, "Alle sorgenti della dottrina spirituale di San Giovanni Battista de LaSalle," in *Rivista lasalliana* 5 (1938), 253; A. Ferté, *Rollin, sa vie, ses oeuvres et l'université de son temps* (Paris, 1902); L. Cavallone, *I maestri e le piccole scuole di Port-Royal* (Turin, 1942); Louis Cognet, *Claude Lancelot, solitaire de Port-Royal* (Paris, 1950).

dents to open their minds to God's light and their hearts to God's grace. Rollin, for example, wants teachers to speak "reasonably" to their students, to use "a gentleness that will win them over."⁴⁷ Teachers are to control their students by "gentleness and the winning of their affection" so as to get their "obedience and submissiveness."⁴⁸ Brother Agathon, the Christian Brothers' superior general, reminds educators that love is won by love: "Hence a teacher, first and foremost, should adopt the sentiments of a father toward them, always assuming that he is taking the place of those who have entrusted them to him: that is, he should show them the depths of goodness and tenderness that their own parents have for them."⁴⁹

Teachers must know their students well, carefully studying their natures and inclinations. They must be aware of their good qualities that are a bit enfeebled and exposed to the onslaught of their passions. A good education should forestall the formation of bad habits by forestalling the commission of individual acts of vice. For if bad habits come to hold sway, then the heart will be dominated by concupiscence and the reason will be obscured. The individual will be unable to know God's light and to feel its loving attraction.

These considerations underline the importance of the teacher's persistent and supernaturally concerned assistance. Left to themselves, students run the risk of lapsing into evil and hence needing corrective punishment, just as the Hebrew people had to be punished by God when they strayed from the right path. The notion of anticipating and preventing faults so as not to have to punish students appears in the work of John Baptist de la Salle, who uses the word *prévenir*: "Teachers should anticipate and prevent faults, so as not to have to punish them, by close attention to themselves and ongoing vigilance over their students." There is a theological reason for this sort of presence and assistance: by his very nature the boy "is weak and inclined to evil."⁵⁰

These principles would be given wider scope and application as a result of Enlightenment culture and the pre-Romantic pedagogy of Rousseau. The Enlightenment presented the Christian educator with the problematic fact of the unbelieving youth. Now educators deplored the fact that many people, upon reaching a certain age, declared themselves to be "libertines": i.e., freethinkers opposing theological dogmatism and advocating a morality in accordance with

⁴⁷ Charles Rollin, *Della maniera d'insegnare e studiare le belle lettere* 3 (Reggio, 1828), bk. 7, pt. 1, art. 7, p. 135.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁴⁹ Frate Agatone, *Le dodici virtù di un buon maestro, accennate dall'abate de LaSalle* (Turin: Marietti, 1835), pp. 35, 37. For other comparisons, see Pietro Braido, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco* (Turin, 1955), pp. 110-15.

⁵⁰ Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, *Méditations*, 32ème, punct. 3, cited by Carlo Verri, *I fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane e la storia della scuola in Piemonte* (Como, n.d.), p. 80.

nature. This morality was dissociated from confessional canons and aimed at a situation of well-being that was rationally desirable and attainable. Libertines and philosophes proclaimed that reason, of its very nature, tended to dissociate itself from confessional constrictions of a dogmatic or moral nature. This gave rise to a pedagogy in line with “nature” or “reason.” Catholic educators, too, encouraged people to pay heed to reason as well as moral qualities. Like moral habits, both the virtues and the passions, reason was to be viewed as a seed growing to maturity, as a power of the soul that grows stronger with exercise and the accumulation of knowledge. Indeed one can detect the influence of Descartes in the insistence that no false, obscure, or confused idea should be allowed to enter the child’s mind. Blanchard writes: “Give them precise information about those things suited to their capacities. Correct their wrong judgments and twisted reasonings. Above all, do not ever give them anything that is not reasonable.”⁵¹

Despite its awareness of original sin, pedagogy of the Enlightenment era put great faith in the substantial power of reason: “Attentive effort should be made to ensure that the ideas of the students, like leavened bread, ferment and rise through the power of reason, which they should now be taught to know and enjoy.”⁵²

Father Blanchard vigorously objects to those who would postpone religious instruction to an older age when students might be able to grasp the basic idea of God after serious reflection.⁵³ This disturbs him because he is convinced that no moral life is possible without religion.⁵⁴ He is sure, moreover, that nature is an open book enabling us to discover God and marvel at God’s perfections.⁵⁵ Important though it may be to teach religion to children, it is not enough, however:

At an early stage it is important to demonstrate to them the principles of religion, intermingling them with historical facts and gradually making them aware of its proofs and most illustrious foundations. This is necessary to forestall the dangers of seduction at an older age, or the no less harmful

⁵¹ Blanchard (Jean-Baptiste Duchesne), *La scuola de’ costumi*, Italian trans. from French (Genoa, 1795, 2 vols; Milan, 1817, 2 vols; Turin, 1825, 3 vols). The Valdocco library has a compendium published in Naples in 1856. The section cited above comes from the “Preliminary Reflections on Education,” Milan ed. 1:8. They are divided into the following sections: (1) Physical education; (2) Moral education, (a) reason, (b) religion, (c) character, (d) morals, (e) authority and respect, (f) punishments, (g) sentiments, (h) time and method of instruction; (3) the teacher or tutor. Duchesne was born in 1731, joined the Society of Jesus, but left the Jesuits in 1762. He died in 1797. See Sommervogel, *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus* 1, col. 1538.

⁵² Blanchard, 1:8-9.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

consequences of a weak and poorly instructed faith. That is the best way to preserve young people from the foolish perversions we know they are wont to succumb to.⁵⁶

This esteem for reason did not diminish the sense of sin or awareness of the embryonic state of the child's reason. Blanchard opposes indiscriminate instruction and the notion that "one should tell children everything, including bad things, so that they will know enough to avoid them and be on their guard."⁵⁷ To advocate such an approach, writes Blanchard, is to show ignorance of human nature and of the almost invincible readiness of children to do anything that strikes or attracts them.⁵⁸ The reason of children is still too weak "to defend them adequately from the seductive allure of evil, from the urgings of curiosity, and from the will to try things that characterizes that early age."⁵⁹ One must not underestimate the weakness of children or of human nature in general:

Your student will commit faults, since that is characteristic of childhood, indeed of human nature. But if you are careful about giving him proper guidance, the faults will be few, or at least fewer will be committed.⁶⁰

The more gentleness, affection, and reasonable kindness you use in your teaching, the more easily will you manage to get your pupil to conform to it. The more you call his attention to his duties, the less danger there will be that he will transgress them... Do not bring up a boy's faults to him without suggesting ways in which he can correct them and urging him to make use of them. This will avoid the feelings of regret and humiliation provoked by harsh forms of correction.⁶¹

Blanchard also stresses "winning the heart" of the student, another point brought out by the pedagogy of the eighteenth century:

Make good use of the sensitivity of your student, and you will find countless ways to reward him or punish him. Let him fear the loss of your friendship more than anything else, which you will try to make him value very highly. Some boys want more than anything else to be friends of their teachers, and this is the result of such an approach.⁶²

Closer to the cultural milieu of Don Bosco is another work along the lines of Blanchard, but it is less open to Enlightenment currents and closer to the ec-

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

clesiastical and moralistic tradition. It is the anthology of pious exercises and instructions compiled by the Vincentian Peter Paul Monaci (1736-1815), which was published in the Turin Library of Good Books.⁶³ One series of “moral and practical counsels” tells fathers and mothers how to handle the education of their children. Here are some examples:

Forestall the faults of your children insofar as you can, trying to prevent them from committing them in the first place.⁶⁴

When they commit a fault that is not too serious for the first time, just correct them with a kindly admonition.⁶⁵

When you do punish them, make clear that you are doing it for their own good, not out of anger.⁶⁶

When you notice they have corrected some defect or vice, show them you are happy, encourage them with nice words, and sometimes even reward them with little gifts.⁶⁷

A second series of considerations deals with education in boarding schools. With regard to the rector, for example, it says:

It is especially necessary that the rector show real concern and effort to make clear to the students what is really good for them and to get them to like discipline: i.e., the rules by which they are bound. Let them not stay in school or seminary merely by compulsion nor do what they are obliged to do merely out of fear, but rather out of love for God.⁶⁸

Similar considerations can be found in Ferrante Aporti, but he is concerned with the much broader issue of mass education, especially at the level of early childhood. Aporti asserts that real pedagogical skill lies not so much in the prudent punishment of mistakes as in the knowledge of how to prevent them in the first place.⁶⁹

⁶³ [Pier Paolo Monaci, CM], *Raccolta di varii esercizi di pietà ed istruzioni nelle quali s'insegnano e spiegano le verità più necessarie a sapersi per vivere ed operare da buon cristiano*, 3 vols., in the Library of Good Books, a. 9 (Turin, 1858; 1st ed., Fermo, 1776; 2nd ed., Bologna, 1777), disp. 201-02, 205-07. The Mexican ex-Jesuit Emanuele Mariano de Iturriaga accused this work of Jansenism: *Esame critico teologico che servirà per un Errata Corrige ad un certo libro stampato in Bologna per Lelio dalla Volpe l'anno 1777, intitolato: Raccolta di varj esercizi di pietà* (Venice, 1777). For other editions of the denunciation, see Sommervogel 4, col. 689. Nevertheless the *Raccolta* was reprinted many times. I have in hand the 17th reprinting, 6th Turin ed. (Turin: Avondo, 1798).

⁶⁴ [Monaci], *Raccolta* (Turin, 1858) 3:59.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁶⁹ Ferrante Aporti, *Scritti pedagogici editi e inediti 2* (Turin, 1945), 114-16. Aporti was in Turin from 1844 on. Other coincidences are noted by Braido (see n. 49), pp.

Another volume of clerical thoughts on the subject was published by Marietti in 1849 and touted by Don Bosco himself.⁷⁰ Priests must try to combat the “murderous faults” that assail and damage children. They should carefully watch over the Christian education of children,

protecting them from the dangers that await them, giving them good books, correcting their inconstancy with loving kindness, making them submissive and obedient to those who have authority over them, and finally teaching them to delight in virtue and to love to receive the sacraments.⁷¹

Preventive vigilance, then, is focused on religious values and “murderous faults.” This concern for apologetics and sense of combat pervades the work, reflecting the atmosphere of combat evoked in Piedmont by the liberal school laws.

118-22. Giacinto Sigismondo Gerdil recommends loving kindness to rectors and students of ecclesiastical *convitti*: *Considerazioni proposte per la formazione di un Convitto ecclesiastico*, in *Opere* 2 (Bologna, 1785), 309, 313. Benvenuto Robbio di S. Raffaele (1735-94), *Apparecchio degli educatori* (Turin, 1787), states that “the loving kindness of the teacher should extend to all the needs of the student” and that “even corrections” may serve to win the pupil’s heart (p. 61). Guglielmo Audisio, *Educazione morale e fisica del clero conforme ai bisogni religiosi e civili* (Turin: Stamperia Reale, 1846), states that “a kind word from a superior sometimes has omnipotent force” (p. 76); “courteous and loving acts and an affectionate paternal voice win mastery over hearts” (p. 77); directors should participate in the games of their students “as friends more than as superiors,” take part in their conversations “since then especially their souls are more open and ready to let someone see them” (p. 106), and encourage recreation and walks (pp. 228-33).

For education in boarding schools there is relevant documentation on the pious institute erected in Brescia by Canon Louis Pavoni for the sheltering and training “of poor and abandoned youths” (the Institute for Artisans). Their care was entrusted to the Religious Congregation of the Sons of Mary, whose Constitutions offer this advice to the vicar: “Recreational activities should have his particular attention. He should never let them be without his supervision, but do it in such a way that they have a certain amount of freedom, in which atmosphere they more readily reveal themselves and one can easily discover their *characters* and inclinations and thus easily manage and guide them with sure success” (*Costituzione della Congregazione religiosa dei Figli di Maria* [Brescia, 1847], pp. 111-12). For other comparisons between DB and Pavoni’s work, see Braido, pp. 97-100.

⁷⁰ *Pensieri ecclesiastici con avvertimenti adattati ai bisogni del tempo, raccolti da un sacerdote*, 2nd ed. (Turin: Marietti, 1849). DB wrote about it from Turin to the Rosminian Joseph Fradelizio on June 5, 1849 (*Ep.* 18). Contrary to what Fr. Ceria writes (*Ep.* 1, p. 23), it is not an extract of the *Pensées ecclésiastiques* by Guy Toussaint Carron (London 1799, Lille 1835). The *Pensieri* (p. 85) includes high praise for DB’s Oratory: “The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin, which on feast days brings together poor and abandoned boys mainly to show them the way to piety and good behavior, could serve as a model for other similar institutions of this most useful sort.”

⁷¹ *Pensieri ecclesiastici*, p. 115.

In Don Bosco's cultural milieu we can readily find pages in favor of religious instruction and education. In the Library of Good Books, the columns of *L'Armonia*, and the pages of *The Gentleman's Almanac* there are combative assertions about the irreplaceable value of religious education and the fatal ills awaiting society if public morality is not based on a religious conscience.⁷² This battle on behalf of the value of religious education goes far beyond what we find in Blanchard, Gerdil's *Anti-Émile*, or Muzzarelli's *Letters to Soffia*, and all the traditional apologetics against Rousseau.⁷³ No longer are writers worried simply about philosophes who favor a culture that is not tied to ecclesiastical tradition. Now they also are aiming their guns at public institutions that enshrine the disestablishment of religion and freedom of religious instruction in the schools.

In the general context of liberal society and the effort to liberalize education, some were concerned about the consequences for society. In his 1844 report to the French Chamber of Deputies, Adolphe Thiers asserted that the State absolutely could not be disinterested in the educational process. If that were left to private whim, disorders would arise, increasing the need for surveillance and the punishment of offenses. In a situation of freedom, the State has to be equipped for vigilance and repression. As Don Bosco will later do, Thiers contrasts a preventive system and a repressive system: "It is elementary and obvious that when one moves away from the preventive system, one moves immediately into the repressive system."⁷⁴

In a work by Bishop Dupanloup we find constant allusions to "preventive discipline" and "repressive discipline" as components of "directive disci-

⁷² E.g.: *Libertà d'istruzione ed educazione della gioventù* in the Library of Good Books, a. 1, disp. 17 (Turin, 1850); "Il clero e l'educazione della gioventù," in *Il galantuomo... pel 1865* (Turin, 1864), pp. 14-21.

⁷³ For an indication of the material relating to Rousseau, see Silvia Rota Ghibaudi, *La fortuna di Rousseau in Italia (1750-1815)* (Turin, 1961), pp. 317-64.

⁷⁴ *Rapport de M. Thiers sur la loi d'instruction secondaire fait au nom de la commission de la Chambre des députés dans la séance du 13 juillet 1844* (Paris, 1844), p. 38. The theme of assistance was picked up again in the *Rapport général présenté par M. Thiers au nom de la commission de l'assistance et de la prévoyance publiques dans la séance du 26 janvier 1850* (Brussels, 1850). Prevention and repression with respect to the jail system were repeatedly discussed in Piedmont with reference to institutions well known to DB. See, e.g.: Giovenale Vegezzi, "Cenni intorno al correzionale dei giovani che è per aprirsi nell'edificio della Generala presso Torino," in *Calendario generale pe' regii Stati... 1840* (Turin, n.d.), pp. 569-88; Giuseppe Cravetta di Villanovetta, "Cenni storico-statistici sul carcere correzionale di Saluzzo pendente il quadriennio 1851-54," in *Calendario generale del regno pel 1856* (Turin, n.d.), appendix, pp. 69-80.

pline.⁷⁵ Vigilant zeal should be exercised to prevent violations of the rules in an educational institution.⁷⁶ Observance of the rules must be fostered carefully:

Preventing is infinitely better than repressing. Care in maintaining what is good and vigilance in preventing what is wrong render the necessity of repression less urgent. Hence the primary importance of directive discipline that maintains what is right, the secondary importance of preventive discipline that precludes what is wrong, and the lesser but still necessary importance of repressive discipline and its punishments.⁷⁷

Every teacher must be most punctual in his disciplinary duties... The benefits of this care and punctuality are that students will never be abandoned or left to themselves, that faults will be prevented which might occur in the teacher's absence, and that this will establish a preventive regimen, which is infinitely preferable to a repressive one. This care and preciseness applies to every moment and activity: studies, classes, recreation, meals, practices of piety, and above all, spiritual reading, which is the high point of the day.⁷⁸

One should act rather than talk, prevent rather than repress, and show all a paternal, vigilant authority that can be strict if necessary but that will not damage those of difficult character.⁷⁹

Finally, a work by Barnabite Alexander Teppa contains sentiments very close to those in "The Preventive System." And we know that Don Bosco was familiar with his work.⁸⁰

Teppa, too, focuses on Saint Paul's text: "Love is patient, love is kind" (1 Cor 13:4).⁸¹ He, too, stresses mutual love between educator and pupil: "If one wants to master the hearts of young people, one must try first and foremost to win their love. If a person is loved, he will readily be heard and obeyed. But there is no way to win love except to love."⁸² When punishment must be inflicted:

⁷⁵ Félix Dupanloup, *L'educazione*, Italian trans. by Clemente DeAngelis, 1 (Parma, 1868), bk. 3, ch. 3, p. 177.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 178.

⁷⁸ Ibid., vol. 3, bk. 2, ch. 8, §1, pp. 327-28.

⁷⁹ Ibid., §2, p. 334.

⁸⁰ See *Ep.* 722. DB also used Teppa's *Vita della venerabile Maria degli Angeli, carmelitana scalza* (Turin: Marietti, 1864), for the work of the same title published in LC in 1865. Also used in Valdocco was Teppa's *Gesù al cuore del divoto di Maria*: see the lists of student books, AS 38 Torino-S. Franc. di Sales 51, and AS 112 Fatture, Marietti.

⁸¹ Alessandro Teppa, *Avvertimenti per gli educatori ecclesiastici della gioventù* (Rome-Turin, 1868), pp. 61-69.

⁸² Ibid., p. 21.

Let it be given with dignity and loving kindness. Thus the words and actions of the teacher will make clear his rightful regret over the fault committed and his duty to punish it, as well as his unhappiness in having to inflict punishment, against his will, on someone he loves.⁸³

Every day teachers must try to gain more experiential knowledge of the “various inclinations of different individuals and the best way to guide them.”⁸⁴ Teachers must avoid squelching the personality of the individual student:

The youngster, even the adolescent given to vice, desires and deserves to be respected, both for the dignity of his nature and for the good qualities also found in him. Showing contempt, disdain, or derision for a young person on account of his vices or defects is not only contrary to humility and Christian charity but also has the sole effect of irritating the youth in question and taking away his respect for a superior who does not know how to respect his charges.⁸⁵

Some of the comments on punishments in Don Bosco’s Regulations for the Houses are remarkably similar to comments in Teppa’s work:

TEPPA: Striking in any way...pulling their hair, ears, and similar acts are to be absolutely banned...⁸⁶

REGULATIONS: Striking in any way...pulling the ears and other similar punishments must be absolutely avoided...⁸⁷

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 49-50; DB: “Let the educator strive to make himself loved by his pupils if he wishes to make himself feared by them. When he succeeds in this, the omission of a token of kindness is a punishment which fosters emulation, gives courage, and never degrades.” See the citation from Audisio in n. 69 above. The experience of DB, Coustel, Blanchard, and others is summed up in this remark by DB: “With the young, punishment is whatever is meant as punishment. It is known that a stern look is more effective than a blow” (*Inaugurazione del Patronato*, pp. 32-33; BM 4:385).

⁸⁴ Teppa, *Avvertimenti*, p. 11.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 21

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 47.

