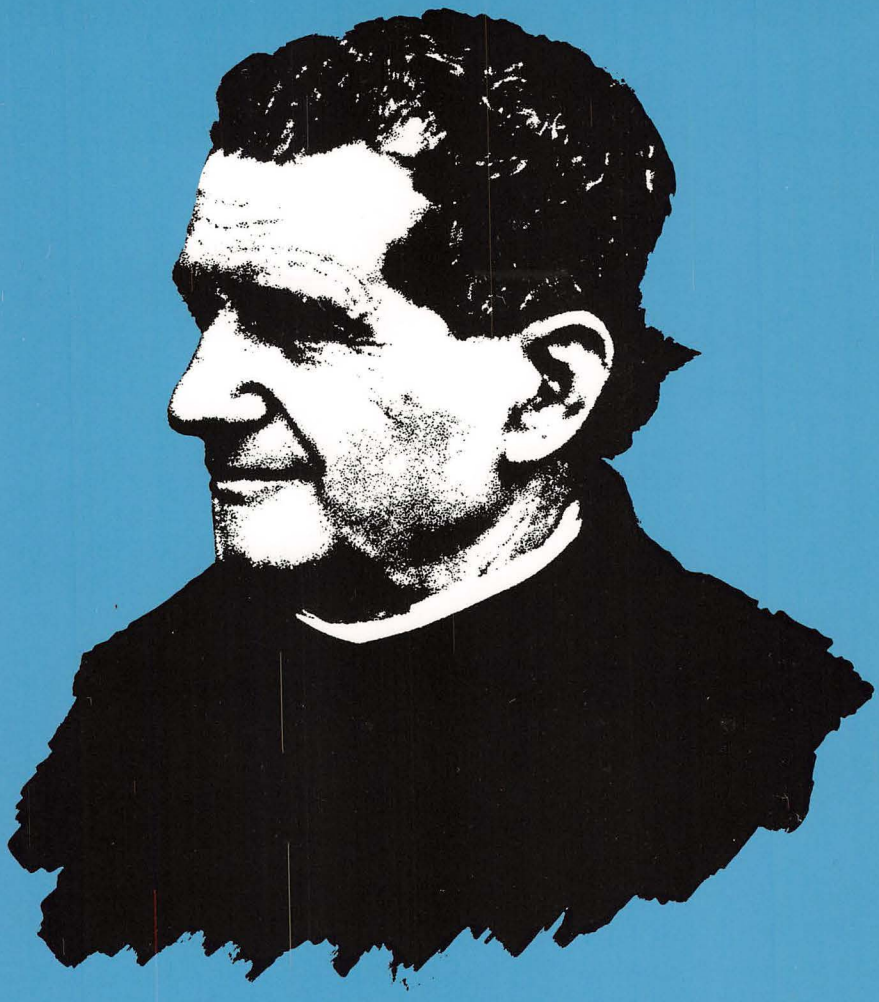


VOLUME XV - 1881-1882

# THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

of Saint John Bosco



# FATHER EUGENIO CERIA

FATHER EUGENIO CERIA (1870-1957) already enjoyed the reputation of a distinguished scholar, author, and editor when in 1929 Father Philip Rinaldi, Superior General, asked him to continue the publication of the **Biographical Memoirs,** the monumental work begun by Father John Baptist Lemoyne. Father Ceria's qualifications had been enhanced by his personal contact with Don Bosco during his formative years as a novice and a student of Philosophy at San Benigno Canavese and Valsalice. **Don Bosco con Dio,** published in 1930 and now considered his masterpiece, is a penetrating and inspiring study of his spiritual father.

By systematic and persevering effort Father Ceria brought the **Biographical Memoirs** to completion in 1939, his contribution being Volumes XI-XIX. Other works followed. While compiling the **Annali della Società Salesiana** in four large volumes (1941-51), he published biographies of St. Mary Mazzarello, the Venerable Father Michael Rua, the Servants of God Father Andrew Beltrami and Father Philip Rinaldi, and many other outstanding Salesians. Though advanced in age, he undertook the collection and editing of the **Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco,** in four volumes, two of which were published before his death, which occurred on January 21, 1957 at the age of 86.

# The Salesian Society

1987

| | |
|---|---|
| Membership | 17,644 |
| Countries | 92 |
| Provinces | 77 |
| Houses | 1,572 |
| Bishops | 63 |
| Archbishops | 19 |
| Cardinals | 5 |

# The Daughters Of Mary Help Of Christians

1987

| | |
|---|---|
| Membership | 17,202 |
| Countries | 70 |
| Provinces | 77 |
| Houses | 1,506 |

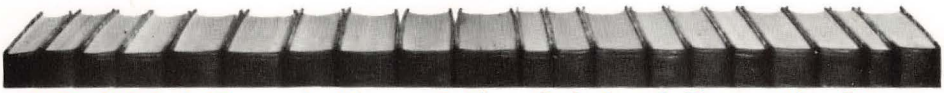

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# THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS OF ST. JOHN BOSCO




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# THE

# BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

# OF

# SAINT JOHN BOSCO

# *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*

by

REV. EUGENIO CERIA, S.D.B.

AN AMERICAN EDITION
TRANSLATED
FROM THE ORIGINAL ITALIAN

REV. DIEGO BORGATELLO, S.D.B.
*Editor-in-chief*

Volume XV
1881-82

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*Feast of the Birth of Mary*

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FIRST EDITION

# Dedicated

WITH PROFOUND GRATITUDE

TO

THE LATE, LAMENTED, AND HIGHLY ESTEEMED

**VERY REVEREND FELIX J. PENNA, S.D.B.**

(1904-1962)

TO WHOSE

WISDOM, FORESIGHT, AND NOBLE SALESIAN HEART

THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

OF

THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

OF

SAINT JOHN BOSCO

IS

A LASTING MONUMENT

This Volume is Dedicated

to

**SISTER ANTOINETTE POLLINI**

Daughter of Mary, Help of Christians,

Missionary and twice Provincial

of the Salesian Sisters

in the United States.

Deeply loved and appreciated

by her Sisters,

she will always be remembered

for her love of Don Bosco

and the implementation

of his Preventive System

through

Reason, Religion and Loving Kindness

# *Editor's Preface*

SAINT JOHN BOSCO, the central figure of this vastly extensive biography, was a towering person in the affairs of both Church and State during the critical 19th century in Italy. He was the founder of two very active religious congregations during a time when other orders were being suppressed; he was a trusted and key liaison between the Papacy and the emerging Italian nation of the *Risorgimento*; above all, in troubled times, he was the saintly Christian educator who successfully wedded modern pedagogy to Christ's law and Christ's love for the poor young, and thereby deserved the proud title of *Apostle of youth*.

He is known familiarly throughout the world simply as Don Bosco.[1] His now famous system of education, which he called the *Preventive System,* was based on reason, religion and kindness, and indicated by its descriptive name that, also in education, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. He always sought to place pupils in the moral impossibility of committing sin, the moral disorder from which all evils flow.

To ensure the continuation of his educational mission in behalf of youth he founded two worldwide religious congregations, the Society of St. Francis de Sales (Salesian Society) and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians (Salesian Sisters), which today number more than 40,000 members conducting 2,800 educational institutions throughout the world.

To help in the difficult art of educating the young, Don Bosco planned to expound his method of education in a book but, absorbed as he was in the task of firmly establishing his two religious congregations and in unceasing other labors, he had to content himself with a simple outline of his ideas in a golden little treatise entitled *The Preventive System in the Education of Youth.*

[1] *Don* is an abbreviation of the Latin *dominus,* master. It is used in Italy as a title for priests; it stands for *Father.*

Fortunately, the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco* are ample compensation for a book which, if written, might have given us only theories. These memoirs, a monumental work in nineteen volumes, until recently reserved exclusively to Salesians and published only in the original Italian, are now available in this American edition not only to his spiritual children, devotees and admirers, but also to all who are interested in education.

In these volumes Don Bosco is shown in action: not *theorizing*, but *educating*. What he said and did in countless circumstances was faithfully recorded by several of his spiritual sons, chief among them Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne. From the day he first met Don Bosco in 1864 to his own death in 1916, Father Lemoyne spent his life recording words and deeds of Don Bosco, gathering documents,[2] interviewing witnesses, and arranging raw material for the present nineteen volumes of the life of Don Bosco, eight of which he himself authored besides readying another volume for the press before his death.

In the compilation of the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, Father Lemoyne's primary sources were the *Memorie dell'Oratorio dal 1835 al 1855* (Memoirs of the Oratory from 1835 to 1855) written by Don Bosco himself, the diaries and chronicles of various fellow Salesians who daily recorded what Don Bosco said or did, numerous letters of the Saint, the *Cinque lustri di storia dell'Oratorio de S. Francesco di Sales* (The History of the First Twenty-five Years of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales) written by Father John Bonetti, S.D.B., and personally checked by Don Bosco, the proceedings of the diocesan process of beatification and other unimpeachable contemporary documents and testimonies. Above all, Father Lemoyne, intelligent, conscientious and well-informed, not only used reliable sources, but was himself an eye witness. He recorded what he personally saw and heard from Don Bosco. This enabled him to write a true history, even though not according to modern critical methods. He concerned himself principally with presenting chronologically his vast selected material and therefore his narrative is somewhat fragmentary and may lack scientific method. It is nevertheless true history, even Volume I which deals mainly with Don Bosco's youth

[2]All the documents in the archives at the Salesian Motherhouse in Turin, Italy are now being microfilmed and stored in the Don Bosco College Library in Newton, New Jersey.

and the training he received from Mamma Margaret, his mother.[3] When gifted writers and scholars of the future will produce a critical biography of Don Bosco, the *Biographical Memoirs* will still not be surpassed because Father Lemoyne lived at Don Bosco's side, wrote what he saw and heard, and eminently succeeded in giving us a living portrait of Don Bosco.

In editing the translation of the *Biographical Memoirs* accuracy and readability were the goals we set. This was not easy and occasionally, as regards the latter, we may have fallen short of the mark. Nineteenth-century Italian does not readily lend itself to an agile version that strives to be an accurate translation and not a paraphrase.

May the reading of these *Memoirs* portraying the life of a man whom Pope Pius XI called "a giant of sanctity" inspire his spiritual children, to whom this work is primarily directed, and all men and women of good will to walk their own path of life in a spirit of service to God and man.

Fr. Diego Borgatello, S.D.B.
*Editor-in chief*

New Rochelle, N.Y.
*June 5, 1965*
124th Anniversary of Don Bosco's Ordination

## EDITOR'S NOTE

As with Volumes VI through X and Volumes XII through XIV, we have omitted material from the original text that is of little interest to American readers and of no direct consequence to these biographical memoirs. Such omissions will always be pointed out in the footnotes.

Fr. Diego Borgatello, S.D.B.
*Editor-in chief*

New Rochelle, N.Y.
September 8, 1988
*Feast of the Birth of Mary*

[3]Cf. Francis Desramaut S.D.B., *Les Memorie I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, Étude d'un ouvrage fondamental sur la jeunesse de saint Jean Bosco,* Lyon, 1962, pp. 411ff.

## *Author's Preface*

OUR Holy Father, Pius XI, in an audience granted us on April 29 [1933], strongly advised that we allot ample space throughout these *Biographical Memoirs* to documentation.

"Valuable as an author's own comments may be," he remarked, "it is the documents that really matter. Above everything else they will benefit posterity, and posterity will search for them." These words we took to be an unqualified, highly authoritative approval of the method we have so far followed, as well as an encouragement to pursue it to the very end. Present and future scholars will never be made to lack anything which may document a life so complex and engaging. Precisely that nothing might become lost—for unforeseen situations often bring to light documents unknown in the past—from the very start of our work we decided to group these documents into special appendices to each volume.

Ample documentation will shed ever brighter light upon Don Bosco's figure, as an impartial study of the harrowing two years of this volume will once more convince us. Unfortunately we cannot say the same of his opponents. However, the hour has struck to mark the end of this prolonged, heroic forbearance. In moments of severest opposition, Don Bosco used to say: "Patience! In due course everyone will know. In His own good time God will bring it all to light." That time is today [1933].

As for the documents themselves we must say something more. Documenting Don Bosco's life requires some clarification, if, in years to come, competent and conscientious historians are not to run into seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

We today [1933] have certain knowledge of many incidents in Don Bosco's life, but in future years when historical criteria are applied to these facts, genuine authentic documentation supporting their historicity will be lacking. Their certainty rests upon a situation which was slightly, if at all, ever noticed and usually overlooked, since no one felt the need to call attention to it. We know that in private conversations and—rather often—in public gatherings, Don Bosco enjoyed telling

stories of events which had happened in the many years preceding the establishment of the Oratory. With the passage of time these reminiscences became rarer, but they never totally ceased. For instance, readers of this very volume will find Don Bosco, at an entertainment given him in France, narrating the famous episode of an attempt made to place him in an insane asylum. So also, at San Benigno, he retold to Father Barberis accounts of other things that had happened to him many years before. However, while in the prior instance his words were stored in the audience's memory, in the latter his listener recorded what he heard and carefully preserved a written account of it.[1] Had this been done more often, our documentation of earlier events would not be as scarce as it is today, to the regret perhaps of those coming after us. These often repeated narratives or confidences gave rise to a living tradition which swiftly spread, albeit under the immediate control of persons who were in a position to point out any distortion of the truth, even at times by consulting Don Bosco himself. It was from this source that Father Lemoyne drew abundantly, without being overly worried about bolstering his narrative with those trifling accessory details which might lend it credibility and trustworthiness for the sake of posterity. This is one caution we must bear carefully in mind in reading his weighty nine volumes. Until these last few decades, while eyewitnesses or trustworthy testifiers of the tradition were still alive, his accounts were accepted with unruffled trust in his knowledge of the facts and in his honesty; however, it shall not always be so. A time will come when readers, unfamiliar with the milieu we have described, will want to get to the bottom of the matter at hand. Hence, before discrediting an account of his or some noteworthy detail, we must recall the very special circumstances of milieu in which the trustworthy author brought his work to completion.

Let us be more specific and take, for example, the very well known episode of [Turin's reformatory] La Generala. Don Bosco's contemporaries and those who heard the story, influenced by that milieu, believed it without the least hesitation. But "one generation passes and another comes" [Eccl. 1, 4] and will not those who regard that era as "days of yore" read it as a legend? Won't they say, "What a miraculous power of education—for one man to take on an outing several hundred juvenile delinquents from a reformatory, unescorted by guards, and yet

[1] *See* p. 404 and Appendix 4 of this volume. [Editor]

no one escapes?[2] Surely, the newspapers of the day must have carried so extraordinary a story, and records may still be in the reformatory's files." However, search as you will, there is nothing to find: nothing in the press, nothing in the reformatory archives. Going one step further, I say that no one can find even one single reliable document to pinpoint the year when this occurred. Back in 1882 attempts were made to establish this and proved unavailing. We do not precisely know who undertook this investigation, of which we have evidence in a letter from Stupinigi.[3] A priest of the area replies to his inquirer: "I am sorry I must tell you again that all my research into the year when the young offenders of La Generala came here, thanks to Don Bosco's kindness, has proved unavailing. I called on the parish priest at Mirafiori, the oldest pastor in this area, and while he recalls the event perfectly well, he cannot tell us the precise year." Obviously, Don Bosco himself could not pinpoint the year; else why was it necessary to seek information so far from the Oratory?[4] Luckily in this instance we have the word of an eyewitness who testifies to the facts—the only authoritative document so far concerning that famed event.

This lack of records which may vex future historians is already affecting the historians of today. We are often asked: "How is it that the first volume of [Edward] Soderini's[5] *Life of Leo XIII* mentions a host of minute details about the preparations for the conclave in which Cardinal Joachim Pecci became Leo XIII, but makes no mention of Don Bosco's contacts with [Francis] Crispi, Minister of the Interior, and [Pasquale] Mancini, Minister of Justice? The reason is very simple: Soderini had no documentation of these contacts to go by. Don Bosco's involvement was strictly confidential and exclusively oral with not the slightest trace of any official character. He was probably entrusted with this mission by Cardinal [Camillus] Di Pietro who, as dean of the Sacred College [and camerlengo], was obliged to busy himself immediately and extensively with the location of the forthcoming conclave. True, Mancini had hastened to write Cardinal Di Pietro a very confi-

[2]*See* Vol. V, pp. 140-144. [Editor]

[3]A suburb of Turin. [Editor]

[4]The letter, dated October 16, 1882, seems to have been found among Father Bonetti's papers. This guess is also confirmed by the fact that, as director of the *Bollettino Salesiano*, he was then writing a serial account called *History of the Oratory*. In the November 1882 issue it published the story of La Generala's juveniles' outing with Don Bosco. The priest who wrote the letter addressed his correspondent as "director." [Author]

[5]Author of *Il Pontificato di Leone XIII*, Mondadori, Milan, 1932. [Editor]

dential letter, later published by Soderini, to assure His Eminence that the Italian government would in no way hinder the freedom of the Sacred College to hold the conclave in Rome; however, this letter does not render Don Bosco's intervention superfluous. Certainly, the cardinal must have known that Crispi, while debating the Law of Guarantees, had stressed to the entire parliament how necessary it was for the Italian authorities to keep an eye on the conclave. Consequently he could not help but realize the wisdom of sounding out Crispi's real intentions and of ascertaining whether or not the government's actual stand was in accord with its written assurances. Now no one was better suited to find this out than Don Bosco. Cardinal Di Pietro, who had become acquainted with his cleverness and prudence when, as bishop of Albano, he had dealings with him on the local school issue there, also shared Don Bosco's conciliatory views, in the interest of souls, concerning relations between the Holy See and the Italian state.

This also answers a doubt raised by Mollat in his excellent book on the Roman Question. Commenting on an article by our Father [Augustin] Auffray[6] concerning Don Bosco's conduct throughout the Italian *Risorgimento*, he concludes that in this particular regard the documents published by Crispi's nephew would seem to contradict the Salesian version.[7] From these documents we learn that no sooner had Pius IX died than Mancini proposed that Premier [Augustine] De Pretis send a confidential letter [to the cardinal camerlengo], giving him assurances that would dissuade the Vatican from holding the conclave outside Rome.[8] But, as we have said above, one point of view does not exclude the other. *Méfiance, mère de sûreté!* [Mistrust is the mother of certainty!] Among us, Don Bosco's interventions in those matters have ever been held as most certain facts, knowledge of which was handed down partly by Father Joachim Berto, who had accompanied Don Bosco to Rome in 1878, and partly from confidences made by Don

[6]"La politique d'un Saint: Don Bosco aux heures du Risorgimento," *Études*, June 2, 1929. [Author].

[7]G. Mollat, professor at the University of Strasbourg, *La Question Romaine de Pie VI à Pie XI*. Paris: Lecoffre, 1932, pp. 371f. Father Auffray's article formed a separate chapter in his *Life of Don Bosco* which was so well received in France and in French-speaking countries. [Author]

[8]Francis Crispi, *Politica Interna*, Ch. 8, pp. 81-93. These pages state that the letter was addressed to the cardinal camerlengo, with whom Mancini had apparently been corresponding, but, actually, the addressee was the cardinal dean with whom Mancini was really on fairly familiar terms. There is no evidence that Mancini had any contact with Cardinal Pecci, who was the "camerlengo." [Author]

Bosco himself. Father Lemoyne has left a record of it in his usual manner, on which we shall comment shortly.

To take another instance, Soderini's second volume,[9] speaking of the *exequatur*[10] denied to Italian bishops, remarks: "Thus, Cardinal [Lucido] Parocchi, a man of letters, who had been appointed archbishop of Bologna, had to wait five years for the *exequatur*, despite the reiterated insistence of two senators, [Joachim] Pèpoli[11] being one, and the appeals of Bologna's civic authorities. These circumstances forced the cardinal to resign and live in Rome in order to avoid greater evils."

Now as our readers will recollect,[12] Don Bosco took a hand in this matter too, specifically mandated by the Holy See. He did all he could in both Bologna and Rome to break down opposition; some clues to his exertions may be found in the cardinal's reports to the papal secretariat of state. However, it is certain that on Don Bosco's part all proceedings were oral, of which but few details were mentioned; of these, as he always did, Father Lemoyne took due note.

In both these instances, as also in many others, Father Lemoyne in gathering his material never overlooked a chance to obtain testimonials which would lend worth to his planned *Biographical Memoirs*, diligently taking notes and saving them. Witnesses are still living today who can attest that, notes in hand, he would sometimes ask Don Bosco himself about details to be cleared up or matters that needed completing.[13] Then, about thirty years ago, coordinating these records with our

[9]*Il Pontificato di Leone XIII*, p. 31. [Author]

[10]Permission granted by a civil ruler for the exercise of a bishop's functions under papal authority or for the publication of papal bulls. [Editor]

[11]Count Joachim Pèpoli of Bologna was an outstanding statesman and patriot. [Editor]

[12]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 72ff. In the first line of p. 73 the first name of Pèpoli should read "Joachim" instead of "Charles." [Editor]

[13]Particularly important is Father Lemoyne's statement concerning what he wrote about Don Bosco's mother. In Volume I, pp. 92f of these *Biographical Memoirs*, he stated: "As concerns Mamma Margaret all that has been written has come directly from Don Bosco himself. For six years and more we had the good fortune to spend almost every evening in friendly conversation with him. Although we very rarely returned to material already covered, whenever I questioned him about what he had told me years before and I had faithfully recorded, I was amazed to hear him repeat the same things about his mother and her very same words, so exactly indeed that he seemed to be reading from a book. The very same assertion I can make about many other occurrences which he kindly confided to me and which I treasured for the sake of my dear confreres."

In a letter from Rome to Father Rua dated April 28, 1884, he stated: "I have not yet been able to see Rome because there is always writing to be done, but I feel I must be near this great man of God, take notes on whatever I come to learn about him, and help him in whatever small measure I can." Father [Charles] Viglietti's diary states on February 27, 1885: "Every day that Don Bosco

archive documents, he secretly handed his work to our printshop at San Benigno Canavese for typesetting; only a few copies were printed, and they were only galley proofs. Unfortunately, however, he did not take the trouble to authenticate and to file away his originals. On receiving the proofs from the printers, he would get rid of all the papers which contained both the data he had accumulated and their sources. Some of these papers, in his handwriting, are still extant, but they concern data which came to him after the galleys had been printed and which he did not insert into the volumes of the *Memoirs*. By so doing, he relied on the trust his confreres put in him, for it was for them mainly that he was writing, with no thought that someday outsiders or posterity might possibly not be so compliant. Therefore, when these *Memoirs* make use of these galley sheets, their only historicity rests on the indisputable knowledge and integrity of the writer who passed them down to us.

It was very fortunate that the apostolic process for the cause of Don Bosco's beatification and canonization was initiated so soon after his death—almost immediately, one might say. It offers us a steady flow of primary eyewitnesses and earwitnesses whose sworn testimony makes it abundantly possible to verify the biographer's account.

Another providential source that greatly helped us in compiling these last volumes was a substantial collection of documents which shed much light on the controversy dividing our blessed father and Turin's archbishop. Our readers have often come across footnotes citing an original document as being in the possession of Father [Dominic] Franchetti of Turin. This distinguished priest was indeed very fortunate because, on the death of Father [Thomas] Chiuso, Archbishop [Lawrence] Gastaldi's personal secretary and heir, Father Franchetti was able to buy his entire library for a thousand lire. He discovered among the books a packet of letters and papers connected with the well-known conflicts. He instantly realized how valuable this discovery would be when the right time came for a monograph on this interesting topic; yet with generosity beyond all praise, he not only permitted us to peruse

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goes out for a walk—I always accompany him—he delights in talking about past events in his life. This makes for highly entertaining conversation. I record all he says in notebooks which I pass on to Father Lemoyne for his *History of the Oratory* and for Don Bosco's biography." [Author]

these papers, but he also allowed us to copy whatever we might find useful in them. I publicly express my thanks to him here. Without these documents, as the reader will realize, I would have found it impossible to shed light upon the final phase of that distressing controversy.

As for myself, the author, I can only visualize myself as a patient silkworm, dedicating my entire self to building my share of that vast cocoon from which one day others will spin the silk to weave a cloak of glory for our founder and father.

Turin, August 2, 1933

# *Acknowledgments*

For the publication of *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco* we owe a debt of gratitude to the Reverends August Bosio, S.D.B., John J. Malloy, S.D.B., Salvatore Isgro, S.D.B., and Dominic DeBlase, S.D.B., Provincials emeriti of the Salesians in the eastern United States and sponsors of this project, and to the Very Reverend Richard J. McCormick, S.D.B., their successor in office.

As regards this volume, we wish to express special thanks to the Rev. Paul Aronica, S.D.B., for his very valuable editorial assistance, and to the Rev. Michael Mendl, S.D.B., for the compilation of the Index. We are also grateful to those who have helped in one way or another, in particular Mr. Joseph Isola, copyeditor of the Paulist Press.

Fr. Diego Borgatello, S.D.B.
*Editor-in-Chief*

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# *Contents*


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | DEDICATION | vii |
| | EDITOR'S PREFACE | ix |
| | AUTHOR'S PREFACE | xiii |
| | ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | xxi |
| | SALESIAN GLOSSARY | xxv |
| 1 | Missions, Missionaries and Two Expeditions | 1 |
| 2 | A Month and a Half in France | 26 |
| 3 | Count Louis Anthony Colle | 56 |
| 4 | From France to Rome and from Rome to Turin | 103 |
| 5 | Celebrations, Nuisances and a Dream about the Future of the Salesian Society | 131 |
| 6 | Father Bonetti's Appeal to the Sacred Congregation of the Council | 153 |
| 7 | Libel Suit against Don Bosco for Defamatory Booklets | 186 |
| 8 | Leo XIII's Settlement of the Bonetti Controversy | 218 |
| 9 | Foundations in 1881-82: Refused or Postponed | 240 |
| 10 | Start of the Salesian Work in Spain, Florence and Faenza | 265 |
| 11 | The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians at the Death of Their First Mother General | 295 |
| 12 | Consecration of the Church of St. John the Evangelist | 308 |
| 13 | The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome | 331 |
| 14 | The Last Blocks to the Granting of Privileges | 351 |
| 15 | 1881: Events and Letters | 365 |

16 Two Months of 1882 in Southern France ..... 395

17 Don Bosco's Journey Through Liguria and Back to Turin Through Romagna ..... 430

18 1882: Memorable Activities ..... 458

19 Claire Louvet: An Outstanding Salesian Cooperator ..... 486

20 Don Bosco's Concern for the Missions and Missionaries ..... 509

21 Don Bosco, Letter Writer ..... 524

APPENDICES ..... 575

INDEX ..... 603

## SALESIAN GLOSSARY
(For the General Reading Public)

ARTISANS: trade school students.

ASSISTANCE: Salesian method of supervision of boys and students, friendly and informal in manner, stressing the prevention of disorders rather than the punishment of offenders.

ASSISTANT: a Salesian engaged in supervising boys.

CLERIC: a member of the Salesian Society training for the priesthood.

COADJUTOR: a lay member of the Salesian Society.

COMPANION OF YOUTH, THE: a prayer book composed by St. John Bosco for the use of boys, originally entitled *Il Giovane Provveduto.*

COOPERATORS: Christians (laymen, lay religious or priests) who, even if they have no religious vows, follow a vocation to holiness by offering themselves to work for the young in the spirit of Don Bosco, in the service of the local church, and in communion with the Salesian Congregation.

EXERCISE FOR A HAPPY DEATH: a monthly practice of piety that promotes spiritual recollection and fervor by meditation on one's eventual death. It stresses the reception of the sacraments of confession and Holy Communion as if for the last time.

FESTIVE ORATORY: a Salesian work which offers boys and young men organized recreational, educational, and religious activities, mostly on Sundays and festive days.

The Festive Oratory was St. John Bosco's first work and, for a good many years, his only one. He called it "oratory," that is, a place of prayer, because its primary purpose was to teach boys to go to church and pray. "Its objectives were the practice of religion and virtue, the boys' moral education, and, consequently, the salvation of their souls; recreation, entertainment, singing, and schooling, which followed in due time, were only the means." (*The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, Vol. II, p. 71. *See also* Vol. III, pp. 67f)

GOOD NIGHT: a short talk immediately after night prayers, given by the Director or someone in his stead. It consists of advice, exhortations, or occasional remarks.

ORATORY: *see* Festive Oratory, Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

ORATORY, THE: abbreviated form of "The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales" (*See below*)

ORATORY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, THE: the *first* festive oratory and the *first* boarding school for boys founded by St. John Bosco in a district of Turin known as Valdocco; the motherhouse of the Salesian Congregation.

On a rainy night of May 1847 a hungry youngster, drenched from head to foot, knocked at Don Bosco's door. Don Bosco's mother fed him and prepared a place for him to sleep. (*See The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, Vol. III, pp. 141ff) Thus, side by side with the festive oratory there began a hospice that eventually grew into a large boarding school and became the motherhouse of the Salesian Congregation.

PREVENTIVE SYSTEM: the Salesian method of education and discipline, based on reason and religion. It stresses vigilance, guidance, and sympathetic understanding in the training of the young.

VALDOCCO: a district of Turin.

The name is probably a contraction of the Latin *vallis occisorum*, the valley of the slain—i.e., some soldiers of the Theban Legion who were martyred under Emperor Maximian. The Salesian motherhouse stands on the site of their martyrdom. (*See The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, Vol. II, pp. 233ff, 268)

# THE

# BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

# OF

# SAINT JOHN BOSCO

# CHAPTER 1

## *Missions, Missionaries and Two Expeditions*

DON Bosco both opened and closed the year 1881 by sending forth new laborers to that remote portion of the vineyard which the Lord of the Gospel had entrusted to him. An appeal had sounded from Rome. On December 3, 1880 Leo XIII had addressed to all Catholic bishops an encyclical dealing with three [pontifical] associations—the Propagation of the Faith, the Holy Childhood, and the Oriental Schools. The Holy Father had issued this fervent appeal:

My venerable brothers, you have been called to share Our solicitude [for the universal Church]. We, therefore, ardently exhort you to cooperate wholeheartedly in giving prompt assistance to Our apostolic missions, fully trusting in God notwithstanding all difficulties.

At stake is the salvation of souls, for whom Our Redeemer laid down His life and appointed Us, bishops and priests, to labor for the perfecting of His saints and for the building up of His mystical body. Hence, wherever we have been entrusted with His flock, let us each do our utmost to provide to the missions those means which, as we have recalled, have been time-tested from the very beginning of the Church—the proclamation of the Gospel, the prayers and alms of devout souls.

After this exhortation the Pope continued:

Should you encounter persons who in their zeal for the glory of God are willing and able to undertake so holy a journey, encourage them, so that once they have searched and discerned God's will, they be not distressed by their human weakness but rather be eager to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Inspired by such firm urging, Don Bosco felt that the time had come to resume the missionary expeditions which had been suspended for the last two years. True, some missionaries, like Father Bernard Vacchina,[1] had gone singly or in pairs, but they were few.[2] Urgent need for personnel in Europe and financial difficulties had made it impossible to do more. Now that the way to Patagonia was open and people were beginning to look upon present achievements as a tangible sign of the perennial vitality of the Roman Catholic Church, he felt that this was the time to push ahead.[3] Even some of the ultra-liberal newspapers commented on the Pope's forceful exhortation, without daring to avow it openly.[5] Don Bosco therefore decided on an initial expedition of six Salesians and eight Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians to leave by mid-January. To this first group he added six more Salesians who were to go to Spain at about the same time. As for financing the expedition Don Bosco put all his trust in his Salesian cooperators, as he announced in his regular January letter.[6]

He tried also to obtain a subsidy of some kind from the Italian government and sent to Benedict Cairoll, premier and foreign minister, a concise report on what had been done and was still being done in Argentina and in Uruguay especially for the ever growing number of Italian immigrants. The report stated that the Salesians were "scattered over thirty-four localities," a round number including not only fixed missionary residences, but also those posts which the Salesians peri-

[1]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

[2]In the official listings their names were included as members of the 1880 expedition. [Author]

[3]One of the gifts Don Bosco received on New Year's Day was a book written by a Rosminian who sent it to him "as a token of his profound veneration." Describing the Church's advance into the remotest quarters of the globe, the author mentioned the "inhospitable wastelands of Patagonia and the Pampas of South America." In an attitude of apologia, he went on to say: "Right now when allegedly Catholicism is dying, it has strength enough between gasps to send to those lands more and more groups of Salesian missionaries, recently founded by Don Bosco, a second Calasanctius,[4] who, meanwhile, here in Europe, thanks to his numerous and ever growing schools, keeps rescuing thousands of boys from pillory and prison and turns them into hard-working, honest citizens" (P.A. Cicuto, *Se il Cattolicismo sia morente* [Is Catholicism Dying?], diagnostic essay, published by Giulio Speirani & Son, Torino, 1881). This book is not entirely free of error. [Author]

[4]St. Joseph Calasanctius (1556-1658), founder of the Piarists. [Editor]

[5]On January 7 [1881], *Il Diritto,* in a long article entitled *Missionari e Parlamento* [Missionaries and Parliament] by Raffaele Mariano, acknowledged the civilizing influence of Catholicism, though the author even at that time openly favored the Protestants, whose energy, morality and skills he praised. [Author]

[6]*Bollettino Salesiano,* January 1881. [Author]

odically visited in the exercise of their ministry.[7] The following statement on Patagonia is noteworthy: "We plan to extend the Italian Missions to the Strait of Magellan and from there to Cape Horn. Hopefully, I will personally confer with Your Excellency on this matter sometime next March, if it is agreeable to you." He intended to try to persuade the foreign minister to use his diplomatic influence to channel the stream of Italian immigrants to those plains of Patagonia which the Indians had abandoned and left to lie fallow. Those were the areas where they could establish colonies, develop agriculture and foster civilization to their own economic and moral advantage. That is what he meant by the "Italian Missions" which were to extend out to the Strait of Magellan. As at other times in the past, the reply he received was evasive, but, even if he accomplished nothing else, it was no waste of time to call the government's attention to his religious and patriotic activities overseas.

Relying upon his patron, Cardinal [Lawrence] Nina, to be his contact with the Holy See in obtaining financial help, especially in the form of Mass stipends and sacred vestments, he sent him a letter that has now been lost. On January 12 [1881] he received by mail from South America his very first letter that bore the postage stamp of Patagonia. In itself this was not very important, but it meant so much to him and brought him such comfort that he wrote again to the cardinal, enclosing the envelope, almost like a proof that all was really going well. In that letter he also enclosed two copies of his report on the Salesian houses and missions of South America covering the years 1875 to 1881.[8]

Turin, January 12, 1881

Your Eminence:

As I had the honor of telling you in my previous letter, our missionaries are willing, in an effort to reduce costs, to sacrifice a cherished trip to Rome to revere our Holy Father and to receive his apostolic benediction.

They therefore humbly ask that Your Eminence request our Holy Father's kindly blessing and send it to them before their departure.

[7]To acquaint the public with what the Salesians had accomplished in South America in five years, *Unità Cattolica* published on January 15, 1881 the report that had been sent to Pope Leo XIII. [Author]

[8]*See* Appendix 2. [Author]

The solemn ceremony has been set for the 20th of this month in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. They will then sail from Genoa on the 22nd, unless, as it is feared, storms at sea, usual in this season, should counsel postponing the sailing date.

Today I received in my mail the first postage stamp of Patagonia. As art it is not a good job, but since it is the first [I have seen] in Europe, I thought I would send it to you with this letter.

I also believe that Your Eminence and our gracious Holy Father will be pleased with the enclosed two copies of the updated report on our American missions. One is for you; I ask you kindly to present the other to His Holiness as a small mark of our missionaries' homage to the Holy See and their offer of the first fruits they have reaped in these five years of evangelization.

I shall have an opportunity to inform you of further achievements of our religious among the Indians of the Pampas and of Patagonia right after the missionary departure which we have planned as above.

In deep reverence I ask for the charity of your prayers and am greatly honored to remain,

Yours most respectfully,
Fr. John Bosco

The cardinal passed Don Bosco's request to the Holy Father, who referred to it on a distinctive occasion. On Monday, January 17, Father Dalmazzo[9] attended a special papal audience given to superiors and procurators general of religious orders and congregations residing in Rome. Its purpose was to get acquainted with the state of affairs of their respective religious families. Father Dalmazzo was given a gracious welcome by the Pope who first asked him about the Church of the Sacred Heart. "You are now on the Esquiline[10] which has been entrusted to you," he said. "Are you busy at work there? Is anything being built? Hurry because great is the need. Do not get disheartened!" He then continued, "I have read Don Bosco's letter to Cardinal Nina. I have already given instructions that something be made ready for his missionaries: sacred vestments, chalices and other things." He then imparted his apostolic blessing for them, saying that he did so with pleasure, and added, "How does Don Bosco manage? Don't all these projects frighten him? It is obvious that the Lord is with him." Cardinal Nina, fearing that the Holy Father might forget Don Bosco's

[9]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]
[10]One of the seven hills of ancient Rome. [Editor]

request for Mass stipends, had prompted Father Dalmazzo to mention them. and the Pontiff kindly responded, "I have requested some from France, and you will have your share. Will two thousand do?" When Father Dalmazzo said, "Yes, that is fine," the Pope concluded, "Then we shall order that they be delivered to you." [11]

Don Bosco of course appealed also to private charity as he had regularly done on similar occasions in the past, but so far we have traced only one of these letters, addressed to his good friend, Father Peter Vallauri of Turin.

Turin, January 3, 1881

My dear Father Vallauri,

*Ab amicis honesta sunt petenda* [Only good things are to be asked from friends], and I am aware of that. Yet I must push a bit beyond the bounds of discretion.

Here I am. I have committed myself to send a missionary expedition to [South] America on January 22. The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians and twelve Salesians are ready to go to relieve their overburdened co-workers, but just now I cannot do anything because I am strapped for cash. In your kindness can you see your way clear to contributing ten thousand francs, if only in loan, in memory of your parents, to assist the Church, support our missions, and ease my tight situation? I write with such trust only because I know your heart's desire to put all you have at God's service for His greater glory and the salvation of souls.

May God keep you in good health! While recommending myself and my poor boys to the charity of your prayers, I am in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Italy's largest Catholic newspaper carried this article[12] on the forthcoming expedition:

We most heartily applaud the courageous Don Bosco and his worthy sons. Aware of how he keeps his important enterprises going with only the private

[11]Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, January 20, 1881. [Author]

[12]*Unità Cattolica,* January 15, 1881. The new expedition consisted of twenty-three persons. This number included not only the six Salesians and eight Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, assigned to South America, but also the six Salesians traveling to Utrera, Spain, and Father Cagliero. It also included Mother Mazzarello and Mother Roncallo, who traveled with some sisters as far as Marseille. [Author]

financial backing and donations of charitable persons, we positively commend this noble undertaking of his to the generosity of Catholics. Helping Don Bosco is today more than ever before a sign not just of Catholic faith, but of our country's sense of charity and genuine brotherhood [. . .] for this aid turns to the advantage of thousands of Italians living in [South] America. It will also help reshape and restore society through the sound moral education of youth and will help evangelize vast tribes who still live in ignorance of Christianity's exceptional temporal and eternal blessings.

Since the departure date was close, Don Bosco anticipated the regular Conference of St. Francis de Sales for the Salesian cooperators to have it coincide with the leave-taking ceremony scheduled for January 20. In a talk marked by Gospel simplicity and that dear charm which was entirely his own, Don Bosco held his vast congregation spellbound for some thirty minutes. He opened by telling them of the Holy Father's special blessing to all the cooperators and missionaries. He then spoke of the Salesians and of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians who had left for the missions in previous years, narrating all the good work they had done, which should comfort so many of his listeners and the generous benefactors who had contributed to that work. He went on to explain his plans for the salvation of the pagan tribes who lived like nomads in the vast wilderness of the Pampas, of Patagonia and of Tierra del Fuego. Hence the need to keep sending new reinforcements of evangelical workers. The conclusion of his sermon was reserved for the departing missionaries, emphasizing the sacrifice they were making in leaving everything for love of Jesus Christ and the souls He had redeemed. Then, again addressing the congregation, he stated: "If they are ready to risk their lives, how can we refuse to make some sacrifice ourselves? Let us pray that God may help and strengthen them, yes, but let those who can do so also support them with donations. You will cooperate with them in giving God glory and in benefiting souls, thus entitling yourselves to that hundredfold on earth which God promises to those who give for His name's sake. What is much more, you will also be sure to save your own souls!" On January 23 *Unità Cattolica* wrote: "We know that Don Bosco's words did not fall on sterile soil, for Turin's generous citizens proved themselves instruments of God's compassion for him and his mission."

The missionaries left immediately for Sampierdarena but did not board ship until February 3. At Sampierdarena a very intimate cere-

mony was held for them in the school's chapel. In his sermon, Don Bosco bade them remember three things:

1. They would have to deal with sullen and unruly individuals to whom they were to show love, love, love!

2. Each was to do his share of work, lest it happen that one would do the work of three, while another did nothing at all.

3. They were to overlook the others' faults, for all have their own and, on detecting their superiors' shortcomings, to act like Noah's two good sons, not like Ham.

The expedition departed in two groups: those leaving for Uruguay and Spain taking the ship *Umberto I* of the Rocco and Piaggio Line, those going to Buenos Aires boarding the *Sud America* of the Lavarello Line.

At this point Father [John] Cagliero, who was with the first group, takes up our narrative.[13]

We said our farewells on the pier, since the first group was sailing two hours before us that same evening, and bade each other a pleasant journey. We met a calm sea and a bright moon, so that when we arrived the next day, Friday, at Marseille, we were in good spirits and not seasick.

We rode at anchor for three days; in fact the ship was put into dry dock to have the propeller replaced while we all went ashore on Saturday morning, February 5, and said Mass at our own house in Rue Beaujour.

Don Bosco arrived from Nice that evening, having left by train one day before us. A small man physically, Father Bologna[14] was certainly huge in kindness, generosity and brotherly love during the two days he hosted us. What a joy for us Salesians! True, we left dear brothers in Italy, but we have found brothers no less dear in France. We left them too, of course, but brothers just as dear are awaiting us in [South] America!

We returned to our ship on Sunday evening. Our beloved father, who always waxes courageous when he wants to show his love to his sons, braved the most violent of mistrals that shake trees, ships and people in order to escort us to the dockyard, some three quarters of an hour from town.

There the owner of *Umberto I,* Mr. Evasio Piaggio, its captain and officers warmly welcomed him with uncommon signs of esteem and reverence. We had a lively conversation over coffee and champagne. Mr. Piaggio, a very gracious person and devout Christian, was so taken by the reports of Salesian

[13]Letter to Father Rua, Gibraltar, February 14, 1881. [Author]
[14]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

work in Italy, France, and [South] America that he gratefully accepted being enrolled as a Salesian cooperator, and, warming up to Don Bosco, wished to escort him to our quarters, accompanied by the captain. Here all the Salesians, Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, and many passengers were assembled. We listened to his final admonitions and received his holy, fatherly blessing. Indeed it was a holy blessing, for it moved us all deeply, and it was fatherly because it touched the hearts of all his children, many of whom were resigned to the thought of never seeing him again until they met in heaven!

Since the hour was late and the wind was kicking up a storm, we walked with him as far as the shipyard, Mr. Piaggio on one side and we on the other. Luckily a coach arrived just then to discharge some ladies. I say luckily because it would have been impossible to walk that long distance at that late hour, buffeted by a most fierce wind.[15]

The following day (Monday the 7th) we spent in dry dock. That night, as soon as the propeller was repaired, four valves were opened and the sea water rushed in with such turbulence that it vividly brought to mind the flood waters released by God at the time of the deluge!

At four o'clock on February 8, as dawn was beginning to break, we steamed out of Marseille en route to Barcelona. Till then we had not had the slightest taste of Neptune's fury, but it was waiting for us as we entered the Gulf of Lions! Mountainous seas and wind, wind and mountainous seas!

Huge crests and gaping hollows of sea, towering waves crashing upon angry seas and smashing against the sturdy flanks of the ship mightier than they. Breakers hammering against the prow, and lifting the ship's stern clear out of the water! Endless clanging of the spars added to the shrill whine of the rigging, and in a flash the whole deck was suddenly awash and we had to retire

[15]In a letter to Father Rua from Marseille on February 9, Father Bologna described the same evening as follows: "At six on Sunday evening the missionaries, with the sisters, Don Bosco and I, set out for *Umberto I* in two buses. Night had fallen and the mistral was raging. The ship lay in dry dock streaming with the violent downpour of rain. Clutching our hats and clinging to Don Bosco, we managed to get up to the deck. Despite the dangerous situation and our caution, Don Bosco kept us in good humor with his funny remarks. On board we were welcomed by Mr. Evasio Piaggio, owner of *Umberto I*, who asked for Don Bosco and escorted him to his own study, where he entertained his guest for three quarters of an hour with exquisite courtesy and cordiality. The ship's officers too welcomed him, vying to show him their good will and respect. The captain was pleased to learn that Don Bosco had sixty thousand subjects and therefore ranked higher than he. Afterward, Mr. Piaggio, the captain, chief steward and officers escorted Don Bosco through the ship, and all knelt when he blessed the missionaries and addressed a few words to all. We walked out into patches of moonlight, the wind blasting us with full force. Mr. Piaggio took Don Bosco's arm and told him to lean on him. The captain led the way, followed by a member of the line's board of directors and the ship's officers. They stayed with us for twenty minutes, guiding us among girders and drawbridges and not leaving us until we reached the road and could board a carriage. The missionaries had come with us and were milling about Don Bosco. We were all so worried about the weather, the darkness and the wind that we were spared the emotion of the moment." [Author]

to our cabins and curl up in our bunks. . . . Later, nearly all of us, hit in varying degrees by seasickness, paid partial or total tribute to the sea.

I say "nearly all of us," because on this single occasion among all my sea voyages, I managed to come through as a much envied and very lucky exception.

That same Tuesday evening, we cast anchor in Barcelona's harbor, our ship having maintained fourteen knots an hour. The crew spent the whole night and all Wednesday loading cargo, while we—that is, Father Piccono, Father Branda, Father Pane and I[16]—decided to go ashore, where we saw the city's truly marvelous, ancient cathedral, St. Eulalia's torture rack, and the crucifix salvaged from the battle of Lepanto. Then we returned on board.

We set sail (without sails, however) for Gibraltar in bright moonlight on Wednesday evening, but again ran into a blustering wind in the Gulf of Valencia. We were tossed about all night long, and forced to fast all the next day. Thursday night to Friday morning (the 11th) we were shrouded in fog, which slowed our course, and our foghorns bellowed warnings to other ships in the area to prevent tragic collisions.

Throughout this leg of our journey we managed to celebrate Mass every morning and administer Holy Communion to the sisters and the coadjutor brothers. The rest of the day we spent in prayer, some reading, a lot of walking, and eating whenever we could. . . . It was an easy, carefree life, *eating, drinking, and strolling about*. You really cannot get any work done on board ship, so you resort to childish pranks and relax and take turns in laughing at one another's bouts with seasickness.

Forty-eight hours after leaving Barcelona we reached Gibraltar and had dinner on Friday evening while at anchor. Later that night, we said our good-byes and called upon our merciful Lady, Star of the Sea, to protect our dear confreres who were continuing their journey across the mighty ocean, and to be with us as we made our way along the coast in a small boat as far as Cadiz. This was the fourth and last parting we had to go through.

The rest of the expedition, led by Father Angelo Piccono,[17] sailed on to Montevideo, Uruguay. The other group, consisting of two Salesians and four Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, was already on the high seas. Both groups had a hard time for about three days when they ran into a fierce gale.

While our hapless travelers feared for their lives, a notorious periodical we have already met, *La Cronaca dei Tribunali*,[18] chose to sink

[16]For all these, *see* Appendix 1. [Editor]
[17]*See* Vol. XII, p. 442. [Editor]
[18]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 69, 207, 226-230. [Editor]

its venemous fangs into our beloved Don Bosco. Incensed mostly by an article in *Unità Cattolica*[19] [entitled The Power of a Catholic Priest and a Touching Ceremony in Turin], the newspaper, under the glaring headline "DON BOSCO AND FATHER MARGOTTI," spewed forth an ugly diatribe against both priests in a double columned article. After insulting the editor of the Catholic paper, it mocked Don Bosco in a nasty mishmash of accusation and insinuation, thus exposing him hideously to suspicions on the part of civil authorities. The periodical in fact charged him with snatching boys and girls from their parents and citizens from their fatherland, insinuating that among the departing missionaries there could be some who were subject to the military draft and were being forced against their will to desert their homeland clandestinely. Then, flagrantly falsifying facts, it resurrected the "Foglino incident," whose outcome we have already described.[20] Such underhandedness was all the more vicious because in those very days the Superior Council for Public Education was debating the enforced shutdown of the Oratory's secondary school.[21] Fiery Father Margotti was doubtless itching to respond in kind, but not a word appeared in his periodical, most probably because Don Bosco, always averse to polemics, had thought it better to let the whole matter die quietly.[22]

Don Bosco gave the departing missionaries letters for their confreres overseas. It was his custom to send a personal note every year to each Salesian priest, cleric and coadjutor in South America. He continued this custom as long as he could until 1884. We have precious samples of this correspondence in nine letters which we have managed to trace, all dated January 31, 1881, and we give them here with a line or two or introduction.

To Father [James] Costamagna,[23] recently appointed provincial to

[19]January 23, 1881 issue. An article about this ceremony also appeared in No. 17 of the *Emporio Popolare*. [Author]

[20]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 227-233. [Editor]

[21]*Ibid.* pp. 108-155. [Editor]

[22]An indirect form of reply may have appeared in an article dated January 30 which quoted from *Atti ufficiali della Camera Subalpina* [Official Acts of the Sub-Alpine Assembly] and from speeches made by Cavour and La Marmora in 1853 against a proposal to include all clerics in the military draft, speeches which La Marmora reiterated in 1869 and 1871, when Italy was already a kingdom. No national events took place in 1881 which might have led Margotti to dig out these documents. It was probably his intent to make it clear once again that any law which forced clerics to leave the seminary for army camps was not fit to be called a law. [Author]

[23]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

replace the deceased Father [Francis] Bodrato,[24] he sends instructions on immediately setting up church organizational structures in Patagonia so as to preclude complications during the expansion of the work of the missions; he also traces out for him some guidelines he is to follow in his new office.

Turin, January 31, 1881

My dear Father Costamagna,

I have received the memos and letters you have been sending me. All is well. Clear skies with a bit of clouds here and there. That's the way life is here on earth. I am sending you some materials, aids, and letters. Take care of the distribution.

We shall do our utmost to liquidate our outstanding debts; do the same yourself. I trust that finances will take a turn for the better this year.

The matter of a prefecture or vicariate apostolic in Patagonia is of top importance. The Holy Father wishes and recommends it, and it is to our advantage. Without it we cannot get support from the Propaganda Fide in Rome, nor from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Lyons, nor from the Association of the Holy Childhood. It appears that neither you nor Father Bodrato has grasped its importance.

News about us here you will hear from the others. I only say to you: "Be vigilant; labor in all things as a good soldier of Christ."

But never forget that we are Salesians: *Sal et lux;* "salt," i.e., kindness, patience, charity; "light" in all our activities so that all may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.

Give my sincerest regards to Mr. [Felix] Friás, to Dr. [Edward] Carranza and to Mr. [John Baptist] Gazzolo, should you happen to see them.

God bless you and all our dear confreres and all our works, so that all may always and solely be for God's glory.

Pray for me. With all my heart in Jesus Christ, I am,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Interpret my mind and in my name give our sisters a brief conference.

The Superior Chapter has definitely chosen you to be provincial in America, and the written appointment will be sent to you soon. This is so that you may become holy and lead others to holiness too.

[24] *Ibid.* [Editor]

To Father [Joseph] Vespignani[25] who was novice master and acting director of the Salesian house at San Carlos in Almagro, he sends best wishes, words of counsel, and news of his family.

Turin, January 31, 1881

My dear Father Joseph,

I have enjoyed receiving several letters from you. I bless the Lord, who has granted you enough health to work in this general state of need. May He enable you to rally about me a large host of aspirants, who will in turn become novices, professional members, and very fervent Salesians.

Tell your dear pupils and mine that this friend of theirs in Europe sends them this word of advice which will guarantee their happiness: "Flee from sin and receive Holy Communion frequently." Explain this to them.

I have heard from your relatives, and they are well. Your cleric brother, Ernest,[26] is enthusiastic and wants to become a good Salesian.

God bless you, my dear Father Joseph. May He keep you in good health. Pray for me, always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

For Father [Dominic] Tomatis,[27] who had succeeded Father Fagnano as director at the house at San Nicolás de los Arroyos, he had a fatherly scolding because he had to wait so long for a letter from him. Don Bosco felt very strongly about letter writing, particularly from [local] superiors, for it enabled him to exercise a thoughtful influence over their respective houses. The uncle to whom he refers here was a Jesuit.

Turin, January 31, 1881

My dearest Father Dominic,

Now and then I have had a letter from you which always brought me much pleasure, but all too rarely. Your uncle, Father Tomatis, has the same complaint. Please let me hear from you once a month, and tell me about the confreres with you. If you plead being busy as an excuse, I shall accept it, but my love for you makes me very anxious to be up to date on whatever concerns you.

[25]*Ibid.* [Editor]
[26]Father Ernest Vespignani, architect. [Author]
[27]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

I have been told that you are straightening out the financial situation at San Nicolás. Excellent! When God will call you to heaven we shall ask Him to give you a crown of glory!

We all love you here and often recall you and your poetic masterpieces. I personally never forget you at Holy Mass and believe that you have not forgotten this old friend of your soul either.

I urge you in your position to look after the observance of the rules by which we have dedicated ourselves to the Lord and especially the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death.

Tell your boys I am praying for them and ask them always to remember that time is a precious treasure of which they must never waste a fragment!

God bless you, my dear Father Tomatis! May He keep you in good health and in His holy grace! Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. The Superior Chapter has definitely appointed Father Costamagna as provincial of [South] America. Please inform those whom it may concern.

Words of heartening encouragement which only he could write were addressed to Father [Thaddeus] Remotti, sole priest at the Church of Our Lady of Mercy in Buenos Aires, who was certainly overwhelmed with work.

Turin, January 31, 1881

My dear Father Remotti,

I have received your several letters with deep pleasure as always, but, please, write more often and more at length. However, I know how hard you are working and excuse you. While laboring for the souls of others, do not forget your own soul. Never omit the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death.

We are moving forward with giant strides. No sooner do we have a capable Salesian than immediately two houses contend for him, and sometimes we can only provide very tender shoots. Pray fervently to God, therefore, that they bear fruit.

God bless you, my dear Father Remotti! You are always the apple of my eye! Keep working. The reward is all ready; heaven awaits us. Let our hearts be where true joys await us.

Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

To the cleric, Joseph Joachim Quaranta,[28] of the house of San Nicolás he sent what amounts to a questionnaire for a spiritual self-appraisal, introduced and concluded with such expressions as to make the young man feel for a fleeting moment that he was once again enjoying a filial colloquy with his spiritual father, as in days past.

Turin, January 31, 1881

My dear Quaranta,

I hear that you are in good health and doing your best. This pleases me no end. Study and piety will make you a true Salesian. Never forget that you must first ensure the salvation of your own soul; then give yourself to saving the souls of others.

The Exercise for a Happy Death and frequent Communion are the key. Are you in good health now? Are you really being good? Is your vocation being safeguarded? Do you feel you are ready for ordination? Give me your answers in your next letter.

God bless you, my dear Quaranta. Take heart! Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Turin, January 31, 1881

My dear Paseri,

You have always been the joy of my heart, and I love you even more now that you have given yourself completely to the [foreign] missions. You have left all things to dedicate yourself entirely to winning souls.

Take heart, then, my dear Paseri. Get yourself ready to be a good priest, a holy Salesian. I shall pray much for you, but please don't forget this friend of your soul.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always, strengthening us against temptation and keeping us on our way to heaven.

Pray for me. Ever yours in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary,

Fr. John Bosco

[28]We give him both first names because they are used interchangeably in the Salesian Directory. At the time of writing (October 1932) he is still active at the parish of St. John the Evangelist in La Boca, Buenos Aires. [Author]

Turin, January 31, 1881

My dear Peretto,

I have no doubt that you will always be the same cleric Peretto, my friend always so anxious to help me win many souls for God. Now that you have totally devoted yourself to this task, show yourself in all things an example of good works. Bear up with tribulations patiently, work as a preacher of the Gospel, and the Lord will bless what you plant and make it bear fruit.

God bless you, my dear Peretto! May He keep you in His holy grace. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

He punned with brother Sappa, an orchardman, about his surname—turning it into useful advice—to relieve his occasional hypertension.

Turin, January 31, 1881

My dear Sappa:

Make sure that your name derives from *sapera* [to be wise] and not from *zappere* [to hoe] and then all will be right. I have received your several letters. Keep sending me good news as you have done in the past. Work and obedience will be your salvation.

May God assist you in giving good example at all times. Pray for me, and I will pray for you, for I wish to be always in Jesus Christ.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

For Charles Audisio, a hard-working coadjutor brother who, as a boy, had attended the Valdocco Festive Oratory in its beginnings, he had words of well-known advice.

Turin, January 31, 1881

My dear Charles,

This old friend of your soul sends you best wishes and urges you never to forget your eternal salvation. Work, but work for heaven.

Exactness in your practices of piety is everything; obedience, too, opens the door to all the virtues.

God bless you, dear Audisio! May He keep you always in His holy grace. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Fatherly love is the tone of the following note to the cleric Bartholomew Panaro, who was teaching in our school at San Nicolás de los Arroyos. He was to become a great missionary, an apostolic worker from his year of ordination, 1884, to his death in 1918, first as a dauntless assistant of Father [Joseph] Fagnano[29] in evangelizing innumerable Indians along the shores of Rio Negro, and later as an assistant of Father [Dominic] Milanesio[30] in establishing the first settlement in the Patagonian Andes at Chosmalal.

Turin, January 31, 1881

My dear Panaro,

How are you doing? Are you making progress in studies and in piety? I hope so. I urge you to persevere at the price of any and every sacrifice. Do not lose sight of the great reward that God keeps in store for us in heaven.

Constant obedience and the Exercise for a Happy Death are essentials.

God bless you, my dear Panaro! Be a model Salesian, and pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Graciousness marks this last brief letter to the cleric Peter Calcagno, who was then at the Villa Colón school in Montevideo. He was later to head the last [missionary] expedition which Don Bosco would send on December 6, 1887 to Ecuador.

Turin, January 31, 1881

My dear Calcagno,

Are you still a good fellow, my dear friend? I hope you are. Never look back. Rather, let's look ahead to heaven which awaits us. *There* is our great reward! Work, save many souls, and also save your own. Temperance and

[29]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]
[30]*Ibid.* [Editor]

obedience are everything for you. Write to me often. God bless you! May He keep you in His holy grace. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Father [Joseph] Vespignani's comments on these letters are contained in a typed memo: "At the beginning of this year [1881] each Salesian in [South] America received a precious gift: a personal letter from Don Bosco, who addressed a word of encouragement and counsel to each one. For all, this was a powerful incitement to perseverance, all the more so because, with our spiritual retreats and recent achievements, we might well call that period one of rebirth of the Salesian spirit in our province, and all hearts were prepared to accept grace and counsel from heaven." The letters arrived during the carnival season. Father [James] Costamagna wrote that the confreres "read and reread them even during the entertainment in the auditorium, totally oblivious of the performances on the stage."[31] Father [Angelo] Piccono, who delivered the letters to the Salesians in Uruguay, informed us that there too those precious notes in the hand of our holy founder brought overwhelming joy and were tearfully kissed again and again.[32]

Shortly before the new missionary contingent got to Montevideo, Bishop Hyacinth Vera had insisted that the Salesians should accept at all costs the parish at Paysandú, an old city on the left bank of the great Uruguay River. The parish—the only one—served twenty-five people. Corruption and loose morals went unchallenged. To please the bishop, the new arrivals, who were supposed to ease the workload of their confreres in Uruguay, would instead have to go to Paysandú. To make matters worse, Father [Louis] Lasagna,[33] their director, fell sick and, to ease his pains, had to take his physicians' advice and return to Italy for a painful, delicate operation. He left on May 1, 1881. On July 21 Don Bosco wrote to Countess [Charlotte] Callori to inform her of Father Lasagna's arrival.

[31]Letter to Don Bosco, Buenos Aires, March 6, 1881. [Author]
[32]Letter to Don Bosco, Villa Colón, March 7, 1881. [Author]
[33]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

Turin, July 24, 1881

My dear Mama in Jesus Christ,

I have had no more news of your health and don't even know if you are at Vignale. If you cannot write yourself, ask someone to write for you, and you will indeed be doing me a great favor, all the more so because I know how exhausting was your ride from Turin to Vignale.

I don't know what to say. Often enough God hears a single brief prayer and grants exceptional favors at once. Yet we have offered prayers for you, our eighty thousand boys remember you every morning and evening, and so far I can't see that we have gotten anywhere. Poor Don Bosco! I must have lost all my credit with the Lord!

Father Lasagna has arrived from Uruguay to regain his health and to find co-workers who will go back with him to his apostolic mission, where the harvest is most plentiful and the workers very few. He immediately asked about you and your family and said he would like to visit you at Montemagno, where he will be going about the middle of this week.

I hope your entire family is well and that you are feeling better. May God grant all of you full health and keep you in His holy grace.

Thank you for the generous contribution you sent me through Father Cagliero.[34] I trust that you will receive at least a hundredfold [here on earth]. Father Cagliero also told me that you would not forget the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome.

Would you willingly accept an appointment from the Pope as solicitor of funds? Do you think I can offer the same appointment to Count Rainero in his position as Knight of Cape and Sword? I would appreciate your letting me know your feelings on this.

God bless you. Pray for this poor soul who is always

Yours devotedly in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Father Lasagna was not strong enough for surgery until the end of September, when he entered St. Maurice Hospital [in Turin]. There he was pleasantly surprised to meet a grateful pupil of his from Lanzo among the team of surgeons operating on him. He felt quite encouraged, though not to the point of full reassurance. Aware of his fears, Don Bosco sent him a message, clearly telling him that he had to return soon to [South] America, where another very important mission

[34] *Ibid.* [Editor]

awaited him. The operation was very successful, as we gather from the following two letters of Don Bosco to Father Costamagna.

San Benigno, October 1, 1881

My dear Father Costamagna,

A few words of cordial greeting in the Lord to you and all our dear Salesian sons and daughters.

Father Lasagna is regaining his strength, but is still far from his usual robust self. Nevertheless, his concern to be of use to the Congregation drives him to want to return to his field of activity. He is really a good man. He has kind words for everyone, especially for you, and this pleases me no end. Father Cagliero has written to ask you your opinion on changes which seem advisable for the province in South America, especially now that we are going into Brazil. In all matters, however, I want to follow your opinion.

The Holy Father is rather concerned and somewhat impatient to see this matter of an apostolic prefecture or vicariate in Patagonia settled. He wants me to send him a formal report on the stand taken by both the government and the archbishop. Have we made any progress in this or is it bogged down?

Give me positive data which I can submit to the Holy Father, for he intends to handle the matter directly.

I cannot understand the attitude of Father Tomatis. He is supposed to write to his superior and have others send reports of his school's personnel. Tell me about the moral and physical condition of the school, our hopes and fears for the future. Without this knowledge we can move forward only with uncertainty. I myself am totally in the dark.

May God bless all of us and make saints of the Salesians, as He makes a great saint out of you. Pray for me.

Ever yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Father Bonetti and Father Bertello[35] are preaching the retreat for our one hundred and seventy novices preparing to take vows on the 3rd of this month. What a goodly number of missionaries!

Turin, October 10, 1881

My dear Father Costamagna,

I am entrusting to you a task to be done by you or by someone else. Please let me know the outcome so that I can inform a person who has been of no small help to our missionaries in [South] America.

[35]For both *see* Appendix 1. [Editor]

Last Thursday our dear Father Lasagna underwent a very serious operation. For two days we all lived in great apprehension. He is doing better now, and the physicians have declared him out of danger.

Thank God, all our confreres here in Europe are in good health.

Please extend my heartfelt greetings to all my sons in [South] America and to all their pupils. Pray much for me because I am engaged in some very complex, serious matters which need particular heavenly guidance.

God bless us all! May He keep us in His holy grace. Amen.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

While the industrious Father Lasagna was awaiting surgery, he did not sit idly by, but busied himself looking for means and personnel, and also mulling over a plan he had long cherished. For some time he had nurtured the idea of setting up a weather station at the Pius IX School in Villa Colón. Broad-minded as he was, he saw how such a station could benefit his mission by advancing the cause of the physical sciences. The school's site was ideal for an observatory to study atmospheric phenomena and report to weather stations in Europe and America which sought to advance meteorology.

In Italy, quite near Turin, lived a man with a worldwide reputation in this science, Father Francis Denza, a Barnabite, director of the observatory at the Charles Albert boarding school in Moncalieri. Father Lasagna went to see him and, as usually happens when two scholars exchange ideas, his plan vastly broadened in scope. They discussed the setting up of a network of weather stations throughout South America which would be run by the Salesians with headquarters in Montevideo. Father Denza proposed this project at the third Geographic Convention held shortly afterward in Venice, and it was favorably received. After this first step, Father Denza conferred with Don Bosco, who gladly consented, as was to be expected. He then drew up a report of the views held by the group who had discussed meteorological problems at the convention and forwarded it to the executive committee of the Meteorological Association. This, in turn, on learning of Don Bosco's "generous interest," expressed its own "deepest and grateful satisfaction" and offered "sincerest congratulations for the courageous initiative in a matter of evident considerable difficulty, yet of great benefit

to the physical sciences throughout the world."[36] This was the beginning of the meteorological observatory at Montevideo, of which we shall have further occasion to speak in the course of our narrative.

In June, Father Lasagna received the sad news of the sudden death of his close friend, Bishop Vera,[37] who had been a good father to the Salesians in Uruguay. Then, shortly before returning to [South] America, as we have narrated elsewhere, he was happy to learn that Leo XIII had appointed a worthy successor, Bishop Innocent Yeregui, who was a warm friend of the Salesians, as we have already narrated. It was therefore with increased enthusiasm that he hurried his preparations for departure.

Whether before or after his surgery—we are not sure—Father Lasagna accompanied Don Bosco to Liguria where he witnessed something that only saints have the strength to do. Bishop Boraggíni of Savona had had a falling out with the director of the Varazze boarding school, Father Monateri,[38] who had decided not to comply with the bishop's expressed wish to send a Salesian priest for some regular religious services to a church located in a mountain beyond the town limits. Added to that was some misunderstanding about parish rights. Father Monateri had acted rightfully. Now, no sooner did Don Bosco, with Father Lasagna, pay a courtesy call on the bishop than he fell to his knees, clasped his hands and begged, "Your Excellency, I ask your pardon for the displeasure given you by Father Monateri, director of our school at Varazze."

"Don Bosco, stand up! What are you doing?" the bishop immediately exclaimed.

"Not until you have assured me that I am forgiven," Don Bosco replied.

"Certainly, certainly, I forgive you! Please stand up!"

Don Bosco arose and they both embraced.[39]

[36]Letter from the Board of Directors to Don Bosco, Turin, November 30, 1881. [Author]

[37]Bishop Hyacinth Vera, born at Santa Catarina, diocese of St. Sebastian, Rio de Janeiro, on July 3, 1813, was appointed bishop of Megara and apostolic vicar of Montevideo by Pius IX on September 23, 1864. When the vicariate was made a diocese, he was named its bishop by Leo XIII on July 15, 1878. He died of a stroke while on a pastoral visit to Pan de Azúcar. [Author]

[38]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

[39]Diocesan process, *Summarium*, No. XVI-98, p. 756. [Author]

That same October brought Don Bosco ineffable joy. A pilgrimage, headed by Monsignor Anthony Espinosa of Buenos Aires, came to Italy from Argentina to pay their respects to the Vicar of Jesus Christ. After commending the zeal of the Argentine bishops, Pope Leo addressed them publicly as follows: "Neither are they slow to show their solicitude to bring Christian civilization to the wild tribes of Patagonia, among whom, thanks to the efforts of zealous religious, new missions are being set up for this purpose."[40] In the personal interview that ensued Monsignor Espinosa told the Pope what the Salesians were doing in Argentina, particularly in Patagonia, and His Holiness replied, "When we were told that the sons of Don Bosco were taking on the mission of Patagonia, our heart was filled with joyous hope for the future of those poor Indians."[41] These highly placed affirmations gave Don Bosco moments of great rejoicing.

To be sure, the missions in Patagonia were making great strides. Father Joseph Fagnano, their enterprising and undaunted superior, forged ahead in evangelizing the Indians. But getting to them was a very difficult task, for their loathing of the white man made them either flee or brandish their weapons at their very approach. In April the Argentine government, in favor of the overwhelming number of Chilean Indians in Argentina, had sent General [Conrado] Villegas with an army of two thousand soldiers against the warrior tribes of the Sayueques, who terrorized the area with raids and pillage. Father Fagnano joined the expedition, traversing on horseback those endless plains in search of peace-abiding, frightened Indian tribes to give them reassurance, protection, instruction and baptism. It is a long story of strenuous, extraordinary adventures in and around the area of Lake Nahuèl-Huapí, source of the Limay River, main tributary of the Rio Negro.

Another mission trip, which took place between October and November, located two more Indian tribes who had pitched camp some one hundred and twenty-five miles from Patagonia. It was a successful mission to some extent, but unfortunately its closeness to a military post proved to be a serious obstacle, what with its free flow of liquor

[40]*Civiltà Cattolica*, Issue 753, November 5, 1881, p. 358. [Author]
[41]*Bollettino Salesiano*, November 1881, p. 9. [Author]

and resultant intoxication and violence. While scouting the banks of the Rio Negro, Father Fagnano came across several Christian settlers whom he was able to help. "Ah, my dear Don Bosco," he wrote on November 10, "if only there were more of us here, how much more could we accomplish!"

We now return to Father Lasagna. During his stay in Italy Don Bosco was able to form an accurate picture of the condition and needs of our houses in Uruguay, and he could also ascertain at close range the virtues, prudence and tact of his beloved disciple. Consequently, he judged it wise to create an independent province in Uruguay under Father Lasagna as provincial, especially since he intended to open a house in Brazil the next year and Father Lasagna was the man to start that Salesian work and extend it throughout that vast empire. Don Bosco did not let him return alone but at the head of a squad of missionaries for both Uruguay and Argentina.

Don Bosco did not send them out unobtrusively, as though he feared a repetition of the vicious slander that marked the previous departure.[42] Some wondered whether this solemn departure ceremony followed too soon on the heels of the former, but the facts showed that all their qualms were unjustified. The departure ceremony was held on December 10 [1881], a bitterly cold, windy and snowy day. Still, the church was full. After the reading of the papal encyclical *Sancta Dei civitas* cited at the beginning of this chapter, Don Bosco briefly acquainted the Salesian cooperators on the Congregation's work of the past year, its mission achievements, and the current progress on the construction of the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Turin and that of the Sacred Heart in Rome. Then he introduced Father Lasagna, who spoke to the audience about the Salesian missionaries present there.

The departing missionaries were eight, two of whom were already waiting for their companions at Marseille, where they were to board ship. To bolster their spirits for the journey and to reaffirm his fatherly concern for Father Lasagna, Don Bosco asked Father Lemoyne, who had been the latter's director, to accompany them as far as Marseille. There, on January 15, they embarked on *La France* of the Maritime Transport Line. The voyage was without incident. Father Lasagna

[42]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 226-230. [Editor]

found all the confreres united for their spiritual retreat at Villa Colón, since it was summer vacation time. He preached the retreat with all the fervor, piety and genuine Salesian spirit which his recent intimate contact with the great heart of Don Bosco had renewed within him.

Just before the year ended, Don Bosco joyfully welcomed a visit from Monsignor Espinosa, who arrived at the Oratory on Christmas Eve with two traveling companions. Thrilled to personally meet this true friend of his sons in Argentina, Don Bosco spared no effort to make his stay in Turin as delightful as possible. The guests also visited San Benigno, where an entertaining welcome was staged for them. On January 4 [1882], they resumed their journey to France.

Monsignor Espinosa brought two letters from his archbishop for Don Bosco, one in Spanish, the other in Italian, both dated from Buenos Aires, August 24 [1881]. In Spanish the good archbishop wrote: "Ask your boys, some of whom I probably remember, to keep me in their prayers, especially as they give my pilgrims a joyful welcome. Remind your priests to pray often for their confreres here; their numbers are on the rise, and they are achieving great good. The national legislature is considering authorizing the government to consult with the Holy Father about redoing diocesan lines. This will set the stage to establish an apostolic vicariate in Patagonia which will be entrusted to your zealous missionaries. I sincerely hope that this will happen, but I have my doubts. Your good sons' prayers can obtain this grace which will be rich also in temporal benefits, I shall keep you informed on the matter. The Salesian missionaries and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians in my archdiocese are a great help and comfort. I praise the Lord for them, as I thank you and rejoice with you!" The second letter stated: "One more priest has recently joined the three who are now in Patagonia because of the vast and fruitful work being accomplished there. I still recall with deep pleasure the time I spent in your delightful company in 1877."

A third letter, which Father Costamagna had forwarded, arrived in Turin at Christmas. It was from Bishop [Innocent] Yerequi, who, even before assuming charge of his diocese of Montevideo, felt that he had to open his heart to the superior of the Salesians in South America. "You should know," he wrote,[43] "that the Salesians will always hold a

[43]Letter to Father Costamagna, Montevideo, November 29, 1881. [Author]

very special place in my heart, and I shall always do all I can for them so that the number of such excellent workers and the fruit of their labors may be multiplied. Please be open and confide in me, and let me know whatever I can do to help them; within my own limitations, they can always count on me as a staunch friend. It was but an involuntary oversight on my part that I did not thank you for having enrolled me as a Salesian cooperator. I make amends by now expressing my deepest gratitude."

Such warm-hearted, authentic testimonials served to underscore what the Holy Father had asserted in the above-mentioned encyclical.[44]

The turmoil of 1881 ended on this note of tender comfort for Don Bosco. With a few drops of sweetness Divine Providence was easing the bitterness of the cup he would still have to drink.

[44]*See* pp. 1f. [Editor]

# CHAPTER 2

## *A Month and a Half in France*

THE Salesians were very anxiously awaiting Don Bosco at Marseille not only because of the turmoil of the previous year,[1] but also because the new buildings under construction entailed ever mounting debts and arrangements had to be finalized without delay. Several times before, his plans to go to Marseille had been thwarted by unforeseen circumstances, but finally in his Christmas greetings to the community he was able to write that he would visit them at the beginning of February. Of course, that did not mean that the government authorities could not pull a quick surprise, for the anticlerical newspapers had by no means called a truce to their attacks against religious congregations. However, his friends kept reassuring each other, "Don Bosco is on his way with the powerful support of His Holiness for St. Leo's Oratory."[2]

Leaving Genoa overland a day before his missionaries sailed from port, he arrived in Marseille the evening of February 5 after a short rest at Nice. He brought with him the prefect general of studies, Father Celestine Durando,[3] to check out and finalize the school curriculum, and a cleric from San Benigno, Jules Reimbeau, a relative of the Harmels,[4] to be his secretary.

The very evening of his arrival he wished to do a work of mercy. We have already mentioned the well-known Regular of the Lateran, Father Pio Mortara.[5] The government's decrees closing down religious orders, which went into effect on October 31, 1880, had surprised him as he

[1]The religious persecution. *See* Vol. XIV, pp. 475-493. [Editor]
[2]Minutes of the Ladies' Committee, January 27, 1881. [Author]
[3]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]
[4]Salesian benefactors. [Editor]
[5]*See* Vol. XIV, p. 202. At baptism his first name "Edgar" had been changed to "Pio." *See also* Vol. VIII, pp. 268f. [Editor]

was seriously ill in Marseille at the College of St. Louis, which was run by the Brothers Hospitallers of St. John of God. The canon had no place to hide, since his presence in their house might jeopardize the brothers. Providence inspired the deeply religious Madame Marcoselles, whom he had known in Rome back in 1869, to offer him asylum in her own home in Rue de Rome. While staying there, his condition worsened and he had to keep to his bed. In the interest of his safety, it was felt necessary to keep his presence a secret, lest he suffer harassment in those sinister days, and also because, as we have stated, he had been accused of evading military service in Italy. Father Bologna, the Salesian director, secretly visited him; nobody in the Salesian house knew about this.

Told that the sick man had asked to see him, Don Bosco immediately set out to satisfy his request, since it was evening and this helped make it all the easier to avoid detection. Postponing the visit might have prevented Don Bosco from going at all or from going without attracting attention. Father Mortara describes the visit as follows:[6]

Father Bologna, my dear friend and director of St. Leo's Oratory, who used to bring me in generous measure the spiritual comfort I so badly needed, told me that Don Bosco was in Marseille. I voiced my eagerness to see him, hoping that he might obtain my recovery. Well, one day, February 5 to be exact, the revered priest came. I requested his blessing and begged him to intercede for me to God, that I might obtain the grace of health I desired and, working for His greater glory, might convert my dear mother (who sadly passed away on October 17, 1896). In reply he exhorted me to be patiently resigned and to offer God the sacrifice of my life, should He so wish. As for my mother, he said my prayers would be more efficacious in heaven. He again blessed me and left. I never saw Don Bosco again and some years later heard that he had died in the reputation of holiness. A well-founded hope assures me that this man of God who so helped me in life will continue to bless and pray for me in that heavenly glory which certainly awaited him.

Referring to this visit, in a letter he wrote to Don Bosco in 1884, he stated:

When you honored me by your visit at the home of the Marcoselles family in Marseille, you told me that Our Lord might suspend the death sentence

[6]Letter to Father Lemoyne, 1898. We have no further information, since we were unable to trace the original and have only this copy, made by Father Lemoyne himself. [Author]

which had already been pronounced upon me. It was indeed suspended, thanks to you. Now heaven help me if I do not dedicate whatever life still remains to me to building up, defending and spreading the mystical kingdom of God.

St. Leo's Oratory, Don Bosco found, had been entirely transformed and expanded four times its size. To avoid any kind of dangerous publicity, his coming was not publicized in any way; yet just two days after his arrival, people of every walk of life started flocking at all hours to the house. It was obvious that such a routine would exhaust him, and so the director asked Father Rua to have the boys pray for him lest the impending exertion prove too much for him. Many people asked for his picture. One well-deserving gentleman, who had invited him to dinner, managed to persuade him to sit for a photograph in the usual French clerical sash and rabat. Knowing how rarely one succeeded in faithfully capturing his mien, he took photos of him in five different poses.[7] Don Bosco himself gave some information about his daily activities in a short letter to his regular secretary, Father Berto,[8] who had stayed behind at the Oratory.

Marseille, February 10, 1881

My dear Father Berto:

If you can get a copy of Father Pirro's dispensation from vows, please send it to me because I need it.

Our matters are getting on well, but I badly need prayers; tell that to Caroglio[9] and his bandits. I have received no further news of the Oratory.

My health is good, but I am very, very tired.

May God make you as good as Job. Love me in Jesus Christ.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

From a letter to Father Bonetti on the same date, we learn that throughout his journey his thoughts were with the Church of the Sacred Heart; in fact, he enclosed the draft of three circulars, to which we

[7]Letter from Father Bologna to Father Rua, Marseille, February 9, 1881. [Author]

[8]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

[9]Father Martin Caroglio, now [1934] at Caracas in Venezuela, was then a student at the Oratory. His "bandits" were his good friends, the altar boys. [Author]

shall refer later, copies of which he was to send to the newspapers, the bishops and the team captains of the fund drive.

Marseille, February 10, 1881

My dear Father Bonetti:

I don't know if you received a report on our missionaries' stopover and departure from Marseille; it would make excellent material for our *Bollettino [Salesiano]*.

I enclose a letter for the newspapers and one for the bishops, both in the Italian original and in a French translation by Reimbeau. Read, correct and mail it; have it translated also in other languages. It might be well to insert a phrase in the letter to be sent to the team captains, something like: "They are requested to send in all money they have collected from the faithful every three—shall we say weeks—or months?"

Things are moving along nicely; prayers are badly needed.

God bless us all. Believe me to be

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Father Guiol was most cordial toward Don Bosco; indeed, we might say that he completely forgot the unfortunate episode which we narrated in the previous volume.[10] But we must not forget that Don Bosco had made a very fortunate decision in choosing the cleric [John Baptist] Grosso[11] as choirmaster for the parish church. Though still quite young, he had won Canon Guiol's unlimited support.

The ladies' sodality, which longed to have Don Bosco preside at one of their meetings, was delighted to welcome him on February 12. Two of the members could not share this rare pleasure, but the minutes assure us: "They will certainly receive the benefits of Don Bosco's prayers and blessings to compensate for their sacrifice."

First the minutes of the sodality's activities in 1880 were read; the money they had collected amounted to twenty thousand francs. Then they drew up the program for the feast of St. Francis de Sales which was to be celebrated on February 16. Finally Don Bosco spoke in his own inimitable French which had a charm of its own. The minutes give us the following extended summary of his speech:

[10]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 311-314. [Editor]
[11]*See* Appendix I. [Editor]

I have come with gratitude to recommend my poor boys to you, but above all to thank you dear ladies for your charity. It is so good to meet women who put aside their own comfort to solicit donations from door to door for a worthy cause. I do not even venture to praise you, lest I offend your modesty, but I give thanks to God whose instruments we all are and in whose work we are all engaged.

I cannot help but say with joy that what you have done in these past two years is truly providential. The right wing of our building in now completed, and the house accommodates one hundred and fifty boarders and sixty day students; unfortunately, we still have to turn down many boys, some five thousand since the oratory first began. This tells us how badly needed this institute is. There are not many boys' boarding schools, and their strict entrance regulations close the door to many. But here at St. Leo's, the sole requirement is that a boy be at either material or spiritual risk, and he is immediately admitted. Once the new left wing has been completed we shall be able to increase the enrollment to three hundred.

We should expand and buy a neighboring house whose windows open out upon the playground with some annoyance to me. We could make it the residence of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, whom we scheduled to come. Their only contact with the school then would be a doorway to the linen room, the laundry and the wardrobe. It would be easy to adapt the house to this purpose and thus eliminate a nuisance. But we need money to purchase the house. It would seem that Divine Providence wants us to have it, since the asking price has gradually been dropping, so much so that now we can buy it for forty-five thousand francs.

Divine Providence wants this work and will provide what we need. When I say Divine Providence, I mean God. Since God wants it, He will give us what we need to do it. Anyone doing a particular job is entitled to means, and we know that they will come. We are the instruments of Divine Providence, and this year Divine Providence and Mary, Help of Christians have manifestly protected us.

We would also like to make another purchase, a parcel of land of four or five acres in this part of the town, which would be excellent for a Sunday oratory for the religious instructions and moral protection of boys who work at different jobs during the week. This would keep them apart from lads who daily attend the oratory. This setup would be similar to that in Turin, which has proved very beneficial, drawing some three thousand boys.

This project would cost about the same. I request your prayers rather than direct donations, since your charity is not unlimited, but I urge you to contribute information and recommendations which might help us raise the money.

There will also be the cost of furnishing the house, providing for linen and

things the boys will need, but we shall do this little by little,[12] as Father Guiol would say!

We still have a debt of almost twelve thousand francs for housekeeping but this is not so pressing. The real problem is that the building contractors have presented their bills to me and are demanding payment of one hundred and twenty thousand francs, which we still owe on the recent construction.

But let us face all these obstacles and crushing debts undismayed. Of course we need money, but I trust in Divine Providence and have no doubt that God will help us, though just now where that help will come from, I cannot really say.

Let me tell you something I have never said before: our faith is solid as long as we do not prove unworthy. I hope this will never happen. We shall be doing God's work if we maintain piety and morality in our school. Once these are neglected, we shall no longer be engaged in God's work. But this will not happen, nor shall we become unworthy of Divine Providence's help.

Don Bosco went on to tell them about the origin, aim and development of the Sons of Mary Program for late vocations. He mentioned the exceptional interest shown in it by the Holy Father, and then went on to say:

When I went to Rome last year, the Supreme Pontiff, deeply hurt by the confiscation of properties of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, was concerned about making up for it by transferring the missionary seminaries elsewhere. Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, an area pretty much the size of all Europe, have never heard of the Gospel; Franciscans, Jesuits and Dominicans were never able to penetrate those lands or, if they did, had to give up their efforts. But now the hour of mercy has sounded for those peoples; they are accepting God's word, and it works wonders. Our Holy Father has also decided to set up an apostolic vicariate and prefecture there. However, what would really be more effective is the sending of many missionaries there. Precisely to achieve that, the Pope expressed his wish of founding a seminary for the training of evangelical laborers. Seville is a possible choice for a missionary novitiate, since Spanish is the language of the nations where the missionaries would work.

We also tried to establish a similar seminary in France, but the problem was that none of the possible locations were as centrally located and as feasible as

[12]Don Bosco knew that his ungrammatical *peu pur foie,* "little by little," was jokingly and congenially received by the ladies. [Author]

this your city. "I have faith in Marseille," the Holy Father said, "for piety and charity reign there. See if you can find people willing to sponsor this project, and tell them that they will be helping neither you nor me, but the Church."

The apprehension arose that bishops, who are themselves facing the problem of scarcity of priests, might object to see vocations, so few and far between, snatched from them for the missions. The Pope considered that and so did Don Bosco. However, the Sons of Mary Program does not raise this problem. Young men with a calling to the priesthood do their preliminary studies and after that are entirely free to choose between entering a religious order or returning to their respective dioceses. There are now thirty-two such seminaries here in Marseille, but we have prudently scattered them through our different houses, like La Navarre and elsewhere. We cherish good hopes of vocations in some three hundred French young men, without counting the five hundred boys at the Oratory in Turin. To all appearances and for public knowledge, the Sons of Mary Program fosters the education of poor boys and the training of young artisans in well-equipped workshops. However, its chief aim is to discover the seeds of priestly vocations among the boys and cultivate them.

These matters will not be brought up at the general meeting, so as not to divulge before a large audience projects which the sad times we live in counsel that we had better keep secret. But they should, by all means, stimulate your zeal, since they bring out the grandeur and importance of our goals.

These good ladies were quite enchanted by Don Bosco's simple trusting faith and pledged their best efforts to help raise funds to further his pious designs. The meeting made a deep and lasting impression on all. Before closing, Father Guiol prevailed upon Don Bosco to give them his blessing, assuring him how much they would appreciate it. With his unalterable kindness, Don Bosco blessed them, but stated clearly that this was the blessing which the Holy Father had expressly asked him to give them.