⁸⁷ *Il sistema preventivo*, “A word on punishments,” no. iv, in *Regolamento per le Case* (Turin, 1877), p. 12; BM 4:385. This section is not in the *Inaugurazione*, which for no. iv has what becomes v in the *Regolamento*: “The director shall see that the rules are well known...” (p. 33). The rough draft of art. iv cited in the text above is in someone else’s hand: AS 026/42.3, p. 7. DB made some corrections: e.g., adding in the margin that such punishments “are prohibited by the civil laws.”

3. Values and limitations of Don Bosco's treatise

The whole fabric of "The Preventive System" assures us that it is a work composed by Don Bosco himself. Two of his letters to Father John Baptist Ronchail (1853-1878), director of the Salesian house in Nice, report that the Italian version of the work was ready. He asks Father Ronchail to have the French translation done by either the lawyer Ernest Michel or Baron Aimé Héraud de Chateaufort (d. 1902). We also have transcriptions by another hand with corrections and additions by Don Bosco, which lead us to assume the existence of an entire archetype that was most likely written in his own hand to some extent at least.⁸⁸

While the terms "preventive system" and "repressive system" may be new in Don Bosco's writings, appearing for the first time in the booklet "The Opening of Saint Peter's Hospice at Nice," his comments on confession and communion certainly are not. He regarded them as "pillars" of a sound education. In his *Life of Francis Besucco*, for example, he sees no secure foundation except in the reception "of confession and communion."⁸⁹ In earlier writings of Don Bosco we do not find the precise statement that eucharistic communion should be allowed to children as soon as they can differentiate eucharistic bread from other bread. That comes from Frassinetti's compendium of moral theology.⁹⁰ But even before "The Preventive System" Don Bosco was backing up his view with appeals to Saint Philip Neri, who advocated communion once a week,⁹¹ and to the Council of Trent, which had said that the faithful should participate at Mass in such a way as to be able to receive the Eucharist not only spiritually but *sacramentaliter*.⁹²

In "The Preventive System" we do find the pedagogical principle that the educator should try to make himself loved by his pupils if he wishes to make himself feared by them. This reminds us of Don Bosco's comments in his "Confidential Reminders" and his remarks on Banaudi in the *Memoirs of the Orationary*. The notion that the boys should have "full liberty to jump, run, and shout as much as they pleased" has all the appearances of being a variation of

⁸⁸ See n. 1 above.

⁸⁹ Cornell, p. 195. This expression in the rough draft (AS 133 Besucco 1) is written by DB.

⁹⁰ See ch. XII, n. 135.

⁹¹ *Regol.*, p. 37; *Maggio*, day 24, p. 142.

⁹² See *Maggio*, p. 142; Bosco, *Nove giorni* (Turin, 1869), day 5 p. 51. See esp. Cornell, p. 199: "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)" (italics added); Bosco, *Inaugurazione*, p. 300: "The Council of Trent...greatly desires...that every faithful Christian, when he or she goes to hear holy Mass, *also* receive sacramental...communion, *so that* he or she derive all the more *fruit from this august* and divine sacrifice (Council of Trent, sess. XXII, ch. VI)."

Saint Philip Neri's maxim that was circulated widely in the ascetical literature of Piedmont during the nineteenth century. Philip Neri was supposed to have said: "Enjoy yourselves. I don't want scruples or melancholy. Just don't commit sin."⁹³

Thus "The Preventive System" has the same features evident in other writings of Don Bosco. His *Companion of Youth* incorporates the *Six Sundays* but adds many new texts. His *Religiously Instructed Catholic* incorporates sections of Aimé, Gerdil, and his own *Warnings to Catholics*. His *Month of May* borrows considerations of the Last Things from his *Companion of Youth*. Then its pages on frequent communion serve as a model for pages of his *Life of Francis Besucco*. It also contains the testimony of Saint Philip Neri and the Council of Trent that I have already mentioned in connection with "The Preventive System." All that should make it obvious that "The Preventive System" may well be regarded as a crucial hub of Don Bosco's experience as a writer and a practical educator.

On the level of pedagogical principles, its main value may be that in it Don Bosco finally manages to formulate the basic elements of his educational system. Among those elements our attention is drawn to loving kindness within the broader context of religion and reason.⁹⁴ There is good reason to see a certain novelty in his notion of loving kindness because both the term and the concept do adequately express his own approach as an educator.

On the literary level Don Bosco's loving kindness seems to share some features of the loving kindness espoused by Port-Royal educators and many others. It, too, is paternal and familial in spirit. The student is asked to have filial trust in familial terms that reflect the culture of country folks and of artisans and the religious mentality of the era of absolutism. The favorite relation is that of father and son rather than of brothers. There is a relationship of authority and submission in an established order which entails "duties." This sort of loving kindness is part of a pedagogical approach that would like the work of educational personnel and institutions to stay as close as possible to family upbringing, both in its representations and its wellsprings. It is to reflect the natural psychophysical relationship of father and son, which is seen as the original prototype of all education. In a traditional society, still closely knit by familial ties, the principle that the educator should assume a paternal cast was axiomatic.

But the loving kindness espoused by Don Bosco is not attenuated by overtones of respectful fear. At least it certainly is not to the extent we note in the Port-Royal educators, in Nicole, Rollin, or the Jesuit John Croiset. In Don Bosco's approach respect is not to result from collateral elements: e.g., fear of the punishments that the educator can dish out, or the aloofness of the educator

⁹³ See the closing paragraphs of ch. III, p. 44.

⁹⁴ See Braido, pp. 175-205.

insofar as he gets games started, then discreetly withdraws. Don Bosco is not afraid that respect for the educator will be diminished by the fact that he participates in games. He wants his educators to play as actively and interestedly as the boys themselves. We know that Don Bosco liked having his clerics pursued in the courtyard by boys who were almost the same age, whereas Father Mark Anthony Durando was greatly disconcerted by the sight. In Don Bosco's eyes respect and trust were to be based essentially on something else. His educators were to present themselves to the boys as fathers and avowed friends in both word and deed. But they were to have the function and actual capability of guiding and helping their young students in the acquisition of religious, ethical, cultural, and vocational values.

The paternal loving kindness desired by Don Bosco was to be shown, not to small groups, but to large numbers of boys, to hundreds of adolescents living in the same educational institute. Aided by assistants, the educator would follow all of them and each of them in an intelligent manner. He was to classify them by their ordinary pattern of behavior as good, ordinary, difficult, or bad. Without letting his own private value-judgment weigh heavily on his boys, he was to pay particular attention to those in greater need. Under one pretext or another he was to call them into the range of his own direct sight or that of his helpers, but without revealing the reason for this closer contact. In this way he would not diminish their personal dignity or inhibit the freedom possible in a general framework of domestic discipline.

The formulated principle of giving them ample freedom to run and jump around accurately documents what Don Bosco really wanted to see going on at the Oratory. To strangers it meant a rambling chaos of boys; to Don Bosco it meant an industrious beehive. The principle also is the germ of an activist approach to education, at least in the sense that such ample freedom in his house fostered the spontaneity and maturation of the boys in their own personal ways.

Besides its value as a formulation of pedagogical doctrines, "The Preventive System" has a deserved place in the history of educational praxis. Incorporated into the Regulations of the Salesian Society, "The Preventive System" came to serve as the basis for the pedagogical training of the young sentries. While Don Bosco was still alive, it was commented on and developed by Father Barberis in his notes on "sacred pedagogy," by Father Francis Cerruti in brief essays and discourses, and by Father Dominic Giordani in various pedagogical writings.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Giulio Barberis, *Appunti di pedagogia esposti agli ascritti della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales* (Turin, 1903), lithographed; Francesco Cerruti, *Le idee di Don Bosco sull'educazione e sull'insegnamento e la missione attuale della scuola* (S. Benigno Canavese, 1886); idem, *Una trilogia pedagogica: Quintiliano, Vittorino da Feltrè e Don Bosco* (Rome, 1908); Domenico Giordani, *La carità nell'educare ed il Sistema preventivo del più grande educatore vivente, il venerando D. Giovanni Bosco* (S. Benigno Canavese, 1886); idem, *La Gioventù e Don Bosco di Torino* (S. Benigno Canavese, 1886).

On the other hand we must not overlook the limitations of “The Preventive System,” which become increasingly evident when we compare its pages with the wealth of experiences and pedagogical formulas offered by Don Bosco’s own writings or other documentation dealing with his life. In some respects “The Preventive System” is a defective indicator; in other respects it is not fully in harmony with the design that a fully systematic treatise might have offered.

First of all, its general formulations on the education of young people, whether considered as theoretical statements or as summaries of the history and pedagogy of education, appear to be quite defective. We read: “There are two systems which have always been used in the education of youth, the preventive and the repressive.” But actually it is difficult to find educational systems that can be adequately classified under those two headings; and it is particularly difficult to find systems that can be classified as repressive.

Second, terms such as “preventive system,” “preventive assistance,” and “preventive warnings” seem to refer primarily to faults that are to be forestalled and eliminated insofar as possible. Preventive presence and assistance, writes Don Bosco, situates pupils in the moral impossibility of committing faults. His system, then, seems to be characterized by a negative element; and it is this that accounts for its ability to rule out punishment, which is a secondary matter in education.

Third, “The Preventive System” does not provide the full framework of offices that actually existed in Don Bosco’s educational establishments. It does mention the director, his assistants, and even the doorkeeper: “A good doorkeeper is a treasure for a house of education.” But there are no references to, or norms for, such important functions in the running of the house as those of the prefect (as either vicar or economer), catechist, and prefect of studies.

Finally and most obviously, the work smacks of the atmosphere and spirit of the private boarding school (*collegio*). At the time Don Bosco’s own institutions were moving in that direction, and much of “The Preventive System” must be likened to Dupanloup’s treatise on such education or Charles Gras’s pamphlet on the teacher in such an institution.⁹⁶ It appears that Don Bosco, in compiling “The Preventive System,” has in mind “houses of edu-

⁹⁶ Carlo Gras, *L’istitutore nei convitti* (Turin: OSFS, 1875), pp. 26-27: the instructor precedes the boys into the courtyard. This work was drawn from DeDamas, *Le surveillant dans un collège catholique* (Paris, 1857). DB himself makes clear his awareness of school life in his outline for a manual of pedagogy to be used by those training to be SDBs. The work was to be entitled “The Salesian Teacher and Assistant.” Various chapters would deal with their presence and attendance in the dormitory, on walks, in church and classroom. They would also deal with the role of the teacher, discipline, rewards, punishments, and so forth. See BM 12:287; MB 18:188.

cation” along the lines of the hospice addition to his Oratory. Such, in fact, was the Oratory of Saint Peter for whose inauguration Don Bosco wrote.

If Don Bosco had written down his pedagogical principles when he had only his festive oratory or his boarding house of Dominic Savio’s day, in all likelihood he would have offered different applications of the basic principles of “reason, religion, and loving kindness.” He probably would have sensed the limitations of ongoing “watchful” presence and assistance at close quarters. He would have put more stress on the type of loving kindness he showed to Savio and Magone when they found themselves in a spiritual crisis. The fact is that his loving, preventive presence in the lives and the hearts of his young people went far beyond close “watchful” assistance and physical presence in the actual locale of his young students, although that is what is described in “The Preventive System” and was possible in the private boarding school and to some extent in the atmosphere of festive oratory and hospice when the boys were gathered together there. His loving and preventive assistance certainly operated in vaster spiritual dimensions when there was less possibility of actual physical presence, when the boys under his educational care were seen only at intervals but, on the other hand, gravitated around the educator, rooted in their lives as father, friend, enlightened counselor, and the one whom they longed to hear and make a sharer of their innermost secrets.

If it had been a good summary, “The Preventive System” could have offered general educational principles and then proceeded to give practical applications to the varied situations encountered in Salesian circles at least. Given the preference of the Salesians for oratories and private high schools in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it could have differentiated Don Bosco’s educational system from others such as those of Port-Royal or the state public schools. For the Port-Royal educators the private school found its rationale in their pessimistic view of the world and the threat of original sin. Peter Coustel had no confidence in parental upbringing. He lamented the heedlessness of fathers and the mawkish sentimentality of mothers. The private school provided select, proven, and responsible educators and was, after all, more suitable for education than the home. In favor of his private schools, Don Bosco could have mentioned the reasons offered in the Constitutions of the Salesian Society. They helped to preserve and nurture vocations. They were also advisable for the education of poor and abandoned boys, who needed food, clothing, and shelter if they were to profit from education.⁹⁷ He could also have mentioned the reasons given by the advocates of Catholic schools in an age when public-school education was seen as a cause of moral and religious deformation.

Described in the Salesian Constitutions as the prime work of charity for youth, the festive oratory is not even mentioned in “The Preventive Sys-

⁹⁷ *Const.*, p. 4, “1. Object of the Salesian Society,” art. 4.

tem.” Running, jumping, chattering as much as one pleased,⁹⁸ playing music, putting on shows, and hikes were originally activities of the oratory. In “The Preventive System” they are presented as activities to be fostered in “houses of education,” which is an equally concrete stage of application.

With regard to religious elements basic to his preventive system, Don Bosco says nothing special about formation in the faith or the practice of charity. He does not dwell on the importance of training in prayer or in joining associations. He simply highlights the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist, opting for granting children first communion as soon as they can distinguish the Eucharist from mere bread.

In a later section of this chapter, I shall cover some of the essential religious values in Don Bosco’s educational system. Here I want to point out how some of his principles (e.g., the winning of hearts, loving kindness, and full liberty to jump, run, and shout), when joined with piety centered around the sacraments, took on much more pedagogical value in his socioreligious milieu. In concrete practice Don Bosco won the friendship and collaboration of the most varied sorts of people who could play some role in educational work. He housed mothers of clerics and formed friendships with parish priests, benefactors, and people who brought boys to him, whether they were believers or not. The noisy outings of his boys on the hills of Montferrat, with band and public shows, tended to stir general sympathy and cooperation among many people. They came to trust the goodness and soundness of Don Bosco’s educational approach. Local priests and parishes were used to having solemn singing and general communion only on important feasts. They were amazed and won over when they saw the boys of the Oratory attending Mass and going to communion, for these were the same youths whom they had seen putting on evening shows. From 1847 to 1864 Don Bosco personally supervised these autumn outings in Montferrat, creating a singular symbiosis of province and Oratory. He thus sowed seeds for a sort of religious renewal and pretty much established a new brand of spiritual exercises among the rural populace. At the same time he was developing a way to keep his educational institutes stocked with new pupils.^{98a}

Finally, we should note that Don Bosco never felt rigidly bound to the formulas set down in “The Preventive System.” The term “loving kindness,” for

⁹⁸ But with the obvious implication of moderation and order as fixed, e.g., in the *Regol.*, p. 32: “Generally prohibited are the playing of cards, tarots, ball, soccer; loud shouting and interfering with the games of others; throwing stones, blocks of wood, or snowballs; defacing plants, inscriptions, and pictures; damaging the walls and furniture; making signs or images with coal...”

^{98a} Editor’s note: For a brief treatment of the role of the autumn outings, see [Michael Mendl], “Comment on the Fall Outings as a Synthesis of Don Bosco’s Educational Method,” in MO:332-38. For fuller discussion, see Luigi Deambrogio, *Le*

example, might seem to have been a very personal and suggestive one. In fact, however, it never was a dominant term in Don Bosco's own way of expressing himself. He soon found reasons to hedge it with explanations and reservations, none of these being akin to those of Coustel, Benvenuto Robbio di San Raffaele, Blanchard, and Teppa. Don Bosco was not afraid that loving kindness would undermine respect for the educator. His fears had to do with sensual matters. He did not want "loving kindness" to be interpreted as the freedom to nurture particular friendships of a sick sort between educator and pupil. He also feared all the potential consequences of an emotional or disciplinary nature; jealousy, malevolence, careless supervision, and scandal.⁹⁹ Thus Don Bosco seems to have preferred other terms that were already familiar to him and that would remind his Salesians of the way he operated as an educator. He urged them to gentleness, mildness, charity, and patience: i.e., to all those virtues that tradition saw incarnated in the bishop of Geneva from whom the Salesians had gotten their name.

In 1880 he gave the superiors of his educational houses this annual practice: "the kindness of St. Francis de Sales in dealing with others."¹⁰⁰ On July 13, 1882, he offered this advice to a Salesian at the Este school: "Strive to practice St. Francis de Sales' virtues of charity, patience and sweetness. Accept heat, cold, thirst and discomfort as so many gifts of Our Lord."¹⁰¹ A few months later he wrote to Father Francis Dalmazzo: "Work always, but with the gentleness of St. Francis de Sales and the patience of Job."¹⁰² Concluding his account of one of his missionary dreams in 1883, he said: "The Salesians will draw the people of America to Jesus Christ by the sweetness of St. Francis de Sales."¹⁰³

Some years later Father Paul Albera, Don Bosco's second successor as Rector Major of the Salesian Society, had good reason for saying that the educational system of their founder was nothing else but charity: "i.e., the love of God expanding to embrace all human creatures, especially the youngest and most inexperienced, in order to instill the holy fear of God in them."¹⁰⁴ We shall shortly explore the importance of that interpretation.

passeggiate autunnali di Don Bosco per i colli monferrini (Castelnuovo Don Bosco: Istituto Salesiano, 1975); Giovanni Battista Francesia, *Don Bosco e le sue passeggiate autunnali nel Monferrato* (Turin: Salesiana, 1897); idem, *Don Bosco e le sue ultime passeggiate* (Turin: Salesiana, 1897). These annual outings are also described in detail in BM, vols. 3-7, in the appropriate places.

⁹⁹ See ch. XIII, n. 173, and the accompanying text.

¹⁰⁰ BM 14:293.

¹⁰¹ To Fr. Nicholas Fenoglio, Turin, July 13, 1882: AS 131/01; BM 15:533; *Ep.* 2319. Gentleness is explicitly linked to the preventive system: *Ep.* 2556.

¹⁰² From Turin: AS 131/01; BM 15:570; *Ep.* 2372.

¹⁰³ BM 16:312.

¹⁰⁴ Paolo Albera, *Lettere circolari... ai Salesiani* (Turin, 1922), p. 342.

4. Other documents on his educational system

Among documents chronologically later than “The Preventive System,” the first to merit consideration is the circular, “The Use of Punishments in Salesian Houses,” composed in 1883. We have a copy wholly handwritten by Father Francesia.¹⁰⁵ Its directions reflect those of Monfat, who in turn goes back to Fénelon, Rollin, the Port-Royal educators, and Locke’s essay on the education of children.¹⁰⁶

The whole sentence structure of the document suggests that the redactional work was mainly done by someone other than Don Bosco. That was normal in the final years of Don Bosco’s life. But we can also recognize terms and concerns that were specifically Don Bosco’s at that point. We find reference to the “preventive system” and the “repressive system.” We also note that Salesian directors are urged to correct students in private rather than in public, “in *camera charitatis*, as the saying goes.” That expression is also found in Don Bosco’s Spiritual Testament, which dates from the same period. The director is urged to show great confidence in his confreres and dependents: “He should never reprimand or sternly warn anyone in the presence of others, but rather in *camera caritatis*, i.e., gently and in private.”¹⁰⁷

The circular on punishments offers a somewhat different definition of the preventive system than does the earlier work with that title; but it is still along the same lines. The preventive system means “disposing the minds of our students in such a way that *without any external violence* they should be inclined to do what we want.” Here the incipient pedagogical activism seems to be jeopardized, and one can glimpse the shadow of “violent punishment.” It is external violence that the Salesian educational system seeks to avoid insofar as possible. In the preventive system coercive measures were never to be used,

¹⁰⁵ See also the preamble to the ed. in the *Ep.* 2395. In the DB files, at AS 131/03, there is only a typed copy. [Editor’s note: José Manuel Prellezo has published a critical ed. of the letter: “Dei castighi da infliggersi nelle case salesiane,” *RSS* 5 (1986), 263-308; Eng. trans. *BM* 16:368-76.]

¹⁰⁶ On coincidences between the 1883 circular and whole phrases of Rollin, see Eugenio Valentini, “Don Bosco e Rollin,” in *Rivista di pedagogia e scienze religiose* 2 (1964), pp. 168-97. But Rollin seems to be only an indirect or at least secondary source. The style of the circular turns out to be closer to Antoine Monfat (1820-98), *La pratica della educazione cristiana* (Rome, 1879); see José M. Prellezo, “Fonti letterarie della lettera ‘Dei castighi da infliggere nelle case salesiane,’” in *Orientamenti pedagogici* 27 (1980), 625-42.

¹⁰⁷ See *MB* 17:266. But we must remember that DB sometimes used to punish in public. Note doc. 2 in Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco’s Dreams: A Historico-documentary Analysis of Selected Samples*, trans. John Drury (New Rochelle: Don Bosco, 1996): Caesar Chiala to Chev. Oreglia, June 5, 1862. And recall the public reproofs to young Zucca and the cleric “Marcello” (i.e., Louis Marcellino, friend of Dominic Savio and later parish priest of Holy Martyrs Church in Turin).

“only measures of persuasion and charity.” Severity was recognized as necessary because of “human nature,” as traditional Catholic pedagogy put it. But in the circular human nature is described as “all too inclined to evil.”

It does not appear that this document on punishments was sent out to Salesian houses while Don Bosco was alive. It was neither printed nor lithographed (as was usual then). We do not know why. But it must be regarded as a major product of the high-school milieu that was now being solidly established in Valdocco and many other Salesian houses.

Deserving close attention as pedagogical documents are the dreams of Don Bosco, both by virtue of their content and their impact on his young people. One reported from Rome to the Oratory in a letter of May 10, 1884, may be considered the most complete and informative exegesis of loving, preventive presence and assistance.¹⁰⁸

The former student (Valfrè) who appears to Don Bosco in a dream, serving as “guide,” mentor, and admonisher, laments that the Oratory is no longer what it was in the old days. No longer is there that confidence between superiors and students that once prevailed. Superiors do not participate in recreation as brothers and friends of the students; they go off, take walks with each other, and pay no heed to the boys. Hence the boys do not heed them or requite them with love in return, whereas once upon a time the boys “loved them and gave them prompt obedience.” Superiors now do not have the sort of love that puts up with “the weariness, the annoyance, the ingratitude, the troubles that youngsters cause.” Superiors do almost nothing but reprove and punish. They do not imitate Jesus Christ, who “did not crush the bruised reed nor quench the smoldering wick” (see Matt 12:20). The heavenly prediction is that things will return to what they were in the golden age of the Oratory when superiors again love their students and truly accompany them:

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...¹⁰⁹

Anyone familiar with Don Bosco’s pages will be struck by the unusual phrasing of the above text. The concatenation of indefinite pronouns gives a

¹⁰⁸ See MB 17:107-14; Pietro Braido, “10 Maggio 1884,” in *Orientamenti pedagogici* 6 (1959), pp. 545-58; Giovanni Bosco, *Scritti sul sistema preventivo*, ed. Braido, pp. 277, 317-27. The translation cited here is found in the appendix to *Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales* (Rome, 1985), pp. 254-64.

¹⁰⁹ Loc. cit., pp. 259-60; italics added.

sense of indeterminacy to the whole passage: “anyone, another, other.” It goes on. The hope is expressed that love will soften even *anyone* who “neglects his strict duty of supervision for the sake of his own ease and comfort,” *anyone* who, “fails through human respect to reprimand *those who* need reprimanding.” Then come the questions:

Why do people want to replace love with the 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 [which is easier and quicker for those in charge]? 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.¹¹⁰

The concatenation of phrases and the repetition of words in this dream are singularly noticeable. In the epilogue, for example, hope is expressed for the return of the good old days:

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 real love and joy for everyone.¹¹¹

In the epilogue we find his secretary’s note in parentheses: “(at this point Don Bosco broke off the dictation; his eyes filled with tears, not of sorrow but because of the inexpressible affection that was evident from his face and voice; after a few moments he went on.)”¹¹²

But what exactly did Don Bosco dictate, the letter or its general scenario? A series of reminders or the whole document with its emphatic setup, verve, and the adjectival usage that seems evident as well in the “secretary’s note”? We do not have any handwritten draft of this letter by Don Bosco. The original we possess, in two redactions, is written by Father Lemoyne and signed by Don Bosco. By virtue of its content, nevertheless, it must be regarded as one of Don Bosco’s richest and most effectively vivid pedagogical documents.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 260; italics added. The bracketed clause is missing in the translation.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 263; italics added.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 264. The ms. we actually have now is due to Fr. Lemoyne. See AS 132 Sogni. It is the so-called brief account; the long one cannot be found. [Editor’s note: Pietro Braido published a critical ed.: “La lettera di Don Bosco da Roma del 10 maggio 1884,” RSS 3 (1984), 295-374.]

5. *Religious elements in Don Bosco's educational system*

Don Bosco's insistence on the importance of religion in the task of education convinces us that we should get a better fix on the value it had in his own awareness and experience. First and foremost, we must go back to his motto, *Da mihi animas*. Addressed to the Lord, this motto reminds us of the vertical and transcendental thrust that capped all his yearnings and desires. In its descending sense, awareness of God as creator, lord, and redeemer is faith that everything comes from him and has him as its beginning and end. It is also faith insofar as the educator finds himself involved as an instrument in God's provident design. Predestination to the ministry of education, which was made known and certain to Don Bosco by extraordinary signs, guarantees that "all authority comes from God" (see Rom 13:1). It also confirms the "father-sons" relationship, modelled after the divine one in the Trinity and the similar one with respect to creatures, especially with respect to those human beings called to divine filiation.

Not only the family spirit and the father-sons relationship but also loving kindness, charity, patience, and gentleness find their chief motives in religious elements: i.e., in the attitude toward children shown by Jesus, who did not break the bruised reed or extinguish the smoldering wick; and in the attitude of Saint Francis de Sales, who is venerated by tradition as the most perfect imitator of Christ's own gentleness. As we have already noted, loving kindness was often justified merely by the fact that experience proved its effectiveness. When Don Bosco is dealing with people whom he does not really know, or whom he knows to be nonbelievers, he seems to be careful to downplay religious factors and focus solely on experiential data.¹¹³ But when he addresses himself to Salesians, religious motivations are stressed to the utmost, above all other considerations. Then experiential data are used to confirm and prove the order willed by God, the only "true" order that allows for the possibility of a "true" education when it is followed.

The basic religious themes of Don Bosco enable us to determine the wider horizons of the word "religion." Don Bosco does not use it to refer solely to obligatory religious practices or the educational value of frequenting the sacraments. He goes beyond a fragmentary view of sacramental piety and the task of education, not stopping at merely methodological issues. For him religion does not have merely external and instrumental functions. He sees the sacraments as instruments of grace enabling us to attain holiness and eternal salvation. They not only preserve us from wrongdoing but also nurture us for goodness. They remind us of the whole problematic of the Last Things, of our divine savior Jesus Christ, of the Church as our ark of salvation, and of

¹¹³ E.g., when he writes to Francesco Crispi; see the final paragraphs of ch. XI, sec. 1(c), pp. 229-30.

the importance of inserting ourselves “early” into God’s plan of salvation and following our vocation.

The aim of education is to turn all youths into “lovely vestments for the Lord,”¹¹⁴ to persuade them at an early age to make the sort of consecration to God that led Aloysius Gonzaga and Dominic Savio to holiness and salvation. Education was to fortify their life of grace by anticipating and foiling the snares of evil. Educators and students would work together, each party in its own proper way, to carry out God’s saving plan. With whispered words in their ears (*paroline all’orecchio*), Don Bosco would invite his boys to carry out and make real his own motto: *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle*. In short, the sole nucleus of Don Bosco’s pedagogy and spirituality was a soteriology that had become personal conviction. It balanced a wide variety of elements that had their proper place: e.g., outings, music, theater, and full liberty for the boys to run, jump, and shout as much as they pleased.

Don Bosco intervened in the life of his boys with a highly charged spiritual life of his own. Trust and the winning of hearts took place in many instances, and certainly in the best instances, by a spiritual osmosis of a lofty and indelible sort. Among the many bits of testimony we have on this matter, the most vivid is probably that of Father Paul Albera. He was a student in Valdocco around 1860, when Don Bosco was at the height of his powers. Don Bosco educated boys, says Father Albera, by loving them, attracting them, conquering them, and transforming them.¹¹⁵ Father Albera describes how he educated them as individuals and as a community:

He wrapped us all in an atmosphere of complete contentment and happiness, from which were banished all pain, sadness, and melancholy. He penetrated our bodies and souls so that we no longer gave any thought to one or the other. We were sure that our good Father was thinking about us, and that certainly made us perfectly happy.

Yes, indeed, it was his love that attracted, conquered, and transformed our hearts! The comments on this in his biography are nothing compared to the reality. Everything about him exerted a powerful attraction on us: his piercing gaze, sometimes more effective than any sermon; a simple movement of his head; the smile that always played around his lips, always new and different but also calm; the curve of his mouth, as when he wanted to speak without pronouncing any words; his words cadenced in one way rather than another; his carriage and his brisk, self-composed gait. All these things worked on our hearts like an inescapable magnet. Even if we could have evaded its force, we would not have done so for all the gold in the world. So happy were we with his singular ascendancy over us, which in his case was the most natural and unforced thing in the world.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ See n. 31 above and corresponding text.

¹¹⁵ Albera, p. 340.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 341.

Once again I seem to feel all the gentleness of his predilection for me as a boy. I felt I was a prisoner of an emotional force that nourished my thoughts, words, and actions. I do not know how to give a better description of my state of mind, which was that of my companions as well... I felt loved in a way I had never been loved before, one that had nothing to do with the very lively love my unforgettable parents had for me.¹¹⁷

Loving kindness was a very modest term in the moral and pedagogical vocabularies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Valdocco it could mean much more than manifested affection or a merely human quality. Many were convinced that the quiet but conquering loving kindness of Don Bosco was singular because it had the tone of something superhuman, something supernatural:

From his every word emanated the holiness of union with God, which is perfect charity. He drew us to himself by the full measure of supernatural love that blazed in his heart and lit the little sparks enkindled by God in our own little hearts.

We were his because each of us was sure that he was truly God's man, *homo Dei*, in the fullest sense of the word.

From that singular allure sprang the work of conquering our hearts. Sometimes his attraction might be exercised by the simple natural qualities of his mind and heart, of his look and bearing, qualities that make the possessor a sympathetic figure. But, after a while, that sort of natural attraction exercised by a person would tend to fade and disappear, if not give way to inexplicable feelings of opposition and aversion.

That was not the case with Don Bosco. His natural gifts of all sorts were rendered supernatural by the holiness of his life. In that holiness lay the whole secret of his allure, which conquered and transformed hearts once and for all.¹¹⁸

We can see the depth of feeling that nearness to Don Bosco could arouse in his boys. They were close to Don Bosco, God's man, a holy man suffused with the power of God. And they were living at his Oratory, a holy place like Mount Horeb, impregnated with the presence of the Most High. Once again Father Albera, with his presentation of the facts, carries us beyond any simple pedagogical methodology. His account of his personal experiences leads us across the threshold into the midst of mystical experiences. We find ourselves in a pentecostal atmosphere, a group experience of the Holy Spirit. It is the realm of charisms, of the extraordinary invasion of the divine. There Don Bosco assumes the role of mediator, his characteristics revealing a spiritual paternity of great efficacy and a singular ability to generate religious experiences. The spirit of the family created by Don Bosco is one of spiritual consanguinity. The educator transmits to his students his own life of union with

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 342.

God through the life of grace in the Church. In this milieu loving kindness, presence, and assistance basically entail projecting one's own spark of spiritual energy into young people, in accordance with their own individual capacities and needs, while foreseeing how it might develop in them and anticipating the factors that might affect them personally when they grow up.

To her nuns Sister Mary Mazzarello used to say: "Let us live in the presence of God and Don Bosco."¹¹⁹ Was that naiveté or hyperbole? Or was it simply one way of expressing the rich spiritual life they experienced as deriving from the spiritual paternity of Don Bosco?

To live in the presence of God was to feel God present and at work in and around oneself. Could not living in the presence of Don Bosco refer to the spiritual instrumentality of Don Bosco, who had the charism of communicating with God and the divine gift of penetrating the thoughts and desires of his own children whether they were near or far away? Could it not express the mutual predilection of those who were involved together in a work that could just as well be called "educational," "sanctifying," or "salvific"?

For it was precisely the earnest concern for salvation that accounted for Don Bosco's persistent emotional pressure on his young people and the expansion of his work in and around the world. His sympathy, friendship, and spiritual osmosis would expand to take in all sorts of different people: friends, cooperators, civil and religious authorities. Father Albera sensed that, too, and exhorted the Salesians accordingly: "My dear ones, we must love the young people that divine providence entrusts to our care as Don Bosco knew how to love them... Herein lies the whole secret of the expansive vitality of our Congregation."¹²⁰

The words of Sister Mary Mazzarello, Father Albera, and hundreds of others who might be quoted here offer us the viewpoint of people who personally experienced Don Bosco as priest and educator and who have the best credentials for interpreting his intentions and his personality, even though they might do so in the categories of an age now remote from our own.

For Don Bosco, loving young people did not mean solely arousing affection for them. It also meant feeling their allure, succumbing to it, and noticing their irreplaceable role in one's own life. Don Bosco puts it all in something more than conventional terms when he writes to his youths from Saint Ignatius Retreat House at Lanzo, from Rome, or from Florence.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Eugenio Ceria, *Santa Maria Domenica Mazzarello* (Turin, 1952²), p. 149.

¹²⁰ Albera, p. 340.

¹²¹ Here are two examples: DB to Fr. Rua, Rome, Feb. 1870, *Ep.* 800: "Although other matters besides the interests of our Society keep me busy here in Rome, my thoughts continually turn to my treasure in Jesus Christ—my beloved Oratory boys. I visit the Oratory several times a day and see Father Cagliero in the confessional, boys going to Communion or praying fervently, and others thinking of Don Bosco or playing.

Finally, loving God and sensing God's presence, along with fearing to do anything that might offend God in any way, were sentiments lived vividly by all who were, or felt themselves to be, in Don Bosco's presence. Father Hyacinth Ballezio (1842-1917) tells us that boys in Valdocco would not have committed the slightest venial sin for all the gold in the world.¹²² The power of the preventive system, made up of reason, religion, and loving kindness may also have come from fearing the eternal damnation of "souls" and feeling that one shared God's own jealous concern. Once again, Father Albera asserts:

Saving souls was Don Bosco's watchword. One could say it was his reason for being and the only rationale for the Salesian Society.

Helping him to save our souls was the most precious gift we could give him. It was the grace, the favor, he begged of us with unspoken insinuations; because his only desire, the sole aim of his apostolate to us, was to lead all our souls to paradise, where we would see God face to face.

He inculcated these three thoughts with such gentleness and mildness that we could not help but share them. These salutary impressions even came across to the most resistant of us. Later on in life they would come to recognize their mistakes and sincerely return to goodness, as I have more than once been able to experience and verify.¹²³

In conclusion, then, the "educational system" of Don Bosco comes across as something more than a theology or a theological pedagogy. As Cardinal Cajetan Alimonda put it, such a system tends to "divinize" the world.¹²⁴ At its innermost depths it is a spirituality.

I see a goodly number who visit the Blessed Sacrament during the day. I find this a most heartening sight" (BM 9:389).

DB (after a serious illness) to Fr. Rua, Alassio, Feb. 9, 1872, *Ep.* 956: "God willing, I'll be back in Turin next Thursday. Really, I long to get back. My body is here, but my heart, my thoughts and even my words are always with you at the Oratory. This is a frailty, but I can't help it" (BM 10:150).

¹²² Note these two comments in Giacinto Ballezio, *Vita intima di D. Giovanni Bosco nel suo primo Oratorio di Torino: Elogio funebre* (Turin, 1888). "That is how Don Bosco governed his own, our beloved, Oratory: with holy fear of God, love, and edifying example. Some might call it theocratic rule. We call it rule by persuasion and love, the kind most worthy of humanity. One can hardly express the wondrous effects of that regimen! Hundreds of young students and artisans carried out their duties with ardor and carefulness. And a goodly number... would not have committed a venial sin deliberately for anything in the world" (p. 12); "Don Bosco was God's representative and commanded in God's name. Holy fear of God was enough to make hundreds of young students and artisans avoid evil and do good. The piety of our good director was communicated to his subordinates, and from them to all his sons..." (p. 10).

¹²³ Albera, pp. 333-34.

¹²⁴ Gaetano Alimonda, *Giovanni Bosco e il suo secolo: Ai funerali di trigesima* (Turin, 1888), p. 7.



EXTRAORDINARY MATTERS

1. Mysticism

Don Bosco's whole life could be viewed as a mystical phenomenon if we take mysticism to mean the feeling that some experience has been subject to the intervention of superhuman factors of understanding and strength, whether they be regarded as divine or angelic. In that sense the life of Don Bosco might well be considered one of the most blatant mystical phenomena of the nineteenth century. There was nothing anachronistic about it, either. Around the same time that Don Bosco was dreaming of (i.e., was seeing in his mind and hearing) Jesus Christ, Mary, mysterious characters, and diabolic monsters, the Curé of Ars was going through similar experiences. Boys in the Salesian house in Mirabello were seeing the baby Jesus in the consecrated host, and the general populace was being shaken by the eye movements of Mary in Taggia as well as by her apparitions in LaSalette, Lourdes, and Spoleto.

It is quite possible to show an ideal literary continuity between miracle stories in medieval documents and those presented by Don Bosco. It is possible to point up links or coincidences between anthologies of marvels published in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the Capuchin Valerio Ballardini of Venice, the Jesuit Charles Gregory Rosignoli, and the Augustinian Charles Juvenal Barberis of Saint Anthony on the one hand, and others published by Don Bosco himself as appendices to hagiographical writings or in suitable collections. We can also see a certain affinity between the miraculous cures and other special graces published by Don Bosco and those reported in publications sponsored by Our Lady of Victory in Paris or Mary Help of Christians in Spoleto.¹

¹ Bookshop receipts (AS 112 Fatture, Speirani) remind us that DB was the editor for Charles Dufriche-Desgenettes, *Storia dell'arciconfraternità del SS. ed immacolato Cuore di Maria, eretta nella parrocchia della Madonna delle Vittorie in Parigi*, 2nd ed., with additions from the 13th French ed. (Turin: Speirani and Tortone, 1857). Ch. 2 deals with

We are not dealing with anachronistic phenomena, then, but with data that readily fit into the religious atmosphere of the day. People were stirred by events in LaSalette and Lourdes, listened to the messages and repeated them to others, linked up their own life-styles with them, and visited the sacred sites to offer their own worship, devotion, or thanks for favorable events. They felt that such favors were due to the relationship of faith and prayer which they had established with the personage and consecrated site connected with a certain event of divine origin.

In the spiritual literature of Catholicism, however, the word “mystic” is applied to a person in a much more specific sense.² Hence one has every right to ask whether Don Bosco was a mystic in that sense. At least one may ask whether those who knew him came to the conviction that God had enriched him with the gift of contemplative union as well. One might also ask what Don Bosco thought of various people: e.g., privileged students of his such as Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, and Francis Besucco; his seminary colleague, Aloysius Comollo; and others of whom he wrote biographical profiles.