Events show that Don Bosco's trust in Divine Providence was not in vain, for, as we learn from the minutes of the March meeting, enough donations came in to reduce the more weighty debt considerably, first by twenty thousand francs, then by another contribution, and, two months later, by another donation equal to the first one. The outstanding debt was cut by half. But the committee was so anxious to free Don Bosco from this nightmare of contractors pressing him for payment, which, they imagined, robbed him of his sleep, that they planned an

extraordinary fund drive directed to industrialists who employed a sizable number of Piedmontese workers and to the workers' families themselves. To help out with their first drive they appealed to the men's committee, headed by Monsieur Rostand.

Morning and evening Don Bosco gave himself no respite from audiences; he was practically voiceless, and fatigue threatened to prostrate him entirely. Finally, on the morning of February 14 he had to state that he could not receive anybody. However, there were always exceptions even then—a sickly nun, the chairman of some agency or other, some distinguished gentleman who had a previous appointment, a neurotic woman crouched in a corner who suddenly sprang toward him with shrieks. They were all received in turn and kept him going till noon. By then he had reached the limit of his strength, and he felt that a heavy weight was pressing upon his chest, drawing the bystanders' compassion. To avoid further exertion that afternoon, he locked himself in his room and emerged only toward evening because he had an out-of-town engagement. An hour's tortuous coach ride brought him to his destination, where he was again obliged to speak, and he got back home at ten that night, completely drained of all strength, with the prospect of having to face another day, with its tide of disappointed visitors renewing their insistence with greater vigor. Some people kept coming back for three days in succession to get an audience. Worse still, a mountain of mail waiting to be answered was piling up on his desk.

Predictably, the morning of February 15 saw not just a series of visits, but a veritable avalanche as no less than sixty people clamored for an audience. Pleading Don Bosco's indisposition and saying he could not have visitors was useless; no one budged. Weary of waiting, the more daring ones seized the first opportunity when no one was watching to dash up to the next floor and knock on his door. He had locked himself in, and, not knowing who it might be, opened the door. It was an unfortunate move. They all burst into his room! Realizing his blunder, he snatched up his pen and the notebook in which he had been writing and slipped into the adjoining room, Father Durando's, but they pursued him even there. When finally the director and other confreres came to his rescue, they had an indescribable time clearing the area. Exhausted, ill, and practically voiceless, he saw no other way to escape than to take refuge with the parish priest of St. Joseph's, Father Guiol.

There he rested until five that afternoon, recuperating enough strength to face the next two hectic days awaiting him.

The feast of St. Francis de Sales had been postponed to February 16 so that he might be present. The bishop, wishing publicly to show his good will to St. Leo's Oratory,[13] chose to celebrate the community Mass and deliver a brief eulogy of its patron saint, giving Holy Communion to a large congregation consisting also of townspeople. Father Guérin, an outstanding speaker, pronounced the panegyric. There was much ado that day at St. Leo's to the late hours of the night and much joy, but not a moment of peace for Don Bosco.

February 17 was Salesian Cooperators' Day; Marseille had an enrollment of nine hundred. Others came from neighboring areas, a few even from as far as Toulon. Archbishop [Theodore] Forcade of Aix presided at the meeting. Father Mendre gave a report on the situation of St. Leo's Oratory and then Don Bosco took the floor. At times, his simple, tender manner of speaking moved his listeners to tears. Father [Louis] Mendre writes: "Don Bosco speaks French haltingly but, even in this, Divine Providence, whose adorable name he pronounces with such reverence that all hearts are instantly touched, comes most wondrously to his aid. It is a rare occurrence with a French audience, but his listeners forget to smile instinctively at his faulty expressions, so intent are they on listening to him, quite enthralled by the charm of his speech, which obviously draws its power from heaven."[14]

Finally, the archbishop of Aix, graciously accepting Don Bosco's invitation, closed the meeting with a few fatherly words, climaxing his talk with: "The Salesians, whose peaceful conquests have excelled those of Alexander, Caesar and Napoleon, have abundantly confirmed the truth that the Church alone is the mother of the poor and of the young. The gentle figure of Don Bosco has none of the traits of a conqueror, and his priestly ranks do not at all inspire the fear aroused by those great leaders' armies; yet God is with Don Bosco, and this is the secret of his success."

At the chapel door alone, where Don Bosco stood with plate in hand, he received two thousand francs, but more contributions came later. The animating spirit behind the whole occasion was Canon Guiol, and on the following Sunday Don Bosco publicly expressed his

[13]Minutes of the Ladies' Committee, February 12, 1881. [Author]

[14]This was written by Father Mendre in a publication to which we shall soon refer. [Author]

deep gratitude to him. Requested to preside at a pious devotion held every third Sunday of the month in honor of the Most Holy Trinity, he agreed and at the proper time began his sermon by saying, "Even were I bold enough to refuse a king's request, gratitude would never allow me to say no to the parish priest of St. Joseph's."

The spacious church presented a magnificent scene that evening, with a full congregation who used to flock to hear the renowned orators that succeeded each other in the pulpit of St. Joseph's. Don Bosco's topic was the "manna," symbol of the Eucharist, and our obligations [to this august mystery]. Concerning this sermon too Father Mendre wrote, "His listeners gave no thought to eloquence, but paid full attention to the word of God. Indeed, certain language slips even seemed to enhance that thoroughly apostolic sermon. I wish the same success to all who have the honor of stepping into that sacred pulpit."

Father Mendre's report to the Salesian cooperators, published along with other writings of his about St. Leo's Oratory, constitutes an interesting monograph,[15] in three parts.

The first part gives a concise account of the feast of St. Francis de Sales; the second is a detailed report on the meeting with introductory and concluding comments. After a thorough narration of the two committees' admirable work, Father Mendre continues: "While these people work outside, what is going on inside St. Leo's? . . . Let us cross the threshold of that blessed home and most respectfully greet the one who in our midst is Don Bosco's envoy, his representative. He came here among us, a worker from the first hour, a humble, tireless man, ready for every sacrifice demanded by the unexpected and speedy growth of this work of ours, always up to his duties, a model of unselfishness to all. Consider the exceptional achievements reached in but a few months and most of all give praise to God." Then, after running through the oratory's current history and gazing into the future, he reflected: "We will not dare indiscreetly to peek into the intimacy existing between Divine Providence and our revered Don Bosco. Wonderful successes we have already seen and doubtless shall see again." *Launch out into the deep* was his concluding exhortation.

[15]*Oratoire Saint-Léon, Fête de Saint-François de Sales et compte tendu de l'année 1880,* Marseille. The above quotations were taken from this anonymous publication. Other information was gathered from letters written by the cleric Reimbeau and by Father Bologna, as well as from the April issue of the *Bulletin Salésien.* [Author]

The third part of Father Mendre's publication was a defense of St. Leo's Oratory; it was addressed to the Italian consul general [Hannibal] Strambio, though directed at the department's prefect to refute certain accusations aimed against the house by prejudicial Marseille newspapers at the end of 1880.[16] Basing himself on a voluminous, slanderous report, the prefect had filed very serious complaints against the Salesians with the consul. Had there been any truth in them, they would most certainly deserve the severest penalties of the law against foreigners who proved unworthy of French hospitality. Strambio confidentially informed the Salesians of the charges. Though the Salesians had deemed it beneath their dignity to heed such base accusations, they realized that they could no longer ignore them, not only because they had to counteract the influence these malicious rumors might exert but also out of regard for the consul himself. This gentleman, both because he was very fond of Don Bosco ever since their school days and because he felt a legitimate national pride in viewing the progress and great promise that St. Leo's Oratory offered, held it particularly dear and did his best to support it. He therefore felt terribly embarrassed before the French authorities at that storm of accusations against the oratory, and this was an added reason for the Salesians to put matters straight. It was Father Mendre who therefore took on the task himself, and he did it masterfully. Don Bosco had read his manuscript back in November, as we see from the following letter which came to our attention after the publication of Volume XIV of these memoirs.

Turin, November 25, 1880

My dear Father Mendre:

You could not have better expressed my thoughts than in the statement you so kindly let me read. Yes, ask Consul Strambio to publish it if he judges it advisable.

I blundered! Instead of jotting down a few additional items on a separate sheet of paper for possible publication, I wrote them in the margin of your own copy. Do what you think is best.

You might also add that our schools in Italy, especially in Turin, very often took in poor, homeless French lads who were sent to us and that we were asked to set up similar homes in France to obviate traveling costs and the need to change customs and manners of living.

[16]*See* Vol. XIV, p. 489. [Editor]

I am most pleased to know that peace and harmony still hold between the parish and St. Leo's Hospice and Oratory. I have good reason to hope that these bonds of love will continue to strengthen. If charity is always needed, it is much more so now.

If you think I can do something from here, just let me know, and I shall comply faithfully with your suggestions.

God reward you for the assistance and help you give our Congregation. Once the storm has passed, what a rousing hymn of thanksgiving we shall raise! God bless you, my ever dear and worthy Father Mendre, and may He keep you in good health. Please offer my humble respects to our parish priest and to Father Bologna. Pray for me, who am always in deepest esteem and gratitude,

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. It might also be wise to point out that we are not more than a pious non-profit organization caring for poor, endangered youth. My concern to get your statement off to you by return mail does not give me time to make a copy. Father Bologna may make one for me. The three letters already sent to the consul are also quite to the point.

I shall write to our good Father Guiol very soon.

During his stay in Marseille Don Bosco told Father Guiol, half in earnest and half in jest, what he had seen in a dream shortly before coming to France, perhaps toward the end of 1880.[17] Father Guiol was firmly convinced of the need to have a summer house where St. Leo's boys could go during the hot season. Don Bosco agreed and even added that it should be furnished so as to serve as a novitiate as well. "As for the house itself," he stated, "I already have one in mind. It is a spacious building in a wholesome locality, surrounded by a pine grove, its access road lined on both sides with gorgeous plane-trees. The entire property is crossed by a teeming brook." Father Guiol, knowing full well that Don Bosco owned nothing in Marseille and leased nothing more than the school building, could not help fearing that he was suddenly losing his mind and, with a certain tremor in his voice, asked him where this estate of his might be.

"I have no idea where it is," Don Bosco answered, "but I am sure it is there and that it is in the neighborhood of Marseille."

[17]In a letter to Canon Guiol in October 1883 Don Bosco wrote: "Three years ago." [Author]

"How odd!" the parish priest replied. "How can you know such a house exists and that it is meant for you?"

"I know, because I dreamed about it."

"What did you dream?"

"I saw the house, the trees, the farm, and brook just as I told you, and moreover I also saw boys running about and playing along the access roads."

Whenever Canon Guiol heard Don Bosco speak of dreams, he did not regard him at all as a visionary, and so he took his words seriously and bore them well in mind. He waited to see what would happen. Not long after, some benefactors offered Don Bosco a house to suit the above purpose, but Don Bosco declined it, thanking them yet saying that it was not the one he was looking for. Some years went by with no sign that his words would come true. Each time Don Bosco and Father Guiol met, they resumed their discussion of the famous summer home which was to be converted into a novitiate and Father Guiol would begin to joke about it amicably.

But Don Bosco was talking about it also to others. In fact, he spoke of it to the cleric [Louis] Cartier[18] in September 1882. While traveling from Marseille to San Benigno to be ordained a sub-deacon, the cleric stopped off at Nice, where Don Bosco was directing the Salesians' spiritual retreat, and in the course of a long chat they had, Don Bosco told him, "We shall have a large house somewhere around Marseille, and there we shall set up a novitiate and a house of philosophy. You will be sent there, but not in the first year, because you will be needed as a teacher at St. Leo's. However, you will commute to teach until you will be permanently assigned there."

It was common belief in Marseille that the dream house might well be the summer home of Madame Broquier, not far from Aubagne. In fact, Don Bosco himself, misled by inaccurate descriptions, was inclined to believe so himself and wrote to the good lady, asking her to let him either buy it or rent it. He sent the letter to Father Bologna to bring to her, but since the letter described the villa that Don Bosco had in mind, the good lady could make no sense of his request, and Father Bologna realized that Don Bosco had been mistaken.

A second offer was made in 1883 by Madame Pastré, a rich Parisian

[18]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

widow whose daughter had been cured by Don Bosco. She spoke of renting a villa she owned near Sainte-Marguerite, not far from Marseille. But, for reasons of his own, without even inquiring about the condition of the house, Don Bosco declined the offer. Some months later, Father Bologna wrote that the woman was still pressing her offer and begging him to accept. Don Bosco replied by asking if it had a pine grove, plane-trees and a brook; if it had, all well and good, otherwise, no. Father Bologna went to see it and reported that there were hundreds of pines and avenues of plane-trees with a stream running through the estate. So he consented to lease the house at Sainte-Marguerite for a period of fifteen years, establishing a novitiate there in 1888 under the name of *La Providence*. Father Guiol, who saw it for the first time with Don Bosco in 1884, was astonished to realize that everything corresponded exactly to what Don Bosco had repeatedly told him he had seen in his dream.

In 1921, Father [Paul] Albera,[19] superior general, was told by a doctor at Allevard-les-Bains the following account of an extraordinary event which most probably took place that same year [1881]. He immediately passed it on to his fellow Salesians at Marseille on February 7. A gentleman of that city, a certain Guérin, was suffering from tuberculosis of the bone in one leg. Scraping the bone had brought no relief, and the physicians, judging his case incurable, told him to keep the sore always open for proper drainage. A devout Christian, the patient had but one desire—to do always and everywhere God's will. An acquaintance of his, who was living in Rue St. Jacques, suggested that he visit Don Bosco, not so much to ask for a miraculous cure as to seek some spiritual comfort from his words. He agreed, was granted an audience, and voiced his holy desire of bearing his cross patiently for God's love. Don Bosco gave him encouragement and a blessing.

The sick man lived on Avenue de Meilhan, too long a walk from St. Leo's for him in his condition, and so he decided to take the trolley at the corner of Rue Paradis and Rue St. Jacques. Since the car was late, he began to walk slowly toward the Exchange, meaning to take the first car passing that way, but none came. After a futile wait, he very slowly began to head toward La Canebière, hoping to find a trolley, but even

[19]*Ibid.* [Editor]

there he found none, nor did he on Rue Noailles. Step by step, almost imperceptibly he arrived home.

Usually he was obliged to retire early and have his supper in bed, but that evening, paying no heed to the family's protests, he began to attend to some business matters and stayed up until it was time for supper. Since he felt no pain on finishing his work, he sat at table with his family and later went to bed. As he removed the bandage to put on a new one, he noticed that the sore had completely disappeared, with not even a trace of a scar. Although Don Bosco had not been asked for a cure, he had worked the miracle.

A house close to St. Leo's had been readied as a residence for the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, but their arrival had to be postponed because of the house's dampness and other problems. Meanwhile Don Bosco blessed the residence in a very private ceremony to which not even the ladies' committee had been invited. They felt rather slighted because at several of their meetings they had given serious thought to providing for the new community. At their meeting of March 3, Father Guiol explained that two reasons had dictated that course of action. First, it would have been unwise to draw public attention just then to a second religious community; furthermore, in those last few days of his stay at St. Leo's Don Bosco could not be reached because of the crowds of visitors, so that Father Guiol had been unable to set a day and hour and make arrangements with him for the ceremony. His explanation put them at ease.

Certainly one could never be too prudent in the face of the events related in Volume XIV; on the other hand, it was a fact that St. Leo's was steadily gaining more support among the good people of Marseille. Hence the men's committee felt that it had everything to gain by publicizing the institute, and so, even during Don Bosco's stay, they approved of the publishing of Father Mendre's statement, to which we have already referred.

We have no further details of interest to tell of this visit of Don Bosco to Marseille. It was probably sometime in this period that a generous benefactress, Madame Prat-Noilly, expressed her disappointment to him. She had two married sons and a daughter, and their lifestyle deeply grieved her; she had asked him to pray that they might change their lives. Don Bosco had promised to remember them and had held out good hopes for their conversion. However, seeing no

improvement, the mother complained to Don Bosco, who very humbly replied, "Yes, the fault is mine, because I have not prayed enough."

The following episode, even if it does not belong to this particular year, but to another in this period, shows the importance Don Bosco attached to music in the festive oratories. While in Marseille he was visited by a religious who had opened a festive oratory in a town of France and who asked whether he approved of music as an attraction for the boys. His visitor believed that it could be beneficial and he mentioned advantages that could stem from it. Don Bosco listened with evident approval and commented, "An oratory without music is a body without a soul." However, his visitor feared some serious drawbacks: dissipation, and the danger that the boys might perform in theaters, restaurants, dance halls or during demonstrations. Don Bosco listened silently and then determinedly repeated his words, "Which is better, to be or not to be? A Sunday oratory without music is a body without a soul."

An extraordinary healing marked his departure from Marseille. The account is preserved in a testimony drawn up by the person who both happened to bring it about and witnessed it.

Mademoiselle Flandrin, seriously ill for a long time, seemed to be at the point of death. Her mother went daily to St. Leo's to try to get Don Bosco to visit the young lady, but, for reasons we do not know, Father Bologna thought that he should not go, and so he spoke of it to Don Bosco so unenthusiastically that the latter made no move.

Then came the day of his departure. To keep him away from the crowds who would obviously jam the railroad station in Marseille to see him off, arrangements were made, as had been done the year before, to drive him to Aubagne by carriage. Madame Flandrin made a last-minute effort, going to Father Mendre this time and imploring him to use all his influence in persuading Don Bosco to visit her daughter. Father Mendre, who knew the woman only by sight from having seen her so many times at St. Leo's, could not refuse her tearful plea and promised that, since it was his good fortune to accompany Don Bosco to Aubagne, he would make sure that the coach would make a detour to her home, where her daughter lay sick, and he would beg Don Bosco's pardon for his boldness and ask him to see the young woman.

It was dusk when they left. Father Mendre, positive that Don Bosco did not know the road, was startled to hear him exclaim, "I think we

are going the wrong way," just as the coachman took the detour which Father Mendre had secretly told him to take. Only Father Mendre knew the reason for this change of direction. Avoiding a direct response to the comment, he merely remarked, "You are in my care now, Father. Just leave it to me, and I shall certainly get you to your destination."

Don Bosco kept quiet. When the coach stopped at Madame Flandrin's door, he did not refuse Father Mendre's request. While the latter waited in an adjacent room, Don Bosco was escorted to the sick girl's room by her mother.

For two weeks the poor young woman's throat had been so inflamed that she had not been able to swallow anything and had been fed intravenously; furthermore, she was burning with thirst. Her father, a government worker, had gone to the office that morning, leaving the house in the certainty that his daughter would be dead on his return; just a few days earlier she had been anointed.

As he approached her bedside, Don Bosco asked her, "Would you like a little water to drink?"

"She cannot swallow," the mother promptly replied.

"Let us pray," Don Bosco said.

They knelt in prayer for a few moments, and then Don Bosco blessed the girl, saying, "And now drink." With no discomfort she began to sip some water, and as she did so, she felt new life flowing through her body. Finally, putting down the glass, she exclaimed, "I am healed!"

Bedlam broke loose, with people shouting, weeping, running madly here and there. Father Mendre, dashing into the bedroom, bumped into Don Bosco who was on his way out, calm and smiling. He went straight to the coach, followed by his dumbfounded traveling companion.

The dying girl got up, dressed herself, and walked out to the porch to await her father's return from work. On hearing his footsteps, she rushed toward him, flinging her arms about his neck. "I am cured, papa!" she cried. "Don Bosco cured me!" Stunned, the poor man staggered and collapsed. The doctor, who was called in haste, had a hard time rousing him to consciousness, while the daughter helped her mother in giving whatever assistance they could offer.

Meanwhile the two travelers were well on their way. Back in the coach, Father Mendre merely squeezed Don Bosco's arm and told him, "Now, Father, you certainly can't say that it is not Don Bosco who

performs miracles!" Very simply and calmly Don Bosco replied, "Blessed be God! Blessed be God!" Realizing it would be indiscreet on his part to press the point, Father Mendre said nothing more until they reached Aubagne.

The girl's recovery was so complete that on March 4 she wrote a letter to Don Bosco and, not knowing his address, sent it to Father Bologna with a note: "Let us all give thanks to Mary, Help of Christians for the miraculous healing granted me, a poor, undeserving sinner. Pray that I may grow in virtue and in devotion to Her. I wish to have a Mass of thanksgiving celebrated in honor of our gracious Mother. Please set a day this coming week for this Mass, but not too early, please, because we live pretty far from you. Please let me know a day or so in advance, that I may prepare to receive Holy Communion and notify several girlfriends of mine."

We have not been able to ascertain just what day Don Bosco left Marseille, probably February 25, for on Sunday, February 27, he was already at Count Villeneuve's chateau at Roquefort after a brief stay at Aubagne. From Roquefort he wrote to Father Bologna in French:

Roquefort, February 27, 1881

My dear Father Bologna,

I have left. We got many things done in Aubagne; now I am at Roquefort, where I shall rest for a day. Tomorrow, God willing, I go on to Saint-Cyr.

1. Meanwhile tell the boys I was much impressed by their good will and piety and hope that they will keep making further progress. Let them strive to break the devil's horns with the twin hammers of confession and Holy Communion.

2. I took leave of our confreres with real satisfaction, for I could see in their faces genuine good will to be true Salesians: with wisdom in their speech and light in their deeds. God be blessed! Courage and perseverance.

3. In the midst of my papers I found six hundred francs; if you are in desperate straits I shall add to them and send you a thousand. However, if you can manage without it, I shall give the money to Father Ghivarello,[20] who is as anxious for it as were the Hebrews for the manna in the desert.

For your information, I am writing to Madame Jacques. In case of an emergency, you may ask her to advance you about five thousand francs. She will shortly make them available to you in her charity.

[20]Director at Saint-Cyr. *See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

Offer my apologies to Madame Brouquier, from whom I had to take leave abruptly to go to Aubagne, where I found everyone waiting in church for me to speak to the cooperators.

All went well, praised be God.

4. Slip the enclosed notes into envelopes and forward them to the addressees.

May God bless us and keep us in His holy grace! Pray for me.

Always your friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

On the same day he wrote an account of his journey to Cardinal Nina hoping that it would strengthen his repeated requests for the usual privileges granted to approved religious congregations.

Roquefort, February 27, 1881

Your Eminence:

I spent three weeks in Marseille and managed to raise the funds needed to stabilize our St. Leo's Oratory. Over two hundred and fifty boys attend, a hundred of whom are seminary students for our missions in South America, Patagonia in particular. I am now taking stock and paying off the debts of the other houses; hopefully I shall also be able to bring the Holy Father a donation. God willing, I expect to be in Rome by the end of this coming March. It is essential, however, that the Holy Father restore the privileges he took from us,[21] for they are indispensable and are the prerogatives of all other congregations definitely approved by the Holy See.

We are already holding services in our new school's church in Marseille. The diocesan bishop celebrated the Mass on the feast of St. Francis de Sales, while the archbishop of Aix presided at the cooperators' meeting. There was a great turnout. The collection brought in more than three thousand francs. Saint-Cyr, Toulon, Fréjus, Cannes and Nice will all have similar gatherings. We shall see what God's grace can do.

I commend all our houses to your kind prayers and to your patronage.

Yours most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

Canon Brémond, parish priest at La Loubière in the diocese of Toulon, passed on to us a striking personal recollection. As an altar boy

[21]*See* Chapter 14. [Author]

at the church in Roquefort, he was very lucky to serve Don Bosco's Mass, one he had never seen anyone celebrate in that fashion. The priest's demeanor as he stood at the altar so impressed him that he could not take his gaze from him, so much so that all through that Mass, he totally forgot to play marbles on the sanctuary carpet as he and his partner usually did.

From Roquefort Don Bosco went on to Toulon, where a gathering of faithful was anxiously waiting for him in the parish church of St. Mary's. He spoke to an eager congregation. A late news item sent from Toulon to the province's Catholic daily read:[22] "He stepped up to the pulpit after the Gospel, and his very first words captured his audience. He is not imposing in stature, and has some problems in expressing himself in our language. However, his whole appearance is endearing. He is a miracle worker and, more, he is an apostle of charity, a man according to God's own heart, a saint."

Apologizing for not speaking French with the elegance of [Jean Baptist] Massillon or the eloquence of [Jacques-Benigne] Bossuet, he spoke of the humble beginnings and development of his work, detailing the account of the two nearby houses of Saint-Cyr and La Navarre, which stood in special need of assistance. "His sermon was delivered in vibrant language," the above-cited newspaper related, "which was both forceful and picturesque; even its errors made it more effective."

After his talk, Don Bosco made the rounds of the church to take up a collection. As he did so, something out of the ordinary occurred. When he held out the plate to a workman, the latter rudely turned away. Don Bosco passed him by and softly said, "God bless you." The man then thrust his hand into his pocket and dropped the equivalent of five cents in the plate. Looking into his eyes, Don Bosco said, "May God reward you." The man repeated his gesture, this time giving ten cents. Thereupon Don Bosco told him, "My friend, God reward you even more!" On hearing this, the man took out his purse and donated a franc. With a telling glance of tenderness Don Bosco moved on. As though drawn by a magnet, the man followed him through the church into the sacristy, and later even into the town, keeping after him until Don Bosco disappeared from view.

At Toulon also, Mary, Help of Christians glorified Her servant. A

[22]*La Sentinelle du Midi,* March 5, 1881. [Author]

young woman of eighteen who lived on the outskirts of the town was suffering from a painful liver ailment which did not respond to medication and treatment. A zealous Salesian cooperator, she had tried to attend Don Bosco's conference, but her illness, which had worsened from the beginning of March, forced her to keep to her bed. *If I could at least see Don Bosco,* she said to herself, *his mere presence might do me some good!* When told of her desire, Don Bosco felt that he should oblige. Standing by her bedside, he urged her to put all her trust in Mary, Help of Christians, and gave her a blessing. On leaving he said, "God grant you good health . . ." abruptly leaving his words suspended in the sentence. The mother, fearing that his reticence meant that her daughter would die, burst into tears but he went on to finish his words, ". . . and holiness." He left the house with a reminder to mother and daughter to place full trust in Mary, Help of Christians. Their faith was not in vain. A week later, as Don Bosco was holding another conference in St. Isidore's Church at Sauvebonne, in whose parish our school at La Navarre was located, the young woman, completely healed, sat in the congregation, listening to him.[23]

Toulon was on the road route to Saint-Cyr and La Navarre. Don Bosco visited both houses, but we have no account of his visit to Saint-Cyr and very little information on his visit to La Navarre. Every bit of space in the house of La Navarre was being used, with the inescapable result that countless needy boys' requests to be admitted were continually being turned down. His charity, which looked to Divine Providence for everything, moved him to think of putting up a building accommodating at least three hundred boys. He asked for a personal interview with the architect. The latter came in from Toulon, and Don Bosco sketched out his overall concept, pressing him to fill in the details. Three months later Father [Peter] Perrot,[24] the director, brought the plans to Turin for his approval. Don Bosco handed them over to Father [Anthony] Sala,[25] his economer general, and to two eminent city architects. He approved the plans after receiving their favorable report on June 26, but not before introducing in his own hand minor modifications which were followed to the last detail. Work began on December 16.

[23]*Bulletin Salésien,* July 1881, p. 12. [Author]
[24]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]
[25]*Ibid.* [Editor]

We now follow Don Bosco along the Côte d'Azur. He got to Nice no later than March 8 or 9, for on March 10, at a meeting of the ladies' committee, Canon Guiol stated that he had received a very important letter from him postmarked from that area. We do not possess the original, but the minutes of that meeting include a French translation which we offer in English:

I have a moment of respite—Don Bosco wrote—and am using it to do what I should have done sooner.

First, let me say that I was somewhat unhappy on leaving Marseille without having had time to speak with you at length as I wanted to about St. Leo's. However, it seems that Father Durando left the school in fairly good condition, thus making it possible for me to give you any needed norms and explanations by mail. The same apparently holds for discipline and behavior. Everyone seems to be full of good will.

God continues to bless us everywhere: at Aubagne, Roquefort, Saint-Cyr, Toulon, Hyères, and we have every reason to thank Him for His spiritual and material blessings.

Father Bologna tells me that all the funds I collected while in Marseille have been used up to pay the contractors, and so he is now penniless and faces outstanding debts. I have raised fifteen hundred francs which I meant to leave at La Navarre but am now sending to him to meet his current need. I hope that the fund drive among the industrialists and working families will balance matters. Father Bologna also tells me that you loaned him five thousand francs for the contractors. I hope this too can be adjusted.

How can I thank you and the ladies' and men's committees who are the mainstay of St. Leo's? Tell them we are indebted to them and that we pray with all our heart that God may reward them generously in this world and in eternity.

There is another matter I have never managed to clear up. Many people maintain that poor Don Bosco obtains special graces from God by his prayers. This is not true. God blesses our undertakings, favors them and protects them. However, since we do not have the means to maintain them, He comes to our aid by granting even extraordinary graces and favors to those who help us financially. Tell our benefactors this, especially Mademoiselle Rocca, so that little by little she can put it in the minutes.

I hope to send you more news very soon. Just now I warmly commend myself to the charity of your prayers. God bless us all and keep us in His holy grace! Keep poor little me in your prayers.

Always yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

The Salesian cooperators' conference was scheduled for Friday, March 12. Father Ronchail, overwhelmed by debts, had carefully organized the day; he owed thirty-six thousand francs just to the firms supplying the workshops, apart from other obligations, so much so that Brother Moro,[26] the bookstore manager and purchaser for the house, dared put in no further orders for anything. One evening Don Bosco told him as the two were strolling in the courtyard, "Debts are made and Don Bosco is expected to pay them, but he has no money." Then, clasping his hands as in prayer for a few moments, he went on, "Well! I shall pray to Our Lady and ask Her to do what She can."

The conference netted Father Ronchail fourteen thousand six hundred francs. Even two Protestant English ladies named Dandas had helped take up the collection in church. Some days later a French gentleman came to see Don Bosco and told him that he would like to do something for St. Pierre's Hospice and that he had sixteen thousand francs available. Don Bosco thought that the man was offering a loan and replied that really he was so deeply in debt that he could not refuse the offer, only he could not foresee when he would ever be able to pay it back. The gentleman explained that he was not making a loan but a donation for the hospital. Don Bosco thanked him and suggested, "Rather than give it to me, give it to Father Ronchail to help him pay off some of his creditors." The man did so. Within a short time, according to Brother Moro, other donations poured in, raising the amount to forty-two thousand francs, though he did not know how much more came in later.

A few days after Don Bosco's arrival in Nice the usual surging flood of visitors began. "Don Bosco!" exclaimed Father Ronchail in a letter to Father Rua.[27] "It is really impossible to describe the flood of enthusiasm his very presence produces. In an endless stream people keep pouring in from morning to night to see him. . . . Let this suffice to give you an idea of the high esteem in which our dearly beloved father is held here and elsewhere."

The following week he stayed four days in Cannes, the guest of an English Protestant family named Monteiths, which considered itself highly honored to host him. It was still the resort season in Cannes, a

[26]Letter from Father Charles Moro to Father Lemoyne. *See* Vol. XIV, p. 319. [Author]
[27]Letter to Father Rua, Nice, March 22, 1881. [Author]

favorite vacation spot in winter for wealthy French and English families, with its delightful beaches. Charity drives were directed to the seasonal cosmopolitan population for philanthropic causes. That was why Don Bosco chose to go there. "If he could have stayed a bit longer in Cannes," Father Ronchail wrote[28] in jest in 1881, "he would have completely emptied the coffers of those kind, thoughtful people who came to him every day with their generous offerings." He returned to Nice on March 19, a Saturday, to celebrate the feast of St. Joseph, which was also the name day of Father Ronchail [director of St. Pierre's Hospice].

Having still a few families to visit in Cannes, he went back for another day on May 21. A flock of people attended his Mass. While he was dining with the Monteiths, a cousin of Mrs. Monteiths, a Protestant, asked him for a blessing and a medal of Our Lady. Throughout that five-day visit he had the family coach and horses at his disposal at all times.

His stay in Cannes had been interrupted on the evening of Wednesday, March 16, because his friends in Nice had organized a charity concert for the benefit of Don Bosco's hospice. It was held in the spacious Paulliani Hall of the Catholic Club; artists of repute gave an excellent program in exquisite taste before a very select audience, such as only Nice can assemble during the tourist season. The performance netted a substantial amount.

The evening's principal organizer was Dr. [Charles] D'Espiney, a staunch friend of Don Bosco who had praised his works in a charming piece of poetry addressed to the ladies present and closing with the reminder that, while Don Bosco had exhausted his funds to achieve so much good, the purses of the good ladies were at his disposal. His easy-flowing verses, masterfully recited by Monsieur Harmel, proved quite effective.[29]

On March 22, a third meeting, open to the general public, was held in Nice. It was a "Sermon de Charité" and featured a fund-raising address. Don Bosco spoke briefly after the speaker and received several very substantial donations.

Throughout all these fund-raising activities, Don Bosco did not lose

[28]*Ibid.* [Author]
[29]*Bulletin Salésien,* April 1881, p. 11. [Author]

himself in matters of local interest; his mind reached out also to persons and matters distant. For example, he remembered the name day of his Roman benefactress, Mrs. Matilde Sigismondi, as this gracious note of his tells us.

Marseille, Toulon and Nice, March 13, 1881

To our good Mamma in Jesus Christ:

This year I cannot honor St. Matilda in the company of our good mamma, but I remember you and shall celebrate holy Mass tomorrow and pray that God may keep you in good health for many years to come, so that you may witness the fruits of your charity and attain heaven. You may be sure heaven is yours, but please don't go until you have lived as long as did Methuselah— 969!

I am still in France but on my way toward Rome, where I hope presently to pay you my filial respects at the beginning of April.

God bless you and Alexander. Have a good name day and pray for me, who will always remain in Jesus Christ,

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

He also gave direct attention to collecting funds for the Church of the Sacred Heart [in Rome], as we shall see, and to organizing the Association of Salesian Cooperators in France, as the following letter to the editor of the *Bollettino Salesiano* tells us.

Nice, March 20, 1881

My dear Father Bonetti,

I have received the circular you sent to reporters and its covering letter. Without realizing it, I also sent out a few of them. Please don't have any more sent to me. Mail me a few forms for the appointment of team captains and some Italian circulars. Address them to Father Cibrario;[30] I shall be with him next Sunday. Next Tuesday I will preach in the Church of Notre Dame here in Nice to raise money for Father Ronchail; Wednesday I shall be in Cannes, Friday in Grasse, and then I shall head for Italy.

[30]Director at Vallecrosia in Liguria. [Editor]

Thanks be to God! I could never have hoped for the abundant blessings poured upon us these past few days. May God be praised! Keep on praying.

Regards to all.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I was able to set up quite a few team captains.

The letter mentions a trip to Grasse, a fairly large suburb of Cannes, some twenty-five miles from Nice. In his French biography, *Dom Bosco*, Dr. D'Espiney tells us that our founder spent several days at Grasse, receiving many visitors and healing an elderly working woman. When she asked for his blessing, Don Bosco told her. "Gladly, but you must kneel down." She could not, she protested, for after a fracture sustained eight years before, one knee had stiffened and had developed a running sore. Still Don Bosco urged her to try. She obeyed, knelt, received his blessing, and rose to her feet with ease. She then asked him to complete his deed of mercy and grant her a brief audience. He agreed and they went into the next room. While the good woman was speaking two cats began to fight, running madly through the room and leaping across the furniture. She jumped to her feet and began chasing them. Don Bosco smiled at her agility and remarked, "I believe you are not as lame as you were trying to make me believe."

"Odd!" the woman exclaimed. "My leg is so much better!"

"You will recover, but not right away. It is better for both of us if Mary, Help of Christians does not grant you this grace immediately."

One day the parish priest at Grasse, Father Mistre, a fond admirer of Don Bosco, introduced some young ladies to him who were known as committee almoners because their duty was to provide for the needs of the parish poor. They were some of the very first Salesian cooperators. Their president spoke briefly on their behalf and was introducing them, when Don Bosco graciously commented, "I am very glad to meet your almoners, but isn't the treasurer here too?" She had been standing with the others and was introduced. Coming forward, she handed him an offering they had put together from their private funds.

During his few days' stay in Grasse, Don Bosco said Mass in the convent of the Sisters of St. Thomas of Villanova, who ran a boarding school. One day the superior, Mother Saint-Ferreol, a talented, dy-

namic woman, told him: "Father, how long your hair is! It needs a trimming."

"I have no time to bother about my hair," he answered.

"Well, if you like, we have a barber nearby who would gladly come and give you a trim," she returned.

"If it will make you happy, I am quite willing."

Of course, she had planned her little trick the day before. The barber appeared instantly and was instructed to save all the hair clippings for her. She kept them as relics and gave a tuft of hair to each of the almoners who worked with her at the convent, saying, "Those of you who intend to grow old will attend Don Bosco's canonization, for he is a saint." One only of their number, their president, lived to see the day.[31]

We have already cited D'Espiney's *Dom Bosco*. Published in Nice in 1881, it is the first actual biography ever written of our saintly founder. A small book written in a flowing style, it was rich in anecdotes and bore all the promise of a best seller.[32] The author worked on it for about a year and then asked Count Cays to review, correct and edit the manuscript and suggest further additions. Convinced that the book would be a blessing for France, he rightly commented, "People everywhere are asking about Don Bosco's congregation; each inquirer is a potential Salesian or cooperator. A letter would not suffice to tell the whole story, and Father Mendre's leaflet is somewhat inadequate."[33]

Father Rua also saw the original manuscript and generally had words of praise for its author, though he pointed out a few errors in dates and cited some passages which might wisely be deleted because of the times. He also suggested that the Congregation not be called a religious organization, but merely a charitable association of priests and laymen.[34] Father Rua, however, did not go over the manuscript thoroughly but only spot-checked it in a cursory reading, else he would have noticed that an anecdote narrated on page 136 about the count of

[31]Her name was Teresa Chauve. She sent this account to Father [Louis] Cartier in a letter dated January 20, 1934, and we were able to insert this while correcting our galley proofs. It seems that Mademoiselle Chauve thought that Don Bosco's visit occurred in 1875, but it is improbable that he was ever there prior to 1881. [Author]

[32]Dr. Charles D'Espiney, *Dom Bosco*, Nice, Malvano-Mignon, 1881, p. 180. [Author]

[33]Letter to Count Cays from Dr. D'Espiney, Nice, June 21, 1880. [Author]

[34]Father Rua's notes to a letter from D'Espiney to Count Cays, July 15, 1880. [Author]

Viancino was not befitting and the name was misspelled Vianichino. When the count read the book, he took issue with Don Bosco, who replied good-humoredly:

Turin, December 18, 1881

My dear Count:

Dr. D'Espiney is a good Catholic, but his book aims at telling some tall tales at Don Bosco's expense. So do not be surprised if you find that it has certain inaccuracies and downright errors.

However, since I shall be meeting the author in Nice next month, I shall not forget to ask him to delete or at least amend some of the stories the book contains.

Still, I am glad that this gave you a reason to write to me. I would be happier had I been able to see you once more in person.

At any rate, I pray God to keep you and your wife, the countess, in good health and in His holy grace. While asking a remembrance in your prayers, I am honored to be,

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

The author's amendments appeared in the second edition, which was very soon issued. Several French editions followed in rapid succession. The Italian translation, which appeared after the eleventh French edition, was done by Salesian Father [Dominic] Ercolini of Tuscany; it was also very popular, and even today [1934] the book makes for popular reading.

Biographies of Don Bosco appeared after that in several languages. They were a true godsend, for the time was drawing near when age and overwhelming concerns would make it impossible for Don Bosco to make the fund-raising trips he had made in the past. Biographies did his begging for him. It is to be noted too that their influence was particularly felt in the first few years after his death, for they kept Don Bosco's memory alive and prevented a decline in financial help from the many people who had previously contributed to his undertakings.

As for himself, he used to say, "Talk well or badly about Don Bosco, as you wish, so long as what you say helps to save souls." He said this because he was fully aware of two things: that talk about his works smoothed the way to saving souls, and that no one could speak of his works without speaking of him, so intertwined were they. And so

he let people talk, intervening only when they were encroaching upon the truth. For example, on learning that Albert Du Boys had described his parents as "fairly well-to-do,"[35] he promptly had it corrected, as Father Barberis told us. "No, no, they were poor," he objected. He spoke the same way during a conversation at the Valsalice College [in Turin] at which the present writer was lucky to be present in September 1887. A Salesian from a region of Poland then under Austrian rule happened to mention a biography in German—whether an original or translation I am not sure—which said that Don Bosco came from a middle-class background. Energetically, he replied, "Write and tell them to correct this! You must write and tell them!"

But the enemy of good was not idle. *The Radical*, a fanatic anti-clerical paper, again attacked him in its issue of June 9 with a blistering article slandering the Salesians in France and urging the government to close down their houses and expel them from the country. That Congregation's founder, it rambled, was a trickster, a self-styled miracle-worker, and the whole aim of his schools was to convince young men to enter the priesthood despite family opposition and then ship these draft dodgers off to America. It styled the Salesians a motley crew of poor devils who had pounced upon France like leeches, no better than a horde of friars escaping from their impoverished Italy—some of them fake priests ordained in defiance of canon law, the others tramp clerics and laymen, army deserters, who made a show of piety to ensnare the simple while privately they were a hotbed of vice. They started by giving a few boys free shelter so that later on they could beat their drums and solicit alms, the boys being later expelled under the pretext of bad conduct and their places taken by others who paid tuition. It claimed that the pupils were cruelly abused, even struck with hammers, made to starve and forced to shout *"Long live the Pope"* and *"Down with the Republic!"* The director, the paper continued, was in touch with the pretender to France's throne. The government's tolerant attitude toward such child-abusing friars was truly unexplainable, especially in the face of the reports and protests sent in by the people. The vicious journalist signed his diatribe and concluded, "Today they completed the building they have put up on Rue Beaujour. The staff is

[35]Albert Du Boys, *Dom Bosco et la pieuse Société des Salésiens*, Paris, Gervais, 1884. He wrote: "His father and mother were fairly well-to-do peasants." [Author]

entirely Italian and lives at the expense of France, an insult to our country. We are confident of our readers' thanks for disclosing the real nature of this unsavory breed of men who put up a front to conceal their true identity as intruding religious that they may have a free hand to carry out their depraved designs. Again we demand that the authorities tell us what they are waiting for before they deport these despicable friars unworthy of our pity. Nor shall we stop raising questions as long as they stay. We demand their immediate expulsion, and in this we are in accord with the great radical party."

How timely was D'Espiney's biography! It sold as fast as it appeared. Many people had met Don Bosco in Marseille, and had experienced what the author had written on the first page of his book: "It is impossible for anyone to see Don Bosco without feeling drawn to him with all one's heart!"

# CHAPTER 3

## *Count Louis Anthony Colle*

COUNT Louis Anthony Colle, a distinguished Salesian co-operator, deserves a chapter all his own, for his entire relationship with Don Bosco forms an extremely interesting period in the latter's life. On July 5, 1882, after a visit from Count Colle and his wife to Turin, Don Bosco wrote to say, "You and Madame Colle have been the constant topic of conversation at the Oratory and at our Valsalice College here in Turin, and also at Lanzo, and San Benigno. We have all been impressed by your gracious manner and down-to-earth piety. You have benefited us all spiritually and materially. Everywhere they keep assuring me of the many prayers they are saying for both of you." Although the long list of substantial donations received from Count Colle was then just beginning, his name was already a household word in Salesian houses, and as we ourselves have witnessed, it became ever more cherished every year. The most outstanding benefactors in this account of ours are [Count] Louis Anthony Fleury[1] Colle and his noble consort, [Baroness] Marie Sophie Buchet. They deeply loved Don Bosco and went beyond the boundaries of nationality in their love for his work in France, Italy and South America. They expressed it by a charity which knew no limits when it was a question of assisting Don Bosco and ineffably comforting him in the afflictions of his last years.

Divine Providence introduced Don Bosco to the Colle family just before it was stricken with a grievous family loss. When Don Bosco was in Marseille in February 1881, the parish priest at St. Mary's in Toulon came to him, begging that he go there and bless the Colles' only

[1]The count's name is converted into *Fleury* in Latin epigraphs and in Italian letters, this being a straight translation of *Fiorito*, or *Floritus*, without much regard for ancient spelling, but this was really part of his surname. His Christian name was Louis, his middle name being Anthony, like his son. [Author]

child, who lay dying at the young age of seventeen. The priest pleaded the parents' utter desolation and praised their virtue, assuring him that they were convinced the boy would recover with his blessing.

Don Bosco replied that he could not go to Toulon but would most certainly pray for the young man, and, regardless of relentless pressure, he refused to change his decision. A week later the parish priest returned, this time determined not to budge until his plea had been answered. Don Bosco yielded, but since he did not want to give the impression that he was going to Toulon solely for that purpose, he told him that he would go there to hold a Salesian cooperators' conference. The date was set for March 1.

On arriving in Toulon, Don Bosco immediately called on the Colle boy, who received him with open arms yet with no show of impatience. Consumption had taken its toll of the victim. Once they were alone, Don Bosco was amazed at the utter candor of the boy's soul, truly a [Saint] Aloysius in name and in fact. Realizing that the youth was ready for heaven, Don Bosco prepared him to offer his life gladly to the Lord and was touched to see how docile he was to the inspirations of grace, readily accepting Don Bosco's promptings and placing himself wholeheartedly into God's hands. However, Don Bosco did not think it wise to dissuade him from praying for recovery, if only out of thoughtfulness for his anguished parents; but he suggested that he pray for healing only if it should be for the good of his soul. God called the young man to Himself on April 3. After receiving the Last Rites, he said to his parents, "I am going to heaven. Don Bosco told me so."

The memories left by this much loved young man made such a lasting impression on Don Bosco that almost immediately he planned to write his biography and most promptly did so.[2] One who reads this little book with careful attention to the wording and style may well

[2]We have three sources of information: this biography, its relevant correspondence, and lastly some handwritten notes of Countess Colle. We shall first consider the correspondence which consists of eighty-two letters, seventy-five written by Don Bosco, one by Father Barberis, three by the cleric De Barruel [later a priest] and three by Father Rua. All are written in French, save for one from Don Bosco and Father Barberis' letter. Don Bosco's French is mediocre and hastily jotted down as anyone can see. The letters cover some six and a half years, from May 4, 1881 to October 17, 1887. The countess' notes refer to her conversations with Don Bosco about her son's appearance. After her death two notes were found among her papers and correspondence, one dated June 3, 1886, the other April 7, 1889. In them she strongly asks her heirs to send all her papers to Father Perrot or to some other Salesian. We had copies of forty-six letters and these notes for several years but came into possession of eighty-two originals only in 1931, thanks to the French provincial, Father Hippolytus Faure. [Author]

question whether it is really Don Bosco's work. The fact is that Don Bosco only sketched a first draft of the book and left the actual writing and final form to Salesian cleric [Camillus] De Barruel.[3] Indeed in a letter dated October 4, 1881, he told Count Colle that he would write it directly in French to save time and later would have a friend of his go over it. That friend was the above cleric De Barruel [an adult vocation].

As to the veracity of the biography, Don Bosco's preface assures the reader that the information had come from people who shared the boy's life and so were in a position really to know his piety, charity and fervor. Of Don Bosco's diligence to obtain positive facts we have evidence in three letters addressed to the young man's father.[4] In the first he thanks the count for what he had sent him and for his patience, and then he asks him to complete his task by collecting the boy's conversations and thoughts which he might have expressed to his parents when giving alms to the poor or when doing his tasks; also, all edifying acts of mortification and patience in dealing with his family, friends, or the poor; particulars of his visit to the Holy Father in April 1878: his words and, more especially, those of the Pope; similar details of his visits to churches or shrines and attendance at special religious services. "Every word, every act of virtue will have its place," Don Bosco wrote. "Please help me in gathering all this material, and I will put it in proper order."

The information he requested arrived. In thanking the count, Don Bosco wrote: "Everything, no matter how trivial, will help enhance the value of this work, which is well under way and just about seventy-five percent finished. I hope to bring it with me when I call on you this January." In his last letter, informing the count that the biography was complete, he added, "Now all I have to do is to read it over and have it copied, so I can bring you the manuscript on my next stopover in Toulon. We must read it through together." In his first letter he had

[3]Don Bosco knew enough French to make himself understood and spoke and wrote it with an aplomb and easy manner that blithely glossed over vocabulary and grammar. The story is still told about Father Mendre, curate and later parish priest of St. Joseph's in Marseille, who loved Don Bosco with tender filial affection. He was sitting beside Don Bosco during a performance at St.Leo's Oratory one day. Every so often the musicians would play a flat note or two. The French priest, who had an ear for music, winced each time, until, finally, Don Bosco whispered in his ear in his own inimitable manner and pronunciation: *"Moussieur Mendre, la mousique de les enfants elle s'écoute avec le coeur et non avec les oreilles."* [Father Mendre, the music of children must be listened to with the heart, not with the ears.] Time and time again Father Mendre would recount this advice with keenest pleasure, affectionately mimicking Don Bosco's accent. [Author]

[4]San Benigno Canavese, October 4; Turin, November 29 and December 30, 1881. [Author]

already assured him, "Before we send it to the printers, you must see it and freely make any comments or corrections you wish."[5]

How much he valued historic accuracy! The second chapter contains a long digression on educational psychology which many readers might regard as someone else's work incorporated into the biography to enhance its value and scope. Running through about eight pages, it deals with the home training of children and is primarily based on the education of the will—an education which is generally neglected in favor of any early discipline of the mind and which is badly stymied by the child's whims and desires that only produce self-love and sensuality. Certainly, as elsewhere in the book, the style of this passage is not Don Bosco's, but we must say that substantially these pages, like the entire book, belong to him. It is obvious that the ghostwriter could not shed his own personality so completely as to preclude subjective elements, and his own bent toward philosophy is most evident here; yet we cannot help but see Don Bosco's own ideas recently formulated in his principles of the preventive system. Don Bosco most likely sketched out the book's general outline, which was then developed by the ghostwriter and submitted to him for review and approval. We may go a step further and say that we can find the nub of this short biography in the one letter which he wrote in Italian[6] when the book was still but an embryonic idea. In writing to Countess Colle,[7] Don Bosco had said that he did not care to entrust some things to print. This reticence bothered her motherly sensitivities, and so Don Bosco explained his thought to her husband in Italian, perhaps so that, not understanding it, she would be given a suitably softened translation.

Turin, May 22, 1881

My dearly esteemed Monsieur Colle:

I realize that your wife is somewhat hurt to know that certain things I do not wish to entrust to print. Let me briefly explain why. As parents you were

[5]The book, *Biographie du jeune Louis Fleury Antoine Colle* by Fr. John Bosco, was published in 1882. It was printed at the Oratory and is so dedicated: *A Monsieur et à Madame Colle Hommage Respectueux*. [Author]

[6]Young Louis had an Italian tutor, but the count himself must have had only a scant knowledge of Italian. Otherwise, why did both Don Bosco and Father Rua write to him in French? Father Barberis, in writing to the count (S. Benigno Canavese, September 6, 1882), apologized for writing in Italian, saying he did not know much French but understood that the count had some acquaintance with Italian. Such acquaintance, to be sure, does not exclude some struggle to understand the language. [Author]

[7]Rome, May 4, 1881. [Author]

overly fond of your only child—too much caressing and too much fuss. However, he always retained his goodness. Had he lived, though, he would have run into serious problems which might indeed have proved disastrous after his parents' death. God therefore chose to rescue him from such danger by calling him to Himself in heaven, where he might soon become the advocate of his parents and of all who have prayed or are praying for him.

As for myself, I have remembered Louis in my prayers and have asked all our houses to pray in suffrage for his soul.

Since you are now in Nice, I think you may enjoy taking a trip to Turin. I shall be waiting for you there with deep pleasure. Nor will Mary, Help of Christians fail to comfort you both.

God bless you, my dear friend, and may He keep you and your wife in good health. Pray for me too.

Always yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Upon arriving in Turin, please go directly to the Dogana Vecchia Hotel where you will be welcome. Anyone can then direct you to our house.

A trip to Turin to see Don Bosco and pray at the Church of Mary, Help of Christians was just what the afflicted couple needed to uplift their spirits after their painful loss, and so they accepted his invitation. Don Bosco refers to this visit in his letter to Madame Colle dated July 3: "My manner must have led you to think I forgot all about your visit, your kindly concern and your generous charity. But please forgive the circumstances I was in. I have been swamped with work and have had no time to call my own. Still, notwithstanding my delay in getting to you, be assured I make a special memento of you and your husband every morning, and I have prayed for Louis, who left us to go to heaven."

This is precisely what the mother wanted to know: what had become of her Louis after death? She kept harping on this with Don Bosco, who wrote to her about it several times and discussed it with her in their mutual visits. Here we enter upon phenomena which lie beyond our human ken and which we shall endeavor to investigate with the help of available documents.

Don Bosco first introduced the topic to Countess Colle in his letter of May 4, 1881. "Be reassured," he wrote. "Our beloved Louis is most certainly saved and asks two things of you: that you earnestly prepare yourself to join him in heaven when it shall so please God, and that you

pray intensely for him, as he in turn will obtain special graces for you." He felt it unwise to say more in writing, but later told her in person what he had not put down on paper. While he was hearing confessions on April 3, he revealed that he suddenly had a distraction, as he called it. He saw Louis happily playing with some friends in a garden. The vision lasted but a flash. Louis did not speak. However, his appearance convinced Don Bosco that he was certainly in heaven. Nevertheless, he kept praying for him, asking God to reveal more to him and hoping for this grace from His infinite mercy, because, as far as might be possible, he wanted to comfort the parents so distraught by the loss of their only child.

God heard his prayer and granted it far beyond anything he might have hoped for. On May 27, one day after the feast of the Ascension, while offering Mass for the intentions of Louis' parents, who were present, he saw the boy at the moment of the Elevation bathed in a flood of light, very lovely in appearance, bright with joy, cheeks fleshed out and rosy. He was dressed in rose-tinted white garments with golden embroidery on the chest.

"Why did you come, dear Louis?"

"I did not have to come," was the reply. "In my present state, I do not need to move anywhere."

"Are you happy, Louis?"

"Completely!"

"Do you miss anything?"

"All I miss are my mom and dad."

"Why don't you let them see you?"

"It would cause them too much pain."

With this the youth disappeared. However, at the final prayer he reappeared and did so again when Don Bosco was in the sacristy. This time he was with several Oratory boys who had died during Don Bosco's absence; this greatly comforted Don Bosco.

"Louis," he asked, "what shall I say to your parents to ease their pain?"

"Tell them to follow the light and to win friends for themselves in heaven."

Don Bosco related this account to the Colle parents when they went to Turin. Hardly a month later, he received another vision described in his letter to the dead youth's mother on July 3. He had continued begging God to reveal something more definite to him, and between

May and July he had had the comfort of seeing Louis and once again hearing him speak.

On June 21, while celebrating Mass, just before the consecration—he wrote—I saw him. He was unchanged, ruddy and brilliant in beauty, his skin resplendent as the sun. I immediately asked if he had a message for us, and he replied quite simply, "St. Aloysius has considerably helped and protected me." I repeated my question: "Is there anything we can do for you?" He gave me the same answer and disappeared. Since then I have neither seen nor heard anything more. Should God in His infinite mercy kindly give us another revelation, I shall promptly inform you.

Some two months later, he again had an apparition and narrated it to Madame Colle on August 30:

Throughout the octave of the Blessed Virgin Mary's Assumption and more particularly on August 25 I prayed and asked that prayers be offered for our dear Louis. On the 25th, at the consecration of the Sacred Host, I was given the great joy of seeing him, clad more magnificently than before. He seemed to be in some sort of a garden, walking with a few friends. All were singing *Jesu, corona virginum* [O Jesus, the crown of virgins] in such harmony and accord that I can never possibly attempt to express or describe it. In their midst rose a lofty pavilion or tent. I was hoping that I might see more and hear more of their marvelous singing, but just then a flash of dazzling light forced me to shut my eyes. Then I found myself saying Mass at the altar. Louis' face was brilliant with beauty; he looked happy—rather, ecstatic. During that Mass I prayed for you and asked God for the singular grace that we may all one day be reunited in heaven.

This letter was written at San Benigno, where he was again given a vision of Louis, as he later explained in Toulon. One day, while preparing a sermon in his room, he had the feeling that someone was standing beside him. He turned to look, and the instant he did so the person immediately switched to his other side. As he was wondering what had happened, he heard a voice asking, "Don't you know me?"

"Louis!" he exclaimed. "How did you get here to San Benigno?"

"It is just as easy for me to come to San Benigno as to La Farlède[8] or Turin, or anywhere else I choose."

"Why don't you appear to your parents who love you so dearly?"

[8]Summer estate of the Colle family. [Author]

"I know they love me, but God's permission is needed for them to see me. Even if I were to speak to them, they could not hear my words. They must go through you."

Don Bosco referred to Louis Colle's apparitions twice more in his letters of 1882. On July 30 he wrote to Madame Colle:

> I have the consolation of telling you that once again I had the consolation of seeing our ever beloved Louis. Many details I hope I can relate to you personally. On one occasion I saw him enjoying himself with friends in a garden. He was richly attired, defying all description. On another occasion I saw him again picking flowers in a garden and then bringing them into a great hall and placing them on a gorgeous table: "Whom are these flowers for?" I asked him. He replied: "I was told to pick them and weave them into a garland for my father and mother, who went through so much trouble for my happiness." I will write more on some other occasion.

On December 4, in a letter to Madame Colle, he declared: "I have seen our dearly beloved Louis several times, always resplendent in glory, bathed in light, garbed in splendor which defies all power of description. I shall say more to you orally when, as I hope, I shall see you at Toulon next February and spend some time with you and your dear husband, who is so generous to our Salesian houses."

He did visit them as he said, but it was in March, when he went into further details. On that occasion he told them of an apparition he was granted while in Rome on April 30, 1882, on the feast of the Patronage of St. Joseph, the third Sunday after Easter. He was standing in the sacristy of the chapel adjoining the new Church of the Sacred Heart, then being built, when he saw Louis drawing water from a well.

"Why all that water?" he asked.

"It's for me and my parents."

"Why so much?"

"Don't you understand? Can't you see that it is the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ? The more abundant the flow of grace and mercy, the more the treasury is full."

"Why are you here?"

"I came to visit you and tell you I am ever so happy."

While in Toulon from March 5 to March 14, he related many other details which were not put in writing. He said that in the various apparitions Louis always appeared dressed differently and, when asked why, replied, "Just for your own delight." His countenance, however,

was the same as in his earthly life, though his cheeks were filled out, his facial expression happy, his person glowing, his garments flecked with gold and outdoing in splendor the lilies and roses they resembled, and his face was sparkling with such increasing brilliance as to dazzle the eye. As for the appearance which came to him while celebrating Mass, he said that they lasted but a minute or a minute and a half at most, and that, had they lasted any longer, he would have collapsed under the strain of the supernatural.

The countess, an enlightened woman, gave much thought to the value of these apparitions and questioned Don Bosco on the subject. As she personally recorded later, he expressed himself as follows: "After due reflection on these apparitions and looking into their nature, I am convinced that they are neither a deception nor an illusion, but very real. All that I observe in them is characteristic of and conforming to the Spirit of God. Without a doubt, Louis enjoys the happiness of heaven. As for their frequency, I do not know the hidden reasons of Divine Providence; I do particularly realize that Louis comes to teach me, telling me matters of earthly knowledge and theology I have never known before."

Let us now look at Don Bosco's description of those appearances. On one occasion Louis handed him a rose, saying: "Do you want to know the difference between the natural and the supernatural? Look at this rose. Watch it." Quickly the rose grew in splendor until it attained the sparkle of a diamond struck by the rays of the sun. "Now look at that mountain," he told him. And Don Bosco saw a mountain, a mass of rock and pockets of muddy soil, a very unsightly view. Soon enough it took on a magnificence of its own, precious gems replacing the muddy puddles.

One day, while at a splendid banquet in Hyères, Don Bosco found himself no longer at table but in a spacious hallway of some kind. Louis came toward him, saying: "Look at this sumptuous banquet. What choice food there is! Too much! So many people are dying of hunger. What a waste of money! Such costly excesses must be cut down." While this was going on, the guests were talking to Don Bosco and, thinking he was lost in a reverie, they called his name, "Don Bosco! Don Bosco!"

On another occasion this strange conversation took place between Don Bosco and Louis:

"Are you happy, my dear Louis?"

"Very happy."
"Are you dead or alive?"
"I am alive."
"Yet you are dead."
"My body was buried, but I am living."
"Am I not seeing your body?"
"No, it is not my body."
"Is it your spirit?"
"It is not my spirit."
"Is it your soul?"
"It is not my soul."
"Then what am I seeing?"
"My semblance."
"How can a semblance speak?"
"By God's permission."
"Then where is your soul?"
"My soul is with God. It is in God, and you cannot see it."
"Then how do you see us?"
"All things are seen in God: the past, present and future are all seen as reflected in a mirror."
"What do you do in heaven?"
"In heaven I forever say: 'Glory to God! To God be thanks! Thanks to Him who created us, to Him the Lord of life and of death, to Him in whom all things have their source. Thanks, praise, alleluia, alleluia.' "
"How about your parents? What message do you have for them?"
"Tell them I constantly pray for them and thus repay them. I await them here in heaven."

In a later apparition, Don Bosco again asked Louis about his reflected image. "You told me that I see but your semblance because your soul is with God. How can a semblance look just like a living human body?"

"You will very soon see," Louis answered. "You will be given a proof."

Don Bosco waited for it. Some time aferward, as he himself related, the deceased parish priest of Castelnuovo appeared to him strolling through the Oratory porticoes. He seemed to be in excellent health and quite happy.

"Ah! Father, here you are!" Don Bosco exclaimed. "How are you?"
"Happy, very happy. Come, walk with me."

"Is there anything you wish?"

"In heaven we have all we desire. But let's walk and chat together. Do you really recognize me?"

"Of course!"

"Look at me carefully. Don't you see me in the flower of youth and perfectly happy?"

"Yes, Father, it is truly you. I have no doubt of that."

They paced together for a while as they had often done before, and then the priest said, "Well, do you understand now?" With these words he disappeared. Then Don Bosco realized that Louis and the parish priest had arranged the visit. When he told the Colles about it, he remarked: "Favors of this kind are so extraordinary that they are really frightening in the responsibility they bring to the recipient."

During Don Bosco's trip to France in 1883, these apparitions kept coming. On Sunday, March 4, Louis sat by him in the train all the way from Cannes to Toulon, from four in the afternoon till seven that evening. He spoke in Latin, magnifying the splendor of God's works. Among other things he called Don Bosco's attention to the nebulae and taught him things truly in the field of astrophysics. "To travel from earth to sun by express train," he said, "it would take no less than three hundred and fifty years and the same amount of time to cross to the far side of the sun; in all, seven hundred years. Now, a nebula is fifty million times larger than the sun, and its light travels for ten million years before reaching the earth. The sun's light travels three hundred and fifty thousand kilometers per second." At this point, Don Bosco, realizing that Louis was warming up to this subject, exclaimed, "That's enough! My brain can't keep up with you. It's too much of an effort, and I cannot stand it."

"But that is just a sample of the greatness of God's works!"

"How can you be in heaven and here at the same time?"

"I move faster than light, with the speed of thought, whether it be to come here, to my parents' home, or anywhere else."

Some days later, while saying Mass at Hyères, Don Bosco again saw Louis. "What's up?" he asked. In reply Louis told him about a region in South America which was in dire need of missionaries, and showed the source of the Chubut River in the Cordillera de los Andes.

"Now let me say Mass," Don Bosco told him. "You are making it difficult for me to continue."

"Children should go to Communion often," Louis went on to say.

"They should be admitted to Holy Communion early; God wants them to nourish themselves with the Eucharist."

"But how can we admit them when they are too young?"

"Start by showing them the Sacred Host when they are four and five years old, and teach them to pray as they look at Jesus. This will be like a Holy Communion. Children must fully realize the importance of these three things: God's love, frequent Communion, and love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus. But love for Jesus' Sacred Heart sums up the other two."

In a previous vision Louis had shown him a well in the midst of the ocean. "Look at that abyss," he said. "The sea continuously flows into it yet never subsides. So too is it with the graces contained in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. They are easy to obtain; all we need do is pray."

In April of that year [1883] he was celebrating Mass in the Church of Our Lady of Victories in Paris when Louis appeared to him while he was administering Communion. As always, he was framed in an aura of glory; about his neck hung a multi-colored necklace—white, black, red and countless other colors indescribably blended together. The shock immobilized his arm, preventing him from giving Communion. The other priests, thinking he was exhausted, began to administer the Holy Eucharist for him. Don Bosco asked Louis, "Why are you here? Why come as I am giving out Communion? See how embarrassed I am?"

"Here," Louis answered, "is the dwelling of all graces and blessings."

"But where am I? I no longer see anybody. What am I to do?"

"Give out Holy Communion."

"But where are the people who were here before?"

"Give out Holy Communion," Louis repeated. "The people are right here!"

So saying, he vanished and Don Bosco found himself at the altar, ready to end the Mass.

Not long afterward, Louis again appeared in the Church of St. Clotilda in Paris. After Mass, Don Bosco was vainly trying to dismiss the crowd from the sacristy in order to say his thanksgiving prayers, but they kept pressing him on all sides.

"Give me a moment to myself," he pleaded. "Let me at least say one Our Father!" But no one heeded him. The parish priest then pulled him into a small adjoining room, which, the moment he entered, was

filled with heavenly light. There was Louis, slowly and intently pacing the floor.

"Oh, it's you, Louis!" Don Bosco exclaimed. "Why are you pacing up and down without saying a word to me?"

"This is not the time to talk, but to pray," was the answer.

"Please speak to me! Say something, as you have always done before."

"Really, I do have something important to tell you, but this is not yet the time."

"Still, do speak to me. I shall be seeing your parents. What consolation can I bring them?"

"Consolation? They will have it. Tell them to keep on praying and serving God and the Virgin Mary while I am beginning to prepare their happiness."

"Pray? There is no further need to pray for you! We know that you are happy. Why do you want your parents to wear themselves out with prayer?"

"Prayer gives glory to God."

"Why don't you visit your parents, who love you so much?'

"Why do you want to know what God has reserved to Himself?"

With that, he disappeared. Don Bosco noticed that all that time Louis had stood with head uncovered.

On the night of August 30, 1883, Don Bosco had an amazing dream which we shall recount in due course [in our next volume]. He dreamed he was in a spacious hall in the company of many friends who had already gone into eternity. A lad, apparently fifteen, resplendent with a heavenly beauty surpassing the sun's brilliance, approached him. It was Louis Colle. In a tour, as fast as lightning, he showed Don Bosco the spiritual heritage reserved for the Salesians in [South] America and the hardships and blood which would be needed to make it fruitful, as well as the future material prosperity of those lands. On October 15, writing to Father Lemoyne[9] in Turin, he asked him to draw up a copy of this dream so he could send it to Louis' parents in Toulon. "Please, hurry the dream about America," he wrote, "and send it to me without delay. Count Colle is anxious to have it translated into French. I'll speed that up." Then, writing to the count on February 11, 1884, he

[9]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

stated: "The meaning of the journey I made with our dear Louis is becoming ever clearer. Just now it seems to be the very focal point of all our efforts. Much is being said, written and made public to advertise and actuate our plans. God willing, when we get together we will have much to talk about."

An interesting episode took place at Orte in 1884. On his return from Rome on May 14 Don Bosco had a stopover of some four hours at that station. It was late, about 10 P.M., and Don Bosco tried without success to doze on a waiting room bench. Suddenly Louis appeared before him, and all else vanished from sight. Don Bosco walked up to him.

"Are you Louis?" he asked.

"Don't you recognize me? Have you forgotten our trip together?"

"Not at all! But how can we accomplish all we talked about? I am tired and in poor health."

"Are you? No . . . you will give me your answer tomorrow."

The vision lasted until it was time for departure. The following day marked the start of the novena to Mary, Help of Christians. Don Bosco, whose health had been deteriorating ever since his return from France, suddenly felt better and continued to improve as the days went by.

When he left the station to board the train, it was two in the morning. Father Lemoyne, his traveling companion, was very surprised to see him do something so unusual. On meeting the conductor, who invited him to board the train, Don Bosco asked, "Do you know me?"

"No, I do not," the man answered.

"I am Don Bosco."

"So?"

"I am Don Bosco of Turin."

That was all they could say because the train was pulling out. Indeed, there was something singular in Don Bosco's words and manner of speaking, which Father Lemoyne, who was accompanying him, had never noticed before. Unable to make head or tail of it, he even theorized that Don Bosco had meant to teach him, his secretary, a lesson—namely that he did not sufficiently appreciate who Don Bosco was. Don Bosco told Count and Countess Colle about this apparition on June 1, 1885 in Turin.

A second dream, occurring the night between January 31 and February 1, 1885, showed Don Bosco the future of his foreign missions. He wrote to Count Colle about it on August 10: "Our friend Louis took me

on a trip to the heart of America,[10] *the land of Ham,* as he called it, and to the regions of Arpachshad[11] or China. God willing, we shall talk about it when we get together." From this we learn who it was that appeared by his side when he instantly found himself transported from America to Africa and of whom he said, when relating the dream, "I recognized him as my guide." We find another reference to the same dream in a letter of January 15, 1886: "You will be receiving an account of a trip to China in the company of our good Louis. When by God's grace we meet again, we shall have much to talk about." From the foregoing it appears that as of June 1885 he had still said nothing of the dream to Count and Countess Colle.

The last apparition we know of came to Don Bosco on the night of March 10, 1885. He was pressing Louis to say something, and Louis replied, "You prayed for me in the sacristy of the Toulon cathedral that I might recover my health."

"Yes, I did."

"Well it was better that I did not recover."

"Why? You might have done a lot of good, made your parents very happy and would have done many things to help people glorify God."

"Are you sure of that? You yourself conveyed the sentence, a bitter one both for me and my parents; still, it was for my own good. When you prayed for my recovery the Blessed Virgin told Our Lord Jesus Christ, "Now he is My son and I wish to have him now that he is Mine."

"When must I start getting ready for heaven?"

"The time is near at hand when I will give you the answer."

Don Bosco told this to Count and Countess Colle in the hallway running alongside his room on June 1, 1885, the eve of the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. As he finished telling them, he remarked: "The beauty of the finery adorning our dear Louis was beyond description. The crown alone encircling his brow would have required not days but months and years for a close study, so varied was its splendor; the more one looked at it, the larger and more brilliant it became."

[10]Most likely this is a typographical error. In Volume XVII of the *Memorie Biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco,* p. 646, Don Bosco is quoted in the same letter as follows: "Our friend Louis took me on a trip to the heart of Africa, the *land of Ham.*" [Editor]

[11]As explained in Volume XVII of the *Memorie Biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco,* pp. 646f, Arpachshad is mentioned in Genesis 11:10-13 as a descendant of Shem. According to Réné François Rohrbacher, the Chinese are the descendants of Arpachshad and the region they populated derived its name from him. [Editor]

Before learning of the events taking place after March 1883—which they were apprised of only in 1885—Louis' parents were never quite at peace concerning his eternal destiny, and so they kept asking Don Bosco for special prayers for the repose of his soul. On one occasion Don Bosco replied:[12] "I have already begun a novena of Masses, Communions and special prayers for Louis, who, I feel, must be smiling at our efforts, because we are praying for the repose of his soul, when, as a matter of fact, he is now our heavenly patron and will remain such until he joyfully welcomes us into everlasting happiness!"

Countess Colle closed her own notes with the comment: "While comforting two lonely hearts by these communications from the supernatural world, Don Bosco appeared to be so overjoyed that he seemed to be looking into the heavenly Jerusalem. He was overcome by emotion, and his eyes glistened with tears, as he repeated Louis' praises of God in heaven."

We will narrate an episode recounted by Countess Colle after her son's death to the sisters at La Navarre. Don Bosco had suggested that she turn to her son in prayer in moments of strain. One day a man came begging to her door and arrogantly demanded money. Overlooking his rudeness, she gave him what she regularly gave to the poor. However, he assumed a threatening manner and tone of voice which frightened her. No one else—not even the maid—was in the house. Then she remembered Don Bosco's words and prayed for her son to come to her aid. As soon as she called upon him in her heart, the burly fellow, as though suddenly overcome by terror, turned on his heels and in two broad strides reached the bottom of the staircase in hurried flight.

Now to return to the apparitions. Was it only to console the grieving parents that Don Bosco was granted the supernatural visions which he confided to the count and countess? Can't we think instead that God's main intent was that these visions should encourage this devout Christian couple gladly to commit a goodly portion of their wealth to help Don Bosco, who had been called to initiate within the Church so many good works in meeting the needs of his time? This is the way Don Bosco must have seen it. In fact, with the boldness of the saints, he had told the desolated parents after their son's death, "God has taken your only son from you that you may adopt all my orphans as your children." And thus did this fervent couple see it too. Count Colle himself

[12]Letter from Turin, August 23, 1884. [Author]

explicitly told Don Bosco that he was putting his entire wealth at his disposal.[13] These were neither idle words nor short-lived pious sentiments. For over six years, that same purse poured out substantial sums for the new house at La Navarre, the Sacred Heart Church and the adjacent hospice in Rome, the hospice adjoining the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Turin, the house of the Sons of Mary at Mathi, the foreign missions, and occasional emergencies at the Oratory and at San Benigno Canavese. At the risk of wearying our readers, we wish to emphasize to the utmost this extraordinary generosity by looking into the correspondence, which, though it does not tell everything, still does much to satisfy our healthy curiosity.

Don Bosco's first request for help dates to July 3, 1881. He wrote to Countess Colle: "So far I have managed to struggle along, but I foresee that, within months, I shall have to call upon the charity of the Colle family—though only in an emergency and within your means." The emergency concerned the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome, but, later, similar situations increased in number and range. His vaguely worded appeal received an encouraging reply. In fact, on August 20 he wrote to Count Colle: "Thank you for the priceless news that you are pledging twenty thousand francs for the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome. This is a real boost for our holy Catholic Church and for its impoverished head. While God will reward you a hundredfold now and ever so much more in the next life, our Supreme Pontiff, joined by all Christians and people of good will, will bless your kindness." The count's letter pledging the money so pleased Don Bosco that he wrote in acknowledgment of its elegance and gentlemanliness: "I have read it over and over and feel I am right in honoring you and the city of Toulon by sending it on to the Holy Father. He may tell people how lawyers can skillfully blend learning with piety. God be blessed in everything!" It should come as no surprise that he sent this personal correspondence to the Pope, because it was the Holy Father who had entrusted the project of the Church of the Sacred Heart to him and took a personal interest in it. Furthermore Don Bosco was even then probably eyeing a specific goal which we shall bring up later.

On July 7, 1882 he wrote to thank the count for the donation in the letter sent to him with greetings for his name day: "On this occasion,"

[13]Letter to Countess Colle, Turin, July 3, 1881. [Author]

Don Bosco wrote, "I wish to thank you most sincerely for all the help you have sent us to open, maintain and enlarge our houses. The souls whom the Salesians, with God's grace, will save through your kindness will be credited to both of you. When you and your wife will enter heaven, those saved through your charity will most assuredly welcome you. *Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti.*" [By saving a soul, you assured your own salvation.] He stressed this thought on December 4, 1883, writing in regard to the missions: "First and foremost let me thank you, dear count, for the generosity you have lavished upon us on countless occasions. If we have been successful in our work in South America, particularly Patagonia, we owe it to you and to your charity. You and your wife have good reason to rejoice. The souls whom our missionaries will save will be accounted to you and your spouse; they will be your key to heaven. And now you are reaching out to other houses of ours and other natives who, through your goodness, will come to the light of faith, and thus swell the ranks of souls who will pray for you."

In that same letter he told Count Colle of two other projects to which he had applied the count's donation, the house at Mathi and that of St. John the Evangelist, both of which successively became the residence of the Sons of Mary. "I have good news for you. We bought the house at Mathi on October 10. It is now furnished and occupied by some fifty young men who could not be accommodated at our house in San Benigno. They are now living there, as they stoutheartedly study for the priesthood. Last Thursday the house was blessed and dedicated to God in the name of St. Aloysius, as a sort of memorial to Louis and his family. This is our first house to be named after St. Aloysius. Blessed be God." Referring to the house of St. John the Evangelist in Turin, he said, "Despite all our efforts, the house going up alongside the Church of St. John the Evangelist is still without a roof. Construction has reached the third floor, and work continues steadily." Finally, on October 22, 1884, he penned the last details: "I am very happy to tell you that the house your money has built for the Sons of Mary is finished, and we have scheduled November 10 for occupancy by approximately a hundred and fifty young men." The date of the formal opening was set at a later date, as Don Bosco informed the count on February 20, 1885, so that the count could be present. "Though we are already living at St. John's, the house has not yet been officially dedicated. We must prepare a good meal and all together drink a cordial toast to you and to

Countess Colle. Is that all right with you, dear countess, our good mother in the Lord Jesus Christ?" As noted before, the count and countess did go to Turin for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians.

At the beginning of 1884, it seemed that Don Bosco's shaky health would not allow him to make his usual seasonal trip to France, where Count Colle was awaiting him impatiently. On February 11 Don Bosco wrote to him, "Every day, sometimes several times a day, I pay you both a visit in spirit, but as yet I have not been able to come in person, dear count and countess. Presently, our works are progressing nicely, thank God; there are more houses, more boys than ever, and as always our work enjoys God's blessing. Praised be God! For some time now my health has not been good, and I don't know whether I can make my usual visit to you. I may be able to tell you soon, but it is agreed, in any case, that we shall meet in Rome."

True, he had hoped to anticipate this visit and arrive at La Farlède, as a "thief in the night" on or about September 20, 1883,[14] but circumstances did not permit it. Still, the count put aside for him the object of Don Bosco's visit as a "thief," as we can clearly see from his letter to the count, dated October 15: "Thank you for your kind information. The work has gone forward these past few days, and the contractors are clamoring for payment. Praise to God, and a thousand thanks to you, my dear count and countess! You truly are our providence, God's chosen instruments for coming to our aid." Father Rua was sent to collect the bounty of Divine Providence, and to arrange a trip to Rome with the count and countess, which they had long wished for. He himself, on his arrival in the Eternal City in April 1884, wrote to them on April 16 about the progress of construction and reminded them of this trip. "I am in Rome. I had a pleasant trip, and, thank God, my health is better. I have given much attention to the work in progress on both the church and the hospice of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The foundations of the latter are causing very serious problems because of their depth, and there is still much work to be done before the huge piles of stone brought in for the building can be laid into place. Now, since you told me that you would like to come to Rome for the laying of the cornerstone and stay but a few days, I feel it would be wiser for the sake of your health and that of the countess that we postpone the date." On April 24 he notified them of the arrival of Father Rua who had gone

[14]Letter from San Benigno Canavese, August 25, 1883. [Author]

to Toulon to pick up the count's donation of one hundred and fifty thousand francs, part of which he had immediately forwarded to Rome. "I received your welcome letter which came quite promptly and all is fine," he wrote. "Father Rua joins me in blessing God and thanking both of you for helping us so much in promoting God's glory. Father Rua promptly sent me all I needed to get the work going, and now we are moving along well."

But the progress was so slow that the ceremony for the laying of the cornerstone was held in May 1885. On May 10 Don Bosco wrote to the count and countess: "All is ready here in Rome for the laying of the cornerstone. We could ask a member of the noble Borghese family to preside. Father Dalmazzo will see to that and guide us along. But one thing is our responsibility. The cornerstone must contain mementos and some data on the family and the sponsors of this building. Kindly take it upon yourselves to have some friend jot down for me some data, such as name, date of birth and any details you may wish to add. Please bear with me. This is history we must pass down to posterity. On receiving this information, I shall complete the task."

It was in 1884 that Don Bosco appealed to Count Colle concerning a purchase which involved a considerable sum of money, but which he still was anxious to make regardless of the cost. He mentioned it to him in a letter dated February 20: "One day, you recall, we spotted a little house from my balcony. 'We should buy that little house,' you remarked, 'to rid ourselves of a nuisance. I shall give you thirty thousand francs for that purpose.' Then and there we could not enter into a sale, because the owner was not willing to sell. Now she is anxious to sell us not only the house but the adjoining land as well. Any way we look at it, this is an excellent buy. The Salesians and all our friends are keen on it and push us to buy, but the cost has risen much higher: one hundred thousand francs for land, landscaping and house. Now, while I don't intend to be indiscreet, I still don't want to hide the fact that this purchase would ease our situation at the residence, the festive oratory, the school and the workshops. Therefore, dear count, in the near or distant future, could you help us out in this matter? I speak unabashedly, for in your boundless charity you have assured me that your purse is at my disposal for whatever may redound to God's greater glory. Give this matter some thought and then reply with the same frankness with which I have appealed to you."

The house up for sale was owned by Mrs. [Theresa] Bellezza, whom

Father Lemoyne often mentions in his volume.[15] It was located to the west of St. Francis de Sales Church and separated from the Oratory by a single wall of the playground.[16] Count Colle paid for the entire package. In pledging the money the count must have proposed something hardly compatible with Don Bosco's lowly opinion of himself or of his purity of intention. We are not sure, but, be that as it may, Don Bosco's answer on February 27 was: "I received your welcome letter, but I wish you would not tell me why you are doing this or that. Just let me voice my needs, and I shall always be equally pleased whether you answer 'yes' or 'no.' My concern is to pray each day for you and the countess, and I do so at holy Mass every morning with a special memento for your intention. My doctors have assured me I can travel to our houses in southern France. On Saturday, God willing, I shall leave for Nice with Father Barberis.[17] While there I hope to pay you a visit and formally dedicate and bless our, or I should say your, church at La Navarre. We shall then have time to talk, and I shall better explain my plans for benefiting you, but always in whatever may bring you joy on earth and finally in heaven."

During that same year of 1884 another pressing need forced Don Bosco to appeal to his generous benefactor's charity. A cholera epidemic broke out during the summer, whose consequences for Don Bosco he thus described to the count in his letter of September 10: "Cholera has ravaged several towns in France and is now terrorizing Italy. So far our houses and boys have been spared, but contributions have fallen sharply and we find it very hard to meet our expenses of building and maintaining our works. Therefore, if you could come to our aid at this time, you will, as ever, be our mainstay. However, should it be burdensome to you to return home from your villa at La Farlède because of the cholera, do not worry. Please stay there and we shall find a way of getting out of our predicament. I repeat: give no further thought if circumstances keep you from doing good." Though we have no direct evidence, we believe that this kindly gentleman found some way of reconciling his ease of mind with his pressing desire to do good.

The close of the year gave Don Bosco a chance to thank Count Colle adequately for all the kindnesses he had performed. On December 29

[15]*See* Vol. II, p. 421; Vol. IV, pp. 424f. [Editor]
[16]*See L'Oratorio di Don Bosco* by F. Giraudi, Plate VIII. [Author]
[17]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

he wrote: "I would like to visit you and thank you personally. Since I cannot do so, let me thank you by mail at the close of this year, my dear generous count and countess. God be praised and thanked for having kept us in good health and, I hope, in His grace! Amid so many other good works, you paid Father Perrot's debts at La Navarre, and the Lord will not fail to reward you generously, while our poor orphan boys will keep praying for your intention. Lucky Father Perrot to have such paymasters! Why can't we have such benefactors in Italy? If Italy has any such paymaster, let him come forth and pay the seventy-five thousand francs Father Rua must shell out for our missionaries in [South] America, besides a nearly equal amount for the outfitting and travel expenses of those who will soon depart. And why does such a benefactor not step forth and pay the debts of our houses in Turin and of our church and hospice in Rome? The reason is clear: in all France and Italy there is but one Count Colle! And we bless our good God thousands of times for the fact that you are here on earth to aid us, sustain and support us in our crises. May God keep you both in good health for many a year and grant you a long, happy life in reward for your charity here on earth, and may He finally give you your great reward in your heavenly home, where I have full trust we will all meet with Jesus, Mary, and our beloved Louis, there to sing God's praises throughout eternity."

In April 1885, accompanied by Father [Charles] Viglietti,[18] he saw the count again at Toulon and, before leaving, received from him the sum of one hundred thousand francs for the church and hospice in Rome and the missions. He intended to repeat his visit in September during the Salesians' retreat. On August 18 he wrote to the count from Mathi, where he had gone for a month to recuperate from his intense weakness, or, as he put it, if possible to slow down his getting old.[19] "Our retreats nearly always start about August 1 and end about October 10. But I will not go to Nice or Toulon before the middle of September; just when, I shall let you know. I am most anxious to see you, but I am not sure I shall, because for this past month all my trips at Mathi have been limited to going from my room to the garden, which is very close to the paper mill. All I can tell you now is that my health is holding, but I think I shall feel better when the weather cools down. Should my

[18]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]
[19]Letter to Count Colle, Turin, July 14, 1885. [Author]

condition keep me from traveling, I will keep you posted on our works. Within this week you will have the papers for our hospice in Rome, and Father Rua is completely at your service, ready to carry out your holy desires in this matter."

The overall public health situation advised against holding the spiritual retreats at Nice. Don Bosco chose to stay for a month at the Valsalice College [on the hills overlooking Turin]. From there he wrote to Count Colle on September 27: "As you can see, I am half-blind and you may find it hard to make out my writing. Forgive me and please bear with me. I shall not fail to remember you and the countess every morning during Holy Mass. O Mary, be our guide along the way to heaven!" In December Father Rua went to Toulon and returned with a precious packet from the count and a pretty little package from the countess for Don Bosco. He answered the countess on December 24: "Father Rua has given me the packet you know about and the little canister of jujubes[20] you so kindly sent me from your garden. I accept it as a remembrance from my most loving and thoughtful Mamma. The tea from the jujubes was excellent and helped ease my cough. Please accept my sincere gratitude."

We would very much like to know how much money Father Rua brought Don Bosco. Once again, from a letter dated January 15, we can gauge the far-seeing providence of God in having Don Bosco forge such a cordial relationship with Count Colle. "I speak of both of you every day," Don Bosco wrote. "I might say every moment, but my poor befuddled head allows me to write but a few words, so little indeed in comparison to all I should be doing to thank you for so much kindness and charity you show us. At this time you are not only the mainstay of our houses and of the Salesians, but in these days practically our sole benefactors. Recently donations have dropped alarmingly, especially for our houses in France and for our South American missions. But our bountiful fundraiser, Mary, Help of Christians, is beginning to come to our aid through extraordinary favors She grants in Russia, Prussia and, most particularly, Poland. Father Rua will write you about our hospice in Rome. Rome is an eternal city. Lots of talk, lots of red tape and a penchant for doing things the slowest possible way! Patience!"

In March 1886 Don Bosco went to Spain, passing through Nice and

[20]An edible fruit of any of several trees of the buckthorn family. [Editor]

Marseille. On March 26 he informed the count and the countess that he would be calling on them. "Monday evening, please God, I shall be with you," he wrote, "and we shall then discuss our affairs to our hearts' content. If you could set up an altar, I would be very happy to say Holy Mass in your home; otherwise I'll abide by your arrangements." As something for the road, the count gave him eighty thousand francs.

Correspondence resumed on July 25 when, far from well, Don Bosco was being hosted by Bishop [Philip] Chiesa of Pinerolo at his villa. From July on we have no letters until September 9, when Don Bosco wrote, "I am back at Valsalice for another series of retreats and a meeting on matters pertaining to our Congregation. Seventy directors from as many houses were present. We spoke a good deal about you and our projects." Then on September 23 he wrote: "Next week we go to San Benigno Canavese where our novices have doubled in number, obliging us to set up a new house for them in a hurry." He was alluding to the house at Foglizzo which had just been opened. In this, as ever, he was thoughtful about keeping his more generous benefactors well posted on what was happening, making them feel that they were personally involved in his undertakings.

We pick up the correspondence again on December 14, when Father Lasagna, heading a missionary expedition, called on the count and countess to pay his respects. He did not leave empty-handed. Don Bosco then wrote to the pious couple: "Father Lasagna has written to tell me about his visit to you and the kindness which you showered upon them all with truly fatherly concern. They are now departing, their hearts deeply touched, assuring me that they will hold you both up in America as a model of Christian life. They are departing to win souls for our beloved Jesus, while assuring their own salvation and yours as well." Then, recalling their hospitality to the missionaries on their visit, he goes on to say, "This is a dish which they shall offer you both as you enter paradise: a very tasty dish, a golden dish adorned with diamonds and filled with good works—among so many others, your help to the Salesians in their mission of converting Indians and sinners; it will enrich you both with joy without end." He then speaks of a precious gift, which he calls "jujube," linking it to the fruit sent him by the countess: "Your 'jujube' — what has become of it? Well, being of excellent quality, it was shared as follows: first, fifteen thousand francs to pay a promissory note sent me by Bishop Cagliero from

Patagonia; second, thirty-five thousand francs went to the Banca Tiberina for the Sacred Heart project; third, the rest was divided among St. John the Evangelist Church and annex in Turin, San Benigno Canavese and Foglizzo, where we have young men studying for the priesthood. As you can see, every word in this letter calls for a commentary, but let's put that off until we have time to talk over our affairs in peace. I would like to write much more in witness to the love and heartfelt gratitude all the Salesians profess for both of you, but my poor head can hardly respond and the countess will have to kindly make out my terrible scrawl."

We have little to go on concerning the count's donations through the year 1887. On March 23, Don Bosco wrote to him about a recent earthquake in Liguria: "I am most happy to tell you that in the recent earthquake, not a single boy or Salesian was hurt. Considerable damage, however, was done to the buildings; the house, school and church at Vallecrosia were almost totally destroyed. But Divine Providence has always been our help and will not forsake us now." Quite probably, the dispenser of Divine Providence was not unmoved by this news. Two other sources are more substantial. One is a postscript of Father Rua to a letter of April 8, in which he thanks the count for his kindness to Father Perrot, who had gone to see him, most probably because he was in need. The second concerns a sum of five thousand francs for San Benigno, as we shall see in due time.

We now close this topic. It is impossible to tally up the sum total of the count's donations, since we have no records and available documentary evidence is often vague, with countless gaps. As best as we can ascertain, the total amount of Count Colle's charitable donations come up to one hundred and twenty thousand francs a year, a sum that fifty years ago was undoubtedly considered very outstanding.

Now let us turn to the various ways Don Bosco expressed his gratitude to him.

When they first met, the count was a lawyer and a Knight of the Order of St. Gregory the Great, a title conferred on him by Leo XIII at the recommendation of his bishop. It was Don Bosco's wish to make him a Roman Knight, and once he realized that Count Colle would be pleased with that honor, he renewed his efforts with greater energy. A French Catholic of the old school, the count treasured this title of nobility, not so much because it was noble, but because it was papal and thus linked him more closely to the supreme head of the Church.

Don Bosco began working toward this goal back in June 1881, when he wrote up a résumé for the Holy Father and sent it to the bishop of Fréjus and Toulon, in order that he might certify its truthfulness and add his personal recommendation.[21] The résumé read:

Turin, June 16, 1881

Most Holy Father:

Foremost among the finest men who have distinguished themselves for professing and prompting the honor and glory of our holy Catholic faith, with no regard for human opinion in these times of ours, is Attorney Louis Anthony Colle of Toulon, a scion of one of Toulon's most highly respected families.

He is also son-in-law of Baron Buchet, army general and former senator of France; zealous chairman of the Catholic Social Union Board in the Var province; chairman of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Toulon; founder of the political-religious daily *La Sentinelle du Midi,* the only Catholic newspaper in the Var province, and the founder and president of the Catholic Club in Provence.

A man of considerable fortune, he constantly contributes to various charities. In March of last year he generously donated twenty thousand francs for the continuation of work on the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice on the Esquiline Hill in Rome. Then, in September of the same year, learning that construction funds were again running low, he made a second donation of twenty thousand francs for the same purpose.

When accommodations for poor boys of the Salesian agricultural school at La Navarre, near Toulon, became inadequate, he donated a further twenty thousand francs with a pledge of eighty thousand more in the future.

This distinguished benefactor is presently a Knight of St. Gregory the Great. However, in his keen desire to link himself and his family more closely to the supreme head of the Catholic Church and more valiantly to prove himself a defender of the Church, he would truly appreciate and cherish for himself and his family the glorious title of Count of the Holy Roman Church. He is prepared to pay all the usual secretarial fees.

Having already benefited from the count's financial support of several hospices entrusted to us by Divine Providence, I humbly kneel at the feet of Your Holiness and ask that you grant this favor.

Fr. John Bosco

[21]Letter to the count, Turin, July 3, 1881. [Author]

Three months later, Don Bosco, seeing no results, enlisted the aid of the cardinal vicar, who knew of Count Colle's generous donations to the Sacred Heart Church.[22]

"Count Colle of Toulon," Don Bosco wrote, "is very wealthy and willing to make more generous donations to the Church. However, it is necessary that Your Eminence ask the Holy Father to grant him the title of 'Count.' I have already submitted to Your Eminence a formal application and the recommendation of his bishop. If you feel it unwise to approach the Holy Father directly in this matter, you might ask the cardinal secretary of state to do so. He has already obtained this honor for Catholics whose credentials were to all appearances less impressive. I believe that the Holy Father will thus gladly encourage a man who dedicates so much of his wealth to the welfare of the Church while leading a fervent Catholic life."

In December, Cardinal [Ludwig] Jacobini, secretary of state, took the matter in hand and assured Don Bosco that the favor was as good as granted. But, as Don Bosco wrote, "People say that Rome is eternal, also in doing business."[23]

He was right. When he went to Rome in April 1881, he discovered that no one had as yet moved a finger. On May 2 he wrote to his "dearest, esteemed friend":

I am in Rome. I have already seen the Holy Father and spoken with him at length about you and your wife. I told him of your contributions to the Sacred Heart Church and to La Navarre, the laying of the cornerstone and other works of charity performed by you and your wife. He listened with fatherly concern, and then told me to inform you that he sends to both of you his apostolic blessing with the assurance that he will pray for your well-being, and your perseverance in God's grace. He then added:

"And the papal decoration you asked for?"

"Holy Father, I am still waiting," I answered.

"What? Oh, such negligence, such negligence! Go to Cardinal Jacobini immediately. He will bring you up to date!"

Cardinal Jacobini, the secretary of state to His Holiness, received me immediately, apologized for the delay and assured me that the papal brief would be handed to me before my departure from Rome. Hopefully, I'll present it to

[22]Sampierdarena, September 14, 1881. [Author]

[23]Letter to the count, Turin, December 30, 1881. [Author]

you in Turin. Head for Turin, then, my dear friends, for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. There I hope we shall have time to talk about our undertakings.

The Colles did not go to Turin but sent their best wishes [for Don Bosco's name day] on the feast of St. John the Baptist.[24] "It was a good day," Don Bosco wrote on July 5, "a heartwarming celebration, and several times I felt the tears well up in my eyes." But had the count and countess come to Turin, they would have left without the papal brief, even though it had been received some time earlier. In the same letter Don Bosco continued: "This Roman brief may truly be called the 'Brief of Setbacks.' It was sent to me in Turin. I checked it and noticed that it was addressed to: *Comes Colle Dioecésis Taurinensis* (Count Colle of the Diocese of Turin). I immediately sent it back to Rome and am now awaiting an amended brief." Finally, on July 19, a year after the initial steps were taken, the brief arrived, and Don Bosco wrote, "After endless waiting, I have this very moment received the Holy Father's brief. One could not ask for more. However, I'd like it to be handed over to you in an appropriate manner, and so I am instructing Father [Peter] Perrot to make suitable plans to present it to you on a chosen date. He will ask you whether you prefer that such presentation take place at your villa or in Toulon or, better still, at La Navarre at the inauguration of the new wing. Do as you and your wife think best."

There was need to point out the legal value of the title. Don Bosco drew the count's attention to this on July 30. "As you will see," he wrote, "the brief is a very precious document for you, your family and the history of the Church. Here in Italy government authorization is needed for anyone to assume a title or wear badges of honor. Since you are a lawyer, I am sure you will know how to go about such things in France. My only concern is that a document of this sort be presented becomingly to you, with due publicity."

The "Consulta Araldica" [the Heraldry Guide] in Italy, which validates all titles of nobility, had no problems ratifying papal titles. Titles of nobility had been abolished in France, but this never kept people

[24]At his baptism Don Bosco had been named after the apostle John, but in 1846 the Oratory boys, believing his name to be John the Baptist—a very popular saint in Turin—began to celebrate his name day on June 24, the feast day of this saint. *See* Vol. II, p. 381. [Author]

from using them in private life. As a matter of fact, titles of nobility still retain their value in the eyes of the public.

And yet, would you believe it, the problems plaguing the brief kept coming back. Whether or not the original sent to Father Perrot got lost on its way or was damaged somehow, a duplicate copy had to be ordered from Rome, and that entailed another long wait. In the meantime, a strange thing happened. Don Bosco had written in the letter we have just quoted: "I shall have to contact you for help sometime in August, but in due time I shall write you quite frankly about it." He did write to the count from San Benigno on August 28: "Here I am at San Benigno Canavese, where I often speak of you and your wife with Father Barberis, Father Rua,[25] Father Durando and others who have had the good fortune to make your acquaintance through us. But as I was honored to write you some time ago, I am now in dire need of money for our young men who are preparing themselves for the priesthood and the foreign missions. If you, my dear count and countess, could help me provide bread for my young men here and badly needed supplies for our Salesians and boys at Carmen in Patagonia, you would really be doing an act of great charity. Formerly, you yourselves offered your charity; now I am requesting it. But please act quite candidly toward me as I have acted toward you. If you can or cannot help out just now, please say 'yes' or 'no' in all frankness. I need twelve thousand francs. In the goodness of your heart, do what you can without inconveniencing yourselves."

The count sent half the amount. In acknowledging the donation Don Bosco wrote on September 6: "Our biggest debt was to our baker who had cut off all deliveries to our community at San Benigno. Our seminarians send you their heartfelt thanks and will pray fervently for you and Countess Colle. Meanwhile we pray that Divine Providence will come to the aid of our missionaries in Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. Father Barberis wishes to thank you personally in the name of his pupils, all of them students for our foreign missions." Father Barberis, in fact, enclosed in Don Bosco's letter a personal note of his own in Italian.

All this was linked with the brief which had been relatively costly for Don Bosco. Since he was already up to his neck in debts, he had tried

[25]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

to solve this problem without letting anyone know of it. The count, however, suspected that this was the case and so inquired about the routine fees for such briefs. Don Bosco delayed answering until he received the long-awaited second copy from Father Dalmazzo, procurator general. Once it was in his hands, he sent it to the director at La Navarre, with the following instructions:

Turin, December 2, 1882

My dear Father Perrot:

We have finally received a duplicate of the famous brief. Believe me, this is a genuine historic document.

Two of you should go together to Toulon, or the Colle couple could make a trip to La Navarre; this might pose problems right now. See what's best and then act. But whatever you do, see to it that the brief is translated into French and then given to the press.

Make it clear that while Attorney Colle will be titled "Count Colle," his wife will become a countess.

Sincerest regards to the confreres and boys, for whom I wish good health and holiness.

Pray for me, ever in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Only after this did Don Bosco reply to the count's request about the brief's fees. Don Bosco's letter is worth reading in its entirety.

Turin, December 13, 1882

My dearest friend:

Blessed be God amid both roses and thorns. After such a lengthy delay, everything is finally in order and, late though it is, the brief has arrived and has been sent to you with the Pope's blessing.

You asked me something I'd rather not talk about, but I will obey and candidly tell you everything. You wrote: "Tell me quite frankly what fees I owe to the pertinent Vatican office for this document. I do not want you to bear that expense."

I'll tell you the whole interesting story. For things such as this, the Holy Father has never in the past asked me for money. Months ago, however, the Pope, referring to this brief, said to me, "It is all done. All you need do is to see the secretary of state." He, in turn, kept telling me, "It's all done." But I never got the brief.

Finally my procurator general in Rome went to Cardinal Jacobini and frankly asked what was delaying the delivery of the brief. He was told that the fee was twelve thousand francs. He remonstrated, tried to see the Holy Father about it, and at long last the fee was lowered to six thousand. Then the official in charge wanted his share, too, claiming a registry fee of five hundred francs. Wishing to act as a real gentleman, I found myself bankrupt and turned to you for help, and you, surely inspired by God, sent the six thousand francs. So all is paid up, and you don't owe anyone anything. My apologies for the patience which I made you exercise in reading this story.

Good day, my dear Count Colle, my friend in the Lord and always! May the Blessed Virgin protect you and the countess, keeping you both in good health for a long time and finally granting both you and me the glory of heaven in the fellowship of our beloved Louis for all eternity. Amen.

Pray for this poor priest who is affectionate as a son in Jesus Christ.

Fr. John Bosco

In reply the count sent him six thousand five hundred and fifty francs.[26] On December 20 Don Bosco answered, "You sent us this money as an act of charity. I accept it in the same spirit with deepest gratitude. It will be used to feed and clothe our orphans and so I shall ask the boys to pray for you, my most generous and dearest friend, and for your wife that the Lord may grant you much joy on earth and eternal happiness in heaven. How can I ever repay you? There is nothing I can give or do for you to repay you properly. There is but one thing and I will do it most gladly. God willing, I shall celebrate three Masses on Christmas night, and our boys and clerics will receive Holy Communion. They will be offered to Our Lord and to the Most Blessed Virgin for your intentions and your wife's."

As the count's donations increased, Don Bosco felt that he had to show his gratitude ever more. With this in mind, he again sang the praises of both Count and Countess Colle to Leo XIII in the spring of 1884, and the Pope kindly conferred another papal distinction upon the count. Without giving the slightest hint, Don Bosco invited them to Turin for the feast of St. John the Baptist rather than for the feast of

[26]The explanation for the additional fifty francs is found in Father Dalmazzo's letter and with the second copy of the brief. "Here is the new copy of the brief for Count Colle. With some difficulty I managed to get it redone for fifty francs." Since this added fee is usually recorded on the back of such documents, Count Colle noticed it and sent the payment. [Author]

Mary, Help of Christians, when he would be too busy with visitors.[27] They accepted his invitation, and, at the testimonial dinner, Don Bosco had the countess sit at his right hand and the count at his left in the very large dining room Then the surprise was sprung. Climaxing the festivities, Father Dalmazzo, who had recently come from Rome, read out the count's citation as *Commendatore* of the Order of St. Gregory the Great. It was a well-staged surprise, arousing the highest enthusiasm. After reading the citation, Father Dalmazzo embraced and congratulated the count. He then handed the medal to Don Bosco, who handed it to the countess to place about her husband's neck amid great applause.

Ever true to himself, the count wrote to Don Bosco after his return to Toulon, and signed himself as "a commendatore very willing to take orders from Don Bosco."[28]

"Your words are quite clear," Don Bosco replied, "but you should know that Don Bosco's pockets are always empty, and Father Rua is forever looking for money! How will you find a way out? We shall always do our best to be discreet in our asking and will at all times happily accept what you so generously give to us to help us save souls. You understand, dear count, that these last words are said in jest and that my handwriting is hard to make out. God bless both of you, dear count and countess! May Mary, Help of Christians keep you both in good health and ever on the path to heaven. Our entire household—priests, clerics and boys—sends its fond regards, asks for your prayers and will receive Holy Communion for your intention tomorrow."

To show his gratitude to his benefactors he would often send them little gifts which he knew they would like. As tokens of thanks to some benefactors he would send bottles of choice wines or exquisite liqueurs given him by patrician families of Turin. Hence he frequently sent Count Colle some excellent vermouth. Replying to the count's first note of thanks on August 30, 1881, he wrote: "A little vermouth is such a trifle, but you were so good in graciously accepting it. I am very glad that you were pleased with such a little thing." On receiving an acknowledgment of another gift, he wrote on December 4, 1881: "I am delighted to learn that the vermouth reached you safe and sound. It is a mere trifle but the only way we can show our thankfulness to you and

[27]Letter from Father Barruel, Turin, May 21, 1884. [Author]
[28]Letter from Don Bosco, Turin, July 5, 1884. [Author]

tell you we love you and very fervently pray for you." On January 18, 1885 he re-echoed his sentiments: "Offhand I am going to ask you a simple question. Please tell me, 'Are you running out of vermouth?' As you know, I am your supplier."

But it was from his deep faith that he usually drew the means to return a favor. No single letter of his omits to mention that prayers have been said or would be said for his two great benefactors; on solemn occasions he would stress it more expansively and fervently. Though we have already seen samples of this, we will consider some which are more meaningful.

On August 10, 1885, shortly before the feast of the Assumption, he wrote the count and countess: "I believe that during this novena for the Blessed Virgin's Assumption, you will not forget your poor Don Bosco, who unfailingly prays every day for your spiritual and temporal welfare. Throughout this novena we Salesians insistently ask the Blessed Virgin to reserve, after a long life, a place for both of you near Her in paradise."

On September 8, 1886 he began his letter with a reference to the Nativity of Mary: "O Mary, our good Mother, give a very special blessing on this day, when Catholics celebrate Your birth, to Your two children, Count and Countess Colle. *With all my heart*[29] I celebrated Holy Mass this morning and our boys offered up their Holy Communions for your spiritual and temporal happiness. Please pray also for me, for I love you tenderly as a son in Jesus Christ."

On September 21, 1886 he wrote to Countess Sophie Colle on her name day: "I would truly love to be with you on this, your name day, but I have to put it off for a while. Today I will limit myself to saying Holy Mass for you, while our orphans will offer up Holy Communion for your intention. We will pray that God will keep you and the count in good health, peace and love to your last moment. Then may the Blessed Virgin, escorted by a multitude of angels, take you with Her to paradise along with your relatives and friends and poor Don Bosco who loves you dearly in the Lord."

On October 22, 1884, the eve of the start of the novena for the feast of All Saints, he wrote: "Tomorrow we shall begin the novena in honor of All Saints. I would not have this day go by without presenting you

[29]These words were underlined in the original French text. [Author]

and your intentions to God. Among other things we thank God for having kept you both in good health, and I am fully confident that the Blessed Virgin will continue to protect you."

On November 29, 1881 as the feast of the Immaculate Conception was drawing near, he wrote, "I would not have this novena to the Immaculate Conception pass without praying for you, dearest count and countess. On the eve of this solemn feast, I shall say Holy Mass and our boys will offer up Holy Communion at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians for your intentions."

On December 4 of the following year he wrote the countess: "Like a loving son, who remembers his good Mamma every day in his prayers to Our Lord, I do not want this novena of the Immaculate Virgin Mary to pass without saying special prayers for you and Count Colle. On the feast day itself, Friday, December 8, all the Salesians and their pupils will offer prayers and Communions for you both. And what will Don Bosco do? I shall say Mass for your intentions on that day. We shall pray that the Blessed Virgin may keep you both in good health for many years, always sheltered by Her grace and holy protection, until we shall all be reunited with our beloved Louis and the angels in paradise."

He wrote again to Count Colle on December 4, 1883: "The entire Salesian Congregation pays its respects to you. On Saturday we shall celebrate a Mass at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians for your intention, and the boys will receive Communion and pray for your intentions."

On December 23, 1883, in sending his Christmas greetings, he wrote: "You know that the Salesians recite special prayers for you every day, morning and evening, while I remember both of you every morning during Holy Mass. But today I wish to offer you a present which will certainly delight you. God willing, on Christmas night, at midnight, I shall celebrate the customary three Masses for you. All our Salesians and boys will pray and offer many Communions for your intention. We shall address our prayers to the child Jesus, imploring Him to grant you many consolations here on earth. May He keep both of you in good health for many years, guiding you safely along the road to paradise."

On December 17, 1884 he wrote to both husband and wife: "The Christmas novena has begun and we have no intention of forgetting you. We are praying for both of you and for your health and safety

every morning and evening. Holy Mass will be celebrated for your intention on Christmas morning that God may grant you a long and happy life." He expressed similar wishes in other years at Christmas, on New Year's Day and on the feast of St. Francis de Sales.

The correspondence we are running through has interesting sidelights on the cholera epidemic which swept areas of Italy and France from 1884 to 1886 and caused the already mentioned financial repercussions. These happenings offered Don Bosco the opportunity to express his gratefulness to Count Colle. The first cases of cholera were reported in the summer of 1884. The count and countess had gone to the Oratory for the feast of St. John the Baptist (Don Bosco's name day), as we have already mentioned, but nothing was heard from them after their return home. Don Bosco was worried, but when the news did come, it was good news, and he replied on July 5: "Your welcome letter was truly a message of consolation for us. We were all asking about you and could get no answer. Father Rua, Father Cagliero, Father Durando, Father Barruel and all the Salesians kept asking about your trip, your health and where you were staying, but no one knew anything until your welcome letter arrived. Now we know that you are in good health and staying at La Farlède. Blessed be God. The overall news of the public health situation is improving, and we are constantly praying for both of you and all your friends that nothing will imperil your health or your peace of mind. We shall continue to do so morning and evening in our personal and community prayers. How fervently and gladly do I pray for you! I remember you both every day at Holy Mass."

Yet Don Bosco himself was far from well. The summer heat, which had always been a drain on his strength, became ever more oppressive in 1884. The doctors insisted that he should move to a cooler climate. Bishop [Philip] Chiesa of Pinerolo offered him the hospitality of his villa, and Don Bosco went there, accompanied by Father Lemoyne. The bishop showered him with attention. Meanwhile Don Bosco followed the spread of the epidemic[30] with apprehension because it was beginning to break out in the neighboring villages and the number of victims kept increasing. "We trust in the assistance of Mary, Help of Christians," he wrote to the count on August 11. "Still, our houses

[30]Don Bosco's letter to Count Colle, July 20, 1884. [Author]

have been turned topsy-turvy by the epidemic. Boys who have parents or relatives have gone home, but the poorer lads remain with us, and we shall look after them and keep up their spirits. If nothing untoward happens, we shall see each other toward the end of September; otherwise, Divine Providence will guide us. All the Salesians and boys are praying for you, and we have great faith also in the devout prayers of both of you."

He returned to the Oratory on August 23, and that very day wrote to the count: "I have just now returned from Pinerolo in fairly good health, praised be God. Turin is surrounded by cholera, but the city itself is totally free of the epidemic so far. Thanks to God and to the Blessed Virgin, all our houses have been spared this scourge. Our priests, clerics and boys are praying and offering up Communions for you and the countess. Thank you for the rosary you say for our intention. Our Lord and His Divine Mother will not let us repeat in vain: 'Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us.' "

But Don Bosco did more than pray; he mulled over an idea. "While I was staying at Pinerolo," he wrote, "I seriously thought that if you and the countess could come to spend the hot summer months at Pinerolo, it would greatly benefit your health. Couldn't we find a cozy little place for you through the summer? Let's keep it in mind for next year."

However, nothing came of it. In fact, on August 10, 1885, Don Bosco wrote: "I see in the papers that cholera is now threatening France. I believe that La Farlède will be spared, but should you wish at any time to come and stay for a while at Lanzo, which is totally free of cholera, just give me a few days' notice, or even one day, and we will have a cottage ready for you and your whole family." He more warmly renewed this offer on August 18: "My dear, generous friend, we trust that both you and the countess are well. All our Salesians and boys are constantly praying that you may enjoy long life at La Farlède in health and holiness. But should anything untoward come up and should you wish to come and stay with us for a while, please feel free to do so. You will be given a rousing welcome."

Don Bosco again spent some time with the bishop of Pinerolo in July 1886, and from there he wrote on July 23: "I constantly think of you and ask God to keep you both in good health for many years. The Salesians are well. No cholera or other ills over here. Hence, if we can

do something for you, it will be a great comfort for us, and we shall be unconditionally at your service." This oft-repeated invitation once more showed Don Bosco's gratitude toward his distinguished benefactors.

The exchange of visits, which we have already reported and which we now re-emphasize so as to better understand Don Bosco's sentiments, resulted in demonstrations of gratitude on one hand and a largess of charity on the other.

Don Bosco had stopped off in Toulon between March and April of 1883. On April 5 he wrote from Valence on the left bank of the Rhone River: "I always fondly remember the gracious kindness, attention and generosity you have lavished upon me so many times, particularly during the days I had the honor and pleasure of spending with you at Toulon. My dear count, please know that in writing to you, I also include the countess, whom we may now rightly call the 'charitable mother' of the Salesians. In all their houses and undertakings, the Salesians will never cease to pray for your health and well-being."

On June 10, he invited both of them to Turin for his name day, saying, "We are keeping the feast of St. John the Baptist on the 24th of this month, and if you can, please come to Turin for the occasion; you will crown the festivities. I think we will have time to chat about our own concerns and maybe take a little trip or two. However, should you choose to anticipate or delay your visit, please feel free to do so, for I have no engagements elsewhere during those days. The celebration of the feast of Mary, Help of Christians was truly magnificent. I shall tell you about it in Turin." The invitation was joyfully accepted. When they left Turin, the count was not feeling too well. Don Bosco hastened to write to him on July 7: "When you left us, my dearest friend, I was quite concerned about your health; you had a bad cold and were coughing. I trust in God that you are feeling better by now; still, I would appreciate hearing from you. So please write a brief note and reassure me."

One of the trips Don Bosco had planned for them was to Borgo San Martino, but that plan fell through, and so he wrote in the same letter: "The celebration at Borgo San Martino was meant for both of you; your accommodations, the choir, the band, the boys, the bishop—everyone awaited you anxiously. I tried to assuage everybody by inviting all to pray for you and your intentions."

At the beginning of 1884 Don Bosco eagerly anticipated his next visit to Toulon.[31] As we have already stated, he went in March with Father Barberis. The count and countess returned to Turin for Don Bosco's name day, and on that occasion the title and insignia of Commendatore of St. Gregory the Great were publicly bestowed upon him. That same year, Don Bosco fervently hoped that they might come back to attend Father Cagliero's consecration as bishop. "I would like to make you a proposal," he wrote on September 7. "It may be difficult, but not impossible. The decision is yours. I believe you were informed that our Holy Father Leo XIII will officially announce Father Cagliero's elevation as bishop on the 13th of this month. He will be consecrated a few days later. He is our first pupil to have attained this lofty office; he will be the first bishop of Patagonia. He is also one of your protégés and is quite fond of you. We are organizing a most magnificent tribute, but there is one big thing we hope for. All of us—and I myself especially—wish to have you with us that day as godparents at this solemn rite. Expressing the wishes of all, I now invite you formally. However, my love for you and my concern for your health prompts me to say that if you feel you may suffer from the trip, I will, at the cost of a great personal sacrifice, insist that you both remain at home. This is my sincere invitation, but feel absolutely free about accepting it or not, even though we all profoundly desire to have you here with us."

The reply was what had been feared. Bishop Cagliero went to Rome in December and returned to Turin on the 22nd, bearing the Pope's special blessing for Count and Countess Colle.[32] He took it to them in person, and was received with the most refined graciousness;[33] in turn they presented him with a gift of fifteen hundred francs.[34] Before the end of 1883, Bishop Cagliero baptized a young Indian and named him Louis Colle; he then sent the young man's photograph to Don Bosco to pass on to the count.[35]

Don Bosco saw the Colles again in April 1885 at Toulon; there he arranged with them another visit to Turin on the occasion of the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, transferred that year, for liturgical reasons,

[31]Letter to Count Colle, Turin, February 11, 1884. [Author]
[32]Letter from Don Bosco, Turin, December 17, 1884. [Author]
[33]Letter from Don Bosco to Count Colle, Turin, February 20, 1885. [Author]
[34]Letter from Father Bonetti to Don Bosco, Marseille, February 11, 1885. [Author]
[35]Letter from Don Bosco to the count, Turin, September 27, 1885. [Author]

to June 2.[36] In the Colle home Don Bosco always felt much at ease because of the Christian piety which reigned there. He voiced the touching memories of his stay with them as follows:[37] "My earthly paradise is still my room, or, rather, the room you set aside for me during my stay in Toulon." As the day of their visit drew nearer, he wrote again on May 26: "All the Salesians are waiting for your arrival on the morning of the 31st. You have not told me whether you are coming by way of Savona or Genoa. I do not mean to inconvenience you in any way, but we shall be ready to welcome you at noon for dinner or at any other hour. You truly will be the friends of Mary, Help of Christians and the sponsors of our celebration. . . . Meanwhile I have made a memento for you each morning at Holy Mass and shall continue to do so until the day of your welcome arrival in our midst."

Don Bosco returned their visit toward the end of March 1886. It was the last earthly meeting of these holy souls. Don Bosco was looking forward to another meeting on a more memorable place and occasion, as he wrote on March 22, 1887: "The tentative date for the consecration of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome is set for May 14; afterward we could proceed to Turin for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians on May 24. Is that agreeable to you? . . . If it is, I shall send you all the details you need to know. We will all await you on that date, and we are praying for your health and long life; your poor, but most loving Don Bosco never fails to make a special memento for you every morning at Holy Mass." He wrote again on April 8: "I don't know whether you have been receiving news from us of late because I have been all but forced to stop my letter writing, except for strictly confidential matters. The consecration of the Church of the Sacred Heart has definitely been scheduled for May 13. I can travel only in brief stages but hope to be in Rome on that day. I also hope to find you both in good health, and to tranquilly enjoy being together again. From Rome we shall return to Turin for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians on the 24th and shall continue talking about our own matters."

Unfortunately, the count's health was also declining; his heart condition had again worsened more than ever. On learning this, Don Bosco wrote him on May 12: "Your letter hit all of us like a thunderbolt,

[36]Letters from Don Bosco to the Colles, Turin, March 13; Nice, April 25; Turin, May 10, 1885. [Author]

[37]Letter to the Colles, Nice, April 25, 1885. [Author]

upsetting all our plans. But your health and your need to take every precaution come before all other considerations. We can postpone our get-togethers to some other time. I desire to go to Rome and pray at length for you at the tombs of Sts. Peter and Paul, and I trust that Our Lord will let you join us for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians at Valdocco. All our prayers are for this intention. We will keep in touch with you. May God's blessing be with us and may Mary grant us to meet again in Turin. All our pupils are praying for you and expecting you without fail, for your visit will bring them the greatest joy." However, in a postscript, Father Rua gave the count some rather disturbing news of Don Bosco's own health. Deferring the date of the church's consecration, as Don Bosco had wished, so as to have the count attend, was not possible, Father Rua stated. It was too late to do anything about it since it had already been publicly announced that the consecration would take place on May 14.

Don Bosco took the trip in slow stages. On arriving in Rome he hastened to write to the count on May 1: "We are here in Rome after a pleasant journey. My secretary, Father Rua, will let you in on the details. If you cannot come, we shall pray fervently for your health. Still, it is my firm belief that we shall see you in Turin, for it is inconceivable to celebrate the feast of Mary, Help of Christians without you. I say this only on condition that your health will permit it, because it is precious to us. My return has been set for May 20 at the latest, but I shall try to anticipate it by a few days. All our works [in Rome] have already started; may God help us see them through! May God grant you and the countess good health and lead you both on the path to paradise. Amen." He signed himself "humble and loving as a son."

The count's reply was not reassuring, and Don Bosco wrote again on May 12: "Your letter tells me that your health is far from being as good as we would all earnestly desire. We, therefore, will continue to pray and, as it were, do violence to the Lord and the Blessed Virgin. All the boys in our schools are praying for you. Tomorrow Father Rua and I will say Mass for you. Friday evening at six we have an audience with the Holy Father, with whom we shall speak at length about you. . . . On Saturday we shall have the consecration of the church and the blessing of the Sacred Heart Hospice which I have so often recommended to your charity."

The Colle family was officially honored at the consecration ceremony; the three major church bells rang out the praises of the count,

the countess and their son Louis, whose names were emblazoned on each of them with Latin eulogies[38] composed by Don Bosco. His handwritten draft is still preserved.

Don Bosco did follow his plan of anticipating his departure from Rome. On May 18 we find him at Pisa, guest of Archbishop [Ferdinand] Capponi. From there he wrote his last letters to his dear friends, and we quote them in their entirety. In translating them [into Italian from French], we have corrected the flaws in syntax which, together with the painful scrawl, reveal Don Bosco's weariness of hand and of mind.

Pisa, May 18, 1887

Dear Count and Countess Colle:

I believe you have by now received the Holy Father's commendation which he added to the apostolic blessing he sent you. Let me just write a few lines to you from the residence of the archbishop of Pisa, with whom I am staying and who has asked me to send you his regards.

Tomorrow I leave for Turin, where we shall most assuredly pressure the Blessed Virgin, Help of Christians, to restore you to your former good health.

All the Salesians pray incessantly for you and your wife.

God bless you both! May the Blessed Virgin guide you always in the path to paradise. Amen.

With the affection of a son,
Fr John Bosco

P.S. During the lengthy audience which the Holy Father kindly granted me, I found time to speak of you and your wife and of all the good works which you are performing and which you help us carry out.

He is deeply grieved to hear that your health is not all we could desire and he asks that many prayers be offered for you in the Church of the Sacred Heart, especially during the novena and solemnity of Mary, Help of Christians.

I have asked him to remember you in his Holy Mass and pray that you may be in good health for a long time. He assured me he will do so. He has also asked me to extend to you in his name a special blessing with a plenary indulgence. Please bear with my scribble!

[38]Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

About a month later he wrote a long letter to the count, but forgot the salutation. The effort to push his sluggish pen across the paper is only too apparent.

Turin, June 14, 1887

I am writing from our Valsalice College which you honored by your visit; this gives us frequent occasion to speak of you and your esteemed countess. Should your health improve enough to allow you to visit us on the feast of St. Aloysius and that of St. John the Baptist, your room and place at table are ready.

A little rest will do you much good since the weather is pleasantly mild. Our whole household is at your service. But our first concern is always for your health, and I really don't know how you are feeling.

I honestly wish to spend some time with you and talk about our work in Rome and San Benigno and about our missionaries. But this demands good health of both you and the countess. All the Salesians are offering their prayers for your health, and we are fully confident that they will be listened to.

The news from our missionaries has not been good, especially concerning Bishop Cagliero. While journeying from Patagonia to Chile, he fell from his horse and lay half-dead in the wilderness of the Cordilleras. Now he is safe and sound after a month of living amid dangers, and, with all the others, has arrived at the town of Concepción, where they have begun to labor for the conversion of the savages.

In their letters our missionaries very often state that they always commend themselves to your kindly prayers. For their part they assure me that never a day goes by that they fail to recommend you and the countess to the prayers of the savages, especially those who have been given your names at their baptism.

God bless you both! May the Blessed Virgin guide you through all perils until you reach heaven.

Father Rua and all the Salesians send their fond regards. I myself shall be for all my days as a loving son.

Yours affectionately
Fr. John Bosco

The count probably asked Don Bosco to have novenas offered for him, as we gather from his reply. He again omitted the salutation. The countess was not well either.

[No date]

We shall offer a novena of prayers to the Blessed Virgin as you request—not once but many times until God will grant our request, as your parish priest at St. Aloysius keeps telling us. God grant it! The whole house is praying for you.

Count Flayose de Villeneuve and his daughter, Ann Marie, are with us to offer their thanks to the Blessed Virgin. We spoke a good deal about you, and he has promised to pray with us for your complete recovery.

Dear St. John the Baptist, let it not be that we shall celebrate your feast day without having obtained from God the count's complete recovery or at least a considerable improvement of his health. Amen.

When you will kindly answer my letters, please do me the favor of writing only these simple words: "I feel better" or "I do not feel better." I do not want you to tax yourself with much writing.

We are also praying for Countess Colle and are fully confident that her recovery will be complete.

O Mary, compassionate and loving Mother, pray for us and protect us. Amen!

Humbly and gratefully as a son,
Fr. John Bosco

Learning from Father [Peter] Perrot that the count's condition was not improving, Don Bosco felt that he should send Father Rua to pay him a visit, particularly since there were also matters he had to look into at Marseille. "Father Rua," Don Bosco wrote,[39] "knows your intentions, your wife's and my own." On Father Rua's return, Don Bosco wrote to the countess.

Turin, July 26, 1887

My dear Countess Colle:

Father Rua has told me of a slight improvement in the count's health. Praised be God! We still keep praying. Let us hope the improvement continues, though even at a slow pace. My condition is just about the same. I'm somewhat better but cannot walk unless supported by two people.

But you, my dear countess, are neglecting yourself. Look after our beloved patient, but do not forget your own health.

My prayers every morning at Holy Mass will be for the count and for your

[39]Letter from Turin, July 7, 1887. [Author]

sister. Every day our orphans offer special Communions for your intentions at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians.

O glorious St. Ann, obtain health, holiness and perseverance for all of us until we reach paradise, paradise, paradise!

As a loving son,
Fr. John Bosco

A sudden remarkable improvement rebuilt their hopes. Don Bosco quickly expressed his joy to the countess.

Lanzo, August 14, 1887

My dear Countess Colle:

Praised be God and thanks ever to the Blessed Virgin! This grace of Count Colle's recovery is truly a marvel! Many times I said or wrote, "Please, God, summon me to eternity, if this is according to Your will, but give Your son Count Colle more time to continue helping our missionaries and our fledgling Congregation." God has chosen to send me such happy news [as a prelude] to my birthday![40] May the Blessed Virgin be always and ever thanked. This is the most welcome news! Father Rua is also writing to you. Please be patient with my awful scrawl!

May Mary protect us forever! Please continue praying for this poor priest, who loves you as a son.

Fr. John Bosco

Later Father Rua's oral messages of the count's improvement were corroborated by a letter from the director of La Navarre, and Don Bosco hastened to congratulate his friend.

Turin, September 6, 1887

My excellent and dear friend:

God knows I hope that your condition will continue steadily to improve and that both you and the countess will enjoy normal good health. We have always prayed for this grace and shall particularly do so on the feast of Our Blessed Lady's Nativity.

I am still at Valsalice. Father Rua is at our school in Este, directing the spiritual retreat for the Salesians of Lombardy. He will join me on Saturday.

[40]Don Bosco's birthday occurred on August 16. [Editor]

Father Perrot spent a few days here with us, and we spoke about your recovery and the health of the countess and her sister.

God bless us and may the Holy Virgin guide us through all perils until we reach paradise. My respects to all of you.

Humbly and lovingly as a son,
Fr. John Bosco

On October 20, Don Bosco conducted the clothing day ceremony for ninety-four novices at Foglizzo. Count Colle paid for the cassocks. This thank-you letter was the last Don Bosco wrote to the count and indeed one of the very last he was ever to write.

Turin, October 17, 1887

My dear Count Colle:

Father Perrot has sent us your generous gift of five thousand francs to enable our young clerics to don the clerical habit. The money went immediately for this purpose, and their clothing day has been set for next Thursday. On that day they will pray and offer their Holy Communions for you and the countess for the continued improvement of your health. We shall also recite special prayers for the other members of your family, living and dead.

Take heart! We shall continue praying for you! My health is improving. Praised be God, and may the Blessed Virgin protect us!

I am only too happy to pray for you and your wife, and am always your grateful, humble servant.

Fr. John Bosco

This distinguished friend and benefactor of Don Bosco preceded his passing into eternity by only one month. A heart attack took him almost suddenly on January 1, 1888. He had received Holy Viaticum twice before during his precarious illness. Father Rua prepared Don Bosco, who was also very ill, for this bad news. As he did for his other distinguished benefactors, Don Bosco had already prepared a letter scrawled in a trembling hand for both the count and the countess, so that it might be rewritten and mailed to them after his own death. He had signed himself "as lovingly as a son" and had added: "I will await you where the Lord has prepared our great reward—everlasting happiness in the company of our beloved Louis. God in His divine mercy will grant us this favor. Please remain always the mainstay of our

Salesian Congregation and the help of our missions. May God bless you!"

The deceased count's charity did not die with his last breath, for his will left to Don Bosco or, in his lieu, Father Rua a legacy of four hundred thousand francs. However, the devil put a finger in the pie. The holographic will, entrusted to the notary Marquand of Toulon, was dated July 2, 1884 but the watermark of the legal paper on which it was written bore the date 1886. A distant relative, estranged from the count and barred from his home, seized this detail to contest the will. The count, it is true, had kept a copy of the will. He had written it on ordinary paper, but it was identical to the legal one in contents and date. Unfortunately in his own hand he had written upon it: "This is an exact copy of the will I entrusted to Monsieur Marquand. It becomes effective if anything should happen to the holographic will I have given to the notary."

Now in all reality the will written on plain paper was an original, whereas the one on legal paper was a later copy. However, according to law, this copy was to be considered as an holographic will. The contestor, instead, believing that either way the case was in his favor, gave the following reasons to prove the invalidity of the will found in the count's home: (1) A copy was no better than an original; since the original was invalid, so was the copy. (2) According to the testator's intention, the will in the count's home was to become effective if the one deposited with the notary should disappear. But this was not the case, and so also the copy kept by the count had no value whatsoever.

Fortunately, the civil court rejected the request to declare the will null and void by basing its judgment on the fact that the copy of the will which the count had in his keeping at home had incontestably been written, dated and signed by the testator and contained the three essential requisites for the validity of a holographic will. It was therefore to be carried out. This judgment was upheld in the court of appeals.

The widowed countess, worthy heiress of her husband, decided to disburse immediately the sum left to Don Bosco, although a clause in the will stated that all cash legacies were to be paid two years after her own death. She was very glad when all the legal formalities were completed. However, when everything was settled, the total legacy amounted to only eighty thousand francs.

Count Colle's tomb bears an inscription from the psalms, an excep-

tional testimonial of Don Bosco's loving gratitude to his beloved and blessed memory.

Three days before following the count to heaven, the evening of January 18, 1888, when Don Bosco already found it extremely difficult to express himself or to show that he understood others, a hushed discussion was going on at his bedside concerning an epitaph for the tombstone of the deceased count. Father Rua was suggesting: *Orphano tu eris adiutor* (You will be a helper to the orphan), while Bishop Cagliero proposed: *Beatus qui intelligit super egenum et pauperem* [Blessed is he who is concerned for the needy and the poor]. Just then, Don Bosco, who the bystanders thought was unaware of what was going on, suddenly opened his eyes and forced himself to say: *Pater meus et mater mea dereliquerunt me, Dominus autem assumpsit me* [Though my father and mother forsake me, yet will the Lord receive me—Ps. 27, 10, *The New American Bible*].

Divine Providence had entrusted to Don Bosco great charitable undertakings, particularly on behalf of poor and abandoned youth. The same Lord led Don Bosco to meet the man who, in times of extreme need for the consolidation of his works, became his treasurer and the minister of Divine Providence.

# CHAPTER 4

## *From France to Rome and from Rome to Turin*

SEVERAL matters, some serious and ticklish, imperatively required Don Bosco's presence in Rome, and so, on leaving France, he bypassed Turin and continued on toward Rome. However, Easter was approaching, when little or nothing could be accomplished there, and so he spent two weeks visiting our houses in Liguria, taking advantage of the good weather to go in search of funds.

On leaving Nice on March 27 [1881] along with Father [Celestine] Durando and the cleric [Julius] Reimbeau, he first went to Vallecrosia to visit a community of two priests, a cleric and two lay Salesians who were then living in tight makeshift quarters while their residence was being readied for them. Don Bosco and his companions were very grateful to Chevalier [Joseph] Moreno who generously offered them hospitality. Reimbeau gives his impression of the confreres' living conditions as follows:[1] "Theirs is a truly edifying life. Their poverty is such as to excite pity. As a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, I have often seen destitute families, but rarely any poorer than they. It is hard to believe, but quite often for weeks at a time they live solely on boiled vegetables seasoned only with salt, Still, they endure their hardship with astonishing cheerfulness and never have I seen jollier people. Their residence is no better than the huts in Patagonia; their chapel and school are in an abandoned oil warehouse. The chapel is so small that I could hardly breathe and felt as if I were choking. Soon, however, they will be moving into some spacious quarters which will make up for all their present discomfort."

At Torrione it seems that the Lord wanted to reward our generous

[1]Letter to Father Barberis, San Remo, April 3, 1881. [Author]

cooperator's kindliness and glorify Don Bosco's holiness through amazing healings. A relative of the chevalier, Mrs. Moreno, had been bedridden for years; then, on the morning of March 31, a son of hers suddenly fell into a coma. Medical intervention was ineffective and his condition was judged critical. The news so deeply affected the mother that she, too, rapidly began to worsen and was soon on the verge of the grave. Without delay our confrere Father [Louis] Pesce administered the last rites to her. Don Bosco, on hearing this, felt very sorry for his good friend Chevalier Moreno and hastened to call on the family to comfort them and their two patients.

The young man gave no sign of life, the mother was in her death throes, and the doctor entertained no hope for them. Don Bosco visited them both, praying a moment for each and giving each his blessing. Wonderful to behold, the young man immediately stretched his limbs and then peacefully fell into a tranquil sleep. By evening he felt so well that he wanted to get up, saying he was very hungry. The mother, too, immediately improved so much that before nightfall she was fully recovered; in turn, her husband also sprang up from what was practically death to life. He was already a good Salesian cooperator, but from that day on he became deeply grateful to Don Bosco and showed it with generous donations. He had been blessed by God with a rich estate.

While at Vallecrosia, Don Bosco wrote two letters—at least, that is all we have. The first was addressed to the director of the Salesian house in Nice.

Torrione, March 29, 1881

My dear Father Ronchail:

Please send Father Confortóla's[2] letter to me at Alassio, as well as a letter which I began and never managed to finish.

Either I or someone else left my cassock in the carriage which took us to the station. Look for it, pack it, and send it as soon as you can to me in Turin. We forgot Mrs. D'Aprotis' "Bellet."

Let me sum up the whole situation like this:

1. Your heaviest debts have been paid, but take note of the names of the people I pointed out to you and keep in touch with them because they seem disposed to help you.

[2]Faustinus Confortóla, the future director of the Salesian house in Florence. [Editor]

2. When you can, drop in for a visit to Mrs. Daprotis, Mrs. Medà and Miss Guigon.

3. If you feel a letter from me would help, let me know, and I shall send it.

4. Endeavor to summon your house chapter often, and insist that no one is to strike the boys and that each one is to read the rules which apply to him. We have much work to do, but we are short of personnel. Let us pray.

God bless you, my ever beloved Father Ronchail! May He grant you good health and may He bless all our boys and confreres. Best wishes to our friends and benefactors.

In Jesus Christ,

Yours most affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I hope to see Father Cerruti[3] tomorrow evening to discuss our problems with him.

The "Bellet" of Mrs. D'Aprotis was a case of wine named after the vineyards producing it, which she had given to Don Bosco. It was ninety years old. Don Bosco wanted to bring it to Rome and present it to the Holy Father. The second letter was addressed to Father Barberis.

Ventimiglia, March 29, 1881

My dear Father Barberis:

1. I received the news about you and our dear boys. Let us bless the Lord in all things. Every day I bless our dear Father Buffa and pray that God in His mercy will spare him to me for years to come.

2. Tell the cleric Lucca that I was very pleased with his letters, that he should go on, that I must have a little talk with him before presenting him for orders, and that meanwhile he should be reassured of my benevolence and fatherly love.

3. As for the work on hand, I have given Father Rua[4] all authority; come to an understanding with him.

4. All goes well with us, but we are overloaded with work. Keep praying for us.

5. I am very glad that the spiritual retreat went off well. In this regard, please tell our dear clerics and priests—Father Piscetta and Father Merigi

[3]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]
[4]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

individually—that I am looking for giants of virtue and that at least the two of them should manage to work miracles. Without that I can't make progress.

God bless us all and keep us in His holy grace. Pray for me, always in the Lord,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Father Buffa died the following April 7 at San Benigno. Forced to interrupt his studies in his second year of junior college, afflicted by various illnesses and a period of troublesome life, he finally found peace with Don Bosco who invited him to spend a few months at Varazze and at Alassio, and finally admitted him to the novitiate. Aware that the young man's days were numbered, Don Bosco speeded up his admission to sacred orders for the priesthood without much difficulty, thanks to the benevolence of Bishop David Riccardi, the new ordinary of the diocese of Ivrea. The chronicle of the house at San Benigno states: "The memory of Father Buffa shall never fade away from those who were privileged to know him and marveled at his outstanding virtues."

On the evening of April 1, Don Bosco and his two companions proceeded to San Remo, where they were met by the director of Alassio, Father Cerruti, who, after welcoming them, returned to his school. They were guests of the Visitation Nuns, among whom was a niece of Father Julius Barberis.[5] There Don Bosco had occasion to meet a very wealthy English lady who had recently been converted to the Catholic faith. In response to his request, she said she was willing to help our work at Vallecrosia, though she admitted it would truly please her if a Salesian house would be founded in her native England.

Don Bosco stayed at San Remo about four days, hosted far beyond his expectations by the sisters. Rest and fresh air worked wonders for his precarious health. "I am thrilled," wrote the cleric Reimbeau, "to see how salutary was his brief stay at San Remo. He received just a few visitors, worked undisturbed in his room, talked with no one and just rested. Today he feels really great. The Visitation Nuns truly treat him as he deserves."

On April 4, the day he left San Remo for Alassio, he sent this memo to Father Rua: "Do you think you might possibly act as my guardian

[5]*See* Vol. XII, p. 352. [Editor]

angel when I go from Sampierdarena to Rome? Our stopovers would be shorter, and I would feel very relieved, while at the same time you could see things first-hand. Let me know." What other answer could Father Rua have given but, "Whatever pleases you pleases me!" Every wish of Don Bosco was an unquestioned command for Father Rua.

Before leaving for Rome, Don Bosco felt that he had to see the main superiors, among them Father Cagliero, who was continuing his priestly apostolate in Utrera, Spain.[6] He therefore wrote to him from Alassio:

Alassio, April 6, 1881

My dear Father Cagliero:

I do not know if this letter of mine will ever get to you. In any event, if you can come to Sampierdarena on Wednesday of Holy Week, Father Rua will also be there and we can have a little meeting. He will accompany me on my visit to our houses at La Spezia, Florence and Rome, and probably, on our way back, at Lucca, Este, Venice, and so on. I plan to be in Turin on May 6 to celebrate the feast of St. John at the Latin Gate.[7]

My head is spinning around, yet I must keep moving. I am hoping Father Rua will bring me relief. Remember me to Father Branda, Father Pane, Father Oberti,[8] the music teacher, and the chef, Goitre.[9]

Our house in Florence was inaugurated on March 4, and Father Confortóla is doing wonders.

We did very well in France, also for the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice. Have you and Father Branda managed to get things moving?

Offer my respects to Marquis [Diego] Ulloa and his family and to the archbishop, whom we await in Turin.

God bless you all. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

[6]*See* Vol. XIV, p. 315. [Editor]

[7]According to legend, this church was built on the spot where the apostle was dipped into boiling oil. It was constructed by Pope Gelasius (†496). A recent examination of the edifice confirms that this might have been so. The first mention of St. John *ante portam Latinam* goes back to the end of the eighth century when Adrian I (†795), the Pope who reconstructed nearly all the churches of Rome existing at that time, restored it completely. [Source: *Guide to Catholic Italy*, p. 571, edited by Msgr. Pietro Barberi and Rev. Ulisse Pucci, Holy Year 1950 Publishing Co., Rome, Italy—Editor.]

[8]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

[9]Michael Goitre, a lay Salesian. [Editor]

He also sent Father Dalmazzo a list of instructions. The third one we shall have to discuss later on.

Alassio, April 6, 1881

My dear Father Dalmazzo:

Father Rua will meet me here on Holy Wednesday and then will accompany me to Rome. We shall stop briefly in Florence, from where I shall write to let you know the date and time of our arrival [in Rome]. In the meantime:

1. In the event we cannot go directly to our new residence,[10] please see to it that we have decent lodgings, even if we have to incur some expense.

2. Make some contacts which possibly will get us some financial help for the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice. Get in touch with Rome's municipal authorities, the Minister of Finance, who is a parishioner of ours,[11] the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Grace and Justice and the Treasurer's Office.

3. Canon Colomiatti, the fiscal attorney, insists that we settle Father Bonetti's case. I told him that he alone can do it:

(a) by revoking Father Bonetti's suspension;

(b) by dismissing the charges brought to Rome against him.

Let's wait and see. We shall discuss this in Rome.

4. At your convenience, call on Mr. Alexander Sigismondi and tell him that I could not celebrate the feast of St. Matilda[12] on the day itself this year, but that important celebrations can be postponed. I wish that this occasion be graced with at least a bottle of choice Cyprus wine or some other select wine.

5. Did you receive the twenty thousand francs I sent you from Toulon for the Sacred Heart Church? I trust that more is on the way.

6. Heartiest regards to the Oblate Sisters and their mother superior; also to the Vitelleschi family, to Commendatore Morello, Chevalier Vignolo, and the others. Mr. Moreno can advise you and show you how to apply for funds to the above-mentioned cabinet ministers.

Pray for me often, my dear Father Dalmazzo. God bless you. Always in Jesus Christ.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

[10]The new treasury building was only a short distance away from the Sacred Heart Church. [Editor]

[11]A Vatican expediter who always hosted Don Bosco during his visits to Rome until Father Dalmazzo, upon being appointed procurator general of the Salesian Congregation with the Holy See, set up his residence in an apartment which the Oblates of St. Frances of Rome had reserved for Don Bosco's use at Tor de' Specchi. *See* Vol. XIV, p. 299. [Editor]

[12]Mr. Sigismondi's wife. Formerly the feast was observed on March 14. [Editor]

P.S. Next Sunday I give a fund-raising sermon at San Remo and then leave for Varazze and Sampierdarena.

Don Bosco's last thought was for Father Berto, to whom he sent a list of some ten errands to do, interspersed with a humorous quip or two to perk up his usually cheerless spirit.

Alassio, April 8, 1881

My dear Father Berto:

I need Father Rua's company on my visit to several of our houses to support me in a few thorny issues. However, there are several things I need you to do.

1. Update Father Rua on the outstanding legal problems we have pending in Rome by providing the documents pertaining to the Marseille novitiate, to the three requests which were turned down, and to the Sacred Heart Church.
2. Please get me a pair of shoes which won't squeak, my summer cloak, a few handkerchiefs, my spring breviary, a few French circulars and an adequate number of Italian ones on the Sacred Heart Church.
3. Pack all these things and whatever else you feel I'll need into your suitcase and go to Sampierdarena next Wednesday with Father Rua.[13] There we shall discuss several things it's best not to put on paper, and then I shall give you instructions for your guidance during Father Rua's absence and mine. After that you can return to Turin with Reimbeau and supervise the sowing of the beans.[14]
4. Confidentially, we have some very serious business on hand and therefore urgently need many fervent prayers and Communions.
5. If the printing of our privileges is finished, ask Father Rua to bring some copies with him, for my own use and that of the houses we visit.
6. God bless you, my ever dear Father Berto! God keep you steadfast in His holy grace! Pray often for me. Always in Jesus Christ.

Your friend,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Remember me to our friends.[15]

Two items merit further attention: the Sacred Heart circulars and the booklet of privileges; we shall speak of them in Chapters 13 and 14.

Don Bosco left for Alassio toward evening and arrived at dusk. Both

[13]Holy Wednesday, April 13, 1881. [Author]
[14]The young Salesian postulants. *See* Vol. XIII, p. 678. [Author]
[15]The boys who prayed for him and the successful outcome of his business. [Author]

superiors and boys went in small groups to meet him. To the first group he said in jest: "You have come to meet Don Bosco *with clubs and lanterns*." Father Peter Giordano writes: "Whenever he came to Alassio, he was always given a joyous rather than a triumphant welcome, especially by the boys and Salesians." Later he adds, "Don Bosco's passing through Alassio was always a treat for us Salesians and boys, a joyous treat!" Hard pressed by the grave need of funds for the Sacred Heart Church, he made an appeal in the parish church, after which Father Cerruti and the parish priest Father [Francis] Della Valle took up a collection. Father Giordano has passed on to us an important recollection of his. While speaking of Pius IX, Don Bosco claimed that the Pontiff, during his last illness, had sent him word to come and pay him a visit and lamented his lack of response, but as we stated in Volume XIII,[16] the Vatican doors were strongly barred to Don Bosco. He mentioned this to several Salesians who were having coffee with him in the dining room, among them Father Giordano, who believes he remembers Don Bosco's precious words. According to him, Don Bosco said: "What grieves me most is that I came to know that the Pope, not seeing me, said to one of his attendants, 'When Don Bosco needed me, he was quick to come over, and I welcomed him as a father greets his beloved son. Now that the Pope needs him, he makes himself scarce!' " As he said this, his eyes welled up with tears, and he said nothing more.[17]

Upon arriving at Alassio From San Remo, Don Bosco found the school's direction very disturbed by a recent event. From the school year 1878-79 on, Salesian Father Matthew Torazza used to go from Alassio every day with another teacher to the municipal school of Laigueglia [Savona]; they would have dinner there and return home in the evening. Because of that teacher a terrible uproar broke out in

[16]Pages 367f. [Editor]

[17]Letters of Father Giordano, Alassio, November 30 and December 9, 1932. That year, 1932, in a special issue of their official bulletin commemorating the seventy-fifth year of their foundation, the Conceptionists published an article by Father Spreafico, a Barnabite, and historian of his congregation. He claimed that Don Bosco chose to butt into the Conceptionists' affairs in order to change their rules and for that reason Pius IX refused to grant him other audiences. What we published in Volumes XII and XIII[18] shows that Pius IX himself had instructed Don Bosco to undertake the reform of that congregation. As for the other allegation, Father Giordano's testimony substantiates what was said elsewhere[19] about the obstacles blocking his approach to the Pope. [Author]

[18]*See* the Index of these two volumes under "Conceptionists." [Editor]

[19]*See* Vol. XIII, pp. 104, 233f, 367f, 381f, 673f. [Editor]

Laigueglia at the beginning of April. The anticlerical newspaper, *Il Secolo* of Milan, lost no time in publishing a telegram from Alassio, alleging that a Salesian priest belonging to the community which staffed the Salesian boarding school in Alassio had sexually abused boys at the municipal school of Laigueglia, where he was teaching. The telegram was followed by another which confirmed it and aggravated matters by insinuating that Don Bosco had gone to Alassio to hush up the whole affair lest the indignant parents withdraw their sons from the boarding school. After an investigation, *L'Osservatore Cattolico* of Milan[20] rebutted the charges that had been inspired by malignant rumors circulating in that part of Liguria, which even attacked Don Bosco personally. Father Cerruti sent a telegram to the slander sheet, stating that the Salesian boarding school of Alassio had nothing to do with the immoral goings on at Laigueglia, that the accused teacher was not a Salesian, and that it was not true that parents were withdrawing their children. As demanded by law, the anticlerical paper was forced to publish the telegram, and from then on it never again ventured to bring up this touchy topic.

To divert Father Cerruti from the hurt of these events, Don Bosco took him along to Porto Maurizio, where he hoped to raise considerable funds. There they were hosted by Canon Fabre, a friend of Don Bosco, and spent two nights at his home. Accompanied by the well-known lawyer Ferraris, Don Bosco went knocking from door to door, but with little success. Still, calmly and smilingly, he jested about the lean funds he received and even about the rebuffs he met with.

This unshakable cheerfulness of his, which never forsook him, he also demonstrated once while having dinner with his host. On the last day of his visit, two young nieces of the canon joined them at table, and one of them, somewhat of a flirt, did not object when a young man sitting beside her made remarks which, though not suggestive, were at least unbecoming. To forestall further embarrassment, Don Bosco remarked in a friendly way that he remembered a sonnet he had memorized in his youth which punned on the words "donna" and "danno," woman and woe. He recited the first quatrain very slowly. The young lady, hurt to the quick, wildly snapped, "How dare you, a guest in our house, poke fun at us?" Ignoring her rude interruption, Don Bosco

[20]Number 88, Saturday-Sunday issue, April 16-17, 1881. [Author]

kept up his slow, deliberate recitation, while the young lady smoldered but dared not add anything to her insolent outburst. Nor did the young man dare continue to dally with her. As we shall see later, this incident too had a happy ending.

Leaving Father Cerruti at the canon's home that evening, Don Bosco again set out in search of funds with Mr. Ferraris. A certain Mary Acquarona lived in Porto Maurizio. A bedridden spinster who had been afflicted for well over ten years by an incurable spinal affliction, she was well known in the city. At first she had intended to send Don Bosco her contribution, but, on second thought, decided to ask him to drop in for a visit and give her his blessing. Don Bosco obliged and received a very warm welcome. Her sister and brother-in-law, an attorney named Ascheri, happened to be with her as Don Bosco came in and briefly told him of her affliction and of her doctor's diagnosis. Exhorting her to put her trust in Our Lady, Don Bosco blessed her and asked her to say certain prayers after he left. He then went into another room and lingered a while conversing with two lawyers. As he was about to leave, the sick woman, fully dressed, walked into the room and told them she was free of all pain. Her brother-in-law called it a miracle, and all felt deeply moved. Then the woman, who had not stood on her legs over those many years, escorted Don Bosco to the door, telling him that she would say good-bye later at the railroad station, though Don Bosco asked her to not go out and cause a sensation. He then returned to Father Fabre's home and, very much as a father would talk to his son, he very simply told Father Cerruti this incident, adding, "I am not happy about her intention to see me off at the station! It will create such a stir! Patience! God's will be done!" Then, with a gentleness that moved the priest to tears, he continued: "Yet I rejoice, my dear Father Cerruti, that in your overwhelming grief you have been given such comfort. When you sing St. Joseph's hymn and come to the words, *miscens gaudia fletibus* [blending joys and sorrows], say it wholeheartedly, for that's the way life is!"

The news of the miracle had a profound effect also on the canon's niece. Very humbly she called on Don Bosco, knelt before him and asked his pardon for the unpleasant scene at dinner.

A big surprise awaited Don Bosco at the railway station. The news of the healing had spread about town like wildfire, and a vast crowd of people had gathered to see Don Bosco. The lady, who had been driven there by coach ahead of Don Bosco, was tranquilly pacing up and

down the station platform, as all eyed her with wonder. Seemingly unable to credit their own sight, they kept asking her if she were really Mary Acquarona. "I myself saw her," Father Cerruti testified at the process [of beatification], "and I must admit that I would never have guessed that she had been ill at all, so healthy did she look!"

The lady was there waiting to thank Don Bosco again. On arriving at the station, Don Bosco gently remonstrated with her for not having listened to him and pleaded with her to return home. Apologizing, she handed him a sealed envelope containing one thousand lire. Don Bosco then withdrew into the station's waiting room, but the crowd followed him.

As the train rumbled into the station, Mr. Ascheri loudly called upon Don Bosco to impart his blessing on everyone present. They all knelt. Don Bosco obliged and then boarded the train with Father Cerruti for his return trip to San Remo. Their curiosity aroused, the passengers had managed to learn during their brief halt in the station the reason for the unusual crowd, and as soon as the train started off again, everybody was talking about it, venturing various opinions. A young man seated in Don Bosco's compartment exclaimed, "I have no faith either in miracles or in God."

"But you would believe in facts verified by witnesses," Don Bosco retorted. "To do otherwise would be unreasonable." He then began to recount in detail how that woman had been healed instantly by no more than a blessing. The young man listened attentively, and then Don Bosco asked him how he could explain the fact without recourse to a supernatural intervention. After slipping in a few stringent arguments for God's existence, he continued: "Well, then, isn't there a being superior to us?"

"Obviously one has to admit that," the young man answered.

"And what follows then?"

"I'd rather not think about it."

"Why not?"

"Because . . . I have no wish to change my way of life. I say that very honestly. But who are you?"

"There is no need for you to know," Don Bosco replied, for no one knew him there. The train was just pulling into San Remo and he got off.

He was returning to San Remo for a meeting he had announced five days before in a circular addressed to the "well deserving citizens" of

the town. Funds for the Salesian work in neighboring Vallecrosia had run out. Now, organizing a drive, he formed a committee of thirty-six men and women of San Remo who volunteered to solicit donations from their charitable friends. They also spoke highly of him to draw people to his conference, and their praise was very effective. The Protestants had spread religious indifferentism far and wide over this entire beach and health resort, and yet people not only jammed into St. Sirus' Church, but filled the entire square facing it, all anxious to hear Don Bosco. Father James Margotti,[21] a native of San Remo who knew the town well, declared that just being able to draw such a crowd from a population so indifferent to anything religious was in itself one of Don Bosco's greatest miracles.

At the end of his talk, Don Bosco announced that he would personally come around for the collection, adding, "You may think it strange to see a priest go begging through the congregation, plate in hand, but when I look at the crucifix and think of all Jesus did for our salvation, I gladly do it for His sake." The collection amounted to eight hundred lire. At the beatification process Father Cerruti recalled how touched he had been by the sight of Don Bosco, tired, worn out, and haggard when he returned to the sacristy. Still, he sat there and welcomed a large number of people who wanted to talk to him or personally put their offerings into his hands.

The same day he returned to Alassio. While there, he drew up a document showing his watchful concern to strengthen and preserve the bonds of unity in his Congregation. As we have already said,[22] Father Cerruti had been appointed provincial of the houses in Liguria and France. Both to ease his work and safeguard his feeble health, Don Bosco had chosen Father Louis Rocca to be his vicar or vice-director. This office, also found necessary in the San Carlos boarding school at Almagro [Buenos Aires], was something new, never mentioned in the rules. To make it a normal and uniform directive, Don Bosco drew up the following articles:

*Office of the Vice-Director*

1. The vice-director shares with the director all matters concerning the running of the house and takes his place during his absence.

[21]Founder, editor and publisher of the Catholic weekly *Unità Cattolica*. [Editor]
[22]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 25f. [Editor]

2. He is entrusted with the religious, moral and disciplinary care of both boarders and day students and is particularly responsible for their conduct. He shall therefore give watchful attention to this duty and keep in touch with the prefect, the catechist, the prefect of studies, the teachers and assistants, so as to keep informed of the exact situation of the house and prevent or remedy disorders, while strongly fostering piety, morality and discipline.

3. With the prefect of the house he shall every Sunday look over the weekly scholastic grades given to him by the prefect of studies and the grades given of conduct in the dormitories given to him by the catechist.

4. He shall also inquire into any discipline problem occurring during the week in church, on the weekly promenade, in the dining room and in the playground.

5. He may register pupils and hire domestic help, following established policies and particularly inquiring into their religious and moral background. He shall then pass this information on to the prefect, who will note it in the postulant's ledger.

6. Every month he and the director shall fill out the appropriate report of the house's status.

7. He shall also be responsible to enforce Articles 8 and 10 of the *Regulations for the Director* as in the Acts of the General Chapter, namely:

Article 8: Every day the director shall diligently go through the house to monitor its operation; he shall check out the dormitories, kitchen, dining room and wine cellar. This is the way to forestall disorders.

Article 10: He shall keep a list of all friends and benefactors of the house in order to invite them to religious celebrations, school assemblies, award ceremonies, and such events.

8. Save for urgent and exceptional cases, he may not expel pupils or employees or change the duties of teachers and assistants without the consent of the director, who is in a special way responsible for the overall running of the house, the religious and moral care of the confreres and all relations with the students' parents and church, civil and school authorities.

9. All confreres and pupils are always free to appeal to the director for any reason whatever.

From Alassio he went on to Sampierdarena, where he met with Father Rua and other members of the superior chapter for a couple of days of meetings. We have only one incident to narrate of this visit as related by Father [Joachim] Berto, who testified to it at the process of beatification. A Genoese lady, whose name he withheld, was living in complete discord with her husband, who for the past twelve years had never addressed a kind word to her but turned to his daughter for

whatever he needed. At meals he never spoke to his wife, nor did he ever show the slightest concern for her. In his chronic surliness he also gave up Mass and prayers. Family life became unbearable.

Embittered and hopeless, the woman went to Sampierdarena to beg Don Bosco for his prayers and comforting words. But on her arrival, he was indeed so busy that he told her immediately, "I really cannot give you much time." Hardly had the woman begun her tale of woe when Don Bosco interrupted her with the words: "Give your husband this medal," and then graciously ended the interview.

This hasty, though kind, dismissal was due to reasons we can easily surmise. But who could fathom the woman's anguish at finding herself deprived of this longed-for help? Meeting Father Albera, the director, she held out the medal to him, saying: "How can I give this to my husband? He no longer prays. He will only throw it heaven knows where." The director exhorted her to follow Don Bosco's advice literally, but she pleaded lack of courage. Father Albera did not relent. "Very well," she replied. "I'll do it, come what may."

One Saturday evening after supper at their summer cottage, the lady worked up courage and told her husband that she had seen Don Bosco, and that he had promised to pray for her family and had given her a medal for him. Flustered with rage, the husband cried: "What? A medal!" He then stormed out and went to his room, his wife fearfully following him. Finding himself face to face with her, the husband suddenly broke down in a flood of tears, sobbing that it was time to end their quarrel. He hugged her and promised that he would be a new man. The following day, to everyone's astonishment, they were seen at Mass together. Peace had been restored to the family. Father Albera thus testified from his own experience to the efficacy of Don Bosco's advice.

From the correspondence we have cited, it is quite evident that Don Bosco did have his own good reasons to take Father Rua with him to Rome, one of the most important being the Sacred Heart Church. Someone had to look into the contracts signed by the previous administration with the suppliers of construction materials, keep in touch with the architect, examine the layout of the hospice and come up with ways and means of raising funds—a huge amount of work which Father Rua could do to make it possible for Don Bosco to look after other business. Among his immediate concerns were the steps he had

to take to obtain the privileges customarily granted to religious congregations and the weighty problems affecting Father Bonetti and the girls' festive oratory at Chieri.[23] We regret, however, that what little information we managed to collect here and there in no way reflects the broad-ranging activity engaging Don Bosco; in fact we have scarce knowledge even of matters which did not require a precedent silence. Father Rua should be the single source we might draw from, but unfortunately all we have is one letter and three hastily written notes to Father Lazzero.[24] Evidently [as a member of the superior chapter], he too was taken up with concerns far more important than forwarding news to the Oratory.

Don Bosco and Father Rua arrived in Florence on the evening of April 16, the vigil of Easter, and stayed there three days. Father Faustinus Confortóla had been living in a very shabby small house on Via Cimabue since March 4,[25] and had done his best to attract as many boys as he could to daily catechism classes and to the festive oratory. The house was so small that there was no room at all for even one guest, and hence Don Bosco continued to accept the hearty hospitality offered him by Countess Girolama Uguccioni. On Easter morning, being himself detained at home by visitors, he asked Father Rua to celebrate Mass in the little festive oratory chapel, and he went there himself that afternoon to give Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament, assisted by Father Rua and Father Confortóla. Afterward, he gave the boys a generous amount of candy which a kind-hearted benefactress had provided for them.

Of course, he wisely used this occasion to make friends with the youngsters. That afternoon he called on Archbishop Eugene Cecconi, who until then had been unable to receive him because of the Easter services at the cathedral. The remaining two days he spent calling on benefactors and, as we shall see later, looking after business matters. On the last day, he declined all invitations so that he might dine with his Salesians. During his stay in Florence he met a great number of people and left behind him, as it were, a luminous trail which we are at a loss to identify as admiration for his charming friendliness or rever-

[23]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 170-190. [Editor]
[24]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]
[25]It is still [1934] to be seen at Via Cimabue, No. 31. [Author]

ence for the holiness which radiated from his countenance, his speech, his whole manner.[26]

Our travelers arrived in Rome the night of April 20. Both before and after their stay in Florence they met many people who either were Salesian cooperators or asked to be enrolled in their number. This time Don Bosco no longer resided at Tor de' Specchi, but found adequate lodgings in a small house which had been purchased near the Sacred Heart Church. Father Rua describes the house as follows:[27]

Our residence in Rome is as comfortable, pleasing and healthy as can be. It is probably one of Rome's most salubrious quarters, free of malaria even in the summer. However, even here we face difficulties with the Protestants. One would think that the Lord has picked us to fight heresy with the weapons of prayer, teaching and love. As you well know, at Bordighera we live quite close to the Protestants, at La Spezia they are not far from us, and in Florence, where our little work is destined to grow, the only place we could settle was where the Protestants are focusing all their forces of propaganda; finally, here in Rome, the Protestant boarding school is just a block away. Let us then pray that the Lord will grant us success in the mission He is entrusting to us, by first sending us help to speed the work on the new building which will cost us no less than several hundred thousand lire, if not a million or more. Don Bosco is praying and doing his utmost to make this venture a success, leaving no stone unturned, but he always reminds us that he needs the support of our boys' prayers.

He did not have to wait long for an audience with the Holy Father, and he hastened to write up an account of it for the Salesian cooperators in the May issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano*.[28]

It will certainly be a comfort for all of you, my dear cooperators, to learn of the Holy Father's outstanding kindness toward you, and it is my pleasure to tell you about it.

On the evening of April 23, His Holiness Pope Leo XIII generously granted me a private audience, and I had the opportunity of telling him how zealously

[26]*See Don Bosco in Florence* by Father L. Mori, Firenze, Libreria salesiana editrice, 1930. The most relevant section of this booklet consists of the testimony of people still living [1934], of whose reports we shall take due note. [Author]

[27]Letter to Father Lazzaro, April 22, 1881. [Author]

[28]The account bears the date of the audience. It was sent to Father Bonetti on April 29 with this note: "I am sending you a letter for the *Bollettino*. Make whatever corrections are needed." [Author]

our cooperators come to our aid in Italy, France, Spain and [South] America. With more than usual interest the Holy Father asked detailed questions about the church and hospice at Vallecrosia near Ventimiglia and at La Spezia and Florence. These undertakings are of particular concern to the Holy Father, for, as he says, they directly help the Church in its struggle against error and its proponents. "Tell these zealous cooperators of yours that I send them my apostolic benediction," he said, "that I thank them for their works, and recommend to them to be steadfast in doing good. Difficulties abound, but God will not fail to come to our aid. The task entrusted to them is a grave one. Sheltering poor boys, teaching them, rescuing them from the path that leads to jail and returning them to society as good Christians and upright citizens—this is a commitment deserving of approval from people of all classes."

He asked me about the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice on the Esquiline. "Is construction making headway? Is the project going forward or is it at a standstill?"

I was happy to tell him that construction is moving along briskly, and that some one hundred and fifty workmen are applying the skills of their trade on a project he has so cordially blessed. I also told him we were heartened by the charity of the faithful, but that this huge undertaking was fast depleting our financial resources.

Moments before my audience someone had brought the Holy Father a gift of five thousand francs for Peter's Pence. "Here," the Pope happily said to me, "this money has just come in time. My right hand accepted it and my left passes it on to you. Take it and use it for your work on the Esquiline. I trust that the world will appreciate this effort of the Supreme Pontiff in favor of an undertaking very dear to him, and I hope that other generous donors will not fail to contribute to it with the means which God placed at their disposal. I am very happy to know you have set up a committee of fund collectors. Small sums pooled together will more easily meet our needs."

At that point the Holy Father seemed to be deeply moved and exclaimed, "O Sacred Heart of Jesus, be a fountain of grace and blessing to all the faithful! Bless those who labor for Your Church all over the world! Shed abundant blessings on the Salesian cooperators, on those who contribute funds, and particularly on the fund collectors who lend their services to enhance Your honor and glory! Yes," the Holy Father continued, "bless them all, their work, their families, their business interests, and grant them happiness in this world and throughout all eternity."

I dared not add a word to what the Vicar of Jesus Christ had said other than to voice my thanks and assure him that the cooperators would continue to work zealously for God's glory and that of holy Mother Church.

Since the commitments entrusted to our cooperators' charity are all directed to help the most needy in our human family and to strengthen our most holy

faith, I believe that the donations required for obtaining the jubilee indulgence, as determined by our Holy Father from March 19 to November 1 of this year, can well be used for these works.

Lastly, I assure you, dear cooperators, that all the boys you are helping will join me in offering prayers each morning and evening for your spiritual and temporal welfare.

The jubilee mentioned by Don Bosco had been announced by Leo XIII on February 20, when the college of cardinals gathered to congratulate him on the third anniversary of his papacy. Replying to their congratulations and best wishes, the Pope deplored the abuse heaped upon the Church practically throughout the whole world and the sad condition to which the Holy See had been reduced, concluding, "Convinced that it is principally to heaven that we are to look for that help without which all effort and strain of ours is of no avail, and mindful that at every time of storm and stress in its history the Church has resorted to the prayers and atonements of the faithful, we have decided to proclaim an extraordinary jubilee this year for the entire Christian world, so that by an intensity of prayer and good works the Lord may speedily be moved to clemency and prepare better days for His Church. Though in one way this jubilee is a sign of the Church's very grave situation, it is in another way a reason for hope and comfort because it generously opens up the precious wealth of the Bride of Jesus Christ for the benefit of the Catholic world."

One day, while Don Bosco was waiting for his audience along with prelates and ladies, there took place one of those delightful incidents which he could so cleverly create and lead to a happy conclusion. When a monsignor, unknown to Don Bosco, came into the room, a gentleman with whom he was conversing told him, "He is Monsignor Pio Delicati." [To his surprise] Don Bosco found himself face to face with the consultor who had given an unfavorable report[29] about his booklet *St. Peter's Centenary* [which also included the saint's biography].

The monsignor did not know Don Bosco either, nor could he have imagined that Don Bosco would have discovered the name of the consultor who had been so ruthless in judging his booklet. In fact the monsignor had seen to it that his name should not appear on the official

[29]*See* Vol. VIII, p. 328. *See also* Vol. V, pp. 385ff. [Editor]

report. *Let me get even with him*, Don Bosco said to himself. He walked up to him and greeted him cautiously. In turn, the monsignor asked for his name.

"I am just Father John Bosco from Turin."

"Ah, Father John Bosco!" he exclaimed. "A well-known man and a gifted writer."

"A writer perhaps, but far from gifted."

"You are very modest. Your books do much good."

"It is certainly not my intent to cause any harm. Still, you may have heard of the problem I had with a booklet of mine."

"Which one?"

"On the life of St. Peter."[30]

"I am surprised to hear that."

"And yet it's true. Some inaccuracies were found and someone even recommended that the work be put on the *Index of Forbidden Books*. This would have been rather funny since I had closely followed Cuccagni[31] and Sanctorius,[32] two famous authors approved by censors of the Holy Office which was now ready to condemn me. I might add that this booklet of mine won a letter of commendation from Pius IX. Fortunately the Holy Father himself intervened and quashed this controversy."[33]

"Ah, yes, of course. . . . By the way, how many boys do you have in your schools?"

"A large enough number, Monsignor. So, as I was saying, *The Life of St. Peter . . .*"

"Yes, but tell me now, how many schools do you have?"

Seeing that the monsignor was doing his utmost to squirm out of the embarrassing predicament, Don Bosco talked about his schools. Monsignor Delicati did not in the least let it out that he had been Don Bosco's censor; in turn, Don Bosco did not pursue the matter, but, rather, recommended his boys to him, and respectfully took leave of him.

[30]*See* Vol. V, pp. 385ff. [Editor]

[31]Luigi Cuccagni, *Vita di San Pietro, Principe degli Apostoli*, taken from the Holy Scriptures with comments from the Fathers of the Church, Rome, 1777, Venice, 1782. [Author]

[32]Aemedeus Sanctorius, *Acta SS. Petri et Pauli ex Sacris Scripturis collecta*, Rome, 1597. [Author]

[33]Actually, the full title of the booklet in question was *St. Peter's Centenary along with a Life of the Same Prince of the Apostles and a Triduum in Preparation of the Feasts of Sts. Peter and Paul. See* Vol. VIII, pp. 327ff, 334ff, 337-342. [Editor]

Let us now glance at the few letters which Don Bosco wrote from Rome and have since come into our hands. The contents of one we know only through the minutes of a meeting of the ladies' committee of Marseille. Canon [Clement] Guiol[34] mentioned it during their meeting of April 28 [1881], and translated aloud a few of the more interesting passages, such as these:

I have just come from an audience with the Pope, and I am writing to you immediately before doing anything else. He spoke at length about Marseille and listened attentively to what I was telling him about the growing number of our boys and of priestly vocations. He endorsed and urged the opening of a novitiate in Marseille. Then he added, "I haven't the time to write myself, but I ask you in my name to thank both the men's and the ladies' committees and all your helpers. Particular thanks to the members of the Beaujour Society.[35] I bless them, their families, their spiritual and temporal affairs."

The Pope then went on to speak of the Salesian cooperators and of the Sacred Heart Church, as you will see in the *Bollettino Salesiano*.

Father Bologna wrote to me about the great work you and your committee are doing on behalf of our festive oratory and school.[36] May God reward all of you generously.

We have three other letters. The first one was to Marchioness [Mary] Fassati on the death of Countess [Azelia Charlotte] De Maistre, her mother. She had constantly helped Don Bosco while she lived and at her death had left him a legacy of three thousand lire.

Porta San Lorenzo 42, Rome
April 30, 1881

Dear Marchioness:

I was traveling when I was promptly notified of the sad news of our beloved Countess De Maistre, the generous benefactress of the Salesian Congregation. I immediately ordered special prayers to be said in all the houses of our Congregation for her eternal repose, even though I have good reasons to believe that she has already been received by Our Merciful Lord into the eternal blessedness of heaven. Still, I shall continue to pray every day for her

[34]*See* Index of Volumes XIII and XIV under "Guiol." [Editor]
[35]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 8, 11, 36, 285f. [Editor]
[36]*See* the Index of Volume XIV under Marseille. [Editor]

and for you especially that God may keep you in good health; we and others have done this for a long time already.

In my private audience with the Holy Father I had ample occasion to speak of the De Maistre and Fassati families; in turn, he remembered with much warmth and by name Counts Francis, Eugene and Charles. He also expressed his sympathy for the death of their mother, the countess, and assured me that he would pray for her during Holy Mass.

He then said: "Send my apostolic blessing to all these well-deserving families [De Maistre, Fassati, Ricci and Montmorency] and ask them to pray for me."

I trust that you will continue in good health, and for this I shall make a special memento every morning during Holy Mass.

God bless you, dear marchioness! May you see the fruits of your charity. May God grant His favors to Baroness Azelia[37] and Baron Charles Ricci. I ask for a remembrance in all your prayers and I am honored to be,

Yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I hope to be in Turin for the novena of Mary, Help of Christians.

The next letter is a reply to Mrs. Mary Acquarona who had informed him that she had suffered a relapse into her former illness.

Porta San Lorenzo 42, Rome
April 27, 1881

Dear Mrs. Acquarona:

I received your letter which brought me some comfort, but also saddened me at learning that you have relapsed into your former illness. I really wish, as I told you, that you should not create a stir, but should only pray and give thanks to the Lord.[38]

Now we must redouble our prayers. God will certainly and definitively grant our request if it is not contrary to the good of our souls. With this provision I have asked the Holy Father to grant you a special blessing and he gladly obliged, assuring me of his prayers for you and your sister Vincenza.

Please offer my humble respects to Father Fabre and Attorney Ascheri and

[37]She was the daughter of Marchioness Fassati and had married Charles Ricci, son of Baron Feliciano Ricci des Ferres. *Source: Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco,* Vol. IV, p. 50, Letter 2180. [Editor]

[38]She had been cured by Don Bosco's blessing. *See* 112f. [Editor]

his family when you see them. May God bless you, dear madam, and reward you for your donation to our church and school in Vallecrosia.

Please pray for me.

Yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Without the shadow of a doubt God did answer their prayers "definitively." In fact some three years later the lady's brother-in-law, Attorney Ascheri, chanced upon Father Cerruti on a train without recognizing him. The lawyer began to talk about Don Bosco and of what he had personally witnessed at Porto Maurizio and, charming speaker that he was, entranced his audience into listening to him with the greatest interest. In addition, six years after the healing, Father Cerruti again met the lady herself in our school at Alassio, where she had gone to pay her respects to Don Bosco, to tell him of herself, and to give him a donation as a Salesian cooperator.

Since, as we have seen in Volume XIV,[39] the Council of State was then considering closing the Oratory's secondary school, Don Bosco tried to have an audience with the new minister of public education, the ultra-liberal Guido Baccelli, who on January 2, 1881, had replaced Francis De Sanctis. His third letter, addressed to Count Tomasi, gives us an idea of the many offices he must have sat in and waited, but unfortunately we have no record of them. Doubtless, he must have also gone through [Vatican] offices in his endeavor to obtain the privileges [usually granted to religious congregations]. As for other matters we have but a meager request for a decoration of the Order of St. Maurice for a Mr. Joseph Repetto of Lavagna Ligure who had personally financed a considerable share of the construction of the St. John the Evangelist Hospice in Turin. Following is Don Bosco's letter to Count Tomasi, an employee of the department of public education.

Rome, May 9, 1881

Dear Count Tomasi:

Heartfelt thanks for the two notes you sent me regarding an audience with Minister Baccelli. I was punctually in his office at the proper time and waited there from eleven in the morning until a quarter after one in the afternoon.

[39]Chapter 4. [Editor]

Then I was told to return the next day at one o'clock. I did. The minister came and went without my being able to speak with him or even ask for another appointment.