In the case of Don Bosco such an inquiry would not be dealing with marginal facts because mysticism was not a marginal fact in nineteenth-century Catholic consciousness. It might be considered such in his case if one were to restrict one’s consideration to the cult of Mary Help of Christians that he was prompted to establish and propagate. In that connection one might readily conclude that contemplative experience had a minor place in his life by comparison with prodigies and wonders: dreams, apparitions, instantaneous or unexpected cures. But when we look at Don Bosco as educator and spiritual director, we soon glimpse the importance of exploring the resonances in his own mind and heart of the mystical reality he experienced within himself or glimpsed in the minds and hearts of his boys. If there was mysticism there, would we not have good reason to see it as one of the underlying reasons for his tenacity in working unceasingly and his absoluteness in proclaiming the necessity of religion in educational work?

I begin this inquiry in the area of prayer. Centuries of Christian reflection have told us that this is the area where God offers the gift of mystical union and contemplation.

extraordinary conversions, ch. 4 with portentous graces and conversions, and ch. 5 with various letters about favors granted. Ch. 1 gives the “history of the start and marvelous progress of the archconfraternity”; it also deals with the verification of a “sign demanded of Mary by the pious founder to show that she wanted and adopted as her own this particular pious institution.” Compare this whole outline with that of DB’s *Maraviglie* (1868), *Rimembranza di una solennità in onore di Maria Ausiliatrice* (Turin: OSFS, 1868), and *Maria Ausiliatrice, col racconto di alcune grazie ottenute nel primo settennio della consacrazione della chiesa a Lei dedicata in Torino* (Turin: OSFS, 1875).

² But not a univocal sense. See the comments of authoritative experts in *DSp* 2, cols. 2058-2193.

Does it not seem, however, that Don Bosco's prayer is ordered to something very different from contemplation and the preparation for it by mental prayer? When he reflects on the nature of prayer or offers some notion of it, he constantly appeals to the proposition of scholastic theology: prayer is petition for what is fitting from God.³

Aware that prayer is petition by its very nature and that it is efficacious if God so wills, Don Bosco is inclined to see its worth in that sense. He readily tells his boys where and when they should pray. A church is the most propitious place because it is a sacred place set aside for meeting God and performing divine worship. The most precious moments for requesting divine favors (e.g., the grace to resist temptation or divine help in triggering help from benefactors) are the major moments of the Mass: the elevation of the host and communion. Particularly efficacious prayers are those addressed to Mary: the rosary, a visit, three Hail Marys at bedtime. Also effective are prayers to Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, one's guardian angel, and one asking for the intercession of Dominic Savio.

But if we look closely, we shall see that this is not the only value Don Bosco attributes to prayer. He writes about prayer in itself and describes silent prayer after receiving communion, mental prayer, visits to Jesus in the Eucharist and to Mary. These descriptions, in particular, could be considered descriptions of unitive prayer, the prayer of quiet, and the prayer of loving presence—at least in some of their phases.⁴

It is worth noting how Don Bosco describes Aloysius Comollo's success in achieving attentive prayer. He does not focus on the fact but on the ease with which Comollo achieved the state of "recollection." Such ease, says Don Bosco, indicates "detachment from creatures" and, implicitly, conformity and union with God's will and love.⁵ Presenting Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, Don Bosco offers other observations along the same lines. Ease in achieving prayerful recollection, absence of distractions, and difficulty in detaching oneself from the state of prayer are signs of the "spirit of prayer." They are partially due to personal effort, to be sure, but they are also gifts from God. Thus they are the fruits of cooperation, but in the case of Gonzaga, God's intervention is in such abundant measure that it can be considered a privilege.⁶

To young people Don Bosco proposes this prayer: "Obtain for me, O glorious Saint Aloysius, a spark of your own fervor. Grant that the spirit of prayer and devotion may grow increasingly in me."⁷ He does not have them ask: "Grant that I may make every effort to grow in the spirit of prayer." The sense of his pre-

³ *Petitio decentium a Deo*. See ch. XII, sec. 15.

⁴ On Jesus in the Eucharist in DB's spirituality, see ch. V, sec. 1, pp. 91-98.

⁵ *Comollo*, pp. 47-48.

⁶ *Sei domen.*, p. 34, day 8: "He managed to gain the privilege of no longer suffering distractions in his prayers... Let us, too, try to acquire this spirit of prayer..." As I have already noted, DB depends on Jesuit Paschal DeMattei.

ceding reading on “Saint Aloysius as a model of prayer” is that this is a product of cooperation. Thus his seemingly generic conception of prayer actually gives adequate expression to a theological conception and a religious sensibility in which virtuous action should lead a person to glimpse the gratuitous and gracious intervention of God in an implicit but real way.

We thus can overcome any fears that might arise from considering prayer abstractly as the petition of subject to sovereign, of inferior to superior. In such terms there would be no logical solution to the shift from plea to familiar colloquy, from a confrontation between sovereign and subject to the loving embrace of creature and creator, of child and loving heavenly Father.

Still less would we be able to find a unitive solution in supplicatory prayer if we focused on the means used by Aloysius Comollo to achieve recollection. Don Bosco describes his approach and implicitly suggests that his readers imitate it:

You want me to tell you...how I go about praying. I use a wholly material image that will make you laugh. Closing my eyes, I enter in thought a large, exquisitely adorned hall. At the end of it is a majestic throne, on which the Almighty is seated. Behind him are all the choirs of the blessed. I prostrate myself and do my praying with the utmost respect possible.⁸

The reality is more complicated. As I have already noted, Don Bosco likes to focus on whatever indicates detachment from creatures, a state of perfection, absorption in God. Admittedly he does not tell us his own personal experiences of “recollection” and unitive prayer, nor does he offer us any theory about unitive prayer and contemplation. But he is quite ready to see loving colloquy and union in certain stages of the spiritual life lived by people he was personally involved with.

The theme of eucharistic communion, in particular, prompts Don Bosco to bring out the spiritual refinement of Comollo, Savio, Magone, and Besucco. We recall that the mystics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries wrote in terms of mystical betrothal and “melting.” We might well ask whether Don Bosco did not cover the same sort of experiences in terms of nourishment and assimilation, of union with Christ in spiritual or sacramental communion that produces joy and inner peace.

The theme of the Eucharist and its effects also prompts Don Bosco to consider the gifts of God. But it never leads Don Bosco, so far as I know, to introduce explicitly the themes of contemplation and mysticism. He readily considers the gifts of God in considering other topics, too, and those gifts would seem to predispose a person to contemplation; but Don Bosco never mentions the word as such.

Of Dominic Savio he writes: “Innocence of life, love of God, and the desire of heavenly realities had so changed Dominic’s soul that he could be said to

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁸ *Comollo*, p. 47.

be all absorbed in God.” The signs of this, Don Bosco tells us, were the ease and frequency with which Dominic went into the state known as rapture in the spiritual literature:

Sometimes he would stop playing, gaze off into the distance, and begin walking alone. On being asked why he had left the game, he would reply, “Those distractions keep coming over me, and heaven seems to open above me, and I have to walk away so that I won’t say things the boys may laugh at.”⁹

Note that Don Bosco is not claiming to present facts that are the fruit of qualities acquired by merely human endeavor. He presents these incidents in a chapter dealing with “special graces and extraordinary facts.” They go beyond the ordinary pathways of grace and the basic capacities of human nature:

Up to this point there has been nothing extraordinary in what I have written about Dominic Savio—unless it be his consistently excellent behavior, his steady advance in perfection by innocence of life, his acts of penance, and his prayer life. Again, we might describe as extraordinary his lively faith, his unshaken hope, his ardent charity, and his perseverance in doing good right up to his last breath.

Now I intend to write of his special graces, of things which he did and are far from being common. I know I leave myself open to criticism. But in this regard I want the reader to understand that my narrative resembles incidents found in the Bible and in the lives of saints. I am recording things I have seen with my own eyes. I assure you I am adhering scrupulously to the truth. I leave the reader free to form his own opinion.¹⁰

In his actual description of Dominic’s absorption in God, however, Don Bosco does not add anything that might help to spell out the meaning of his observations. Scholarly students of mysticism might well feel unsatisfied, maintaining that Dominic remained in the realm of intellectual visions, a realm quite different from that where the divine essence invades the scene in an extraordinary way.

To Dominic Savio it seemed that heaven had opened above him. He expressed himself in terms that remind us of Saint Stephen, the first martyr, or Saint Paul, who was taken up in rapture to the third heaven. We are reminded of divine experiences recounted in the scriptures. Exegetes whose works could be consulted by Don Bosco had interpreted these experiences as ecstatic visions and raptures.¹¹

⁹ SDS:117.

¹⁰ SDS:115.

¹¹ On Acts 7:55 and 2 Cor 12:1, see the comments of Martini, Tirino, and Calmet. François-Armand Gervaise, OCSO (1660-1751), DB’s source for his *Vita di S. Paolo*, has a chapter on that apostle’s “continual prayer” and “intimate union with God” (*Vita* [Naples, 1786], vol. 3, bk. 5, ch. 8, pp. 42-48), but DB did not use it. Gervaise’s treatment

To Savio's innocence of life, his love for God, and his desire for celestial things could be related elements that Don Bosco highlighted a few years later in the *Life of Blessed Mary of the Angels*. After some years of difficult trials, she also felt "a most lively desire" for union with God. It was a preparatory stage until she was granted "the heavenly favor...of sublime union, which renders souls similar to the blessed in heaven while they are still on this earth."¹² At this point the biographer tries to clarify what "sublime union" is:

In it a soul journeys ever in the presence of God. Without any effort its mind and heart are continuously fixed on God. In everything it sees God, feels him, enjoys him. Where before it had to make efforts to focus on God, now it must do violence to itself to remove its thoughts from him. Oh, what an enviable state!¹³

May not this be a new way of presenting the state of detachment noted in Aloysius Comollo? Is it not similar to the description of Aloysius Gonzaga, who was privileged with a highly refined spirit of prayer? Does it not remind us of the ease with which Dominic Savio's remembrance of God ended up in ecstasy?

The fact is that the ecstasies of Mary of the Angels, referred to as "diversions" by another biographer whose work served as a model for Don Bosco's, tally with Dominic Savio's "distractions."¹⁴ When Mary had been granted union with her divine Spouse, she needed only to speak of God, or hear people speaking of him, to be rapt out of her senses.¹⁵ Compare this with an incident recounted about Dominic Savio:

One day, during recreation, our conversation centered on the reward reserved in heaven for those who have not lost their innocence. "Such innocent souls," someone said, "are closest to God and they will forever sing a special hymn of glory to Him!" That was enough to raise Dominic's soul immediately to God, and he collapsed, rigid, into the arms of his listeners.¹⁶

does not seem to go beyond acquired virtues. Insofar as contemplation and mysticism are concerned, the problem is posed in terms very similar to those we face with DB.

¹² [Bosco], *Vita della beata Maria degli Angeli, carmelitana scalza torinese*, LC 13 (1865), fasc. 11-12 (Turin: OSFS), pp. 56-57. The style is very dull and reminds one of the contemporary biography of Francis Besucco. Mss. of the latter work make clear that it was compiled with the help of others (Joseph Bongiovanni), even for Besucco's life at the Oratory. The Preface of the biography of Mary of the Angels is signed by DB (p. 5). By 1866 it was being listed as one of DB's works. See Bosco, *Storia d'Italia* (Turin, 1866), p. [528]. The Preface also indicates the sources used: biographies by Elijah of St. Teresa (Turin, 1729), Alexander Teppa (Turin, 1864), and the Carmelite Anselm of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, 1817-76 (Rome, 1865).

¹³ [Bosco], *Vita...Maria dei Angeli*, p. 57.

¹⁴ Elia di S. Teresa, OCD, *La diletta del Crocifisso: Vita della venerabile madre suor Maria degli Angeli* (Turin: Valetta, 1729), p. 180.

¹⁵ [Bosco], *Vita...Maria degli Angeli*, p. 57.

¹⁶ SDS:117-18. This episode was introduced into the 2nd ed. (1860).

In Dominic, then, we find the same signs found in the Carmelite nun. Could not the cause be the same? Could not Dominic's state of being habitually "absorbed in God" designate a state of mystical union?

When we compare the biography of Mary of the Angels put out by Don Bosco with that written by Elijah of Saint Teresa, her first biographer, it is even more obvious that we are facing two very different types of language that suggest very different criteria of interpretation. Elijah of Saint Teresa scrutinizes the Turin Carmelite in the light of the spiritual experiences of Saint Teresa of Avila and the doctrines of Saint John of the Cross. Her physical and moral prostrations over a period of fifteen years are viewed as the spiritual "night of the soul." In that darkness, according to John of the Cross, the soul already "has the beginnings of the perfect loving union for which it is waiting."¹⁷ Mary of the Angels herself interprets her states of mind in terms akin to those of the late seventeenth century. She writes of the state of "quiet" or the sense of "annihilation," always in relation to loving union with God.¹⁸

Like Don Bosco and the Curé of Ars, for a time Mary also was afflicted with nighttime incubi. Hellish monsters climbed on her bed, met her face to face, threatened her.¹⁹ In her life they were moments of her mystical night of the soul. They were seen in a very different perspective in the case of Don Bosco, who regarded them in dialectical opposition to his apostolic labors. According to what he told his clerics and boys, this was the devil's way of expressing his anger for the good being accomplished at the Oratory. His diabolic infestations, he said, were connected with the fact that youths decided to dedicate themselves seriously to the Lord, or with the fact that Protestants were being brought back to the Catholic Church by Don Bosco's labors.²⁰

¹⁷ Elia di S. Teresa, p. 172.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 171-72.

¹⁹ Detailed and dramatic are the descriptions offered by Mary of the Angels, which Elijah of St. Teresa reports in quotation marks. Many of the incubi are of a sexual nature. The terms of 19th-century hagiography are obviously more toned down, in line with the sensibilities of both authors and readers. Useful for orientation is Giuseppe Cocchiara, *Il diavolo nella tradizione popolare italiana: Saggi e ricerche* (Palermo, 1945).

²⁰ It would be interesting to go over the documentation of Fr. Bonetti on diabolic infestations at the Oratory and their prostrating effects on DB. See Bonetti, *Annali II*, pp. 19-21 (AS 110 Bonetti 3). Here I offer a sample extract:

For several days DB appeared tired and more and more worn out than usual. We asked him what was wrong, whether he wasn't feeling well. He answered us that for four or five nights he hadn't been able to sleep. But why? And he told us this: "The other night (the 6th or maybe the 7th of this month, February [1862]), I had just gone to bed and was about to doze off when I was seized by the shoulders and vigorously shaken. I was terrified! 'Who are you?' I cried. I lit the lamp, got dressed, looked under the bed and in every corner to see whether anyone was there, whether someone was playing some kind of joke on me. Nothing! I tried the

In the life of Mary of the Angels, heavenly visions were seen as effects of her attained perfection, or presented as fruits of the divine love that bends down to enrich its favored soul or further stimulate its interior life. Don Bosco, on the other hand, gravitates toward others. His dreams almost always have an educational and pastoral context. He is convinced that they are gifts from heaven designed to further the salvation of the souls entrusted to him.

door; it was closed. I checked the door leading into the library; it was closed and all was quiet. So I went back to bed. I had hardly dozed off when another jolt thoroughly frightened me. I wanted to ring for [Joseph] Rossi [1835-1908] or [Joseph] Reano [1826-?], but then I decided I had better not disturb them. And as soon as I lay down again, I felt a crushing weight on my stomach and couldn't breathe. I couldn't help crying out, "Who is this?" I struck out with my fist and met only air. I turned over, but these attacks resumed. In such miserable fashion I spent the night. The next evening I blessed the bed before going to sleep, but it did no good. That terrible game continued, and it went on continually for four or five nights. I wonder what will happen tonight (it was Wednesday evening, February 12), eve of the first Exercise of a Holy Death, on which we could gain the plenary indulgence granted by the Holy Father Pius IX on January 13 (of this same year 1862)."

This evening, the 15th, some clerics and priests and Chev. Oreglia who were with DB after supper asked him right away whether he had been left alone at night, and this is what he told us: "The other evening when I went to my room, I found the bedside table doing a tap dance. Oh, isn't this something! I said to myself. I went up and asked the table, 'What do you want?' It just went on dancing. I started pacing the room and the table stood still; I went near it and the tap dancing resumed. I assure you, he went on to tell us, if I'd heard someone telling what I've seen and heard, I certainly wouldn't have believed it. Doesn't it sound like the witch tales our grandmothers used to tell us? If I ever told all this to the boys, they'd be scared to death."

We begged him for more details, but he firmly refused to tell us anything more. "When one has something to say," he remarked, "he should consider whether it will redound to God's glory and the welfare of souls. My story wouldn't meet this standard." I said to him, "Who knows? It might help our souls." As the others agreed, he told us, "While I was in bed that time, I saw successively the shapes of a bear, a tiger, a wolf, a monstrous serpent, but horrible looking. I saw them leap upon the bed and squat there. For a little while I let them be, and then I exclaimed, 'O good Jesus!' and in a flash everything disappeared. And so I passed the night."

I noted that at that time DB had in his room a pamphlet which he was reviewing for publication in the LC; it was called *The Powers of Darkness* [by Fr. Charles Philip of Poirino]. The history of this book is a little strange. And it concludes: "Behold! The devil loves to dwell with his friends."

Also see BM 7, ch. 8 ("Diabolic Vexation"), pp. 43-51, esp. pp. 46-48.

Bonetti's chronicle (pp. 34-36) continues:

On Sunday, February 24 [=23], DB was extremely tired and had to go to bed. It wasn't even a quarter of an hour before Chev. Oreglia called him to go out on a sick call. He got up instantly, went to hear the confession and comfort the sick man, and returning home, went to bed again. That evening Fr. Michael Rua dropped in

Given such considerations, we might wonder whether it would be valid to conclude that the mystical realm was quite outside the interest and concern of Don Bosco. Are we or are we not pushing too much when we bring up mystical themes in connection with a man of the mid-nineteenth century who was dedicated to action and used to conversing in simple terms with ordinary youths and adults? In the same time and place we find other people, such as Mary Henrietta Dominici, who resolutely oriented their own spirituality around absolute, quiet abandonment to God. But even in her autobiographical pages we do not seem to find much more than vigilant self-control and ongoing attention in the quiet of her spirit to the kindness of God the Father and love for Jesus Christ and souls. Aside from the opacity of her language, however, even that basic attitude might indicate a mystical soul. She read Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Alphonsus, and Rodríguez. She contemplated God's will and providence, to which Canon Cottolengo had dedicated his own project. So her soul might well have managed to live the realities she came across in a popular work by the Jesuit Caussade, a work published by the Salesian press the year after Don Bosco's death.²¹

to inquire how he felt. "I'm very tired; in the morning I can rest; I'm continually awakened; last night I kept dozing on and off. No sooner would I close my eyes than I would hear hammer blows striking under my pillow. I would sit up on the bed, and everything could stop; I lay down again, and again I heard the noise. So I spent the night!" "But if that's the story, exorcise this spirit." "Well, tomorrow I'm going to spend a few days with the bishop of Ivrea. When I return, if it comes to torment me again, I know what I'll do. I'll try something I haven't done yet." "What's that?" "I'll question it in the name of Jesus Christ. I'll force it to speak and tell me whether it comes from God or from the devil. It won't be able to get away; it'll have to answer. When I describe these things to the boys, I laugh. But I assure you that I'm not laughing in my heart, and they give me a lot to think about. Last year was a hectic year for the Oratory, an extraordinary one; but this year beats it by far!"

During that day he was asked whether he knew why he was being so troubled. And he answered, "The devil doesn't want a Catholic school opened at Porta Nuova, the one finally about to be opened to counter the Protestant one." "But are you the only one involved in that project?" "I advised it, I promoted it, I undertook to find the personnel *and pay those who will be sent there*" [italicized words added in the margin].