Nor could I see the secretary general. I shall therefore write to his office, but that will not allow me to discuss various matters affecting the public welfare.

Nevertheless I am much obliged to you for your interest toward our poor boys and pray God to shower His heavenly blessings upon you.

Gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I think it best to enclose my appeal and ask you to have it delivered to one of the top men in the ministry.

During his stay in Rome, Don Bosco asked Father Rua to visit the Salesians at Magliano Sabino, and it seems that on this trip Father Rua met the future Cardinal [Peter] La Fontaine, patriarch of Venice, who was then a young cleric. Thirty-five years later the cardinal wrote: "I was deeply impressed by his affability, spiritual concentration, and prudent openness."[40]

On the morning of May 10, Don Bosco was present at a touching ceremony. Several hundred French pilgrims who were in Rome to acquire the jubilee indulgence were making the prescribed rounds of the seven major basilicas, asking a different prelate to celebrate Mass for them at each visit. When they went to the basilica of St. John Lateran, they asked Don Bosco to say Mass and give a brief homily in French. He gladly accepted. He praised them for their devotion in visiting St. John Lateran, *Mater et caput omnium ecclesiarum* [the Mother church and head of all the churches], after having paid their respects to the Vicar of Jesus Christ, Shepherd of all shepherds, and then congratulated them for having come [to Rome] to strengthen their faith and loyalty to Peter's chair and to his successor Leo XIII. His blessing, which they had received but a few days before, was a pledge of happier times for them, their families and country, which harbored so much good in the midst of so much evil, having never belied its glorious title, *Eldest daughter of the Church.*

As usual, Don Bosco called a meeting of his Roman cooperators at

[40]Letter to Father [Angelo] Amadei, Venice, September 22, 1915. [Author]

Tor de' Specchi for the afternoon of May 12. The next day, *L'Aurora*, reporting on the meeting, remarked on his worn-out mien and his calm presentation. Cardinal [Cajetan] Alimonda presided. The paper then summed up his talk as follows:

After telling the audience that His Holiness had kindly sent them his apostolic blessing, he said that he would speak of Salesian works in general and then of the Sacred Heart Church. Since the previous year Salesian houses had increased in number. The Patagonia missions were thriving, and the Salesian schools at Nice, Ventimiglia, La Spezia, Lucca and Florence had been enlarged and put on a sound financial basis. These new foundations were doing well side by side with similar Protestant centers, whose very harmful influence they managed to halt, thus wresting souls from the clutches of Satan. Youth and the future, according to Bishop Felix Dupanloup, were one and the same thing. A serene future for Italy could be expected if this apostolate of educating and rescuing our youth could be strengthened by the support of the Salesian cooperators.

Passing on to speak of the Sacred Heart Church, he said that it had been an excellent idea for a church to rise on the Esquiline Hill, once sacred to false gods, but now dedicated to God's mercy through the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Just as Rome had once stationed its sentries there, so it was only right that now a school be erected where sentries would be trained to safeguard souls.

The distinguished Father Maresca[41] had zealously initiated the work. The Salesians would continue it. There were in Rome sixty-six Protestant institutions—clubs, schools and attractive hospices—trying to wrest souls from the Catholic faith, and many of the faithful were easily being seduced by promises of employment and other fringe benefits.

A bulwark had to be raised against all this propaganda and a home provided for orphaned and abandoned boys all over Italy. Hence, alongside the church a home had to be built to shelter and educate at least five hundred boys. To this end Don Bosco was appealing to the charity of the Romans. In the past they had given generous help for his undertakings in other Italian cities; now they should reach out to him with open hands, lest we witness in Rome itself the eagerness of Protestants in lavishing energy and money for the triumph of heresy, while Romans remain uncaring and powerless in defense of their faith. He closed by saying that Cardinal Alimonda had graciously agreed to address

[41]Anthony Maresca (1831-1891), a Barnabite, publisher of the *Messaggero del Sacro Cuore*, a Roman weekly. [Editor]

a few words to them to bolster their charity; he was happy to see that His Eminence was espousing the Salesian cause.

The cardinal had this to say about the Salesians: "Divine Providence seems to have founded this Congregation, so as to ease many a wound with balm, to uplift the many fallen, to bring peace to distraught hearts, to glorify God's name and to destroy sin." He closed by tactfully and opportunely remarking: "True, you Romans have a virtuous clergy, but moral reinforcement is never too much and we welcome it gladly from whatever source it comes."

The meeting at Tor de' Specchi was a leave-taking, for on the evening of May 13 Don Bosco was in Florence, and on May 15, a Sunday, he addressed Salesian cooperators and friends in the Church of St. Florence serviced by the Oratorians.[42] In preparation for this meeting he had drawn up a circular which he sent to Father Confortóla with a covering letter:

Rome, May 10, 1881

My dear Father Confortóla:

Read the enclosed, send and address the letter to the vicar general, and personally deliver it to him with a copy of the invitation sent to the Salesian cooperators; amend it if necessary, and rush it to the printer. Also:

1. Have some six hundred copies printed.
2. Send a copy to each priest in Florence, to the men and women singled out by Father Justin Campolini, Marchioness [Gerolama] Uguccioni and other friendly persons.
3. When the vicar general will choose a church for the meeting, go to speak with the parish priest so as to make sure that there will be no conflict with his regular church services. Keep me informed of everything.
4. Each letter will need a two-lire stamp. You can get help from the marchioness, her daughters, Father Justin and friends of our good Mamma.

We shall arrive in Florence Friday evening and leave Monday morning after the meeting. Regards to our dear Salesians. Let's pray that all goes well for God's greater glory. May His grace be with us always. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

According to the report sent to Father Bonetti for publication in the July issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano* by Father Confortóla, director of

[42]A congregation founded by St. Philip Neri. [Editor]

the recently founded festive oratory, Don Bosco spoke about the Salesians, their objectives, their achievements elsewhere, their purpose in coming to Florence, and their need of support from the cooperators and other good citizens. Skimming over everything else, Father Confortóla almost literally transcribed Don Bosco's comments on almsgiving, a favorite topic of his in the pulpit and in private conversation, in letters and brochures, especially in the last decade of his life. In fact, virtually on the very eve of his death, he seemed to feel that he had to write a booklet exclusively on that subject. At a time when people were sinking ever deeper in a quagmire of selfishness and a feverish pursuit for material goods, Don Bosco did all he could to help the world put its surplus of resources to Christian use. He spoke thus to the people of Florence:

You will ask, "How can we have any surplus for alms in such critical times when it's a problem just to survive?" Very frankly let me tell you that, yes, we all have a surplus to give to the poor and to works of mercy if we really want to. There is always something superfluous in our homes and their fancy appointments, furniture and precious bric-a-brac. There are costly coaches, horses and fittings, unneeded domestics, excessive wardrobes, choice foods and also, let us say it, surplus money in many purses. Now according to the Lord's commandment, whatever is not needed should be given to the poor.

The question is raised how much of one's surplus is to be given in alms; some say a fifth, others a fourth and so on. I personally feel that this question has already been answered by the Gospel's injunction, which could not be simpler or more explicit: "Give what remains as alms" [Lk. 11, 41].

Among those to whom your alms belong are many poor and abandoned boys who today roam the streets barefoot, ragged and dirty, living on what they can get by begging, and sleeping in crowded hovels. No one is caring for their material and spiritual needs. They are growing up in ignorance of God and of their religious and moral duties; they curse and steal, they are lewd and steeped in vice, capable of committing any crime. Many of them end up in jail, or, worse still, in the churches of Protestants. Here in Florence, the Protestants have opened many homes in which naive youngsters, enticed by money and countless deceptive promises, often losing their innate goodness and trodding underfoot all virtue, finally throw away their faith.

You see these things every day. You yourselves have told me how the Protestants have already dragged into their nets many boys and girls, even entire families, who, to quote your own words, have sold out to the enemies of our faith, to Satan's ministers, through the lure of money and all sorts of gifts, clothing and food.

How are we to stem this tide of evil and forestall its tragic consequences? I have come to Florence precisely to do this, at the invitation primarily of your archbishop and also of the more zealous cooperators. We have already opened a festive oratory in the city at 31 Via Cimabue, and we would also like to open a boarding school to shelter as many youngsters as possible, in order to safeguard their morals and their faith and turn them into good citizens and true Christians.

But we need your help; we need your surplus which we will wisely use for God's greater glory and that of the Most Blessed Virgin, as well as for the greater welfare of souls, especially among the young.

In closing I will say: I must continue my journey, but I am leaving here my representative, the director of the above-mentioned festive oratory in this city of yours. Pour out your alms generously into his hands in proportion to your God-given means to achieve what you and I both desire: the salvation of many, many souls. As St. Augustine said, by saving a soul, you assured the salvation of your own.

Several seminarians attended the conference, all anxious to meet Don Bosco. One of them, Joachim Bonardi, now [titular] bishop of Pergamum and auxiliary of Cardinal [Alphonsus] Mistrangelo, recalls the good feeling he experienced in seeing him, kissing his hand, and listening to his very simple but totally God-centered words.

Despite several difficulties, which we shall later cite, Don Bosco had such faith in Divine Providence that, on leaving for Turin, he told the director not to back down, but rather to plan on building not only a hospice but also a church worthy of the great Mother of God and of the piety of the faithful because he, Don Bosco, was ready to make every sacrifice for the Florentines.[43]

Nothing out of the ordinary seems to have occurred in Florence. Writing to Father Lazzero, Father Rua mentions just a providential, if somewhat unpleasant delay in Don Bosco's departure after his first stopover. The delay brought him an unexpected, handsome donation.

In Rome, instead, something unusual did happen, though it occasioned no stir. According to Father Dalmazzo's testimony, two events took place. In one instance, several spiritual favors were granted. By the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians, Don Bosco restored a woman's health. A while later, coming across several Protestant acquaintances of hers, and asked how she had recovered from such a

[43]Letter from Father Confortóla to Don Bosco, Florence, June 10, 1881. [Author]

grave ailment so quickly, she told them what had happened. Brushing aside all religious prejudices, one of them, whose daughter was very seriously ill, decided to take her to Don Bosco. He blessed her, and the young girl was healed. Bursting with joy, the mother kept repeating, "This is the mistake which we Protestants make: we do not honor Mary." In 1885 Don Bosco received a letter from that family telling him that all the members had converted to Catholicism.

On another occasion, while he was offering Mass in our old chapel in Via Vicenza, a man came in who for eighteen years had been suffering from a crippling condition. Hardly able to move on crutches, he asked Father Dalmazzo to introduce him to Don Bosco, but the priest, having to hasten to get Don Bosco's breakfast ready, asked the cleric Zucchini to take him to Don Bosco right after Mass. Very humbly the gentleman asked for his blessing. Don Bosco asked him a few questions and, seeing his deep faith, removed the crutches from under his arms and said, "Walk!" The man began to walk with the greatest ease, and he left with the crutches under his arm, saying that he wanted to keep them as a remembrance.

While Don Bosco was sipping his coffee, Father Dalmazzo remarked, "So he was really and completely healed after your blessing!"

"It was the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians that healed him," Don Bosco corrected him.

"I too have given the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians many times using the same words," Father Dalmazzo replied, "but nothing like this ever happened."

"What a child you are!" Don Bosco answered. "That's because you have no faith."

# CHAPTER 5

## *Celebrations, Nuisances and a Dream about the Future of the Salesian Society*

THE Oratory used to celebrate a holiday cycle of its own which we may truly call Salesian and whose observance was by this time [1881] a firmly established custom. It included the feasts of Mary, Help of Christians, St. Aloysius, St. John the Baptist and the Assumption. The last two were respectively kept as the name day[1] and presumed birthday[2] of Don Bosco. They were eagerly awaited yearly events marked by intense joy and remarkable spiritual blessings. There was nothing particularly distinctive about any one of them in 1881, and so we shall only give those details which single them out as different from previous celebrations, most of them dealing with the solemnity of Mary, Help of Christians.

The Oratory routinely made plans for each of these feasts well in advance; Don Bosco saw to it that no celebration took place without thorough preparation. Hence, at the end of April, while he was still in Rome, Father Rua wrote in Don Bosco's name to the economer general of the Salesians, Father [Anthony] Sala, to request the Turin chancery's permission to invite some bishop to preside at the pontifical Mass and other services in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians on Her feast day, May 24. Today [1934] such formalities are quickly disposed of, but, at that time, the archdiocese of Turin had detailed regulations about such matters, as we can readily sense from the tone of an ordinance in its liturgical calendar of 1881. Article 14 stated: "It is a grave lack of reverence due to one's own shepherd, and to his episcopal

[1]*See* p. 83, footnote 24. [Editor]
[2]Don Bosco was born on August 16, 1815, the day after the feast of the Assumption. [Editor]

office, to invite some other bishop to officiate at a sacred function in the archdiocese without first obtaining the archbishop's explicit permission for each and every occasion." Father Sala therefore called on Archbishop Gastaldi on May 2 to request his consent to invite the newly appointed Bishop [Dominic] Pampirio of Alba to officiate at one of the solemn services or at least to preach on May 24. As Father Sala paid his respects to the archbishop, the latter asked, "What do you want from me?" Playing for time, Father Sala replied, "My superior has charged me with the construction of the Church of St. John the Evangelist, and since the artists have already begun their work, I find myself in somewhat of a quandary and thought I might wisely consult Your Excellency. We would like to depict the seven bishops of the Asian churches in the semblance of angels, as we read in the Apocalypse." "Yes," the archbishop replied, "something from the Apocalypse is quite fitting. As far as I am concerned, do as you please."

Tactfully, Father Sala continued, "I went to Alba the other day to look at the paintings in the cathedral, the work of our own artist Costa, and as Bishop Pampirio and I were talking about the painting and the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, he gave me to understand that he would gladly come at least once to pontificate on the titular feast of the church. But, since I could give him no definite answer until I had consulted with Your Excellency, I merely commented that we would be happy to have him with us on such a memorable occasion. My purpose in coming today is also to ask Your Excellency's required permission, if you see fit to grant it."

"Don Bosco will have to write to me about that."

"Upon being informed of Bishop Pampirio's pious wish, Don Bosco asked Father Rua to delegate me to seek Your Excellency's permission."

"My answer is no," the archbishop replied, "because the Salesians are behaving in too reprehensible a manner concerning their Church of Mary, Help of Christians, and they act that way just to spite me. Giving my permission would only be approving something I cannot sanction."

"Your Excellency, do not say that! We are working hard to do good to all and hurt no one, least of all our own archbishop! Indeed, we make sacrifices in order to help you in your diocese and especially here in Turin."

"Yes, indeed! For instance, Father Lemoyne keeps publicizing without my permission miracles performed by Mary, Help of Christians,

and his pamphlets are distributed throughout my entire archdiocese under my very nose just to spite me!"

"This is the first time I have ever heard talk of miracles, Your Excellency! We always use the word 'graces' obtained through the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians."

"What Father Lemoyne described were miracles, and miracles must be approved by Church authorities according to the decree of the pertinent Sacred Congregation."

"I know nothing about this decree, but I do know that no book about graces obtained through Mary, Help of Christians has been printed without ecclesiastical approval."

"True, but this approval was by another ordinary! Furthermore, by what authority is that church passed off as a shrine? Such action requires that the incidents, the miracles, must have the approval of the ordinary, and not be stories. . . ."

At this, Father Sala, a man of impressive stature and patriarchal honesty, leapt to his feet, rummaged through his pockets and pulled out a handful of papers. Singling out a postcard, he handed it to the archbishop. "Read it," he urged. "Read it, Your Excellency, and you will see for yourself that Don Bosco does not make up graces obtained from Mary, Help of Christians."

The archbishop refused. "Well, then, let me read it to you," Father Sala continued. "It is really Divine Providence that sent this postcard to me this very morning."

He read it. It came from a certain Chevalier Mercalli, who was writing from Rome about the wondrous recovery of his wife, Countess Fenile. Now and then, the archbishop interjected remarks such as, "I am sure that for these people. . . ." Finally he said, "If all the graces were like this one, I'd have no problems approving them. . . . Besides, some good is being done."

"Then why do you treat us this way?" Father Sala retorted. However, the subject was abruptly changed, and the conversation switched to the Sacred Heart Church in Rome. The archbishop made a quick about-face now and even went so far as to say that he admired Don Bosco, that Divine Providence was on his side and that he could squeeze money out of a rock. On taking his leave, Father Sala remarked, "If there is no objection then, Bishop Pampirio could deliver the panegyric." "Leave Bishop Pampirio in Alba where he belongs," Archbishop Gastaldi replied, "so he can continue to rage against

Rosmini!"[3] Then, as Father Sala reverently bowed, and was about to go, the archbishop told him, "I'll think it over."[4]

Father Sala returned on May 19 to make another request of the archbishop. If Bishop Pampirio were not allowed to offer the pontifical Mass, could he at least deliver the homily? The answer was a flat no. Seemingly, the archbishop was determined not to grant the Salesians any truce. The following day Father Francesia,[5] director of the Valsalice College, asked him to administer the sacrament of confirmation to the boarders on a day of his choice. The answer again was no; he would never set foot in a Salesian house, he said, because the Salesians were pitted against him. Yet, just two weeks later, Father Francesia himself was to give one indisputable proof of submission to the archbishop. Despite his having had faculties for hearing confessions over the past twelve years, he was notified to report for an examination in moral theology. Understanding this to mean that his faculties to hear confessions were being questioned, Father Francesia simply wrote a very respectful letter assuring the archbishop that his faculties were in order. Nevertheless, shortly afterward he reported to his examiners, who in turn were surprised and embarrassed. Of course he won their full approval.

We should also note that when Archbishop Gastaldi was invited to Valsalice to administer the sacrament of confirmation, he expressed his displeasure at the fact that the Salesian press at Sampierdarena had printed in its monthly *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings] a feature article by Count Emilian Avogadro della Motta about socialism, adding an appendix attacking Rosmini's teachings and tenets.

All these things took place while Don Bosco was back in Turin, having arrived there on the evening of May 16 after a four-month absence. The Oratory was all ready to give him a rousing welcome, but he arrived a few hours sooner than expected, while everyone was in church for the novena services. Since it was time for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, he decided to give Benediction himself. Who could describe the happiness which thrilled everyone's heart on seeing him walk out of the sacristy in his vestments and go to the altar? The

[3]Anthony Rosmini (1797-1855) was a philosopher and the founder of the Institute of Charity. He also served as an advisor to Pius IX, but gradually fell into the Pope's disfavor. Archbishop Gastaldi was one of Rosmini's admirers. [Editor]

[4]Letter from Father Sala to Father Rua, Turin, May 3, 1881. [Author]

[5]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

rest of the evening was passed in happy singing, clamorous clapping and a band serenade.

The very next morning a circular letter went out to the Salesian cooperators of Turin, inviting them to a meeting to be held in the Oratory's Church of St. Francis de Sales on May 19 for men and May 23 for women. "We shall discuss noteworthy projects underway to advance God's glory, benefit civil society, and cheer the hearts of righteous people," Don Bosco wrote.

The cooperators received a detailed report, much as would be done in a family circle, and all listened with the deepest interest, feeling that in some way or other they were part of the Salesian family. They were briefed on the progress made in regard to the on-going constructions of the Church and Hospice of St. John the Evangelist in Turin, the Church of Mary, Help of Christians at Vallecrosia, the school and festive oratory at La Spezia, the festive oratory in Florence, and the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice in Rome. Then they were enthralled by an account of the apostolic labors of the Salesian missionaries and Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians in Uruguay and Patagonia. Having reached the hearts of his listeners, Don Bosco deftly and easily digressed into the contrast between a missionary's life and that of many Christians who wallow in pleasures with hardly a thought to using some of their wealth to cooperate in their fellowmen's eternal salvation.

To Christians such as these—he said to the men cooperators—one might well apply the words uttered by St. Peter on another occasion against Simon Magus: "Keep your money to yourself to perish with you." They should ponder that someday God will demand an account of the bounty He has showered on them. To each wealthy person He will say: "I gave you riches that you might use some of them for My glory, and for your neighbor's relief. Instead what did you do with them? You threw them into a life of ease and fun, pleasure trips, high living, entertainment and receptions." One may object: "I don't throw away my wealth. I hold on to it and make it grow every year. I invest it in houses, land, vineyards and so on." To these also the Lord will say: "True, you hoarded your wealth and watched it grow. Yet, all the while the poor were going hungry, thousands of homeless children were growing up in religious ignorance and vice, souls redeemed by My blood were lost in hell. You held your money dearer than My glory, your purse more precious than your brothers' soul. Now go to perdition with your pleasures, money and possessions."

I know that such is not the case with you—Don Bosco continued—and that

you give alms as your means allow; but how many people there are who could follow your example and do not!

He then went on to say that, just hours before, he had learned that the house at San Benigno, which trained future missionaries, directors, teachers and assistants for his schools, was having serious problems with overdue bills from the baker who could no longer afford to supply bread on credit. "I had planned to ask your help," Don Bosco went on, "for several important undertakings, but now I think it wiser to meet the needs of these young men, the hopes of our Congregation. Whatever you choose to donate will be sent this very evening to relieve those dear sons of mine, your brothers, who trust entirely in Divine Providence."

He spoke pretty much in the same vein to the women cooperators: he updated them on the accomplishments achieved during the past year for indigent youth by the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, on the increase and growth of Salesian houses, on the ever swelling numbers of souls being guided to heaven, and on the agricultural schools, child care centers, schools, and girls' festive oratories. To get a good idea of these oratories, he suggested that they go to see what the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians were doing in Turin and in neighboring Chieri. After describing the daily activities of those two oratories, he continued:

Seeing a festive oratory in action would warm your heart, and you couldn't help wishing that more such places would be opened in other parts of the city and in every country. Now, the work being done in Turin and Chieri is also being done in over forty houses of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians in Italy, France and [South] America, and even in the barbaric lands of Patagonia. If only we had the means, how much good we could do! Good will is not wanting, but that is not enough. We need funds to open and support such undertakings, and more often than not, the funds are lacking.

Now, how can we contribute to these and other works of mercy and faith? Let's do what the Hebrew women did in the desert when they wanted to have an idol to worship in place of the true God. Moses had ascended Mount Sinai to receive the stone tablets of God's commandments and was late to return. The restless people rose up against Aaron, demanding that he set up for them an idol, a calf similar to those that were worshiped in Egypt. Frightened by the riot, Aaron readily yielded to their wishes but, hoping that perhaps he might dissuade that perverse mob from its evil demand, he ordered the people to

hand over all the rings, bracelets, necklaces and earrings of their wives and daughters. Would you believe that hardly had he uttered the word than a heap of gold was piled at his feet! It was melted down and cast into a calf, before which men and women prostrated themselves and, as the Scriptures tell us, indulged in a shameless orgy.

And so, isn't it a shame that on the one hand Hebrew wives and daughters sacrificed their precious jewelry to an evil cause, while Christian women and girls keep adorning themselves like so many queens or ladies-in-waiting and then find themselves unable to contribute to the glory of the one true God by embellishing His churches and coming to the aid of a multitude of homeless children? Certainly I would not want to be in their place at the moment of death or on the day of judgment!

I am not saying that a woman must deprive herself of adornments befitting her social position; let her wear them if custom so requires. What I am saying is that she is bound not to overdo it, not to cater to worldly vanity. She must, instead, find out if she has more than she needs in home furnishings, personal wardrobe or life-style, and if that is the case, she is bound to turn over the surplus to religious and charitable causes. This is what you have already been doing. Continue to do so, my dear cooperators, so that each one of us, in our own way, may foster love for Our Divine Savior and glorify Him by helping many souls get to heaven.

On occasions such as these, he usually wrote brief notes to some of his more distinguished cooperators who lived at a distance from Turin to remind them of the solemn feast [of Mary Help of Christians], which could easily have been overlooked since it was then not as widely observed as it is now [1934]. Following is a sample addressed to Count Eugene De Maistre.

Turin, May 21, 1881

Dear Count Eugene:

Though I do not write to you often because I know how busy you are with a thousand and one things, I do remember you and your family every day at Holy Mass.

When I was in Rome, the Holy Father spoke much to me about you and your brothers, Charles and Francis; to each of you he sends his special blessing.

A Mass will be celebrated for your intentions at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians, our heavenly benefactress, this coming Tuesday, Her solemn feast

day. Our prayers will be that She grant your whole family good health and the precious gift of perseverance in virtue.

God bless you, my dear Count Eugene, and please pray for me too.

Always yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

In addition to the large number of local women cooperators who attended Don Bosco's conference, the vigil of Mary's feast was enhanced by the presence of a group of French pilgrims[6] who stopped in Turin for a half day, spending part of their time at the Oratory. As they arrived, solemn first vespers of Mary, Help of Christians were being sung; after Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament, the guests were given a welcome reception with band music, songs and speeches. Don Bosco then addressed the gathering. After recalling their recent encounter in St. John Lateran,[7] he thanked them for their visit and assured them of his own prayers and those of his Salesians and boys. "Look upon all of us Salesians as your best friends," he concluded. "We shall always be glad to be of service to you whenever possible." Then a good number of pilgrims, urged by Father [Francis] Picard, superior of the Assumptionists and eloquent leader of the pilgrimage, asked to be enrolled as Salesian cooperators.

The sponsors of the feast of Mary, Help of Christians in 1881 were both French. Madame Jacques, a well-known cooperator, came expressly from Marseille to sponsor the event though she had been in Rome in April. On her way back home she was able to fulfill an earnest desire of her committee which Don Bosco had nicknamed "his army against the devil." We recall that a photograph had been taken of him in Marseille and that those ladies had asked him for a few copies. Since, then and there, he had none, he had promised to send them autographed prints from Turin. However, the good ladies waited in vain, and so they asked Madame Jacques to request of him that precious remembrance. Determined to satisfy her friends' desires, Madame Jacques took a photograph, had copies made at her own expense, and requested that Don Bosco autograph each print. He went further and enriched each print with a "long, pious message," which

[6]*See* Vol. XIII, pp. 101f; Vol. XIV, pp. 92f, 386ff. [Editor]
[7]*See* p. 125. [Editor]

he wrote during the singing of vespers on the feast of the Ascension. It was painful for him to write, but, as the women who received the signed photographs said, it added to the "value of the precious souvenir." Canon [Clement] Guiol voiced their gratitude to Madame Jacques at the committee's first meeting.[8]

The *petit prieur*, or junior sponsor, as he was called, was the six-year-old son of Count Flayose de Villeneuve of Rocquefort, a close friend of Don Bosco. In April 1880 the lad [Raymond] had suffered a severe attack of pneumonia. Noticing with dismay that hopes for the boy's recovery were vanishing, the father rushed a telegram to Don Bosco, who knew the child quite well. He happened to be in Lucca when the news reached him. He said Mass for the boy, asking for a healing from Mary, Help of Christians. As it was later ascertained, the lad's father was at his son's bedside at the moment Don Bosco was saying Mass, and he called him by name to ascertain if he were still alive. To his indescribable relief, the child replied, "Papa, I am hungry!" He had suddenly recovered consciousness, the fever had gone, his cough was lessened, and he was again strong and healthy without any convalescence. A month later, however, the child again fell seriously ill, this time with pleurisy. As he pulled through the crisis, the doctors prescribed a rigorous health routine for a period of several months. The father, full of faith, went to Turin on May 24, the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, and prayed to Her fervently. On returning home, he found his son fully recovered, so much so that a year later he brought him to the Oratory to celebrate that feast and to act as "sponsor," a role usually reserved to adults. His charming ways won all hearts.[9]

The solemn feast of 1881 was celebrated without a pontifical Mass, but not without a bishop. That year the archbishop of Milan, Louis Nazari, a relative of the counts of Calabiana, was celebrating his jubilee of priestly ordination on May 28 and 29. The celebration was attended by all the bishops of Lombardy and by the bishops of Piedmont as well, since Archbishop Nazari, a Piedmontese, had been

[8]Minutes of the committee meetings of May 12 and June 8, 1881. [Author]

[9]Rev. John Baptist Lemoyne, *La Madre delle Grazie*, Sampierdarena, 1881, p. 155. *See also Bollettino Salesiano*, July 1881. The child's sister, a religious of the Sacred Heart, sent us a report of this miracle in March 1934. [Author]

bishop of Casale.[10] As Bishop [Dominic] Pampirio of Alba made his way to Milan for the celebration, he stopped off at Turin and was a guest of his own order, at St. Dominic's Church. To satisfy his devotion, on the morning of May 24 he went to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, where he had once before preached, to celebrate Mass. Don Bosco, of course, immediately asked him to say the community Mass.

As soon as Archbishop Gastaldi got wind of this, he immediately reprimanded Bishop Pampirio by letter, telling him that he could not countenance his presence in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. When Bishop Pampirio returned to St. Dominic's and found the hand-delivered letter, he promptly sent a note to Don Bosco to inform him of what had happened. Next he notified Archbishop Gastaldi that he would not be presiding at any other function, but that he would be delivering a panegyric on Our Lady in the evening, since his talk had already been announced publicly. He pointed out that if he were not allowed to do so, a scandal would arise once word reached the vast congregation flocking to the church. Begrudgingly Archbishop Gastaldi withdrew his prohibition, but he would not yield on the other points or even allow him to give Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

Although it was a weekday, a constant flow of people streamed into the church from dawn to late evening, and crowds of neighborhood folk poured into the church plaza to enjoy the sight of the first gaslight illumination of the exterior of the whole church. That year it became clear that it was far too small to accommodate the huge crowds of worshipers on such occasions; a large number had to be content to attend major functions by standing in the plaza facing the church. Since there was no bishop for the pontifical Mass, Don Bosco had to sing the high Mass—by no means a light burden—besides giving Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and going through all the other strains of the day, but, as one Turin newspaper put it, "everyone was delighted."[11] The same news article ended with the wish: "God grant

[10]Mindful of Bishop Calabiana's kindness in accepting the Salesians in his diocese of Casale when they opened the boarding school at Mirabello in 1867 and of his kindness to them at all times, Don Bosco sent him the following telegram, dated May 29: "Salesians, pupils, your most loving sons, send cordial congratulations on your priestly jubilee, remembering you as a friend, patron, benefactor. We all pray that God will allow you and your guests to celebrate this day once again." The eminent prelate replied: "Deeply moved, I thank you for affectionate attention. I cordially bless you all!" [Author]

[11]*Unità Cattolica*, No. 24, Thursday, May 26, 1881. [Author]

long life to this worthy priest who humbly and zealously kindles and keeps alive the flame of piety among the Christian people."

Reports of graces came pouring in, some oral, others in writing. Don Bosco would not have even a slightest trace of them lost, and so we have at hand countless letters addressed to him and bearing his own remarks on replies to be sent. They are all kept in a special ledger in the sacristy.[12] As usual, Father Lemoyne compiled and published the more outstanding of these graces.[13]

Such an endless flow of visitors to the Oratory offered Don Bosco a unique opportunity to enroll new cooperators. Precisely with this in mind, he drafted a *Brief Outline of the Objectives of the Salesian Society*, dated May 24 [1881], and had it printed in a small, handy-sized folder for free distribution. In simple, concise and clear terms it presented the essential make-up of the Salesian Congregation, its activities, its current statistics, and ways to support it.

Once the festivities of Mary, Help of Christians were over, all thoughts were turned to the two family celebrations of St. John the Baptist and St. Aloysius. We find that the 1881 festivities were not much different from the celebrations of the past. As for Don Bosco's birthday, mistakenly kept on the feast of the Assumption, we must note that at the Oratory it took on more significance as the years went by. From 1881 on, the solemn prize-awarding ceremony for both students and artisans was held for the first time on that day and presided over by Don Bosco. This novelty paved the way for an ever more solemn celebration of Don Bosco's sixty-sixth birthday. After expressing his thanks, he closed his talk as follows:

> You say that Don Bosco has done so many nice things, but it is your love that makes you see things differently from what they really are. Everything that was done and is being done is due to God's help and the intercession of the Most Blessed Virgin. If the Lord had not given us the strength and taken us by the hand, what could we have done? And what about the help given us by our many benefactors? Don Bosco is no more than a blind instrument in God's hands, who thus shows us that when He wills, He can achieve mighty things by using even the lowliest of tools.

[12]One of these ledger entries is Don Bosco's own; another, on a loose sheet and postdated, is also in his handwriting. [Author]

[13]*La Stella del mattino*, Sampierdarena, 1883. [Author]

He then alluded to several trying situations which had severely tried him that year. Doubtless the boys could not fully make out what he was talking about, but Don Bosco's intent was to encourage his co-workers and friends who in various degrees knew what he meant. He then praised at length a former pupil of Nizza Monferrato who had started a thriving model union of young Catholic workers in his town, holding up this example for his listeners' admiration and imitation. His final thought was for their souls.

Who knows—he asked—whether we shall all be together again next year? Will you and I be here? Last year some who were full of life and joy, healthy and strong, are no longer with us. So let us live each day as though it were our last, and let us do good while we can, so that when death strikes, we shall not regret having spent our days fruitlessly, worthless to both God and our fellowman. I hope and pray that this bell may toll very late both for you and me, but should it come sooner, let God's will be done.

After alluding to the more recent trials, he said:

Now let me go on to another subject and tell you that always, but especially this year, we have had our share of roses and thorns. We all know that they are inseparable. What are we to do, my dear sons? Let us always accept God's will in both joy and sorrow, for He will never forsake us, even in the midst of a most raging storm. Take heart, therefore, be brave always, and never weary of doing what is right. God will be with us!

The year 1881 brought Don Bosco more aggravations, some worse than others. Since we have already seen some of the more serious ones in the previous volume[14] and others will be part of this narrative as it develops, here we shall mention only the minor problems, so minor indeed that we have called them nuisances [in this chapter's title], not because they were negligible, but because they seem comparatively mere trifles. Among them are the hard times the press gave him, such as the three instances already cited in previous chapters. More remain to be seen.

It was Don Bosco's regular practice to reciprocate favors done to him as best he knew and could. One way was to obtain civic or ecclesiastical honorary titles for his benefactors when he felt the honors

[14]*See* Vol. XIV, Chapters 4, 7, 9, 10, 20. [Editor]

would be welcomed. In these instances his aim was not to cater to people's vanity for his own profit, but only to repay a favor. Obviously civil honorific titles enhanced the reputation of the recipients and furthered their interests, while honors from the Holy See were viewed by good Catholics or eminent clergymen as indicative of a tighter bond between them and the Supreme Pontiff. But certain rabble-rousing journalists, accustomed to judging others by their own yardstick, did not see it that way. An example was the notorious editor of the *Cronaca dei Tribunali*.[15]

In its issue of March 26 [1881] this periodical published an article entitled "Don Bosco and the Chevaliers." After vilifying the thirty-seven thousand Italians who had been granted honorific titles, the writer dug into the past and, craving for any chance to smear Don Bosco, described in his own fashion the allegedly questionable route taken by a Turinese liquor dealer named Revelli to win a chevalier's decoration in 1870. Ardently desirous of this title, he had given Don Bosco a donation of four thousand lire and had obtained his heart's desire. However, through it all, Don Bosco did not know that a broker had handled this matter and played a double role. When the newly knighted Revelli got wind of it, he dragged Don Bosco into it as a conniver with the broker and brought charges against both before the local magistrate in Turin, demanding the restitution of the money which he asserted had been extorted from him. The judge dismissed the case and ordered the plaintiff to pay costs and damages. The verdict did not sit well with the author of the article, and he treated his readers to a fantastic version of what had happened, closing his account with the barb, "I cite this episode for the benefit of those who will one day canonize the Reverend Bosco—priest, political wizard and dealer in knighthood. Now let's see what the *Corriere di Torino* can say in his defense."

The Catholic daily, however, made no comment, certainly at Don Bosco's request, since he constantly abhorred polemics. Yet, this journalist's reprehensible outburst generated an unexpected attestation of the worldwide reputation of holiness in which, willy-nilly, Don Bosco was held.

He was hit by a more serious and more vicious diatribe in *La*

[15]*See* pp. 9f. *See also* Vol. XIV, pp. 207, 226, 229-233. [Editor]

*Gazzetta d'Italia* of Florence on June 7; the author seems to have been a Protestant who probably resented the Salesians' presence in the city. A new book had come from the pen of the well-known ex-Jesuit Father Charles Curci[16] which, while rehashing the author's often expressed ideas, deplored the scanty education of a very large number of Italy's clergy. He then proceeded to describe how Italian priests were recruited, trained and ordained, concluding that unavoidably they lacked the necessary ecclesiastical and academic knowledge and consequently could not exert any moral influence upon the people. Then, with the unruffled slyness of truth's champion, the writer commented: "Turin has a priest, a certain Don Bosco, who runs several schools where he trains hundreds and hundreds of boys for the Church; many of them later go to the missions of Africa, South America and the Indies. A number of them, however, stay here or come back after spending a year or two among the infidels. It's anyone's guess what kind of priests they are. Ninety percent of them come from the lowest social classes." Evincing further generalizations, he concluded that it was everyone's duty in those days to be concerned with Italy's ecclesiastical problem. His "everyone" was particularly aimed at government executives who, in all reality, had for some twenty years taken a far too great interest in the subject, precisely as he wished them to do.

And thus it was that the Salesians were cutting an ugly figure in Tuscany, appearing to some degree as a band of uncouth, boorish and backward fellows. Don Bosco addressed these calumnies when he spoke to Salesian alumni—all priests—at their annual meeting on August 1 [at the Oratory]. Their spokesman had felt the need to energetically refute such slanderous accusations. Taking his cue from him, Don Bosco told his listeners that several years before, someone whose name he could not disclose had written to Rome, stating that the Salesians were poorly educated.[17] He then continued:

What happened then? We checked the records and, citing authentic, notarized documents, proved that of the Congregation's two hundred members, one hundred and eighty had successfully passed rigorous examinations in the diocesan seminary, in the University of Turin, and in certified colleges and

[16]Rev. C. M. Curci, *Le nuova Italia ed i vecchi zelanti*, Bencini Publishers, Florence, 1881. A decree of June 15, 1881 placed it on the *Index of Forbidden Books*. The author laudably accepted the condemnation and repudiated his work. [Author]

[17]*See* Vol. XI, pp. 201f. [Editor]

secondary schools. All had obtained academic degrees in theology, philosophy and literature or teachers' certifications. Once Rome studied the documents, the accuser of the Congregation was confronted with these findings. Would you believe it? He retorted that no one should be surprised that Don Bosco had so many priests with degrees and diplomas because he always picked the most talented of his pupils for himself and neglected the rest. So you see how true are the words of Holy Scripture: "The whole world is in the power of the evil one." Yes, the world is vicious, and no one could ever still its tongue, even if he were to stuff its mouth with potatoes.

I do not want my sons to be walking encyclopedias—he went on, warming up to the subject—nor do I expect my young artisans to become lawyers, philosophers or theologians. Still less do I intend my school teachers to prepare themselves to become ministers or ambassadors. I am satisfied if each of them is qualified for his job, whether as a craftsmaster, teacher or priest. If they meet this requirement I maintain that they are learned enough to be worthy members of society and the Church. As such they deserve the same respect as is given to others. So, let's do what we have to do and pay no heed to wagging tongues and acid pens.[18]

It's really disgusting to read the shameless calumnies which the papers now and then cast into Don Bosco's face. Also in 1881, *Il Fischietto* chose to live up to its ill reputation by venting its vulgarity in an article of October 11. It published a letter supposedly written by a Roman cardinal to Don Bosco. After identifying both of them in vulgar terms, the writer characterized Don Bosco in words of mocking praise as a man intent solely on tricking simpletons to turn over their money. Though it was common knowledge what uses Don Bosco put public charity to, the author went so far as to cast ridicule even on the churches he had built. This was no longer humor, but libel. Yet, despite the vicious intent to discredit him, this scandal sheet unwittingly highlighted a reality that transcended irony, when the would-be cardinal told Don Bosco in the make-believe letter: "With measured strength and gentleness you have won over so many good people, and, like it or not, your name resounds across the continent." Yes, the echo was there. Mock as they would, the fact remains that in Italy Don Bosco was idolized by all right-minded people.

Just days later, even the *Gazzetta Piemontese*, which posed as an unbiased paper, chose to launch an attack on Don Bosco in its October

[18]This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

20 issue. A certain Mr. Anglesio, a well-known Catholic banker in Turin, was caught in a financial crunch because of some unsuccessful business ventures, and so, before the whirlwind of legal suits could sweep him away, he decided that it would be wise for him to vanish. That disappearance gave the hack writers' imagination unlimited scope, some even saying that he had taken refuge in the Vatican and had been appointed manager of an imaginary Vatican banking house which was in the planning stages. Finally rumor had it that, in the words of the newspaper, "he had found shelter in one of the many institutions of the famous Don Bosco" and "was later sent off to an institute of this highly influential clergyman in Buenos Aires." The very words "many institutions" and "highly influential" reveal a livid sectarian rage against a man who was held in such high esteem in a hostile world. What actually happened was this. Mr. Anglesio was a regular benefactor of Don Bosco and constantly provided the Oratory with free medical supplies. He faced financial ruin with Christian fortitude. Leaving his remaining fortune in the hands of his creditors and keeping just enough to pay his fare to South America, he gave what was left, a few hundred lire, to Don Bosco, who in turn offered him hospitality in the Salesian house of Patagónes, where Mr. Anglesio lived a holy life until his death.

The final vexation of this kind to hit Don Bosco in 1881 started with a will dated 1878. In the space of three years a veritable deluge of leaflets was let loose in and around Genoa by a certain Father Paul Ricchino, brother of the testator, himself also a priest. The last batch of leaflets was released in December 1881 and copies were sent to various bishops and cardinals. We have in our possession one which had been sent to the cardinal vicar of Rome, who in turn passed it on to Father Dalmazzo. Luckily, its vulgarity and wild assertions nullify the accusation against the "Turin wonder-worker" who performed "astonishing first-class miracles." However, who can reckon up all the evil consequences of calumny, regardless of its wild allegations?

Definitely this was an outright lie. Father Angelo Ricchino, administrator of Our Lady of Grace Church at Sampierdarena, had been confined to bed for several years with a cancerous growth on one foot. During that time, Father Paul Albera sent two priests to the parish every Sunday to say Mass, hear confessions, and preach, and he personally visited Father Ricchino on many occasions to befriend him and cheer

him up. When surgery on the big toe was called for, Father Albera was the only one who could alleviate Father Ricchino's anxiety. The priest had been rather rashly advised by someone in authority that undergoing surgery was his duty, so that he was torn between what he felt was a duty and his fear of the consequences. Father Albera eased his moral anxieties, assuring him of no such obligation; then he gradually persuaded him to follow his doctor's suggestion. By then, however, it was too late. Just before his death, Father Ricchino took steps to reward the charity of the priest who had been of such help to him and at the same time to provide for his own sister, lest she be left without assistance. He entrusted her to Father Albera, who found accommodations for her with the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, and he named Father Albera his sole heir of the modest legacy.

Immediately Father Paul Ricchino, the deceased priest's brother, contested the will. Of a somewhat shaky reputation himself—as later legal suits show—he now questioned the validity of the will, although he had never bothered to call upon his bedridden brother until he knew that he was about to die. He claimed that Father Albera was not the true heir, but merely a trustee for Don Bosco, and the anticlerical judge ruled in his favor. However, before the court arrived at a verdict, this pitiable priest did all he could to discredit Don Bosco through newspapers, leaflets and oral accusations. But God's justice trips up the evildoer. Four of the journalists who took part in the fray were given sentences ranging from three to seven years for blackmail against some citizens. The source of all this hubbub ended his days miserably. He was hit with a shameful court trial and finally died without receiving the last sacraments.

To lift up Don Bosco's spirit lest it be crushed beneath such a load of both minor and serious vexations, God intervened now and then to strengthen him in the heartening assurance of the mission entrusted to him from on high. That September he had one of his most important dreams that showed him the Congregation's immediate future and its glorious achievements, along with the evils which threatened to destroy it if timely remedies were not applied. What he saw and heard impressed him so vividly that, not content with merely telling the dream, he put it down in writing as well. The original has been lost, but numerous copies have come to light, all of them in remarkable agreement.

*Spiritus Sancti gratia illuminet sensus et corda nostra, Amen* [May the grace of the Holy Spirit enlighten our minds and hearts, Amen].

### *Norms for the Salesian Society*

On September 10 of this year 1881, the day the Church dedicates to the glorious name of Mary, the Salesians were assembled at San Benigno Canavese for their spiritual retreat.

On the night of September 10–11, while I was asleep, I dreamed that I was in a richly adorned hall. I seemed to be strolling up and down its length with the directors of our houses when a man of majestic mien—so majestic that none of us could fix our gaze on him—appeared among us. Glancing at us in utter silence, he too started to pace the hall several steps from us. He was clad in a rich mantle or cape closed at the front of the neck with a scarf from which a ribbon hung down on his chest. The scarf was inscribed in luminous letters: *Pia Salesianorum Societas anno 1881* [The Pious Salesian Society in 1881]; on the ribbon were the words; *qualis esse debet* [what it ought to be]. Ten diamonds of extraordinary size and brilliance adorning that august person kept our gaze from being fixed upon him. Three of the diamonds he wore on his chest: on one was written the word *Faith*, on another was written *Hope*, and the third over his heart bore the word *Charity*. The fourth diamond, affixed to his right shoulder, was inscribed *Work*; the fifth, on his left shoulder, read *Temperance*. The remaining five diamonds adorning the back of his cloak were set into a quadrangle; the largest and most brilliant sparkled in the very center, and on it was written *Obedience*. The diamond to its upper right read *Vow of Poverty*, and that below it, *Reward*. On the diamond to the upper left was written *Vow of Chastity*; its sparkle had a brilliance all its own and drew our gaze as a magnet attracts iron. Beneath it was a diamond inscribed *Fasting*. These four diamonds focused their dazzling rays upon the one in the center; their rays, resembling tongues of fire, flickered upward, forming various maxims.

The diamond *Faith* emitted rays with the words: "Take up the shield of faith that you may fight against the devil's wiles." Another ray proclaimed: "Faith without works is dead. Not the hearers but the doers of the law will possess the kingdom of God."

On the rays of *Hope* were the words: "Hope is in the Lord, not in men. Let your hearts rest where true joys are found."

The rays of *Charity* read: "Bear one another's burdens if you want to fulfill My law. Love and you shall be loved. Love your souls and the souls of your charges. Recite the Divine Office devoutly, celebrate Mass attentively, visit the Holy of Holies with great love."

On the word *Work*: "The remedy for concupiscence, a powerful[19] weapon against the devil's wiles."

On *Temperance*: "Remove the fuel and the fire will die out. Make a pact with your eyes, with your cravings, your sleeping, lest these enemies plunder your souls. Self-gratification and chastity cannot co-exist."

On the rays of *Obedience*: "The foundation of the whole edifice and a précis of sanctity."

On the rays of *Poverty*: "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Riches are thorns. Poverty is not made of words but is in the hearts and deeds. Poverty will open the gates of heaven and enter it."

On the rays of *Chastity*: "All virtues come with it. The clean of heart will see God's mysteries and God Himself."

On the rays of *Reward*: "If the lavish rewards are delightful, do not be deterred by the many hardships. He who suffers with Me will rejoice with Me. For My friends, suffering is momentary, but heavenly happiness is everlasting."

On the rays of *Fasting*: "The most powerful weapon against the devil's snares. The safeguard of all virtues. By it devils of every sort are cast out."

A wide, rose-colored ribbon formed the edge of the lower hem of the cloak and on it was written: *"Topic for Sermons, Morning, Noon and Night:* Glean even bits of virtues and you will build a great edifice of sanctity for yourselves. Woe to you who despise small things; you shall fall little by little."

Up to this point the directors were either standing or kneeling, totally bewildered and silent. But then Father Rua, as though beside himself, exclaimed, "Let's make a note of this, lest we forget it." He sought a pen but found none. Pulling out his wallet, he rummaged through it in vain. "I will remember," Father Durando said. "I intend to write it down," Father Fagnano retorted and began writing with the stem of a rose. All were surprised and they found they could read the writing. When Father Fagnano was through, Father Costamagna dictated these words: "Charity understands all things, bears all things, overcomes all things. Let us preach this in word and deed."

As Father Fagnano was writing, the lights went out and we were left in total darkness. "Silence," Father Ghivarello said. "Let us kneel down and pray; the light will return." Father Lasagna intoned the *Veni Creator*, and then the *De Profundis* [ending with the invocation] *Maria, Auxilium Christianorum*. As we all responded *Ora pro nobis*, a light shone, focusing on a poster which read: *Pia Salesianorum Societas qualis esse periclitatur anno salutis 1900* [The Pious Salesian Society as it runs the risk of being in the year of salvation

[19]This must have been a slip of the pen, instead of "most powerful," just as further below under *Fasting*. [Author]

1900]. A moment later the light grew stronger, and we were able to see and recognize each other.

At the heart of this glowing light, the same august person appeared again, but he looked very sad and on the verge of tears. His cape was faded, moth-eaten and threadbare. Where each diamond had previously been set, there was now a gaping hole made by moths and other insects.

"Look and understand," the personage said. Then I saw that the ten diamonds had turned into as many moths ravenously eating through the cape.

In the place of *Faith* I now saw "Sleep and sloth."

In the place of *Hope*, "Buffoonery and scurrility."

In the place of *Charity*, "Negligence in the performance of spiritual duties. They love and seek what gratifies them, not what pertains to Christ."

In the place of *Temperance*, "Gluttony." "Their God is their belly."

In the place of *Work*, "Sleep, theft and idleness."

In the place of *Obedience* there was only a gaping hole and no inscription.

In the place of *Chastity*, "Concupiscence of the eyes and pride of life."

*Poverty* had been replaced by "Comfort, clothes, drink and money."

In the place of *Reward*, "The things of earth are what we seek."

Where *Fasting* had been, there was only a hole, no writing.

We were now all filled with fear. Father Lasagna fell into a faint. Father Cagliero turned as white as a sheet and, grasping a chair for support, cried out, "Can it be that things have already come to such a state?" Father Lazzero and Father Guidazio, frightened out of their wits, reached out to hold each other up. Father Francesia, Count Cays, Father Barberis and Father Leveratto fell to their knees, rosary in hand.

At that moment an ominous voice declared, "How the beauty has faded!"

Then, as we stood in semi-darkness, something strange occurred. Pitch darkness again swallowed us up and in its midst a most dazzling light arose in the form of a human body. We could not fix our eyes on it, but we could make it out to be a handsome young man, clad in a white garment interwoven with gold and silver threads and entirely bordered by a string of brilliant diamonds. He moved toward us majestic in mien, yet gentle and friendly, and addressed us as follows:

"Servants and instruments of Almighty God, listen and understand. Take heart and be strong. What you have seen and heard is a heavenly warning sent to you and to your confreres. Take it to heart and endeavor to understand it. An attack foreseen does less harm and can be warded off. Let each of the inscriptions be a topic of your talks. Preach unceasingly in season and out of season. However, make sure that you always practice what you preach, so that your deeds may be a light, which may be passed on to your confreres from generation to generation as a solid tradition. Take heed and understand. Be cautious

in accepting novices, strong in training them, prudent in admitting them [to vows]. Test all of them, but keep only the good; dismiss the lightminded and fickle. Take heed and understand. From morning to night ceaselessly meditate on the observance of the constitutions. If you do this, the hand of the Almighty will never fail you. You will be a model to the world and to angels, and your glory will be the glory of God. Those who will live to see the end of this century and the dawn of the next shall say of you: 'By the Lord was this accomplished, and it is wonderful in our eyes.' Then all your confreres and all your sons shall sing: 'Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to Your name be the glory.' "

These last words were chanted, and the youth's voice was joined by a multitude of other voices, so melodiously blended and resonant that we were soon beside ourselves and, to keep from swooning away, chimed in the singing. As the song ended and the light dimmed, I awoke and realized that it was dawn.

*Memorandum.* The dream lasted almost the entire night, so that, come morning, I was totally exhausted. Still, fearing that I might forget, I quickly arose and jotted down some notes, to serve me as a reminder in recalling all I have here written on this feast of Our Lady's Presentation in the Temple.

I could not possibly remember everything. But among other things, I was able to ascertain with certainty that the Lord is very merciful to me. Our Society is blessed by God, but He asks us also to do our share. The evils threatened will be warded off if we preach about the vices and virtues pointed out to us. If we practice what we preach, we shall be able to hand on to our confreres a practical tradition of what we have done and shall do.

I also managed to ascertain that many thorns and difficulties lie immediately ahead of us, but they will be followed by great consolations. Around 1890 there will be a great fear, around 1895 a great triumph. Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us.

Father Rua immediately saw to it that the august person's directive was followed—namely, that matters revealed in the dream should form the topics of sermons. He himself gave a series of talks to the Salesians at the Oratory commenting in detail on both parts of the dream. The dates mentioned by Don Bosco as years of triumph or defeat correspond in our Congregation to the onset of adolescence in human life—a critical, precarious period setting in most cases the stage for the entire future. Certainly, the growth in both members and houses as well as the spread of our Congregation to several nations, both of which were experienced in the final decade of the last century, could doubt-

lessly lead to some deviation or other, which, if not promptly checked, might take us farther and farther from the right path. However, at Don Bosco's death, Divine Providence gave us a successor whose enlightened mind and energetic spirit measured up to the demands of those critical years. Father Rua, whom we may well characterize as the personification of all that is beautiful and wholesome in the first part of the dream, was indeed the watchful sentry, the undaunted and unquestioned leader needed to shepherd and guide the young recruits along the rightful path.

The portent of the dream transcends time. Don Bosco sounded the alarm for the special period which was to follow his death, but the admonitions *qualis esse debet* and *qualis esse periclitatur* contain a warning which will never lose any of its significance. Hence Don Bosco's words to the superiors will always be valid: "The evils threatened will be offset if we shall speak about the vices and virtues pointed out in the dream."

# CHAPTER 6

## *Father Bonetti's Appeal to the Sacred Congregation of the Council*

ON November 2, 1881, Don Bosco joined the forty-five or so novices in San Benigno for their monthly Exercise for a Happy Death, and while there he blessed their clerical habits. He appeared pretty much himself, giving no hint of even a shadow of bitter grief, but, while unburdening himself to Father Barberis, he spoke of afflictions which he said were among the most heartrending he had had to endure at any time in his life. "Yesterday," he said, "I had to plead strongly with the Lord to help me retain my sanity. These things can drive one insane. Particularly in these last two days, a whole mess of problems have been piling up and past events have come to light, all of them distressing." Then, regaining his composure somewhat, he smiled sadly and added, "I need someone to cheer me up a bit." These words suffice to help us understand why he had so trustingly revealed his feelings to his dear Father Barberis. To drive away such painful thoughts, that evening after supper, he recounted some experiences of past years.[1]

The most pressing of Don Bosco's worries were then three: the closing of the Oratory secondary school still being considered by the Council of State, Father Bonetti's case concerning the Chieri oratory, and a lawsuit pending from the publication of pamphlets libeling the archbishop of Turin.[2] The first we have already narrated ahead of time in Chapter 4 of the preceding volume; we shall go into the third later

[1]These details are gleaned from handwritten sheets inserted into the chronicle of the house of San Benigno. Their contents were either dictated to someone or written by Father Barberis. [Author]

[2]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 189f. [Editor]

on, while here we shall resume the account of the second distressing situation which we began in Volume XIV.

As we have seen, immediately after the first two phases of the case, until then involving only the archdiocese, Father Bonetti initiated a third when, wearied by delays cleverly contrived to block any recall of the decree of his suspension, he decided to defend his own priestly honor as well as the reputation of his religious community, and he appealed to the Sacred Congregation of the Council. Three times he had addressed that body in an effort to regain the full exercise of his priestly ministry from the archbishop of Turin or, at least, to be given a canonical reason for a denial. Again and again the Sacred Congregation wrote to the archbishop on this matter, only to receive, after a lengthy silence, what it judged to be unsatisfactory reasons. Hence on July 3, 1880, the Congregation decreed to take up the whole matter in a full session of the cardinals, and on July 17 so notified Archbishop Gastaldi. Finally on December 11 the archbishop was officially ordered to inform Father Bonetti of this decision. He did this through his secretary, Monsignor [Thomas] Chiuso, who on Christmas Eve sent a memo to Father Bonetti which closed with the words: "His Excellency grants you one month from this date in which to present your case to the Sacred Congregation of the Council."

The interval between December 11 and 24 had allowed the archbishop time to draft a lengthy report and send it to the prefect of the Sacred Congregation, Cardinal [Prospero] Caterini on December 29. It was no more than a condemnation of the Salesians, though it opened up as follows: "I am deeply pained at finding myself forced to lodge complaints against an organization of the well-deserving Father John Bosco, for I fondly recall that it was one of my most exciting priestly ministries to help him with his newly formed institutions, and neither then nor later as bishop of Saluzzo and archbishop of Turin did I ever lessen my interest and efforts to favor those institutions which are still thriving with heaven's evident blessing."

To prove his support of Don Bosco's works he then brought forth two incidents as follows: "When the Valsalice College in Turin was about to be shut down—he wrote—I did my best to help the Salesian Fathers acquire ownership and to keep it open as a private school under the direction of Don Bosco. To this end I personally used ten thousand lire of my own money to pay off the outstanding debts contracted by the college's former administration which the Very Reverend Don Bosco

refused to assume. Again, toward the end of February of this year 1880, I offered Don Bosco a house which I owned, next to the parish church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Turin, valued at forty thousand lire, my sole condition being that the Salesians should use it to run two free elementary schools for boys. This request was never even acknowledged." We have elsewhere contested this allegation.[3] As regards Valsalice, certainly ten thousand lire was no mean sum, but his generosity deserved the thanks of the former administrators since it was their debt he was paying off, not that of the Salesians, who did not get a single cent from it. Furthermore, the Salesians were given the use of the building, not its ownership; in fact, they had to pay the Brothers of the Christian Schools a yearly rental fee of eight thousand lire, and when they finally bought the school, the archbishop made no more than a token contribution.

This preamble was followed by the already known charges against Father Bonetti: his violations of parish rights in the case of a nun's funeral at Chieri; his dispute with the parish priest of Santa Maria della Scala concerning the older girls' attendance at the festive oratory; his suspension without previous canonical admonitions; the pamphlet entitled *The Archbishop of Turin, Don Bosco and Father Oddenino*, which the archbishop asserted had been published "with Father Bonetti's cooperation." The climax indeed was a hateful accusation against Don Bosco himself. The archbishop charged: "The Very Reverend Don Bosco, superior of the Salesian Congregation, who does so much good in Turin and elsewhere, informed the canon curate of Chieri in the course of a conversation that, should problems arise concerning the girls' festive oratory, he, the canon, was not to go directly to the archbishop but rather to him, Don Bosco, so that they might work things out, in effect bypassing the archbishop. The canon was shocked by this suggestion of the Very Reverend Don Bosco, whose virtues are highly esteemed, for it could bring about the charge of insubordination of a pastor against his ecclesiastical superior, the archbishop."

Actually the antagonistic canon had made a mountain out of a molehill. The conversation had taken place in 1878, the year when the archbishop had given Don Bosco permission to open a festive oratory at Chieri. Aware that the canon was uncooperative and realizing that he would go running to the archbishop for every trifle, Don Bosco in the

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 419-423. [Editor]

course of conversation had told him, "Since the archbishop has granted us permission to hold religious services, there is no need to bother him about minor differences of opinion. Whenever you do not approve of something we do in the running of the oratory, please write to me a friendly note about it and we shall come to terms to our mutual satisfaction."

This was the extent of the scandal that so gravely perturbed the canon's delicate conscience!

Father Bonetti presented his case to Rome on January 8, 1881. A month or so later, the archbishop sent the chancery's fiscal attorney, Canon [Emanuel] Colomiatti, to Rome; he was to check on the state of the case before the Sacred Congregation of the Council and make the opportune rebuttals. He arrived on Friday, February 4, and was granted a papal audience on the morning of February 8, thanks to the zealous offices of Monsignor Macchi, papal chamberlain for private audiences. Meanwhile, Archbishop Verga, secretary of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, had shown Father Bonetti's appeal to Canon Colomiatti, allowing him to read it and take notes at will. The canon spent the better part of a day scrutinizing Father Bonetti's entire presentation and then drew up a memorandum summing up the account and rebutting each charge.

In this report to Archbishop Gastaldi we find two items that are hardly reconcilable. After scrutinizing Father Bonetti's presentation of his case, the canon is quick to affirm that Father Bonetti will have the worst of it, but then he shows a very great concern about meeting with Cardinal Nina as soon as possible, excusing himself in the opening lines of the letter to Archbishop Gastaldi for not having immediately called on the cardinal the day after his arrival in Rome. "I did not go straight to Cardinal Nina," he states, "because my first care was to see at what stage the case stood." Obviously, he had been charged with a special mission to the cardinal, a mission plainly evidenced by what he writes further on: "I am going to the cardinal today and will try to bring about an out-of-court settlement to bypass the proceedings of the Sacred Congregation of the Council."[4]

So shaky was his vaunted certainty of success that he was virtually

[4]Letter of February 8, 1881. The originals of the letters of Canon Colomiatti to the archbishop from Rome are in the possession of Father [Dominic] Franchetti[5] in Turin. [Author]

[5]*See* pp. xviii-xix. [Editor]

reaching out for support. He therefore called on the Salesians' cardinal protector with the sole motive of soliciting his interest in the new approach to the controversy. Indeed, he stated his anxious interest that the conflict be settled in a fair and acceptable way between the two parties without recourse to a court, saying that, as long as Father Bonetti was willing to apologize to the archbishop, the way would be open to a peaceful and mutually satisfying agreement. Cardinal Nina, however, felt that it would be wiser to abide by the decision of the Sacred Congregation which already had the matter in hand. Still the canon insisted and pleaded with His Eminence to contact Don Bosco to this end. After mature reflection, the cardinal did not deem it opportune to disregard the canon's plea, and so he sent a letter to Don Bosco, appealing to his prudence and charity and assuring him that Canon Colomiatti seemed well-disposed and would not reject an out-of-court settlement. He immediately took action, presenting his viewpoint in the matter, and sent the letter through Canon Colomiatti personally. The canon, however, could not deliver it directly because Don Bosco, as we know, was then in France,[6] and so the letter was forwarded to him. His clear-cut reply pins down the controversy to its basic elements.

[No date]

Your Eminence:

Your kind letter concerning Father Bonetti's controversy has reached me by a roundabout way at Roquefort near Toulon.

I most earnestly wish to see this conflict settled amicably. It has been nearly a year since the archbishop sent for me and we came to the understanding that he would revoke Father Bonetti's suspension while, for the sake of peace, I would agree not to send Father Bonetti to Chieri for priestly service. When I spoke to Father Bonetti he was quite satisfied; he is a truly exemplary, hard-working priest. However, very early the following morning I was handed a letter from the archbishop in which he retracted every single thought or word of a friendly settlement, thus reinstating the former status quo.

At the present time an unacceptable condition precludes a settlement. Father Colomiatti states that unless Don Bosco accepts it, the archbishop will bring legal action against him as the author of the infamous booklets which were published against the archbishop.

[6]*See* Chapters 2 and 3. [Editor]

This means that if I agree to a settlement, I declare myself guilty of writing those detestable libelous booklets, which I have always condemned. If there is a real desire for an out-of-court settlement of this controversy, I see no simpler way than to abide by our previous agreement and revoke Father Bonetti's suspension. This would clear up the whole mess.

I should also point out to you that the threat of automatic suspension still hangs over me if I ever personally or through others write or publish anything which might touch unfavorably upon the archbishop. However, all this notwithstanding, I shall write to the archbishop of Turin from here, and ask him to tell me his mind on this matter.

I offer my humble thanks to Your Eminence for the interest you take in our affairs and assure you of all our gratitude which we express in our prayers. Meanwhile, I am honored to remain,

Your obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

At the same time, Don Bosco sent Father Rua some instructions on what was to be done. Acting promptly, Father Rua called upon Canon Colomiatti on March 4 and 5. He informed him that the Salesians, in deference to their cardinal protector, would gladly settle Father Bonetti's controversy in a friendly matter and withdraw the complaint they had filed with the Sacred Congregation of the Council against their archbishop. Actually, he added, this had always been Don Bosco's desire and that of the other superiors. The appeal to the tribunal of the Holy See had been made only because the archbishop had consistently refused to revoke voluntarily a dishonorable penalty he had inflicted on a religious in violation of an explicit decree of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. After some reflections and exchange of thoughts between them, the canon gave Father Rua reason to hope that Father Bonetti's banishment from Chieri would also be canceled, but only on condition that he apologize.

"For what offense should he apologize?" Father Rua asked. "For a bit of reluctance in complying with the archbishop's orders, for letters that were somewhat disrespectful, and also for having reiterated his appeal to Rome last year, after his suspension had been commuted to a simple prohibition to exercise his priestly ministry in Chieri," the canon answered.

This was not altogether true. In fact, the archbishop's letter to Don Bosco, dated May 27, 1879, expressly and plainly had stated: "I am

withdrawing Father Bonetti's faculties to grant sacramental absolution." Thus the archbishop made Father Bonetti appear guilty of transgressions he had never committed, disgracing him before the whole town. But Canon Colomiatti seemed ready to overlook and dismiss this item as trivial; he insisted, however, on an apology for the derogatory pamphlets against the archbishop, particularly one treating of the Chieri affair.[7] Father Rua's reply was that the suspension had nothing to do with the publication which had appeared several months later; the Salesians, he said, had nothing to do with the pamphlets and declined all responsibility for them.

In short, Father Rua inferred that: first, the archbishop, unable to back up the charges he had brought to Rome, was trying to wrest from the Salesians a more or less explicit admission of complicity in the matter of the pamphlets so as to win sympathy for his cause; second, fearing the consequences of having inflicted an uncanonical suspension, the archbishop hoped that the fear of a libel suit concerning the pamphlets would delay the court case and suspend it indefinitely. "These are suspicions of mine," wrote Father Rua to Don Bosco, "but they are by no means rash. True, Canon Colomiatti has assured me that during his stay in Rome, he was given to understand that, should the case be heard, Father Bonetti would be found guilty, but I really believe that he fears the verdict will be against the archbishop.[8]

Two other items Father Rua was able to report with certainty to Don Bosco. Although Archbishop Gastaldi might revoke the suspension, he would do absolutely nothing to remove from Father Bonetti's name the pall of calumny he had cast over it, since he kept insisting that the latter be barred from Chieri for an indefinite period of time. Yet, he owed amends to Father Bonetti for the harm done to his reputation, where the problem had all begun. Secondly, Canon Colomiatti was trying to push Father Rua into a settlement, bypassing Don Bosco, arguing that the matter would otherwise unduly drag on. Hence, very wisely Father Rua remarked, "I am afraid something underhanded is going on."

His fears were not without foundation. Assuming that there was a sincere desire for a peaceful settlement, the path ahead lay open and smooth. As a first step, the archbishop would have to lift the eccle-

[7]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 189f. [Editor]
[8]Letter from Turin, March 7, 1881. [Author]

siastical censure he had laid upon Father Bonetti contrary to a decree prohibiting ordinaries from suspending confessors who are religious except for reasons touching upon the sacrament of confession. A true or alleged lack of respect was something that did not enter into that case by any stretch of the imagination. Consequently, the archbishop should strive to redress publicly the wrong done to Father Bonetti by at least dispelling the ugly suspicions raised against him to the hurt of the entire Salesian Congregation. Probably the only deterrent factor in this procedure was the fear that the archbishop's authority could be jeopardized, but this could very well be avoided by giving Father Bonetti permission to preach occasionally in Chieri's churches or by granting him in writing general faculties to hear confessions in diocesan girls' institutions upon request.

To Don Bosco's observations, Cardinal Nina replied with a dilemma.[9] Either, on the one hand, Father Bonetti could morally and juridically defend himself against alleged complicity with the defamatory pamphlets—and in that case his honor and the good name of the Congregation ruled out any kind of settlement— or, on the other hand, Father Bonetti did not feel totally above suspicion and feared that, through incidental circumstances beyond his control, he might have become involved indirectly in some sort of complicity. In such a case, the cardinal believed that a well-worded and pointed apology, stating the true facts with their circumstances and nothing more, would be appropriate. Then he added: "Since you are well aware that we are dealing with a peculiar personality, you should use your own good judgment and prudently choose your course of action. Being far more knowledgeable about people than I myself am, you will also be in a better position to discern if the other party's offer of a compromise is merely a disguise and a trap. Do not lose heart. Bear in mind that being tested through adversities is an essential element of works acceptable to God."

We cannot understand how a cardinal who wrote these lines, after giving so many proofs of loving esteem for Don Bosco, could, on February 8, actually air his views in such a manner as to lend credence to Canon Colomiatti's written words to Archbishop Gastaldi: "Be-

[9]Letter, Rome, March 16, 1881. [Author]

tween us, the cardinal does not consider Don Bosco a saint, whereas he regards as such Father Anglesio[10] of the Little House."[11]

From Nice, Don Bosco forwarded the cardinal's letter to Father Bonetti, who was then preaching at Aosta. He, in turn, realizing that his adversaries were running scared because they were in the wrong, urged Father Rua to stand firm on his demand that his good name, compromised by an uncanonical suspension, be vindicated, and that amends be made without any requirement for an apology, because the alleged lack of respect for the archbishop's authority did not constitute a canonical reason. He urged firmness too in the matter of the published pamphlets. "We have been involved in them only as scapegoats," he wrote. At the most, he did admit that in talking with people intent on prying into what had actually happened, he might have weakened to the point of opening his heart to them to prove his own innocence. But, he said, no law of God or man forbids a slandered victim to get a load off his chest and defend his honor among friends. If, later, they had betrayed his confidence, he should not be held responsible for their acts. He also urged Father Rua to stall for time as long as Don Bosco was in Rome.[12]

But the chancery in Turin could brook no delay. On March 29 Canon Colomiatti wrote to Don Bosco urging him to come to a settlement with the archbishop. Writing back from Alassio, Don Bosco laid down two essential conditions if the matter was to be settled and peace restored.

Alassio, April 5, 1881

Very Reverend Canon Colomiatti:

I had given Father Rua full powers to work out a settlement in the conflict concerning our unfortunate Father Bonetti, pointing out that the simplest way was to revoke a suspension whose legality is very questionable. I had already come to an agreement on this point with our revered archbishop.

However, the following morning, His Excellency sent me a letter voiding all pertinent negotiations and concessions.

On going more thoroughly into the matter, we discovered that some charges

[10]Father Louis Anglesio was at this time rector of the Little House of Divine Providence founded by St. Joseph Cottolengo. [Editor]

[11]Letter, Rome, March 8, 1881. [Author]

[12]Letter from Father Bonetti to Father Rua, Aosta, March 20, 1881. [Author]

had been made which only besmirched the honor and good name of a priest who has always been above reproach morally and otherwise during his life among us. What I fail to understand is the demand that Father Bonetti admit guilt for something which he holds in utter horror; if there were a well-founded suspicion on this matter, this alone would force me to expel him immediately from our poor Congregation, which has faced so many adversities.

In my opinion, the only way to end this most disgusting incident should be: (1) to revoke Father Bonetti's suspension, as has already been done; (2) to dismiss the grave charges lodged against him in Rome, unless they can be proved beyond doubt. In such a case Father Bonetti would be expelled from the religious congregation to which he belongs. He, however, assures me he has not the least fear that the charges can stand up, and he asks only that he be allowed to offer his explanations at the appropriate time.

This, my dear canon, is my friendly and confidential viewpoint and opinion. Father Rua, who is handling this case, can better come to an agreement with you. God bless us all and keep us in His holy grace.

Yours respectfully,
Fr. John Bosco

The letter was sent to Father Rua, and he promptly delivered it to the canon. From his talk with him, Father Rua got the impression that the whole matter could be settled amicably on condition that Father Bonetti would write and publish in the *Bollettino Salesiano* a brief disclaimer of all responsibility for the pamphlets against the archbishop, deploring their content and publication,[13] without any further requirement of apologizing for what the archbishop called the "Chieri libel." When informed of this, Father Bonetti rushed to Turin from Aosta, since Father Rua was shortly to meet Don Bosco at Sampierdarena and accompany him to Rome. They agreed they had no problem with a written statement declaring that Father Bonetti had had no part whatever, directly or indirectly, in the unfortunate publications. Father Rua wrote to the canon from Sampierdarena, because on the day of his departure from Turin he had sat in the latter's waiting room two hours without being able to see him.[14] However, he did not lessen his insistence on his main contention. "It is my thinking," he wrote, "that

[13]Letter from Father Rua to Father Bonetti, Turin, April 8, 1882. [Author]
[14]Letter, April 14, 1881. [Author]

there must be a clear-cut distinction between the suspension issue and that of the pamphlets; likewise, the revocation of the suspension and the amends to the archbishop's reputation must not depend upon our declaration in the *Bollettino Salesiano.*" Then, even more respectfully, he added, "Since the suspension was issued in written form, would it not be fair that it be revoked in the same manner? Better still, should it not be stated that the suspension was not inflicted for the usual reasons, that is, for dishonorable conduct, but rather for some other reasons? Please do what you can."

The canon had sent to Father Rua a copy of the pamphlet about the Chieri affair so he could read and see for himself that Father Bonetti's hand was certainly in it. Father Rua expressed his opinion as follows: "As for what I think, let me say that, although I have been too busy to read the whole thing, from the part that I have read I feel that by no stretch of the imagination can anyone conclude that Father Bonetti is its author. If someone thinks he is, then all we can say is that unfortunately we often err in our judgments." His letter, written on Holy Thursday, ends in a manner which is typical of saints: "I admire your personal interest in this controversy and I can't help expressing my sincere esteem for you. Please, accept my best wishes for the coming celebration of Easter."

Canon Colomiatti waited until Easter Monday to send Father Bonetti a note inviting him to his office any morning that week to receive a message. This gave Father Bonetti five days to consult Don Bosco at Rome. His laconic reply was: "I believe you can go as asked, but always stand firm on the two fundamental conditions: revocation of the suspension and withdrawal of all charges lodged against you with the Holy See. I shall hasten my return."

Just when and how the two opponents met we do not know, but on April 24 a written message came from Canon Colomiatti, addressed to Father Rua's office at the Oratory while he was still away. It was a notice that Father Bonetti's faculties for confession had been issued, and therefore either he or Father Bonetti should call at the chancery to pick up the document. When Don Bosco was told, he gave this advice to Father Bonetti:[15] "You will be receiving another letter concerning that well-known problem of yours. Make sure you neither say nor write

[15]Letter, Rome, April 29, 1881. [Author]

anything that can get to others. They are out to frame us. Be cautious in everything." These two notes of his show that he set the example.

We have no documents concerning the next two weeks, but then came a letter from Archbishop Gastaldi for Don Bosco. He received it while he was still in Rome and just about to leave for Florence. Again the archbishop restated how well deserving he was of the Salesian Congregation, but we shall limit ourselves to what really matters. "How happy I would be—he wrote—if our relations could again be as they were from 1848 to 1872, when they reached the very summit of concord. I have never changed since then, and I have given glowing proof of this to you and yours. If you and your Salesians wish to draw upon yourselves the fullness of blessings of St. Maximus, bishop of Turin, be willing to admit the wrongs you have done to his present successor and ask his pardon. Promise that you will not do, say, or publish anything anywhere concerning the diocese of Turin without first checking it out with me. Then you will see how speedily peace will be restored with the splendor of bygone days."[16]

Trusting the archbishop's word, Don Bosco bowed to his wishes. Therefore, on May 27, Canon Colomiatti called on Don Bosco with full powers from the archbishop to end the whole affair. Their meeting was a long one, and Don Bosco believed in the honesty and sincerity of the promises. Consequently, he and the canon verbally agreed that the archbishop would drop all the charges lodged by him in Rome against Father Bonetti, Don Bosco and the entire Salesian Congregation; furthermore, Father Bonetti was to be free of all further vexation and suspension from hearing confessions as he had been prior to February 12 and 14, 1879, and as the archbishop has also stated on the evening of May 26 of that year [1881] though he retracted his word the following morning. On the basis of these two conditions alone Don Bosco handed a written statement to Canon Colomiatti as a basis for a peaceful settlement, but—let this be noted—his written statement was to be returned to Don Bosco with a letter from the archbishop expressing his acceptance of the two conditions. Both parties stipulated that this was a verbal agreement. Don Bosco's statement read: "In my position as rector of the Pious Salesian Society, I am happy that the controversy between Father John Bonetti and His Excellency, the most reverend archbishop of Turin, has been amicably terminated. I now ask His

[16]Letter, Turin, May 10, 1881. [Author]

Eminence, the cardinal prefect of the Council, kindly to return the documents relating to this matter." His signature and the date followed.

As soon as the archbishop got Don Bosco's statement into his hands, he sent it with one of his own, not to Don Bosco to have him check if its wording was in conformity with the understanding he had reached with Canon Colomiatti, but to the cardinal prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Council. In a covering letter the archbishop wrote: "In consideration of the statement made to my fiscal attorney by the Very Reverend John Bosco, Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation, concerning the girls' festive oratory operated by the Salesian Sisters at Chieri—which to date has not been in any way exempted from the ordinary's authority—and looking to the good of the Salesian Congregation, I hereby state that it is my intent that no further action be taken in my countersuit filed with the Sacred Congregation of the Council against Father Bonetti; this countersuit was a necessary response to the suit filed by the aforesaid Father Bonetti. I therefore ask His Eminence the cardinal prefect to allow me to withdraw the documents pertinent to the case."

Here several things must be pointed out. To start with, no mention whatever is made of the two verbal conditions, nor is there a revocation of the ban against Father Bonetti's hearing confessions in Chieri. The charges against Father Bonetti were not the only documents that were to be withdrawn, for the agreement with Canon Colomiatti, the fiscal attorney, was that all other papers as well were to be withdrawn. Furthermore, explicitly mentioning the girls' festive oratory operated by the Salesian Sisters subtly insinuated that Father Bonetti had only been suspended from hearing confessions in a sisters' private chapel, not in a public chapel belonging to the Salesians. Finally, a simple draft which was given in all confidence, and was to have been returned to the writer once the archbishop had agreed to its conditions so that it could be copied more presentably, could never be considered an official document, so official that it could be sent off-hand to a cardinal prefect [of a Roman Congregation].

But these were not the only irregularities. The oral agreement called for the canon to give Don Bosco an oral answer in person. Instead, he notified Don Bosco by letter and enclosed a copy of the archbishop's statement. Furthermore, the canon let several days go by before notifying Don Bosco that the archbishop's statement had been sent to Rome. Worse still, rather than use the quickest way of sending the letter,

which would be by hand delivery, he mailed it. Consequently, a whole week went by without Don Bosco's knowing anything, for the letter did not reach him until shortly before supper on June 2. He suspected a ruse whose purpose we can easily detect from the telegram which he sent at about seven o'clock that very evening to Archbishop Verga, secretary of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, to forestall any untoward consequences. It said: "Please let no documents concerning our case leave your office. Letter to follow. Bosco." That same evening Don Bosco wrote to Archbishop Verga as follows:

[June 2, 1881]

Your Excellency:

Just moments ago I was informed by mail that the archbishop of Turin has sent to the Sacred Congregation of the Council a paper written by myself which was to be used as the basis of an amicable settlement in Father Bonetti's case. This paper was a confidential communication to the diocesan fiscal attorney, Canon Colomiatti, who was supposed to show it to the archbishop and then return it to me with the archbishop's own statement on the matter at hand. The archbishop's statement did get to me, but it does not match the agreement which I reached with his diocesan fiscal attorney: that is, the revocation of Father Bonetti's suspension and the recall of all documents concerning him, as well as those casting discredit on me and my Congregation. On the other hand, I would never have sent my statement to Rome without a covering letter befitting the cardinal prefect of such an important Congregation.

I therefore beg you to hold this case at the stage where it is now. More detailed explanation will follow by mail.

I am honored to remain, with esteem and respect,

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Very anxious to let Canon Colomiatti know that the archbishop's conciliatory gesture did not in the least correspond to their own agreement, Don Bosco immediately wrote to the canon.

Turin, June 2, 1881

Reverend and dear Canon,

I have just received your letter by mail, informing me of the archbishop's statement. With regret I must say that I fail to see how it conforms to the agreement we made. Hence, I think we must confer together again and come

to a better understanding. I'll be available. If possible, please drop in to see me, and I trust that we can come to a better understanding in a few minutes.

With great esteem, I remain

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco had his own reasons to move so quickly. Once the documents were taken off the records, the controversy would be dealt with out of court, and should no friendly settlement be reached, the case would have to be reopened, starting again from scratch. Indeed, had Don Bosco fallen into the trap, he would have run into a crucial dilemma once negotiations fell through, for either he would have to forego any redress or he would have to shoulder the racking burden of reopening the case. Fortunately he caught on to the ruse in time and prevented any suspension of the case.

Canon Colomiatti waited two days before calling on Don Bosco, and when he did come he captiously denied that the two conditions for a settlement had been orally agreed upon at their previous meeting. This astonishing about-face made the deceit even clearer to Don Bosco. Anyway, as he escorted the canon out, he promised to give more thought to the matter for several days before breaking off negotiations, for he had had no intention to close the door on any other settlement. He had asked for a meeting only to clarify the ambiguities he feared. About a week after their meeting, he wrote to the canon as follows:

Turin, June 11, 1881

Dear Canon Colomiatti:

As you suggested, throughout the entire week I have reflected and prayed and also consulted someone who is very devoted to our archbishop in reference to our controversy.

Yet I am more and more convinced that the archbishop's statement does not conform to our agreement; it leaves Father Bonetti no better off than before, and it does not revoke any of the charges filed with Rome against me and against our Congregation which has been encountering so many difficulties. This is further corroborated by the archbishop's attitude toward us, as you well know.[17]

[17]He alludes here to the archbishop's refusal to go to Valsalice College for confirmation, as well as to his order to Father Francesia to take an examination in moral theology. *See* p. 134. [Author]

Perhaps, if you had respected our agreement to keep my paper as a confidential document for you and for him only and then had told me what was to be added to it, we might have cleared up this whole situation with but minor modifications, but this was not done. Moreover, you told me that not a single word of what had been written would be altered.

In view of this, I see no other course than to let the Holy See judge where I am right and where I am wrong; I accept in advance their decision whatever it may be. I believe that the archbishop too will be pleased about this because the verdict will come from a higher authority which grants and limits powers and regulates their use.

However, as for myself, I assure you that it is always my pleasure to remain

Your most humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

In the meantime Father Bonetti had also written to Rome, letting Archbishop Verga know how and why the conciliatory agreement had dishonestly been sent to Cardinal Caterini.[18] It is undeniable that anyone sincerely seeking a compromise should yield somewhat to his adversary. But pretending to seek a compromise without any intention of yielding on anything is nothing but forcing one's own will on another.

Recognizing Don Bosco's determined stand, Archbishop Gastaldi wrote to Canon [Charles] Menghini and formally hired him as his defense attorney.[19] Later Canon Colomiatti informed the cardinal protector of the Salesians, Cardinal Lawrence Nina, in his own way. In those days, Don Bosco received a dateless letter which bore no indication of its origin and was illegibly signed. The writer, citing certain impressions made in Roman circles by Don Bosco's telegram and letter of June 2 to Archbishop Verga, lectured him on the advisability of settling the controversy amicably. The writer seemed to be a friend of the archbishop and to be expressing the feelings of other friends who wished to ward off a setback for Archbishop Gastaldi. One of them was Cardinal [Gustavo] Hohenlohe, bishop of Albano; he too advised Don Bosco to put an end to the controversy.[20] But each of the principals had chosen his own path, and regardless of Archbishop Gastaldi's plans,

[18]Cardinal Prospero Caterini, prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Council. [Editor]

[19]Father Francis Dalmazzo managed to copy the archbishop's prejudiced letter and sent it to Turin. [Author]

[20]Letter from Attorney Leonori to Father Bonetti, Rome, August 14, 1881. [Author]

Don Bosco was determined to pursue matters to their end. The only concern he expressed to his own lawyer was that the letter be considerate of the archbishop.

Turin, July 8, 1881

Dear Attorney Leonori:

Despite my fervent wish to put an amicable end to the controversy which has dragged on for more than two years between Archbishop Gastaldi of Turin and Father John Bonetti, who is still under suspension, I nevertheless realize that the problem must be brought before the plenary session of cardinals, and soon. Hence I ask you to take up this matter and be our defense counsel. I urge you to endeavor in every way to avoid any manner of speaking and feeling which might be judged improper for a subject in addressing his superior.

I will see that you are properly reimbursed for expenses you may incur.

Very gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

There is no better uplift for our spirits disheartened by this array of sorry events than to break our narrative with a letter by Don Bosco to his cardinal protector at the very apex of all these regrettable intrigues.

Turin, June 30, 1881

Your Eminence:

At least once in a while I have good news to send you. After a long series of efforts, privations and sacrifices, we have finally managed to finish our new church and residence in La Spezia, and we are already dwelling in it. We have thus been enabled to attract over five hundred boys from the Protestant schools and give them a Catholic education. With more space we could save a far larger number. We shall see how we can do this, trusting that God's help will never fail us.

Also, our new residence and church in Vallecrosia has been finished and crowds are attending services. The *Bollettino Salesiano* is featuring a good account of the bishop carrying the Blessed Sacrament in solemn procession from its temporary chapel to the church. I am also glad to tell you that the Protestant schools for boys and girls have been closed down once and for all for lack of pupils. Now not a single Catholic attends the Waldensian church, despite its standing offer of material benefits to lure unwary Catholics.

Our house in Lucca has been doing fine, despite grave difficulties which are gradually clearing up. We are experiencing a more stormy time in Florence, where the Protestants enjoy a vast outlay of money, while we have no resi-

dence and live in extreme poverty. Nevertheless, we fervently trust that before long we shall be able to be self-sustaining and consolidate our position, but we need your prayers and a special blessing from the Holy Father.

Father Dalmazzo will fill you in with details. I would be grateful if you would inform the Holy Father of our progress in my name, for on several occasions he gave me to understand that he took this very much to heart.

Please remember me in your kind prayers.

Most respectfully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Father Bonetti's case apparently was due to come up in September, but September came and went, without even the hint of a forthcoming hearing. Father Bonetti, worried and fretful, kept pressuring Attorney Leonori as though he were to blame for the delay, urging him to finish his defense brief, have it printed and send it to the cardinals before the autumn recess, so that on their return they could immediately hear the case.

Suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, the unexpected occurred on the last day of September. Don Bosco was presiding over the novices' spiritual retreat at San Benigno as they prepared to take their vows, when Canon [Charles] Menghini, the archbishop's attorney, turned up officiously with the commission to work out a basis for an accommodation. Don Bosco sent for Father Bonetti, and the following three fundamental conditions were agreed upon:

1. Father John Bosco, Superior of the Salesians, agrees to withdraw the charge brought by Father John Bonetti to the Sacred Congregation of the Council concerning the suspension imposed upon him three years ago by the archbishop of Turin, in connection with the [Festive] Oratory of St. Theresa in Chieri. He also promises to enjoin Father Bonetti from hearing confessions in that oratory until the real or imaginary fears of conflict with the local parish priest have been dispelled.

2. On his part, His Excellency the Most Reverend Lawrence Gastaldi, archbishop of Turin, declares in writing that Father John Bonetti was suspended for no reason touching upon the sacrament of confession or for having violated an interdict, but because of clashes with the local parish priest. His Excellency also declares that he is now fully reinstating Father Bonetti to hear confessions in Chieri as well; also that he is withdrawing all charges and printed statements which cast discredit upon Father John Bosco and the Sale-

sian Congregation not only in the above-mentioned but in any other matter as well.

3. As a canonical reparation the archbishop of Turin will also grant Father John Bonetti faculties for hearing confessions of even cloistered religious subject to episcopal jurisdiction according to the prescription of the *Superna* constitution of Clement X.

An exercise in frustration! Canon Menghini submitted the results of that discussion to the archbishop who immediately made his way to Rome, and that was all! Don Bosco waited in vain for some communication. On the contrary, Archbishop Gastaldi dispatched his fiscal attorney, Canon Colomiatti, to Rome to file another lawsuit against Don Bosco crisscrossing the first. However, he did so without losing sight of the former, for, while pushing the second suit, he had to keep delaying action upon the first as long as possible. To this end, he enlisted the aid of Cardinal [Innocent] Ferrieri, and so it was ruled that the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars would look into four basic points at issue: 1. Were the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians exempt from the archbishop's jurisdiction? 2. Were their convents and oratories also exempt? 3. Did exemption apply to the Salesians who ministered to those convents and oratories? 4. Were the Salesians in the convents and oratories of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians to be considered as residing in houses belonging to the Salesian Congregation?

Canon Colomiatti drafted the necessary papers introducing the inquiry, which, being presented as a matter of principle, took precedence over the first case still pending before the Sacred Congregation of the Council.[21]

The reader must not lose sight of the true facts of this controversy, which, briefly stated, are these: On February 12, 1878, the archbishop of Turin, on the pretext of protesting the lack of respect shown to the parish priest of Chieri, and the consequent friction, without prior warning to Father Bonetti or to his superior, had, contrary to canon law, suspended the former from hearing confessions both in Chieri and throughout the archdiocese, to the shame of the priest and his Congregation; later this suspension was limited to Chieri. Hence, we ask:

[21]We are omitting a long footnote by the author as irrelevant to this controversy, but showing how Canon Colomiatti did distort facts in other matters. [Editor]

What did Father Bonetti's case have to do with these questions proposed to the cardinals? Nothing whatsoever. They were merely a ruse to tire out the opposition. But the delay also worked in Father Bonetti's favor, for it gave him time to take further action. In October he had a memorandum printed which he respectfully submitted to the Holy Father and to the cardinals. It was a dossier of fifteen large-size pages, giving a restrained account of what had anteceded the case and the facts themselves, as well as a dignified refutation of the archbishop's reasons for not fully reinstating him to his ministry.

The foot-dragging brought another advantage as well. On November 10, on the death of the aged Cardinal [Prospero] Caterini at eighty-six, Cardinal [Lawrence] Nina, who knew Don Bosco very well, was appointed prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Council. Don Bosco hastened to congratulate him. His Eminence replied on November 24: "I attribute to your goodness the extremely gracious sentiments you expressed in your letter of the 11th congratulating me on my appointment as prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Council. I thank you with all my heart. Always wary of my remaining feeble strength, I now feel a greater need than ever of appealing to your kindness to ask the Lord to lend me the aid and support I need to carry the burden which the Holy Father has benevolently laid upon me. Yet despite my limitations, I will never lessen my efforts to live up to the expectations and demands of my office."

At the beginning of November Don Bosco was deeply grieved to find he was being made the public target of the archbishop's indignation. On November 10, during the diocesan synod, Archbishop Gastaldi delivered two speeches in the cathedral, during which he used far from kind words about the Salesians and their superiors, without however actually naming them. That morning, while stressing the validity of the festive oratories for boys, he never even mentioned the oratories in Turin directed by Don Bosco over the past forty years, but he enthusiastically heaped praises upon those run by the Oratorians [founded by] St. Philip Neri, who, he declared, were everywhere outstanding and helped their bishop, causing him no problems. His listeners instantly grasped his meaning. Even more clearly he expressed himself that evening: "I recommend to you obedience and respect to your bishop. Do not act like *some religious*, who are quite reverent and devoted to the far-off Pope, but show little or no respect to the bishop in their midst. They pay homage to St. Peter's Chair, but none at all to ours of

St. Maximus. Such unfortunately is the case of *a certain priest* in this diocese, who, flaunting his loyalty to the Pope, gets involved in matters hardly acceptable to his archbishop, causing him annoyance." He also attacked the Catholic press for opposing the teaching of Rosminian ideas, expressing himself in even harsher language about "periodicals, newspapers, yes, shameless rags which vaunt the name Catholic and are a disgrace to the Church! There is hardly one which does not overstep its bounds and butt into affairs not its own, doing more harm than good and causing the faithful to be scandalized." One of his listeners, Father Louis Fiore, was so angered by the speech that he reported the whole thing directly to the Pope.[22]

It became critically important to dissipate the malicious gossip against Don Bosco fomented by evil tongues in Church and government circles of Rome. With this aim Attorney Leonori had begun putting together a pamphlet on Don Bosco and his Congregation for wide-scale distribution throughout the city. This pamphlet appeared toward the end of the year.[23] Its seven chapters covered Don Bosco and the Salesian Society with its growth in Italy, France and the foreign missions. It also cited some of the more outstanding tributes paid to Don Bosco's work, closing with the comment that through his undertakings Don Bosco had blazed a sensible path for the clergy to take in keeping abreast of the times.

The noisy outbursts made against him at the synod convinced Don Bosco more forcefully that he had to take up his own defense in a field that was more restricted yet more important. Woe to the Salesian Congregation if in the higher ecclesiastical circles and among the bishops of Italy and the Holy See's cardinals a notion should take hold that the Salesians and their founder were unruly and contested their bishop's authority. Regardless of anything, some kind of an exposition paper was needed to reach the higher prelates and enlighten them thoroughly about the true state of affairs between the Salesian Oratory and the Turin chancery, between Don Bosco and Archbishop Gastaldi. The assignment was entrusted to Father John Bonetti and Father Joachim Berto, the latter being also the Congregation's archivist and

[22]*See* Appendix 3. [Editor]

[23]Costantino Leonori, *Cenni sulla Società di San Francesco di Sales istituita dal sacerdote Giovanni Bosco* [Outline of the Society of St. Francis de Sales Founded by Father John Bosco], Roma, Tipografia Tiburtina, 1881. [Author]

Don Bosco's secretary.[24] The result of their work was a monograph entitled: *To the Most Eminent Cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of the Council: A Statement by Father John Bosco.* The reasons for this statement were clearly set down in the first few pages which formed an introduction written by Father Bonetti and edited by Don Bosco, who made it his own.

Turin, December 15, 1881
Octave of the Feast
of the Immaculate Conception

## REASONS FOR THIS STATEMENT

For the past ten years the newly founded Salesian Congregation and I personally have endured grave vexations at the hands of the archbishop of Turin, the Most Reverend Lawrence Gastaldi, so that, besides being endlessly harassed, we have been hindered in ministering to souls. This prelate has forbidden us to use the faculties granted us by the Holy See; contrary to the Church's prescriptions he has claimed the right to interfere in the internal and disciplinary running of our Congregation, as though it were only a diocesan congregation; often without reason he has refused to admit our candidates to holy orders and for trivial pretexts has withheld from our priests faculties to preach, hear confessions, and even celebrate Mass in his diocese; at times he has suspended them without canonical grounds and in disregard of canonical procedure; he also has forbidden us to publicize in his diocese papal briefs issued on behalf of our works; he has denigrated charitable institutions which have received the Holy Father's commendation and blessing; he has written letters to persons of high and low station, and he has even published defamatory writings against the Salesians and the superior. All of these deeds would seem to stem from the enemy of all good who strives to stifle and destroy our helpless Congregation or at least to overwhelm it with obstacle after obstacle, in order to keep it from attaining that goal for which it was founded and approved by the Holy See.

Hitherto, we have endured all these and innumerable other vexations in silence. Our Holy Church is going through trying times, and I did not want to trouble you with additional problems by officially calling for the authoritative, supreme judgment of the Church on our behalf. I was disinclined also to have

[24]The original manuscript of the two compilers contains a number of deletions, additions and modifications in Don Bosco's hand; there are also frequent pen strokes deleting long passages. [Author]

to file charges against a person whom I have always highly esteemed and revered.

We were ready to endure further similar vexations and difficulties in silence, but recently the archbishop had recourse to the Sacred Congregation of the Council, calling for action against us, and he published defamatory charges against me and the entire Pious Salesian Society. I therefore feel bound by obedience to present this list of complaints to the Holy See. Since it is with a sad heart that I carry out this duty, I shall pass over in silence many acts and statements which touch upon my humble person alone, and I have proffered only charges which concern the Congregation or myself as its head and superior.

Fr. John Bosco

The statement, running more than seventy pages, lists the malignant acts of the archbishop of Turin against Don Bosco and the Salesians from 1872 until 1881 while a two-page summary points out the harmful consequences of these acts. It closes with an appeal and a declaration: an appeal to the Holy See for help and protection; a declaration of unconditional acceptance of any and every judgment, counsel and advice the Holy Father would graciously give.

Don Bosco's words that he was "bound by obedience to present" this report does not mean he received an order from a higher authority. In fact, if we compare the statement's initial draft with its final wording we are reminded that the Holy See itself, in approving the Congregation and entrusting its care and direction to him, had placed upon him the duty to safeguard its interests and defend its good name. He had this report printed in maximum secrecy and security, keeping to himself the original manuscript, the galley proofs and all copies. He also exercised every possible precaution in mailing it only to high-level prelates. This report, printed around the end of 1881, was sent also to Leo XIII, who, after leafing through it, became so upset that he exclaimed: "Let's put an end to this quarrel; otherwise Archbishop Gastaldi will have a bad name in history." It was then that he first thought of reserving the whole matter to himself, as we shall see in the next chapter.

As the day of the hearing drew nearer, Archbishop Gastaldi went to Rome, drawn there also by a very important occasion. The Holy Father had chosen the feast of the Immaculate Conception for the canonization of Benedict Joseph Labre, Lawrence of Brindisi, John Baptist Rossi,

and Clare of Montefalco. Archbishop Gastaldi used this opportunity to study the situation at close range and to win as many supporters to his cause as he could.

He had two audiences with the Holy Father. At the second, which lasted an hour and a half, the Pope went into his relationship with the Salesians. Cardinal Nina was present throughout the audience, and from him we learned the details.[25] At one point Leo XIII asked, "What is this ongoing conflict with Don Bosco and the Salesian Congregation? When will it end? Poor Don Bosco! He works endlessly and does so much good! I hear nothing but praise on all sides for the Salesians, and I am very fond of them. Why do you treat them as you do? Stop it once and for all! Rather than support and help them, all you do is block their progress!"

"Holy Father, that is not true," the archbishop answered. "I am very fond of Don Bosco and his Congregation, and I have tried to help it in every way. God knows how keenly I desire a settlement. If only Don Bosco would come to me, I would gladly embrace him. I have always preferred a friendly settlement, but Don Bosco turned me down and brought action against me to the Sacred Congregation of the Council. Let Don Bosco come to me, and he will see how I welcome him."

"How can you expect him to come if you will not even receive him when he calls on you? Is this the way to treat a priest imbued with zeal and the spirit of God?"

"I will immediately receive him, and I am prepared to settle everything."

"Then go, but let this matter be settled once and for all. Otherwise I shall have to take steps I would prefer not to."

Don Bosco's attorneys had already drawn up and printed their defense. [Charles] Menghini's seemed quite moderate and called for a "reconciliation of the two luminaries of the Turin diocese."[26] Both he and [Constantine] Leonori agreed on formulating the issue as follows: *Whether in this case the local suspension or prohibition to hear confessions is to be upheld or nullified.* Menghini restricted the first part of his defense to a statement of facts, and in the second he showed why the archbishop's censure should be declared null because it was unjust,

[25]Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, December 21, 1881. [Author]

[26]Letter from Attorney [Constantine] Leonori to Father Bonetti, Rome, November 10, 1881 and from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, November 29, 1881. [Author]

prompted by hatred of the Salesian Congregation, and contrary to canonical procedures. The third part of his defense was a refutation of some objections. The archbishop's defense presented the case not as a canonical suspension, but as a simple limitation of faculties, the inference being that it was the ordinary's right to withdraw faculties when and how he pleased, even without formal procedures. Shortly before the closing of the hearing, Father Bonetti saw fit to submit some thoughts of his on this and other points to the cardinal prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, clearly and concisely sketching out the true situation. Then, on being told that an issue was being made of the charge that Salesians had been sent to Chieri to administer the last rites to a Daughter of Mary, Help of Christians, he sent the cardinal a statement from Canon [Matthew] Susa who declared that he had personally given the last sacraments to the dying sister. This document indirectly alerted the Sacred Congregation to other assertions, cautioning it at least to have some reservations.

The case came to trial on December 17. Two of the eight cardinals voted in the archbishop's favor; the most forceful defenders of Don Bosco's cause were Cardinals Randi, Chigi, Hergenröther and Ledochowski. When the Pope was told of the trial's results, he restated what he had already said in other words to Archbishop Gastaldi: "Pass no verdict, but rather propose a settlement so as to safeguard the archbishop's authority. Don Bosco is so virtuous that he will fully cooperate. The archbishop may or may not accept it. If he does, Don Bosco will be satisfied because he seeks only peace, and once peace is attained, the conflict is over. If not, we shall at least *have taken the bull by the horns*[27] and he will be done for."

At this point Cardinal Nina became somewhat upset and said that the time had come to stop wagging tongues in other places too because also in Rome some people were taking their cues from Turin and supporting the archbishop's stand, persecuting Don Bosco and nullifying all the good work of the Salesian Society by depriving it of the privileges [enjoyed by religious congregations]. As cardinal protector of the Salesians, he made other remarks as well.

The Holy See's tribunal suspended sentence as follows: "Deferred

[27]"Exact words" as reported by Cardinal Nina in repeating this conversation to Father Dalmazzo. Letter already quoted, December 21. [Author]

as explained by the most eminent Cardinal Prefect." The latter promptly informed Don Bosco confidentially in this letter:

Rome, December 20, 1881

CONFIDENTIAL

Reverend Don Bosco:

You will very shortly receive a letter from the Sacred Congregation of the Council regarding the contention you are involved in. Sentence has been deferred, because, without prejudging merit, it is also the Holy Father's view that this be handled in the manner which will be duly indicated to you, since the archbishop has personally informed His Holiness orally of his deep desire to reach an agreement. In the hope that the archbishop will this time accept the proposal with all sincerity, let me ask you, in my concern for your Congregation, not to block a settlement in any way, but to agree wholeheartedly with everything that will be proposed to you, without straying in the least from the instructions you will receive. When you will call on the archbishop I know that I don't have to appeal to your virtue, for I trust that your manner of acting and speaking will be respectful and so tempered that you will not compromise yourself in any way, but will, if it is possible, even force him to be gracious. Briefly, you will say that you are quite pleased that the Holy See has given you an excellent opportunity to come to a meeting with His Excellency whom you have never ceased loving and respecting. You will refrain from any discussion of questions or complaints and will merely present a petition on behalf of Father Bonetti in the terms which will be suggested to you. Show your willingness to come to an agreement on the running of the girls' oratory within the limits permitted by law and in your mutual desire to benefit souls. Advise Father Bonetti to be very reserved in speech and in everything touching upon the archbishop and the local parish priest. In these circumstances, courteous conduct, even at the cost of sacrifice on your part and on that of your people, will only win higher esteem for your Congregation and will smooth the way to solve other difficulties which are being raised against you at every step, perhaps even unwittingly, so as to obstruct God's work. Make sure you keep meticulous records of everything that will take place between you and Archbishop Gastaldi, so that you may faithfully make a report to this Sacred Congregation.

I felt I had to tell you this without delay. I take this opportunity to wish you from my heart all spiritual and temporal blessings from the Divine Child, who will welcome, I am sure, the gift of your many trials and sorrows, which He will compensate with a high degree of comfort and courage to continue in

your work. I implore abundant blessings on your Congregation from the Lord and am pleased to remain, with great esteem,

Most affectionately,
✠ Lawrence Cardinal Nina, *Prefect*

The intent therefore was that, before a verdict should be passed, efforts should be made to resolve the conflict fairly and honorably for both parties. The Sacred Congregation formally informed Don Bosco of this, even detailing what he was to do: he was to call on the archbishop, present Father Bonetti's petition to be reinstated as confessor in the girls' oratory at Chieri and ask his pardon for any unpleasantness he might have caused him; Don Bosco was to come to some understanding on running the girls' oratory in such a way that the Salesians would not interfere with parish services and that they themselves would not be hindered from ministering spiritually to souls, as they had done so faithfully before.

The official letter sent at the same time to the archbishop was slightly longer. It listed five items: 1. The measures taken against Father Bonetti had been excessively severe. 2. He was given the cardinals' decision and how it was to be carried out. 3. He was to welcome Don Bosco *immediately and graciously* and grant Father Bonetti the faculties requested *without any delay*. 4. He was to admonish the parish priest at Chieri and his assistants to exercise greater charity toward the Salesians. 5. He was to revoke the automatic suspension which threatened Don Bosco were he to write or print anything in defense of himself or his Congregation. Lastly the archbishop was asked to show docility and efficiency in doing everything with utmost solicitude.

Before receiving the rescript from Rome, Don Bosco had already answered Cardinal Nina as follows:

Turin, December 28, 1881

Your Eminence:

How kind Your Eminence is to this humble Congregation! I thank you with all my heart. So far I have not received the letter of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, but as soon as I do, I shall faithfully follow the fatherly advice you so kindly gave me. But coming to any agreement will be very difficult. Three times in the past I have been summoned by the archbishop, but our talks always ended up in my being scolded and branded a liar. Nevertheless, I am

willing to try again, and I hope I shall not provoke his ire. But from all that has occurred, the outlook seems dim. On the 17th of this month a settlement was reached. On the 20th he issued an admonishment, returning Father Bonetti's case to its beginnings in terms far from pacifying.[28] On the 23rd Turin's seminarians who had been our students asked to be allowed to visit me to present their Christmas greetings, since I had been their father both spiritually and materially, but this year they were strictly forbidden to come to me either singly or in a body.[29]

Yesterday, one of our former pupils, now a priest in the seminary,[30] asked the rector if he might pay a visit to Don Bosco and confer with him, explaining that for years he had cherished the hope of becoming a Salesian and going to the foreign missions. He was given a lecture far from fatherly, which concluded with these words which I will quote verbatim if you do not mind: "If you become a Salesian or go to the missions, you will be rushing pell-mell to the devil." Well, I trust that a simple act of contrition will win pardon for the sin of becoming a Salesian or of going to the foreign missions.

From everywhere friends come to sympathize with me, because the archbishop has been flaunting *his complete victory over Father Bonetti, Don Bosco and all the Salesians*.

At any rate, I have been and am ready for any sacrifice which will make it possible to end a situation which has caused me such a waste of time.

Please do not take offense at my confidential tone of writing to you. I remain in profound respect,

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Leo XIII felt that this time he would not be forsaking his usual aloofness if he were to send a message to Don Bosco. He instructed Monsignor Boccali, his private chamberlain, to write on December 27 in the name of His Holiness. The first part of the letter is diplomatic: "When His Excellency, the archbishop of Turin, was in Rome to take part in the canonization ceremony, he told the Holy Father that he

[28]We shall speak further of this in the next chapter. [Author]

[29]Letter of December 23 from the seminarian Bartholomew Gillio to Father Bonetti: "This year the seminarians of Turin who were once pupils of Don Bosco regret to say that they may not visit their dear superiors again to wish them a Merry Christmas, because Canon [Joseph] Soldati has forbidden them to do so. We are truly grieved, particularly since the other seminarians are free to go to the secondary schools they attended to present their greetings to their former superiors. So I quickly decided to write this letter without my superiors' knowledge. . . . These are the feelings of all the seminarians who were told today they could not call at the Oratory where they spent the happiest years of their lives." [Author]

[30]Father Cravero. [Author]

wished to see a settlement in the dispute pending before the Sacred Congregation of the Council concerning himself and the Salesian, Father [John] Bonetti, in reference to a situation that took place in Chieri. The Holy Father was pleased, and specifically to facilitate such a settlement the Sacred Congregation suspended its judgment in this dispute at its last session and deferred passing a verdict. It also directed that both parties meanwhile be informed of the suitable way to reach such a goal. You will receive the official statement of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, as will also the archbishop."

The second part of the letter reveals the Pope's high regard for Don Bosco: "The Holy Father knows that you have always shown yourself ready to bow not only to his orders, but to his wishes as well, and he has no doubt that you will comply docilely and readily to the directions you will receive in the letter. Among other things, you will be asked to call on the archbishop. Please do so in a manner duly becoming and considerate of his high office. Once the Bonetti case has been settled, it may not be too hard to move on to further agreements and thus end all these hard feelings." The secretary's closing advice was: "I would like to be kept informed of the result of your interview and of the steps being taken, for I am expected to give His Holiness a full report." Don Bosco's reply to Monsignor Boccali and through him to the Pope reads as follows:[31]

Turin, December 30, 1881

Your Excellency:

I have been honored to receive your letter concerning the conflict between Father John Bonetti and Archbishop Gastaldi. I assure you sincerely that on receiving the directives of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, I shall follow them faithfully and take Your Excellency's advice. As yet that letter has not come.

However, I fear that the archbishop will raise difficulties because he has been letting me know in several ways that he won a full victory in Rome. In fact, on the 20th of this very month, he issued a new admonition against Father Bonetti, ordering him in threatening terms to report to the chancery for the very same charges covered by the deferred judgment of the 17th.

At any rate, please assure the Holy Father that I am ready to make any sacrifice to end an inane situation which has already caused me to lose so

[31]This reply was donated to the Salesian school at Faenza on October 16, 1926 by Mr. Pasquale Piancastelli of Bologna. [Author]

much time just when I most need to spend it on my distressed Congregation and in the sacred care of souls.

Please assure the Holy Father of the filial love our eighty thousand boys have for him. Tomorrow, New Year's Eve, 1882, they will receive Holy Communion and pray particularly for a long and happy life for our Holy Father, for the benefit of Holy Church and of our lowly Congregation.

With many thanks, I am

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Truly, Don Bosco knew his adversary. The archbishop seized upon the Roman rescript and sent Cardinal Nina a stiff, biting, critical appraisal. "What settlement?" he exclaimed at one point. "It sets down unequivocally the time in a commanding tone, demanding my obedience and all the docility I can muster. Your Eminence, what difference is there between a settlement and a judgment issued by the Sacred Congregation? I will tell you: a judgment is never caustic against the guilty party. This enforced settlement tells me to 'receive' him 'graciously.' Again, it later states: 'Furthermore the terms of the settlement are not fair and just. . . .' This is an uncalled-for order. It has no parallel in the acts of the Sacred Congregation. This imposed arbitration is no more than a subterfuge which I leave to others to qualify. . . . I should be clearly told that there is no intention to mete out justice to me, rather than have the guilty shielded with a mantle that weighs more heavily upon me than the capes of which Dante speaks in the *Inferno* (. . .) Look at the enormous injustice of the settlement! No, I cannot and I must not believe that the Holy See sanctions the contents of this revered letter of yours." Then, heaping insult upon insult he climaxed his abusive letter with the words: "Your Eminence, as cardinal protector of the Salesian Congregation, you have proven yourself to be its capable advocate, and I take exception to the protector's standing in as my judge, taking advantage of his office and authority as prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Council to lay upon me an order which the eminent cardinals in plenary session would never impose. . . . Yours respectfully, etc."

After this angry outburst, the course of events was as to be expected. Father Bonetti composed his apology as directed. Its two essential elements were: "Deferring to the supreme authority of the Holy See and revering Your Excellency, I once more implore you to have the

goodness to reinstate me to hear confessions throughout the entire Turin archdiocese, particularly in the city of Chieri and the St. Theresa Oratory. At the same time, I humbly beg your pardon for any unpleasantness which I may have for any reason, even unintentionally, caused Your Excellency. I promise that my relationship to you shall always be that becoming an obedient and respectful priest, as religious profession requires." Taking this apology with him and accompanied by Brother Joseph Rossi,[32] Don Bosco called on the archbishop on January 2 at ten in the morning. We will let him tell us what happened in the letter he immediately wrote to Cardinal Nina:

[Turin, January 2, 1881]

Your Eminence:

On receiving the letters of the Sacred Congregation of the Council concerning the controversy between Father Bonetti and Archbishop Gastaldi, I immediately had an apology drawn up and personally brought it to the archbishop, ready to meet any reproof or tirade of his with proper calm and respect.

This morning I went to his residence at ten-thirty. Though it was his day to receive visitors, I found the waiting room empty. The archbishop's secretary, a former pupil of ours, told me that I could see the archbishop as soon as a priest, also a former pupil of ours and now a parish priest, came out of his office. Out he came, but we were signaled to wait. Meanwhile a layman arrived and was immediately ushered in. After we waited about an hour, Archbishop Gastaldi had his secretary inform me that he had an appointment with the king's attorney general and after that a meeting with his fiscal attorney, so that he could not see me that day.

I asked if the archbishop had set another day and hour when I might call on him again. Embarrassed and mortified, the secretary replied, no, he had not.

I then realized it was best to ask the secretary to hand over Father Bonetti's apology to the archbishop, informing him that this was the reason for my visit and that it was prompted by the official cited in the petition. I was given no further reply. We shall see. If I can get anywhere, I shall immediately inform Your Eminence, and should you in turn have any counsel for me, I assure you that I shall follow it faithfully with all the calm and respect due to the head of the diocese.

Please note that several times in the past I went through the same experience of being shut out of an audience; sometimes I was admitted, but got nothing more than a humiliating tirade.

[32]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

I have given Monsignor Boccali an almost identical report, as he requested.

May God recompense Your Eminence for all the trouble I am giving you. Please be assured that the Salesians will not prove ungrateful. They have labored tirelessly and will continue to do so for the good of Holy Church, as Your Eminence, the kindly protector of our humble Congregation, may see for yourself in the report I will send you.

Please give us your blessing and accept the humble homage of the prayers of the Salesians and their pupils (eighty thousand and soon a hundred thousand). They all offer their prayers to heaven for your good health and a long, happy life. I am honored to remain,

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The report sent to Monsignor [Gabriel] Boccali, drafted by Father Bonetti and touched up by Don Bosco, goes on to describe the astonishment of the archbishop's household staff and of those who witnessed or heard of what had happened; it also speaks of further serious harassment, to which we shall return in the next chapter. A copy of Father Bonetti's petition was also enclosed. "Both documents I have sent to the Sacred Congregation of the Council by order of higher authority," Monsignor Boccali answered.[33] "I will pursue the case now that an out-of-court settlement is out of the question." Canon Colomiatti and the archbishop's secretary, Father Corno, who had been on duty in the waiting room the morning of January 2, both endeavored at the apostolic process [of Don Bosco's beatification] to convey the impression that Archbishop Gastaldi was "most willing" to receive Don Bosco at any time on any day. They would have done better to keep silent. Father [Peter] Cossu[34] makes two very apt comments: "Archbishop Gastaldi knew the reason for Don Bosco's visit. . . . But his letter to Cardinal Nina makes it extremely clear with what frame of mind he was ready to receive him."[35] Certainly, after that letter, he could not then or ever again be disposed to welcome Don Bosco in reconciliation. In fact, his letter says as much with no attempt at a

[33]Letter, Rome, January 9, 1882. [Author]

[34]Father Peter Cossu (1885-1949) was a member of the secretariat of the Superior Chapter, now called "General Council," for forty years. His deep knowledge of canon law and allied subjects made him extremely helpful to the major superiors. [Editor]

[35]*Confutazione delle accuse formulate contro la causa del Venerabile Giovanni Bosco, #93* [Rebuttal of the Accusations Lodged Against the Cause of the Venerable John Bosco], Polygraphic Institute for the War Department, Rome, 1922. [Author]

cover-up: "Moreover, as long as the Salesians have not been granted very special privileges, and in view of the duties and rights of my episcopal office, which I bear, though unworthily, I cannot agree to this settlement which does not live up to its own requirements of fairness and equity for both parties."

The case therefore came up once more before the Sacred Congregation of the Council on January 28, 1882. To the issue: *Is the suspension or prohibition from hearing confessions in this case to be upheld or nullified?* the cardinals replied in the negative to the first part; to the second, *affirmatively and as explained.* The Council's intent was that the archbishop was to be censured severely in the name and by order of the Sacred Congregation of the Council for his ill-advised letter of December 31, 1881, to the cardinal prefect, a letter which the Sacred Congregation seriously condemned. Informing Father Bonetti of the outcome, Attorney Leonori commented:[36] "I think you should be satisfied. . . . Yet with a lawyer's freedom, I shall always insist on utmost reverence and prudence. Pardon my bluntness, but I am very fond of Don Bosco."

Official communication was sent to the archbishop on January 31 [1882]. Father Bonetti immediately wrote to Don Bosco, who was then in France, to tell him the good news.[37] Archbishop Gastaldi did not yield, but immediately filed an appeal; this required another session of the Sacred Congregation and suspended the effects of the verdict. Thus Father Bonetti was left in his painful situation, under a cloud of evil suspicions. He pleaded with Cardinal Nina that if a retrial was necessary, it be done as soon as possible. On April 12 he insisted again with Don Bosco, who was then in Rome: "I beg you, Father, remember me, too. Four years I have been under censure in the name of the Church and yet contrary to its laws. How long must I remain in this situation? I am tired and beg for compassion." However, procedure called for a wait of three months before the case could be retried. The final, really definitive verdict was to be passed in May [1882], thanks to the Pope. As we have said and shall see shortly, Leo XIII had reserved the case to himself.

[36]Rome, January 29, 1882. [Author]
[37]Letter, Turin, February 2, 1882. [Author]

# CHAPTER 7

## *Libel Suit against Don Bosco for Defamatory Booklets*

WE now enter upon the most painful period of Don Bosco's life. His deepest afflictions did not come in a row but rather tumbled upon him all at once. Only a true man of God could have held up under that onslaught of adversities. It was a veritable struggle for survival. Although he was not inclined to credit the rumor that a plot was afoot to destroy his Congregation, he was certain of one thing—that any disgrace falling upon him would also deal his Society a mortal blow. While not a few of its members would leave and many candidates would be deterred from entering, the perilous disgrace of being discredited in the eyes of the world would more than suffice to bring about its total fall.

It is touching to see how gentle and kindly souls, sensitive to his suffering, were quick to offer him Christian comfort. A young priest, a Salesian cooperator, wrote from Rome:[1] "With you I share all the ill fortune that has befallen the Salesians over the past eleven years. God, who has designed the Salesian Congregation as a mighty force of apostolate, is irrigating its roots in the waters of tribulation. . . . God has allowed it to happen that the Salesians should find a powerful adversary in one who should be their natural protector. He alone knows why, but the Salesian Congregation shall not fail to realize its belated victory." Another Salesian cooperator, speaking on behalf of her colleagues at Acqui, touched a sensitive nerve:[2] "To our great sorrow we have come to learn that many enemies are warring against you and your

[1]Letter from Father Andrew Maggia, May 3, 1882. He was on the staff of the orphanage in Piazza Capranica. [Author]

[2]Letter from Joan Bosio Saladino, June 15, 1882. [Author]

holy undertakings; but, on the other hand, to show you how wholeheartedly we strive to abide by your principles and sentiments, these attacks, far from discouraging us, only strengthen our courage, kindle our zeal, convince us all the more that the Lord is pleased with your works, and afford us such consolation as comforted St. Teresa, who grieved when she was neither thwarted nor persecuted."

We have often mentioned controversies concerning pamphlets. Now it is time to take a longer look at them, for also this controversy is interwoven with those we have already seen.

In 1878 a booklet entitled *A New Year's Gift to the Clergy: A Critique of the 1878 Liturgical Calendar of the Archdiocese of Turin by a Chaplain*, was published by the Bruno Press of Turin. A year later the same firm issued a second booklet entitled *The Archbishop of Turin, Don Bosco and Father Oddenino*, or *Some Comic, Serious and Sorrowful Events Narrated by a Resident of Chieri*, who signed the preface as *Father of a Family*. But we have said enough about the booklets already.[3]

Once begun, the conflict intensified since there was no lack of fuel. That very year, 1879, again in Turin, under the imprint of Fina Press, a third pamphlet appeared entitled *A Brief Essay on the Teachings of Archbishop Gastaldi of Turin*; the author, "The Chaplain." A wordy introduction facetiously criticized several moves of the archbishop; then it listed the more noteworthy clergymen hounded by Archbishop Gastaldi, the last one being "Turin's most humble, meek and hard-working priest, Don Bosco." The bulk of the book was a lengthy, scholarly, and well-documented refutation of some twenty-four [philosophical] theories culled from various writings of the archbishop. This was followed by four Appendices written in the style of the Introduction. The first concerned certain liberal leanings of the then Canon Gastaldi. The second narrated how the Convitto Ecclesiastico's[4] demise came about through the archbishop's doing, using a lengthy quote from the *Bollettino Salesiano*[5] on the history of that important institute. The anonymous author recalled that Don Bosco had been a

[3]*See* Vol. XIII, pp. 482f; Vol. XIV, p. 190. [Editor]

[4]An ecclesiastical college in Turin specializing in pastoral theology. It was here that Don Bosco started his work for boys while attending courses immediately after his ordination. *See* Vol. II, pp. 31ff, 54-61. [Editor]

[5]January issue, 1879, p. 7. [Author]

student of Father Cafasso[6] at the Convitto and had often been heard to say, "If I have done any good, I owe it all to Father Cafasso, in whom I trusted for all my decisions, my plans, everything I did." The third Appendix reprinted the archbishop's letter of August 4, 1877, in which he downplayed religious life in general, but with allusions to Don Bosco as one who deliberately dissuaded boys from entering the [junior] diocesan seminaries of Giaveno and Bra. In this regard "The Chaplain" ironically commented: "When the need arises to malign *someone*,[7] one can readily create confusion by making a travesty of the Gospel, of history, tradition and anything else." The fourth Appendix told the story of St. Teresa's Oratory in Chieri, coupling it to Canon Gastaldi's enthusiastic praise of the Valdocco Oratory; his closing commendation, which is worth quoting,[8] was printed in large letters: "Greetings, you second Philip [Neri], greetings, excellent Father! May your lead be followed in every city, may priests everywhere arise to tread in your footprints, may they open to all young people sacred premises where holiness goes hand in hand with clean fun. Only thus can healing come to one of the most grievous hurts of society and Church, the corruption of the young."

Finally, under the imprint of the Bruno Press, bearing the date of the first pamphlet, March 1879, "The Chaplain" brought out a fourth pamphlet entitled *The Rosminian Question and the Archbishop of Turin* as a second *New Year's Gift to the Clergy.* The author wrote a brief preface, a slightly longer conclusion and a variety of scattered remarks in either caustic footnotes or in briefly worded polemical slogans merged with the text. The bulk of the pamphlet was a compilation and reprint of a series of charges and answers exchanged between Archbishop Gastaldi or his colleagues espousing Rosminian philosophy and the historian Father Peter Balan.[9] His remarks had appeared in a heated Rosminian debate begun in *Unità Cattolica*, taken up again by Father Biginelli in the Rosminian journal *Ateneo* of Turin, and finally carried to extremes by Father Balan himself in Milan's *Osservatore Cattolico*. The last part of the publication was a collection of a number of articles

[6]Now St. Joseph Cafasso. He was canonized by Pope Pius XII in 1947. For further information *see* the Indexes of preceding volumes. [Editor]

[7]The italics were the chaplain's own. [Author]

[8]From Turin's *Conciliatore*, April 7, 1849. [Author]

[9]Archivist of the secret Vatican archive and author of the *Storia della Chiesa*, a continuation of the *Histoire Universelle de l'Église Catholique* by René François Rohrbacher. [Editor]

published by Canon Gastaldi in *Conciliatore* in 1848 and 1849 defending Rosmini's work *Le Cinque Piaghe della Chiesa* [The Five Sores of the Church] which had not yet been condemned by Rome.[10] Here too we find references to Don Bosco. A footnote on page 79 recalls the question of *La Nuvoletta del Carmelo* [The Little Cloud of Carmel];[11] another footnote on page 94 remarks that the diocese of Turin was "scandalized by the fact that the founder and superior general of a religious congregation approved by Pius IX was being cruelly persecuted." Then, in a Foreword prefacing the book's third section, the author, citing Archbishop Gastaldi's statement that he had known Rosmini to be a holy, pious priest, recalled the praise given to Don Bosco in the previous pamphlet and remarked, "He also knew and declared another priest, still living, to be holy and pious; nevertheless, were it not that you and I have proof of this distinguished priest's holiness, we could no longer believe Archbishop Gastaldi, because with the passage of time he has changed his opinion and now calls this priest proud, ignorant and even worse."

Also, as we have elsewhere stated,[12] the first booklet mentioned Don Bosco several times. The title of the second pamphlet speaks for itself. We found it necessary to stress this on-going reference to Don Bosco because it sheds more light on the events that followed. Another observation is also in order. Archbishop Gastaldi always referred to these pamphlets as notorious or defamatory. However, the censor of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, whose duty it was to examine the documents concerning the controversy between the archbishop and Don Bosco, expressed the opinion that it would in no way be correct to label them definitely as such.[13] Now let us consider the heavy crosses which poor Don Bosco was forced to bear as a result of these unfortunate publications.

The chancery of Turin, to be sure, restlessly sought to discover the source of such scorching publications. A simple comparative study showed that they were not the work of a single writer, but the force behind them all was obviously a single person who signed himself "The Chaplain." The search pointed to the Valdocco Oratory and

[10]*See* Vol. III, p. 369. [Editor]
[11]*Ibid.* [Editor]
[12]*See* Vol. XIII, pp. 482f. [Editor]
[13]*Positio super rev. script.*, 1906, p. 17. [Author]

focused upon Father Bonetti and Don Bosco. Countless attempts and tricks were used to wrest from them a single line or word which might incriminate them. Hence the insistence that Don Bosco apologize for the second pamphlet and repudiate it. Had he done so for the sake of peace, he would have exposed himself to the charge that he admitted his guilt in regard to one of them, and raised the suspicion that he was partially responsible for the others as well. But wisely he never yielded to such an injunction. Subsequently Canon Colomiatti, who in this investigation had been appointed deputy judge for starting legal proceedings, made it known that he would be satisfied if Father Bonetti would at least give him a hint of his suspicions, but Father Rua, who represented both Don Bosco and Father Bonetti in their absence, dissuaded him from complying with such a demand.[14]

As far back as December 29, 1880, in his letter to Cardinal [Prospero] Caterini,[15] Archbishop Gastaldi had stated his conviction that Father Bonetti, if not the author, had certainly collaborated in compiling the second pamphlet and that therefore by inference he was also responsible for the others, since the archbishop found their style quite identical. He therefore declared unhesitatingly, "I feel I am in duty bound to take action against Father Bonetti and against Don Bosco too, for, as rector major of the Congregation, he had to be knowledgeable about all its doings and could therefore have prevented all this scandal, punished the responsible person and informed me of that punishment." Then, warming to the topic, he continued, "Your Eminence, this is a very serious matter. Please see to it therefore that due amends are made to offset the evil consequences of this libel on the part of the Salesians who are involved. I trust that the Sacred Congregation will take to heart this request of mine and, as justice demands, will rally to the defense of the episcopal dignity so shamefully disgraced."

To be positively sure of his next step, Archbishop Gastaldi showed the now famous defamatory pamphlets to Attorney General Demissoglio, requesting that he examine them and determine whether they constituted matter for criminal proceedings against Don Bosco or anyone who was their author. After studying them, the magistrate replied, "One can of course find enough material for action, but isn't there any truth at all in all those accusations?"

[14]Letter from Father Rua to Father Bonetti, Turin, April 8, 1881. [Author]
[15]*See* pp. 154f. [Author]

"Naturally," the archbishop replied, "certain things are open to different interpretations. . . . Misunderstandings are possible. . . . Certain things cannot be denied."

"Then let the matter die!" the magistrate advised. "Let's not stir up a hornet's nest from which we could never free ourselves with honor."

Meanwhile the investigation continued. On July 11 and 13, 1881, Canon [Thomas] Chiuso, chancellor, and Canon [Emanuel] Colomiatti summoned Father [John] Turchi, a former pupil of the Oratory, who was then rector of the local Institute for the Blind, and subjected him to a detailed cross-examination regarding Don Bosco's culpability in the libelous publications. A former Jesuit, Father [Anthony] Pellicani, was likewise summoned on July 12. Here we run into a rather tangled situation which had grave consequences.

In 1880 Father Louis Leoncini, a Piarist,[16] had gone to Turin from Savona and had called upon the archbishop to inform him that he knew something which he thought he should tell him about. Some time before, he said, he had met on several occasions with Father Pellicani at Piacenza, and the latter had disclosed to him as something absolutely true that Don Bosco had pressured him to write against Archbishop Gastaldi, promising to supply him with all the material he needed. Further, he said, Father Pellicani had assured him that he had rejected the request; however, he, Leoncini, recognized Pellicani's style while comparing *A New Year's Gift to the Clergy* with a book recently authored by Pellicani and felt he was right in believing that the latter had, after all, yielded to Don Bosco's instigation and was the anonymous *Chaplain*. Archbishop Gastaldi did not forget this precious bit of information. On June 6, 1881, he wrote to Father Leoncini, asking him to confirm his statement and assuring him that he, the archbishop, would be very grateful to him.[17] Father Leoncini's reply no longer spoke of a single pamphlet but of all the anonymous pamphlets written against Archbishop Gastaldi, stating that Father Pellicani had given them to him to read and then had told him that Don Bosco had on one occasion urged and begged him to write about those incidents against Turin's archbishop. However, considering this a highly dangerous task, he had

[16]An order founded in 1597 in Rome by St. Joseph Calasanctius for the education of poor boys. [Editor]

[17]We find this in an unsigned letter written in the archbishop's hand and bearing this note in the same writing: *Copy of letter*. It is in the possession of Father [Dominic] Franchetti. [Author]

replied that he didn't have the material for such a task. He had said this, he stated, to slip out of such an obligation without offending the asker. Don Bosco, he claimed, had then said he could get him all the material he needed. Shortly after, he continued, he encountered Don Bosco and heard from his own lips that, since he had refused the assignment, Don Bosco had found someone else to write those pamphlets. Summoned without prior warning to the chancery, Father Pellicani swore to the truth of this secret accusation. Thereupon Father Leoncini's letter and the ex-Jesuit's testimony, though not exactly quoting from his sworn statement, were sent to Rome and constituted the primary evidence for the accusation.

When Don Bosco found this out several months later, he sent for Father Pellicani and made him realize his complicity in the false accusation, persuading him to retract his falsehood. Then, not satisifed with the spoken word, only too apt to be borne off by any wind, he wrote him a letter whose significance would last, stating the facts as they were.[18]

Turin, October 14, 1881

Reverend and dear Father Pellicani:

I have thought about our conversation, and as far as I can remember, I believe that the following can be stated in writing with factual certainty.

You came to the Oratory to discuss some particular works of yours then in print or being printed. In the course of our conversation several deplorable incidents concerning our ecclesiastical superior happened to be mentioned. You remarked that it would be most useful to bring them to the attention of the Holy Father. I replied that you might do so since you had both the time and capability. That was all.

It may be that different words were used, but this was the precise meaning. I feel that rectifying this matter is necessary, because, from the investigation being conducted by the archbishop, it is most probable that I shall have to ask you to testify again. You might say that, having given more thought to our conversation, you feel bound to modify your testimony as above.

Yours respectfully,
Fr. John Bosco

[18]Father Berto was able to copy it, and the copy is in our archives. [Author]

The previous day Canon Colomiatti, the diocesan attorney, had gone to Rome. Relying on his correspondence with Archbishop Gastaldi, we can follow him step by step in his visits to cardinals, bishops, and other important persons. On October 14 he wrote: "This morning, on my visit to the Vatican, Cardinal Jacobini's secretary and I arranged for an audience with His Eminence this evening. I also called on Attorney Achille Carcani, who has seen the documents implicating Don Bosco in the libel case, and he was quite surprised by Don Bosco's conduct. However, since he is to be the reporting magistrate in this case, he requested me not to ask him for his opinion. Instead, he sent me to a friend of his, a highly esteemed attorney for criminal suits, [John] Sinistri by name, to get all the advice I might need." On October 16 he wrote: "Last Friday evening, the 14th, I went to see Cardinal Jacobini, and hardly had I given him Your Excellency's letter and the Peter's Pence donation than the Pope called for him. The cardinal graciously asked me to return in the early evening of the next day. I did so and together we went through the whole story of Father Bonetti and Don Bosco at great length. His Eminence, on reading Father Leoncini's letter, was convinced of the seriousness of the situation and asked whether I had already spoken with Cardinal Ferrieri about it. I replied that I had talked with the cardinal that very morning and that Cardinal Ferrieri had told me not to be at all surprised at the criminal act imputed to Don Bosco by Father Leoncini, because from the various matters discussed by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars concerning Don Bosco, he had come to realize that he is not a man you can in any way deal with. He added that the chancery would do well to start a fact-finding process in order to unmask him. Cardinal Agnozzi, secretary of the same Sacred Congregation, was also present. When Cardinal Jacobini heard of this, he remarked to me, 'I would agree. All the necessary documents should be assembled and produced as evidence in cross-examining Don Bosco, in the hope that he will bow to and acknowledge authority.'"

On October 17 he wrote: "This morning I had the ineffable comfort of kneeling in homage before the Holy Father. Before that, I saw Cardinal Nina. While reading Father Leoncini's letter, he kept repeating, 'Is it possible, is it possible?' He then said, 'It might be . . . here is the original letter.' I remarked that the documents implicating Don Bosco in the libel case would not have come to light had he not behaved

as he did during the negotiations for a settlement. Now, since Don Bosco (I went on), who is not in the dark about any one of these documents, rather than calling on the archbishop, maintains he has been calumniated, Archbishop Gastaldi is forced to defend himself by producing the pertinent documentation. That is why Cardinal Ferrieri and Cardinal Jacobini, once they learned this, told me it was necessary to initiate a fact-finding process. When Cardinal Nina heard this, he said, 'I have no objections. It is the correct thing to do. Please let me know in writing what will come out of it.' As you see, Your Excellency, it is good that the situation has come to this stage for the triumph of truth and justice, that the Salesians may once and for all submit to lawful authority."

On October 19 he wrote: "I have just come back from Attorney Sinistri, a counsel for the criminal section of the papal lay court of Rome, who refused to accept a position in the present [Italian] government. I showed him all the documents compiled by the Turin chancery relative to the case of Don Bosco and the Salesians. He found them all in order and gave me satisfactory answers to all doubts and questions I put to him as to whatever preparations might still have to be made for the trial. I was quite pleased with him, all the more so because he told me to write to him whenever in the course of the trial I might need advice or some clear directive as regards the sentencing. Then he told me himself that, should Don Bosco appeal the decision, he would take up our defense. His name is highly respected and carries weight with the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, for which Attorney Carcani, who sent me to Sinistri, is the judge in criminal cases. I have thus covered myself on every side, also because the Salesians here are already printing their position in the case,[19] and this means they are not looking for any kind of settlement—fine, let it be. . . . After talking with the key persons here, mentioned in this and in my former letter to Your Excellency and after listening to their opinion, I have identified three distinct elements in this entire controversy: the Bonetti question facing [the Sacred Congregation of] the Council, the question of the policy to be followed by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and the question of criminal proceedings. This has prompted Attorney

[19]The case of Father Bonetti's suspension. (*See* the previous chapters.) [Author]

Menghini to say that everything is moving well and that no problem should arise. *Divide et impera!* [Divide and rule!]"

Once Canon Colomiatti got back to Turin, his most pressing concern was to get his hands on evidence of Don Bosco's guilt. Since the moral pressure put upon several priests, among them Father Vincent Minella and Canon Matthew Sona, to force them to testify against the Salesians had failed, the chancery bribed an inspector[20] of Turin's police department who eagerly set about investigating on his own without informing his chief. No detective technique was spared until suspicion finally centered upon a printer, a former Oratory pupil. Several times unknown agents descended upon his home in his absence, pestering his wife with biased questions such as the names of her family's visitors and her husband's friends, and whether he had any dealings with priests, and, if so, with whom? They also tried to intimidate her by threatening to arrest her husband unless she told all she knew. But since they could get nothing out of her, the police inspector summoned the poor fellow to his office on October 23 and subjected him to a lengthy cross-examination marked by abusive language, threats of a lawsuit and imprisonment, and promises of rewards. Everything was tried as on a seasoned criminal who had fallen into the clutches of the law, all in an effort to force him to say what they wanted to hear. Don Bosco did not leave his former student defenseless when he turned to him for help. He wrote to the inspector as follows:

Turin, October 24, 1881

To the Inspector of Public Security of the Borgo Dora Precinct:

Mr. Ferdinand Brunetti has just come to see me, frightened and trembling because of repeated house searches so threatening as to cause his wife considerable anguish. Let me tell you for your own information that Mr. Brunetti attended this school for five years, during which time his conduct was blameless. Throughout the past twenty-two years after graduation, he has always been known to be an honest, hard-working man earning his living by the sweat of his brow. I therefore respectfully urge and most warmly request you to respect the immunity of his home as guaranteed by our prevailing laws and to stop the endless annoyance caused by persons unknown who force their way into his house.

Fr. John Bosco

[20]Nowadays [1934] known as a police deputy. [Author]

Don Bosco also demanded an explanation from the chief of police, but he knew nothing about it and most probably would never have allowed his officers to tangle with matters outside their competency. Realizing that his problem was not with the police after all, Mr. Brunetti wrote to the Minister of Grace and Justice at the beginning of November, asking to be freed from the harassment. However, when he was next visited by a detective dressed as a priest and claiming to be a Salesian, he had no further doubt that his so-called clerical visitor had been illegally authorized by the diocesan authorities, and, furiously indignant, he wrote to the Pope [on November 9, 1881].

But it was Father Pellicani who, more than anyone else in this sordid business, was morally bound to give an explanation. On November 23 he called on Canon Colomiatti to clarify his previous testimony; he also left Don Bosco's letter with him. Canon Colomiatti reported to Archbishop Gastaldi who was then in Rome: "Father Pellicani came to my office yesterday and confirmed his former testimony; furthermore, he stated that Don Bosco tried by word and writing to get him to alter his testimony. Father Pellicani gave me a letter to that effect. Alas, for the age we live in and its manners.[21] Father Pellicani's new testimony could not have been more fatal to Don Bosco! Besides, he also told me that Father Secondo Franco[22] too was solicited by Don Bosco to write defamatory pamphlets against Your Excellency, but, like Father Pellicani, he refused. I have asked Father Franco to see me next Monday."

How striking it is that Father Pellicani's testimony was by far the most damaging bit of evidence implicating Don Bosco in the conspiracy of those libelous publications, and yet what he really said has never been revealed. Even at the beatification process Canon Colomiatti limited himself to saying it was "damaging to Don Bosco," but he never even hinted at its substance, much less produced it. And was Father Franco mentioned again throughout the rest of the controversy? Such a man's witness would have crushed the defendant for good. However, if indeed he was interrogated, he—great man that he was, and no one could deny it—must have so confounded his questioner that his very name was neither then nor ever again even brought up during the trial.

[21]From Cicero's *O tempora! O mores!* [Editor]

[22]Father Franco, S.J. (1817-1893), after graduating from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, distinguished himself as a spiritual director, writer and preacher. He was a good friend of Don Bosco. *See* Vol. VIII, p. 185; Vol. X, p. 212; Vol. XI, p. 147; Vol. XII, p. 367; Vol. XIII, p. 219. [Editor]

If he was never interrogated and Canon Colomiatti did not introduce his testimony, then the canon must have had his good reasons. As for thinking that a man like Don Bosco could have made such a proposal to a person like Father Franco and, assuming the worst, that the latter should have disclosed that to an ex-confrere, it is so implausible that the very concept points at least to a sick mind. The only credible explanation of Canon Colomiatti's written statements to Archbishop Gastaldi is that Father Pellicani meant one thing and the canon understood it to favor his own thinking. We shall soon see a striking proof of this.

Canon Colomiatti's aforesaid letter continued: "Your Excellency understands that for the moment not a word must be said to anybody of this testimony of Father Pellicani, because as long as no one knows of it, Don Bosco will have no way of squirming out of it. Should the secret leak out, he will certainly hear of it and use every expedient to protect himself. Allow me then, Your Excellency, to ask you not to breathe a word of this to any cardinal or anyone else in Rome." Such meticulous precautions arose from his fear of being forced at some time to lay his cards on the table and find himself disgraced. Don Bosco eventually got wind of these intrigues, and toward the end of November or the beginning of December (our copy of the letter is undated) he wrote as follows to the Holy Father:

Most Holy Father:

In the midst of my busy preparations for another missionary expedition of Salesians to South America, more precisely Patagonia,[23] word has reached me of a certain charge being filed against me and my unfortunate Congregation with the Holy See by the Most Reverend Lawrence Gastaldi, archbishop of Turin, in connection with some anonymous pamphlets. The archbishop is accusing me and my Salesians of having authored those publications, and I have heard that a verdict is to be passed within a few days. Since I have insufficient knowledge of the charges being brought against me and have been told that all is based on conjecture and speculations, I am in no position to offer classifications. Consequently, I cannot possibly defend either myself or my Congregation as my conscience demands. Therefore I respectfully ask that at its December 17 session the Sacred Congregation consider only the matter of Father Bonetti's suspension and that I be given a hearing before any final

[23]The departure ceremony took place on December 10. [Author]

decision is made concerning charges which are utterly baseless, in the matter of the above-mentioned pamphlets.

Meanwhile, let me state at the very outset that I never took part in any way directly or indirectly in the publication of these pamphlets, which I have not even read. Two things alone I know about them: first, they deal with some Rosminian teachings espoused by the archbishop; second, some time ago Archbishop Gastaldi wanted me to issue a statement disapproving, indeed condemning, these pamphlets. However, since I was assured on investigation that there was nothing reprehensible in them, but that rather they were praiseworthy as conforming with Catholic teaching and opinions which rightfully enjoy your approval, I refused to put my name to any statement of disapproval, nor would I allow any of my confreres to subscribe to it either, for fear we might be disapproving something worthy of approval. I therefore believe that my refusal may have led Archbishop Gastaldi to suspect that either I or my Salesians were responsible for those pamphlets.

Most Holy Father, I am willing to abjure and deplore anything in those pamphlets which the Holy See considers reprehensible and worthy of censure. Further, since these booklets have been and are still being read by a number of people and have raised doubts concerning several major articles of faith, I humbly but insistently beg Your Holiness to have them examined and to issue appropriate guidelines for those who have read them or will do so.

Confidently trusting that your usual gracious charity will prompt Your Holiness to grant my humble request, I join with all my Salesians and kneel before you, asking for your apostolic blessing. I am your humble and devoted son,

Fr. John Bosco

Privately and without mincing words, Leo XIII usually expressed his opinion whenever the occasion arose, as for example when Baron [Amato] Héraud, the distinguished Salesian cooperator of Nice, came to Rome to discharge his two-week duty as chamberlain of sword and cloak. Received in private audience on November 30, he brought His Holiness Don Bosco's respects. The Pope smiled on hearing the name and remarked, "Ah, yes, Don Bosco! The things he does . . . and how he does them. . . ."

"Divine Providence is with him, Holy Father," the baron commented.

"Could you possibly tell me why he is having so much trouble in Turin?" the Pope went on.

"Ah, Holy Father, his charisms steal the spotlight from others."

"All the bishops and the entire clergy for whom he trains seminarians side with him save one," the Pope remarked. "But why? . . . I think it is some petty jealousy ('the exact word used by His Holiness,' the baron commented in parentheses). Yes, of course, I bless him, and I bless all his undertakings, most particularly the one here in Rome."[24]

As we have said, Archbishop Gastaldi went to Rome for the canonization ceremonies of December 8, but that was not the sole purpose of his trip. In fact, on meeting Bishop Ronco, newly appointed to Asti, he told him, "I came to Rome several days early because I have lawsuits pending before the Sacred Congregations. You surely are aware of the pamphlets published in Turin. Well, it will be proven quite simply and beyond all doubt that Don Bosco was their author." On hearing that, his auxiliary bishop, who knew Don Bosco well, was shocked.[25]

Meanwhile, as was urgently necessary to clear the way for the forthcoming trial of Father Bonetti's suspension, the libel suit for the defamatory pamphlets had to be set aside as irrelevant to it. As soon as Don Bosco received and reviewed a copy of Attorney Menghini's defense from his own attorney, Leonori, and saw that it also dealt with the libel suit, he wrote an exhaustive explanation of his view of the matter to Cardinal Nina.

Turin, December 10, 1881

Your Eminence:

Right in the midst of my busy preparations for another missionary expedition to South America and Patagonia—they leave Turin this very day—I received a statement from the archbishop of Turin concerning the controversy between him and Father John Bonetti, a member of our Salesian Congregation. I was surprised to read that my most revered archbishop, instead of limiting himself to proving the legal basis of his censure of suspension against Father Bonetti, chose to involve me and the entire Salesian Congregation, accusing us of having published pamphlets which have absolutely nothing to do with this case, basing his entire charges solely on groundless conjectures and assertions. Since this case is to be tried before the full court of the most eminent cardinals on the 17th of this month, and since I cannot possibly

[24]Baron Héraud wrote down this little dialogue to Don Bosco on December 23, as soon as he returned to Nice. [Author]

[25]Letter from Father [John Baptist] Anfossi to Father [John] Bonetti, Turin, December 5, 1881. [Author]

supply all the required explanations or draw up a proper defense for myself and my confreres, as I am in conscience bound, I humbly request, because of lack of time and the considerable load of work in connection with our missionaries' departure, that the forthcoming session of the Sacred Congregation consider only the question of Father Bonetti's suspension imposed some three years ago, and not any other irrelevant matters.

I think this a reasonable request because: (1) The pamphlets in this case are in no way the cause of the suspension which is the heart of this trial, since they were not yet in existence. (2) Readers state clearly that they contain nothing contrary to faith or morals or Church discipline. Rather, I am told they are orthodox and only refute certain teachings and lifestyles not conforming to the Holy See's wise decisions. (3) To make a correct judgment on the guilt of the person or persons responsible for their authorship and publication, we must first know if the pamphlets are good or bad. Some time ago Archbishop Gastaldi insisted that I sign a statement disapproving, indeed condemning them, but, lest I censure something which might be approved, I refused to sign any such condemnation nor would I allow any of my confreres to sign it—something that has harshly irritated the archbishop.

Since these pamphlets have been read by many people and are still in circulation, disturbing consciences, I intend to write to the Holy Father and respectfully ask him to have them examined and then issue guidelines for people who have read them or may still do so.

Meanwhile, at the very outset I categorically state that I had nothing at all to do with either their writing or their publication, nor have I issued any orders relevant to them.

I therefore disclaim the account given on page 47 of the document by my revered adversary. It has been substantially misrepresented. The facts are these: Some time ago, Father Anthony Pellicani, an ex-Jesuit, visited our printshop in Turin to have some of his book done there and came to see me in my room. In the course of the conversation, some incidents were mentioned which are well known throughout the archdiocese and have caused malicious gossip to the detriment of God's greater glory and the welfare of souls. Father Pellicani remarked, "It would be advisable to compile and send a report to the Holy Father to inform him of the situation and thus remedy it." "Father," I replied, "since you have the time, why not write to His Holiness?" That was all. I did tell him to write, yes, but only to the Holy Father. It is untrue that I urged and begged Father Pellicani to write and publish libelous pamphlets; it is untrue that, after their publication, I met this priest and told him that on his refusal I had found someone else to take on this commitment and write those pamphlets. One need have but an ounce of common sense to realize immediately that even had the events happened as recounted, I would never have been fool enough to speak in such terms with an ex-Jesuit or anybody else.

What then are we to make of the letter written by the Piarist, Father Leoncini? One of two things: either he distorted or misinterpreted Pellicani's account, or the latter, realizing that some people suspected him to have authored the pamphlets because he had even been summoned by the chancery of the archdiocese, manipulated his story to draw fire from himself and direct it toward poor Don Bosco. God, who sees and knows all things, see and knows that I am not lying, and that's enough for me.[26]

Page 22 of the archbishop's testimony also mentions a letter of Father Vincent Minella incriminating me, but, since I do not find it among my documents, I have no idea of its contents and do not know how to respond to it. Let me point out also that Turin's archdiocesan chancery has shown little sensitivity and tact in this matter. It summoned several diocesan priests, former students of mine, and subjected them to odious cross-examinations, even resorting to threats so as to wrest from them or persuade them to give false witness against me in favor of the archbishop, a party herein concerned. I think the chancery should not play both judge and prosecutor, as it has actually done. In fact there are those who maintain that individuals who are friendly to us have been subjected to serious vexation, house searches, and threats from Turin's security police at the archbishop's own instigation.

I think too that Canon Colomiatti's report to the most revered archbishop concerning his efforts to reach a friendly settlement errs seriously in several statements. I have just one question. If it were true, as alleged, that the canon and I agreed that Father Bonetti would no longer go to Chieri, what need was there for an amicable settlement? If the situation was going to remain exactly as it stood, all that talk and all those letters were useless.

Another consideration. Page 42 of the fiscal attorney's report quotes from my letter of June 2 and from Father Bonetti's letter [of June 7] to the most reverend secretary of the Sacred Congregation of the Council. Both letters requested that no documents be returned and that the trial be resumed. However, Canon Colomiatti omits the most important part, namely, my statement that the document I was sending him was confidential and was meant to be only a working paper for the archbishop to draft his own statement in accordance with our oral agreement; it was not to be sent to Rome. Had that been my intent, I would certainly not have written it on loose leaf paper but on official stationery. Since the fiscal attorney's report does not quote these words of mine, it is far from honest and in some places is very untrustworthy.

As for the so-called second document cited on page 44, I ask: What has this to do with the matter at hand? Are we to suppose that the archbishop inserted it just to discredit our Congregation? And if such were not his intent, why did he

[26]In the proceedings of this lawsuit, Monsignor Marini, promoter of the faith, labeled Pellicani "inconstant" and Leoncini "too naive." [Author]

not include the glowing tribute of praise written in response to that letter by the bishop of Casale in his own name and mine? This way of citing documents is far from fair in my opinion.[27] Lastly, let me say that rather than cite documents irrelevant to the case, Archbishop Gastaldi would have been wiser, and it was in fact most necessary, to cite documents on which the case is based and which the archbishop so forcefully uses to discredit us. Why, among others, did he not produce the well-known declaration of Father Michael Sorasio, chancery secretary, which—so the archbishop asserts—is so incriminating for Father Bonetti? Why does he not quote this very incriminating statement? We are entitled to know it, so that we may check out its validity and study whether it has been tampered with as it passed through the hands of an interested party.

I should state here that on May 26, 1879, the archbishop summoned me and together we smoothed the whole matter out satisfactorily, but early the next morning he sent me a letter which retracted everything we had agreed on the previous evening. I should add too that since December 1877, while he was writing and publishing statements against our humble Congregation, he threatened me with automatic suspension should I ever, directly or indirectly through others, write anything unfavorable about him, even though I might do so in legitimate self-defense or to vindicate my confreres.

In view of the above, now that fortunately I can write to you, I respectfully implore Your Eminence compassionately to order the withdrawal of this suspension which has been hanging over my head for four years like Damocles' sword. Your Eminence, there is more I could tell you, but the matter is pressing, and, as far as I have explained, time is running short.

While I respectfully ask your pardon for all this latest bother, I ask you and through you all the eminent cardinals to give their enlightened judgment upon the one main point, that is, Father Bonetti's suspension, and to table the pamphlet issue to a more suitable time.

Trusting that Your Eminence will sympathetically understand my grief and continue as always to treat our new-born Congregation with great kindness as it faces such a trying ordeal, I pray that Your Eminence may be abundantly blessed. I remain with warmest esteem and deepest veneration,

Your most devoted and humble son,
Fr. John Bosco

Events came to a head rapidly. On December 17 the Sacred Congregation of the Council voted to suspend judgment on the merits of Father Bonetti's plea and to bring both parties to the settlement table.

[27]This episode had occurred in December 1869. *See* Vol. IX, pp. 358, 364. [Editor]

This decision was rated a partial victory for Father Bonetti; hence the archbishop hastened to offset the untoward effect which this news would doubtless create in Turin. What was his plan? To trap Father Bonetti in a criminal trial before the official notice of the Council's decision should reach him. The Council's formal communication was ready for mailing on December 22, but on December 20 Father Bonetti was subpoenaed to appear before the ecclesiastical court and respond to charges of libel in connection with the booklet *The Archbishop of Turin, Don Bosco and Father Oddenino*. The charges were filed by Canon [Michael] Sorasio, fiscal promoter of the archdiocesan chancery, Canon [Emanuel] Colomiatti being the deputy judge. This court was made to appear as having been constituted as far back as June 22. The accused had thirty days to report; if he delayed beyond that time without just cause, he would be judged by default. Don Bosco informed the cardinal protector and sent him a copy of the subpoena.

Turin, December 22, 1881

Your Eminence:

I take heart in sending you a summary of the vexations caused us by our archbishop; it will also serve as a rebuttal to the vehement and completely unfounded charges which he has deliberately filed against Don Bosco and the Congregation. I have said nothing of his attacks upon me as a person, which have smeared my position.

Can you believe this? Yesterday, while the matter is still pending before a higher court, he issued a writ to Father Bonetti, threatening him with a lawsuit and ordering him to appear at the chancery to respond to the charge of conspiracy in writing or publishing those libelous pamphlets of which Father Bonetti is as innocent as a new-born babe.

And meanwhile letters, time, and frustration devour the hours which should be given to the good of souls and religion. All I have ever asked is to be allowed to work in this time of dire need, nothing else.

The Salesians all pray God to keep you in good health for the welfare of Holy Church and the sake of our sorely tried Congregation.

Our boys will receive Holy Communion on Christmas Eve for Your Eminence's intentions.

We all ask you to remember us in your holy prayers. I am greatly honored to be,

Yours most devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco also sent a copy of the subpoena to the Holy Father, informing him of what had happened.[28]

Turin, December 22, 1881

Most Holy Father:

In deference to the eminent cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, I would like to offer some clarifications and respond to the charges being brought by His Excellency, Lawrence Gastaldi, archbishop of Turin, to the Sacred Congregation of the Council against me and the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales. I feel it my duty to draw up a concise report of some of the obstacles, by no means insignificant, which seriously offset whatever little good the poor Salesians are endeavoring to accomplish in Europe and in our missions of South America. I am sending you a copy of this report, Most Holy Father, that you may be kept informed of our affairs, since you are the Salesian Congregation's supreme moderator.

If our former afflictions were serious, our present woes are no better. Attempts are being made today to force our Congregation to espouse philosophical doctrines totally unacceptable to Your Holiness as both erroneous and dangerous. So far we have held out firmly and shall continue to do so, regardless of the sacrifice and pain, but I will say that I now need timely advice so as to be able to give my religious sound directives in order that all our schools, houses of studies and seminaries in Piedmont, Italy, France, Spain, and [South] America may teach orthodox Catholic principles with unquestioned deference to the Supreme Head of the Church.

We have suffered harassment and aggravations very frequently during these past two years, and they have only too often drawn us away from the work of the sacred ministry, causing us an immense waste of time which we wished to devote to promoting God's glory and the welfare of souls. These harassments and aggravations are in no way diminishing at present. I hurt. As I write this letter and as the Sacred Congregation of the Council has pending before it the appeal of Salesian Father John Bonetti against the archbishop, I am handed a subpoena summoning this confrere of mine to the office of the archdiocesan fiscal attorney to answer the charges in this case, threatening him with ecclesiastical censure unless he makes his appearance before a self-styled judge who is a party in the same lawsuit which is just now pending before the Holy See's supreme court. Hence, contrary to general expectations, the irritation

[28]This letter was drafted by Father Bonetti and edited by Don Bosco, who added a few things to it. [Author]

and waste of precious time is relentless and our position may grow more and more intolerable.

The enemies of our faith are striving with satanic fury to wreck the beliefs and morals of young and old, causing dismal harm and ruin. Every day our work increases as we endeavor with some success to stem the surging tide of evil. For this we need to be left in peace and be helped, or at least not thwarted, in the good work which is the aim of our Congregation; otherwise we shall grind to a standstill.

Therefore, Most Holy Father, I earnestly and humbly seek your wise counsel and your strongest support. Speak and we shall listen. We shall abide by both your express orders and your wishes. Not only shall we follow you as our universal teacher, but also as our personal teacher. Not only among ourselves as Salesians shall we revere your august person, but we shall do all in our power to inspire, foster and increase these sentiments in the eighty thousand and more boys whom Divine Providence has gathered in our houses in Europe and South America. In a word, we shall be totally dedicated in all things to the Apostolic See wherever the Lord may send us at any time.

However, to have us carry out this sacred commitment with freedom, to allow us to work effectively and meet the needs of these tragic times, to let me govern this Congregation as I should, Most Holy Father, please speak an authoritative word to the one and only bishop among a thousand who seems to strive to push our poor Congregation off its true path, raising obstacle upon obstacle to block the motherhouse, the heart of all the others, to prevent it from going forward with needed alacrity and force it to a standstill.

I fully trust, Most Holy Father, that you will accept in your fatherly goodness the humble plea I present in my own name and in that of all the Salesians, asking you to come to the aid of your many devoted children.

It is my pleasure, on this happy occasion of Christmas, to wish Your Holiness every happiness, and I assure you that in your Salesian houses very fervent prayers will especially be offered every day that God may grant you the desires of your kindly heart.

In closing, I kneel and ask for your apostolic blessing for myself, the Salesian Congregation, our boys and our missionaries who are now crossing the Atlantic en route to Patagonia. With deepest veneration,

Your most humble, obedient and respectful son,
Fr. John Bosco

Cardinal Nina was not slow to reply. His letter was marked "confidential" and contained statements like the following: "I urge you, keep a calm, cool head, so as not to offer an excuse to your oppo-

nent. . . . As for the summons, it shows ever more clearly the bad disposition of the chancery and of its leader. From the wording of the summons which refers to Father Bonetti as 'the writer' of those pamphlets, one should infer that the fiscal attorney has proof of the accused's guilt. According to Father Leoncini's letter, the accusation would rest squarely on your shoulders. Why, therefore, were you not subpoenaed by the court? Maybe to divert the public's overwhelming anger and exasperation from your inquisitors? I see that Canon Colomiatti is a fit tool in the hand of his master." He then advised Don Bosco not to send his report to the cardinals, as the time had not yet come.

The cardinal was correct about Don Bosco's not being haled before the chancery court, but whatever is deferred is not canceled. He got a summons dated January 5, 1882 and personally served by Mr. Aghemo, courier of the archdiocese, on January 7 at about ten in the morning. The prosecutor's charge was twofold: that Don Bosco had ordered the libelous pamphlets and that he had supplied data to its actual author. Let it be borne in mind that this was meant to be the archbishop's true response to the audience that Don Bosco had requested on January 2—a giant step forward indeed toward the friendly settlement requested by Rome! We can guess how sincerely Archbishop Gastaldi could be "totally disposed" to receive Don Bosco that same morning or any following day, as Canon Colomiatti claimed at the process of Don Bosco's beatification.

Furthermore, how odd it was that the libel issue had already been filed with the Sacred Congregation of the Council, and no less at the request of the archbishop himself. In fact his letter to the Sacred Congregation on December 29, 1880, had denounced Don Bosco and Father Bonetti as the pamphlet writers, and the archbishop's brief of the Bonetti case stated: "I demand and insist that the Sacred Congregation of the Council take action in the case of Bonetti as co-author, if not sole author, of the libelous booklet." He repeated his charge on June 21, 1881, demanding some action. Therefore since the archbishop had already chosen the Sacred Congregation of the Council to adjudicate the alleged libel criminal action, the matter was entirely out of his jurisdiction and he had no legal basis to start any other criminal proceedings. Don Bosco immediately sought the advice of Cardinal Nina on what was he to do:

Turin, January 7, 1882

Your Eminence:

Behold, a brand new sign of good will favoring a friendly settlement! The enclosed copy of the archbishop's subpoena makes all clear. Seemingly, the archbishop wants to drag things out and make me waste both time and money.

1. I now need your advice: Must I appear while the case is being tried by a higher court? If so, may I request a hearing in another court? May an ordinary summon at will the superior of an ecclesiastical congregation and thus throw into confusion a poor religious community against which the ordinary has no legal case and which seeks only to labor for the welfare of souls unfortunately well on the way to damnation?

2. I should go to France on the tenth of this month to solicit funds for the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice in Rome because we are running out of money. Should I go or should I stay here and seriously endanger the project assigned me so insistently by the Holy Father in his zeal and charity?

3. I have taken steps to delay my departure to the 16th, but I cannot defer it beyond that date because of appointments I have already made to receive substantial contributions.

My Salesians and I are in dire need of help, counsel and comfort, and we trustfully look to you, our well deserving protector.

I have never asked and shall never ask for anything but peace and tranquility, so that I may carry out my holy ministry on behalf of greatly imperiled souls.

These new charges have arisen because I will not alter my stand. I am against Rosmini: that is why I am being falsely blamed for those pamphlets.

I am not their author. My stand has been to profess the truths of our faith and to follow every directive, every counsel, every desire of the Supreme Pontiff.

In the Lord Jesus Christ, with greatest gratitude and profound veneration,

Yours most devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

In his letter to Monsignor Boccali explaining why he had failed to obtain an audience with Archbishop Gastaldi, Don Bosco enclosed a copy of the summons. The monsignor replied thus on January 9, 1882: "Be patient. Don't lose heart. If you had nothing to do with those pamphlets, the outcome of this new trial can only be in your favor."

Meanwhile the opposition in Turin pursued its course relentlessly. On January 12, just days after both summonses had been served, the

appointment of Canon Colomiatti as deputy judge was announced; the document was ante-dated by seven months. On January 18 Father Bonetti filed a plea impugning the legality and competence of that court for two reasons: the retroactive date and the fact that Archbishop Gastaldi was himself one of the principals in the case. He therefore notified the chancery that he had asked the Salesian procurator in Rome to request the Sacred Congregation of the Council, already involved in the case, to appoint as a special judge either the bishop of a neighboring diocese or a competent, impartial clergyman who would take over all the pertinent documentation and initiate a canonical process to be later sent to the Sacred Congregation for its verdict or for any other action. As per counsel of his attorney, Leonori, the plea was filed in Father Bonetti's name out of respect for Don Bosco because, in the attorney's words, "this truly holy and charitable man should not be exposed to a lawsuit."[29] Canon Colomiatti rejected the charge of incompetence and again ordered Father Bonetti to appear.

Instead of obeying, Father Bonetti appealed to Rome. His appeal was granted without the slightest difficulty, and the Sacred Congregation of the Council enjoined the archbishop from proceeding against either Don Bosco or Father Bonetti, delegating Archbishop [Celestine] Fissore of Vercelli to compile all the documentation and send it to the Sacred Congregation of the Council, which would then decide the case. Thus, the accused were no longer accountable to the chancery of Turin in this matter.

Here let us make a brief digression. In the last week of January [1882] Bishop [David] Riccardi of Ivrea was in Turin, most certainly with the consent of his metropolitan, Archbishop Gastaldi, since he was celebrating Mass wherever requested within the archdiocese. The Salesians sent him two invitations: Father Rua asked him to celebrate the Community Mass at the Oratory on the feast of St. Francis de Sales, January 29, and Father Francesia requested his presence at Valsalice for the same feast which had been postponed two days. He graciously accepted both invitations. Later, however, after having dined with Archbishop Gastaldi, he wrote to the Oratory explaining that unforeseen circumstances prevented his keeping his commitment; he

[29]Letter to Father Bonetti, Rome, January 9, 1882. [Author]

sent a similar letter to the director of Valsalice. On leaving Turin, he confided to Father [James] Margotti[30] that he was leaving in utter discontent because he could not see how the metropolitan archbishop could forbid a suffragan of his to celebrate Mass in a religious house. He asked Father Margotti to convey his regrets to the Salesians.

Since Don Bosco was in Rome when Archbishop Fissore arrived in Turin to carry out his assignment, he spoke with Father Rua. His only task was to question witnesses, if any, take their own sworn statements, and send everything to Rome. Instead, complying with Archbishop Gastaldi's wish, he tried to bring about a reconciliation, apparently with Father Rua's acquiescence. Furthermore, the archbishop had also asked Bishop [Stanislaus] Eula [of Novara] and Bishop [David] Riccardi, who had come to Turin, to work out a friendly settlement through the good offices of Father [Celestine] Durando. The two prelates went to Valsalice for a festive celebration, and after the entertainment they took him aside and pressured him to go along with the archbishop's wish. When Don Bosco got news of this from letters of Father Bonetti and Father Durando, he wept almost for grief that his sons' good faith should be thus caught off guard, and immediately he sent this exact message to Father Rua: "Neither Father Bonetti nor anyone else in the house is to deal with this matter without previous counsel from the Sacred Congregation of the Council, and always in agreement with Don Bosco. This advice comes from competent authority."[31] At this stage, searching for a friendly settlement offered little hope for victory, while, on the part of the Salesians, any cooperation with that search was equivalent to admitting their fear of a well-deserved guilty verdict.

Always aiming toward a settlement, Archbishop Fissore, after obtaining a statement signed by Father Rua and Father Bonetti repudiating the libelous pamphlets, tried to win a similar statement from Don Bosco to present it to Archbishop Gastaldi. Don Bosco, however, not only declined, but also sought unsuccessfully to get back the other signed statement. Nevertheless, he did personally hand to Cardinal Nina the following letter:

[30]Founder, editor and publisher of *Unità Cattolica*. [Editor]

[31]Letter from Father Berto to Father Bonetti, Rome, April 8, 1882. [Author]

Rome, May 8, 1882

Your Eminence:

An amicable settlement of Father John Bonetti's case has always been a fervent wish of mine. On several occasions I have made similar proposals to His Excellency, the archbishop of Turin, which he accepted but later turned down. One was made in 1879. On May 26 he himself summoned me. I obliged and we agreed that Father Bonetti's faculties to hear confessions throughout the Turin archdiocese were to be restored, leaving it to my prudence not to assign him to Chieri, although he was not banned from there, and that if he should occasionally go there to preach or hear confessions, he would not be censured in any way by the ecclesiastical authority. This proposal was accepted. I notified Father Bonetti, and he was very glad. We all felt very relieved that a settlement had finally been reached in a controversy which had caused us such a huge waste of time that we could have spent on the care of souls. However, very early the next morning, May 27, I was handed a letter from the archbishop which revoked indefinitely all that we had agreed to on the previous day.

At this stage I see no other solution fair to both parties than that proposed and accepted in May 1879, that is:

1. The archbishop of Turin shall grant Father Bonetti faculties for confessions throughout the entire archdiocese of Turin.

2. Father Bonetti shall continue working as a good priest for God's greater glory as befits an honest, zealous clergyman.

3. To lay all these matters to rest, the archbishop shall withdraw two letters, respectively dated November 25 and December 1, 1877, threatening Father John Bosco with automatic suspension should he write, print or distribute any material written or oral which might prove derogatory to the archbishop of Turin.

These withdrawn letters shall be burned and nothing more said about them.

As to the matter of the pamphlets, I declare that neither I nor my Salesians were ever in any way, as far as I know, involved. I have always disapproved and still do disapprove of language derogatory to ecclesiastical authority. I am also most willing to repudiate anything contained in those pamphlets which is pointed out to me as being reprehensible in the eyes of the Church. However, those who have read and studied these pamphlets agree that the subject matter of the pamphlets, or alleged libels, is fully in accord with principles and concepts recently endorsed by the Holy Father.

Lastly, whatever the Holy Father or you may judge favorable to God's greater glory, I am ready to accept unconditionally.

Yours most devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

The following comments were attached to this letter:

Rome, May 8, 1882

It must be borne in mind that identical proposals for a settlement have on other occasions been made to His Excellency, the archbishop of Turin. He first agreed to them, then modified them, and finally rejected them.

He rudely refused to give me an audience on January 2, 1882, when I called on him in Your Eminence's name and even in the name of the Holy Father, to work out an amicable settlement.

For the past few days, he, the archbishop of Turin, has been bandying about—and even sent word to me through my own religious—that Don Bosco is a most infamous character, an impostor who concocts miracles and then publishes them as happening through the intervention of Our Lady.

He also adds that Rome mishandles everything and that in Rome what matters is whom you know and so on.

These things seem hardly helpful for reaching an amicable agreement, all the more so after the Sacred Congregation of the Council has issued an authoritative statement.

The cardinal thought Don Bosco's statement too concise and expressed the wish for a more exhaustive presentation.[32] Don Bosco complied and had Father Bonetti draw up another. The cardinal also suggested that he get a retraction from Father Leoncini and Father Pellicani about that famous letter which bothered the Pope no end.[33] Father Leoncini would not hear of it, but the fact that the Turin tribunal for Don Bosco's beatification qualified him as a man "too naive," a simpleton, considerably undermined his credibility and presented him as one who can easily misconstrue things and let himself be taken in. Father Pellicani, regretting that the charge should still be pending against Don Bosco, felt bound in conscience for the sake of truth to make the following refutation:

STATEMENT

I have learned that because of a sworn statement which I made in holy obedience to the chancery of the archdiocese of Turin, the Very Reverend John Bosco, superior general of the Salesians, is being charged with inciting me to write a defamatory pamphlet against the archbishop of Turin. I state before

[32]Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, May 15, 1882. [Author]
[33]Letter previously quoted from Father Dalmazzo. [Author]

God that the only proposal Don Bosco ever made to me was to write a memorandum to be sent to the Holy Father, Pope Pius IX,[34] and that we discussed nothing else. I further state that I repeatedly made this straightforward and unambiguous declaration to the fiscal attorney, Canon Colomiatti, when I was asked to give a sworn deposition.

If my same declaration was not as explicit as I would like it to have been in the testimony I formerly gave and signed under oath, it is because I was told that the phrase I used then, namely, "to be presented to Rome," meant, as indeed it may—and here must—be understood: "to be presented to the Holy Father."

As for Father Leoncini's letter to the archbishop which reported the private conversation I had with him when I tried exclusively to dispel the suspicion he entertained (perhaps to undermine my credibility) that I was the author of those libelous pamphlets against the archbishop, I acknowledge that letter and endorse it as true *only in substance*. I declare that if it contains, as I am told but do not remember, the words "*he proposed that I should write against the archbishop*" with no further qualification, such words should be interpreted in the same meaning as my other words above, and that to attribute any other meaning to them, that is, that they favor the charge imputed against the Very Reverend John Bosco, would be totally untrue. I issue this entire statement only in the interest of truth, since I have no ill feelings against either the archbishop or Don Bosco, and would be happy to see harmony restored between them for God's glory.

Fr. Anthony Pellicani

There is a world of difference between composing a memorandum for the Pope and writing a libel. The second paragraph of Father Pellicani's protestation makes it quite clear that his words must have been twisted to make his original testimony seem to say what he had had no intention of saying. It, seemingly, became ever clearer why the actual sworn testimony of Father Pellicani was so stubbornly kept secret, while Father Leoncini's letter was widely publicized and even printed in Archbishop Gastaldi's *Summarium* of his position in the Bonetti case.

In the meantime other events had come to pass. On May 12, 1882, when Don Bosco had already left Rome, Canon Colomiatti arrived with authorization to rebut with Cardinal Jacobini Don Bosco's report to Cardinal Nina and then negotiate a settlement. The archbishop had

[34]Pius IX died on February 7, 1878 and was succeeded by Leo XIII on February 20. [Editor]

written to the Pope, requesting permission to send a personal representative to explain his position, and the Pope had conferred with Cardinal Nina on the matter. Once Leo XIII, who had already decided to take the case into his own hands, was reassured that Archbishop Gastaldi was really seeking a settlement, he ordered the proceedings to be halted, and Don Bosco was summoned to Rome by telegram. Father Dalmazzo did send him a telegram on the afternoon of May 18 and received this reply from Father Rua: "Very precarious health prevents our Father from traveling."

Father Dalmazzo instantly hastened to Cardinal Nina and asked if Don Bosco could be dispensed from making an appearance or at least if he could postpone his journey. The cardinal replied that the order had come from the Pope himself, and that, on learning that Don Bosco had recently left the city and had returned to Turin, His Holiness had commented: "It cannot be helped. Now that Turin's archbishop is so well intentioned, I personally want to settle this controversy. Please telegraph him that he is to come." In turn, Canon Colomiatti was ordered by Turin to stay in Rome as long as necessary, even four months, until the Gordian knot was severed.[35]

Father Dalmazzo telegraphed his reply to Father Rua: "Tried to dispense with your coming. Nina regrets any deferment, since he must leave on the twenty-eighth." Father Rua's answer was: "Humanly impossible for Father to travel. We await you in Turin." At the same time Don Bosco sent this note to the cardinal through Father Dalmazzo:

Turin, May 20, 1882

Your Eminence:

I deeply regret that I cannot immediately travel to Rome as I would like to. I just am unable to sit, and my foot so pains me that I can barely walk. Still, should Your Eminence consider my presence essential, I shall set out on the 24th of this month. I shall have to make some brief stops along the way, but hopefully will be in Rome about midday of the 26th.

Please pardon this unintentional delay. I am honored to be,

Yours devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

[35]Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, May 21, 1882. [Author]

In a covering note to his procurator, Don Bosco plainly spoke about his ailment. He had to be explicit to dispel any suspicion that he was suffering from a "diplomatic ailment."

Turin, May 20, 1882

My dear Father Dalmazzo:

Read this letter and bring it to Cardinal Nina. My sickness is of no consequence. An inflammation on my backside keeps me from traveling by train. Also, my feet are swollen with two sores that are not diplomatically induced. Try to find out why I am so hastily wanted in Rome. If it cannot be avoided, I am ready to set out at once, come what may.

If you can come, do so and we will talk things over and then you can accompany me back.

Regards to Ventrelli and Father Barale and our other dear confreres: Father Braga, Father Savio, Father Cagnoli, etc. Write me immediately if necessary. God bless us all. Amen.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

As Father Albera testified at the beatification process, he was actually suffering from hemorrhoids.

After hearing Canon Colomiatti, the Pope was displeased by Don Bosco's report to Cardinal Nina, not only calling it out of place, but also charging that it contained untruths, since Archbishop Gastaldi, who rejected every word of it, brought forward arguments in refutation. As soon as Don Bosco was told of this, he had Father Bonetti send the following comments to Cardinal Nina, asking him to bear them in mind when speaking with Canon Colomiatti:

1. The Bonetti case must be kept distinct from anything else. It has nothing to do with either the libelous writings or my report or any other question raised before or after. This is in view of the decision already issued by the authoritative Sacred Congregation of the Council.

2. It should be borne in mind that my report was written in response to the complaints lodged by the archbishop of Turin and published in the press; the charges demanded an adequate reply, lest extremely serious accusations against the Salesian Congregation be accepted as true. Our sole wealth is our

good name and the moral support we need to labor for God's greater glory and the salvation of souls.

3. The facts presented in my report are all backed by authentic documents.

4. If Canon Colomiatti has any arguments proving that the facts set forth in my report are untrue, Don Bosco asks that they be communicated to him in *writing*, *not verbally*, so that he may either correct his statement or respond to them properly.

Meanwhile, it helps to point out that even after the settlement was reached, incidents took place which give us reason to fear that any hope of a happy and peaceful outcome was no more than an illusion. In this regard Don Bosco telegraphed Father Dalmazzo to return to Turin and personally update him on the highlights of the case.

These few lines from Don Bosco served as introduction to the cardinal:

Turin, May 22, 1882

Your Eminence:

Father Bonetti's comments have been written in my name. We are sending you these letters by the hand of Monsignor Marini, who has honored us by his presence today. I am expecting Father Dalmazzo and will send him back to Rome with all necessary faculties.

Please remember me in your kind prayers and send me your blessing.

I am greatly honored to be,

Yours most devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

One of our unpromising incidents which Father Bonetti pointed out took place at the Valsalice College. The regional Catholic Convention[36] met in Turin in April, Duke [Scipio] Salviati presiding; the archbishop had not been well and so had not attended. To entertain the delegates Father [John Baptist] Francesia staged a Latin play in their honor in the spacious school chapel, turning it into an auditorium for the occasion. Nothing in the play was unbecoming to the dignity of the place; in fact,

[36]*See* Vol. XIV, p. 374. [Editor]

the bishops of Novara and Ivrea were present and took no offense.[37] Even in Rome, performances were very often staged in public churches as, for example, in December 1881 in the Church of the Holy Apostles, and at St. Vitalis in May 1882. However, the archbishop of Turin chose to turn the Valsalice incident into a battle cry. Father Francesia was summoned to the chancery, denied a chance to speak, and charges were lodged against him in Rome. "It was my intention to use this opportunity to witness to our Catholic faith, to our apostolic, *papal* faith, and instead we got hit by both ends," wrote Father Francesia.[38] "A disreputable Turin newspaper, which would have gleefully made a mountain out of a molehill if a profanation [of a church] had taken place, attacked us mercilessly because of our unswerving loyalty to the Pope, and now I hear that our archbishop is once more on our heels as if we had profaned the temple."

That "once more on our heels" was a probable allusion to another recent event at our Valsalice College where Chevalier Besson was a hired teacher of German. He was a convert from Protestantism and the chairman of a very popular association known as "Catholic Courage." One day Archbishop Gastaldi invited him to dinner. From the very outset he was bombarded with endless talk about Don Bosco, the Salesians, their schools, mostly their faults. The worst was still to come. On leaving the table, the archbishop took the professor aside. "You teach at the Valsalice College and should be in on a few things," he said. "Tell me, isn't it true that there are immoral goings-on among the staff?" The professor was shocked and pained by the question; he resolutely denied it and then both orally and in writing told the director about it, expressing his utter disgust.

Other events, by no means friendly, were the obstacles that the archbishop continually kept throwing in the way of the consecration of the Church of St. John the Evangelist, as we shall relate in due course. Just now we cannot refrain from speaking about his last[39] Lenten pastoral letter. Its two final pages were packed with obvious allusions to Don Bosco and the Salesians. A cover letter expressly demanded that

[37]That performance brought the director a flattering letter from Duke Salviati. [Author]
[38]Letter to Father Dalmazzo, Turin, May 24, 1882. [Author]
[39]Archbishop Gastaldi died in mid-morning of March 25, 1883. [Author]

the entire pastoral be read and explained to the people. Some priests omitted the last two pages.

In brief, the further we walk this "Way of the Cross" whose conclusion we shall narrate in the next chapter, the more easily we can understand Don Bosco's touching expression of grief when in 1882 he told Canon Colomiatti and others present, requesting the canon to quote his words to Archbishop Gastaldi, "All he need do now is plunge a knife into my heart."

Yet discouragement was not his, only strong faith in God and in the justice of his cause. Some years later, Father Berto voiced his regret that in such a conflict it had not always been possible to fight in the open, so that covert tactics had to be resorted to in order to defeat his adversary with his own strategy. Don Bosco let him finish and then commented, "It was the Lord who guided the course of events!"

# CHAPTER 8

## *Leo XIII's Settlement of the Bonetti Controversy*

DURING the summer of 1884, since his health was poor, Don Bosco spent a few weeks at Pinerolo with Bishop Philip Chiesa. Father Lemoyne went with him. One day, quite abruptly, he told his future biographer, "It might be wise to destroy all our correspondence with Archbishop Gastaldi with all pertinent documents." Hiding his utter astonishment, Father Lemoyne asked, "What would we have left to record of the Oratory's history from 1872 to 1883?" "Just say that Don Bosco kept up his usual work," he replied. He continued speaking with such conviction that Father Lemoyne, fearing a specific order to that effect, took advantage of another person's approach to excuse himself and leave Don Bosco with his visitor. When they later returned to Turin, the topic was never mentioned again. However, to say the least, if prudence required that such documents be destroyed, it would have been imperative for Don Bosco's adversary to do likewise with his correspondence with the Salesians lest the historical truth be badly one-sided. If, for example, Canon Colomiatti's letters from Rome to Archbishop Gastaldi about the matters then in hand were to be in other people's possession today with no authentic copies available of what Don Bosco had then written or had others write, we would most certainly have a very arduous task trying to refute the charges brought against him by the canon's letters. But, things being as they are, we have been enabled to give each side its due and shall continue to do so.

Father Dalmazzo, heeding Father Rua's summons, immediately left Rome for Turin, from where his report on Don Bosco's health to Cardinal Nina was hardly encouraging, for though he was up and about, he was in no condition to take a trip. Father Dalmazzo also sent the cardinal additional information, backed by the documentary evi-

dence which he had requested concerning the play given in the Valsalice chapel, so as to counter this latest charge.[1] His Eminence replied:

Rome, May 27, 1882

Reverend and dear Father,

I thank you for your letter and enclosures which I have received. However, Monsignor Marini had already briefed me on the facts of the case.

What is taking place is providential. When you see Father Bonetti, please tell him I have received his letter. Thank him for me and give him my regards.

However, your news of poor Don Bosco has on the one hand grieved me and on the other given me comfort. What I mean is that I would not wish him to suffer, but in some way his role in this life is to play the part of Job. Please offer him my sympathy. If his health does not permit him to travel, it will be necessary for him, if we are to follow the Holy Father's express will, to write a letter investing you with full power of attorney; in it he is also to state that he had already told me, his cardinal protector, of his intent to come to a friendly settlement with the archbishop. I, in turn, have already informed the Holy Father that under all circumstances Don Bosco is ready to accept gracefully all the conditions which His Holiness, in his enlightened justice, will see fit to lay down, and that he and his Congregation will be honored to be docile sons of the Holy See.

Please see to it that you come back with all haste. Meanwhile, I remain with the highest esteem

Most affectionately at your service,
Lawrence Cardinal Nina, *Protector*

Without the slightest hesitation Don Bosco did as the cardinal protector suggested and wrote the two following letters, one to Leo XIII and one to Cardinal Nina.

Turin, May 30, 1882

Most Holy Father:

My health, Your Holiness, prevents me from coming to Rome to kneel respectfully at your feet and accept all that you judge will contribute to God's greater glory.

[1]Letter of May 25, 1882. [Author]

However, I have charged our confrere, Father [Francis] Dalmazzo, to represent me with full powers in all matters as it may please Your Holiness.

I humbly ask for your blessing on my eyesight, now so sorely threatened, that I may use whatever days of life God may still grant me to set in order the affairs of the humble Congregation which Your Holiness has so graciously entrusted to me

Kneeling humbly before you, I am most honored to be

Your loving son,
Fr. John Bosco

[The letter to Cardinal Nina was as follows:]

[Turin, May 20, 1882][2]

Your Eminence,

Since it is impossible for me to come to Rome and unconditionally accept the gracious will of our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII, I am granting full power of attorney to our confrere, Father Francis Dalmazzo, procurator general of the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales and pastor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, authorizing him to negotiate, finalize, and agree to whatever may be pleasing to His Holiness in the matter of the distressing conflict with His Excellency, the Most Reverend Lawrence Gastaldi, archbishop of Turin.

He has instructions to clarify certain would-be facts which have been charged against this hapless Salesian Congregation.

Fr. John Bosco
*Superior General of the Pious Salesian Society*

The Holy Father was satisfied that Father Dalmazzo, acting with full delegated power, would be able to represent his superior before the secretary of state in the settlement of this matter.[3]

The entire case was therefore entrusted to His Eminence Cardinal Ludwig Jacobini, who acted as delegate of Cardinal Nina but reported directly to the Pope. Cardinal Jacobini ordered Colomiatti to present a plan for an equitable settlement to the secretary of state. It consisted of seven articles which covered all the points of contention between the archbishop and Don Bosco. These articles were passed on to Don

[2]This date is taken from Eugenio Ceria, *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. 4, p. 140, Letter 2300. [Editor]

[3]Letter from Cardinal Nina to Father Dalmazzo, Rome, May 30, 1882. [Author]

Bosco, who examined them carefully and then proposed seven articles of his own with reasons for his proposed modifications. We now present both sets of articles; the archbishop's are printed in Roman type, Don Bosco's in italics.[4]

1. Don Bosco shall write a letter to the archbishop, in which he is to express his regret that within the past few years certain incidents have upset the harmony which used to exist between him and the chancery, possibly causing grief to the archbishop. If the archbishop has reason to believe that either Don Bosco or some member of his Congregation has contributed to that state of affairs, Don Bosco shall apologize to the archbishop and implore him to put the past behind him.

*1. Don Bosco shall write to the archbishop expressing his regret that in the past few years certain incidents disrupted the harmony that used to reign between them, possibly causing grief to the archbishop.*

2. The archbishop shall reply to Don Bosco's letter stating that the sentiments expressed therein brought him no little comfort and that, harboring no doubt of the latter's sincerity, he puts the past behind him and reinstates Don Bosco to his good graces.

*2. Within three days the archbishop shall reply that the sentiments expressed by Don Bosco brought him no little comfort and that, harboring no doubt of the latter's sincerity, he promises to give him and his Salesians new proofs of his former good will.*

3. Three days after this exchange of letters, the archbishop shall send Don Bosco renewed faculties for Father Bonetti to hear confessions anywhere in the archdiocese. In turn, Don Bosco shall give his word not to send Father Bonetti back to Chieri for the period of one year. At the end of that time, the archbishop shall not block through the chancery his return to Chieri for special occasional visits to preach or to hear confessions.

*3. Three days after this exchange of letters, the archbishop, abiding by the rescript of January 28, 1882 of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, shall send Don Bosco renewed faculties, with no territorial restrictions, for Father Bonetti; in turn Don Bosco shall give his word not to assign Father Bonetti to Chieri as director for one year. After that time Don Bosco and his delegate*

[4]The reasons for Don Bosco's amendments may be found in the Appendix of the *Memorie Biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. XV, pp. 739-741, Document 37. We are omitting this document in this edition. [Editor]

*shall be free to draw upon Father Bonetti's services as they judge best to meet the Salesian Congregation's needs. Mainly in view of the above-mentioned rescript and of the unjust penalty which this good priest has had to endure over the past four years, he shall enjoy at least the very same faculties as any other confessor in the archdiocese who, after a regular examination, has been judged qualified and approved [for such ministry]. Consequently, the chancery shall have no power to prohibit his right to hear confessions or to restrict his faculties except in accordance with the sacred canons.*

4. Although Don Bosco's report of the facts concerning the archbishop was not intended for publicity and was exclusively directed to the cardinals of the Sacred Congregation, he shall nevertheless undertake to retrieve and destroy all copies thereof.

*4. Although Don Bosco's report of the facts concerning the archbishop was not intended for publicity and was but a simple self-defense presented to the most eminent judges, rebutting the charges published in the press by the archbishop against the Salesians, and although it was based on documented facts, Don Bosco pledges himself to retrieve the copies he distributed for this purpose, once it has been proven to him, orally or in writing, that the contents of his report are not true.*

5. To eliminate any chance of friction, the archbishop shall withdraw and destroy the two letters, one dated November 25, the other December 1, 1877, which threaten Don Bosco with a deterrent penalty of automatic suspension should he write, publish or distribute any papers or statements which might prove damaging to the archbishop.

*5. To redress the honor of the Salesians, to right the harm done to their reputation by the affront to their founder and superior general, and to obviate any chance of friction, the archbishop shall withdraw and destroy the two letters, one dated November 25, the other December 1, 1877, which, in violation of the sacred canons, threaten Don Bosco with a deterrent penalty of automatic suspension should he write, publish or distribute papers or statements which might prove damaging to the archbishop. He shall further state that he shall retrieve any publication or manuscript containing unproven charges and imputations against the Salesians.*

6. As for the pamphlets indicted by the chancery, Don Bosco declares that he has always condemned and still condemns the unseemly manner and language used in speaking of ecclesiastical authority and that he is ready to declare this formally whenever it should be necessary. Likewise, he is fully

ready to denounce the contents of those pamphlets, if specific points or statements are cited by the Church as being reprehensible.

*6. This article is accepted in full.*

7. As a result of such declaration, the lawsuit initiated by the archdiocesan chancery should be dropped.

*7. As a result of this declaration, which is to be issued only after the archbishop has reinstated Father Bonetti's faculties, the lawsuit initiated by the archdiocesan chancery shall be dropped.*

These counter-proposals were written by Father Bonetti. Both proposals and counter-proposals were studied and then fused into one document named the "Settlement." On June 15, both Father Dalmazzo and Canon Colomiatti were summoned by Cardinal Nina, who bade them read the document and sign it as soon as possible, although each was allowed to give his own opinion. Father Dalmazzo remarked that, while he found reason on the one hand to be glad for the treatment given Don Bosco, he felt unhappy with the final decision concerning Father Bonetti. That very evening he wrote in this vein to His Eminence, but his objections proved unavailing, since this was the Pope's will. He then asked whether he might be allowed to sign with a properly worded reservation. The cardinal refused permission and ordered him to sign. Father Dalmazzo obeyed.

When this was done, His Eminence explained to him why he was impelled to follow this course of action. Through this mild measure the Pope was hoping to win over the archbishop and make him change his ways of doing things, especially in matters of doctrine; in fact, it would appear that Colomiatti had promised the Pope as much. Secondly, the Pope had taken into account the acrimony of certain statements about the archbishop made by Father Bonetti in the *Bollettino Salesiano* which revealed his aggressive temperament; a proof of this, the Pope said, was the letter that had been addressed to him.[5] Following is the text of the "Settlement."

[5]At a later date (June 18, 1882), Father Bonetti added the following note to Father Dalmazzo's letter which reported these events: "It is true, but I was younger, somewhat weary, and shocked that nothing was being done to end the controversy, and then there was my love for Don Bosco. Still, were I to find myself again in such a situation, I think I would be more prudent, although the style is the man." [Author]

Rome, June 16, 1882

His Holiness, aware that several controversies which have existed for some time between the archbishop of Turin and the Salesian Congregation are a source of unpleasantness and tension which demean authority and bewilder the faithful, has made it known to both parties concerned that it is his will that they desist from all discord and re-establish a genuine and lasting harmony between them through the following agreements:

I. Don Bosco shall write a letter to the archbishop in which he is to express his regret that within the past few years certain incidents have upset the harmony which used to exist between him and the chancery, possibly causing grief to the archbishop. If the archbishop has reason to believe that either Don Bosco or some member of his Congregation has contributed to that state of affairs, Don Bosco shall apologize to the archbishop and implore him to put the past behind him.

II. The archbishop shall reply to Don Bosco's letter stating that the sentiments expressed therein have brought him no little comfort and that, having no doubt of the latter's sincerity, he puts the past behind him and reinstates Don Bosco to his good graces.

III. Three days after this exchange of letters, the archbishop shall send Don Bosco renewed faculties for Father Bonetti to hear confessions anywhere in the archdiocese. In turn Don Bosco shall give his word not to send Father Bonetti back to Chieri for the period of one year. At the end of that time, the archbishop shall not block through the chancery his return to Chieri for special occasional visits to preach or to hear confessions.

IV. Although Don Bosco's printed report of the facts concerning the archbishop was not intended for publicity and was exclusively directed to the cardinals of the Sacred Congregation, he shall nevertheless undertake to retrieve and destroy all copies thereof.

V. To eliminate any chance of friction, the archbishop shall withdraw and destroy the two letters, one dated November 25, the other December 1, 1877, which threaten Don Bosco with a deterrent penalty of automatic suspension should he write, publish or distribute any papers or statements which might prove damaging to the archbishop.

VI. As for the pamphlets indicted by the chancery, Don Bosco declares that he always condemned and still condemns the unseemly manner and language used in speaking of ecclesiastical authority and that he is ready to declare this formally whenever it should be necessary. Likewise, he is fully prepared to denounce the contents of those pamphlets if specific points or statements are cited by the Church as being reprehensible.

VII. As a result of such declaration, the lawsuit initiated by the archdiocesan chancery should be dropped.

*By virtue of the powers granted me by my most esteemed superior, His Excellency Archbishop Lawrence Gastaldi, I herewith agree to and approve the above articles.*

Canon Emanuel Colomiatti

*By virtue of the powers granted me by my superior general, the Very Reverend John Bosco, I herewith agree to and approve the above articles.*

Fr. Francis Dalmazzo
*Procurator General*

Cardinal Nina sent Don Bosco the authentic document on June 23, with the following comments: "As you can see from the terms of this 'Settlement,' your first and foremost duty is to write a letter to the archbishop according to the main directives traced out for you in the first article. I need not add that the more you keep to disciplined language inspired by humility, the better is your hope of winning over the heart of the prelate. It would be desirable to try to see him again and reach out to him. In short, do all you can to show that you are sincerely in tune with the Holy Father's intent for a genuine and lasting peace. If unfortunately you should get no response, do not be daunted, because God will provide (. . .). If the judgment rendered Father Bonetti seems rather severe, you can convince him that his honor has essentially been restored with the unrestricted faculties [for confession], and his virtue will not desert him in being resigned to stay away from Chieri for one year. Lastly, most earnestly I must commend two particular items to your well-tried prudence. First, neither through the *Bollettino Salesiano* nor in any other manner will you permit anyone of your Congregation to publish anything which even remotely may allude to the archbishop or the chancery. Second, should any new motive or pretext for friction arise, please inform me immediately so that I may advise you as best I can for your Congregation. My firm trust in your virtue and prudence assures me that what must be done will prove successful, and I ask you to keep me duly informed."

To understand correctly Don Bosco's reply to the cardinal we must know that on June 18 Father Dalmazzo had written him as follows: "Colomiatti was repeatedly received in audience by the Pope, on one occasion remaining with him an hour and a half, whereas I was not received, was not heard." Hence his doubt that the articles, rather than having been dictated by the Pope, might have been presented to him by

the opposing party and all the more so since Cardinal Nina inexplicably was contradicting himself in a statement he had made to the Sacred Congregation of the Council. Don Bosco's reply was as follows:

Turin, June 27, 1882

Your Eminence:

I received your letter communicating to me the draft submitted by Canon Colomiatti to the Holy Father. There are some things which are very difficult to implement. I am requesting a few days to offer some clarifications which I shall promptly bring to Your Eminence's attention

Please pardon my very poor scrawl, but I wanted to write this myself, notwithstanding my poor health. With deepest respect I am,

Yours devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

It would be unfair to think that Don Bosco's doubt was merely a pretext for gaining time or undoing what had been done, as Cardinal Nina perhaps thought. Don Bosco was sincerely convinced that the cardinal's summoning of Father Dalmazzo to state his reasons so he could compare them with those of Colomiatti was sheer comedy since the cardinal and the canon had already agreed behind the scenes on what was to be done. Don Bosco says as much with no reserve in his letter on June 28 to Father Dalmazzo: "This is one big mess! I have received the famous communication. I am drafting some observations. However, the communication bears your [approval and] signature. If you have any comments, send them at once. Cardinal Nina summoned you to make a fool out of you. We shall try to get out of this as best we can."

However, regardless of the opposing party's intrigues, the "Settlement" itself was a true expression of the Pope's will, as Father Dalmazzo assured Don Bosco on June 30: "Cardinal Nina was charged to put in writing the Pope's wishes, that is, the very terms of the settlement. When he took the liberty of deleting the condition that Don Bosco keep Father Bonetti in Turin for a year, the Pope chided him as though the cardinal had not fully understood him. Moreover, he had him read the entire document then and there and in his very presence made him put in a few changes. So it was the Pope and the Pope alone who drew up the whole agreement. Once I was assured that it was not only his wishes, but his express will that Don Bosco abide by it for the

sake of peace, I, mindful of Don Bosco's previous protestations of submission to whatever the Pope might stipulate, could not but carry out my duty and sign the document."

Don Bosco understood all this, but quite properly he felt that he should await the cardinal's reply. It was worded severely, since he evidently had not grasped Don Bosco's reasons for doubting the true source of the articles.

Rome, July 5, 1882

Very Reverend Don Bosco:

Your letter of June 27, which reached me only this morning, has caused me no little surprise and, I might add, some chagrin.

In it, you speak of some kind of a draft submitted by Canon Colomiatti to the Holy Father and remark that it contains things very difficult to implement.

However, my letter communicated to you the "Settlement" already signed by the parties authorized by their respective superiors, whose terms were conceived and approved not by Colomiatti but by His Holiness himself.

This element alone should dispel any difficulty in implementing them, unless you wish to forget and renege on what you have time and again stated both in speaking and writing, namely that in your decisions you would never distance yourself from the will of the Holy Father, in which you saw the will of God. To requestion again the approved articles would only be tantamount to questioning whether the Pope's mind is founded on principles of justice and looks to the best interests of both parties.

In this regard let me indeed inform you that these past few days the Holy Father has pressed me, through his secretary of state, to assure him that the agreement has been complied with; he wants it to be an accomplished fact. What am I to tell him in reply? I do not have the nerve to say that nothing has yet been done, and that it is you who are now raising serious difficulties about going along with the terms. Please realize for yourself what a terrible impression it would make if you contradicted in deed the docility and submission which you professed in word, and what bearing it might have on his benevolent attitude to your Congregation.

I would not like to think that it is Father Bonetti who is raising these problems; were such the case, I would be disappointed to detect in you an excessive weakness or deference toward a subordinate. Furthermore, considering his treatment in its proper light, I do not think that, in the entirety of facts and circumstances, it entails an impossible sacrifice.

I therefore ask and implore you once again, to the best of my knowledge and ability, not to waste time in further observations which would at this stage be useless, if not harmful, but rather promptly to implement the "Settlement"

so that I may soon be able to tell the Holy Father that the deed is done and thus to offer some comfort to his spirit, so sorely tried in a thousand ways.

With my usual esteem for you I am,

Most affectionately,
✠ Lawrence Cardinal Nina, *Protector*

Don Bosco read the articles of the "Settlement" to the superior chapter. All were dumbfounded. Father Bonetti was exasperated with the terms forced upon him; all were distressed at the humiliation inflicted upon their beloved father. After their initial dismay, they began to discuss the feasibility of filing for a delay so as to gain some time for thinking. Father Cagliero alone said nothing. After listening for some time in silence, Don Bosco asked him, "What have you to say?" Thus challenged, Father Cagliero faced his colleagues and stated with customary bluntness that he did not share their views. The Pope had spoken, and the only thing to do was to obey. The Pope had made that decision because he knew Don Bosco and was certain that he could rely on his virtue, and so there was no reason for delay.

Since the Congregation's good name was involved, Don Bosco had read the terms of the "Settlement" to the chapter solely to inform the members officially; he had not meant to open a discussion or wait upon counsel from anyone on what to do. On July 8 he wrote the following apology to Archbishop Gastaldi:

Turin, July 8, 1882

Most Reverend Archbishop:

Realizing that the several controversies which have arisen for some time between Your Excellency and the humble Salesian Congregation are a source of malcontent and irritation detrimental to authority and disturbing for the faithful, His Holiness has deigned to inform me that it is his will that all discord cease and that a genuine and lasting peace be re-established between us.

Therefore, seconding the fatherly and wise intent of our august Pontiff, which has always been mine, I express to Your Excellency my own regret for the incidents which in the past few years have disrupted the harmony which used to exist between us and may also have caused Your Excellency sorrow. Indeed, if Your Excellency has reasons to believe that either I or some member of this Congregation is responsible for this state of affairs, I beg your pardon and ask you graciously to forget the past.

In the hope that Your Excellency will benignly accept these sentiments of mine, I gladly take this occasion to wish Almighty God's choicest blessings upon you, as I am greatly honored to remain, in esteem and reverence,

Yours most respectfully,
Fr. John Bosco

That same day he wrote to the cardinal protector, admitting his own error quite calmly and stating that he had complied with the first and principal article of the "Settlement." He gave not the least hint of resentment for the lecture the cardinal had given him.

Turin, July 8, 1882

Your Eminence:

My first impression was that the seven articles of the "Settlement" signed by Father Dalmazzo were but a draft agreement submitted to ask for and present some clarifications. But once I ascertained from Your Eminence's letter that they were the explicit will of the Holy Father, I hastened to carry out the first article, which, as you yourself have stated, is my first and foremost duty. For Your Eminence's information, I am enclosing a copy of the letter I sent to the archbishop.

May Your Eminence graciously continue your benevolence toward me and pray for me and our poor Congregation which is presently experiencing severe distress.

Hoping that I may soon be able to inform you of the outcome of my letter to the archbishop, I pray God to grant you happiness. I am honored to remain in highest esteem,

Your most respectfully,
Fr. John Bosco

Under the terms of Article 3, the archbishop replied to Don Bosco's letter in irreproachable terms.

From St. Ignatius, Lanzo
July 11, 1882

Very Reverend Father:

I received your letter of July 8, 1882 and am very happy to inform you that the sentiments expressed therein brought me no small comfort.

I therefore heartily grant the pardon you requested both for you and for any member of the Salesian Congregation who, to my mind, is responsible for the

state of affairs which you regret. Very willingly I overlook the past and reinstate you to my good graces.

I also freely forego any demand for a formal statement of denunciation of the pamphlets indicted by my chancery.

Since, in the light of your communication, my two letters, one dated November 25, the other December 1, 1877, cease to serve the purpose for which they were written, I wish them to be returned to me and destroyed.

With this letter I also renew faculties for confession without territorial limits to Father John Bonetti, Salesian priest, since I respect your pledge in accordance with the Holy Father's intent made known to you and accepted by you as being both wise and fatherly. I am also withdrawing the lawsuit initiated by my chancery.

I thank Almighty God and our august Pontiff, who in this controversy has truly been a loving father. Trusting that the Salesian Congregation will always be a source of comfort to the archbishop of Turin, I send you and your Salesians my pastoral blessing. May it be a token of that more abundant blessing which I ask the merciful Lord to shed upon you and your entire congregation.

In Jesus Christ,

Most affectionately,
✠ Lawrence, *Archbishop*

The fifth article alone remained to be implemented. In compliance Don Bosco returned to the archbishop the two letters threatening suspension.

Turin, July 18, 1882

Most Reverend Excellency:

Pursuant to Your Excellency's letter of July 1, I am returning the two letters, one dated November 25, the other December 1, 1877, in which I was threatened with automatic suspension should the reasons contained therein actually occur.

From my heart I bless the Lord that the causes of discord between Your Excellency and the humble Salesian Congregation have now ceased, and I fully trust that our solicitude in the future will be centered only on God's glory in these difficult times for our holy faith.

With full esteem and deepest reverence,

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The same day he briefly informed Cardinal Nina of his actions and personal feelings.

Turin, July 18, 1882

Your Eminence:

I am enclosing a copy of Archbishop Gastaldi's reply to my letter and today have also sent him the two letters which brought about so many hard feelings.

As I submit my poor Salesian Congregation to this humiliation, I hope that peace will endure! But I have great fears about it. It is claimed that Don Bosco has been found guilty, that Father Bonetti will no longer return to Chieri, etc.

At any rate, I acted with full sincerity, and I keep going in silence.

With unfaltering gratitude,

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Once the terms of the settlement were executed, Cardinal Nina sent Don Bosco his final pronouncement of comment and commendation. On July 26 he wrote Don Bosco: "I received your latest most welcome notification and insert of which Canon Colomiatti had already sent me a copy. I have of course given the Holy Father a full account of everything; he felt very happy and consoled that at last all differences have ceased and peace has been restored, a peace that must be genuine and lasting. At this point it is quite superfluous to argue who won and who lost. As I see it, it is the Congregation that always wins out because the substance of the case has been resolved. Nor are we to forget that acts of humility, though seen by the world as a mark of weakness, are always seen by God and by discerning people as deeds of virtue which honor the doers and bear the promise that 'he who humbles himself shall be exalted.' Hence, be at peace with what you have done and comfort your confreres with the thought that their compliance with the Holy Father's decision will redound to the advantage of the Congregation and to God's glory."

Lurking beneath the rainbow of peace which arched from the banks of the Dora to the valley of St. Ignatius retreat house there had to be the raucous creaking of journalist toads. Under the banner "A Shady Deal," the *Gazzetta Piemontese* on July 26 ran an article digging up the old "rancors" between Archbishop Gastaldi and Don Bosco and giving a loose report of recent events. In tone it seemed to favor the

archbishop. In fact it claimed that it was due to "the [cardinal] protectors in the Vatican" that the Roman Congregations had originally ruled in favor of Don Bosco, but that the Holy Father had later "quashed the Roman Congregations' decision," declaring Don Bosco "wrong" and "forcing" him to "submit to the archbishop" and to destroy all "found" and "unsold" copies of the [defamatory] pamphlets.

The writer had certainly not gone to the Oratory to pick up that misinformation! On July 25, writing to Cardinal Nina about the consecration of the Church of St. John the Evangelist [in Turin], Don Bosco lamented, "The chancery itself boasts of the humiliation it has inflicted on Don Bosco. I know there will be more of the same. This gossip, loosely spread about and maliciously interpreted, batters my poor Salesians. Already two of our directors have asked to withdraw from a Congregation which they see as the laughing stock of the authorities. Other priests and clerics are doing the same. However, as I told Your Eminence, it is my intent to maintain strict silence." All of these things made him open his heart to Father Dalmazzo on July 29 in the following terms: "Every day our relations with the archbishop enter a new phase. Today peace, tomorrow war. I accept it all and in the meantime keep moving forward."[6]

Father Bonetti could not swallow the bitter pill. When first told of the decision, he gave vent to his feelings in a very long letter to the Pope. However, while he was rewriting it in good penmanship, he came to know with certainty that the "Settlement" reflected the Pope's will. Thereupon he locked his letter in the desk drawer. There it has lost nothing of its value, since it remains for us a clear record of the tribulations which Don Bosco and his sons had to endure. Father Bonetti also complained to Father Albera about the serenity with which Don Bosco accepted and acted upon the Pope's decision; he even manifested to him the idea of taking a temporary leave of absence from the Congregation so as to be free to defend both Don Bosco and himself. Father Margotti [the editor of *Unità Cattolica*] was quite eager to gain Father Bonetti for his own newspaper. Contrasting these two

[6]On July 21 Father Dalmazzo had written to Don Bosco about Monsignor Verga, secretary of the Congregation of the Council and later cardinal, stating: "When he was consulted by Cardinal Nina about the terms of the 'Settlement,' he disapproved of it, calling it a blatant injustice. He also expressed admiration for Don Bosco's patience and self-abasement in accepting everything 'for the sake of peace.'" Then, expressing his own private opinion, he added, "Everyone, except the Pope, is convinced that nothing will come of it. However, we tried everything." [Author]

attitudes helps us better to evaluate the heroic virtue of Don Bosco, of whom Father Albera testified: "As for myself, during those days I had many occasions of dealing with Don Bosco, and I never detected in him anxiety or pain."[7]

To keep his mind occupied during the months of his severest anguish, Father Bonetti began to write a *Popular Life of St. Teresa of Avila,* which was published in the latter part of August. Despite the strain of those days, it was a very well written biography. He sent two copies to Cardinal Nina, asking him to present one to the Holy Father. In his letter[8] he wrote: "In due time I was told about the seven articles of the 'Settlement' between His Excellency the archbishop of Turin and the Salesian Congregation. I confess, Your Eminence, that, at first, some of those articles deeply grieved me because they seemed to me a punishment upon my revered superior Don Bosco and upon my poor self. However, no sooner did I come to know that the articles had been prompted by the Holy Father than I had a change of heart. I felt such esteem and love for him that I immediately accepted them with full docility and submission, such as he has a right to expect from his true children."

The cardinal very warmly welcomed his letter and had it answered with a note saying that as soon as he saw the Pope, he would present him with the book and ask him to read the letter.[9] The occasion came three weeks later. The Pope read the letter from start to finish and asked His Eminence to express his pleasure and to send him a message of comfort. The cardinal promptly obliged.[10]

In November Father Bonetti again took up his pen to inform Cardinal Nina of the malicious gossip being set in motion against Don Bosco and the Salesians by their adversaries. After listing the facts, he concluded, "They treat us as disrespectful and rebellious, the scum of the clergy. The worst part is that they base their charges on the decision of the Holy Father. This is now a matter of life and death for the Salesian Congregation which desperately needs that its benefactors esteem and support its many undertakings for the advancement of religion and civil society. It needs the trust of the faithful if it is to have

[7]*Summarium* of the *Processiculum*, p. 125. [Author]
[8]Turin, August 27, 1882. [Author]
[9]Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Father Bonetti, Rome, September 5, 1882. [Author]
[10]Letter of September 16, 1882. [Author]

religious vocations; even more it must enjoy the trust of its members, if they are not to abandon their vocation." Through Attorney Leonori,[11] the cardinal replied, "This is unavoidable petty gossip." He then added that he was to pay no heed, nor was he to lose his calm. Petty gossip indeed! It flooded sacristies and rectories with malicious calumnies that are responsible for that certain strain of coldness and precious little liking for Salesians which we still [1934] find among some of the older members of the diocesan clergy.

In February 1883 Father Bonetti was once more forced to protest to Cardinal Nina against the embarrassing obstacles that the chancery kept throwing up when Salesian publications were being examined for the Imprimatur and against the chancery's prohibition to parish priests to distribute, as a proof of having fulfilled one's Easter duty, a booklet entitled *Gesú Cristo nostro Dio e nostro Re* [Jesus Christ Our God and King] which Father Bonetti had himself written to deaden the blasphemous assertions being spewed out to the people by the foul rag of a newspaper sacrilegiously named *Jesus Christ*. However, by the time Cardinal Nina replied, Archbishop Gastaldi was no longer among the living. He died suddenly on Easter morning [March 25, 1883]. Filing the above mentioned complaints was therefore useless. In his reply on March 29, 1883, His Eminence wrote: "Let us adore God's inscrutable designs and pray [for him] with Christian charity. However, I confess that on hearing the tragic news [of his death] I was overcome by deepest grief at the thought that the last act of his pastoral authority was an indignity against my poor Salesians and would certainly hinder his canonization. All that remains now is that we pray very much that the Lord send a shepherd according to His own heart."

The archbishop's death raised the question whether the terms of the "Settlement" concerning Father Bonetti were still binding. The latter queried the Sacred Congregation of the Council, whose reply was *Nihil innovetur*, that is, the situation would hold until the installation of a successor. But Father Bonetti fretted under the odious third article which after one year's banishment from Chieri would allow him to return only for special occasions. At the completion of his banishment, he therefore pleaded to be freed from any limitations of time. Benev-

[11]Letter of February 15, 1883. [Author]

olently considering his request, the Pope fully revoked that provision.[12] His decision was officially communicated to Don Bosco in a rescript of the Sacred Congregation [of the Council] which stated that the stipulation no longer held after the bishop's death. On the rescript's cover Father Bonetti wrote: "The end! At last!"

But the end has not come for history. Two questions still face us and demand an answer. The first touches upon the beginning of the criminal trial. The Turin chancery's decrees summoning Father Bonetti and Don Bosco to respond to the charges concerning the [defamatory] pamphlets named Father Michael Sorasio as plaintiff, stating that his denunciation was based on adequate evidence. Eventually, even if belatedly, the truth finally emerged in 1917, when Father Sorasio frankly and humbly admitted the true facts to the cardinal prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites in a letter dated November 8. The motive for his confession he revealed in his opening statement: "The Apostolic Process of the Venerable Don Bosco is now over, and since His Eminence, our cardinal archbishop, has delegated me as his vicar, I shall join my colleagues in drawing up the final report. However, being now in my eighties and fearing death, I should like to tell Your Eminence a personal incident which may cast some light on the resistance this apostolic process has incurred. I intend that this account be included with the court documents upon my death."

The personal incident runs as follows. In 1881 Father Sorasio was the chancery's secretary and treasurer. One day Canon [Thomas] Chiuso, the archbishop's secretary and chancellor, told him that as treasurer of the archdiocese he was to petition the fiscal attorney, Canon [Emanuel] Colomiatti, to initiate legal proceedings against Don Bosco as the author of the notorious pamphlets. Father Sorasio very strongly objected that it was not possible for Don Bosco to have sunk so low; he had far more pressing things to do, such as providing food and other necessities to so many boys at the Oratory and in his schools and missions. Furthermore, he said, he believed that Don Bosco was unqualified to write about the philosophical arguments that comprised one of the pamphlets. Having been a fellow seminarian of Canon Chiuso in their moral theology classes, he also added very bluntly,

[12]Letter from Cardinal Nina to Don Bosco, July 10, 1883. [Author]

"Look, Don Bosco is now such a colossus that he can crush the whole lot of you!"

Struck by the force of those words, Canon Chiuso retorted, "Then you do know who authorized them!" Father Sorasio's reply was that he really did not know, but he suspected the Jesuit Father [John Baptist] Rostagno, whom he had once heard exclaim, "Ah, we shall put your archbishop in his place!"

Unable to draw anything more from him, Canon Chiuso sent him to Canon Colomiatti, who asked him or ordered him to petition for the start of a lawsuit against Don Bosco and received the same reply except for the reference to the "colossus." With an air of cocky assurance, Colomiatti then asked him, "What if we were to find him guilty?" Sorasio shrugged his shoulders and answered that, assuming that there was clear and certain evidence to justify that verdict, he would then accept it. Flaunting a thick file before Sorasio's face, the canon exclaimed: "Do you see this? Don Bosco's cause (of beatification) is not going to be like Cottolengo's!" On hearing this, Sorasio signed the papers previously drawn up to proceed against Don Bosco. *Parcat mihi Deus* [God forgive me], he exclaimed in his letter, offering as an excuse that those were days of "power versus super-power," to say the least.

However, Sorasio paid dearly for daring to speak out in defense of Don Bosco. He soon found himself barely tolerated at the chancery. The archbishop, never hinting as to what had occurred, kept pressing him with unusual earnestness to accept some vacant parish, first outside the archdiocese, and then just outside Turin, until finally the priests of Corpus Domini, aware that he was being badgered by the chancery, accepted him into their congregation.

The second point to clarify is: Who actually did write those pamphlets? Didn't the voluminous file flaunted by Canon Colomiatti contain at least something which could cast a shadow of suspicion upon Don Bosco and the Salesians? The one who really delivered the death blow to the alleged evidence was Father John Turchi who in 1881 was director of Turin's Institute for the Blind. Called to testify at the apostolic process [for the cause of Don Bosco's beatification] he asked for and obtained the court's permission to present in evidence a sealed envelope for the exclusive use of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. It contained a very lengthy letter addressed to the cardinal prefect which he wrote under oath in testimony. He stated first that he was not

prompted by any rancor against the deceased Archbishop Gastaldi, but that he rather felt compassion for him as a man who was influenced by first impressions, had a somewhat unbalanced mind, and was surrounded by bad advisors.[13]

Then, after giving a detailed account of the state of the archdiocese during the administration of Archbishop Gastaldi and after detailing all the circumstances which had led to the notorious pamphlets written "by a chaplain," he openly admitted, "That chaplain was and is none other than myself, John Turchi."

A fellow townsman of Don Bosco, John Turchi had lived at the Oratory for ten years, from his third year of secondary school to several months after his ordination. He was one of the seminarians whom Don Bosco had taken into the Oratory to help them continue their studies after the diocesan seminary was closed down. Father Turchi deeply loved Don Bosco and was infuriated to see him being baited and badgered by Archbishop Gastaldi, Canon Chiuso and Canon Colomiatti. While he lived in Rome in 1877 and 1878 as a private tutor, he had come to know—thanks to distinguished acquaintances—the rumors circulating in higher ecclesiastical circles about the goings-on in Turin. Thus, he conceived the idea of writing about them. Father [John Baptist] Anfossi, doctor of letters and philosophy, who had been his fellow student at the Oratory and was as warmly attached to Don Bosco, used to send him frequent news from Turin which he used for his work. This was how the first pamphlet, *Strenna del Clero* [A New Year's Gift to the Clergy],[14] came about.

During his stay in Rome, Father Turchi came to know that Father Anthony Ballerini, S.J. was writing about Archbishop Gastaldi's doctrines; in fact, at that time the Jesuit was compiling *Piccolo Saggio* [A Short Essay] which he sent to Father Turchi who by now had returned to Turin. Turchi then edited it, adding a foreword of his own, an introduction, appendices and the epilogue. But neither Turchi nor Bal-

[13]*See Memorie Biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. XV, pp. 751f, Document 42. Likewise, Bishop Re of Alba testified during the preparatory process (*Summarium*, p. 137): "To understand the length of the controversy between two men both of whom were motivated by honest intentions, I think it wise to recall that, together with many good qualities, the archbishop had a somewhat inflated concept of his own authority and learning, as well as a rashness which often caused him to make snap decisions which he was unlikely to change for fear of compromising the prestige of his office." [Author]

[14]*See* Vol. XIII, pp. 482f; Vol. XV, pp. 187ff, 191. [Editor]

lerini had anything to do with the printing, since Father Anfossi and two workers, both former pupils of the Oratory, saw to it; the latter two handled also the contract and costs. Sales brought in just enough to pay the printer and to send a substantial contribution to the municipal old people's home. They worked so secretly that not even the printer himself could ever suspect who the authors really were.

Father Anfossi personally compiled the booklet entitled *La Questione Rosminiana* [The Rosminian Question], but Father Turchi added the footnotes.[15] Concerning the pamphlet *L'Arcivescovo di Torino, Don Bosco e Don Oddenino* [The Archbishop of Turin, Don Bosco and Father Oddenino],[16] Turchi wrote: "I thought that Father Bonetti might have been its author, but I was assured by a reliable person who was in a position to know that it was not Father Bonetti, but someone who had no connection with the Salesian Oratory. I really have no idea who the author was."

We may find it strange that Father Turchi should have waited until 1895 to come out with the truth. Had Don Bosco's criminal trial resulted in a "guilty" verdict, he doubtless would have felt it his duty to talk. "That I was one of the pamphlets' authors," he stated in his letter, "I would have frankly avowed at any cost, but only if the proceedings reached such a point that Don Bosco would have suffered great hurt." The Pope's intervention, which ruled the charge [of libel] irrelevant to the issue, did away with the urgency of a confession.

We find no better way of closing this narrative, which has now run through three chapters, than to quote the summation of the ecclesiastical censor appointed by the Sacred Congregation of Rites to investigate the controversies originating from the opposition of Archbishop Gastaldi and his chancery against Don Bosco. "From all that has transpired," he wrote,"it is clear that all the above-mentioned controversies were provoked and exacerbated by the words and deeds of the Most Reverend Archbishop Gastaldi, who, it would seem, relentlessly busied himself in searching out those things which, we would say with St. Paul, 'promote idle speculations rather than that training in faith which God requires.' [1 Tim. 1, 4] Be that as it may, it

[15]Father Turchi also informs us that Father Anfossi authored a letter about the archbishop of Turin and signed it "A Former Oratory Pupil Who Is Honored To Proclaim Himself a Salesian Cooperator." *See* Vol. XIII, p. 290. [Editor]

[16]*See* Vol. XIV, p. 190; Vol. XV, p. 187ff, 203. [Editor]

is certain that throughout the length of this controversy, Don Bosco remained constantly respectful, humble, submissive and conciliatory in both word and deed as befitted his position of founder and rector of the Salesian Society, but he also knew how to assert charitably and courageously the reasons why he had to defend and protect his religious Congregation."[17]

Such a statement, clear as daylight, scatters all shadows, not from Don Bosco's brow now haloed in splendor, but from the mind of even the most exacting historian. Rich also in Christian wisdom we find the statement expressed in the most stormy period of this controversy by Bishop, later Cardinal, Joseph Guarino, archbishop of Messina:[18] "I know all about it," he wrote to Don Bosco. "However, the obstacles set up by men are short-lived. Do not be disheartened. The mark of God's works is contradiction; the devil has to balk against your new Congregation; let's give the poor fellow his due, for, when all is said and done, his malicious tricks have a way of producing the good effect of cleansing us by long-suffering." And so it was!

[17]*Positio super revisione scriptorum*, 1906. [Author]
[18]"Very confidential letter" to Don Bosco, Rome, December 1, 1881. [Author]

# CHAPTER 9

## *Foundations in 1881-82: Refused or Postponed*

DURING the two-year period covered by this narrative, Don Bosco was flooded with proposals and requests from France, England, and countries outside of Europe, but we will discuss these later. Just now we will limit ourselves only to some of the many proposals he received from various parts of Italy, which had to be either deferred or refused. In later volumes, of course, we will not need to devote so much attention to negotiations which died aborning or were deferred to the unforeseeable future because Don Bosco gradually distanced himself from these dealings to such a point that there is little to say about his involvement in them. Here, however, we still feel that we should broaden our perspective a bit and offer our readers a condensed view of a whole series of negotiations which, though failing of their goal, still present us a meaningful side of his activity. We shall begin with Sicily, and move northward up the Italian mainland to Turin.

It is remarkable how quickly the Sicilian clergy seemed to understand Don Bosco and grasp the objectives of his Congregation. Bishops, canons, seminary rectors, parish priests and clergy were all overjoyed to be enrolled as Salesian cooperators, and they wrote him warm letters of admiration to express their ardent and urgent pleas that he send Salesians to care for Sicily's youth. Certainly it was due to these extensive psychological preparations that both the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians were enabled to open so many houses after the death of their founder when the rapidly growing personnel made it feasible. As we continue and round out the account which we began in Volume XIV,[1] all we need do is present some

[1]*See* pp. 534-545. [Editor]

documentary material, part of which is prior to this two-year period, but came later to our attention. A few glances beyond 1882 will help round out our narrative.

## 1. Catania

Catania kept pressing more than ever not only for a school of arts and trades, but also for the Cutelli boarding school, all the more so because Don Bosco had formally committed himself through his two representatives, Father Cagliero and Father Durando.[2] In a chapter meeting of June 1881, Father Cagliero reminded the members that their commitment to Catania was long-standing, and so when Don Bosco voiced his wish to keep his word, all the superiors enthusiastically set about lining up personnel. However, since no director could be found, they decided to write to Canon Cesàreo and ask his further indulgence. The delay, wrote Father Cagliero,[3] would "help the house in Catania to become a reality, and its Salesians will become citizens of Catania. However, should the committee feel jeopardized in some way or other by this new delay of ours and believe that it cannot adjust to this situation, then all our cherished hopes and dreams for Catania will be dashed to pieces. The sole reason we can cite for our absolute impossibility is our unprecedented lack of experienced personnel."

The people of Catania resigned themselves to this delay. "We here are impatiently waiting for the Salesians," the canon replied immediately. "We have many applications, even from boys who will pay tuition. I look forward to a rich harvest, but what of the workers? When will they come? We await and will keep awaiting them, but, for the love of Jesus and Mary, let them come quickly."

As a tangible sign of his concern, Don Bosco sent Salesian cooperators' diplomas to several priests of Catania and appointed the vicar general, Canon [Rosario] Rìccioli, as their dean. It is edifying to read with what humility and gratitude they agreed to become members of this pious association, and how their membership made them more eager to have the Salesians come as soon as possible.

[2]*See* Vol. XIV, p. 242. [Author]
[3]Letter of June 14, 1881. [Author]

## 2. Messina

Heart-rending were the pleas of Cardinal Joseph Guarino, archbishop of Messina. He had a seminary unworthy of the name. "I am downhearted and deeply grieved," he wrote to Father [Peter] Guidazio, director of the Randazzo school.[4] "Without a seminary I do not see how I can possibly continue as bishop. All have what they need to this end—all but I. This yearning of mine is a martyrdom. Without my dear Salesians I shall never have a seminary." He then said that he wanted to bare his heart to Don Bosco "with true Salesian confidence," to use his own expression.[5] When he had been transferred from the diocese of Syracuse to that of Messina in 1875, he found that the proper formation of the clergy had been totally neglected for eighty years. What was left of the seminary building, partly destroyed by earthquakes and fire, was hardly livable and in ruins; the course of studies was deficient and haphazardly done; there were hardly any seminarians; order and discipline were nonexistent. The impact of such a situation upon the entire archdiocese can be easily inferred. "I am totally brokenhearted," the bishop went on. "Put yourself in my place, you who are so sensitive of heart, without which you could never have done such marvelous works of mercy. Penniless and all alone in shouldering a vast diocese, I am expected to raise it up, while I am reduced to impotence!" He did have some qualified priests who had either studied on their own or had attended the royal university's school of theology, but no one had any idea of what a seminary was or how young men were to be trained. The archbishop, after a wait of four years for the [government] *exequatur*, had immediately set about restoring the buildings, but nothing at all had as yet been done for the seminary's spiritual restoration.

He felt that he had to begin from scratch, with elementary grades and later a secondary school, but for this he needed teachers and a spiritual director who would care for the entire priestly formation. True, there was a rector, but he did not reside in the seminary and mainly busied himself keeping track of food expenses. Acting also on the advice of Cardinal [Louis] Bilio, Archbishop Guarino called upon the sons of the "loving Don Bosco" and begged, "Father, bring comfort to one who, thanks to your goodness, is a Salesian cooperator and consequently one of your sons, albeit unworthy. Do not reject my plea;

[4]Letter, July 17, 1880. [Author]
[5]Letter, July 24, 1880. [Author]

stretch out a helping hand and aid me. . . . The city yearns for Don Bosco's sons, especially since they have seen how kind, friendly, warm and gentle they were during their stopover." They had passed through Messina on their way to Randazzo.

All that Father Durando could do was to inform the archbishop that Don Bosco was willing to open a seminary-boarding school "as soon as possible."[6] But as the delay stretched out, the archbishop begged Father Guidazio to plead with the superior chapter.[7] "On bended knee I implore this favor of your revered council," he wrote. "Open my heart to it. Say that I am a warm person and will love the Salesians as my own sons; they will be jewels in my episcopal mitre, my crown, the delight of my heart, my sharers in joy, my comfort in grief. . . . I am but a poor beggar at Don Bosco's door seeking a crust of bread for my spiritual spouse." Some months later he wrote again,[8] this time echoing the sentiments expressed by other prelates of Sicily: "Forget [South] America! The plight I am in deserves top priority. Here there is ever so much work to do, and I shall always lead the way for my beloved Salesians. Ask them; they will tell you that I love them. When a Salesian is my guest, I am overjoyed. Ah, if only you could come to Sicily. . . . As I have already written to you, I will meet you at Reggio if you do not care to come by boat from Naples."

Facetiously perhaps, Don Bosco had laid down one condition for sending his Salesians: the archbishop was to obtain for him from Rome the privileges [usually granted to religious congregations]. Indeed, when he went to Rome, the archbishop actually did all he could, but, as we shall see later, he did not succeed. Yet that was not the reason why the Salesians did not go to staff the seminary of Messina. In fact, Don Bosco would have found it very convenient to open a boarding school under the legal name of "seminary," for he would then not be subject to the demands of the government's educational authorities. The truth of the matter is that despite the archbishop's assurances to the contrary, Don Bosco could not see his way to reconciling the necessary independence he required for his houses with the presence of an irremovable rector; furthermore, no provision was made to protect the Salesians from possibly unpleasant developments at the death of the

[6]Letter from the archbishop to Father Durando, Messina, August 20, 1881. [Author]
[7]Letter, May 27, 1881. [Author]
[8]Letter to Don Bosco, October 1, 1881. [Author]

benevolent archbishop. Divine Providence was to bring the Salesians to Messina in some other way, and with them also the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. However, if today [1934] both the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians have a magnificent network of charitable undertakings within the city and the entire archdiocese, credit is due to the far-sighted and enduring zeal of Cardinal Guarino, who prepared the ground but saw little more than a bright promise of the harvest. As a rule, God achieves his works little by little.

### 3. Syracuse

Marchioness Mary Carmela Gargallo of Castel Lentini, a charitable Syracusian living in Naples, wished to use part of her holdings in Syracuse to give the city a hospice for young apprentices and agricultural students. Seeking advice on what to do, in 1879 she turned to Jesuit Father Valente, who passed the information on to his well-known Turinese confrere, Father Secondo Franco. He in turn forwarded the letter to Father Rua, telling him that he was very glad to be able to cooperate in some way with the good work of the Salesians and its expansion.[9] As Don Bosco was then in Rome, Father Rua replied that the Salesians were hard pressed to take up the work because they lacked personnel; however, he urged the good lady to send in more details of her project. Meanwhile the marchioness, who had gone to the Côte d'Azur and had visited the Salesian hospice in Nice, told Father Ronchail, the director, of her plan, and he offered to be her spokesman with Don Bosco.

Through him the marchioness informed Don Bosco that, to carry out her cherished project, a former Capuchin monastery in Syracuse could be used for that purpose. The city fathers had agreed to turn it over to her, and the archbishop intended to obtain the Vatican's permission; further, she was ready to endow the house with an annual income of four thousand lire. As an ardent admirer of his, she suggested that Don Bosco meet her in Naples anytime he went to Rome.[10] As we have seen, Don Bosco did visit her in March 1880. However, he could not attend to this until the end of May, when he sent her the following letter drafted by Father Rua.

[9]Letter, Turin, March 20, 1879. [Author]

[10]Letter to Father Ronchail, Naples, November 4, and to Don Bosco, November 23, 1879. [Author]

[No date]

Dear Marchioness:

With all our good will, we could not possibly write to you before today concerning the projected hospice in Syracuse. We hope you will understand when you realize the heap of matters which have piled up during my four-month absence and the important and nearly countless tasks my priests and I have had to carry out during the novena and celebration of the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. However, we have been mindful of your wish for a speedy reply. In fact, as soon as I could have a meeting with my chapter, our first discussion centered on the hospice in Syracuse and all related documents.

Having carefully examined your correspondence with the town authorities and the letters between you and me, we feel that it is both fitting and speedier that the township entrust the former monastery and chapel of the Capuchin Fathers with adjoining quarries[11] directly to me so as to avoid many meticulous formalities. Since we already have a similar arrangement with the township of San Benigno Canavese for an abandoned abbey, and have the approval of the prefect's office in Turin, we think that we can adapt its wording to the present situation, with the hope that the prefect of Syracuse will raise no objections. I enclose a copy of a contract draft, modeled upon that agreement.

As for repairs and furnishings and the annual endowment, we prefer to deal directly with you; hence we are submitting the draft of an agreement to be made with you. Please examine it and see if we can agree on it. This plan seems to be the simplest and most suitable way to guarantee the Salesian Congregation's autonomy and to meet your wishes, even after you and I have both been called to eternity.

I welcome this opportunity to reiterate my esteem and gratitude to you. May the Lord bless you! May He reward your generosity toward poor youth and may He grant success to this undertaking for His greater glory and for the welfare of souls.

Yours respectfully,
Fr. John Bosco

The marchioness' lawyer submitted the application to change the beneficiary of the former monastery, and the mayor presented the proposal to the town council, which approved it unanimously. Then Archbishop La Vecchia of Syracuse, feeling that the hospice's opening was now certain and near, and wishing that his "somewhat disorganized seminary should benefit from influence of the good Salesian Fathers,"

[11]These are caves around Syracuse, hollowed out in past centuries to quarry stone. They are still used by rope-makers and others. A famous one is the "Ear of Dionysus." [Author]

requested that a Salesian priest be assigned as its rector.[12] The reply, however, stated that it was impossible for the moment.

The year 1880 passed with nothing appreciable happening. As the new year opened, the marchioness hoped for a second visit from Don Bosco on his trip to Rome. She had retained an eminent lawyer to look into the matter, but she awaited Don Bosco's arrival in order that the whole matter might be "clarified from the one who was the light in similar affairs." The loss of loved ones and physical ailments had disheartened her, and she hoped that seeing Don Bosco would boost her morale. "Your presence," she wrote,[13] "will make me regain the joy and cheerfulness which I can no longer hope for in this land of exile." Her words are an echo of the impression of holiness which Don Bosco had left on her the previous year.

The Syracuse authorities had included the adjoining land, known as the "Forest," with the monastery and had turned both over to the marchioness; this property too had also belonged to the Capuchins with whom the marchioness had already prepared a contract for a fictitious sale to Don Bosco.[14] Insisting that he brook no further delay, she expressed her best wishes for a happy name day of St. John [the Baptist].[15]

Don Bosco did not share her desire for haste, since he was still awaiting her long overdue decision on two proposals[16] which he had sent to her. When her decision came, he found it unacceptable. Writing on June 24, she acknowledged receipt of the papers and expressed her views. "Being inexperienced in legal matters," she wrote, "and noticing that some articles in your contract do not fit at all with my plans in founding this hospice, I consulted an authority in these affairs, Attorney Palmulli. He agreed entirely with me and then drafted a counterproposal for me, which I am now sending you so that you may

[12]Letter to Don Bosco, Syracuse, August 3, 1880. [Author]

[13]Letter, Naples, April 17, 1881. [Author]

[14]Letter from the marchioness to Father Rua, Naples, June 7, 1881. [Author]

[15]At his baptism Don Bosco had been named after the Apostle John, but in 1846 the Oratory boys, believing his name to be John the Baptist, a very popular saint in Turin, began to celebrate his name day on June 24, the feast day of this saint. *See* Vol. II, p. 381. [Editor]

[16]Namely, a request to the municipal authorities of Syracuse to sublet the former Capuchin monastery directly to Don Bosco rather than to the marchioness, and, secondly, a contract with the marchioness about turning the monastery into a school of arts and trades and meeting the necessary expenses. *Source*: Document 43 in the Appendix of Volume XV in the original Italian edition. [Editor]

understand my mind." She intended the monastery to remain in her possession, so that, should the Salesians ever have to leave Syracuse, the hospice could still continue under other people's direction. Then, to safeguard from any eventuality the capital which she was allotting for annual income, she wished that the agreement be drawn up in perpetuity and placed under the protection of the archbishop then in office. Thus the Salesians were to have only the use of the building and the interest on the capital. To meet all other expenses of household and equipment, they would have to rely on the income accruing from the workshops, because the marchioness did not intend to burden her heirs with financial obligations. Obviously, this setup did away with the total autonomy on which Don Bosco always insisted, and opened the way to problems which in those days hindered all charitable undertakings that were subject to government interference. By law, any undertaking which was to continue in perpetuity had to be approved by the government.

During discussion of these two widely differing and irreconcilable views, the township was forced to meet an urgent need and use the former monastery as temporary military barracks. Trying to shorten the time of that use, the marchioness insisted that the Salesians should come immediately. At the top of her letter, addressed from Castellamare di Stabia and dated August 3, 1881, Don Bosco wrote: "Reply: impossible. Negotiate until conditions are met." He was alluding to the acceptance of the two proposals, but they were never accepted. The marchioness' last letter to Don Bosco, dated December 21, 1882, conveyed her Christmas greetings and offered a new proposal of sorts which to all intents made it clear that the two previous ones were to be forgotten. Her former letter had stated: "No matter how these plans will end up, I shall never cease to be your most loving servant and daughter." A postscript added: "Grant me your wholehearted blessing." In this her last letter asking for comfort and encouragement she wrote that she was appealing to him as "the consoler in all sorrows." Again, on October 30, 1883, enclosing a donation of one hundred lire for his missionaries, she asked Don Bosco to pray for her, addressing him as her father and adding: "We never see each other and write but rarely, yet I am convinced that I am closer to you than you are to me." Those who dealt with Don Bosco could not help reverencing and loving him, even when they did not see eye to eye with him. In this instance matters would not have turned out so negatively if in her

excessive prudence she had not entrusted the negotiations to the lawyers who, of course, advised her according to their own views.

## 4. Bronte and Marsala

We have already spoken about the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians going to Bronte,[17] whose century-old boarding school had enjoyed a fine reputation throughout the entire island but was then in decline. Its founder had been the Venerable Ignatius Capizzi [1708-1783], a native of Bronte and an Oratorian priest of Palermo [where he died]. The school was run by the diocese. Despite the new government's esteem and its official certification of the school in 1867, the enrollment of both boarding and day pupils kept declining, possibly because of unqualified teaching personnel. Now, with the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians being there and the Salesians being at nearby Randazzo, people asked if Don Bosco might not be able to revive the former reputation of the sinking school.

In 1879 the town mayor, who was well acquainted with Salesian schools, asked Don Bosco to contribute two teachers for the upper grades of the secondary school. Then in 1880 Father Joachim Leo Zappia, a Basilian monk and the school's director, feeling concerned especially about a healthier moral climate, wrote to Don Bosco: "I need educators. For the past hundred years this school has been run by a repressive system, and here I cannot find teachers who know any other system. That is one reason for the drop in enrollment, which in 1849 was nearly four hundred whereas now it is down to barely forty." He therefore pleaded that Don Bosco send him help with a Salesian priest as spiritual director and two assistants, either priests or clerics, so that together they might introduce "the excellent system inspired in him by the Holy Spirit." He promised to befriend Don Bosco's sons as a brother who was proud to be a Salesian cooperator.

Despite his desire to give the offer favorable consideration, and also in view of the need to give spiritual assistance to the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, Don Bosco was forced by lack of personnel to decline the proposal. In February 1881 Cardinal [Anthony] De Luca, a native of Bronte and an alumnus of the Capizzi boarding school, in the course of a conversation, urged Don Bosco to take the school; the

[17] *See* Vol. XIV, pp. 526ff. [Editor]

latter, who could not refuse him then and there, told him that he was inclined to do so. Upon hearing this news, the director was extremely overjoyed. Either the cardinal did not realize that Don Bosco was not committing himself to any definite date or the people of Bronte misunderstood the cardinal's words; the fact is that they believed that Don Bosco would keep his promise without delay and so there was no end of pleas to take action. However, it was Don Bosco's successor, Father Michael Rua, who fulfilled Don Bosco's commitment, given without a fixed date, four years after Don Bosco's death.

Likewise, the house at Marsala was opened in 1892, although Don Bosco had initiated negotiations for it back in 1879. Father [Sebastian] Alagna had just begun a sort of a hospice for boys by sheltering a number of them in a former monastery of the Friars Minor Conventuals which the municipality had let him use and which was supported by public charity. However, doubting that he could continue on his own, he appealed to Don Bosco for "advice, guidance and assistance." All that Don Bosco could offer was just the usual good intentions to be realized at some distant date. Meanwhile Father Alagna started to put up a building, always with funds provided by charitable people, and called it the House of Divine Providence. But through it all he nurtured the hope in his heart that one day he would be able to hand over his work to Don Bosco. As the number of the boys grew, he redoubled his insistence and gave Don Bosco no peace; nor did he spare his successor until, as we have already said, the latter satisfied his wishes.

### 5. Mazzara, Piazza Armerina, Noto

Marsala is in the diocese of Mazzara. Two bishops of Mazzara appealed to Don Bosco successively in 1883 and 1885 for Salesians to staff the junior seminary, but both had to abandon all hopes because of absolute lack of personnel. Likewise Bishop Gerbino of Piazza Armerina had earnestly insisted in 1880 that Don Bosco take over the direction, administration and some teaching as well of the diocesan seminary. At the top of the bishop's letter, Don Bosco jotted his reply: "Let Father Durando send him a letter of thanks with regrets that all our personnel have already been committed elsewhere."

Going back to 1879 we find that Bishop John Blandini of Noto [Sicily], longing to have a good boarding school in his diocese, pressingly appealed to Don Bosco, and, since his request could not be

granted, he asked for at least two Salesians to start a festive oratory in his city. Disappointed a second time, he pleaded for three Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians to run the municipal girls' school at Ferla. In his reply to Father Rua on July 26, 1883, he stated: "I was very grieved to receive your negative answer. I understand very well that the more precious a commodity, the rarer it is, and so there are never enough sons and daughters of that wonder-worker, Don Bosco, to meet the wide ranging needs and countless requests which come to him from the old and the new world." He then concluded: "If I am too insistent, please attribute it to the great trust which Don Bosco's Congregation inspires in me." Don Bosco jotted these few notes for Father Durando to send a reply: "Write a fine letter. We would like to please him. We hope that in due time the Lord will send us personnel also for the diocese of Noto."

### 6. Girgenti, Agira, Leonforte

Bishop Dominic Turano of Girgenti (today's Agrigento) showed remarkable persistence in trying to get the Salesians to his diocese. In 1883 he let Don Bosco know that a charitable citizen of a densely populated seaboard town in his diocese (probably Sciacca) desired that Don Bosco open there a private school with all five secondary grades, assuring him of an annual subsidy of four thousand lire. Soon after this, the bishop proposed that he open a house of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians in the same town. The following year he stated that he would be satisfied with just two Salesians to run a private elementary school. Despite three refusals, Bishop Turano, always speaking on behalf of that charitable person who was now ready to purchase a house and turn it over to Don Bosco for a school, limited his request to a single Salesian priest and a lay Salesian to teach the first or second year of secondary school. He probably thought that once the work was started, the rest would follow. However, the proposals were always based on mere future possibilities.

When Cajetan Blandini, brother of the bishop of Noto, became bishop of Agrigento, he was faced with the problem of reorganizing the town's school, named after its founder, Bishop Gioeni. Formerly intended as a training school for young workers, it had been turned over to a lay staff and had become such an unmanageable mess that the authorities were about to shut it down. The bishop hoped that the

Salesians would remedy the situation, but the setup of the school had been so drastically changed that the best of intentions could not hold against outside interference. Briefly, this matter will surface again at a much later date when Father [Joseph] Bertello, first provincial of Sicily, will advocate accepting the undertaking. Nothing could better meet the aims of the Salesian Congregation than a trade school. Even then, however, no common ground of agreement could be found. As regards Agira, a town of twenty thousand people located at the heart of the island in the diocese of Nicosìa, we have a large dossier of correspondence dating from February 1877 to many years after Don Bosco's death. Two items are noteworthy; the perseverance of Father Philip Julius Contessa, who tried in every way to get a Salesian house for his own town, and the good will of both Don Bosco and Father Rua in meeting his desires, yet without ever agreeing on mutually acceptable conditions. Don Bosco noted on the first of these letters: "Father Rua, please read. Looks good to me and may perhaps be feasible." But neither that first proposal nor those which followed ever did eliminate that "perhaps."

Not content with his personal efforts, Father Contessa pleaded also on behalf of the mayor of Leonforte, an important neighboring town of the diocese. The aim was to set up a boarding school like the one in Randazzo, which was attended by very many Leonforte boys. It was also hoped that the Salesians would take over the town's public schools. As usual, however, the conditions laid down did not support those hopes. From the first general chapter on, ever greater precautions were followed before accepting a new foundation.

### 7. Bari

Leaving Sicily behind us, we move into the peninsula to Bari, the capital of Apulia. We have an exchange of correspondence dated 1880 and 1881 concerning a foundation in Bari. In October 1878 a widow of the city, Mary Calò-Carducci (her husband had been a Guarnieri) had gone to Turin with her daughter and met with Don Bosco, who, noticing their piety and generous disposition, enrolled them both as Salesian cooperators. On returning home, they were so touched by the sight of the moral neglect of so many young people that they wrote to Don Bosco and offered him a house of their own in the older section of the city for a festive oratory. Then, Archbishop Francis Pedicini, deeply

grieved by the spread of Protestant activity within his diocese and anxious to save so many poor young people, saw no better means of salvation than the festive oratory, and he also insistently pleaded with Don Bosco. In Lent of 1881, Don Bosco asked Monsignor [Anthony] Belasio, who was going to Bari to preach, to look over the situation and report on it. The monsignor confirmed the city's dire need of Salesians especially to help the boys. But the usual problems arose: Don Bosco could not send two or three Salesians there unless their living conditions were tolerably satisfactory. Besides, the economic hardships of the times—worse than today's—made it far more difficult for the bishops of Italy to subsidize generously charitable undertakings, because they themselves had been reduced to poverty. Admirable indeed was the generosity of the two good ladies who, despite repeated denials, kept sending Don Bosco donations for his missionary expeditions and for the Church of the Sacred Heart. Yet, their prayers, joined to good works, were not in vain. Though neither of them may have been then alive, the Salesian School of the Most Holy Redeemer was opened in Bari in 1905.

## 8. Ascoli Piceno

In 1879 a reformatory run by the township of Ascoli Piceno became a veritable madhouse. Some two hundred boys were being taught a trade, but the management had been so haphazard that twice the administrators had been fired. Thought was then given to Don Bosco. In 1881 there was also the intervention of a niece of the Vitelleschis, the noble Roman family which was so devoted to Don Bosco, but nothing came of it. When some kind of order was finally restored in the reformatory in 1885, the mayor asked Don Bosco for at least one Salesian who "by word and example" would give the reformatory a moral and religious orientation. The request was warmly backed by Bishop Bartholomew Ortolani, who told Don Bosco how comforting it would be for him "to acquire such excellent religious," and who also assured him that the institution would end up entirely in the hands of the Salesians. But this bishop's optimism did not consider, as Don Bosco did, the dangers involved in binding oneself to municipal authorities and thus exposing oneself to government interference.

## 9. Parma

The ever thriving St. Benedict School in Parma was opened in 1888, the year of Don Bosco's death, but negotiations had started a long time before. The idea first came from Bishop Dominic Villa, who in 1879 planned to build an orphanage and entrust it to the Salesians. Negotiations were opened the following year. The bishop acquired a former Benedictine monastery with its surrounding land, but shortly after a tentative agreement had been drafted, the bishop died on July 21, 1882. His will bequeathed the building to Don Bosco on condition that he open it as an orphanage within three years; after that time, the condition not being met, the property would go to the diocesan seminary. However, proper legal form was not followed in leaving the legacy to Don Bosco.[18] This caused all sorts of problems; the matter became a tangle and the would-be undertaking was not faithful to the original plan.

Still determined to open a Salesian house in Parma, Don Bosco appealed also to public charity and to the munificent Duke Roberto of Parma, whom he had met in Nice and who was then residing at Biarritz [a fashionable summer and winter resort] in the Basses-Pyrénées. Having been informed that he was to address the duke as "king," he wrote as follows:

Turin, July 28, 1882

Your Majesty:

For many years the city of Parma has been longing for a hospice for destitute boys who presently are routinely referred to our home in Turin. Lengthy discussions were held with Bishop [Dominic] Villa of blessed memory, who contributed to the purchase of the former monastery of St. Benedict. In this monastery, bought and registered in my name, we could set up a public church for adults, a hospice and a playground where neglected boys could enjoy wholesome games after fulfilling their religious duties.

We were in the process of gathering needed funds for the purchase and

[18]The bishop had stated: "I bequeath the former Benedictine monastery, its orchard and grounds purchased by me from Rondani-Manici for a boys' orphanage to Father John Bosco of Turin, superior of the Salesian Congregation, which will administer and operate such institution. If the orphanage is not opened within three years after my death, the said monastery, orchard, etc., shall pass to the diocesan seminary of Parma." [Author]

restoration of that property when God called to Himself our charitable and zealous prelate. He gave me your name and address along with those of others to whom I might apply for aid. The project is planned for 1883. I believe that I shall have the blessing of God and men; however, it is to you that I address my first appeal.

I do not know whether at this time and in the present circumstances Your Majesty will be able to give kindly thought to my request. However, I still appeal to your good heart and shall be grateful for whatever you may decide to give.

On my part, I shall not fail to pray to our compassionate God that He keep you, the duchess and your entire family in good health. May He hear our prayers and let us see better days.

I assure Your Majesty of the prayers offered by the one hundred thousand boys in our care. I am highly honored to be,

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Duke Robert, son of Charles III, whom he had succeeded in 1854, went into exile in 1859.[19] He certainly must have known of Don Bosco's treatment of the tragic murder of the duke's father in his *Storia d'Italia* [History of Italy].[20] When he and Don Bosco met in Nice, the duke let him know that he was acquainted with the Parma project and felt that he should make a contribution to it because of a promise he had made to Our Lady on behalf of his wife. He immediately sent Don Bosco a donation of ten thousand lire enclosed in a letter which overflowed with love for him and with Christian piety.

We cannot omit a gracious episode preserved among the documents concerning the planned hospice. While negotiations were going on, Bishop Villa took to heart the lot of a well-to-do family which suddenly found itself in critical financial conditions through the father's sudden death. The bishop asked Don Bosco to accept as a pupil the older of the two sons who was barely nine. "This lad is very promising," the bishop wrote. "He is bright and alert." Might he "be accepted into a Salesian school," he pleaded "and be given a chance to continue his studies and grow in the holy fear of God, as his excellent parents have taught him?" The bishop's request was one of the items in an ordinary business letter which the bishop sent to Father Durando, imploring

[19]Duke Robert (1848-1907) died in his villa at Pianore near Viareggio. [Author]
[20]*See* Vol. V, pp. 322-333. [Editor]

"his kindly intervention with the wonder-worker Don Bosco." He was not writing directly to Don Bosco because he knew he was absent from Turin. We do not idly say "imploring," for the bishop actually wrote in the following terms: "I kneel to you and beg you to the best of my ability." The boy was accepted at the Oratory for the 1882-83 school year.

On Bishop Villa's death, Canon Tescari, his protégé and future bishop of Borgo San Donnino (today's Fidenza), taking upon himself the late bishop's solicitude for that family, prepared the young lad to leave home and informed Father Durando as follows: "The mother, as fine a woman as she is a poor widow, cannot go with him, and so the boy will come alone. Kindly have someone meet him at the station, lest he get lost and fall into the wrong hands. The Lord will repay you for this deed of charity."[21] The boy, who had been so lovingly brought up by his parents and was then quite young and very lively, was warmly received by Don Bosco. Once he got over his initial shyness, he became so attached to the Oratory that he decided never to leave it. He is our confrere Father Paul Ubaldi,[22] professor of Greek literature in Italian universities; presently [1934] he is a highly esteemed professor in the Catholic University of Milan.[23]

## 10. Pisa

Pisa came to Don Bosco's attention in 1880. Jesuit Father Emil Pardocchi, a resident there, happened to be in Lucca on the day Don Bosco was holding a meeting of the Salesian cooperators. He attended it and was deeply impressed by Don Bosco's talk. Speaking to him later, he gave him such a realistic account of the religious situation in Pisa where Protestantism was spreading far and wide that Don Bosco felt compelled to go to the city's aid. Then and there he urged him to mention the matter to Archbishop Paul Micaleff. Upon receiving the message, the prelate, elderly and ailing, lifted his hands and eyes to heaven and cried, "If only this were true! Come, Don Bosco, come! I

[21]Letters from Bishop Villa, October 9, 1881, and from Canon Tescari, August 6, 1882. [Author]

[22]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

[23]When Paul Ubaldi was a fourth year secondary school student, he read a brief Greek composition of his own to Don Bosco on the latter's name day celebration in 1885. When he went up to greet Don Bosco, expecting a few congratulatory words, Don Bosco told him, "My, what a Greek scholar! We shall make a university professor out of you." [Author]

ask for nothing more and then I shall sing my *Nunc dimittis.*" The vicar general, Monsignor Ricci, also could hardly believe the news; it was just too good and wonderful to be true. In turn, the Salesian cooperators in Pisa called a meeting to discuss how they might best expedite the coming of the Salesians. Among them was the incomparable professor, Joseph Toniolo, the glory of Pisa's university school of political economy, who combined vast knowledge with rare Christian piety.

The archbishop's death did not stop the initiative, all the more so since his successor, Archbishop Ferdinand Capponi, was of the same mind. The plan began to take shape. In the outskirts of the city there stood a retreat house and an adjoining public church dedicated to St. James; it was proposed to offer both to the Salesians. Besides, the Visitation Sisters had a convent in the vicinity, and they too insistently wrote long letters asking Don Bosco to send the Salesians without delay. In June 1883 the archbishop sent Don Bosco a detailed draft of a contract, but he could not accept it because its terms made it so nebulous that, despite the best of intentions, it offered no guarantee of stability. Ultimately, Don Bosco was to see from heaven his Salesians and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians enter this historic city on the Arno River.

## 11. Arenzano, Perosa Argentina, Oulx

Not to prolong this chapter, we select only three projects among others. The first project was in Arenzano in the Genoa province. In 1881 the town officials negotiated with Don Bosco about providing Salesian teachers for the municipal schools. To his suggestion that they apply to other religious congregations, the mayor replied, "In these trying times, what congregation is as kindly tolerated by the government as are the Salesians?" However, Arenzano was less fortunate than Perosa Argentina and Oulx, which eventually did welcome Don Bosco's sons after a long wait.

Perosa Argentina, a large town near Pinerolo, had a population of two thousand Catholics and some two hundred scattered Waldenses[24]

[24]A Christian sect founded by Peter Waldo, a merchant of Lyons, in southern France in the twelfth century. The heresy rejected the hierarchical structure of the Church, the sacramental system and other doctrines. Its adherents were excommunicated in 1184 and their tenets were condemned several times thereafter. If interested, *see also* Vol. V, pp. 17f, 78, 89ff, 291-295, 388f, 413ff, 435ff, 474f. [Editor]

[also known as Waldensians]. Some forty thousand had settled here and there throughout Italy, half of them forming various communities in the Pinerolo valley [in Piedmont]. Fairly large groups of Waldenses also populated the villages bordering on Perosa Argentina, such as Pomaretto, for example, where they not only had an imposing church and hospital, but also a boarding secondary school which drew Catholic boys from other areas. The parish priest of Perosa Argentina, who had seen this agricultural community turn into an industrial, commercial center through the establishment of two major silk factories, had also seen a change in the people's living habits— particularly the harm being done to young people who, lured by attractive amusements, deserted religious instruction. Since this town was an important center in that valley, the Waldenses yearned to install themselves in it and control it.

Faced with this sad situation, the zealous parish priest, Father Joseph Paolasso, a good Salesian cooperator, appealed to Don Bosco on September 23, 1881. "I turn to you and to your Salesians," he wrote. "God has chosen you to be ministers of His mercy in these tragic times. I ask you to consider how you can best open a festive oratory and, perhaps, a small boarding school in some suitable spot in this town." Don Bosco realized the advisability of doing something there, but put it off for the future, when personnel might be available. Sixteen years went by before his successor was able to turn Don Bosco's desire into reality.

In 1881 and 1882 the leading citizens of Oulx, a mountain village in the district of Susa, did their best to get Don Bosco to establish a boarding and day secondary school for the benefit of the entire valley. Many plans were considered but then and there no suitable locality was found.

## 12. Turin

Let us now rescue from oblivion an incident which is to Don Bosco's credit and gives us a good idea of his practical business sense. As things turned out, it was by a mere accident that he was not entrusted with the spiritual care of Turin's Mauritian Hospital.

In 1573 Emanuel Filbert, duke of Savoy, established the Order of St. Maurice by merging the Military Order of St. Maurice, founded by Amadeus VIII in 1434, with the Hospitallers of St. Lazarus [of Jerusa-

lem] whose origins date back to the twelfth century. Even today [1934] it is a knighthood second only to the Order of the Annunziata and has the king for its grand master.

At its onset, the Order of St. Maurice with the help of private and state donations opened a hospital in the eastern outskirts of Turin; it soon became known as the Mauritian or Knights' Hospital. It had modest beginnings, but it gradually expanded and today [1934] cares for a large number of patients. At first it stood outside the city, but, as Turin grew, the hospital became surrounded by apartment complexes and was soon too small to meet the needs of the burgeoning population. A new and larger hospital was planned in a more suitable locality along a boulevard leading to Stupinigi—as relaxing and healthy a site as one could ask for.

The site was ideal, but not so the funds. The Order of St. Maurice could not finance the costly venture by itself. Though King Humbert conferred with his council, and especially with Caesar Correnti, first secretary to the grand master and minister of education for two terms, no solution could be found for this grave problem. Correnti knew Don Bosco quite well—so much so that Father Lemoyne's notes tell us that he was indebted to Don Bosco for some outstanding service rendered, for which Correnti always said he was most thankful and eager to show his gratitude in some practical way. He may have been referring to the time when, as a follower of Mazzini,[25] he lived in Turin as a political exile from Lombardy. He had already lent the prestige of his name to Don Bosco's defense in the matter of the closing of the Oratory secondary school.[26] The difficulties of financing the construction of the hospital made him think of Don Bosco. He mentioned his name to the king, portraying him as a most successful fund-raiser for great undertakings. The king welcomed this suggestion, and so it was decided to consult Don Bosco on this important matter, but only in strict confidence.

Correnti called on him several times in the king's name. Don Bosco willingly agreed to come up with a plan and in fact implement it himself on condition that his name should never crop up and, above all,

[25]Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) was an Italian patriot who in 1832 organized a secret revolutionary society, *La Giovane Italia*, whose purpose was the unification of Italy under a republican form of government. He instigated rebel manifestations in several parts of Italy and aided in organizing Garibaldi's expeditions. Until his death he remained an uncompromising republican. [Editor]

[26]*See* Vol. XIV, Chapters 4 and 7. [Editor]

that no one should interfere with his plan. "Let me figure out the whole thing," he said. "I need total freedom. If I err, patience; I will take the blame." Correnti took pains to point out to him that the king did not want him to put up a single penny of his own money because His Majesty was aware that he had to provide for his many institutions. The king merely asked that he submit his plans, and he assured him that no one would interfere. He even went beyond this; he wished to know whether Don Bosco could take on the spiritual care of the hospital through his Salesians. In reply Don Bosco stated that he was not averse to serving his king also in that.

With this understanding, Don Bosco set to work. He studied the situation, looked for a site and then came up with a plan. He suggested a grand lottery with specified cash awards, a limited number of tickets and set prices. The sale of tickets and collection of money was to be done by two hundred prominent gentlemen acceptable to the court. These gentlemen, however, should neither be the kind that liberals called "churchy people" nor opponents of religion. Forming a national committee, they would distribute the tickets, sending them, above all, to every knight of the Mauritian Order. Don Bosco then reached an understanding with [Joseph Anthony] Musso, a banker, about allocating the necessary funds. Sensing a good business deal and knowing that there were no risks in dealing with Don Bosco, Musso quickly agreed.

We may well wonder why Don Bosco ever got involved in such a venture. His main concern was the spiritual care of the sick, for he could foresee that it would be overlooked. He therefore hastened to suggest that a church be built near the hospital to serve a double purpose: caring for the spiritual needs of the patients and staff, and serving the people of the adjacent Crocetta borough, whose parish church was far too inadequate for the burgeoning population. If the Order of St. Maurice could not finance the hospital, he said, he himself would raise the funds. He also brought to their attention that the old smaller church might be given to the Order of St. Maurice in exchange for the new, and that the clergy assigned to the parish, who were already receiving a salary, would be content with a modest fee and might even forego any stipend at all for the sake of the hospital. In any event, he said, he could provide Salesian personnel for that purpose.

After detailing his plan for the lottery, he sent it to the king with the notation that the prize money was already available. The sovereign read

it with wonder, finding it to be an excellent idea and assuring Don Bosco that as regards the church, funds would be provided. In the meantime, Don Bosco had prepared a circular in which, after mentioning the new hospital as an undertaking not connected with him, he went on to say: "The Order of St. Maurice and its grand knight, our esteemed sovereign, desire that a church be built near the planned hospital to serve both patients and staff, while meeting the needs of the area residents who do not live close to any other church. To raise funds for this house of worship, I appeal to those fellow citizens who have the moral good and the honor of our great city at heart. We believe that the public will be glad to hear that the construction and design of this church, as well as all the religious services it will provide, have been entrusted to Father John Bosco and his priests." This circular, whose original autograph is in our archives, was not published, but it speaks eloquently of Don Bosco's zeal for the welfare of souls.

As agreed, secret negotiations went on for some time between the king, Correnti and Don Bosco, since any intrusion of busybodies could create problems. But then precisely what had been feared did happen. News leaked out at court generating high praise for Don Bosco; some individuals, however, smarted at not having been consulted. Among them were Father Pavarino, chaplain of the Royal Basilica of Superga, and Canon Durio, court chaplain. Both dropped in on Don Bosco to say that they had heard of his plans for a lottery and were very eager to contribute to its success. Don Bosco tried to make them understand that it was the king's will that no one was to meddle or have anything to do in the matter, but they so insisted that he alerted Correnti about it; Correnti, in turn, through Baron Cova, repeated to him in the king's name that he alone was in charge of directing and carrying out the project.

Opposition, however, whether covert or blatant, kept hounding him. Eventually Archbishop Gastaldi got into the fray, voicing his objection to any parish transfer and complaining that he had not been the first person to be consulted; he alone—he declared—had the right to decide which church should be a parish church. He, therefore, vetoed the idea. Doubtless, in principle he was within his rights; however, expressing an opinion did not constitute an infringement of his jurisdiction.