On Monday, speaking again with some of us about his continual nighttime disturbances, he repeated that he would compel that spirit to speak. We asked him, "But what if it doesn't want to answer?" "Oh, it can't get away; it will be forced to speak." "What will you say to it?" "I'll say this: *Adiuro te, In nomine Jesu Christi dic mihi quis sis, et quid vis.*"

Also see the variant account in BM 7:49.

²¹ I mention Cottolengo because he was in Mary Henrietta Dominici's circle of acquaintances and interests. Of the writings of Jean-Pierre de Caussade, SJ (1675-1751), Dominici possessed *L'abbandono alla provvidenza divina* (Turin: Salesiana, 1888). The original French ed. was put out in 1867 by Fr. Henry Ramière (1821-84), the founder

In the case of Don Bosco we face a similar barrier: the opacity of his simple and unrevealing language. He is a practical man, one who is quite willing to talk about astonishing works that have been accomplished; he is shy and discreet, however, when it comes to revealing his own mental and spiritual activities behind the scenes.

But if we apply to his own life the terms that he used with regard to others, we can with good reason make the following statements. Despite the external nature of his efforts, imposed on him by his educational and organizational activities, he seems to have been stimulated by apostolic demands to possess and nurture an attitude of habitual union with God. He displayed a very fine sensitivity to religious values, ease in elevating his mind to God, fervor, and a solid, vivacious charity. In the last years of his life he was caught in moments of profound recollection, indeed of authentic ecstasy, both when he was celebrating Mass and when he was alone in his room. Those who found him at such moments might well have said of him what he said of Dominic Savio: "Innocence of life, love for God, and the desire of heavenly realities had so changed Dominic's soul that he could be said to be all absorbed in God."²²

2. *Miracles*

It is obvious, in any case, that ecstasies, raptures, prolonged colloquies with God, and ease in recollecting himself in prayer helped to nurture the conviction that the finger of God was intervening in a special way in Don Bosco himself and in his immediate surroundings.

of the Apostleship of Prayer. There were Turin eds. in 1885 (Artigianelli) and 1888 (Berruti). Among many bits of testimony to the "mystical openness" of Dominici, I cite a selection from her diary (see *Vigilia eroica* [Rome, 1951], p. 224):

"All for the greater glory of God and my dear St. Ignatius. Jan. 13, 1866. Finding myself today in great confusion, I had a great desire to speak with you, Father [i.e., her confessor], for counsel and comfort. But fearing that my desire was too strong for the little anxiety I felt, hence not in conformity with the will of God, I turned to the Holy Trinity... I passed four and one-half hours perfectly awake, but completely with God. It seemed that I contemplated all God's perfections together as one, so joyously and sweetly I could not begin to understand or explain it. I seemed lost in admiration of that immense Good that I, given my baseness, could never come to comprehend. This joyous union with my good God lasted until 10:00 A.M. the next day, Sunday the 14th... How many times I feel like asking a thousand things of God, but all my requests fade to nothingness because, it seems to me, I see and feel myself wholly absorbed in, identified and made one with, the will of God. Thus I feel that I face the sweet and happy necessity of not being able to desire, will, or seek anything besides this most holy, lovable, and precious will."

For DB's relationship with Dominici, see the index of DBLW:299.

²² SDS:117.

The reactions displayed the wide range of possibilities available to the religious mind and heart. Francis Dalmazzo, at the age of fifteen, left the bishop's school at Pinerolo to go and live with Don Bosco, about whom he had heard wondrous stories of holiness and priestly zeal. Reaching the Oratory, he heard confirmation from Father Dominic Ruffino that Don Bosco had resurrected a boy some years before. Despite the scarcity of food, he remained when he saw with his own eyes an extraordinary event as he stood at the door of the sacristy of the church of Saint Francis de Sales: drawing from a practically empty basket, Don Bosco continued to dole out buns to hundreds of boys.²³

²³ Testimony of Fr. Francis Dalmazzo at the diocesan information-gathering process, sess. 119, Jan. 16, 1893, ad 32, copy in AS 161/12, ms. A, pp. 70-72 (multiplication of the buns). See also BM 6:453-55. For his first acquaintance with DB, see sess. 118, Jan. 14, 1893, ad 24, ms. A, p. 64:

"From 1860 on, when I came as a student to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, I heard people speak of DB as of a saint. Indeed I will add that while I was still a boarder at the Pinerolo school I had read issues of the LC written by him, had asked people who he was, and had been told by several people that he was a saintly priest. That's why I decided to leave the school where I was and become one of his sons. From that time on I heard talk in the Oratory of miracles and extraordinary deeds. Among others, I was told by Fr. Ruffino, then only a cleric and now deceased, that DB had revived a dead boy who used to visit the Oratory, in order to hear his confession; that he had multiplied chestnuts to distribute them to the boys; that once, when the Oratory boys were out with DB to visit Our Lady of the Fields, a few miles from Turin, all the bells had begun to ring on their own; and so forth. I thus became convinced right then that DB was a saint. This notion grew steadily every day as I got closer to him and witnessed his virtues and the extraordinary things God worked through him.

"I have travelled to France, Switzerland, Belgium, England, and every section of Italy several times. Everywhere I have heard people talk about DB as a new St. Vincent de Paul, St. Philip Neri, etc. Often, even at inns, I have been pressed by many to tell things about DB, since all were eager to hear them.

"This notion of the saintliness of DB, as far as I know personally, has always been deeply rooted in our people, among both the well-educated and simple folk."

Francis Dalmazzo was the son of Joseph and Louise Odone Dalmazzo. He was born in Cavour in 1845, entered the Oratory in Oct. 1860, soon after his father's death, and was enrolled as a novice in Sept. 1867. He had already undergone clerical investiture in Piobesi, his mother's residence, in 1861. He took triennial vows at the Oratory in Apr. 1869 and perpetual vows in June 1872. Ordained a priest in Magliano Sabino in Jan. 1881, he had already been the SDB procurator general since Jan. 1880, and he remained in that post until 1887. He was murdered in Catanzaro on Mar. 10, 1895.

For the multiplication of the chestnuts, the witness for Fr. Ruffino is Bro. Joseph Buzzetti ("Memorie," AS 110 Ruffino 5, pp. 53-54; ms. copy of Fr. Lemoyne). For the multiplication of hosts, on the other hand, the witness is DB himself: "Another time there was a large number of boys for communion and few hosts. DB began to give out communion, giving the last communicant the last host. DB said that he saw them multiply in the pyx, but how he did not know." The same event was heard from DB's own lips in 1876 by Fr. Joseph Vespignani; see ch. I, n. 57, and the corresponding text, pp. 17-18.

The miracles multiplied and drew greater attention when Don Bosco became the apostle of Mary Help of Christians. As the years went by, everything about his life came to be regarded as miraculous: the extraordinary favors, the sudden healings in various places, the success of his work, the spread of the Salesian Society and his missionary efforts.²⁴ To their sense of gratitude to God and Mary Help of Christians, the common people instinctively joined veneration for Don Bosco. When he implored God for divine help and power, people instinctively felt that it issued from him. This conviction was bolstered insofar as they saw him as the zealous priest thinking mainly of the welfare of souls, even when he expressed himself in a witty remark.

Their religious sense instinctively linked Don Bosco to Jesus. This is particularly evident in documents issued during the last fifteen years of his life. Writing about a favor obtained through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians and the intervention of Don Bosco, Father Lemoyne entitled the incident: "Arise and walk."²⁵ He called the new church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians the "new pool of Siloam."²⁶ In D'Espiney's account of the resurrection of young Charles, Don Bosco's "Charles, arise!" recalls Jesus' command to Lazarus or the son of the widow of Nain.²⁷

Don Bosco is implicitly presented as a "man sent from God" (John 1:6) for a calamitous time. Don Bosco too "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38) through the cities of France, as Jesus had done long ago in Palestine. Exclaims Father Charles Viglietti:

Praise be to God! I would not have believed had I not seen it myself! I had heard of his trips through France, but I had no inkling of the reality. People on route stood still in ecstasy to contemplate Don Bosco, blocking his passage, trying to touch him, weeping tears of consolation after having heard him or gotten a look at him. Others, like Zacchaeus, were content to see him from a distance

²⁴ To give one piece of testimony among many, I cite Giacomo Colombero, *I santuarii della Vergine SS. in Piemonte* (Turin: Salesiana, 1898), p. 29: "The favors of the Holy Virgin [Help of Christians] are certainly numerous... I simply note the fact that the greatest wonder of Mary Help of Christians, which increases year by year, is the growth of the Salesian Oratory. From humble beginnings it has grown into a huge tree, its branches spreading all over the world."

²⁵ Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, *La città di refugio, ovvero Maria Ausiliatrice* (S. Pier d'Arena, 1880), pp. 22-25. It was published outside Turin to escape the unfavorable censorship of Abp. Gastaldi. The original testimonies of the favors published in this book were also retouched by DB (AS 133 Maria Ausiliatrice).

²⁶ Literally: "Un Paralitico guarito alla novella probatica piscina," in Lemoyne, *La Madre delle grazie, ovvero Maria Ausiliatrice in ogni bisogno spirituale e temporale* (S. Pier d'Arena, 1881), pp. 42-52. My comments in the preceding note apply to this vol. also.

²⁷ See Stella, *Don Bosco and the Death of Charles* (New Rochelle: Don Bosco, 1985), pp. 33-34.

as Zacchaeus had seen Jesus [see Luke 19:1-10], feeling themselves unworthy to get close to him.²⁸

At Nice in March 1885, Viglietti senses a repetition of Jesus' encounter with the centurion or the ruler of Capernaum (Matt 8:5-13; John 4:46-53):

A woman came with her husband on Friday, March 27... to commend to Don Bosco her mother, who was close to death. Don Bosco imparted a blessing for the sick woman...and they received a telegram announcing the complete cure of the sick woman. They then found out that the cure had begun its work precisely at the moment that Don Bosco imparted his blessing.

On April 25, 1885, Viglietti records that a possessed woman was exorcised by Don Bosco:

Around 7:30 A.M. we were just about ready to leave for the home of Marchioness Lopez to say Mass when a possessed woman was brought to the door. As soon as she saw Don Bosco, she flung herself to the ground and went into a terrible swoon. Don Bosco told her to invoke Mary. She cried out: "No, no... No, I don't want to come out, to leave." Don Bosco gave her the blessing of Mary Help of Christians. She then got up, took the medal, kissed it, and went off to hear Mass. She seemed to be sane and sound again, and she took a meal—all in the presence of many people who had seen what had happened. Those with her swore that they had not seen her so calm and peaceful for quite a long time; they were quite astonished.²⁹

3. Knowledge of hidden things

Don Bosco showed that he knew hidden things and had vision from a great distance. In the summer of 1862 he sent a letter from Lanzo that is highly significant. We still possess the original:

Dearest Sons... In my several visits to the Oratory I found good and bad things. I saw four wolves roaming about among the boys, biting a few. Perhaps not all these ravenous wolves will still be at the Oratory when I return. If they are, I intend to rip the lambs' clothing off them!

On another visit I noticed a few boys chatting on the balcony near the clocktower during night prayers and others on the small staircase of the new wing. [Brother Francis] Provera [1836-1874] sighted a few on the main floor but missed the others upstairs. I also saw some sneak out Sunday morning to skip part of the church services. But I was quite upset when I spotted several

²⁸ See AS 110 Viglietti (several redactions), chronicle entry headed Nice, Mar. 26, 1885.

²⁹ See AS 110 Viglietti. The event took place in Barcelona, Spain.

youngsters slipping out during afternoon services to go swimming! Poor boys, how little they care for their souls!

I also noticed that some boys had a serpent coiled about their bodies, striking at their throats. Some were crying, “We have sinned”; others laughingly sang, “We have sinned, and what yet has befallen us?” But then their throats swelled, almost choking them. Today I see that the devil is causing great havoc through idleness.

Courage, my boys, I shall soon be with you. With the help of Father Alasonatti, priests and clerics, and Chevalier Oreglia and his beard, I shall chase away wolves, serpents, and idleness.³⁰

A few days later, Father Bonetti made this notation in his chronicle:

No less surprising is the following incident. Knowing that Don Bosco was away from the Oratory and thus hoping that their escapade would go unpunished, three artisans—Davit, Tinelli, and Panico³¹—skipped afternoon church services on Sunday, July 20, to enjoy a swim in the canal near the Dora Riparia River. In the vast crowd of resident and day boys, neither Father Alasonatti nor the young assistants noticed their absence. As their escapade remained undetected that day and the following day, the culprits felt sure of themselves, but their hopes of evasion were rudely shattered unexpectedly. Don Bosco had seen them. The first thing on Monday, July 21, he mailed a very fatherly letter to everyone at the Oratory, incidentally mentioning the escapade without identifying the culprits...³²

In January or early February of 1870, Don Bosco wrote from Rome in pretty much the same vein:

Although other matters besides the interests of our Society keep me busy here in Rome, my thoughts continually turn to my treasure in Jesus Christ—my beloved Oratory boys. I visit the Oratory several times a day and see Father

³⁰ BM 7:135-36; AS 131/01 Torino-Oratorio; *Ep.* 267, dated July 21, 1862, from St. Ignatius in Lanzo. Also see ch. XI, n. 82, and the corresponding text, p. 247.

³¹ Davit (*Davì*, according to Bonetti’s chronicle) is registered as Stephen Davite, son of John and Margaret Carbonier Davite, born in Lucerne, Switzerland, on Dec. 13, 1846. He entered the Oratory as an artisan on Jan. 31, 1862, and left in Nov. 1863. Joseph Vinelli (*not* Tinelli), son of John Baptist and Teresa Bo Vinelli, was born in Turin in 1846. He entered the Oratory as an artisan on Mar. 21, 1862; according to the registry files, he left in Apr. 1864. There is a Panico on a list of young students and artisans for 1862-63, allograph ms. with notations by DB (AS 132 Oratorio 7). But the name is not on the registry or accounting files, nor is it on the list of “deceivers and deceived” (AS 132 Oratorio; BM 7:134-35).

³² BM 7:134. Bonetti, *Annali III*, pp. 37-42 (AS 110 Bonetti 4). The event is also narrated by Bro. Peter Enria (AS 110 Enria, pp. 43-44; 161/14, ms. A, pp. 43-44) and by Fr. Rua (with some inaccuracies: AS 161/1, ms. A, pp. 290-91). Fr. Lemoyne follows Bonetti in BM 7:134-38. There is a duplicate in BM 7:290-91, where Lemoyne follows Enria and Rua.

Cagliero in the confessional, boys going to Communion or praying fervently, and others thinking of Don Bosco or playing. I see a goodly number who visit the Blessed Sacrament during the day. I find this a most heartening sight.

But to my bitter sorrow I have also seen things to horrify everyone were I to put them in writing. I shall only say that scattered among the many good boys were some I saw resembling pigs with inscriptions of this sort on their foreheads: *Quorum deus venter est* [whose god is their belly—Phil. 3:19] or *Iumentis insipientibus comparatus est* [He is compared to senseless beasts—Ps. 48:13]. And each acted in the way marked by these inscriptions.

What particularly struck me was the sight of many lads whose tongues seemed to bloom with fragrant roses or lilies. One day, however, I noted quite a number of youngsters, students and artisans alike, whose mouths held hideous snakes spewing poisonous drivel. I called to them but they ran away and would not hearken. Shall I name them? I'll just tell Father Rua who some of them are, and it may suffice for him to admonish them. On their foreheads they bore the words: *Corrumpunt bonos mores colloquia prava* [Foul conversations corrupt morals—1 Cor. 15:33].³³

More than once Don Bosco seems to have been absorbed in perceiving distant events.³⁴ From the very start of the Oratory, he was in the habit of foretelling the deaths of various boys who frequented the Oratory, as we learn from Father Rua's testimony at the diocesan information-gathering process. He did not name names in public, his express intention being to ensure that their lives would be at peace with God. What made an impression on people was the fact that the youths in question did die at the predicted time.³⁵ He secretly entrusted a certain boy to the cleric John Cagliero so that the latter might prepare the boy for a holy death.³⁶ A singular document is a memorandum written by the Oratory infirmarian:

Memorandum. Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales. January 30, 1864. Written below are the exact words said to me by...Don Bosco, my boss and guardian of my soul, the evening of January 29, as he was going to bed.

Dear Mancardi: Note well. Two artisans will be going to paradise before the end of this coming Lent. They are Tarditi and Palo. Be alert. (signed) Ignatius Mancardi, Infirmarian.³⁷

³³ BM 9:389-90. See AS 131/01 Torino-Oratorio; *Ep.* 800.

³⁴ See, e.g., ch. III, n. 51, p. 40, and *Indice* MB, s.v. "Lontano," p. 238.

³⁵ Testimony at the diocesan information-gathering process, ad 23, AS 161/1, ms. A, p. 275.

³⁶ One of the these boys was Secondo Gurgo, who died on Dec. 24, 1855. See AS 110 Cagliero; BM 5:244-48.

³⁷ There is a photographic reproduction of the document in Lemoyne, *Vita di San Giovanni Bosco* (Turin, 1943), 1:656. Unfortunately, the original cannot at present be found in the AS, but the handwriting assures its authenticity.

The sheet shows signs of folding and also bears the writing of the prefect of the Oratory, Father Victor Alasonatti: "Predictions of Don Bosco to be opened after Easter 1864." That year Easter fell on March 27. Peter Palo died on February 26, Vincent Tarditi on March 12. According to the records, Palo had been sick for four or five months; and Tarditi had been sick for awhile, according to Father Lemoyne.³⁸

The documentation could be multiplied. Taken as a whole, I find it worthy of interest because of the sense of conviction that pervades it, even though it may range from extremely precise to very general and, in my opinion, deficient. On the one hand we get detailed testimony about extraordinary cures; on the other hand we get general remarks that are very sparse or else bathed in a welter of astonishment. Sometimes precise predictions are interlaced with general forecasts, sometimes specific details surface in predictions fraught with symbols. Don Bosco himself liked to speak in parables. Laden with biblical echoes and reminiscences, his language could prompt others to go further and assume that Don Bosco had been privileged by God to see something in a dream or vision.³⁹

4. Legend

The attitude of those around Don Bosco should also be noted because Don Bosco was aware of it and it affected his own way of thinking and expressing

³⁸ Both died at the Cottolengo Hospital. Peter Palo, son of the late John Baptist and Teresa Rocca Palo, was born in Lagnasco on Apr. 22, 1847. Vincent Tarditi, son of the late Louis Tarditi, was born in Saluzzo in 1847. See AS 276.

On the event, see BM 7:373, 383. Also see the testimony of Fr. Lemoyne at the diocesan information-gathering process (Rome, 1907), p. 822: "Some may naturally object that since the boys were already sick, DB could naturally know that they would not survive long. But the importance given it by Mancardi, already of some age and experience as an infirmarian, proves that he did not judge the catastrophe possible in such a short time."

³⁹ I have offered an analysis of one of these wondrous works and the documentary sources connected with it in *Don Bosco and the Death of Charles*. I offer a similar documentary analysis for DB's dreams *Don Bosco's Dreams: A Historico-documentary Analysis of Selected Samples*, trans. John Drury (New Rochelle: Don Bosco, 1996).