This kind of publicity forced Correnti to call a meeting of the hospi-

tal's administrative board to which he invited Don Bosco. He attended, escorted by coadjutor Brother [Andrew] Pelazza, who waited for him in the reception room. After the board members were briefed about the whole plan, everyone had his say about the fund-raising, but Don Bosco kept quiet. Finally, Correnti halted the discussion. "Let us now hear what Don Bosco has to say," he announced. Don Bosco then acquainted them with the plan he had submitted in writing to the king and guaranteed its success. After listening to their objections, he smilingly remarked: "Well, let me tell you the quickest way to get a lot of money. Ask every knight of Sts. Maurice and Lazarus and every knight of the Crown of Italy[27] to contribute ten or twenty lire. You will find how willingly they will pay! There are so many, many knights!" Everybody laughed at such a bright idea and the whole issue seemed to be settled.

After the meeting, Correnti escorted Don Bosco to the door, bade him good-bye, and asked for a remembrance in his prayers. Brother Pelazza, bewildered that such a great personage should be so obliging, could not keep his astonishment from Don Bosco once they were in the street. As they walked home, Don Bosco said, "Correnti is a man of lofty ideals, and he would do much good if he were not so tied up to the sects. Still, I believe that were he to have Don Bosco or some other priest at his side at the point of death, he would make his confession." Correnti died at Meina (Novara) eight months after Don Bosco's death. In his last days he was visited by Monsignor Anzino, court chaplain, and by his parish priest. All that we can positively say is that the latter administered to him the anointing of the sick.[28]

Now that Don Bosco's role in the hospital project was pretty well known, he got no rest, especially from the two priests who called on him practically every day, suggesting changes or additions to his plan. How much time they made him waste! His well-founded views could not penetrate their minds. Their obstinate interference so wearied him that he finally told them they could take over the whole project, if they so wished; he had enough business of his own and had not accepted the task for his own pleasure but only to satisfy the king's wish. Happy at

[27]This order of knighthood, founded by Victor Emmanuel II in 1868 in commemoration of the annexation of Venice to Italy, had been joined to the Mauritian Order. [Author]

[28]*Unità Cattolica*, October 7, 1888. [Author]

Don Bosco's proposal, the two gadflies inquired if he would be willing to support their plans. He agreed to that. However, he never heard from them again; brushing him aside, they took the whole matter in their own hands. But they lacked two qualities: Don Bosco's expertise and the trust of the officials who had to provide the lottery funds. When the king and Correnti came to know of these dealings, they both felt that it was wiser not to press Don Bosco any further. His masterful project came to nought, and the hospital's construction not only drained the resources of the knights but also imperiled their financial situation for quite some time.

November 11, 1881 was set for the laying of the cornerstone in the presence of the king. He was very eager for Don Bosco to be present. Also in view of this, Correnti adamantly wanted Don Bosco to officiate at the ceremony. Don Bosco, however, dissuaded him very persuasively and, overcoming his objections, convinced him that he would act wisely if he would brush aside his personal feelings and invite the archbishop. Still, having at heart to introduce Don Bosco to the king on that occasion, Correnti purposely called on Don Bosco at the Oratory, refusing to leave until he had obtained his formal promise to attend. Don Bosco agreed, but on condition that if—as was rumored—[Guido] Baccelli, minister of education, should represent the government, the minister was not to deliver any speech. It was only too obvious that if he spoke, he would blast out against the clergy and the Pope—something Don Bosco found repugnant in one who had once been a citizen of the Papal States and a professor at the Pontificia Università della Sapienza. It is hard for us today [1934] to see how having contact with such people could then embarrass a priest in front of Catholics. The Roman Question was still a painful thorn in their hearts. Don Bosco was assured that Baccelli would not come to Turin; in fact, he did not budge from Rome despite persistent rumors that he would certainly be in Turin.[29]

Don Bosco kept his word, but though he was personally invited as an honored guest—we have his invitation in our files—he merged with

[29]On November 11 [1881] *Unità Cattolica* carried this description of the ceremony: "Leading city officials will attend the formal ceremony, as will Minister Guido Baccelli, who will represent the government." But the following day it reported: "Minister Baccelli was not present, having been detained in Rome by official duties. The government was represented by Senator [Bartholomew] Casalis, prefect of [the province of] Turin." [Author]

the crowd and made no attempt to draw attention to himself throughout the ceremony.[30] On his arrival, the king immediately asked Correnti where Don Bosco was. Correnti looked about and, not spotting him, felt disappointed and somewhat hurt. A few days later he called on Don Bosco to complain that he had not kept his word. Apologizing as best he could, Don Bosco remarked: "I kept in the rear so that I would not be introduced to the king. If he had addressed only a few words to me, you can imagine what the newspapers would be saying about me all over Italy! Worse yet, who knows what impression it would make in Rome? It would have been an awkward situation for me, and even the king would have felt uncomfortable!" Correnti was silent for a moment and then, admitting that Don Bosco was right, expressed admiration for his discretion. "I had not thought of that," he stated. It was then that he understood what Don Bosco had told him on some other occasion which we cannot pinpoint. Correnti had asked him how he had managed to keep going at a time when so many factions were locked in conflicts. "I give to each his own," Don Bosco had then told him, "and I shun all unnecessary arguments and publicity."

Despite all the setbacks we have described, Correnti did not want to forego Don Bosco's cooperation completely, nor did Don Bosco feel that he ought to abandon the hospital project entirely. When in 1884 Don Bosco asked Correnti, first secretary of the Mauritian Order, for a decoration for Professor [Joseph] Bonzanino,[31] Correnti graciously consented and used the occasion to ask Don Bosco to help in the construction of the planned church for the hospital by recommending it to the charity of the faithful. As things stood, Don Bosco could not openly solicit funds for this cause because, with the discarding of his plan, he was no longer in a position to handle that task successfully. Still, anytime he sought a knighthood for anyone, he would persuade the petitioner to contribute handsome sums for the projected hospital. Moreover, once the plan for a neighboring church was dropped, the

[30]Flanked by Canons Chiuso, Antonelli and Bertoglio, by Father Genta, dean of the parish priests, and by other notable clergy, Archbishop [Lawrence] Gastaldi blessed the cornerstone and delivered a speech before the king. The speech contained several expressions which were criticized as offensive to Catholics professing greater loyalty to the Pope. Those were the days of Don Bosco's afflictions which we described in previous chapters. Most certainly he would have felt very uncomfortable if he had sat among the honored guests. [Author]

[31]Professor Bonzanino was running a small private secondary school in Turin and accepted many Oratory pupils at no charge. *See* Vol. IV, p. 465; Vol. V, pp. 175f, 257. [Editor]

hospital was left with not even a private chapel. This should not surprise us, for, since the Order of Sts. Maurice and Lazarus had become a lay order and had been affiliated with the Order of the Italian Crown, it suffered the common fate of all secularized institutions. When Don Bosco visited the new hospital, he asked Correnti if provisions had been made for religious worship. Secretary Correnti hemmed and hawed, claiming that they had followed the norms set by the health department and passed on to the architects. Heeding the suggestion of the nuns who had joyfully welcomed him as he entered the building, Don Bosco pointed to a large room which could easily be converted into a chapel. Correnti remained silent, but he did comply with Don Bosco's wishes. Hence, the patients owed it to Don Bosco if they had the presence of the Blessed Sacrament to comfort them in their afflictions.

# CHAPTER 10

## *Start of the Salesian Work in Spain, Florence and Faenza*

THREE Salesian works which are doing very well today [1934] date back to 1881; they are the boarding school at Utrera, Spain, and the two houses in Florence and Faenza. We shall start with Utrera, which came first and introduced Don Bosco to Spain.

It almost seems as if Divine Providence injected some humor in the way the seed of a lordly tree fell on Spanish soil and in time spread its branches to all corners of that nation. It all began with Marquis Don Diego de Ulloa who was thinking about opening a hospice for poor boys in Utrera. To this end he wrote to the superior general of the Marist Fathers to ask him to assume its direction. The superior general in turn called on the marquis too early in the morning and was not received; he returned on another day, but only the womenfolk were at home. Somewhat in a huff, he walked away and let the matter drop. After waiting in vain for a reply, the marquis consulted with Archbishop Joachim Lluch y Garriga of Seville, to whose diocese Utrera belonged, asking how he might realize his charitable intent. The archbishop, a Carmelite, had resided at his monastery in Lucca when the Salesians were there and had been very favorably impressed by their work. He suggested that the marquis appeal to Don Bosco. Having no knowledge of either Don Bosco or the Salesians, the marquis asked the archbishop to write to Turin on his behalf, and the latter willingly obliged.

A reply was not long in coming, but it only gave vague hopes. The year was 1879. On January 24, 1880, as we have already mentioned in the previous volume,[1] Father John Cagliero and Coadjutor Brother

[1]*See* Vol. XIV, p. 315. [Editor]

Joseph Rossi arrived in Seville, capital of Andalusia. They were welcomed enthusiastically by the archbishop, who, giving thanks to God, told them that he was most delighted to meet Don Bosco's sons. Waiting for them at the archbishop's house were the marquis, his son Anthony, and his son-in-law Henry Muñoz. At seventy-one the marquis, a patriarch of stalwart faith, hoped to see the Salesians established in his home city of Utrera before he died. His wish was shared by his entire family, all of whom were imbued with the same Catholic spirit. His personality reminded Father Cagliero of the Argentinian nobleman, Francis Benitez.[2] With holy enthusiasm, the archbishop talked to the family about Don Bosco and his work.

The marquis' son-in-law then took the visitors to Utrera. As the archbishop had already notified the local vicar general of their arrival, the city's clergy was assembled to give them a warm welcome. The "alcade" or mayor, an excellent Catholic, not only went to meet them, but for two full days personally took them to see churches, schools and other institutions.

Utrera is some eighteen miles southeast of Seville in the heart of a vast, fertile plain decked with wheat and rich in olive orchards and cattle, but it is best known for its *ganaderos* or breeding farms of bulls trained for bullfighting.

Utrera in those days numbered slightly over twelve thousand people, all Catholic but, as was common in much of Spain, not practicing; hence the Protestants had no trouble sinking their roots there. Practicing Catholics were hopeful that the Salesians' presence would shake up the prevailing religious apathy and force out the preachers of falsehood.

The city had several churches, particularly two dating from the fifteenth century, veritable cathedrals; however, quite a few churches were just about abandoned for lack of priests. The archbishop told the Salesians to take their pick from among them. Father Cagliero chose the church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel because it was centrally located, within easy reach of the people, and far from the nearest parish. Since the adjoining rectory was too small, the marquis offered to share half of his fine home with the Salesians until they could find better accommodations. On the feast of St. Francis de Sales, which

[2]*See* Vol. XIII, p. 127. *See* also the Indexes of Volumes X, XI and XII under "Benitez." [Editor]

occurred shortly afterward, Father Cagliero gave the sermon in that church and enrolled the first Salesian cooperators of Spain.

He took no step without duly informing Don Bosco, who was then in Marseille, and, at his wish, also Father Rua, sending them long letters sparkling with spirit and wit. On his departure he not only left behind him, but also took with him, the very finest impressions. "The archbishop," he wrote to Father Rua,[3] "wants us in Seville and in other locations of his vast archdiocese. He has set himself up as the Salesians' great Spanish 'Papá.' Marquis Ulloa, his son, his son-in-law, and the mayor of Utrera all intend to be Spain's first and foremost Salesian cooperators. In our world travels we have come to know courtesy and brotherly concern, but I believe that Spain, particularly Andalusia, holds the record." To Father [Julius] Barberis, novice master, he wrote,[4] "They may have too exalted an idea of us, and I fear that when they see us in action, the sparkle will fade away. So tell your novices to be manly and cheerful. It may well happen that God will choose some of them to work wonders in these lands which promise a vast harvest! Bid them remember that Spain is the land of Teresa of Avila, Ignatius, Dominic, Rodriguez, Isidore, Thomas of Villanova, and their followers." Among the novices who heard this prophetic utterance was the one whom God had already chosen to develop and organize the Salesian Congregation in Spain, Father Philip Rinaldi, Don Bosco's third successor.

As soon as Don Bosco had a free moment on his return from Marseille to Nice, he sent letters of thanks to Marquis Ulloa and to the archbishop of Seville. To the former he wrote:

Nice, February 26, 1880

Illustrious Marquis Don Diego de Ulloa:

I have no way of thanking you for the kindness you have shown my Salesian sons who were greatly honored to be your house guests. I am most sincerely grateful to you. God will amply reward you.

It is my fondest hope, however, that you will honor us with a visit to Turin so that I may have the opportunity to thank you personally for all you have done and are ready to do in favor of our humble, fledgling Congregation.

God bless you, my dearest and kindest marquis! May He keep you and your whole family in good health and in His grace.

[3]Seville, January 30, 1880. [Author]
[4]Seville, January 31, 1880. [Author]

I rejoice to consider you one of our most distinguished benefactors, and I assure you that you, your worthy son Anthony, your son-in-law Henry and his family will be remembered in our community and individual prayers offered daily in each Salesian house.

Asking for a kind remembrance in your prayers, I am highly honored and grateful to be in Jesus Christ,

Your most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I confirm all that Father Cagliero, my delegate, has concluded with you concerning the house we hope to open in Utrera, and trust that, God willing, all will be ready by next October. The Salesians, your sons and mine, will be ready to set out at that time to accept the commitment which Divine Providence has assigned them through you.

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

We do not have a copy of his letter to the archbishop, but we do have the archbishop's reply in Italian, a language which the archbishop learned while studying in Italy.

[No date]

My revered Don Bosco:

A thousand thanks for your eagerly awaited letter of February 26. I rejoice in the Lord that Father Cagliero and his companion have arrived home safe and sound from their visit to Seville. I too am very happy to have met them, and I hope that I may have these dear Salesians working in my archdiocese by October. God bless this foundation of ours in Spain; those who come after us will reap its harvest. God, the giver of all good, will repay us generously for our efforts.

My ailments continue to shake my peace of mind. As soon as I can undertake my longed-for journey to Rome, I shall let you know in ample time and set up a meeting with you in Turin. Meanwhile, please give my regards to Father Cagliero; I thank him for his note, to which this is an answer, and for the Marseille newspapers. I ask the Salesians and you to remember me in your prayers. I am

Yours devotedly,
✠[Joąchim Lluch y Garriga],
*Archbishop of Seville*

The opening of a house in Utrera was therefore presumably decided. "Negotiations in Utrera have already been concluded," Father Cagliero wrote to Father Rua in his aforementioned letter, "and we have picked six Salesians for next October." However, he mistimed the actual opening.

As we mentioned in the first chapter of this volume,[5] Father Cagliero accompanied the staff of Salesians who had been assigned to the new house in Utrera at the beginning of 1881. By that time, news about them had spread through the Iberian peninsula like wildfire, as the travelers were soon to find out at Gibraltar. Having missed the ferry which sailed from Gibraltar to Cadiz every Friday, they had to wait until the following Tuesday. It was an endless hassle to get permission to land on that English stronghold, but once they did, they found themselves surrounded by good friends. The episcopal vicar and his ten priests seemed very well informed about Don Bosco and his difficulties, so that they gladly accepted his invitation to be enrolled as Salesian cooperators. It was the archbishop of Seville who had been Don Bosco's press agent, for in his *Diocesan Review* he published a history of the Oratory, drawing from the *Bollettino Salesiano* which from January 1879 had been serializing Father Bonetti's brilliant narrative, later to be published in book form entitled *Cinque lustri di storia dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales* [Twenty-Five Years in the History of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales]. In addition, the *Popular Review* of Barcelona, the Madrid newspapers and other periodicals reprinted the articles of the *Diocesan Review* of Seville, causing Don Bosco's ventures to be heralded throughout the land.[6]

Utrera gave them a glorious welcome. On February 22 Father Cagliero and Father Branda, the director, called on the archbishop, who wrote to Don Bosco that very day, "Your sons have arrived in Utrera amid demonstrations of affection and joy from my beloved Andalusians. Today I received a visit from Father Cagliero and the newly appointed director. They have already started their sacred ministry. I trust that they will do a great amount of good in Spain. I have already prepared another residence for them in Ecija, once the episcopal see of St. Fulgentius. Have no doubt, my dear Don Bosco, that I will be *leur grand Papa* [their big daddy]."

[5]*See* pp. 7ff. [Editor]

[6]Letter (already quoted) to Don Bosco, Seville, February 23, 1881. [Author]

The diocesan clergy of Seville was warmly sympathetic toward the Salesian Congregation, seeing it as a blessing for Spain's youth which had steadily been going downhill ever since 1868, when the radicals began to sink their roots ever deeper. Valencia's bishop also did his best to win the Salesians' promise to open a house in his diocese, as did also the bishop of Malaga, who anxiously sought to meet a Salesian with whom he could discuss his proposal. Father Cagliero obliged him with a visit. He found that some zealous priests and laymen had already started something resembling what they had read about Salesian enterprises in Turin, Sampierdarena, Nice and Marseille, but the Salesians were needed to orient, direct and advance the undertakings according to our educational system. He enrolled twenty Salesian cooperators. From what he heard there and elsewhere, he got the impression that everywhere "a pressing need was felt to instill good morals into the working class," and people were convinced that "our Congregation offered the only remedy for the social ills" of the day. These are quotes from a letter of Father Cagliero to Don Bosco. The watchful clergy's assessment was correct. Recent events have proven that Spain's salvation no longer rested with the aristocrats but rather with the populace, who therefore needed immediate attention to the utmost.

As remarked above, Seville's archbishop praised the promptness of the Salesians in setting about their sacred ministry. The Church of Mount Carmel had been abandoned for quite some time. It lacked everything, so that they had to borrow candles, candlesticks and vestments, but in less than two weeks they put together everything needed for divine worship. The functions were drawing ever increasing crowds. First came the boys who flocked around the Salesians, filling sacristy and sanctuary, some vested as altar boys, others learning to become altar boys, many joining catechism classes which had been so long neglected. The mothers hailed the arrival of the new apostles. Marquis de Ulloa wept with joy. Father Cagliero, in a letter updating Don Bosco, exclaimed:[7] "And we? We have already given thanks to Divine Providence for using *los muchachos* [the scamps] of Valdocco to highlight ever more His glory and mercy in this country."

Also neighboring Portugal turned to Don Bosco's sons. Through the apostolic nuncio, Father Cagliero received a registered letter from the chairman of the Association for the Protection of Workers who invited

[7]Utrera, March 1, 1881. [Author]

him to visit the capital and see for himself the urgency of coming to the rescue of the children of the poor working class. From Oporto he received a second letter written on behalf of the cardinal telling him how eagerly he was being awaited in Portugal's second largest city to set up a Salesian house there without delay. On receiving all this information, Don Bosco replied in writing with his usual unshakable calm:

[No date]

My dear Father Cagliero:

I received your letters and forwarded them to Turin. Your fellow missioners were soundly rocked as far as St. Vincent,[8] from where they sent me mail. Our work is progressing very nicely. God has blessed us. Forward! My respectful regards to all our benefactors, especially our most revered archbishop of Seville— dearer to us than a father—to whom I hope to write before long. Try to do something for our Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome.

We urgently need your presence here. I hope to be in Rome by the beginning of April and then return quickly to Turin. Heartiest greetings to all our dear friends, confreres and boys in Jesus Christ.

God bless us all! Pray for me

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

It was only after he had returned to Turin from Rome and received Father Cagliero's report that Don Bosco found time from his busy work to write to the archbishop. He wrote in Latin, perhaps forgetting that the prelate knew Italian very well and also probably wishing to make it easier for other clergymen to read his letter. It was a plain unpretentious Latin, in which without much concern he voiced the sentiments he sincerely felt for the archbishop.

His recommendation to Father Cagliero to give thought to helping the Church of the Sacred Heart did not go unheeded; any wish of Don Bosco was always an order to his loving sons and co-workers. Father Cagliero made a translation from the Italian of a circular—which we shall quote later—and of Don Bosco's letter and had both translations

[8]An allusion to a three-day storm they encountered during their voyage to Montevideo. [Author]

printed, sending copies to every bishop and parish priest of Spain. The newspapers also gave them publicity.[9]

The real problem for the Salesians was the language, which they had never studied. It was one of the main reasons why Father Cagliero stayed on in Utrera until Easter, April 17. On the evening of that solemnity he publicly took leave of the faithful—the women, to be sure—who frequented the Church of Mount Carmel. For the occasion his lively fancy prompted one of those sparkling witticisms for which he is still fondly remembered. Walking through the town that morning he had seen the so-called bull of the *aguardiente* [firewater]. On all great occasions a Spaniard cannot forego his favorite amusement. In those days, when an arena for the *corridas* [bullfight] was not available, a simple expedient was used. A wild bull with a long rope tied to its horns was let loose into the city streets and squares. Among crowds of spectators, some strong men bravely confronted it, egging it on in all kinds of ways, standing in front of it, and dodging its furious lunges, while others were ready to stop the bull short by tugging on the rope when things became dangerous. Since this took place at the hour when people went out for a sip of brandy, the bull was called "aguardiente."

Today this highly dangerous thrill is illegal outside an arena, but Father Cagliero then saw it take place as he walked through the town. So he began his sermon pretty much as follows: "I must return to Italy. I have to admit that up to now the thought of leaving pained me, because having seen none but women inside this church, I pitied them as if they lived a lonely life, with no men to protect and care for them. This morning, however, while walking along the streets of Utrera, I found myself in the midst of a thick crowd of hale and hardy men. 'Thank heaven!' I exclaimed. 'There are men too in Utrera!'" The moral needed no further pointing, but the preacher's remarks bolstered it further, and we are assured that once word of his clever comment was made public, it yielded excellent results.

Although the marquis did not sit within the congregation, he was faithful in attending Mass. He was loyal to the custom prevalent among nobility of receiving Communion only at long intervals and in grand style, that is, in ceremonial dress, his chest bedecked with decorations. He approached Jesus as he would his sovereign. Now, as the Salesians

[9]Letter from Father Cagliero to Don Bosco, Utrera, March 17, 1881. [Author]

started the practice of frequent Communion, he could not set his mind at rest in seeing humble folk go to Communion so often. But he too soon yielded and gradually shed his old custom, even receiving Holy Communion daily. So ardent became the joy of this Christian soul that he could never thank Don Bosco enough for the priceless gift he had received in his declining years.

Leaving Utrera, Father Cagliero went first to Lisbon and then to Oporto. In Portugal's capital he had a most cordial interview with the apostolic nuncio, Archbishop Aloisi-Masella, a warm admirer of Don Bosco, who characterized Don Bosco's works as works of God. He also had an audience with Queen Maria Pia, daughter of Victor Emmanuel II. Their half-hour interview touched on Turin, Don Bosco, Mary, Help of Christians, the Salesian missions, the new foundation in Spain, and future foundations in Portugal. With some curiosity the queen asked, "How does Don Bosco manage to achieve all these good ventures with no funds?"

"That is the great secret of Divine Providence," replied Father Cagliero, "and from the very beginning Your Majesty's grandfather and saintly mother were part of it."

"I am delighted to know that Don Bosco's thoughts run also to Portugal. He must begin as soon as he can."

"When that happens we certainly shall rely upon Your Majesty since we are Italians, Piedmontese, and, more precisely, Turinese."

"That is understood."

Before leaving, Father Cagliero spoke to her of the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice which Don Bosco was building at the Holy Father's request as a monument to her godfather. "Ah, yes," she exclaimed. "Pius IX really deserves it! He was a saint." She added that she would gladly make a donation. Before ending the interview, she asked Father Cagliero to present her respects to Don Bosco and to congratulate him on his magnificent achievements.

In Oporto Father Cagliero found a sincere friend of the Salesians in Cardinal Amerigo Ferreira dos Santos Silva. He sought to have a Salesian house in his diocese at any cost as soon as possible. However, Father Cagliero left as soon as he could lest he compromise himself, though he realized how distinguished a work of charity it would be for the Salesians to set themselves up in Oporto where, in addition to a broad spectrum of multiple moral problems, the Protestants were

firmly entrenched. At that time Father Mendre's brief French sketch of Don Bosco[10] was translated into Portuguese and printed in Oporto.

On April 27, crossing central Spain, Father Cagliero went to Barcelona by way of Badajoz and Valencia and from there crossed the frontier into Marseille.[11] He arrived in Turin shortly before Don Bosco got back from Rome.

Don Bosco seems to have had a very clear notion of the good work his sons were called upon to carry out in Spain. In fact, he had told the future director of Utrera [Father John Baptist Branda] on the feast of St. Teresa of Avila in 1880, "Utrera will serve to hone our weapons and whet our swords as we move forward into much broader fields. In the near future a married woman living presently in Barcelona—and, mind you, this is certainly no dream—will be widowed and will ask us to go to Barcelona. There we shall establish a house, and then many other houses will follow." This prediction began to come true in 1882 when Dorotea Chopitea de Serra became a widow; in suffrage for her husband's soul she decided to sponsor a festive oratory and a hospice for abandoned youth, entrusting both to the Salesians. That was the real source of the vast growth of Don Bosco's Congregation in Spain.

The opening of the house at Utrera was followed two weeks later by the inauguration of the house in Florence. Don Bosco had been well known in Florence for some time. His many visits to the city, Italy's provisional capital, on government business, the astonishing outcomes of his blessing, and most of all the miraculous restoring to life of Countess Gerolama Uguccioni's godson[12] had not only spread his fame but had endeared him to the city's ancient families. Archbishop Limberti and Archbishop Cecconi also held him in high regard. Hence, when the Protestants boosted their efforts to win over the people of Florence, the faithful turned to Don Bosco as the one best prepared to halt the flow of this evil propaganda.

The Tuscan capital had first asked Don Bosco to establish his work there as far back as 1877 through the Society for the Mutual Assistance of Catholic Workers, headed by Marquis Pompeo Bourbon del Monte.

[10]*A obra de Don Bosco*, translation from the French by Father Louis Mendre, Oporto, Palavra Press, 1881. [Author]

[11]Letter from Father Cagliero to Father Lazzero, Oporto, April 26, 1881. The Lisbon weekly *A Cruz do Operaio* [The Worker's Cross] had written about Don Bosco, the beginnings of the Oratory, Father Mendre's booklet and the Salesian missions in its issues of July 23, August 6 and 13, and September 3. [Author]

[12]*See* Vol. VIII, pp. 240f. [Editor]

The original invitation was quite vague. Later the society appointed a committee to run a fund-raising drive, to find a suitable site, and to conduct nègotiations. Chairman of this committee was Attorney John Grassi; the corresponding secretary was George Rastrelli. The search for a suitable site went on for quite some time; finally in May 1880 a small house located at 31 Via Cimabue was rented. The aim was to start with an art and trades school and a few elementary classes, but long-range plans called for much more: an institution which would be a monument erected by the Florentine Catholics to the sacred memory of Pius IX. Don Bosco personally saw the premises that very May and agreed that it should be the modest cradle of his Florentine apostolate.

In July the committee pressured Don Bosco to send one Salesian to start the work. Don Bosco, instead, sent Father [John] Marenco,[13] director of the house at Lucca, to see whether the place was really ready to be opened. Father Marenco[13] found the facilities large enough for a beginning, but everything else was no more than a flood of words, with loads of assurances, many hopes, but nothing definite; in fact he even had to go to a restaurant for his dinner. Archbishop [Eugene] Cecconi wrote to Don Bosco on August 1, "We have very little money, but you are used to beginning with little." Father Dalmazzo, sent to investigate more closely, heard some rumors which counseled delayed action.

Meanwhile the committee issued a circular asking for outright donations or pledges, but they went too far in stating that the Salesians would certainly be there at the opening of the school year. Though determined to please his Florentine friends, Don Bosco had set no date, and so, on learning this, he wrote that the required personnel could not be made available by that year, due to the recent death of several Salesian priests. The archbishop called a committee meeting and decided to insist, as he actually did on November 12, stating that he could not count on the local cooperators until the Salesians had actually settled there. Meanwhile, he added, the Protestants were hard at work and rejoicing. Would Don Bosco at least send him a definite reply?

After this meeting, Canon Justin Campolari, a devoted cooperator, wrote to Don Bosco: "I learned of the meeting from a person who was present and thought that maybe a shortage of personnel was not the only and main reason for your deferment, the real reason being the uncertain

[13]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

financial support for the institution. I too believe that the funds collected in the drive are inadequate. Should this be the case, I suggest that you say so very frankly in a letter to the archbishop, because it would be a shame to see your project begin with so meager and shaky a support and at the risk of being forced to close it down in two or three years. In that case it would be wiser not to open it at all. . . . Believe me, my dear Don Bosco, there is a dire need for a Salesian house in the site they selected in Florence, but once it is opened it must be strong enough to hold its own against the Protestants. They certainly do not lack money to lure unwary parents to send their children to their school, which unfortunately is already full of innocent little ones."

Don Bosco was so deeply touched to the quick by these last words that he strove with his chapter to find some way to speed up the sending of Salesians. In January [1881] the archbishop renewed his appeal. "I have done my best," he wrote, "to assure you of a steady income. I am now glad to say that it is prudent to begin. As you know, the house is ready, and I can assure you of an annual income of fifteen hundred francs to support three Salesians for a few years. My dear friend, delay no longer! Yield to the ardent plea of a bishop who begs your help in God's name!" We have a copy of Don Bosco's final answer which he had held back as he awaited the outcome of several letters that he had asked be sent to some women cooperators. A secretary's note informs us that, as of the end of December [1880], he had received but one donation, and that not very substantial. Furthermore, the people with whom he had corresponded were not sufficiently reliable since none of them could guarantee either financial or moral support. Don Bosco therefore had waited for the archbishop to take the initiative, and the prelate's last letter had come up to his expectations. He therefore replied:

Turin, January 25, 1881

Your Excellency:

In response to your touching letter I am, as we say here in Piedmont, ready to do the impossible. I delayed my reply because the people whom I was asked to contact by mail either did not answer or sent disheartening replies. Now that I have seen Your Excellency's good will and know that I shall be dealing with you personally, I put myself into your hands and will do all you say.

Meanwhile, trusting in your letter, I am writing to Father Marenco, director of our house at Lucca, asking him to go to Florence next week to set up the

place so that the Salesians who will soon be there will find all they need to cook their pasta.

I trust that you will good-heartedly host Father Marenco for the day or two he will be in Florence.

Meanwhile, I will pick a few Salesians from several of our houses so that within a few weeks a priest, a young cleric and a coadjutor brother will be available for our new undertaking. I will let you know the exact date of their arrival. For the time being I think that it would be wise for them to limit their activity to the festive oratory and recreation center; later, as they become better acquainted with the town, its ways and customs, they may start evening classes and whatever else Your Excellency may judge best.

My thanks to you and everyone who has put such trust in our lowliness. While humbly requesting the kindness of your holy prayers, I am highly honored to remain,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The archbishop was thrilled. A few days later he joyfully welcomed Father Marenco on his return to Florence to finalize arrangements, showering him with graciousness, kindness and fatherly affection. After pointing out what things were still needed, things for the house, Father Marenco returned to Lucca and wrote to Don Bosco that the new Salesian community could set out in a couple of weeks. "From what I've heard," he wrote, "I suggest that those who go to Florence keep in close touch with the archbishop, who is truly a genuine father to us." We shall soon see how timely was his recommendation to work closely with the archbishop.

Three Salesians took possession of the house on March 4: the director, Father [Faustinus] Confortóla,[14] a cleric and a coadjutor brother. They immediately ran into serious problems, the first of which arose from the committee which was supposed to turn everything over to Don Bosco and the Salesians without further ado. Those gentlemen felt that doing so would only put them in a bad light. Therefore, grossly exaggerating all they had done and having not the slightest notion of what a religious congregation was all about, they took it for granted that the Salesians should be subordinate to them in some way or other. Consequently, they proposed a contract that would keep the new institution

[14]*See* Vol. XIII, p. 659. [Editor]

perpetually fettered to the Society for the Mutual Assistance of Catholic Workers, much like a subsidiary. Don Bosco would never have agreed to any such embarrassing dependence which would have made his Salesians puppets in the hands of others or, as Father Confortóla put it, would have forced them to beg others for legs to walk with. From the correspondence in our files relating to this annoying situation, we can readily understand a complaint expressed by Don Bosco. "Look at these developments," he told the director in April. "Before any Salesians went to Florence, we in Turin were being flooded with the most enticing offers. Now that Don Bosco is there, they fence him in, practically saying, 'Now we shall dictate our own terms.'"

However, this attitude was not shared by the two members of the society who had more often kept in correspondence with him, Mr. Rastrelli and Mr. Lucaccini. The one most opposed to that kind of contract was the archbishop, who, on Don Bosco's stopover in Florence, advised the society not to shackle Don Bosco with those unfair terms. They did not heed him, but he did manage to convince them to draw up another contract less barbed with odious clauses. Don Bosco brought the contract with him to Rome to let Father Rua check it out, but it was obvious that even the amended draft would not guarantee the financial independence and freedom of action he sought. However, on his stopover in May, he found that the archbishop's conciliatory efforts had proved quite successful. The society handed over the undertaking to the Salesians and accepted an exquisitely tactful, unfettered statement drawn up by Father Rua who personally presented it to the society.

This is not to say that all bad feelings disappeared, but Don Bosco let it pass. Heaven help him had he easily yielded to resentment or discouragement! This time the doors of several gentlemen of means, among them the chairman of the society, were closed to him, and his fund-raising conference brought in no more than two hundred and forty-four lire and eighty-one cents, the lowest realized by any fund-raising conference. The poor result was probably due to the disheartened feelings of some of the fund-raisers, committee members, and the mistrust of the Salesians felt by others who were influenced by current rumors. In this regard it should be noted that the committee had distributed a printed memorandum during the conference to let everybody know that the signatories were "gladly" handing over "the institution that had been brought into being by the united efforts of Catholic charity to the well-deserving Father John Bosco and his Congrega-

tion." At the same time the committee issued on behalf of the Society for the Mutual Assistance of Catholic Workers a report of the funds it had collected and its expenses. It named an actual total income of eighteen thousand and thirty-one lire and fifty-six cents, which in reality was only a paper sum since most of it was in pledges only. A copy of this report was formally presented to Don Bosco, who rapidly scanned it in silent thought for a moment, and then, slightly shaking his head, handed it back without a word. At the very moment that he was to request contributions, this report gave everyone to understand that, thanks to the society, the Salesians were already generously provided for.

As regards Don Bosco, the effect of these unpleasant incidents was dispelled by personally seeing and hearing from others that the festive oratory was making steady progress. Although, in a city like Florence, young people were lured by public shows and festivals, the oratory enrollment reached two hundred. Later, when summer vacation began, some fifty youngsters used to frequent it daily, keeping the Salesians busy from morning till night. "The Lord makes up for our feeble efforts by giving us good health and the comfort of achieving some good," Father Confortóla wrote.[15] "He enables us to protect these poor boys from evil and from manifold dangers."

Don Bosco invariably found great support in the motherly concern of Countess Uguccioni, who was always ready to exert her telling influence among Florence's foremost families for his benefit. As soon as he could after his latest stopover in Florence, he wrote her this letter of grateful tribute:[16]

Turin, June 22, 1881

Dear Mamma in Jesus Christ:

I have a free moment and will use it to write you a few lines. I wrote to Countess Guicciardini in the terms you suggested; perhaps she will answer.

I was very sorry to hear of the death of Costance Donati,[17] a good Christian lady. We have prayed for her and are also praying for her family.

[15]Letter to Father Rua, Florence, July 2, 1881. [Author]

[16]Only recently did we get hold of copies of Don Bosco's many letters to the countess. We have been able to compare them with the originals. In the appendix of hitherto unpublished documents, we shall print thirty-seven of them, written between 1866 and 1888. [Author]

[17]*See* pp. 388f. [Editor]

For you I wish abundant health and holiness, as well as patience when I come to weigh you down in your own house with our problems.

God grant you and both your small and large family [what God was to grant them is missing]. Please pray for this poor man who will always remain in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and of Mary,

Your most grateful son,
Fr. John Bosco

More problems arose from another source. The lease on the house expired at the end of October. The landlord wanted to sell, and had no intention of renewing it, and so the Salesians had to move out. Don Bosco asked the director to find other premises for a permanent residence. It was not in the Salesians' interests to buy the building and stay there, since there were too many inconveniences. For example, on Sundays crowds watched the boys playing as though they were in a stadium. In any event, Father Rua had already looked at several houses in the area but had not as yet come up with any choice. Continuing the search, Father Confortóla came across a place, and everyone he consulted agreed that the location, premises and price were satisfactory. The property skirted the left side of Via Fra Angelico, not far from Via Cimabue. Father Joseph Franco, brother and fellow Jesuit of Father Secondo Franco, S.J., who knew the town well, told the director, "By all means write and tell Don Bosco that he could not find a better place in Florence to advance his work and to benefit the people. This area is fast becoming a pagan stronghold. It has neither church nor priests, and so it won't be long before no one will any longer know anything about religion or the sacraments. Worse still, the Evangelicals have cleverly encircled it and set up their nest at its very center, thus easily making new conquests. But once the Salesians will set up a hospice, a festive oratory, day classes and a public church, all Protestant endeavors will come to naught, God will be glorified, and souls will be saved. Just let Don Bosco send four men of God, and that will be enough. Tell him also that when the lucky day will dawn for the opening of a public church, those four priests will hardly suffice to hear confessions, for at heart Florentines are upright people, and when they come to see something good they love it and go for it with a passion." Father Confortóla wrote this in a letter to Don Bosco on June 10. Moreover, the archbishop not only urged the purchase of that property, but begged them not to delay because the Protestants were keeping an eye on the Salesians and any procrastination would give the devil more leeway.

Don Bosco therefore set up a purchasing committee made up of five Salesians and a diocesan priest representing the archbishop. Father Confortóla acted as agent for the five Salesians; the seller was Mrs. Joan Glotz née Panzani. The matter proceeded rapidly—so rapidly indeed that by September 5 the deed of the purchase was properly drawn up, and its terms were excellent. Then with lightning speed the work of renovating the building was begun so that the hospice could be opened as soon as possible. However, at the very peak of activity, funds began to run out, and so Don Bosco, then at San Benigno Canavese, wrote and sent to Florence the following circular letter:

From afar I appeal to your well-known charity to aid an undertaking which is meant entirely to benefit the endangered youth of Florence.

I believe you are aware that a festive oratory and a hospice for the poorest of the city's boys has been opened as a line of defense against the great harm being done to the young by the Protestants.

But the large number of these boys soon convinced us that our premises were too small and that we could do much more if we had more spacious facilities. Driven by this serious and growing need, encouraged by His Excellency Archbishop Cecconi, and relying on the charity of the people of Florence who have never failed me, I thought it best to begin remodeling and expanding the building we now own. Work has progressed rapidly, but funds are now running short, and despite all our best efforts I find myself faced with the risk of having to halt this work of charity on behalf of religion and morality.

Lest I leave any stone unturned in the interest of a work of public and private charity, I now appeal to your zeal and generosity. Certainly God will reward your benefaction, and those youngsters whom your donation will enable to return to the path of uprightness and eternal salvation will unfailingly invoke heaven's blessings upon you and your family every day.

Trusting fully in your help, I ask God to grant you a long, healthy life. I am highly honored to remain gratefully, etc.

At about the same time he took the opportunity to express his thanks to Countess Uguccioni and indirectly to recommend the venture to her.

Turin, October 6, 1881

Dear Mamma in Jesus Christ:

Please tell Mr. Pestellini that we shall say many prayers for him at Mary's altar and that he should put all his trust in the great goodness of this Benefactress of the entire human race.

Our work has begun in Florence; there is much still to be done, but God's aid will not fail us. Courage! You will always be our beloved Mamma, first and foremost of our benefactresses.

God bless you, my well deserving Mamma, and with you may He bless your family, both small and large. Keep praying for this poor man who gratefully will always be in Jesus and Mary,

Your devoted son,
Fr. John Bosco

Father Confortóla, who during the complicated purchase transactions had shown sharp business acumen, kept the work going forward at a record pace, dreaming up ways of finding money, and, while directing the festive oratory in Via Cimabue, speeding up the work so as not to delay the opening of the hospice. Since it would accept secondary school students, authorization of the provincial superintendent of schools was required. True, his office could be bypassed for some time under the pretext that this was also a trade school, but in those difficult times it was just too risky. It was the archbishop who eased the situation. He had some seventy applications from boys aspiring to the priesthood, and he planned to screen them carefully, sending the best to Father Confortóla as soon as the hospice opened. Thanks to this plan it was easy to obtain a decree from the archdiocese designating the hospice a junior seminary, over which the provincial superintendent of schools had no control. The plan was carried out. Replying to Father Confortóla's report in this matter, Don Bosco wrote:

Turin, October 14, 1881

My dear Father Confortóla,

I fully approve of what has been done in agreement with Archbishop Cecconi, but I wish to support his charitable goals as much as we possibly can. Therefore:

1. We shall gladly take in the boys he will send to the hospice at a fee of thirty francs, and if that does not work out, we will ask him to consider cutting back on living expenses or slightly raise the monthly fee if absolutely necessary. See if it is possible to enroll thirty of the archbishop's applicants. Try to get the archbishop to send thirty boys.

2. The thought of seventy aspirants to the priesthood is truly enticing. If the archbishop agrees, we could, for this year only, divide them up among our schools in Lucca, Spezia and Sampierdarena. By next year I hope we shall have ample facilities to put them all together in Florence. If the archbishop

goes along with this plan, let me know immediately and I will set it in motion. The train fare for the youngsters would not be too expensive since they are entitled to half fare.

3. Tell the archbishop that preference will always be given to the boys he recommends, and that he shall always have full say in all matters of religion and instruction.

4. All I ask you to do is find funds for renovating and furnishing our new house.

May God bless all we do. In Our Lord Jesus Christ always,

Your affectionate friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

At the end of October the lease on the house in Via Cimabue expired, and so on November 2 the festive oratory moved, lock, stock and barrel, to the new house. The dedication of the hospice had to wait until the feast of the Immaculate Conception. The house was small; thirty people easily filled it. However, once a sapling is rooted in good soil, it grows steadily into a tree, spreading its branches and withstanding foul weather.

The arrival of Salesians at Faenza occurred in the first days of November. Negotiations for this foundation took much time, but we shall condense them to a few pages. Father Paul Taroni,[18] the Faenza seminary's saintly spiritual director, noted in a personal memo of his: "Let me state once and for all that it was always Don Bosco who wanted this Salesian house of Faenza, even rebutting the arguments of his chapter and the difficulties it raised." Don Bosco's propensity to do something for this staunchly Catholic city in central Italy goes back to 1877 when he met Father Taroni in Turin on the feast of Mary, Help of Christians.[19] Both saintly men got along extremely well so that a fruitful spiritual relationship was forged between the Faenza seminary and the Valdocco oratory.

The following June Don Bosco asked Father Lazzero and Father Barberis to stop off at Faenza on their return from Rome, giving Father Taroni an opportunity to fire more strongly the people's aspirations. But, in October, he suffered a deep hurt. In the course of a formal dinner Cardinal [Lucido] Parocchi, elevated that year to the see of Bologna, clearly showed little regard for either Don Bosco or the

[18]*See* Vol. XIII, pp. 324f. [Editor]
[19]*Ibid.*, pp. 323f. [Editor]

Salesians. It is true that, when he later met Don Bosco in Bologna,[20] this illustrious cardinal did a complete about-face and in a confidential talk with Father Taroni on August 7, 1880 retracted everything he had said. In the meantime, however, Father Taroni was forced to do all in his power to dull the sharpness of the cardinal's words, which had stirred up among the clergy hostile feelings against the Salesian Congregation.

In the spring of 1878, Salesian cooperators, failing to find adequate facilities in the city, went to the suburb of Urbecco where a former monastery seemed quite suitable. It had been suppressed by Napoleon I; in 1859 the papal government had assigned it to the two parishes of Urbecco with certain conditions, one being that the parish priest who held in trust the former monastery open a school for the area's poor boys. However, because of a series of political turmoils nothing could be done. So when Father Babini, now an elderly priest, whose abundant correspondence with Don Bosco we possess, heard about the plans of the Faenza cooperators, he thanked God for relieving his conscience of a heavy burden.

The times were propitious. In July [1878] Bishop Angelo Pianori brought the matter to the attention of Leo XIII, who encouraged him to pursue it. In September, Father Clement Bretto,[21] a young Salesian priest who later became economer general, after escorting some boarding students from Alassio to Lugo, went to Faenza with instructions to check out the facilities; he liked what he saw. In March of the following year, Father Cagliero and Father Durando stopped at Faenza while doing their exploratory trip through Italy and confirmed his favorable opinion. They were having dinner at the seminary when they received a letter from Father Bonetti who, replying from Magliano Sabino in Don Bosco's name to Father Taroni's letter of the year before, wrote: "As soon as the nest is ready, the Salesians will settle in it." This confirmed what Don Bosco had said a month before to a student from Faenza who was attending our school at Alassio: "The people of Faenza have stolen my heart and I can't resist paying them a visit." The Salesians' arrival and Don Bosco's visit became Father Taroni's favorite topics of conversation both in the seminary and out.

[20]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 72f. [Editor]
[21]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

Father Babini, the parish priest, was at Valdocco for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians and opened negotiations. Because of legal matters connected with the former monastery, Don Bosco felt that he should not further pursue the matter without the Holy See's previous consent. The parish priest therefore immediately went to Rome. In a private audience Pope Leo XIII praised the scope of the work, pointing out the urgency of saving the young. Soon after, Cardinal [Theodulph] Mertel, head of the Secretariat of Memorials,[22] wrote to the bishop of Faenza, asking about the need and feasibility of accomplishing the project. The bishop's reply to both points was positive. A papal rescript followed, approving the project and assigning two hundred and fifty lire yearly to the Salesians for the first three years of residence in Faenza.

So unexpected a windfall kindled the enthusiasm of Faenza's Salesian cooperators to such a degree that twelve priest cooperators banded into a permanent committee headed by the vicar general in order to expedite the plan and see it through to completion. In May 1880 three of them went to Turin to relieve the superior chapter's lingering fears. In a meeting with Father Rua, Father Durando and Father Cagliero, it was agreed that three Salesians would be sent to Faenza in June if the building could be made ready for occupancy.

During the remodeling, rumors began flying in Faenza that Jesuits expelled from France were moving into the city. Protests and threats of demonstrations against their coming were raised by loud-mouthed anticlericals who angrily egged the populace on, labeling the Jesuits as immoral religious and troublemakers. But after the dust settled, the common sense of the majority of the people quickly hushed the troublemakers' uproar.

Although the twelve-member committee met repeatedly in an effort to solve the problems raised by the central government and the provincial authorities, the resulting delay made occupancy of the residence impossible even by the end of 1880. On his return to Rome in 1881 the bishop felt he could assure the Pope that the Salesians would soon be in Faenza. "Good!" exclaimed Leo XIII. "They will be a great blessing to your diocese." Responding to the pressing demands of Faenza's citizens, the superior chapter announced that it was ready to send one

[22]A subdivision of the Secret Chancery of the Holy Father dealing with membership petitions not handled by other Congregations. Source: *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1907, Robert Appleby Co., New York, N.Y. [Editor]

of its members to visit them. In fact, at the end of March, Father [Anthony] Sala, economer general, stopped at Faenza while on his way to Rome for matters concerning the Church of the Sacred Heart. He too liked the premises and gave a few directives for the definitive setup of the house, agreeing that it should be named after St. Francis de Sales. However, everything seemed to conspire against it. Ten days after Father Sala's departure copies of the Milan newspaper *Secolo* flooded Faenza, making lurid charges against the Salesians in Alassio.[23] It was an anxious moment for decent people; however, a refutation of the charges was circulated throughout the city and foiled the sectarians' plans.

How rough a road the committee had to traverse as they experienced enthusiasm and discouragement, disagreements and reconciliation, and some distrust stemming from Turin's procrastination. Romagna's people, by nature ardent and generous, found it hard to understand that time must often be allowed to run its course in business affairs. Eventually, on July 19 Father Durando wrote, "It is our policy to work in harmony with the bishop. We shall write to him within this week and will take action." Father Rua's letter to the bishop received an immediate reply voicing his hope for a quick opening of the house. Don Bosco, deeply gratified by his letter, sent him a Salesian cooperator's diploma and informed him that, when next assigning personnel, the superiors would give foremost attention to meeting the wishes of Faenza's Salesian cooperators.

Yet by the end of October no Salesian had as yet arrived, notwithstanding the many prayers Father Taroni had urged his seminarians to say! We can understand his utter disappointment on learning that personnel was not available. His grief knew no bounds when he saw the Protestants descend in force upon Faenza.[24] At the height of his distress he was encouraged by a letter from the Salesian cleric [Henry] Fos-

[23]*See* pp. 110f. [Author]

[24]Having a poet's spirit he could not help expressing himself in poetry when deeply touched. On this occasion he eased his sorrow in these three stanzas which he sent to the cleric Foschini:

"Are the Salesians coming?"
Christians demand.
"The Protestants are coming,"
the bad men reply.
The Protestants, yes;
The Salesians, no;
Mary, see
What has befallen us.

Behold, O Mary, so many dear innocents at Thy knee;
Have pity on them, have pity, if Thou hast none for us. [Author]

chini, formerly a seminarian of his, who informed him that despite the obstacles raised by the other superiors, Don Bosco himself had not lost hope.

And that hope was realized in a very unexpected way. On the night of October 22, a train wreck occurred in Liguria between Sarzana and Avenza: thirteen coaches derailed and were badly damaged with loss of life and many casualties. Among the passengers was a young Salesian priest who, after his spiritual retreat in Piedmont, was returning to Randazzo in Sicily, where he was stationed. At that very time Father Cagliero, on completing his tour of Sicily, had sent word to the superiors in Turin not to send any more priests to Sicily, since there was no need of additional personnel. Providence seemingly was intervening. Immediately Don Bosco telegraphed both Father Cagliero and the unharmed Salesian to meet in Rome and go to Faenza together to open the festive oratory. Thus it was that Father John Baptist Rinaldi became director of the new house; though a young man, he was to win the love and esteem of the people of Faenza and all Romagna. Later the cleric [Henry] Foschini[25] and Paul Bassignana, a coadjutor who became very popular in the city—they used to call him Paolino—were sent to help him. Paolino was truly a saint. To the end of his long life he was the Salesian community's "wise and faithful servant" and an angel of kindness to the city. Father Cagliero formally opened the festive oratory on [Sunday] November 20, 1881 in the presence of two hundred boys. That evening the people of Faenza sang the first Vespers of Our Lady of the People, their beloved patroness. The coincidence was telling: the Salesians had gone there precisely to save the children of the people.

At first it caused no small surprise that, with so many Salesian cooperators, priests or laymen, in Faenza, Don Bosco should have singled out only one person, Dr. Mark Cantagalli, to whom he recommended the Salesians he was sending from Turin. On a business card he wrote: "Father John Bosco thanks, greets and blesses the Salesian cooperator Cantagalli, recommending to his care the small Salesian family in Faenza." Dr. Cantagalli was a physician, and this explains the timely recommendation, but no one understood why he should have been singled out. Father Taroni, a man of God accustomed to seeing God's plan in all things, later offered an explanation when the doctor's

[25]*See* Vol. XIII, pp. 665f. [Editor]

brother was appointed bishop of Faenza; it was almost as if Don Bosco had foreseen the future. On the evening of December 8 the Holy Father's first subsidy reached the Salesians from Rome.

Don Bosco's much awaited visit to the Salesian house in Faenza took place on May 13, 1882. He immediately made it known that he wished to hold a public conference, but opinion on this was divided. As we shall see, the press had been waging for several days a fierce war against the Salesians. Also Romagna's so-called "republican" papers—a name long synonymous with Freemasonry—had been disgorging a flood of insults and blasphemies, and political rallies were being held throughout the city. Fearing that the agitators might use this occasion to provoke demonstrations against the unwelcome newcomers, the local clergy tried to dissuade Don Bosco from holding the conference. But he would not yield. "We want everyone to know what this is all about," he stated, "lest they think that we are any kind of conspirators or have come with evil intentions." Deferring to his determined stand, the priests discussed which church they should choose for the purpose. After letting them talk for some time, he interrupted, saying, "Let's call on the bishop and do what he suggests." The choice fell on the parish church of the Servites, one of Faenza's largest and most frequented churches.

On the morning of Sunday, May 14, feast of Our Lady of Grace, Don Bosco celebrated Mass in the cathedral at Her altar for the seminary's upper classmen. At Communion time, realizing that several other people wished to receive, he took the large Host reserved for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and broke it into particles for the eight communicants.

After Mass he visited the seminary, to the clerics' joy. How often they had heard Father Taroni talk about him, his virtue, his works, his miracles, and now here he stood in their very midst! They received him in the courtyard beneath a large balcony. As he slowly approached them, he looked at them and exclaimed, "Oh how I love you!" He addressed them in the lecture hall. Again he said that he had loved them for a long time, that he had often spoken about them, and many a time had prayed for them, warmly longing to meet them; now that he finally saw them he was happy. He asked the rector if they went home for [the summer] vacation. On being told they did not, he exclaimed, "Lucky people!" He then told them about a twelve-year-old pupil of

his who, after vacationing at home one summer, absolutely refused to return to the Oratory. When Father Taroni asked why not, Don Bosco answered, "If one could see the souls of youngsters who go home for vacation, he would realize that many leave with the wings of a dove and return with devils' horns. I regret to say it, but, unfortunately, one goes home with good intentions and then . . . I'll say no more. . . . I am sorry to see my sons go home for vacation and would prefer they stay with me, and so I suppose that your superiors feel the same way. You are fortunate . . . but let's drop the subject." In closing he wished them the three S's: *Sanità*, *Sapienza*, *Santità* [Good Health, Wisdom and Holiness], commenting briefly on each.

We should not hide the fact that the bishop and some of his clergy feared that the Salesians' presence in their city might hurt the seminary, especially when they would open a boarding school. It was with this latent anxiety in mind that the rector asked him to pray for the seminary because of the decline in the number of applicants. Don Bosco reassured him; the Faenza seminary's enrollment, he said, would go up. So soon and effectively was his prediction verified that both the bishop and rector used to say that this alone convinced them Don Bosco was a saint.

That afternoon he spoke to three hundred boys. A certain father who was dying, he told them, gave his three sons healthy grains of wheat. One son put the seed away without planting it; one sowed it carelessly; the third sowed it well on good soil. The moral of his talk was that as one sows so shall one reap. Later he gave a talk, almost an hour long, to a crowded congregation from the pulpit, standing, biretta in hand, and dwelt on the objectives of the Salesian Society, stressing that it was totally dedicated to the welfare of boys. He announced that on the following day he would offer Mass in the Church of St. Anthony of Padua and would address the ladies of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Wherever he planned to establish his work, Don Bosco always gave great importance to the cooperation of pious women whom he was able to inspire to work with him.

At that Mass many received Holy Communion. In his brief talk, he congratulated the good ladies and mentioned several indulgences and how to gain them; then he spoke about the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome, asking them in the Pope's name to contribute toward it.

At this time, Count Marcel Cavina was critically ill. He and his

family were held in high esteem by the whole city for their dedication to religion and works of charity. They hoped that, through Don Bosco's prayers, heaven might grant him the grace of a recovery. Don Bosco went to his bedside twice, the second time being right after the address to the ladies of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and just an hour before his departure. Father Taroni, recalling the blessings Don Bosco's visit brought to the Salesian cooperators, to the seminarians and to the count's family, wrote: "Don Bosco's visit served to bring strong encouragement especially to his cooperators, a remarkable increase of seminarians, and a truly wonderful resignation, peace and serenity in the count until his death."

Before the count's decease, Don Bosco wrote three times to Canon Joseph Cavina, his brother. His first letter contains a further affirmation of a statement of his. In 1875, when speaking to the directors[26] [at the annual conference of St. Francis de Sales] he had told them of his wish that the Pope's acts of kindness toward him should return to the Pope through donations to Peter's Pence. That his was not just a pious wish is proven by the six thousand francs for the Pope which Don Bosco had brought with him from Marseille to Rome, where, as we have seen, they were stolen.[27] Here again we see the same noble thought. In this he was very much himself. At the very beginning of Peter's Pence in 1849 had he not sent the meager but priceless contribution of his poor Oratory boys?[28]

Turin, May 28, 1882

My dear friend in Jesus Christ:

I received your kind letter and thank you. I saw your brother twice while in Faenza and found him seriously ill. Since then I have prayed and have had others pray for him. While I was with him I thought that I might suggest to him an exceptional means of recovery which several times achieved good results—a handsome donation to ease the Holy Father's financial difficulties. But I went no further, because I knew it was the pious intent of your mother and family to make such an offering when the grace was obtained. However they graciously gave me a donation for Masses and for prayers; the latter we have offered and continue to offer both morning and evening at the altar of

[26]*See* Vol. XI, p. 13. See also p. 119 of this volume. The originals of Don Bosco's letters to the canon are preserved in the archives of the Cavina family. [Author]

[27]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 352ff. [Editor]

[28]*See* Vol. III, p. 361. [Editor]

Mary, Help of Christians. My dear Monsignor, I shall not fail to say a special memento for you every morning at my Holy Mass. I ask you also to kindly pray for me. In the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Besides being generous to Don Bosco while he was their guest, the Cavina family sent him a further two thousand lire which he assigned to the Church of the Sacred Heart. In alluding to young Count Charles, worthy successor to both the name and the virtue of his father, Don Bosco used the epithet "graceful," which would seem quite out of keeping with his usual way of describing one's physical appearance, and so we should understand this as it is commonly used in the Piedmontese dialect, meaning "courteous, obliging."

Turin [no date]

My dear friend in Our Lord Jesus Christ:

I have received your letters, and today I got the four money orders of five hundred francs each to be used for the greater glory of God and of the Blessed Virgin Mary by imploring Her aid for your sick brother. That was my intent while I was in Faenza. Morning and evening I still keep praying before the altar of Mary, Help of Christians. If God will not grant us the miracle of his physical recovery, we may still be sure beyond doubt that the miracle of his eternal salvation will be accomplished.

I had in mind to do something for the Holy Father who, I know, is in dire need, and so the money you sent is being used today to pay off a debt contracted in building the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice in Rome, in which the Holy Father takes a keen interest.

May the merciful Lord deign to listen to our prayers and grant us those graces which are in accord with His holy will and the spiritual good of your brother.

Please extend my humble respects to your brother, your mother, your sister-in-law and graceful little Charles, your nephew.

May the Lord bless you all. Please pray for me too. Always in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary,

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

The third letter came shortly before the death of Count Cavina on June 19.

Turin, June 8, 1882

My dear Father Joseph:

How grieved I am by the news you give me of your brother! Here we have prayed morning and evening in Our Lady's church in order to obtain his recovery. Were so many prayers in vain? I cannot believe so; it only means that God intends to grant us a spiritual rather than a physical favor. Please assure your mother, Marchioness Cavina-Durazzo, that we are also praying for her in particular. Then, should God ask a complete sacrifice of us, let us respond generously. God is Our Father and Our Lord, and we shall do our best to say "Your will be done!" Warm regards to you and your whole family. In Jesus Christ,

Yours devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

The family of the deceased always kept a warm remembrance of Don Bosco. At the approach of the Christmas season, Canon Joseph Cavina sent him his best wishes and then confided his spiritual needs to him. He received the following reply:

Turin, December 27, 1882

My dear Father Joseph,

I delayed for a short while my answer to your letter so that I might have the pleasure of writing to you personally and letting you know how much I appreciate your greetings and prayers. I heartily thank you and pray that God may repay a hundredfold you, my dear Father Joseph, your whole family and, especially, your little nephew. May God safeguard him.

You ask me to pray that God may enlighten you to choose the path which will unfailingly lead you to life everlasting. Yes, I shall do that gladly and ask you to do the same for me. Should the Lord inspire you to come and stay with us even only a short while, you will be a brother visiting his family homestead, the master coming to his servant's house. There is plenty of work awaiting you too. Yet we shall do our best to have regard for your health and station.

Since you so kindly wrote to me in all confidence, I too commend myself most warmly to your prayers and to your holy Masses. Just now I have to deal with very important matters regarding our foreign missions, and my success depends on heaven's aid. Therefore I rely very heavily on your prayers.

God bless you, my ever dear Father Joseph, and may He keep you in good health. Please pay my humble respects to your entire honorable family. I am always honored to be in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

The festive oratory's success so enraged the enemies of good that they fought against the Salesians tooth and nail. During recreation one day a rifle was fired across the playground, the bullet meant for Father [John Baptist] Rinaldi; almost miraculously no one was hurt. One night the main door was soaked with gasoline and set afire. Even among good people there were misunderstandings which caused hard feelings. All these things aroused fears that Don Bosco would recall his Salesians and close the festive oratory. But, as Father Berto affirmed at the process [for Don Bosco's beatification], Don Bosco replied to someone who begged him to avert this peril that, despite the opposition of Satan and the sects, the house of Faenza would not be closed down but would rather grow. Father Berto's statement is confirmed by this letter of Don Bosco to Canon Cavina:

Turin, September 17, 1883

My dear friend in Our Lord Jesus Christ:

I was very happy to receive your letter which gave me such heartening news of your family. I thank God that all of you are enjoying satisfactory health and sincerely pray that it keeps getting better and better and that the Lord's grace may make you steadfast in His service until you receive the reward of the just in heaven.

However, I was deeply grieved to hear of the obstacles hindering the work we do to help poor and endangered youth. Shall we leave the field to enemy hands? Never!

When dangers threaten, we must redouble our efforts and sacrifices. We shall willingly do all that lies in our power, but you and your friends too must lend a helping hand so that we can open a hospice for poor boys. Let all of you think and do something about it.

Father Rinaldi will explain my thoughts better to you.

I have no time to write more, but I assure you that I shall not forget to pray for you, my dear Father Joseph, and for your well-deserving family at my Mass every day.

Please commend our entire Salesian forces to Our Lord, especially now that we are making a decisive foray into Patagonia.

God bless us all. In Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Far from leaving Faenza, Don Bosco gave orders to look for premises which might offer greater possibility of apostolate and afford greater freedom of action. In the meantime an unofficial stipulation was made between him and the committee of Salesian cooperators. It remained in effect until the festive oratory was successfully transferred from the suburb to the center of the city. Here the work grew by leaps and bounds; at present [1934] it still continues to exert a beneficial influence for good not only in the immediate area but throughout the entire Romagna region.

# CHAPTER 11

## *The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians at the Death of Their First Mother General*

WHILE the Bonetti case was running into further complications in Rome because of jurisdictional problems, Attorney Leonori wrote to Don Bosco:[1] "I would suggest that this is the time for you to seek approval of the constitutions of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, following the same procedures you adopted for obtaining your Congregation's approval; this would eliminate all problems." Other people too were of the same mind, but Don Bosco was in no hurry to seek such approval. He knew only too well that Rome's tendency was to make the women's communities totally independent from their male counterparts and that just then such a separation would be both untimely and harmful, for he felt that he still needed time to shape the promising Congregation according to his ideal. In this he was merely following the precedent set by the Vincentians, who for similar reasons never sought approval of St. Vincent de Paul's rule for the Daughters of Charity.[2]

The new community, we have said, was a promising one. In 1881, imitating the policy set by the Salesians in 1872, the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians started issuing their General Directory of

[1]Rome, June 21, 1881. [Author]

[2]In 1901 a decree of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars required that, among other conditions for approval of a women's congregation, it be totally independent of any male congregation having a similar mission. In 1918 that decree was incorporated into the new Code of Canon Law. For the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, the decree went into effect in 1906. In 1921 Pope Benedict XV appointed Father Paul Albera apostolic delegate for the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians; his duty was, personally or through delegates, to safeguard the founder's spirit. [Author]

sisters and convents, adding brief obituaries of deceased sisters. Their superior chapter was then listed as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Superior General* | Sister Mary Mazzarello |
| *Vicar* | Sister Catherine Daghero |
| *Economer* | Sister Joan Ferettino |
| *First Assistant* | Sister Emily Mosca |
| *Second Assistant* | Sister Henrietta Sorbone |
| *Novice Mistress* | Sister Petronilla Mazzarello |

The directory listed the names of ninety-seven perpetually professed sisters, fifty-six with triennial vows, fifty-five novices, and seven lay sisters. The lay sisters formed a distinct group; dressed in black, they wore a shawl rather than a guimpe. While their duties and rights did not differ from those of the other sisters, their distinct habit clearly designated a difference of status. Hence they often felt somewhat ill at ease, like second-class religious—a situation very alien to the mind of the founder and the spirit of the community. However, the appropriateness that the sisters who did housework or ran outside errands should wear something lighter seemed to advise against any changes, and so this situation continued until 1922, when Article 21 of their constitutions was drawn up, stating "The sisters engaged in errands outside the convent may wear a plain cloak over their religious habit when they go out." From then on, all the sisters wore the same habit inside the convent.

The motherhouse in Nizza Monferrato was structured after the Valdocco Oratory. The mother general was the directress, but she was assisted by a vicar who actually ran the community. The other houses numbered twenty-three: two of them were in Sicily (Catania and Bronte), three in France (Nice, La Navarre and Saint-Cyr), and six in South America (Almagro, La Boca, San Isidoro, and Patagónes in Argentina; Villa Colón and Las Piedras in Uruguay). During 1881 and 1882 ten more convents were founded: eight of them were in Italy (Fontanile, Visone, Incisa Belbo in the Acqui diocese; Rosignano Monferrato in the Casale diocese; Sampierdarena in the archdiocese of Genoa; Trecastagni in the archdiocese of Catania, and Máscali Nunziata in the diocese of Acireale); one was in France (Marseille), and one in Argentina (Morón near Buenos Aires).

In the midst of all this activity, God called to Himself the woman

who, wrapped in her humility, had been its inner driving power from the early days of its slow growth. Until then the Congregation's need was to sink roots deeply into the religious virtues, so that it might grow into a straight and sturdy tree. In this regard, the gentle holiness and relentless work of Mother Mazzarello were all that Don Bosco could wish. But now the Congregation's ever more rapid and vast development demanded a leader blessed with a happy combination of supernatural gifts and uncommon natural talents. Mother Mazzarello herself, inspired as she was, had a surprising grasp of this need, so much so that before the June 1880 elections she would approach the sisters who were to vote and gently suggest to them something like this: "As you can see, the Congregation now needs knowledgeable superiors, since well educated young women are entering, and it becomes ever more difficult to discern if they are really called to the religious life. Not so for country girls, who are open-hearted, and one can see through them. Guiding the first group calls for much virtue and learning. Hence, vote for Sister Magdalene Martini, who is now in South America, or Sister Catherine Daghero." Though they paid her no heed then, a year later they took her advice.[3] The illness which brought Mother Mazzarello to her grave had long been dormant within her. Throughout that winter a dull pain in her side would now and then flare up with considerable discomfort, but she paid no attention to it. While accompanying her missionary sisters to the port of departure, she was overcome by a high fever at Sampierdarena; nevertheless, feeling somewhat better, she set sail for Marseille, planning to visit the sisters in France. However, on arriving at Saint-Cyr, she was stricken by a very violent attack of pleurisy and had to stay in the convent for a month in great pain, to everyone's edification.

On her journey home she met Don Bosco at Nice and asked him whether she would ever fully regain her strength. Don Bosco replied with a story. "Once upon a time," he said, "Death came knocking at a convent door. To the sister portress, who opened the door, Death said, 'Come with me.' But the portress replied that she could not, since there was no one to take her place. Without another word Death walked into the convent and kept telling everyone it met, 'Come with me,' whether she was a sister or a postulant or a pupil, even the cook. But all answered that they could not heed its call because they still had a lot of

[3]*See* Maccono, *Suor Maria Mazzarello*, p. 268 (1st edition). [Author]

things to do. Finally Death approached the superioress. 'Come with me,' it told her. She too presented her excuses why she could not. But this time Death did not back down and insisted, 'The superior must lead by example, even on the journey into eternity. So come, and don't hold back, because I cannot accept your excuses.' What was she to do? Naught but bow her head and follow." Mother Mazzarello understood, but passed it off in fun, so as not to grieve the sisters who were with her.

At Saint-Cyr she had had but one desire—not to die away from Nizza Monferrato, far from her good daughters. The Lord heard her prayer. She arrived there on March 28, but she harbored no illusions. Don Bosco had made it clear enough that her last hour would not be long in coming. Knowing this, how deeply the joyous welcome she was given must have distressed her! Indeed, hardly two weeks later the pleurisy returned with most grave symptoms.

In her humble, unabashed simplicity she prayed in her sufferings, humming hymns to Our Lady, interesting herself in the needs of others and speaking kindly to all. One day she made three recommendations to the chapter members and to the more elderly sisters gathered about her bed. First, there should be no jealousy among them after her death; as long as her poor scrap of a body was still with them, such danger would not arise, but later who could say? Second, they were to help one another in doing good but leave the running of the Congregation to those who were in charge. . . . Third, the sisters had forsaken the world, and therefore should not create another like it in the Congregation.

Father Cagliero arrived from Spain on May 10. Since Don Bosco was away from Turin and Mother Mazzarello could not have his final blessing, she prayed that at least the sisters' director general might come to her before her death. When Father Cagliero arrived, she had already been given the last sacraments, but on the eve of her death he spent three quarters of an hour at her bedside, giving her the opportunity to talk at ease about her spiritual needs. She died a holy death on the morning of Saturday, May 14 [1881] at the age of forty-four.

Mother Mazzarello's life and governance prove beyond argument that Don Bosco had really been inspired in choosing her to head the newborn Congregation. Though rather irritable by nature, she controlled herself and became patience personified; though without schooling, she enjoyed the sincere respect of sisters who were well educated; always most modest, she had an extraordinary talent in cor-

recting others, discerning vocations and calming disturbed minds. Her death brought bitter grief to all her daughters, but the reputation for holiness enshrining her memory made her the pride of her religious family, and they took steps before long to urge her cause of beatification.

There was and there still is some surprise at the lack of clues indicating Don Bosco's reaction to this sorrowful happening. A few things must be pointed out. The day Mother Mazzarello died he was with Father Rua in Florence, striving to resolve some regrettable problems in that house and to come up with a final and better arrangement. Also we must admit that we have no information on what he privately said or did in many instances. Then, too, when we consider the sisters, we find it is an irrefutable fact that, though Don Bosco privately and publicly praised the sisters' work, he never singled out any sister by name—a reticence very much in keeping with his reserve in certain matters, a reserve he would not break for all the world. Nor can we forget the objections Rome made concerning the ties between the Salesian rector major and the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians,[4] as well as the insinuations rampant in Turin about Don Bosco's alleged maneuverings to wrest the sisters and their convents from the archbishop's authority.[5] All these things must have convinced him at the time that he would be wise to be on guard and forestall misunderstandings by refraining from public comments which others might seize upon to charge him with excessive interference in the government of a Congregation which was only diocesan.

Though Don Bosco did not speak about Mother Mazzarello's death, the *Bollettino Salesiano* did. Its June issue published a brief but highly laudatory obituary. Then in five other issues,[6] it gave its readers a spellbinding biography which highlighted the deceased mother's virtues and merits. Can we suppose that any of these notices went unobserved by Don Bosco? Rather, it seems to us that here and there we detect the touch of his pen.

According to the rules of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, the governance of the Congregation during the vacancy passed into the hands of the vicar, and a new mother general was to be elected not later

[4]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 162, 166f. [Editor]
[5]*See* p. 155. [Editor]
[6]September, October and December 1881; March and June 1882. [Author]

than two weeks after her predecessor's death. The vicar, Sister Catherine Daghero, while informing the sisters of the details of Mother Mazzarello's death, enclosed a letter written to the vicar by Father Cagliero, director general, in Don Bosco's name. It read:

Turin, May 24, 1881

Dear Sister and dear Daughters in Jesus Christ,

Our beloved superior and father, the Very Reverend Don Bosco, has deeply shared your rightful grief for the profoundly felt loss each of you has sustained in the death of your Very Reverend Mother General.

He commends to God the lovely soul of the deceased and prays for her orphaned daughters.

He asks that you all resign yourselves to God's holy will and he prays that you all stand united in the beautiful bond of charity and in the perfect observance of your Congregation's holy rule. Since present circumstances prevent you from carrying out Article 3, Chapter 4, of your constitutions concerning the election of a mother general, he postpones that election to next August at the time of your spiritual retreat.

He urges all of you to put your trust in Divine Providence and in the motherly protection of Mary, Help of Christians. He also asks that all recite a daily *Pater*, *Ave*, and *Gloria* to the Holy Spirit in all the Congregation's convents, that you may be given a mother like your former one to guide you all to heaven!

I ask for a remembrance in your fervent prayers. In Jesus Christ,

Your director and father,
Fr. John Cagliero

The election was scheduled for August 12. The general chapter, comprising all the mother superiors of Italy and France, together with the members of the superior chapter, met in the Church of Our Lady of Grace at Nizza Monferrato. The boarders were also allowed to attend. After calling upon the Holy Spirit's enlightenment, Don Bosco, as rector major, assisted by Father Cagliero, director general, and Father Lemoyne, local director, gave an appropriate talk and then in God's name declared the meeting in session. Tellers were chosen by secret ballot: Sister Rosalie Pestarino, superior of the Chieri convent, and Sister Adele David, superior of the Vallecrosia convent. The chapter would have preferred that Don Bosco choose three candidates from whom they would elect a mother general, but Father Cagliero at once opposed the plan. Twenty-one sisters voted and elected Sister

Catherine Daghero of Cumiana as their superior. The rule required that the mother general be at least thirty-five years old, whereas Sister Daghero was only twenty-five, but Don Bosco gave her the necessary dispensation. The new mother general's election was everywhere hailed with great rejoicing, since she was already highly esteemed by the sisters, both near and far.

While election preparations were still underway, she happened to be with Don Bosco, who told her, "I have a fine box of bitter macaroons for the poor soul who is to succeed Mother Mazzarello, because that poor soul. . . ." In fact, he sent the new superior not one but two boxes, one of macaroons, the other of candy, with this note:

Nizza Monferrato, August 12, 1881

Dear Mother General:

Here are a few tidbits for your daughters. Keep for yourself the sweetness you are to show them at all times, but also be ready to accept the bitter macaroons, or, better still, the bitter pills it may please God to send you.

God bless you and give you virtue and strength to sanctify yourself as well as the entire community entrusted to you.

Pray for me.

Yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

When the meeting was over, the sisters poured into the courtyard and gathered about Don Bosco. Close to him there was also Countess Gatti. "Look how many you are already!" Don Bosco exclaimed. "Your house is big, but it will expand further. Be women of courage. Though you have lost a humble mother, you have been given another most humble. You had a saintly mother and now you have one no less holy. . . . But where is she now? Look for her and tell her to show herself!" They sought about and found her in the attic, hiding in tears.

That evening a show was given in the little theatre to honor both the newly elected mother general and Don Bosco. The latter asked Mother Daghero to sit between him and Countess Gatti. At the end of the performance he said, "This is your mother. And, Mother, these are your daughters. I see two trays on the table, one containing tiny macaroons, the other candy. Now, Mother, give each sister a spoonful of macaroons first, then one of candy." After that was done, Don Bosco, turning toward the mother general, said to her, "Do this always. For

each and for all something a little bitter because it is good for both soul and body, and then candy—but this always later."

Since August 2 Don Bosco had been at Nizza conducting the usual retreat for women and girls and keeping very busy hearing their confessions and counseling. Then each evening after prayers he gave a short talk. Sister Angela Rinaldi recalls that in one of them he dwelt on this thought: "Many people say Don Bosco is a saint, and that he does wonderful things, but I can tell you that Don Bosco is just an ordinary priest, an instrument for great things in God's hands, great things for the salvation of souls, especially those of the young. But he can do nothing without your cooperation. . . . He relies on the spiritual help coming from your prayers strengthened by a truly Christian life, and he looks to you for material assistance in the form of small or large offerings. . . ." These retreats always produced such good results that in 1882 he went so far as to remark, "If I had not already founded the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, I would do so now just to accomplish this much good."

Among the retreatants there was young Eulalia Bosco, his grandniece, daughter of Francis Bosco who was the son of Don Bosco's brother, Joseph. On seeing her, he said: "Your sister Mary asked to become a postulant this year, but Our Lady wants her in paradise and wants you to take her place." The girl was taken aback and stammered, "Oh no! My sister is getting better, and I do not feel like becoming a nun." Her sister died, and young Eulalia returned to the convent a year later as a postulant. She is still alive today [1933]. After serving in Rome as mother provincial, she was elected to the superior chapter, of which she is still a member.

While caring for the sisters and retreatants, Don Bosco snatched spare moments of free time to revise his *Il Giovane Provveduto* [The Companion of Youth][7] and update it. He therefore wrote to his secretary:

Nizza Monferrato, August 8, 1881

My dear Father Berto,

When you come, make sure that you bring the other notebooks of the old edition of *Il Giovane Provveduto* because I brought the wrong sequence with

[7]*See* Vol. III, Chapter 2. [Editor]

me. Take care of yourself and of all our young bean plants[8] and grapes. Farewell and pray for me. In Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

On August 8 he wanted to gratify a former pupil of his who had founded a Catholic Workmen's Association at Nizza. This man, recalling the pertinent gratifying words uttered by Don Bosco on his name day,[9] thought that he should take advantage of this opportunity to honor him and benefit the association. In agreement with the honorary chairman, Count Caesar Balbo, he invited the members to a formal reception, enhanced by the presence of parish priests and other clergy, at which Don Bosco himself presided. Father Joseph Bertello read a masterly address between several other speeches. Don Bosco then spoke and moved his listeners as he reminded them how he had always been the friend of the workingman.[10] Four days later, while preparing to leave Nizza, he sent a gracious letter to the association and its chairman:

Nizza Monferrato, August 12, 1881

My dear Charles Brovia:

Yesterday I wanted to thank each and every member of the Catholic Workmen's Association, which you so well manage, but I had neither the time nor the opportunity. Please thank them for me, and tell them I took much comfort from the evening and shall retain an undying recollection of what might be truly called a Christian social gathering. May God increase your numbers!

God bless you and the entire association. Humble regards to Count Caesar Balbo. Pray for me too. In Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

Through his graciousness Don Bosco had also in mind to win well-wishers to the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, all the more so because some townsfolk did not look upon them with a kindly eye, as we have already had occasion to demonstrate.[11] In October the new

[8]*See* Vol. XIII, p. 678. [Editor]
[9]*See* p. 142. [Editor]
[10]*Bollettino Salesiano*, September 1881. [Author]
[11]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 198ff. [Editor]

mother general went to Rome. Father Cagliero, whom Don Bosco had sent to Sicily to visit the Salesians and Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians and preach their spiritual retreat, made a stopover in Rome and visited the Salesian house at Magliano. As he was preparing to resume his trip, Mother Daghero brought him some nuns so that he could escort them to Trecastagni [in the province of Catania] and help them start a new foundation.

It was a solemn occasion. A vast number of Italian Catholics were flocking to Pope Leo XIII in protest and reparation for a most shameful insult recently given to the Vicar of Jesus Christ. On the night of July 13 [1881] as Pius IX's mortal remains were being transferred from the Vatican to the place he had chosen for his burial, a gang of roving madmen hired by the Freemasons charged the cortege in a vain effort to scatter it at any cost, even threatening with satanic fury to fling the mortal remains of the great Pope into the Tiber. The entire world rose up in indignation, particularly the whole of Italy. On October 16 [1881] some twenty thousand Italian pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Basilica in enthusiastic homage to Peter's successor. Then the following morning a papal audience was held in the Vatican halls where the pilgrims arrayed themselves in regional groups to see the Pope. Mother Daghero and the sisters joined the Piedmont detachment, as did also Father Cagliero and the other Salesians.

Never could they have dreamed of so magnificent a pageant, especially when the Holy Father, followed by a train of prelates, toured the hall. They saw how graciously Leo XIII stopped when someone presented the Salesians, and he stopped to talk first to the cleric Eusebius Calvi[12] and then to Father Cagliero.[13] They all heard the Pontiff say, "Don Bosco is a saint." The sisters too were presented to the Pope, who remarked, "The sisters of Don Bosco! Good! Good! How many houses do you have? Where are they?" Mother Daghero, on her knees, was so touched and taken aback that she could not find words to answer, and Father Cagliero came to her aid. On hearing that they were in Argentina, Uruguay and Patagonia, he exclaimed: "Oh, these good

[12]Ordained a priest in 1885, he worked zealously in Piedmont, Liguria, Calabria and Sicily for over forty years, inspiring many priestly and religious vocations among his pupils. He went to his heavenly reward from the Oratory on January 4, 1923. [Editor]

[13]*Bollettino Salesiano*, November 1881. [Author]

sisters! Even as far off as Patagonia! God bless you all, each of you, your superior and all your houses!"

With the end of the year 1881 came a handsome heavenly gift to the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. On the last day of December Don Bosco had a dream about them which he narrated to Father Lemoyne, who, as he always did with anything relating to Don Bosco, immediately took notes of all he said. They form the basis of our account.

Don Bosco found himself gathering chestnuts in a grove [of his] near Castelnuovo. Scattered over the grassy ground were many, big, fine chestnuts. While he was absorbed in what he was doing, a woman appeared and gradually came toward him while picking up chestnuts and placing them into a basket. Don Bosco, annoyed by the way she was helping herself to other people's things, addressed her, "What right do you have to come here? I can't see how you dare come and take chestnuts from my land."

"Oh!" she replied. "You mean I have no right?"

"I think I'm the owner and this is my property."

"Be that as it may, but I am also gathering chestnuts for you."

The woman spoke in so resolute a voice without pausing in her work that Don Bosco thought it best not to pursue the matter, and so he continued picking chestnuts. When their baskets were full, the woman called to Don Bosco and asked, "Do you know how many chestnuts I have here?"

"That's a strange question!"

"Just answer it. Do you know how many there are?"

"Of course not! Am I supposed to be a wizard?"

"Then I will tell you."

"Well, then, how many are there?"

"Five hundred and four."

"Five hundred and four?"

"Exactly. Do you know what these chestnuts symbolize?"

"No!"

"They symbolize the the houses of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. That is the number they will open."

While they were talking, they heard a loud uproar of a nasty crowd of shouting drunkards. They could hear them advancing through the trees. Frightened, Don Bosco took off, the woman following close

behind, until they were finally stopped by the bank of a river. They could go no further, and going back was out of the question. Don Bosco became very worried. Meanwhile the crowd drew nearer, shouting and viciously trampling underfoot the chestnuts lying on the ground.

At this point Father Lemoyne comments: "Possibly unfulfilled vocations, mainly lost because of hostility against the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, or, more likely, the fate of those girls who still remain in the world."

Don Bosco was awakened by the uproar, but moments later he dozed off again and the dream continued. He was sitting on the bank of a swollen stream; a short way off sat the woman with the basket of chestnuts on her lap. Far off could still be heard the drunkards' receding shouts as they seemed to be fading away behind a hill; it all took but an instant.

Don Bosco kept eyeing the chestnuts, which were really large and beautiful. But, looking more closely, he noticed that many of them were worm-eaten.

"Look at these," he told the woman. "What are we to do with them?"

"Throw them away, lest they spoil the good ones. You must expel the girls who are not good or who fail to keep the spirit of the house because they are being consumed by pride or some other vice. Do this especially with the postulants."

Father Lemoyne comments: "The chestnuts of the second dream symbolized the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians."

As Don Bosco kept looking at the chestnuts, he sorted out a few and found that the worm-eaten ones were not many after all, saying as much to the woman. She replied, "Do you think that all the remaining ones are good? Couldn't there be some with an undetected worm?"

"If so, how can we ferret them out?"

"It's not easy. Some postulants are so guileful that it seems impossible to unmask them."

"Then what shall we do?"

"There is only one way. Use the rules as a gauge and keep an eye on them. You will see who is spiritually motivated and who is not. This test will hardly ever fool a careful observer."

Don Bosco kept staring at the chestnuts, lost in thought, and then he suddenly awoke. Dawn was breaking.

As he told Father Lemoyne, the dream came back every night for a full week, for no sooner would he fall asleep than instantly the woman and the chestnuts reappeared. Once she told him, "Look out for the rotten chestnuts and those that are hollow. To test them, put them into a pot of hot water. The test is obedience.... Boil them and then squirt the rot out of them. Throw them away. The hollow ones, that is, the vain ones, always rise to the top. They cannot stay at the bottom with the others, but will strive to come up somehow. Scoop them out with a skimmer and fling them away. Bear in mind also that husking good chestnuts after boiling is no instant job. First remove the husk and then peel off the skin. They will appear very, very white. But look carefully; some of them are twins; pry them apart and you will find another fine membrane within. That's where some tartness is hidden."

We would find it hard to come up with a better metaphor of the various kinds of persons who make up a religious community, and to show how difficult it is to probe the inner recesses of the heart, even when it is good.

# CHAPTER 12

## *Consecration of the Church of St. John the Evangelist*

IN his letter of January 1882 to the Salesian cooperators, Don Bosco gave this account of the Church of St. John the Evangelist.

This sacred monument which the Salesian cooperators are raising to Pope Pius IX, our great Pontiff and eminent benefactor, is now practically completed. Artists and craftsmen have finished the chancel, central aisle, side aisles, and walls; final touches will be added in a day or so. The marble floor has been laid, and the five bells whose most harmonious chimes will summon Turin to worship have already been installed in the belfry; the altars are also being set up and the confessionals, doors and pews are being made. Chevalier Bernasconi of Varese, the celebrated organ builder, is at work on one which will do him honor and be worthy of our church.[1]

We now let Don Bosco lead us on a tour of the church's interior, leaving the bells and organ to the end.

The "chancel" mentioned by Don Bosco contains the apse and the sanctuary. The apse's paintings portray Jesus on Calvary as He says to Mary, "Woman, there is Your son," and to John, "There is your Mother." A group of pious women stand at the foot of the cross; from above, a cluster of angels gaze upon the scene in grief and adoration, while one of them holds out to the Redeemer the chalice of His passion. This painting, done to resemble a Byzantine mosaic, is the work of Henry Reffo, a Turinese artist, who also decorated the side walls of the sanctuary depicting a charitable deed of St. John the Evangelist, passed on to us by ancient Church historians. The fresco on the Gospel side of the sanctuary shows an assembly of the faithful reverently

[1]*Bollettino Salesiano*, January 1882. We have already devoted the entire Chapter 18 of Volume XIII to this church. [Author]

looking upon John the Apostle as he entrusts to the bishop of Smyrna[2] a young lad to be trained for the priesthood. Directly opposite, St. John is seen in a rocky fastness as he comes upon the same youth and clasps him to his heart, though the latter had unfortunately gone astray and was now leading a band of robbers. In both scenes the artist wanted to symbolize Don Bosco's protective and redeeming ministry to youth. The two sanctuary paintings are matched by two others, the work of a former Oratory pupil, Joseph Rollini. They portray clusters of angels chanting a hymn of praise and victory to the Lamb of God, who is shown breaking the seals of the book which contains the future destiny of the Church, as St. John narrates in the Book of Revelation.