The considerable size of the documentation can be seen from various entries in the *Indice MB*: "Fatti straordinari" (pp. 173-74), "Grazie della Madonna" (pp. 205-07), "Miracoli" (pp. 257-58), "Morti" (p. 267), "Predizioni" (pp. 339-41), and "Profezie" (p. 351). It is also evident in various sections of the material compiled for DB's process of beatification and canonization. In the *Positio super introductione causae* (Rome, 1907), see the articles, "De donis supernaturalibus et miraculis in vita," pp. 767-83, and "De fama sanctitatis in vita," pp. 834-86. In the *Positio super virtutibus* (Rome, 1923), see the article, "De donis supernaturalibus et miraculis in vita," pp. 972-1028.

himself. We can discern various reactions: the reflective calm of Father Rua; the ingenuousness of a boy covering his face with his cap so that Don Bosco will not be able to surmise his sins; the surprise and shock of someone hearing Don Bosco whisper in his ear a response to his most secret thoughts or questions; the bold initiative of cleric Cagliero who, tipped off by Don Bosco, seeks out boys who are gambling in some hidden place (Don Bosco, in the courtyard, had heard the clinking of money); the fervent trust of many ordinary people who asked Don Bosco to give them a blessing from Mary Help of Christians; and the reverent, loyal friendship of Cardinal Joseph Berardi (1810-1878), whose beloved nephew had been healed by Don Bosco. Many told of the appearances of a mysterious dog known as Grigio ("Gray"). He had come to help Don Bosco when he was being assaulted by thugs. Intermittently over the years he put in appearances at the Oratory, in Alassio, and on the hills of the Monferrat area. People called it "prophecy" when Don Bosco predicted something with an air of jest or mystery, to an individual or the public, in the bosom of his Valdocco family or amid his friends and benefactors in Rome, Nice, Marseilles, Paris, or Barcelona.

There was also a tendency to sense that superhuman forces were intervening for good or ill. A typical example is the incident that occurred on July 9, 1884, of which Father Viglietti has left us a vivid account. A violent storm hit Turin about 6:00 P.M., the sort of thunderstorm that frequently breaks the sultriness of midsummer. The rain came down in torrents. Four bolts of lightning hit the church of Mary Help of Christians. Consternation gripped the inhabitants of the Oratory. Some left their rooms. One boy, thrown into a panic by the hellish din, fell down a flight of stairs. Quite alarmed, Father Lemoyne went to Father Bonetti's room, the latter being sick at the time. Bonetti told Lemoyne what was running through his own mind at the time. Was it not an unusually fierce storm? Could the thunder and lightning be a display of diabolic rage. "I'll bet," added Bonetti, "that at this very moment Cardinal [Innocent] Ferrieri [1810-1887] has signed the decree granting us all the privileges of the Redemptorists." Replied Lemoyne: "I hope you're right! It would be about time! Don Bosco has been working on that for the last fifteen years." Father Lemoyne went on his way, seeking out Father Berto to get clarification about a response he was supposed to give someone in a letter. Don Bosco's secretary was radiant when he met him. The decree granting the aforementioned privileges had just arrived. The excited secretary told him:

As I put it into Don Bosco's hands, the first flash of lightning struck. Don Bosco tried to read it but couldn't. The windows were open and the first three flashes of lightning skimmed them. I took Don Bosco by the arm and led him into the other room: "Come away. Don't you see it's dangerous here? The bolts of lightning seem to be looking for you." As Don Bosco moved away with me,

the fourth flash of lightning struck and the bolt of fire seemed to reach out toward the desk, as if trying to burn up the decree.⁴⁰

At that moment the inhabitants of the Oratory saw the storm as the focus of a struggle between the forces of heaven and hell. The feeling was not without foundation. For a decade they had endured bitter arguments with Archbishop Gastaldi, who had died the previous year. Now the privileges, exemption from episcopal authority in particular, would permit the Salesian Society to venture into the world without fear of hindrance or humiliating opposition. The devil had done what he could to prevent the Oratory from spreading God's work, but good had triumphed. Now the devil could only vent his impotent rage.

Actually the furious storm was not confined to Valdocco. A few hours later, it hit Lombardy and Venetia. Around 10:15 P.M., it hit Verona. A few days later, Turin's *L'Unità Cattolica* reported:

The sky was an ongoing flame because of the frequent flashes of lightning, followed by uproarious peals of thunder. At Càvalo in the province of Verona, various people had congregated in the kitchen of a little house to escape the fury of the storm. While they were talking among themselves, a bolt of lightning came through the window and struck dead a carabinieri [who was there on leave].⁴¹

The meteorological observatory at Moncalieri, near Turin, was run by Barnabite Francis Denza (1834-1894), the founder of the Italian Meteorological Society. For July 9-10 it reported: "Storms and heavy rains in very many areas of the continent; heavy rain in Genoa and Turin; winds of the third quadrant felt here and there; barometer declining everywhere; moderate temperature in the north."⁴²

It seems quite clear that a sense of the marvellous pervaded the minds of those around Don Bosco. Don Bosco's field of activity (Valdocco, Piedmont, and elsewhere) was also permeated with popular and traditional elements that prompted awe in the face of the grandiose, the unexpected, the impressive figure. In some cases we can follow the process: the germination, growth, and validation or decline of a legend.⁴³ Such phenomena are all the more interest-

⁴⁰ The episode is even more astonishing in the MB. The four bolts of lightning fall out of a clear sky, not during a violent storm (MB 17:140). One can imagine the consternation it caused Fr. Bonetti and others. Note also that Fr. Lemoyne incorporated the Vignietti account into the *Documenti* for the life of DB.

⁴¹ *L'Unità cattolica*, July 13, 1884.

⁴² *Ibid.*, July 15, 1884. Another fatal incident took place on the evening of July 10. A woman was struck by a bolt of lightning in Dosso del Liro (Como). See *L'Unità cattolica*, July 12, 1884.

⁴³ Here I am thinking of certain circumstances surrounding the resurrection of young Charles: see *Don Bosco and the Death of Charles*. I am also thinking of the verification of DB's predictions, which I discuss in *Don Bosco's Dreams*.

ing insofar as they are unwitting products of misunderstanding, enthusiasm, relatively uncritical consideration, or serene religious faith grounded on the authority of sometimes dubious texts.

We find the last-mentioned problem in Don Bosco's case as well. Between 1855 and 1870, the Holy Office began to give closer scrutiny to ascetical and hagiographical writings laced with visions or legendary material.⁴⁴ It wanted faith, not credulity. This seemed all the more necessary in an age when Faith had to be more prudent in order to withstand the attacks of unbelievers and their charges that the Church was guilty of obscurantism.⁴⁵ As I have noted, Don Bosco's *Life of Saint Peter* came in for Vatican censure. The *Life of Saint Joseph* ran the same risk. Don Bosco vented his complaints in a letter to kindly Cardinal Philip DeAngelis (1792-1877), the archbishop of Fermo:

I cannot for the life of me explain why such strictness is applied [to my work] when I spare no expense or effort to stick to the sources and best authors with Roman approval, while millions of abominable books are published and no effort is made to put them on the Index. No one bothered to consider the sources used for the material of the book [on Saint Peter], otherwise [Rome] would have proceeded a bit more cautiously... They should first examine the books from which I took information and notice that the work on Saint Joseph is not my own but merely a compilation from books that are publicly known, promoted, and approved by Church authorities, especially by the master of the Sacred Palace.⁴⁶

The *Life of St. Joseph* presents many charming legends. It tells of the lily that blossomed on the staff of Joseph when he was competing with other sons of

On this matter it would be useful to examine the whole psychological dynamics of the Italian populace during the Risorgimento. E.g., it also created a legendary and religious halo around Garibaldi, who supposedly was protected in battle by the Archangel Michael. See Francesco Lanzoni, *Genesi, svolgimento e tramonto delle leggende storiche* (Rome, 1925), p. 221.

Passing interest in the place of legend in DB's life was shown by Fr. Alberto Caviglia, *Don Bosco: Profilo storico* (Turin, 1934²), p. 157: "In 1856 DB had a dream, one of many. A mysterious man was turning a wheel akin to that of Fortune... I bring up this legend again here (what extraordinary man in history has not had his name mixed up with legends?) to remind you once again that in DB's life ideas were first dreamed, then...broke out and expanded into reality."

⁴⁴ Data in Franz Heinrich Reusch, *Der Index der verbotenen Bucher* 2 (Bonn, 1883), 1193. Among those censured who were close to DB in time and place was Fr. Felice Cuniberti (1810-65) of Savigliano. His work, *Vita di N.S. Gesù Cristo: Opera postuma* (Savigliano, 1865), was condemned *donec corrigatur* by a decree of June 11, 1866.

⁴⁵ See the letter of Fr. Angelo Vincent Modena, OP, Secy. of the Cong. of the Index, to Abp. Riccardi of Turin, Rome, Apr. 29, 1867, in BM 8:334-35. See all the files relating to DB's censured work, *Il centenario di S. Pietro Apostolo*, in AS 133 Papi, S. Pietro.

⁴⁶ From Turin, June 18, 1867; *Ep.* 562.

David for the hand of the Virgin Mary. It describes the nuptial ceremony, at which Joseph gave Mary a gold ring studded with an amethyst. It recounts the legendary wonders that took place in the desert during their flight into Egypt:

[The fifth-century Church historian from Palestine, Salaminius Hermias] Sozomen tells us that as soon as the Holy Family reached that ancient land, its trees bowed down to adore the Son of God, wild beasts forgot their instincts and welcomed them, and birds chirped a chorus of praise for the Messiah. If we are to believe creditable authors, the idols of the area recognized the conqueror of paganism and collapsed in countless pieces.⁴⁷

For his *Life of Saint Pancras* Don Bosco relied on the Bollandists and the legendary biography compiled by Charles Juvenal of Saint Anthony. The Bollandists could have put him on guard against wholly implausible episodes, but Don Bosco chose to find support in the work of Charles Juvenal and his baroque biography. So he describes in detail the catechumenate of Pancras and his uncle Dionysius under the direct tutorship of Pope Saint Caius (d. 296) and recounts a dramatic dialogue between the young confessor of the faith and the savagely cruel emperor Diocletian (245-313).⁴⁸

Don Bosco makes much of the principle that his facts are taken from accredited authors. His approach shows clearly that his work is one of popular rather

⁴⁷ [Bosco], *Vita di S. Giuseppe, sposo di Maria SS. e padre putativo di G. Cristo, raccolta dai più accreditati autori* (Turin: OSFS, 1867), p. 54. We find something of the same sort in the anonymous *Vita di San Giuseppe, glorioso patriarca e vergine sposo della Santissima Vergine Maria* (Monza, 1866), p. 260: "It was a joyous spectacle, writes Fr. [Anthony Mary] Affaitati [OFMCap, 1660-1721], following Sozomen, to see the trees not only bow their heads and branches to the holy wayfarers but bend their thick trunks completely and touch the ground to pay reverence to Jesus. The wild beasts..." The account proceeds with the fall of idols as the Holy Family passes, following Origen (185?-254?), Eusebius of Caesarea, St. Athanasius (297?-373), and the German mystic Catherine Emmerich (1774-1824). In different words the same events are narrated in Vincenzo Gregorio Berchiolla, OMV, *S. Giuseppe: Manuale di letture e contemplazioni* (Nice, 1860), pp. 127-33; (Rome-Turin: Marietti, 1867²), pp. 112-21. On the fall of idols, see Marc-André [=Jean-Marie-Joseph] Huguet, *L'interiore di San Giuseppe: Letture e meditazioni* (Turin: Marietti, 1862), p. 92.

⁴⁸ [Bosco], *Vita di S. Pancrazio martire, Con appendice sul santuario a lui dedicato vicino a Pianezza* (Turin: Paravia, 1856), pp. 3-4: "To compile this little book I have read and given close consideration to the accounts of the most accredited legends of the saints regarding St. Pancras, martyr. I have also read the works of [the Carthusian monk Lawrence] Surius [1522-78] and the Bollandists for May 12 and p. 680 of the appendix [= *Acta sanctorum maii* 3 (Venice, 1738), 17-22, 680-82]; of Louis Sébastien LeNain de Tillemont (1637-98), *Memorie sopra la Storia Ecclesiastica*, vol. V [= II]; of Fr. [Charles] Juvenal [Barberis], Discalced Augustinian, *Delle meraviglie di S. Pancrazio, libri tre*, published [at Carmagnola] in 1655." For a recent bibliography on St. Pancras, see Antonio Rimoldi, "Pancrazio," in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* 10 (Rome, 1968), cols. 82-85.

than critical hagiography, the kind that likes to find its own convictions exemplified in the episodes recounted. Thus the courage of the martyr becomes a victorious confrontation with the supreme imperial authority, and the superiority of good over evil is exemplified in legendary accounts of nature's homage to the Son of God as he is being persecuted by corrupt and malign human nature.

Don Bosco's hagiographical works were part and parcel of the Piedmontese milieu, not only of the common people but also of educated clerical circles.⁴⁹ Canon Lawrence Gastaldi, who would become the archbishop of Turin, gave credit to the legend of the Theban martyrs of Turin.⁵⁰ He defended the view that the three martyrs, honored in Turin from the time when Saint Maximus (d. ca. 470) was bishop, belonged to the famous legion that had been decimated in Valais and was immortalized in the *Passio Acaunensium martyrum* by Saint Eucherius, bishop of Lyons (d. 449).⁵¹ In the course of centuries, popular thinking incorporated into the Theban Legion various saints whose cult was of obscure origins.⁵² The learned Gastaldi even credited problematic relics of the military martyrs on the authority of sixteenth-century authors, and he supported the etymology of *Val d'occo* from *Vallis* or *vallum occisorum*.⁵³ The soil of Valdocco,

⁴⁹ And, of course, it is in the same framework that we must situate the hagiographical works published in the LC: e.g., those by the Marist Mark Andrew Huguet, the French lay historian Peter Sebastian Laurentie (1793-1876), and the SDBs John Bonetti, John Baptist Lemoyne, and Julius Barberis.

⁵⁰ [Lorenzo Gastaldi], *Memorie storiche del martirio e del culto dei SS. martiri Solutore, Avventore ed Ottavio, Protettori della Città di Torino* (LC: Turin, 1866); published with the author's name (Turin: Speirani, 1880).

⁵¹ See D. van Berchem, *Le martyre de la légion thébaine: Essai sur la formation d'une légende* (Basle, 1956); L. Dupraz, *Les passions de S. Maurice d'Agaune: Essai sur l'historicité de la tradition* (Fribourg, 1961). The martyrs celebrated by St. Maximus were probably ordinary citizens of Turin.

⁵² See Felice Alessio, *I martiri tebei in Piemonte: Appunti critici* (Pinerolo, 1902), taken from vol. 17 of the *Biblioteca della Società storica subalpina*. Alessio also takes Gastaldi into account. Popular legend readily linked personages who were familiar. Thus Romulus (reigned 753-716 B.C.), the founder of Rome, dialogues with King David (fl. 1000 B.C.); and Constantine (280?-337) becomes the grandson of Nero (37-68) as well as the father-in-law of Rothari, king of the Lombards (reigned 636-52), who became the father of Pepin (714?-68) and Charlemagne (742-814). One legend had it that the 11,000 martyr companions of St. Ursula were wives or sisters of the 10,000 (or 11,000) soldiers of the Theban Legion. See Lanzoni, p. 208.

⁵³ In other words, an etymology as fanciful or semiserious as *ca-da-ver* = *caro data vermibus*. The etymologies suggested by experts on place names, such as Peter Massia and Dante Olivieri, run along the following lines: *Wald* (whence *Vald*) or *Vallis*. There is more uncertainty about the second part of the name. Massia suggests that *Valledoc* is a corruption of *Valle d'Otto*. Fr. John Baptist Borino, SDB (1881-1966), suggests that the ending *oc* might come from the noun *acqua* (*Valle d'acqua*) or a very rare diminutive (*Valletta*). See Dante Olivieri, *Dizionario di toponomastica piemontese* (Brescia, 1965), s.v. *Valdocco*. On *ca-da-ver*, see Beyerlinck, who presents the etymon without discussing it

wrote Gastaldi, “is evidently blessed by God, as we see from the various charitable institutions that have arisen on it. I need only mention the admirable Little House of Divine Providence and Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales as signs that it has been irrigated by the blood of our saints.”⁵⁴ Gastaldi, too, links the nobility of a site with personages he sees as important. Soil consecrated by the blood of Christ’s confessors would, by that very fact, be supernaturally fertile in the religious institutions it produced.

Don Bosco expressed many times his conviction that the Oratory was built on the precise spot hallowed by the blood of the Theban martyrs Adventor and Octavius. He printed it in the *Wonders of the Mother of God*.⁵⁵ More than once he told his Salesians of his 1844 dream, when he had been forced to abandon Saint Philomena Hospital and find a new place for his Oratory. Mary appeared to him in the fields of Valdocco:

“In this place,” she added, “where the glorious martyrs of Turin, Adventor and Octavius, suffered martyrdom, on these clods soaked and sanctified by their blood, I wish that God be honored in a very special manner.”⁵⁶

In the meantime, I found myself being surrounded by a very vast and ever increasing number of boys, but, as I kept looking to the Lady, the premises and the means were also growing accordingly. I saw then a very grand church on the very spot she had pointed out as the place where the soldiers of the Theban Legion had been martyred. There were a great many buildings all around, and in the center stood a beautiful monument.⁵⁷

Into his dreams, then, Don Bosco wove facts or events in which he had imperturbable faith.⁵⁸ Through its language the dream gave him a certainty that

(*Magnum theatrum vitae humanae* 2:1). See also Gerardus Johannes Vossius, *Ethymologicon linguae latinae* (Lyons, 1664), p. 86: “Suaviter nugantur, qui *cadaver* conflatum aiunt ex tribus vocibus, *caro data vermibus*.”

⁵⁴ [Gastaldi], pp. 42-43, note.

⁵⁵ *Maraviglie*, pp. 106-07, note; *Maria Ausiliatrice* (see n. 1), p. 28.

⁵⁶ BM 2:233, which comes from the chronicle of Fr. Barberis, Feb. 3, 1875. The narrative further on in BM 2:268 depends on Fr. Bonetti, *Annali III*, p. 66 (AS 110 Bonetti 4). But are we not dealing here with a duplicate?

⁵⁷ BM 2:233.

⁵⁸ We find something similar in the devotion of the Curé of Ars to the “martyr” Philomena. This devotion blossomed in the 19th century on the basis of very fragile archeological evidence and the visions of a nun noted for holiness. The cult was suppressed from the liturgical calendar in 1961. See Dante Balboni’s article on Philomena in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* 5 (Rome, 1964), cols. 796-800.

To make DB’s dream historical proof of the caliber of the Thebans and the site of their martyrdom would be like taking Jerusalem as reconstructed on the basis of visions reported by Sr. Mary of Agreda or Catherine Emmerich. Such visions are topographically conflicting with each other and with the reality. They are of great value for students of folklore, but disastrous for archeologists.

he was in a blessed place that would serve to spread God's glory. The fact that his Oratory was prospering could serve to confirm the divine power at work in the area.

Don Bosco had no taste for larding his hagiographical and biographical writings with miracles.⁵⁹ But he and those around him did assume supernatural intervention when singular events, such as unforeseen sudden cures, could be verified. They were ready to be moved when they contemplated events that seemed to be tangible proof of divine intervention. Don Bosco did not whimsically multiply miraculous narratives, but he had the profoundest respect for testimony from witnesses he deemed trustworthy.

This attitude, too, must be considered an important factor in his tenacious efforts and his basic religious outlook. It is in no way contradictory to his well-known cautiousness, his practical ability, his critical sense, and the penetrating eye he displays in matters involving his talents as educator, organizer, and entrepreneur.

But is it possible that we are not dealing with the ingenuous or unwitting process whereby legends are created? Perhaps we are dealing with a conscious effort to present facts in such a way that they will evoke wonder, sympathy, excitement, and cooperation.

Is it not Don Bosco himself who substitutes hyperbolic figures for the real ones when he describes the number of youths under his care or the growing number of Salesians?⁶⁰ An oral tradition that survives today tells us that Don Bosco put it something like this: If I say that I take care of 500 boys, people will think I take care of only 400; if I say 400, they will think 300 or 250.⁶¹ Don Bosco justifies promotional hyperbole in much the same spirit that an individual seems to use in declaring income for taxes. Finding tax rates exorbitant, the citizen declares lower income figures to the internal revenue service, feeling that the taxes actually paid will then be more in line with the reality of his or her actual finances. Don Bosco seems to think that his private benefactors and social-welfare agencies will have a similar mental reservation about his work and his figures, thus contributing in line with his real needs. And does Don Bosco not encourage Father Barberis to use hyperbole in writing to Countess Callori, one of his most faithful supporters? Tell the countess that the Salesians wear themselves out in festive oratories. Use hyperbole because it is a legitimate figure of speech as taught in rhetoric.⁶²

⁵⁹ The point about larding accounts with miracles (*miracolare*) is made by Fr. Caviglia when he discusses DB's biography of Dominic Savio: see *Opere e scritti* 4 (Turin, 1943), 389.

⁶⁰ See DBLW:179, the final paragraph of "Secondary Sources and Related Reading."

⁶¹ Statements brought to our attention by the more elderly SDBs of Turin.

⁶² Chronicle for Apr. 3, 1877, AS 110 Barberis 1, 11, pp. 62-63: "DB had me write to Countess Callori, giving her an account of events at the external [*sic*] Oratory during

In such amplifications dealing with institutions and the number of youths, Don Bosco tends to draw attention to the objective reality i.e., a charitable work begun, still alive, progressing, and in urgent need of support. In the presentation of extraordinary events, such as sudden or unexpected cures, Don Bosco shows the same psychological bent. He tends to draw attention to the objectivity and singularity of the happenings, which therefore point to God's special intervention. Verifying the work of God and proclaiming it are done in such a way as to kindle faith and evoke charity in an intricate interplay of factors that cannot easily be described.

Around Valdocco the most zealous inflator of facts may well have been Father Charles Viglietti, the enthusiastic young cleric who accompanied Don Bosco to France and Spain in 1885 and 1886. According to him, the crowds that flocked around Don Bosco were simply immense.⁶³ The little church of Belén, which can barely hold four thousand people standing tightly packed, had fifteen or twenty thousand people in it, according to Viglietti, when Don Bosco was celebrating Mass.⁶⁴ On April 10, 1886, Don Bosco was met by the agent of a rich lord, Joachim Jevert, marquis of Gélida. Viglietti reports that Jevert owned seventy ships. Jevert's daughter, questioned specifically in more recent times, said that the marquis was rich but had only three ships.⁶⁵

Travelling toward Sarrià, Don Bosco stopped at a convent. One of the nuns was brought to Don Bosco. She could not move. Reports Viglietti: "When the medal of Mary Help of Christians was placed on her legs, she was suddenly cured. We saw her running and jumping, much to the astonishment of her

Lent and the retreat given them. Among other things he told me to use as well the rhetorical device known as hyperbole in writing about our affairs to bring out all the hard work done for these youths. If it is a rhetorical device, that means its use is not to be condemned. In fact, it is generally taught in the schools."

⁶³ Chronicle for May 5, 1886, in Barcelona: "DB gave benediction to an immense crowd of at least 15,000. Leaving, we could not make it to the carriages waiting for us. The adjacent streets were simply jam-packed with people, shouting and weeping. People wait outside all night for the arrival of Don Bosco, go into church and pray, pray [*sic*], say the rosary..."

Here I am simply bringing up a few facts insofar as such facts had an impact on the outlook and behavior of DB. In vol. 3 of this series, *La Canonizzazione (1888-1934)* (Rome: LAS, 1988), I shall consider the formation, growth, and decline of legendary elements surrounding the personality of DB insofar as they relate to his influence and wider impact.

⁶⁴ Chronicle for Apr. 30, 1886.

⁶⁵ Questioned by Fr. Salvatore Rosés Llugany (1877?-1964), date unknown to us. AS 110 Viglietti has a typed and bound copy of the chronicle, with penned notes by Fr. Rosés. Fr. Ceria used these for the MB. Today Fr. Ramon Alberdi has checked the chronicle of Fr. Viglietti for the events that took place in Spain: see *Don Bosco en Barcelona: Itinerario en el centenario de su visita (1886-1986)* (Barcelona: Edebé, 1986).

whole community, who had seen her as an invalid for a long time.”⁶⁶ The fact is that the nun did feel cured at the moment and walked by herself, to the astonishment of her sister nuns. But she relapsed into the same malady shortly afterwards and was still completely bedridden when she was visited many decades later, expressly to verify the story, by Father Salvatore Rosés Llugany, a Salesian.

5. *Don Bosco and the extraordinary*

There is no denying the halo of legend that seems to surround events and personages that deeply affect the common people. But in many instances there is a solid core in the happenings that invites further reflection. The happenings cannot be regarded as nothing. With good reason might Don Bosco be induced to ponder, sometimes with uneasiness and sometimes with a sense of awe, what was happening inside him and around him ever since the dream he had around the age of nine.

Don Bosco may well have felt calmer when the events in question were wondrous cures, for then he could regard himself as playing a secondary role. He had merely served as a stimulus to lively faith and fervent prayer.⁶⁷

His attitude toward dreams was a different matter, however. In allegorical form they enabled him to perceive hidden facts or future events: sometimes in general terms, sometimes in very specific terms; sometimes with a feeling of certainty about the meaning of the symbols, sometimes uncertain about his own

⁶⁶ Chronicle for Apr. 20-21, 1886. One final point about Viglietti's chronicle: On Nov. 13, 1884, he noted: "DB told Bp. Cagliari, 'You will attend the closing of the [First] Vatican Council.'" Cagliari died in 1926, without any papal document coming down about its resumption or closing. Attempts were made to use this to accuse DB of false prophecies and thus wreck his beatification process. Fr. Philip Rinaldi, the Rector Major at that time, had to send a letter of clarification to the Card. Prefect of the Cong. of Rites, with strong words against Fr. Viglietti: "More than 40 years ago, while I was living and dealing with the oldest members, I came to know that when Cagliari was named a bishop, the Venerable had said that he *would live many years*, which was taken by us to mean he would live past 85—would pass 88 in fact—and that he would *participate in a great event in the Vatican*. DB did not specify what this *great event* would be. Viglietti, then a cleric, lightheartedly fashioned his own interpretation of DB's words and said, and wrote, that DB had told Bp. Cagliari that he *would attend the closing of the Vatican Council*. It is also true that for more than 40 years I and many others have judged Fr. Viglietti's interpretation to be downright arbitrary and false. And I have also said so to people who asked me about it. Asked about it specifically by me and others, Card. Cagliari himself always reiterated that DB had not made any such prophecy to him" (from Turin, Sept. 29, 1926; MB 18:400-01).

⁶⁷ Indeed, he did not hesitate to advertise them in issues of the LC.

interpretive capabilities. Don Bosco then waited to see how things would turn out in reality. He, like others, waited for verification of something that had seemed to him to be a prophecy but that he chose out of prudence to present merely as a parable.⁶⁸

To those who asked him how he could reveal hidden things Don Bosco was wont to give a jocular reply. He said that he used a magical formula: *otis botis pia tutis*.⁶⁹ In short, he evaded the question and thus invited the curious to halt at the threshold of mystery. It was a jesting way of getting across his own motto: *nulla ti turbi* ("let nothing trouble you": see John 14:1).⁷⁰ In other words, have patience and gentleness with all, especially with young people. Have fortitude when you have to ask for donations and face humiliation. Have courage and tranquillity in the difficulties of life because you thereby become holy and fulfill the will of God. But those who heard the *otis botis* might have gotten the feeling that they were confronting the supernatural.

Don Bosco himself admitted that he had posed the same indiscreet question to Dominic Savio. How had Dominic known that a dying man in a completely unknown house was in need of spiritual assistance? Writes Don Bosco: "Days later, I asked Dominic how he came to know about the dying man. His face took on a look of distress, and tears came to his eyes, so that I did not press my demand."⁷¹

In the intimacy of his Valdocco family or in circles of loyal friends in Rome, Florence, or Turin, Don Bosco was less unwilling to discuss the "old events and matters of the Oratory." Indeed he seems quite anxious to do so, even though they have to do with himself: "Not out of vainglory. No, that's not really involved. But to celebrate the magnificence and power of God; to show that when God wants something, he will make use of any means and make sure that all obstacles are overcome."⁷²

There were moments when he was deeply moved by coincidences that did not involve his own person in any substantive or direct way. He was seen crying in the quiet precincts of the episcopal garden in Pinerolo. He had opened one letter and read a demand for the return of thirty thousand lire. Then he opened a second letter from a Belgian lady, and she was offering him the same sum. The religious gears of Don Bosco were triggered at once and he uttered an emotional whisper: "The Madonna wishes us well."⁷³

⁶⁸ See my monograph *Don Bosco's Dreams*.

⁶⁹ AS 110/13 Berto, pp. 73-74.

⁷⁰ Note his first confidential reminder to SDB directors. See ch. XIV, n. 37, and the corresponding text, p. 460.

⁷¹ SDS:117.

⁷² Chronicle of Fr. Barberis, AS 110 Barberis 1, 10, p. 1.

⁷³ So reports the suspect witness, Fr. Viglietti. In this case, however, his testimony dovetails with what others report for similar circumstances. See Lemoyne, *Vita di San Gio-*

At times he was assailed by feelings of alarm and dismay, feelings akin to those of Moses near the burning bush and its aura of the supernatural. To a young Salesian priest, Father Stephen Trione (1856-1935), he once said jokingly: "I hope that you get the gift of miracles from God." Retorted Trione: "Nothing would be better! Then I could more easily convert sinners!" Don Bosco grew serious and replied: "If you had that gift, you would pretty soon beg God tearfully to take it away from you."⁷⁴ When he thought that the thaumaturgy associated with him might somehow be credited to his merits, he was careful to warn people. In his "Spiritual Testament" he tells his Salesians:

I urgently recommend to all my sons to refrain from making statements orally or in writing to the effect that Don Bosco ever obtained graces from God or worked miracles in any way. This would be a very serious mistake. Although the grace of God was abundantly bestowed on me, I have never pretended to be the recipient of supernatural powers or to know how to work miracles. I have only prayed and gotten saintly souls to pray to the Lord for His graces. At all times I have found the prayers and Communions of our boys most effective. The merciful God and His most holy Mother have come to our aid in our need.⁷⁵

Giving advice to his sons for future days, when he will no longer be with them and they will have to act without his help, Don Bosco apparently wanted to sound the need for caution. But the fact remains that the extraordinary did impregnate the religious outlook and life of Don Bosco and his milieu, serving as a stimulus for a certain kind of asceticism and apostolic activity. Taken as a whole, the extraordinary elements form a solid core surrounded by a halo of marvelous legend. Attempting to analyze them, the researcher often finds himself at the threshold of the unfathomable.

vanni Bosco 2:405. The episode has also been scrutinized by a careful scholar: Giovanni Battista Borino, *Don Bosco: Sei scritti e un modo di vederlo* (Turin: SEI, 1938), pp. 94-95.

⁷⁴ Lemoyne, *Vita* 2:443. The testimony seems to be worth accepting in substance even though the cast given it by Fr. Trione, a popular speaker, tends toward rhetorical dramatization.

⁷⁵ SWSJB:353-54. See MB 17:261. On dreams DB wrote as follows to Bp. Cagliero (Turin, Feb. 10, 1885): "I again urge you not to put too much stock in dreams, etc. If they help you to understand moral matters or our rules, fine, keep them in mind. Otherwise, pay them no heed" (*Ep.* 2532).

Others, however, remind us that this is not the only value or merit to be attributed to dreams. Speaking in the name of all, Fr. James Costamagna brings up the matter in a letter to Fr. Lemoyne: "Also tell Don Bosco that we shall not heed the words he wrote in his last letter to the bishop [i.e., Cagliero]: i.e., 'Don't believe everything my dreams say.' For we are content to make the profession of faith of Urban VIII [1568-1644], standing firmly by the visions of our Father, who one day said to me, and I shall never forget it: 'Of all the religious orders and congregations, ours may well be the one that has had more of the *word of God*.'" See MB 17:305.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The invisible world and the visible one equally interested and absorbed Don Bosco, even as they did many of his contemporaries. God, Mary, and the saints pervaded the lives of such people as Cardinal Newman, the Curé of Ars, Pope Pius IX, and Saint Bernadette Soubirous.* For Don Bosco it was only logical that God should be present in human affairs and vicissitudes. It was both natural and necessary that he himself, having an extraordinary mission to young people in extraordinarily difficult times, should be assisted by the Lord in a very special way.

For Don Bosco, sin and the assaults of hellish powers against human beings were realities whose effects could be verified. The Church was, in fact, being persecuted even as Christ had warned. But Don Bosco had an unshakable faith that the Church was the only ark of salvation offered to humanity by God. The Church was God's family, governed by Christ, its invisible head, and by Christ's vicar, the Pope. The latter was its visible head, the father to whom we owed loyal obedience.

The nineteenth century was a time of struggle and combat, but victory was fixed in the mind of Don Bosco even as it was in the minds of Gregory XVI, Pius IX, Frederick Ozanam, and the founders of Italian Catholic Youth. Goodness would certainly make its way onward and flourish. Since goodness came from God alone, "true" goodness was to be found only in the true religion; and only in the true religion was it possible to find true happiness. Outside of religion there could be no salvation, no true morality, true and complete education.

Like many others, Pascal and Newman had the conviction that evil continued to grow proportionately alongside goodness. Don Bosco himself was

* The words and images come from Henri Bremond (1865-1933) in his introductory remarks to the French edition of Newman, *Méditations et prières* (Paris, 1906), p. vi.

convinced that the Church had never faced such difficult times as it did in the nineteenth century. But even though the future of the Church was unclear, it was certain that goodness would be victorious. Even on its earthly journey, the Church would see a radiant dawn and enjoy a time of peace and glory.

Missionary expansion in the nineteenth century was a clear sign of progress for Don Bosco even as it was for Jesuit John Perrone, Pauline Marie Jaricot (1799-1862), and the promoters of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. The collapse of revolutions seemed to be a sign of victory and success. In the apparitions of LaSalette, Lourdes, and Spoleto as well as in the prophecies of Dominican Sister Rose Colomba Asdente of Taggia (d. 1847), Don Bosco and many others found reasons to be certain of their own faith and resolute in their actions. The Lord was near. The wicked would be confounded. Good people would see their constancy rewarded. The Pope would see the rainbow of peace, and the Salesian Society would see a glorious new day.

Like Saint Louis de Montfort, Charles Dufriche-Desgenettes, Pius IX, and many average Christians, Don Bosco was convinced that his was an age when God's aid to the Church was being funnelled through Mary. It was a time when Mary was to be honored and invoked. It was the hour of Mary Help of Christians: "Be devoted to Mary Help of Christians and you will see what miracles are."

The affairs of the human race that interested Don Bosco were not political events or scientific discoveries. His attention went to those matters that somehow were related to religion, to factors that affected or promoted religious growth in nations and people's souls. The historiography that meant something to Don Bosco was the one that pointed up the further progress of a divine plan, the triumph of good and the defeat of evil.

The new dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and papal infallibility had great evocative power. They were proclamations of truth realized with special divine assistance, symbols of what Catholics believed and hoped for. Mary Immaculate would always crush the head of hell and its forces, whether they were operative in schisms, heresies, personal sins, or revolutions. Peter was the rock against which the waves of evil would shatter. If we clung to Peter as a polyp to a rock, we could be sure of salvation in time and eternity.

Other figures served as symbols in the religious world of Don Bosco: Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Alphonsus Liguori, Saint Philip Neri, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, and Saint Vincent de Paul.

Saint Francis de Sales served as a banner and a hope for Don Bosco, even as he did for Monsignor Louis Gaston de Ségur, for the Association of Saint Francis de Sales for the defense of the faith, for Marchioness Barolo, and for the founders of charitable associations connected and unconnected with the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. The Francis de Sales of militant nineteenth-

century Catholics was the saint who had written the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and proposed holiness to all, more than the author of the *Treatise on the Love of God*. Above all, he was the apostle of the Chablais, the one who had won back to the Church seventy thousand heretics. Their Francis de Sales was the man burning with charity, zeal, and conquering love, the reincarnation of the gentle Christ on earth. For Don Bosco he was the holy model of the gentleness to be used with young people and all those who had to be led back to the Church.

The Saint Alphonsus who inspired Saint Joseph Cafasso, Cardinal Gousset, Joseph Frassinetti, and many other priests dedicated to the care of souls was not merely the probabilist or equiprobabilist of moral theology. He was the Alphonsus whose evangelically sound but gentle moral teaching had stemmed the Jansenist heresy, protected souls from a cold and discouraging moralism, and kept in the Church good, simple souls who would have left it to escape the rebukes of rigid, intemperate pastors.

The Saint Philip Neri who inspired Don Bosco was the one whose own life mirrored the affection of Jesus for children: "Let them come to me" (Luke 18:16). This was the Philip Neri who went through the streets of Rome and became like its children in all things save sin; who understood their irresistible urge to play and endorsed an inner serenity that exploded in noisy play as well as in prayer and angelic purity. The Philip Neri of Don Bosco was also Frederick William Faber's (1814-1863), the one whose heart overflowed with warmth and affection for Jesus in the Eucharist.

There was much less of Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Philip Neri in the writings of Don Bosco than there had been in the writings of Saint Alphonsus. But Don Bosco kept the evangelical essential of both: the figure of the gentle saint and limitless, contagious charity. Like many others of his day, Don Bosco hypostatized the two figures, offering an eternal image that stooped to deal with the cogent needs of the day.

In an age when disaffection from the Church seemed unrestrainable, Don Bosco joined many others in going back to the gospel message and looking to its nearest and most felicitous incarnations for the energy needed to leaven the world anew.

Don Bosco's vocation had been indicated to him on the threshold of adolescence, in his unforgettable dream around the age of nine. It found full expression in germinal form in his proposal of catechism lessons to Bartholomew Garelli on December 8, 1841. His priestly zeal had found its desired dimension. Along with a burning desire to save his own soul and those of others, he now knew the way to go about it: i.e., charity embodied in loving kindness that was respectful and hardworking.

That first contact with Garelli already had emblematic value for Don Bosco. It was catechesis under the aegis of Mary Immaculate, addressed to a

poor boy who had come from the Asti area to Turin, who had nothing against the Church, but who might have become an enemy of the Church and a danger to society if he had been left misunderstood and alienated.

What happened afterwards can be regarded as a duplication of the first episode. Don Bosco would renew the vital and affective ties of boys to the ark of salvation, boys who had been uprooted from their traditional surroundings and were in danger of becoming new apostates from the faith.

Don Bosco's work with Garelli multiplied into oratories, schools, and the Salesian Society. It was the progressive transformation of scattered animals into a docile flock under the supreme pastor, and of some of these sheep into co-workers in caring for the flock. The flock continued to grow around him, both in Turin and the world at large. It all was done under the prod of benign and patient charity, in an atmosphere of boisterous joy that camouflaged the painful pricks of the inevitable thorns.

Everything takes on a sense of urgency in times of disaffection, uprooting, and sharp conflict. Don Bosco's appeals evince the tension of imminent evils. Society had to be saved as soon as possible, or worse times would lie ahead. Society could be saved by giving a good education to the upcoming generation. If the task were postponed, it might be too late to do anything.

Don Bosco's *Da mihi animas* became the exercise of charity in the Constitutions of the Salesian Society. It found shape and solidity in the resolve to live by the chief theological virtue, which was a gift from God. In the nineteenth century that same virtue had found concrete expression in other works: the Schools of Charity of the Cavanis brothers; Rosmini's Institute of Charity; the prodigious growth of the Daughters of Charity, which had been founded by Vincent de Paul; Cottolengo's "the love of Christ impels us" (2 Cor 5:14); and the self-sacrificing work of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society and its local branches.

Relentless urgency prompted unremitting work and a concern for essentials. One had to discover the real possibilities of the moment and the new psychological and environmental factors at work. To the boys under his care, who were still capable of responding to religious ideals and seeking happiness, Don Bosco proposed an ideal of holiness that was easy, joyous, and hardworking. It was really nothing more than self-fulfillment—or, in the viewpoint of that day, the fulfillment of one's own ordinary duties.

To co-workers enchanted by his personality and ready to devote their whole lives to young people, Don Bosco proposed a religious life that was not meant to mirror the traditional images of that state, which were now prone to arouse antipathy and anticlericalism. His followers would be religious in shirtsleeves, happy and hardworking. Being with Don Bosco, they would be in a family, as it were. They would live as brothers, even as many of them had as adolescents at the Oratory.

For Don Bosco's co-workers vows, a uniform habit, communal practices of piety, and houses of formation would not be as evocative as their own private vocabulary and its corresponding realities: being with Don Bosco, working on behalf of young people, living as a family. Nothing seemed to spur them on as much as the conviction, verified by facts, that they were the kind of new religious envisioned for the salvation of souls in a new age. The simple means of sanctification utilized by good Christians of their time and place, such as the rosary and frequent communion, got the prophetic authorization of Don Bosco. For many Salesians the use of those simple means marked the start of their contemplation and their fervent communication with God.

It is not Don Bosco's little theoretical solutions but his whole life that gives new and singular meaning to expressions and pages which, in themselves, seem to reflect a more general and common mentality. It is his life that gives us the true measure of his sayings and writings. His life helps to provide us with what we do not find in his written pages: e.g., an articulate treatment of the spirituality of the diocesan and religious priest. His life bears witness to what Don Bosco did to integrate young people into the adult world without shock, whereas we have almost nothing from him on the theme of young people's "entry into the world" through specific vocational orientations and the formation of families of their own. The life of Don Bosco is what we come up with when we notice the language issuing from the pressure of the times on him and his inner life. In their allegorical form, his dreams objectivize the way he saw the world around him and how he felt he had to act in order to meet the "needs of the time." The allegory of his prophetic dreams objectivizes his aspirations. The reality that follows—the behavior of Don Bosco and others—gives prophetic and objective value to his dreams.

The essential and elementary nature of all Don Bosco's pages also takes its meaning from his surroundings. The same holds true for the spiritual writings of many others in the nineteenth century: e.g., Saint Anthony Claret, Louis Gaston de Ségur, and Isidore Mullois.

The nineteenth century did not have voices like those of Saints Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. The religious world of Piedmont in the nineteenth century could not base itself on contemporary mystical experiences; nor did it succeed in rooting itself in a new dogmatic theology of the sort articulated by John Adam Möhler, Matthias Scheeben (1835-1888), and Newman. The theological and spiritual backdrop of nineteenth-century Piedmont remained the literature of earlier centuries. Its spirituality was fed by Louis of Granada, Alphonsus Rodríguez, Venerable Louis de LaPuente, Bossuet, Francis de Sales, Saint Alphonsus, Archbishop Martini's translation of and commentary on the Bible, Bishop Casati's catechism, and more recent imports from

France. Considered in itself and apart from the conditions of the time, the spiritual production of Piedmont in the nineteenth century was fairly meager.

But the times were new and had their own originality. In the nineteenth century Catholics in Piedmont deplored sins against moral behavior and sins against faith. They were alarmed by violations of Sunday as a day of rest, seeing them as so many indications of abandonment of the Church. In the hands of workers they saw books and periodicals that were anticlerical, antireligious, and blasphemous. As the lower classes were being uprooted from their traditional locales, there was a real danger that they would be uprooted from the Church as well. Thus the thrust of nineteenth-century Catholicism in the region was new: toward conservation, conquest, and preservation of the masses now moving toward social and cultural betterment.

That is what we find in the case of Don Bosco. His treatment of religious themes is consciously and deliberately popular. He will draw from any source that can be renovated and placed at the disposal of youths and the common people. He addresses himself to the lower classes to win their basic adhesion to God in the Church, the sole ark of salvation. His apologetics, like that of many of his contemporaries, is not just that of reason or that of the heart; nor is it limited to anti-Protestant polemics on the catechetical level. It deliberately becomes the apologetics of educational work and helpful assistance, the usefulness of which was acknowledged by many people whether or not they were believers.

The value of this effort is best understood by looking at the course of events. It suggests that one of the characteristic phenomena of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the diffusion of an Italianizing spirituality in the Catholic world. Various factors were involved, many of which also helped to account for Don Bosco's own success. By virtue of their widespread impact and influence, his outlook and spirituality may well be considered one of the most characteristic, popular, and fertile expressions of nineteenth-century Italian Catholicism. If we want to find a close parallel in an earlier period, at least in terms of assimilative capacity, effectiveness, and syntony with the times, the best example might well be Vincent de Paul.

APPENDIX 1

Key to English Titles Used for Don Bosco's Works

The titles of works by Don Bosco cited in the text are given in English even though most of them have never appeared in English. This key enables the reader to find the name of the work in the original Italian. Full titles and bibliographical information are given in Appendix 2.

Apparition of the Blessed Virgin at
LaSalette

*Apparizione della Beata Vergine sulla
montagna di LaSalette*

Bible History

Storia sacra per uso delle scuole

The Catholic Church and Its Hierarchy

La Chiesa cattolica e la sua gerarchia

The Catholic Equipped for Pious
Practices

*Il cattolico provveduto per le pratiche di
pietà*

The Catholic in the World

Il cattolico nel secolo

A Celebration in Honor of Mary Help
of Christians

*Rimembranza di una solennità in onore
di Maria Ausiliatrice*

The Christian Trained in Conduct and
Courtesy

Il cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà

The Christian Vademecum

Porta teco cristiano

Church History

Storia ecclesiastica

A Collection of Curious Contemporary
Events

*Raccolta di curiosi avvenimenti
contemporanei*

The Companion of Youth

Il giovane provveduto

Confidential Reminders for Directors

Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori salesiani

Conversations Between a Lawyer and a
Country Pastor

*Conversazioni tra un avvocato ed un cu-
rato di campagna*

The Conversion of a Waldensian Girl

Conversione di una valdese

Cornerstone Ceremony

*Rimembranza della funzione per la
pietra angolare*

- A Debate Between a Lawyer and a Protestant Minister
Dramma: Una disputa tra un avvocato ed un ministro protestante
- Deliberations of the [First] General Chapter
Deliberazioni del capitolo generale...1877
- Deliberations of the Second Salesian General Chapter
Deliberazioni del secondo capitolo generale
- Deliberations of the Third and Fourth General Chapters
Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale
- Devotion to Mary Help of Christians
La nuvoletta del Carmelo
- Devotion to the Mercy of God
Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio
- Devotion to Your Guardian Angel
Il divoto dell'Angelo custodi
- Droll Tale of an Old Soldier of Napoleon
Novella amena di un vecchio soldato di Napoleone I
- Easy Way
Maniera facile per imparare la storia sacra
- Fundamentals of the Catholic Religion
Fondamenti della cattolica religione
- General Chapter of the Salesian Congregation (1877)
Capitolo generale della Congregazione salesiana...1877
- General Councils and the Catholic Church
I concili generali e la Chiesa cattolica
- The Gentleman's Almanac
Il galantuomo
- The History of Italy
La storia d'Italia
- The Jubilee Year
Il giubileo e pratiche devote
- The Key to Heaven for the Practicing Catholic
La chiave del paradiso
- The Life of Aloysius Comollo
Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo
- The Life of Blessed Catherine de Mattei da Racconigi
Cenni storici intorno alla vita della B. Caterina De-Mattei
- The Life of Blessed Mary of the Angels
Vita della beata Maria degli Angeli
- The Life of Dominic Savio
Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico
- The Life of Francis Besucco
Il pastorello delle Alpi
- The Life of Joseph Cafasso
Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso
- The Life of Michael Magone
Cenno biografico del giovanetto Magone Michele
- The Life of Saint Joseph
Vita di S. Giuseppe
- The Life of Saint Martin
Vita di san Martino
- The Life of Saint Pancras
Vita di S. Pancrazio martire
- The Life of Saint Peter
Vita di san Pietro
- Mary Help of Christians and Her Favors
Maria Ausiliatrice, col racconto di alcune grazie

Memoirs of the Oratory <i>Memorie dell'Oratorio di s. Francesco di Sales</i>	Rules or Constitutions of the Salesian Society <i>Regole o costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales</i>
The Month of May <i>Il mese di maggio</i>	Saint Peter's Centenary <i>Il centenario di S. Pietro</i>
Nine Days Consecrated to the August Mother of the Savior <i>Nove giorni consacrati</i>	The Salesian Cooperators <i>Cooperatori salesiani</i>
The Opening of Saint Peter's Hospice <i>Inaugurazione del patronato di S. Pietro</i>	Severino <i>Severino, ossia avventure</i>
The Power of a Good Upbringing <i>La forza della buona educazione</i>	Six Sundays <i>Le sei domeniche</i>
The Preventive System <i>Il sistema preventivo</i>	Spiritual Testament <i>Testamento spirituale</i>
The Religiously Instructed Catholic <i>Il cattolico istruito nella sua religione</i>	Two Debates on Purgatory <i>Due conferenze...intorno al purgatorio</i>
Rules for Salesian Houses <i>Regolamento per le case</i>	Valentine <i>Valentino, o la vocazione impedita</i>
Rules of the Oratory for Externs <i>Regolamento dell'Oratorio...per gli esterni</i>	Warnings to Catholics <i>Avvisi ai cattolici</i>
	The Wonders of the Mother of God <i>Maraviglie della Madre di Dio</i>

APPENDIX 2

Cross-Reference of Don Bosco's Italian Titles to English Key

Complete bibliographical information for works cited in the text, with English rendering; followed by bibliographical data for existing English translations. Titles published originally as part of *Letture cattoliche* are indicated by LC with the volume number and the issue(s).

Many of DB's works were reissued as reprints or new editions (some, like *Il giovane provveduto*, in dozens of them). Only the first edition is cited here. Anyone wishing information about subsequent editions may consult Pietro Stella, *Gli scritti a stampa di san Giovanni Bosco* (Rome: LAS, 1977).

Apparizione della Beata Vergine sulla montagna di LaSalette, con altri fatti prodigiosi raccolti da pubblici documenti. Turin: OSFS, 1871. LC 19: May.

Apparition of the Blessed Virgin at LaSalette

Avvisi ai cattolici: I nostri pastori ci uniscono al papa; il papa ci unisce con Dio. Turin: De-Agostini, 1853. LC: introduction. See also *La Chiesa cattolica*.

Warnings to Catholics

Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso [sic], esposta in due ragionamenti funebri. Turin: Paravia, 1860. LC 8: Nov.-Dec.

The Life of Joseph Cafasso

English trans. *The Life of St. Joseph Cafasso* by Patrick O'Connell. Rockford, IL: TAN, 1983.

Capitolo generale della Congregazione salesiana da convocarsi in Lanzo nel prossimo settembre 1877. Turin: Salesiana, 1877.

General Chapter of the Salesian Congregation (1877)

Il cattolico istruito nella sua religione: Trattenimenti di un padre di famiglia co' suoi figliuoli secondo i bisogni del tempo. Turin: De-Agostini, 1853. LC 1: Mar., Apr. 10, May 25, July 10 + 25, Sept. 10. Original title (1850): *Il Cattolico istruito*.

The Religiously Instructed Catholic

Il cattolico provveduto per le pratiche di pietà, con analoghe istruzioni secondo il bisogno dei tempi. Turin: OSFS, 1868.

The Catholic Equipped for Pious Practices

Il cattolico nel secolo: trattenimenti famigliari di un padre coi suoi figliuoli alla religione.

Turin: Salesiana, 1883. LC 31: Jan.-Mar.

The Catholic in the World

Cenni storici intorno alla vita della B. Caterina De-Mattei da Racconigi dell'ord. delle pen. di s. Dom. Turin: OSFS, 1862. LC 10: Jan.-Feb.

The Life of Blessed Catherine de Mattei da Racconigi

Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo, morto nel seminario di Chieri, ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù. Turin: Speirani and Ferrero, 1844.

The Life of Aloysius Comollo

Cenno biografico del giovanetto Magone Michele, allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales. Turin: Paravia, 1861. LC 9: Sept.

The Life of Michael Magone

English trans. in W.L. Cornell, *Don Bosco: Spiritual Director of Young People.* Manila: Salesiana, 1986, pp. 111-156.

Il centenario di S. Pietro apostolo, colla vita del medesimo principe degli apostoli ed un triduo in preparazione della festa dei santi apostoli Pietro e Paolo. Turin: OSFS, 1867. LC 15: Jan.-Feb.

Saint Peter's Centenary

La chiave del paradiso in mano al cattolico che pratica i doveri di buon cristiano. Turin: Paravia, 1856.

The Key to Heaven for the Practicing Catholic

La Chiesa cattolica-apostolica-romana è la sola vera Chiesa di Gesù Cristo: Avvisi ai Cattolici. I nostri pastori ci uniscono al papa. Turin: Speirani and Ferrero, 1850.

Warnings to Catholics

La Chiesa cattolica e la sua gerarchia. Turin: OSFS, 1869. LC 17: Feb.

The Catholic Church and Its Hierarchy

I concili generali e la Chiesa cattolica: conversazioni tra un parroco e un giovane parochiano. Turin: OSFS, 1869. LC 17: Aug.

General Councils and the Catholic Church

Conversazioni tra un avvocato ed un curato di campagna sul sacramento della confessione. Turin: Paravia, 1855. LC 3: June 10 + 25.

Conversations Between a Lawyer and a Country Pastor

Conversione di una valdese: Fatto contemporaneo. Turin: De-Agostini, 1854. LC 2: Mar.

The Conversion of a Waldensian Girl

Cooperatori salesiani, ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume ed alla civile società. Turin: Salesiana, 1876.

The Salesian Cooperators

Il cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di san Vincenzo de' Paoli: Opera che puo servire a consecrare il mese di luglio in onore del medesimo santo. Turin: Paravia, 1848.

The Christian Trained in Conduct and Courtesy

English trans. *The Christian Trained in Conduct and Courtesy According to the Spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul*, trans. Silvester Andriano, ed. Margaret L. MacPherson (Paterson, NJ: Salesiana, 1956).

Deliberazioni del capitolo generale della pia Società Salesiana, tenuto in Lanzo-Torinese nel settembre 1877. Turin: Salesiana, 1878.

Deliberations of the [First] General Chapter

Deliberazioni del secondo capitolo generale della Pia Società Salesiana, tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel settembre 1880. Turin: Salesiana, 1882.

Deliberations of the Second Salesian General Chapter

Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale della Pia Società Salesiana, tenuti in Valsalice nel settembre 1883-86. S. Benigno Canavese: Salesiana, 1887.

Deliberations of the Third and Fourth General Chapters

Il divoto dell'Angelo custodi, aggiungetevi le indulgenze concesdute alla Compagnia canonicamente eretta nella chiesa di S. Francesco d'Assisi in Torino. Turin: Paravia, 1845.

Devotion to Your Guardian Angel

Dramma: Una disputa tra un avvocato ed un ministro protestante. Turin: De-Agostini, 1853. LC 1: Dec. 25.

A Debate Between a Lawyer and a Protestant Minister

Due conferenze tra due ministri protestanti ed un prete cattolico intorno al purgatorio e intorno ai suffragi dei defunti, con appendice sulle liturgie. Turin: Paravia, 1857. LC 4: Feb.

Two Debates on Purgatory

Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio. Turin: Botta, 1847.

Devotion to the Mercy of God

Fondamenti della cattolica religione. Turin: OSFS, 1872.

Fundamentals of the Catholic Religion

La forza della buona educazione: Curioso episodio contemporaneo. Turin: Paravia, 1855. LC 3: Nov. 10 + 25.

The Power of a Good Upbringing

English trans. *Peter; or, The Power of a Good Education*, trans. from the French version, which in turn is based on the 2nd Italian ed. (*Pietro, ossia la forza della buona educazione.* [Turin: Salesiana, 1881]). London: Burns, n.d. (This edition came to the editor's attention too late to be used in the translation.)

Il galantuomo: Almanacco nazionale pel... Issued annually by DB for 1854 through 1888, with somewhat varying titles. Various Turinese publishers.

The Gentleman's Almanac

Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de' suoi doveri degli esercizi di cristiana pietà per la recita dell'uffizio della beata Vergine e de' principali vespri dell'anno coll'aggiunta di una scelta di laudi sacre, ecc.. Turin: Paravia, 1847.

The Companion of Youth

English adaptation. *The Companion of Youth: A Book of Prayers and Guidance for Boys.* London: Salesian, 1955. (This edition came to the editor's attention too late to be used in the translation.)

Il giubileo e pratiche devote per la visita delle Chiese. Turin: De-Agostini, 1854. LC 2: Nov. 10 + 25.

The Jubilee Year

Inaugurazione del patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare: Scopo del medesimo con appendice sul sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù. Turin: Salesiana, 1877.

The Opening of Saint Peter's Hospice

Maniera facile per imparare la storia sacra ad uso del popolo cristiano. Turin: Paravia, 1855. LC 3: Mar. 10 + 25.

Easy Way

Maraviglie della Madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice. Turin: OSFS, 1868. LC 16: May.

The Wonders of the Mother of God

Maria Ausiliatrice, col racconto di alcune grazie ottenute nel primo settennio dalla consacrazione della chiesa a Lei dedicata in Torino. Turin: OSFS, 1875. LC 23: May.

Mary Help of Christians and Her Favors

Memorie dell'Oratorio di s. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855, ed. Eugenio Ceria, SDB. Turin: SEI, 1946.

English trans. *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855,* trans. Daniel Lyons, SDB. Notes and commentary by Eugenio Ceria, SDB, Lawrence Castelvechi, SDB, and Michael Mendl, SDB. New Rochelle: Don Bosco, 1989.

Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata ad uso del popolo. Turin: Paravia, 1858. LC 6: Apr.

The Month of May

Nove giorni consacrati all'augusta madre del Salvatore, sotto al titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice. Turin: OSFS, 1870. LC 18: May.

Nine Days Consecrated to the August Mother of the Savior

Novella amena di un vecchio soldato di Napoleone I. Turin: OSFS, 1862. LC 10: Dec.

Droll Tale of an Old Soldier of Napoleon

La nuvoletta del Carmelo, ossia la divozione a Maria Ausiliatrice premiata di nuove grazie. S. Pier d'Arena: S. Vincenzo de' Paoli / Turin: Salesiana, 1877. LC 25: May.

Devotion to Mary Help of Christians

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When uncertainty may exist as to whether an author should be alphabetized by his given name or in some other fashion, his name is given as it appears in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*.

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INDEXES

Six indexes are offered: 1. Sacred Scripture, subdivided as (a) Texts, and (b) Persons; 2. Writings and other works of Don Bosco; 3. Authors and other sources; 4. Persons; 5. Places; and 6. Topics.

Since so much textual material is contained in the footnotes and so many early modern, as well as contemporary, authors are cited, these are included in the indexes.

The use of hyphens between consecutive page numbers, e.g. 408-09, indicates that the work, person, or topic is mentioned on both pages, but not necessarily continuously.

The following abbreviations are used in the indexes:

bet.	between
BVM	Blessed Virgin Mary
DB	Don Bosco
MHC	Mary Help of Christians
OSFS	Oratory of St. Francis de Sales
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
relig.	religious
Sal.	Salesian
SS	Salesian Society
SVPS	St. Vincent de Paul Society
tow.	toward
w.	with

Main entries are abbreviated as needed in subentries by using the first letter(s) of the main entry rather than spelling it out.

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