The church has three naves. The walls of the central nave are adorned by seven medallions (one set above the main entrance) depicting the seven bishops of Asia Minor mentioned in the Book of Revelation. Henry Reffo is the artist. Two other medallions are set above the two side doors opening into the vestibule. They are the work of Professor Salvino Caneparo of the Regia Accademia Albertina and portray, respectively, St. Alphonsus Liguori on the right and St. Francis de Sales on the left; both saints were proclaimed doctors of the Church by Pius IX. The two side aisles encircle the apse, thus providing an unobtrusive ambulatory around the main altar.

Subdued lighting filters into the church through ten tall windows and six magnificent rose-windows set high in the walls. Their stained glass allows for just enough light to enhance pious meditation. Five of the rose-windows are placed beneath the semi-calotte of the apse and portray in stained glass St. John the Evangelist, St. James, St. Andrew, St. Peter and St. Paul.

Six side altars are adorned with paintings of various artists, each marked by its distinctive quality. The two more imposing are dedicated respectively to the Immaculate Conception and to St. Joseph. The main altar, Oriental in style, boasts a magnificent tabernacle, opening in the front and in the back. The sanctuary is encircled by a broad balustrade of Satrian marble with four artistic gates.

There is a story behind the Pompeian mosaic floor. Its cost had been estimated at nine thousand lire. One day while at Sampierdarena, Don Bosco happened to meet Mr. [Joseph] Repetto,[3] the owner of a marble quarry in Lavagna Ligure. He greeted him with the title of chevalier.

[2]Now Izmir, a seaport city in Turkey. [Editor]
[3]*See* p. 124. [Editor]

"Don't tease me, Don Bosco," came the reply. "I am not a chevalier, just a plain business man who does his job as best he can."

"But could not a man in your position use a title of honor to enhance your position before your peers, your workers, your business associates and the social world? Don't you agree?"

"Of course I would not take offense!"

"Well, look, you have contracted to lay the flooring for the Church of St. John the Evangelist. Could you not do it free of charge and rid me of a worrisome expense? It would be an act of charity in God's eyes. And I promise to obtain a chevalier's cross for you."

"We could manage that," Repetto said.

"Then it's a deal," Don Bosco concluded.

On second thought, however, Repetto felt that it was too high a price for a mere honorific title. He manifested his misgivings to Father [Anthony] Sala, who urged him to follow Don Bosco's advice, assuring him that anyone showing generosity to Don Bosco always gained by it. As things turned out, Mr. Repetto laid the floor free of charge and got his knightly cross. Some time later, thanks to the Oratory, he was awarded the contract to build a monument to Bishop [Hyacinth] Vera in the cathedral of Montevideo, which brought him a handsome profit.[4]

The main door, made of walnut with bas-reliefs in bronze, is a singular work of art in Turin. It was designed by Professor [Joseph] Boidi[5] and inspired by Don Bosco, who wanted the faithful of Turin to remember that the church they were entering was a lasting monument to Pope Pius IX. The bas-reliefs highlighted Pius IX's two most historic acts: his defining the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary and his proclaiming St. Joseph patron of the universal Church. The first bas-relief has a remarkable detail: a prelate, clothed in dalmatic and standing reverently before the Pontiff, holds an open book. At Don Bosco's suggestion the artist gave the prelate the features of Archbishop Louis Fransoni, Turin's intrepid shepherd in 1854, the year of the dogmatic definition. The entire cost of the door was assumed by a former pupil of the Oratory, Father John Baptist Anfossi, who, orphaned at thirteen, had been taken into the Oratory by Don Bosco. It was a token of his undying gratitude to Don Bosco who had been both father and teacher to him. The facade's majestic features with

[4]We have the rough copy of Don Bosco's letter to the Minister of the Interior for the honorific title. [Author]

[5]*See* Vol. XIII, p. 443. [Editor]

its lofty bell tower rising from the center strikes the visitor who approaches the church from Corso Vittorio Emanuele II. In a panel above the main door a gorgeous mosaic portrays the Divine Redeemer seated on a throne, with the inscription "I am the way, the truth, and the life," drawn from St. John's Gospel. He is flanked by the Greek letters alpha and omega, as St. John thrice hails Him in the Book of Revelation, showing Him to be the beginning and the end of all creation.

Above that mosaic, in the panel of the triforium[6] another striking mosaic portrays the glory of St. John the Evangelist, borne triumphantly aloft by an eagle, the symbol ascribed to him by the doctors of the Church.

Don Bosco seems to have taken particular delight in writing about the bronze bells in his letter [to the Salesian cooperators]. Their blessing was truly an event, as their joyful peals cheered the whole neighborhood, blasting the long grim silence which hung over the enclave of the Waldensian church. The five bells were hoisted to their graceful tower on December 1, 1881. The blessing, minutely planned and solemnly carried out by Canon Berardi, pro-vicar general of the archdiocese, was held in the unfinished church in the presence of a great number of benefactors and friends personally invited by Don Bosco and a vast crowd of worshipers. Very unique and effective was a motet sung to the accompaniment of a carillon rung on a special keyboard by an experienced musician. The bells had been cast in the Bizzózero foundry in Varese in the key of E-flat. We point out only the inscription carved upon the largest bell: *Centenis domibus Salesianis Italiae, Galliae, Hispaniae, Americae divinam opem imploro* [I implore divine assistance upon the hundred Salesian houses of Italy, France, Spain and America].

A wrought-iron rail fence enclosing the church grounds between the hospice and an apartment building in Corso Vittorio Emanuele II was offered by Archbishop Gastaldi. The cathedral canons had commissioned a gate for the front of the cathedral, but the city building department had denied permission; it was then offered to the new Church of St. Secundus but, as it clashed with the church's architecture, the offer was declined. In a letter to Father Rua on February 21, 1882 Archbishop Gastaldi wrote: "I am donating this gate hoping that St. John the Evangelist will ever more protect our archdiocese; by this

[6]A triple-sectioned window. [Editor]

gift I also intend to show my benevolence to the Salesian Congregation, regardless of what has appeared in print to the contrary. It is my fervent wish that the relations existing between the Salesian Congregation and the present successor of St. Maximus[7] may be marked by that harmony which both the Gospel and the Church's laws require of all religious congregations toward the head of the diocese."

Since the fence was far too high and it would cost as much to alter it as to build a new one, regrettably the only thing to do was to thank him but decline the offer.

A fine work of art in the Church of St. John the Evangelist is a marble statue of Pius IX set on a high pedestal at the right side of the entrance. Right hand raised in blessing, the Pope holds the decree of the Salesian Society's approval in his left. He is clothed in papal robes and wears the triple tiara on his head. His expression is very fatherly, his smile angelic. So lifelike is the statue that all it need do is speak to be alive. It is the work of the sculptor Francis Confalonieri of Barzago in Brianza. The Latin inscription [composed by Father John Baptist Francesia] states that the church is a monument to the memory of this great Pontiff.

On April 25, 1882 the statue was set on its pedestal, within which was sealed a commemorative parchment bearing the signatures of several illustrious persons. Father [John] Bonetti signed the document in Don Bosco's name, for he happened to be in Rome at the time. Remarkable is the statement to which the signatures are affixed: "It was our wish to dedicate this statue with special solemnity, but reasons of prudence, which posterity will appreciate, counseled us to forego it at this time." These words echoed most poignantly a recent event which had deeply grieved Turin's Catholics.

On the morning of April 11 [1882] Archbishop [Celestine] Fissore of Vercelli consecrated the Church of St. Secundus. In a generous gesture, as though to wipe out the past,[8] Don Bosco offered the services of the choir, the first one to sing in the church, and with them went also the Oratory brass band to give a concert in the square after evening services.[9] Don Bosco most certainly felt delighted at seeing opened to

[7]A great fifth-century bishop of Turin. [Editor]

[8]*See* Vol. X, pp. 88f; Vol. XIII, pp. 446-454, 459-463. [Editor]

[9]*See* Vol. X, p. 522. Father Bonetti, writing from Rome to Father Berto on April 17, 1882, had this to say: "To see our boys' choir and brass band take part in the archbishop's undertakings hurts us very badly *at this particular time* because outsiders really believe that he is well-disposed toward us." [Author]

the public another house of prayer in which he had personally concerned himself ten years before. However, the enemy of all good was not pleased. We have already recounted how the construction of this church, which had been suspended for several years, was resumed in 1878 with the intention of erecting it also as a monument to the memory of Pius IX.[10] In affirmation of this purpose a bust of the deceased Pontiff was placed on the facade of the church with an inscription that irritated the anticlericals, whereupon riots, sparked by the freemasons and their main tool, the *Gazzetta del Popolo*, broke out with outrages that would have shamed even barbarians. Bust and plaque were torn away amid lewd jests and missiles thrown by the infuriated mob which carried out this outrage, unhindered, to the bitter end. After happenings like this, it was certainly unwise to publicize the dedication of Pius IX's statue. In fact, we have reason to wonder that the simple fact of erecting the monument went almost unheeded and without a scandalous riot.

But then something happened to provoke biting verbal exchanges. At the same time that Pius IX's bust was being torn away from the facade of St. Secundus, a wagon drove up from the railway station to deliver the statue of Pius IX to the Church of St. John the Evangelist. Brother Buzzetti, looking for some workmen to help him unload the enormous weight, came across the very masons who had just done their work of removing Pius IX's bust from the other church, and he hired them to carry the statue inside the church. And so the very same people who had ripped out the Pope's bust at one church just moments before now raised his statue in the very spot which had been the focus of so much contention for the honor of erecting a monument to Pius IX.

Three months later, at the inauguration of the organ, it was deemed advisable to proceed cautiously. The ceremony was advertised as an academic presentation of a musical festival to be given July 3 to 6. To make sure that event would fully and exclusively live up to its claim, the invitations and programs for the occasion bore only the signature of the producer, Father John Cagliero. But Don Bosco went further, resorting to one of those clever ruses of which he was a master. Pricked by the triumph of the mob which had so offended God in the person of His Vicar both by word and deed, the Catholic press, branding the action a brutal outrage, unwisely challenged it, boasting, "We shall

[10]*See* Vol. XIII, pp. 445ff. [Editor]

attend the inauguration of the statue of Pius IX in the Church of St. John the Evangelist. Meet us there, if you have the stomach for it!" Did this herald a free-for-all? The members of the Catholic Youth Association were certainly spoiling for a fight to show the world that fear could not deter them when it was a matter of upholding their standard. And so it was possible that the confrontation which had been averted at the dedication of the statue could occur at the inauguration of the organ. Don Bosco took steps to prevent that. Since admission was by personal invitation only,[11] he cleverly invited all the liberal newspapers. The editors, pleased by this courtesy, attended and of course saw the statue of Pius IX. However, finding no demonstration to report, they let the matter drop. The more tolerant *Gazzetta di Torino*[12] went beyond mere silence and published an article beginning: "For three full days this new church, erected like so many others by that exceptional man Father John Bosco, has been full of people except for short intervals when its magnificent organ is silent. The elite of Turin's society assembles there for the morning concert, from nine to noon, and again for an afternoon concert, from three to six."

Let us add too that Don Bosco performed in his own inimitable style. Generous as always in his poverty toward whatever would lend dignity to divine worship, especially in urban areas, he never stinted on either the dimensions of a church or its decorations. In 1870 the architect Edward Arborio Mella wrote to his daughter:[13] "Don Bosco stopped in to see me, and we came to an understanding about a rather beautiful and reasonably large church with three naves. We shall work on it. What a unique person! Quoting the budget estimated by the city building department, he remarked with calm and enviable self-confidence, 'But it is better to do a good job, and if the new estimate should be twice as high as the present budget, it does not matter. We will find a way to cover the cost.'" He therefore asked the contractor to order a first class organ, and he got what in those days was an unrivaled masterpiece. To bring out its range he sought out renowned organists in Turin and elsewhere, among them Petrali of Bergamo and Galli of Milan. He himself put in an appearance only on the fourth day, the last

[11]This "personal invitation" bore the names of the selected organists and the program. A postscript read: "Donations to defray the cost of the organ will be appreciated." [Author]

[12]July 6, 1882 issue. [Author]

[13]Countess Adele di Rovasenda, mother of Marchioness Maria Terzi, owns the original letter and allowed us to quote from it. [Author]

one. The *Gazzetta di Torino,* in its aforementioned article briefly reporting on the church, the organ and the organists, concluded the article with another tribute to Don Bosco: "Yesterday afternoon, the author of all these marvels, Don Bosco, appeared in the new church's sanctuary in the company of several other priests. His manner is grave, but pleasant, and he conversed quite amiably between musical selections and at the end of the performance with the many people who flocked to pay their respects. Just seeing him, one realizes that he is what our friends in France would call '*quelqu'un*'—a real somebody—and indeed one must acknowledge that all he has accomplished and still continues to accomplish is amazing!"

The organ recitals were but a prelude to a far more solemn event. The church was finished in every detail; its architecture, frescoes, paintings, decorations, floors, altars and door were like a lofty monument, whose sight delighted the benefactors; they felt that their money had been well spent. Indeed it was time to get on with the solemn consecration of the church.

To keep public interest in the coming event at its peak, Don Bosco did not wait for the last minute to do his planning. Back on January 10 he had sent personal invitations to the leading families of the area to attend a special meeting on the adjoining premises on January 14. At the assembly he told his listeners about his plans and asked for suggestions on what could be done to make the event a success.

The consecration was to be held toward the end of May.[14] Don Bosco seemed to have given up hope that Archbishop Gastaldi would attend, and so, while in Rome in April, he took steps to have a cardinal officiate.[15] In this attempt—truly unprecedented—he was encouraged by an overture made by Rome's cardinal vicar the year before. Don Bosco gives us to understand as much in his letter to the cardinal:[16] "Father Dalmazzo," he wrote, "has sent me the most wonderful news: that Your Eminence is willing to come to Turin and consecrate the Church of St. John the Evangelist now nearing completion, erected in honor of Pius IX. I take it you mean it, and I rely upon you for this most solemn occasion of ours. The ceremony is scheduled for May 6,

[14]Letter of Father Bonetti to Don Bosco, Turin, April 12, 1882. [Author]

[15]Above quoted letter and letter from Father Berto to Father Bonetti, Rome, April 16, 1882. [Author]

[16]Sampierdarena, September 14, 1881. Forgetting that he was in Sampierdarena, Don Bosco wrote "in our city" as if he were in Turin. [Author]

1882. This coming winter we will personally finalize all arrangements to suit Your Eminence's convenience."

News of Don Bosco's plan leaked out. On April 28 Father Rua was informed in strictest confidence that Archbishop Gastaldi, working through influential friends[17] whom he had sent to Rome or who had offices there, had already taken steps or would soon do so to foil the whole plan. June came and went, and still nothing had been finalized. Father Dalmazzo informed Don Bosco,[18] "Cardinal Nina is the only one who would agree to consecrate the Church of St. John in October, because, he says, he has to go to Turin. However, not being a bishop, he cannot perform the consecration. He suggests that either the archbishop of Turin carry out this function or it should be postponed lest it stir up another hornet's nest." Our documents do not make it clear just why Don Bosco was looking for a cardinal. At the apostolic process, however, Father [John] Turchi testified that Don Bosco had personally told him that Archbishop Gastaldi would neither consecrate the church himself nor allow any other bishop to do so, and, therefore, to silence the gossip occasioned by the delay, he (Don Bosco) had so informed the Holy See which, in turn, gave the archbishop an ultimatum: either he would consecrate the church or Rome would send a bishop to do so.

After reflection on Cardinal Nina's advice, Don Bosco hit upon a compromise: defer the consecration to a more suitable date and, so as not to delay the church's opening, ask the archbishop for permission for a simple blessing. Therefore, at the beginning of July, he wrote to the archbishop:

Turin, July 5, 1882

Your Excellency:

Work on the Church of St. John the Evangelist is now nearing completion, and the neighborhood residents earnestly plead that it be opened for public worship. I would very gladly satisfy this pious desire of theirs. However, in view of present circumstances, I think it best to have it simply blessed, deferring the solemn consecration to a more opportune moment.

It seems that the Church's laws concur in affirming that the superior of a congregation definitively approved by the Holy See may perform the blessing of a church belonging to that same congregation. However, should Your Excellency have any doubt about this, I explicitly ask you to grant me the

[17]Letter from Father Bonetti to Father Berto, Turin, April 29, 1882. [Author]
[18]Letter to Don Bosco, Rome, June 30, 1882. [Author]

required faculties with whatever provisos that may be required by the sacred rites.

Most humbly,
Fr. John Bosco

Twenty-two days passed without a reply; finally on July 27 Don Bosco wrote to the archdiocesan chancellor, asking whether the archbishop, who had been away from Turin from the beginning of the month, had left any instructions concerning his request. At that time he had no knowledge of certain background details which we now know.

The day before Don Bosco's letter of July 5 arrived, Archbishop Gastaldi went to St. Ignatius' Shrine near Lanzo, where several priests were making their spiritual retreat. Don Bosco's letter was opened and held up in the chancery office. On July 6 Canon [Emmanuel] Colomiatti—cognizant or not of Don Bosco's letter—wrote to Cardinal Nina: "Archbishop Gastaldi is willing to consecrate the new Church of St. John the Evangelist personally so as to show his good will for Don Bosco. This is also my desire, and, trusting this is pleasing to His Holiness, to Your Eminence and to Cardinal Jacobini, I am doing and shall continue to do all I can to favor it."

However, Colomiatti foresaw a problem; beneath the church was a chapel and an auditorium. Since the chancery knew of this, the archbishop had sent a query to the Congregation of Rites on March 3 asking whether a church might licitly be consecrated if stage plays were given in its basement for the wholesome entertainment of the young. On May 4 a negative answer came in, stating that a church and its basement were consecrated as a single unit.[19] To clear this obstacle, Colomiatti asked Cardinal Nina to advise Don Bosco to add in his application to the archbishop a statement to the effect that the crypt would not be used for such a purpose.

Colomiatti wrote a postscript to his letter, stating that as he was about to seal it, the pro-vicar general who had received Don Bosco's letter to the archbishop came in to ask his opinion on the matter. For this reason, he was enclosing a copy of the letter, with this comment of his own on the second paragraph:

I notice that this letter seems to take it for granted that the superior of the Salesian Congregation is on a par with the superiors of religious orders or of

[19]Cf. *Bollettino Salesiano*, June 1882. [Author]

especially privileged congregations. Contrariwise, this is what the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars decreed on January 13, 1875 concerning the Salesian Congregation: *The condition imposed on all institutes with simple vows* (hence the Salesians) *is that in the event that they have been granted any privileges by the Holy See, the said institutes are exempt or otherwise not subject to the jurisdiction of the ordinary only in those things contained in the constitutions approved by the Holy See.* Now neither in the Salesian Constitutions nor in the briefs issued to the Salesian Congregation do we find the faculty claimed by Don Bosco. Will Your Eminence kindly let me know as soon as you can what answer should be given to Don Bosco? I do not want to forward his letter to Archbishop Gastaldi before receiving your reply. I believe that Your Eminence will agree with my interpretation of the law, as I also believe that you will not object to my promptly forwarding to you a copy of the letter, so that, once I have your decision, I may inform the archbishop of it and obviate any friction. Don Bosco's letter brings out into the open that very same principle which has obsessed the Salesians in their contention with the archbishop.

In those days Don Bosco and Archbishop Gastaldi were exchanging letters as required by Leo XIII's *Settlement*.[20] Don Bosco already had done his share when on July 26 Cardinal Nina voiced his own opinion to him about the blessing of the church and basement. Though he congratulated Don Bosco also in the Pope's name for having met the conditions of the *Settlement*, he had only harsh words about the blessing. After recalling his previous advice to invite the archbishop to officiate at the consecration, the cardinal added: "I have also seen the draft of your letter to the archbishop on this matter, and it does not at all strike me as being suitable, since it both involves a doubt and implies an evasion. We must be explicit and above board in all our dealings." Cardinal Nina may have given greater weight to Colomiatti's remarks than to the wording of Don Bosco's letter. Supposedly, the alleged lack of sincerity lay in hiding the suspicion that the archbishop might want to consecrate the church himself and in deciding to dispense with that through the use of a simple blessing. Yet the two facts cited by Don Bosco were certain, namely that it was advisable to bless the church immediately and inadvisable to stir up the anticlericals by a solemn ceremony which would only rekindle anti-papal hostility whose embers had barely died down. That Don Bosco had no ulterior motive is

[20]*See* Chapter 8. [Editor]

confirmed by the following few lines he sent to the cardinal on July 25 about his comments. Their letters crisscrossed. "I have sent the archbishop a reminder about the blessing of the Church of St. John the Evangelist," Don Bosco wrote, "but have so far received no reply. I inquired of the chancery if he had left any instructions, but again no answer. Meanwhile people are complaining about the delay and I don't know what to tell them." As for the problem posed by Church law which Colomiatti made so much of, Cardinal Nina felt no concern. Being well versed in canon law, he was certainly in a position to know what competent canon lawyers thought about this particular case even after Colomiatti had quoted the decision of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

There remained the matter of the church basement. It had no stage. It was a spacious wide-open area surrounded by a semi-circular corridor; both could be used for almost any purpose. The *Bollettino Salesiano* had clarified all this, as Don Bosco also did in a letter to *Unità Cattolica* rectifying a "mistaken rumor" which circulated after the Roman decree was made public.

Turin, June 21, 1882

To the Editor:

Kindly help me correct a rapidly spreading false rumor concerning the Church of St. John the Evangelist which you have often graciously written about in your fine journal.

Your May 21 issue published a response from the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, which stated that a new church may not be consecrated if its basement is being used to stage plays for young people. Since at present the only church with a basement is St. John the Evangelist, many people wonder if the delay in its consecration is caused by this ruling—i.e., is the religious consecration so eagerly awaited by the public being held up because of the alleged theater in the church basement? Let me state that the official reply cited above in no way applies to this church, since the basement contains the following rooms and nothing else:

1. A children's chapel meant for religious instruction, Holy Mass and other sacred services for children only, thus making it possible to hold sacred services in the church for the large population of the neighborhood without disturbance.

2. A separate hall for meetings, religious education and customary award ceremonies for teenagers. As is quite evident, there is not the slightest shadow of a theater or of anything intended for worldly entertainment.

The delay holding back the long-awaited consecration is due solely to some last finishing touches.

Thank you for the cooperation which I trust you will grant me.

Gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Cardinal Nina, who certainly knew of all this, gave Don Bosco some practical advice in his letter of July 26 which we have already cited. "If you are willing to follow my advice," he wrote, "renew your request to Archbishop Gastaldi and then, both in person and in writing, invite and urge him to officiate at the consecration. Since the allegation that the church basement is to serve as a theater is quite unfounded but is a potential stumbling block, deal with it openly. Let the archbishop know in writing what has already been published in the *Bollettino Salesiano*,[21] namely, that the basement area is in no way meant for theater purposes, since that would certainly be unbecoming to a house of worship. Take my advice, which is also the Holy Father's opinion, and rest assured that all will be well."

Later[22] it came to be known that Cardinal Nina had answered Colomiatti's letter some days before, enjoining the archbishop to consecrate the church without further delay. A letter of the archbishop to Don Bosco from Forno Alpi Graie, dated July 26, is in accord with this order. "The grave obligation weighing upon me to obviate any excuse for un-Christian gossip and to edify the public categorically demands that I myself, no one else, consecrate the new church, erected by the faithful in Turin under your sponsorship and dedicated to God under the title of St. John the Evangelist. This is my firm decision." He closed with a few instructions concerning necessary preparations. However, the previously scheduled pastoral visits to the parishes of the Lanzo valley precluded his return to Turin before the end of August.

Having been apprised of all these things, Don Bosco, on August 4, thought it best to write as follows to Cardinal Nina:

I trust Your Eminence will not mind if I keep you informed of developments in the matter you have so graciously concerned yourself with. I had written to Archbishop Gastaldi that because of the restless times in which we live, I was limiting myself to a simple blessing of the Church of St. John the Evangelist.

[21]June issue, 1882. [Author]
[22]Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, October 25, 1882. [Author]

Almost a month later he replied, stating that he would personally come to consecrate it. I gratefully acknowledged his offer. Hopefully, barring anything that may disrupt this move for peace, the long-awaited era of peace will commence. The usual problems remain, of course; given the occasion, he treats us to strong verbal whippings in private conversation and also in caustic newspaper articles. But I just ignore all that and struggle along in silence.

In the margin of the archbishop's letter Don Bosco jotted this note for his secretary's reply: "All directives accepted; late October suggested." In brief clipped phrases he added two reasons. At the end of August priests and clerics would still be making their spiritual retreats and the Oratory boys would not yet be back from vacation. Consequently it would not be possible to train the altar boys and the choir. Then, too—and he felt this was understood—the celebration would all the more likely be undisturbed the more time elapsed after the recent anticlerical outbreaks. The archbishop did not object to October. The specific day only had to be set, and so Don Bosco personally wrote to the archbishop on September 16 from Sampierdarena:

Sampierdarena, September 16, 1882

Your Excellency:

While here for [the Salesians'] spiritual retreat, I would like to follow through on the consecration of the Church of St. John the Evangelist. If it is not too inconvenient for you, Saturday, October 28 or the following Saturday would be fine for us. However, October 28 would be more suitable because the [university] students would still be away and we would be spared potential trouble. Please decide as you see best.

Once a date is set, I shall submit a timetable and program for your approval.

If you wish, you may give an answer to this messenger.

With the greatest veneration and gratitude,

Your most devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The archbishop agreed upon October 28. In mid-October an attractive circular printed in several languages informed the Salesian cooperators of Don Bosco's joy and invited them to attend the ceremony or, if they could not, to be with him in spirit or through a charitable donation.

Dear Friend,

With a heart full of joy I send you the good news that on October 28 we will consecrate to God's worship the Church of St. John the Evangelist erected in Turin by the special zeal and charity of the Salesian cooperators. Eminent artists agree that in both architecture and art this church is one of the most exquisite and beautiful sacred buildings gracing this our city of the Blessed Sacrament and of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary.

It is now our duty to offer thanks to God, who in so many ways has helped us to overcome countless obstacles of all sorts in erecting this church to His honor and by providing the financial means and the advice, artistic talent and generosity of so many wonderful, devout Christians.

We must also beg Him graciously to take the new church under His almighty protection and to look with kindness and love upon all who will come to open their hearts to Him at its altars, to entrust Him with their spiritual and temporal needs, and to implore His powerful help.

For this reason and also to render the consecration as solemn as possible, I earnestly wish that the ceremony be attended by our Salesian cooperators not only of Turin but also of neighboring cities and countryside. Since such a full-scale attendance is not possible, I ask all to be with us in whatever way their hearts suggest.

If you or someone in your family can attend the ceremony, please consult the timetable below of sacred services to be held throughout the eight days of this celebration.

My intent in telling you of this event is that you may rejoice in the Lord in seeing that your charity is beginning to attain its purpose, that is, God's glory, the promotion of our faith, and the salvation of souls. The songs of praise that from that day on we shall raise to God in His new church, the prayers of thousands of the faithful, and the salvation of countless souls are treasures which you too shall share in due course as your bountiful reward from God.

On my part, I shall forever unite my humble prayers to those of the Salesians and of the youngsters entrusted to us, daily asking the Lord graciously to shower His choicest blessings upon you and your family both in this life and in the life to come, according to His promise, "My mercy I will not take away from him who shall raise a temple to My name, and will set up for him a throne in the eternal kingdom."

In closing may I request your continued charitable support for the many undertakings which God has graciously entrusted to us, that we may do some good to fellow men and above all to poor, destitute youth.

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. The church has been completed and a few appurtenances still needed have been ordered. Still, let me state openly that we have an outstanding debt of forty-five thousand lire, partly for the organ and partly for decorations and other work during the past few months. If you can help us defray this debt, you will indeed be doing a work of charity and faith, which God will certainly not fail to adequately reward.

Mindful also of spiritual treasures, he humbly petitioned the Holy Father as follows:

Rome, October 30, 1882

Most Holy Father:

Humbly prostrate at the feet of Your Holiness, Father John Bosco begs that a plenary indulgence be granted to all the faithful who, at the forthcoming solemn consecration of the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Turin and throughout the octave, shall visit this church, after having duly confessed, received Communion, and prayed for your intentions and the needs of the Holy Mother Church.

[Your devoted son,
Fr. John Bosco]

The Pope's prompt reply came through Monsignor [Gabriel] Boccali, limiting the plenary indulgence to the single day of the solemn consecration.

Don Bosco had not seen Archbishop Gastaldi for a long time because all the exchange of letters required by the *Settlement* had taken place while the archbishop was absent from Turin. Upon returning home, the archbishop wrote to him on October 20 and informed him that before the consecration he wished "to confer with him personally on several matters pertaining to the service of God." He also expressed the hope that he would call at the archbishop's residence before that date. Don Bosco promptly complied, but on the two occasions he called at the residence, the archbishop was away. He therefore took to pen and paper and wrote him with the utmost deference:

Turin, October 24, 1882

Your Excellency:

I too wish to pay my respects to you in person before the consecration of the Church of St. John the Evangelist, but I happened to call just on those days or at those hours when you were away.

On your return, I shall quickly come to receive your instructions. Meanwhile I humbly ask for two favors:

1. Please come to pontificate at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament once, preferably on the last evening of the octave of the consecration.

2. Please accept our invitation to dine with us at least on the day of the consecration in the company of the clergy who took part in it. Since the premises at the church site are not yet ready, dinner will be served at our Valsalice College. Immediately after the ceremony you will find a coach at your disposal. As soon as I know you are back, I shall hasten to call upon Your Excellency to receive and carry out any instructions you might give me.

With deepest esteem and gratitude, I am honored to be,

Your obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Despite the best of intentions Don Bosco had no chance whatever to meet the archbishop during those few days. They finally met on the morning of October 28, when the archbishop most punctually arrived for the ceremony. Don Bosco was there to receive him with fitting honors. As the archbishop approached Don Bosco, he exclaimed, "Oh! Don Bosco!" and then turned to talk to others. He next donned the vestments, performed the sacred ceremony and departed so quickly that Don Bosco was barely able to escort him to his coach and say goodbye without ever having a chance to talk to him. However, before leaving, the archbishop did tell the diocesan seminarians who had attended the consecration, most of them former Oratory pupils, "Go and assist at Don Bosco's Mass." Although Don Bosco warmly requested him to pontificate at least once during the octave, he did not do so.[23]

Seeing that at last the toil and worries of so many years had been crowned with achievement, and witnessing the splendor of the consecration rites and the vast concourse of people, Don Bosco was filled with joy. If he did have any feelings of hurt, he kept them to himself, so that not even a fleeting shadow could be seen to cross his face, nor a word heard hinting at interior grief.

Even the weather contributed to making the event a glorious celebration. On the evening and the night preceding the ceremony there was a steady downpour of rain, but on the morning itself of October 28 the rain ceased before the archbishop's arrival. Then, after the consecra-

[23]Letter from Don Bosco to Father Dalmazzo, Turin, November 1882. [Author]

tion, the sun appeared and, throughout the octave, the days were sunnier than they had been over the previous two months. Toward midday, as the bells joyfully signaled the end of the holy rite, the doors were flung open, and a stream of people poured into the church to attend the first Mass, which was celebrated by Don Bosco, assisted by Father Lemoyne and Father Bonetti. Don Bosco also delivered the first homily in the church, after Vespers, describing how that neighborhood looked thirty-five years before in contrast to the present, and predicting what it would shortly become through God's protection and the people's good will.[24]

During the first three days of the octave, Bishop [Emilian] Manacorda of Fossano, Bishop [Basil] Leto of Biella and Bishop [Dominic] Pampirio of Alba pontificated in the new church. Throughout the week, zealous preachers generously dispensed God's word, and splendid rituals followed one another amid excellent singing and music. After the pontifical Mass of October 29, the Blessed Sacrament was exposed as though for the Forty Hours. Some of Turin's outstanding clergy celebrated High Mass in the church after the triduum of pontifical Masses. There was also a solemn service for the souls of deceased benefactors. In short, Don Bosco spared neither expense nor effort to make the religious celebration truly magnificent in grandeur, but always with an eye to corresponding spiritual benefits. In writing to a French lady cooperator[25] he told her with open delight, "You will read about the consecration of the church of St. John the Evangelist in the *Bulletin Salésien*. We witnessed a truly miraculous sight. Thousands upon thousands of men made their confession and received Communion with extraordinary devotion."

For prudent reasons the preachers refrained from speaking of Pope Pius IX in whose memory the church had been built. But their silence was more than made up for by the majestic statue which excited the admiration of everyone who entered or left the church. There were some underlying rumblings, but no disorders. Not without reason did the November issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano* report: "Don Bosco does not hesitate to thank even the handful of the city's troublemakers who, driven perhaps more by the powers of darkness than by their own malice, might have wanted to disrupt our festivities as they did last

[24]The January 1883 issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano* carried the highlights of his sermon. [Author]

[25]Letter to Mademoiselle Claire Louvet, Turin, November 2, 1882. [Author]

spring at the Church of St. Secundus, but refrained from doing so. If this self-restraint was spiritually motivated—as respect for the freedom and property of others most certainly is—then we ask the good Lord to reward them by opening their eyes to the light of truth." But of course thanks were also due to Don Bosco himself, who had so planned the whole celebration as to give no pretext to anyone who was looking for an excuse to create "an incident" and then justify its consequences.

Nevertheless Satan's fury, though restrained, did find vent in two newspapers which personally attacked Don Bosco. It is not so much the printed word that deserves study as the hidden instigators. Those articles are proofs of the crafty wiles with which Don Bosco had to contend, using prudent determination.

The *Cronaca dei Tribunali*—never at a loss to carry out its seemingly self-imposed mission to shatter Don Bosco's reputation as a citizen—spouted its poisonous wrath against the "Valdocco Saint" in its issue of Saturday, October 28, labeling his new church a "protest against the present order of things." For was it not true that he chose to inaugurate it on the very same day which "summoned the people to exercise their loftiest right," i.e., the right to vote? Of course that symbolic protest sprang from the fact that the Church of St. John the Evangelist was a monument to Pius IX, "the betrayer of Italy." The writer saw the statue as the personification of the "Pope-King," because the head was crowned by the triple tiara. Hence the liberals were put on the alert by pointing out this contrast: "While the people will hasten to the polls, the clericalists will assemble in this church to renew their oath against the present order of things and strive to restore the Pope's temporal power."

Another attack was launched in two consecutive issues by an even more vicious periodical which was published on Sundays and sacrilegiously bore the name *Jesus Christ*. It was edited by the same renegade who put out the *Cronaca dei Tribunali*. Its issue of October 22-29 blared out in bold print: "On the 28th of this month, Don Bosco, who has finally had his way, will inaugurate a new church dedicated to St. John the Evangelist. This church is another monument to the memory of Pius IX." Then three other crushing charges were leveled against Don Bosco. First, a lengthy article entitled "Father John Bosco" fired this shot: "Father John Bosco, who enjoys a truly worldwide fame, is representative not of the intrinsic holiness which bursts forth from the Gospel, but of that religion which arrays itself with Christian doctrine,

and beneath that golden exterior hides a vicious ugliness." Before revealing where this vicious ugliness was to be found, the article went on to portray a "former" Don Bosco, who "had eyes only for poor boys and had no thought but of their future." This Don Bosco deeply impressed him, the newsman wrote. Truthfully, it even impressed us. But this "former" Don Bosco had nothing in common with the "latter" Don Bosco. The former Don Bosco was a faithful copy of St. Vincent de Paul; the latter Don Bosco was the genuine incarnation of a Catholic reactionary. The sublime ideal of brotherhood had given way to that of big business; politics and money had been lumped together with the Gospel. Hence lay the vicious ugliness.

The would-be proof of that charge was a pack of lies expressed as follows:

> Hence books and newspapers for clerical propaganda are spread about; associations and committees are organized; miracles are resorted to. Don Bosco is turned into a saint, and his very clothing is sold at so much a snip, as though it were a charm against the evils of this world and of elsewhere. Hence he turns out biographies of young boy-saints, like Dominic Savio, biographies of girl-saints like the Rigolotti sisters. I shall later return to these miracles and to this Salesian association against which it is high time the government protected itself by law. The banner is ever the same, the banner of charity, but its bearer is no longer the same one. So beware of this powerful enemy of Italy who is so opposed to our nation's freedom. Bear in mind his great sway over the young and remember that it is to our youth that we pass on our unified nation which has cost us so much blood and so many martyrs.

The article then quoted from a Lutheran source a forged document—a would-be price list drawn up by Pope Leo X for obtaining the pardon of various sins. This disgusting forgery was meant to show how Don Bosco learned the art of "hoodwinking simpletons" in order to raise funds for his undertakings.

Lastly in a short article entitled "Countering Propaganda" occasion was taken of the above libel to counteract Don Bosco's publications with the *Biblioteca Universale*, a very low-priced collection of irreligious and immoral books. The sales pitch was in these lines: "To learn, one must read. The priests offer you Don Bosco's *Letture Cattoliche* [*Catholic Readings*] or the lives of the saints. Our suggestion is that you read books which will taint neither heart nor mind, but will

direct them to self-knowledge and to the knowledge of our rights and duties."

This scandal sheet renewed the attack in its November 5 issue with a string of venomous articles. First came a brief history of the new church and a fair description of the building, both tinged with malevolence which reached its peak in this final blast: "This church is a screaming protest against the magnificent temple of our nation's glory. This monument honors Pius IX, the foremost enemy of our unification." Then in a terse, untitled diatribe against Father [James] Margotti,[26] the paper issued a veiled threat: "It was no mere chance that Don Bosco chose to inaugurate his church on the very days the liberals' attention was centered on their great electoral battle. Don Bosco is cunning! But the liberals, even if they hold no demonstrations, have their eyes wide open and will one day match monument for monument."

Later, the same denigrator tore into a monograph on the Church of St. John the Evangelist by the architect [Albert] Buffa. In the Foreword to his "elegant booklet" the author paid this tribute to Don Bosco: "People are astonished at the wonders of Divine Providence and admire the venerable person of Don Bosco." The *Cronaca dei Tribunali* seized on this to hammer away again with greater viciousness at its notion of a "dual" Don Bosco, underscoring especially the disgraceful case of Father [Paul] Ricchino[27] in such a way as to rip into the reputation of Don Bosco's holiness. Buffa had cited statistics in a footnote: "The Salesian institutes now number a hundred and fifty, and they house some one hundred thousand boys." The reaction of the spokesman of masonic liberalism was: "Liberals, are you sound asleep? Aren't you alarmed that these hundred thousand boys of today will be tomorrow's hundred thousand priests?" The petty anticlerical politicians, however, who bore Pius IX a mortal grudge, closed their remarks by dragging the Pontiff's name through the mud, defying Don Bosco to take up his defense and refute the indignities presented in those articles as actual facts which precluded discussion.

If Don Bosco read all the infamous remarks we have lightly touched on here, he must surely have wept in his innermost heart at the thought of the scandal given the little ones of all ages, but neither personally

[26]Editor and publisher of *Unità Cattolica*. [Editor]
[27]*See* pp. 146f. [Editor]

nor through others did he give a rebuttal. To have done so would have only added fuel to the fire. Furthermore, Dante's erstwhile verses were singularly applicable to this new Capaneus:[28]

> "No torment, other than your own mad rage
> Could ever pain enough to match your fury."[29]

The newspapers were but the mouthpiece of those pulling the strings behind the scenes. The unknown bosses who had twice sent armed henchmen in an attempt on his life, as we have already cited,[30] were now sharpening the pens of hired newsmen. The historian can draw but one conclusion. If, despite Don Bosco's painstaking care to keep free of all political ties, people still persisted in attaching political labels to his work, what would have happened had he failed to exercise such caution from the beginning? We today readily admire his sharp prudence as we see its results, but that he so neatly traced his line of action and followed it so unhesitatingly, even when greater minds went astray, merits supreme praise. He had made up his mind that, when necessary, he would breast the tide of his age and so he did!

Very much missed at the consecration services was Count Charles Reviglio della Venaria, who had died in 1881. Throughout the gamut of controversies sparked from the very beginnings of the construction of the Church of St. John the Evangelist he had given Don Bosco his boundless, very effective support. Once the eight-day celebration was over, Don Bosco arranged for a solemn funeral Mass for him in the new church, to which he invited Salesian cooperators and friends in a touching circular letter.

Don Bosco also enlisted literary art to praise the new house of God. He asked Father John Baptist Lemoyne, in whom he had a writer by no means an amateur, to prepare as complete a biography of the church's titular saint as could be done. The result was a rather original and appealing story within reach of the masses while it still appealed to the educated.[31] The author links the apostle to actual localities and people and contemporary events which serve to highlight his noble figure. The

[28]The mythological king of Argos who challenged Zeus and was struck by a lightning bolt. [Editor]

[29]Inferno, Canto 14. Translation into English Blank Verse by Lawrence Grant White, New York, Pantheon Books © 1948, p. 24. [Editor]

[30]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 405ff. [Editor]

[31]Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, *L'Apostolo San Giovanni e la Chiesa primitiva* [The Apostle St. John and the Early Church], Tipografia Salesiana, Torino, 1882. [Author]

chapter entitled "St. John, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Sorrowful Way" is exceptionally good. St. John's works are also commented upon: the readers are regaled with some of his Gospel's more exquisite pages; significant passages of his epistles are considered and there is even an attempt at a brief presentation of the Apocalypse in which he depicts the early Church's battles to serve as a model and inspiration to Catholics of the day. He also delights in seizing every opportunity to combat in understandable terms contemporary errors concerning the divinity of Jesus Christ, His teaching and His Church. His smooth style gives this book a timeless touch.

Now let us return to the church itself. Albert Buffa,[32] the architect, wrote an excellent monograph about it, which, like Father Lemoyne's book, was available to the public at the consecration. He began with an historical introduction describing the obstacles that had to be overcome and briefly outlining the evolution of sacred architecture. The most important part of the text gives a detailed description of the building and its art, concluding with this summary statement: "Seen as a whole, the Church of St. John the Evangelist possesses a harmonious unity and well-balanced wholeness and lightness, a precision and noble simplicity which enables it to meet the severest critical standards. Art and beauty are predominant, raising the soul above earthly sorrows and taking it into the pure, life-giving atmosphere of heartwarming thoughts and eternal verities. It has nothing bizarre, fantastic, or garish in its decor—only beauty and delicacy. Most praiseworthy is the execution of design which matches the elegance of thought and purity of art. In this grand building the demands of art were in no way sacrificed, as unfortunately it all too frequently happens, to base economic considerations."

[32]Albert Buffa, *La Chiesa di San Giovanni Evangelista* [The Church of St. John the Evangelist], Tipografia Salesiana, Torino, 1882. [Author]

# CHAPTER 13

## *The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome*

ABOUT to set out for Rome in the winter of 1881, Don Bosco wrote from Alassio to Father Cagliero, who was then in Spain:[1] "My head's in a whirl!" Unhappily that poor head of his was being jarred by dissonance and harrowing anxiety from which only his saintly serenity saved him. At the heart of his worries lay his concern for the Sacred Heart Church. However, the die had been cast, and he had no choice but to see the project through, regardless of what it cost him.

Day by day the pressure kept weighing upon him to send money to Rome without cutting back on the funds demanded by other undertakings which needed his support if they were to be completed. And so, being a good fisherman, in January 1881 he flung his nets far out into the sea for a great haul by sending thousands of petitions throughout the world. He wrote in Italian but immediately had the petitions translated into commonly spoken languages.

Acting on the principle that Christians the world over should take to heart religious projects started and sponsored by the Holy See, he addressed leaflets to the universal Church in Italian, French and English, his message being worded from an article published that month in the *Bollettino Salesiano*, which told his cooperators about the project the Holy Father had entrusted to him.

Without going into the whole story which we have already narrated in Volume XIV,[2] we note the order in which Don Bosco listed its various phases:

[1]*See* p. 107. [Author]
[2]Chapter 24. [Editor]

1. A church on the Esquiline in Castro Pretorio, dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus to serve twelve thousand souls and to be a monument to the immortal memory of Pope Pius IX. The parish has been duly recorded and officially approved by Church and state authorities. 2. A youth center for boys to meet their religious obligations and have a place for healthy recreation, particularly on Sundays. 3. A night school for young workers who have little opportunity for a regular education they badly need. 4. A day school for destitute or abandoned boys who cannot attend city schools. 5. A hospice with classes and trade courses for homeless boys who have left their villages and towns and homes only to wander Rome's streets and squares. Many have come in the hope of finding work and earning a living; they soon find their hopes dashed and themselves in desperate straits, victims of crime and prison. The hospice must accommodate some five hundred orphans; it will be run like the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin.

He then listed ways of helping:

1. Contributing money or building materials. 2. Praying and recommending the work to possible contributors. 3. All contributions are to be sent to His Eminence, Cardinal Raphael Monaco La Valletta, vicar general of Rome, or to Father Francis Dalmazzo (Torre de' Specchi No. 36, Rome) or to the Rev. John Bosco in Turin. 4. Solicitors bearing an identification card signed by the Rev. John Bosco will be authorized to collect donations. The card will bear the seal of the Salesian Congregation with the words *Pia Societas Sancti Francisci Salesii.*[3] 5. Archbishops and bishops, pastors, curates, and rectors of churches are respectfully asked to volunteer as solicitors in their areas; they do not need the identification card. Donations are to be forwarded to one of the persons above. They are also asked to vouch for card-bearing solicitors.

The circular went on to list the benefits granted to donors and solicitors:

1. The special blessing of the Holy Father who approves and commends this project to all who work to spread the faith and to foster good morals, the care of youth and the overall good of society. 2. After the church is built and consecrated, a Mass will be celebrated at the main altar every Friday; the chaplet of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and other prayers will be offered for benefactors. 3. The same prayers will be offered on the feast of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Christmas, Corpus Christi and the feastdays of the

[3]The wording of the seal was later modified to read: *Societas Salesiana. Discite a me qui mitis sum.* [Author]

apostles. 4. In special homage to the august Mother of God to ask Her powerful protection upon our benefactors the rosary will be recited, followed by the singing of the Litany of Loreto or of the *Ave Maris Stella* [Hail, Star of the Sea] and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Prayers for the deceased with the psalm "Out of the depths" will close the service. 5. This special devotion will take place in perpetuity.

Solicitors were given forms to record the donors and contributions, as well as a detailed procedure to follow.[4] To the norms were appended the eleven more outstanding promises of Our Divine Savior to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque for all who promote devotion to the Sacred Heart.

Don Bosco's appeal to the charity of the Catholic world did not stop there.[5] He sent out another batch of appeals in Italian to the archbishops, bishops and Catholic journalists of Italy and in Latin to their colleagues in other nations. Archbishop Gastaldi graciously acknowledged Don Bosco's invitation but excused himself by saying that he could not help. Though, as the reader knows, relations were in those days strained, his letter does him credit.

A few lines of Don Bosco to Father Dalmazzo show us how tirelessly Don Bosco worked to insure the success of his worldwide campaign. On receiving the solicitors' form sheets, printed in Rome after his departure, he wrote to Father Dalmazzo on May 31, some days after his arrival in Turin on May 16, once he got a brief respite from the urgency and myriad details of the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. "This is the first breathing spell I have had," he wrote. "I received and am studying the forms. Are you sending them from Rome to the solicitors in your files, or shall I mail them from here? It is advisable to enclose a newsletter informing them of the special papal blessing, and of the work's importance and progress. Due to our urgent need, ask them to send in all funds they may have collected by the middle of July."

Regularly, fifteen thousand lire were needed every month to cover wages and running costs, but by mid-July the work moved so fast that the architect, Francis Vespignani, informed Don Bosco that at that pace he would soon be needing twice that amount. Don Bosco was not

[4]Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

[5]Among the donations made in 1885 there is one of twenty thousand lire from the Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. More will be said about his generosity. A large number of Italian and foreign bishops also sent contributions. [Author]

shaken, but rather gladly wrote to the Salesian cooperators in his January 1882 report that the side aisle walls were up to the height of the capitals and that the nave had also been considerably built up.

In his concern for souls he set up a fairly large temporary chapel as a parish church for the area's six thousand residents. Rome's cardinal vicar blessed it on July 10 and celebrated the first Mass. Three days later the chapel received a blessing of another sort. At early dawn, a crowd of mourners who had in the dead of night defended the revered corpse of Pope Pius IX from infamous attackers escorted the casket past the rising church—a memorial to his virtuous life—on their way to entomb it in the Basilica of St. Lawrence-Outside-the-Walls.

Don Bosco, we have said, faced the cost rise without fear, but he also did not tempt Providence. Reporting a particularly generous contribution to the cardinal vicar, he took the occasion to tell him of his fund-raising activities:[6] "A certain Father Peter Lovatelli of Cerano, diocese of Novara, has promised to send Your Eminence in October a money order of ten thousand lire for the Sacred Heart Church; kindly deposit it. I am working without pause to find funds and, thank God, am succeeding, but Father Dalmazzo keeps spending and never cries 'Enough!'" Besides sending out circulars, he also appealed in person to wealthy people, who he hoped would contribute generously. A brief note to Father Dalmazzo says much:

Turin, July 15, 1881

My dear Father Dalmazzo:

All goes well. God be praised! I waste not a moment, but it is God who blesses the work, so cheer up. I have several schemes lined up. Among them is the one I am enclosing addressed to the cardinal vicar. Read it for your own information, seal it, and deliver it personally to His Eminence. Let's pray that it goes through because there are still more to come.

We are endeavoring to send you personnel and funds. I shall write again soon. Regards to our friends and benefactors. In Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

On July 1, he informed Miss Amalia Lacombe, an active Salesian cooperator of Valence, France: "In the Holy Father's name I am send-

[6]Sampierdarena, September 14, 1881. [Author]

ing you a solicitor's certificate to collect funds for the project he has kindly entrusted to us. The solicitor's name is blank, so that your parish priest can insert his name if he will accept the commitment. If not, would you please assume the responsibility?" He did the same with other French and Italian women. To Countess [Charlotte] Callori he wrote toward the end of July.

My dear Mamma in Jesus Christ,

I am enclosing a solicitor's certificate for you and hope that you will soon fill up the donors' form with donations large and small. You may have some success where you are going. If you get no contributions, you will still earn valuable merit for the unrecorded humiliations you may have to suffer.

You love the mission work in Rome, and for that I rejoice because there is so much need, all the more so now that the Protestants on the Esquiline have launched a full-scale assault on Catholics. However, while some give alms for the Patagonia which is in Rome, we let others zealously offer their very lives for the many natives of the real, uncivilized Patagonia.

God bless you, my well-deserving countess. May He bountifully grant you health and holiness! Please pray also for this poor soul. Always in Jesus Christ,

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Some days prior he had written to Princess Clotilda, daughter of Victor Emmanuel II and wife of Jerome Bonaparte, whose year-round residence was the castle of Moncalieri.

Turin, July 24, 1881

Your Highness:

As Your Royal Highness probably knows, the Holy Father has entrusted the building of the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice in Rome to the Salesian cooperators. I am the chief beggar, and in His Holiness' name I am seeking financial help which is really badly needed.

I am therefore appealing to Your Highness' well-known kindness which never refuses any work of charity if at all possible. I have another special reason to hope: we are promoting devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, for whom I know you cherish a love all your own.

The enclosed circular will give you an idea of the project's size and merit. Presently, the building rises twenty feet above ground.

I rely on the services of my former pupil, Canon [Hyacinth] Ballesio, to

whom, if you will, you may send whatever response your kindly heart will suggest. Let me assure you that throughout all the past vicissitudes I have always commended Your Highness and your august family to our individual and community prayers. I promise to join my prayers for you to those of the eighty thousand boys whom God has entrusted to our care.

God bless you, my generous and worthy princess of the House of Savoy! May God keep you and your children in good health and in His holy grace! Meanwhile, it is my honor to remain, with highest esteem,

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Though we have no documentary proof, we have good reason to believe that the "saint of Moncalieri," as people called her for her virtues and benefactions, secretly, or possibly under another name, sent Don Bosco her charitable contribution. These two saintly souls never met on earth. In Don Bosco's declining years the princess anxiously desired to make his acquaintance, but court protocol kept her from going to him while illness and discretion would not allow him to go to Moncalieri. At long last, through the good offices of Canon Ballesio, it was arranged that Princess Clotilda would one morning go into the sacristy of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians where Don Bosco would receive her, but shortly after he had agreed to this, Don Bosco was forced to take to his bed, never to leave it.

He appealed also to Count de Chambord, who contributed one hundred and, later, five hundred francs.[7] Since this undertaking was not specifically French, it is not surprising that the count's donations were kept at a minimum.[8]

Salesian schools also made genuine sacrifices to respond to Don Bosco's appeal and send in their savings. At Randazzo, on Father [Peter] Guidazio's[9] suggestion, teachers and staff agreed to keep their pupils during study periods in their respective classrooms, freeing the study hall to become a dormitory, so that fourteen more boarders could be accepted and greater savings be sent to their good father at the school year's end.

[7]Letter from the chaplain to Don Bosco, Froshsdorf, November 28, 1881. [Author]

[8]Don Bosco applied for a subsidy to the Ministry for Grace and Justice, as well, but on July 3 received the answer "that in view of lack of funds" it was impossible to contribute toward the church and hospice he was building "with such zeal." [Author]

[9]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

Despite all these efforts, however, Don Bosco realized that his funds could no longer suffice, and so he decided that it was time to effect a plan he had long been toying with: he would send his priests out wherever he had hopes of getting financial aid. Toward the end of August 1881, therefore, Father Peter Pozzan and Father Stephen Febbraro left Turin for a month's tour of the whole Trent area.[10] Don Bosco had prepared the way by sending word of their coming to designated individuals in a form letter which he carefully personalized.

August 10, 1881

Dear Friend,

I am very happy to inform you that work on the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice in Rome is progressing rapidly, and construction has risen well over twenty feet from the ground. One hundred and sixty workers are on the job, their wages amounting to fifteen thousand lire a month. It is a considerable though inescapable expenditure, and we have decided to take an exceptional step and appeal directly to our more outstanding cooperators. With the Holy Father's blessing we are sending you Father Peter Pozzan, trusting that you will receive him kindly and respond generously. God willing, he will visit you in the latter part of the month with a letter of introduction to all those people who have been blessed by God with the means to help us.

Meanwhile, kindly welcome this personal representative of mine. Introduce him to friends who take to heart the good of religion and society.

God bless you and reward you generously for your charity!

Very gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Rev. Pozzan is the director of the Sunday Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and editor-in-chief of the *Bollettino Salesiano*.

He also gave each of them a letter of introduction to Bishop John James della Bona of Trent.

Turin, August 16, 1881

Your Excellency:

To carry out the revered wishes of His Holiness Leo XIII we have decided to launch a fund-raising campaign among our Salesian cooperators so that we can continue building the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice on the Esquiline in Rome.

[10]Region in northern Italy; formerly the Italian speaking portion of South Tirol. [Editor]

Hence I am sending two of our Salesians, Father Peter Pozzan and Father Stephen Febbraro, to Trent. They will be calling on Your Excellency for your blessing and permission to collect funds and to receive your moral support.

Since the Holy Father has very much at heart the construction of this church and hospice and has warmly recommended it, I trust that you will be so kind as to use your influence to introduce these priests to people who are in a position to help us.

I hope that some happy occasion will bring Your Excellency to Turin, when we shall have the unique pleasure and honor of welcoming you in our midst.

Assuring Your Excellency of my sincerest and deepest gratitude, I am highly honored to be,

Yours devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

They solicited funds in homes and churches with such outstanding results[11] that Don Bosco expressed his gratitude in a form letter of thanks.[12] Moreover, the happy outcome of this venture prompted him to do the same the following year throughout the Venetian provinces, using the same fund-raisers, who were themselves natives of the Tirol.

When sending money to Don Bosco from this second tour, Father Pozzan could not help mentioning the high esteem in which the Venetian people held him. "These lively Venetians look upon Don Bosco as a fellow citizen," he wrote on August 29 from Longarone, "and they never tire of hearing about his life of charity." On September 10, after covering parts of the dioceses of Cèneda, Feltre and Belluno located in Cadore, Carnia and Upper Friuli,[13] he wrote again from Udine: "Thank God, we have been most cordially received everywhere and, considering the poverty here, the contributions we have received are generous. . . . Do not forget us. Distant as we may be, you are always in our hearts and on our lips. Pray for the many loving friends who keep giving me messages for you." Lastly, on September 24 he wrote from Spilimbergo in Friuli: "Everyone speaks enthusiastically of Don Bosco and the Salesians." Such reverence for Don Bosco explains the generosity of these good people despite their own critical condition in those days when disastrous floods inundated the farms and towns of Veneto, Piedmont and Liguria.

[11]Letter from Father Pozzan to Don Bosco in the *Bollettino Salesiano* of November and December 1881 and March 1882. [Author]

[12]The *Bollettino Salesiano* carried it in December 1881; we have found no copy. [Author]

[13]Districts of Venetian and Trent provinces. [Editor]

Visible, too, was the hand of Divine Providence in comforting Don Bosco. Within the limits we have set for this volume we cite only two instances. In September 1881 Don Bosco had to take out a loan of twenty thousand lire; his creditor, however, faced with a sudden emergency, demanded repayment after just two months. Don Bosco was caught short, not knowing where to turn, when surprisingly, like dew from the sky, he received two letters. One came from Father [Dominic] Tomatis, director of the Salesian school of San Nicolás, Argentina, with a contribution of 60,500 pesos or 12,293 gold francs, for the Sacred Heart Church, a donation from sixteen Italian farmers. The second letter came from Cerano in the province of Novara and contained ten thousand lire, given, as we have already stated,[14] by the parish priest, Father Peter Lovatelli. Don Bosco asked Father Dalmazzo to mention the generous contribution of the South American farmers to the Pope, and then expressed his thanks to Father Dominic Tomatis in a longer letter than usual.

Turin, December 21, 1881

My dear Father Tomatis:

I have received the handsome gift of 12,300 lire sent to us by our dedicated cooperators of San Nicolás to help keep work going on the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice in Rome. Such a generous offering from our overseas patriotic Catholic countrymen certainly deserved to be reported to the Holy Father, for he himself entrusted this project to our zealous Salesian cooperators.

The Pope was delighted with the news and praised the donors' generous charity. "Thank these good beloved sons of the Catholic Church," he said. "I bless them, their families and their work. I grant them all a plenary indulgence at their next reception of Holy Communion."

I gladly pass on these gracious words of the Supreme Pontiff to our good friends and cooperators, confident that the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the boundless source of grace and blessing, will repay them a hundredfold in this world, as he promised, and grant them an eternal reward in the life to come.

Should these friends ever visit Italy, tell them that they will be made to feel at home in our Salesian houses.

Give them my heartfelt regards, and commend me to their prayers. I in turn shall never forget them at my holy Mass.

Tell Graziano that his last letter pleased me no end, as did Father Rabagliati's. I shall soon reply to them and others.

[14]*See* p. 334. [Editor]

Father Lasagna,[15] fully recovered, has left for Montevideo. His piety and zeal truly edified us. The confreres in Italy, France and Spain send you their brotherly greetings and request your prayers. Very special best wishes for heaven's blessings upon Monsignor [Peter] Ceccarelli.

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always! Pray for me. In the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

One day in April that year, while Don Bosco was in Rome, Father [Francis] Dalmazzo, pastor of the Sacred Heart Church, received a contractor's bill of five thousand lire. When all attempts to raise the money failed, he went to Don Bosco repeatedly to ask for his help. At long last a registered letter addressed to Don Bosco came from France. The envelope and enclosed letter both indicated an enclosure of four thousand lire. Strangely, however, the envelope contained five thousand lire. Father [Joachim] Berto gasped in surprise, but Don Bosco remarked, "There are five thousand lire rather than four because that's what Father Dalmazzo needed!"[16]

Very rightly—and we have multiple proofs—did Leo XIII say about Don Bosco and the Sacred Heart Church[17] to the archbishop of Messina: "He is a living proof of Divine Providence." Yes, indeed, but he was also a man who toiled hand in hand with Divine Providence and left no stone unturned. The following letter[18] also gives us a true picture of Don Bosco exerting all his talent and efforts to help himself so that heaven might help him.

My dear Father Dalmazzo:

Let me set things in order lest I forget anything.

1. I ran out of solicitors' forms. Please have more printed, stamped and mailed, otherwise everything will come to a standstill. But make sure each sheet bears the heading: "Contributions for the Church," etc.

2. See to the printing of the French leaflets, because I have received requests and have none to send.

[15]In May 1881 Father Louis Lasagna had temporarily returned to Italy for surgery. *See* p. 17. [Editor]

[16]*Summarium super virtutes*, VI, 118 (*De heroica spe*). [Author]

[17]Letter from Archbishop [Joseph] Guarino to Don Bosco, December 1, 1881. [Author]

[18]This letter has neither date nor signature. Its context (item No. 10) places it doubtless in the first half of September 1881, as pointed out by Father Ceria in his *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco*, Volume IV, Letter 2225, p. 80f. [Editor]

3. Count De Roubion of Nice will send you twenty-five hundred francs for a column [of the Sacred Heart Church]. Send him a note of thanks.

4. Father Peter Lovatello, parish priest of Cerano, shortly to become a Salesian, will send ten thousand lire for the church: eight thousand in October, the rest in November. Please advise the cardinal vicar, because the money will probably be sent directly to him.

5. Father Pozzan is seeking funds in the Tirol. He has already received two thousand francs, with more to come. We are working elsewhere too, and God has been blessing us generously, so let us give Him heartfelt thanks!

6. On leaving Rome I mislaid the list of solicitors and pledges for the church columns. If you have a copy, send it to me so I can get some funds, especially in France.

7. I believe that I wrote or had someone write to you to say that I shall gladly consent to be a godfather, or perhaps I already am.[19]

8. Shall I get some priests ready to send you?[20] Father Biondolillo will gladly come; so will Father Rossetti, Father Valimberti and others. Let me know.

9. Also, in the midst of all your work, tell me if you have time to breathe and if there is anything I can do to ease your burden.

10. I leave tomorrow for Sampierdarena, where I shall stay one week.

Before that he had written [to Father Dalmazzo] from Alassio[21] to pave the way for requesting a government subsidy from Rome's municipal administration and from several state departments. We do not know what action Father Dalmazzo took, but the following brief instructions, date uncertain, briefly outlined the steps:

Call on His Excellency [Caesar] Correnti, secretary of the Knights of St. Maurice; assure him that his orders will be carried out. Ask him to read the letter and both memos. Do just about the very same for the Treasury Minister; tell him that he will soon receive a memo. The same holds for:

1. Count Visone, majordomo of the king's household; tell him that our Congregation has always been favored and to some extent even founded by the king's ancestral family.

2. A similar note to the Department of Grace and Justice; stress the erection of the parish and so forth.

[19]Marquis Léon Boulanger de Saint-Cyr, count of Villeneuve, had invited Don Bosco to Marseille for the baptism of his newborn son. [Editor]

[20]They were needed for pastoral work in the Sacred Heart parish. [Editor]

[21]Letter of April 6, 1881. [Author]

3. A note to the Department of the Interior; emphasize our goal to help destitute boys.

4. A note to the Department of Public Works, which in the past has given us subsidies and other benefits for youngsters we have accepted into our schools, especially the children of the national railway employees.

5. A note to City Hall, so concerned about the well-being of the people and poor boys. Marquis Francis Vitelleschi should go to the mayor with Father Dalmazzo.

6. If possible, have someone go with you to the Department of Education, stressing the work of our schools.

The list of donations sent to Rome have rare contributions of a thousand lire, even less those above that figure. The offerings collected by the solicitors amount at most to a few hundred lire. By far the most contributions are made up of a few lire saved by lay people and clergy of Rome and Turin who have a big heart but limited means. To arouse this charity all the more among the people Don Bosco included in the March issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano* a full-page engraving of the church which could be cut out and hung up in a house or store window.

For our own edification and to the lasting honor of a great religious order, we must recount the following incident. The superior general of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Brother Irlide, sent a circular from his Paris headquarters to all his confreres on January 3, 1882 urging a renewal of piety and mortification during the months of the Holy Childhood [January], St. Joseph [March], Mary [May], and the Sacred Heart [June]. So as to make their prayers, fasts and sacrifices more acceptable to God, he suggested that the funds saved during those months be dedicated to the construction and the furnishing of the Sacred Heart Church in Rome. Since France had already vowed to erect a national shrine to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Paris, it had been judged inadvisable to appeal to the people on behalf of a church being built in Rome. Still, the superior general wrote: "We believe that our worldwide institute, especially consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, should do for the church being built in Rome what it has done for the church in Montmartre. Our dear confreres' savings as they cut back on food once or twice a week throughout the year, and the funds collected from our students, especially of our boarding schools, are to be allotted to the same cause. Our contributions to the church in Rome will draw blessings of the adorable and merciful Heart of Jesus on our entire order, especially on the houses making the offering. Obviously,

such blessings will be in direct proportion to the generosity of the sacrifices the brothers will have taken upon themselves." The contributions reaching our procurator general in Rome amounted to the handsome sum of twenty thousand francs, and the deceased Brother Irlide's successor presented them personally to Don Bosco on February 15, 1885.[22]

One donation has an interesting story to it. Archbishop (later Cardinal) Joseph Benedict Dusmet of Catania wanted to purchase some of Father Cagliero's musical compositions for his seminary and ordered them directly from Don Bosco, requesting an invoice. Don Bosco told Father Cagliero to handle the order. He did so, facetiously making the invoice: "Total cost 14.75 lire. Note that the decimal point may readily be disregarded as useless." The good archbishop wrote back,[23] "I take your note as a voice from heaven that the decimal point is irrelevant and useless. Please accept the enclosed fourteen lire in payment and an additional fourteen hundred lire—with no decimals—for the construction of the new Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome. I have been slowly scraping up this amount bit by bit to use it for a charitable work I began and have not yet completed, but the irrelevant decimal made me change my mind. It recalled the well known adage: *Qui cito dat, bis dat* [A ready giver gives double]. So I hope Don Bosco will graciously accept my donation and reciprocate with a fervent prayer to that adorable Heart which so dearly loves us, still. And you, Father, accept my fourteen hundred lire—no decimals—which will go down in the annals of Salesian finances." This generous deed, published anonymously in the *Bollettino Salesiano*, induced readers everywhere to do the same and send donations they had set aside for later projects.[24]

But it was not only finances which hindered the church's construction. Countless obstacles were raised by the former committee headed by Marquis [Julius] Merighi.[25] Its contracts had to be rescinded and old obligations liquidated, but those responsible set forth claims and made exorbitant demands. Even the committee chairman branded the Salesians as intruders, denouncing them to Church authorities as impossi-

[22]The last detail is mentioned in the diary of Father [Charles] Viglietti. [Author]

[23]Letter from Catania, January 21, 1883. *See Bollettino Salesiano*, March 1883, and *Cardinal Dusmet*, by Father Gaetano Amadio, Arte Sicula Press, p. 109. [Author]

[24]*See Bollettino Salesiano*, May 1883. [Author]

[25]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 457f. [Editor]

ble to deal with and dishonest. A coalition of stone workers and marble cutters sided with him, ready to go to court. However, the most irate was the general contractor, who charged exorbitantly for his work and threatened to sue. Moreover, the architect favored his assistants and workers. Regrettably, there was good reason to believe that he was being egged on by a party interested in creating mistrust and blocking smooth progress.

In the spring of 1882 Don Bosco went to Rome and did his best to clear the air and forestall future misunderstandings, as we can see from the following letter. Another letter [to the cardinal vicar], however, which we shall quote later, makes it clear that the architect, once he met Don Bosco, kept steering clear of him. The heart of the problem was his stubborn refusal to acknowledge Salesian ownership of the project.

Rome, May 9, 1882

Dear Count Vespignani:

Following the discussion I was honored to have with you, I took your suggestion and brought in an expert to evaluate the work done and check if it tallied with the contract's terms. Several rather substantial comments given to me I now pass on to you. Since I must leave for Turin on business, I have instructed two of my priests, Father Francis Dalmazzo, parish priest of the Sacred Heart Church, and Father Angelo Savio to act in my name. I shall accept their decisions.

Personally I hopefully wish that we can settle any differences amicably through the mediation of a third person, an expert we can both trust. To forestall future misunderstandings, I think that we must agree on these two guidelines:

1. Settle past disagreements once and for all.
2. Establish clear policies and ground rules; specify exact costs for every phase of the work in the contract. To avoid deterioration and damage to materials because of delays, construction is to be immediately resumed now when the weather is most ideal for work.

Let us please work out all differences in a way that will redound to our utmost spiritual benefit and God's greater glory.

Yours sincerely,
Fr. John Bosco

The expert whom Don Bosco chose as arbitrator was G. Squarcina, architect and parliament member. His reply to Don Bosco cited Don

Bosco's guidelines to Count Vespignani as prompted "by sound administrative tact and plenty of common sense." He added: "I think that much time is being wasted in futile discussion, while even the very nature of the work demands its immediate resumption."[26]

As a matter of fact, construction had come to a standstill on June 17 until a satisfactory solution could be found. The cardinal vicar called a meeting of Marquis [John] Patrizi, Count [Francis] Vespignani, Andolfi the contractor, Father Dalmazzo, and Father Savio. The architect submitted his resignation, and the cardinal accepted it; this helped speed the final break-up of the obstructive committee. However, Andolfi adamantly refused to work under Father Savio. The result was an impending court action. Furthermore, the cardinal, reluctant to entrust the entire project to the Salesians, kept wavering from the Salesians' side to the committee's. Also he balked at hiring Squarcina, feeling that as a member of parliament he would always favor the Romans. Meanwhile rumor got around that the Salesians had already gone bankrupt. As Father Dalmazzo aptly put it, Rome was a tough nut to crack.[27]

While Squarcina was doing his best to break the deadlock, the opposition became stiffer than ever, nor did Father Savio's reports give any hope that the impasse would soon break. In July, anxious to have his representatives' authority definitively honored, Don Bosco penned the following tactful letter to the cardinal vicar:

Turin, July 5, 1882

Your Eminence:

Father Savio has sent me a report on the controversy surrounding the Sacred Heart Church. I gather that there are those who would like to muddy the waters and flout all authority, even that of the parish priest, Father Dalmazzo. I will confine my remarks to a letter I will address to Father Savio, who will hand it to you personally. However, if we are ever to expedite matters, I believe it indispensable that Your Eminence withdraw from this mess and leave all problems to Father Dalmazzo, who has to come up with funds to meet the costs. Hoping to settle the issue, I wrote twice to Count Vespignani, but he neither replied nor came to see me during my stay in Rome.

I earnestly desire that construction be resumed. I am making incredible

[26]Letter to Don Bosco, Rome, June 17, 1882. [Author]
[27]Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, June 7, 21 and 30, 1882. [Author]

efforts to raise money. But when shall we ever see that church completed if things continue like this?

I trust that my [poor] eyesight will allow me to write you very soon.

I ask your blessing.

Most respectfully,
Fr. John Bosco

The letter meant for the cardinal was to be drafted jointly by Father Dalmazzo and Father Savio and then sent to Don Bosco in Turin for his comments, but we have found neither the original draft nor a copy. Our archives do have, however, a copy of Don Bosco's letter to Father Savio the following day.

[July 6, 1882]

My dear Father Savio:

I have written to the cardinal vicar and asked him to leave all decisions to you and Father Dalmazzo. I also said that as long as they refuse to acknowledge our ownership, we shall only be a thorn in his side, and nothing will ever get done. Now sit down with Father Dalmazzo and together draft a reply to the cardinal vicar, but first send it to me. I will read it and return it immediately. I amended a few lines in my report and then realized that the cardinal vicar had already received his copy.

Time and money are being wasted, adding to the mess. We are not Romans, and hence . . .

God bless us all! Regards to the confreres.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. You may consult some lawyer.

Don Bosco was quite convinced that this procedure would stop all arguing and work would resume without delay. And so we can understand the holy impatience expressed in his letter of July 29 to Father Dalmazzo: "We haven't heard a word from you! Write or send word by someone about the Sacred Heart Church. Has work been resumed or will it resume soon? Is there anything I can do from here? Are your funds running out? Are you still receiving contributions in the mail? [. . .] Regards to Father Savio. Tell him to concentrate on the problems and see the church through to its completion, despite the hurts inflicted upon us by wicked old Satan."

The serenity of these last few lines is heightened toward the middle

of the letter, when, after calmly touching on two very thorny issues—the first concerned procedures to obtain ecclesiastical privileges [usually granted to religious orders] and the second related to the archbishop of Turin—he went on, "Your brother dropped in the day before yesterday with good news about his family and your mother. Next Tuesday we get ready for our spiritual retreats which will run until the feast of All Saints. More news will reach you from others. Heartfelt regards to all the confreres. Pray for me."

Despite Don Bosco's firm insistence that work immediately resume, summer went by and fall set in and there still was no progress. On returning to Rome from his October retreat in Turin, Father Dalmazzo found the situation messier than ever.[28] On December 6, with the onset of winter, Don Bosco wrote to him: "Is there no way of resolving this impasse with the general contractor? Maybe you and Father Savio might sit with him and amicably come to some solution." On December 18, calmly as ever despite the many setbacks, he wrote again: "Best wishes to you and to all the confreres for spiritual and temporal happiness! Please extend my greetings to all the confreres and my recommendation as well—the exact observance of *poverty, chastity and obedience*, through which we consecrated ourselves to the Lord. It will be a great day for us when perfect charity shall reign among us, when all this mess with the general contractor will be done away with, and we shall resume work on the Sacred Heart Church. Is the lottery asleep? Get it moving, and we'll do our best here to lend you a hand." The lottery was but one of Don Bosco's usual means of raising funds for his enterprises; even while in Rome he did not overlook it. He set about it without fanfare and prudently since everywhere collections were being taken up for the victims of northern Italy's tragic floods. We shall tell the story of this Roman lottery and its ups and downs in a later volume.

The thorny conflict began to be resolved with the beginning of the new year. It broke when Count Vespignani terminated the general contractor's services and sent the final bill which amounted to some forty thousand lire. As Don Bosco's legal agent, Father Savio decided to pay this sum promptly without questioning it so as to hasten the contractor's withdrawal and bring the matter to an end. Father

[28]Letter to Don Bosco, Rome, October 30, 1882. [Author]

Dalmazzo quickly informed Don Bosco, knowing "how much you desired that news."[29]

This decision led to the final termination of the old contract; legalities and signing took place on February 6. Don Bosco's representatives then bought up all the equipment, lumber, security fence, and remaining building materials, paid off the balance due on the residence and chapel, and took over undisputed ownership. Thus, with the old contract out of the way, it was an easy task to dissolve the various schemes devised by the now defunct committee which, in neglect of its watchdog duties, had allowed all parties to go their own way.[30] Finally, once the unusually rigid winter began to break, work was resumed. While all workers were striving to make up for lost time, a new block was raised threatening another shutdown. That was in 1883, but we will bring it up now. Architect Vespignani, perhaps too easily swayed by the sly insinuations of intriguers, abruptly quit supervising the construction and sent notice of his decision to the cardinal vicar of his decision, who, of course, asked him to state in writing his reasons for such a drastic step. He listed five: 1. arbitrary changes in dimensions of walls and ceilings; 2. other arbitrary alterations with no regard to safety; 3. demands to see blueprints for additional work; 4. false statements that he demanded unneeded and very costly art work; 5. poorly concealed attempts to drop him.

Upon receiving this notice, the cardinal passed it on to Father Dalmazzo, who, uncertain of what to reply and probably anxious to act in agreement with him, asked him what he thought should be done. Rather than offer suggestions, the cardinal took back Vespignani's letter and mailed it to Don Bosco with the cryptic remark: "Father Francis Dalmazzo has asked what reply he is to make and what assurance he can give the architect that his orders will be obeyed." To begin with, Don Bosco asked Father Dalmazzo to state in writing his response to each of the architect's complaints and send it to him. He did so promptly, whereupon Don Bosco wrote to the cardinal:

Turin, July 31, 1883

Your Eminence:

I would have wished Count Vespignani did not bring you problems plaguing the construction of the Sacred Heart Church, lest the weighty load which

[29]Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, January 31, 1883. [Author]
[30]Letter from Father Savio to Father Rua, Rome, February 20, 1883. [Author]

already consumes your precious time be aggravated. I read your note to the architect's letter and sent it back to Rome for more detailed information. The problem stems from a difference in the mode of operation. In northern Italy architects submit finished plans; it is the general contractor who deals with the owner, and the owner then takes over all payments and ultimate responsibility. In Rome, however, architectural plans [for further work not contemplated at the start] are not available and so that part of the work cannot be put up to bids.

However, somehow or other, even with greater sacrifice, the work seems to be moving. May it continue! I am doing my utmost to raise funds for Father Dalmazzo to meet scheduled payments. I fully trust that, with Your Eminence's help, resources will no longer be lacking and the construction will move rapidly ahead.

We always ask God to grant Your Eminence good health for many more years for the good of holy Church, and we pray that one day you will preside at a very solemn ceremony of consecration of our, or I should say your, church in Rome.

Give me and all the Salesians your gracious blessing. On their behalf I am greatly honored to be in veneration and esteem,

Yours most devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco had deftly put his finger on the hurt. A general contractor who takes orders only from the architect, not the paymaster, and an architect who is not required to furnish the owner with the plans of the work done make for a bad combination that inevitably causes financial waste and endless wrangling which ultimately hurts the owner.

Count Vespignani, who, after all, was an honorable man, finally yielded to reason and took back his ill-advised decision; he again directed the work with the help of his associate, Valentine Grazioli. The general contractor was Chevalier James Cucco.

Even with this situation now under control, Don Bosco knew from experience that not all disputes would cease, all the more so because he planned to start adding a large hospice to the church. He wrote about it to Father Dalmazzo and gave him directives.

Turin, August 3, 1883

My dear Father Dalmazzo:

Enclosed please find some papers I had no time to hand over to Father Sala. He is on his way to Rome with money and with full power of attorney to obviate our having to face continual crises.

We have to get things ready to start work on the hospice as early as next spring. If you are going to attend our next general chapter, put your ideas down on paper and either send them in or bring them with you.

God bless you all! Regards to my dear sons of Macao.[31]

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was to cost Don Bosco many more sacrifices before it was finished. Father Rua, who was in a position to know, confirmed this during Don Bosco's apostolic process, claiming that the project was a severe drain on his strength. It was painful to see him in his advanced years frail in health, often racked with major afflictions, going up and down stairs to beg alms, often being subjected to harsh humiliations. So great was his pain at times that, when speaking intimately to his sons who asked why he was so stooped, he would answer, "The Sacred Heart Church weighs heavily on my shoulders." At other times, in humorous fashion, he would play on the word "persecute" and remark, "They say that the Church is persecuted. I, instead, can say that the Sacred Heart Church persecutes me."

[31]At one time the Jesuits had purchased land and houses at Castro Pretorio, using funds contributed by their mission at Macao in China; hence the name of this locality. [Author]

# CHAPTER 14

## *The Last Blocks to the Granting of Privileges*

WHEN Don Bosco's straightforward attempts of 1875 to obtain the communication of privileges from the Holy See failed,[1] he neither panicked nor gave up, but, adhering to his usual practice of circumventing obstacles which he could not meet head-on, he sought alternate approaches to achieve his purpose. The Congregation's growth and spread convinced him more and more that he had to win for it full juridical identity consonant with his times. Daily experience taught him how precarious it was to be at the mercy of local bishops; even with the very best of intentions the Congregation's legitimate freedom was all too often being curtailed and its identity altered. Instead he needed to solidify his Congregation and give it such homogeneity that in any environment at all it would be in a position to fulfill its commitment, unfettered by prejudice, in perfect singleness of spirit. Perforce, therefore, he could not help but view his Congregation as incomplete until he could assure it of that legitimate autonomy which other great religious families advantageously enjoyed.

And indeed, as he saw it, the Salesian Society would in the future be on a par with the great congregations. Its greatness—no mystery to him—had not yet shone to all who observed it, and this was the main reason why Church authorities were at first reluctant to grant his Congregation the charism of privileges. Also, the fact that widely disparate forces worked against him should come as no surprise to the historian who has learned skillfully to find his way through the ceaseless clashing of those human shortcomings which we call passions, nor does it shock the biographer who knows quite well that Divine Providence is

[1] *See* Vol. XI, Chapters 9 and 21. [Author]

wont to refine the virtue of saints through many tribulations and thus lead them to victories for God's kingdom. His unalterable calm notwithstanding, Don Bosco did not try to cover up a certain haste to reach his goal. Feeling that his days were numbered, he doubtless was anxious to be at hand to guide his Salesians during their initial experience of total canonical exemption. This too should help us to understand the inflexible tenacity with which he pursued his goal, regardless of the countless obstacles that might arise and block his every step. The fact also that his efforts were happily crowned with victory once Turin's hostility was breached is the best proof that there were no real reasons in all honesty for anyone to oppose his cause.

When his first requests of 1875 were repeatedly presented and rejected, Don Bosco was satisfied to obtain various temporary favors with the least possible formality from his ever kindly friend, Pius IX. Thus he was able to avail himself of three highly important privileges: 1. *pastors' rights* which directors of Salesian houses could use toward dependents residing in their houses; 2. *extra tempus* ordinations for Salesian clerics; 3. *dispensation from testimonial letters* from a postulant's bishop before admission to the novitiate. These privileges had been granted in 1876. The first two were valid for three years in Italy and five abroad; the third bore no time restriction.[2] When the three-year period of the first two expired, he requested an extension, with the following results. As regards the pastors' rights, after lengthy insistence on his part, a brief dated March 21, 1882 renewed the 1876 privileges for a further three and five years respectively. He got nowhere with the ordinations *extra tempus* until 1884. In 1881 Archbishop Joseph Guarino of Messina warmly championed his cause, specifically for the sake of the boarding school of Randazzo, but to no avail.[3]

Obtaining the dispensation from the bishop's testimonial letters was a complex problem since this privilege had been revoked rather dramatically four years before. Don Bosco himself left us this account in 1882.[4]

Five years have passed since Cardinal Ferrieri condescended to receive me. Since then, despite all my pleas and letters, I could never obtain either an

[2]*See* Vol. XIV, p. 179, footnote 10 and pp. 180ff. [Editor]

[3]Letter from Archbishop Guarino to Don Bosco, Rome, December 1, 1881, and from Attorney Leonori to Don Bosco, Rome, December 26, 1881. [Author]

[4]Letter to Father Dalmazzo, San Benigno, September 8, 1882. [Author]

audience or even a written reply. In the last interview he granted me, he backed up the charges brought against me by the archbishop of Turin that I admitted postulants to the Congregation without applying for his testimonial letters. I replied that I always made it a point to request the letters, but that when obstacles were raised, I availed myself of the faculties I had received from the Holy See to proceed without them.

"Who granted you these faculties?' the cardinal demanded somewhat in a huff.

"The Holy Father," I answered, "our well-deserving Pius IX. The relevant papers are with the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and I have an authentic copy."

"That permission ceases as of now. Take care not to use it in the future."

I wonder whether the prefect of a Roman congregation has power to suspend a privilege granted so formally. Be that as it may, however, I merely replied that I would abide by his orders, and I have never again invoked that privilege.

Such was the situation when Don Bosco went to Rome in 1881 with the resolve to renew his struggle against the Holy See's reluctance to grant him the privileges. He had prepared himself with some preliminary work. Through his secretary Father Joachim Berto, well skilled in researching and gathering such material, he had compiled a printed monograph documenting the privileges and permissions granted to the Salesian Society by the Holy See and various bishops.[5] The list opens with the first spiritual favors granted by Gregory XVI on April 18, 1845, which could be shared by fifty "collaborators," and it ends with the faculties recently granted by the bishop of Fréjus and Toulon and by the bishop of Ivrea to Salesians working in their dioceses. Wanting all his confreres to share the benefits of this painstaking work, Don Bosco sent a copy to each house with a covering letter explaining its application.

[No date]

Dearest sons in Jesus Christ:

Desiring to help you more easily understand and apply the privileges graciously granted by the Holy See to our Pious Society, I decided to have them

[5]*Favori e grazie spirituali concessi dalla Santa Sede alla Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1835 al 1879*, Torino, Tipografia Salesiana, 1881 [Spiritual Favors and Graces Granted by the Holy See to the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales, 1835-1879, Turin, Salesian Press, 1881]. [Author]

printed for our common benefit. These privileges are precious gifts granted to religious institutes by the Holy See, which can modify or add to them whenever it judges it to advance God's greater glory. Hence we must use them as needed and express our deepest thanks and profound veneration to the Supreme Head of the Church.

This list of privileges shows that during its first decade our Congregation consisted of one director assisted by some priests and laymen. To that director these papal and diocesan concessions were granted.

In 1852 he was formally appointed superior of the Congregation with all needed powers to govern it.

By 1858 the Society began to look like a religious congregation, and after sixteen years of study and testing it was definitively approved in 1874.

That these privileges or concessions may serve their purpose, please remember:

1. Take advantage of these spiritual favors whenever they can contribute to your spiritual well-being as, for example, the indulgences.

2. Use them moderately and prudently in your own communities and private chapels.

3. Use them only most sparingly when they touch upon the authority of the bishop, to whom at all times we owe respect, obedience and reverence.

The rescripts, decrees and briefs herein contained have been carefully compared with their respective originals and found to be identical.

The translation was made and checked by qualified members of our own Congregation.

However, since some rather serious problems may arise in implementing these privileges, we are working on a commentary for a precise and faultless way to apply them, so as to achieve the Holy See's aim, which is God's greater glory and the welfare of souls.

Live in joy. May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always.

Fr. John Bosco

Just what positive action Don Bosco was able to take during his 1881 stay at Rome to win the communication of privileges we cannot ascertain from the documents at our disposal, but it would seem that he used his time mainly to gain the good will of influential prelates and have them on his side in the hour of need. The only thing we know for certain is that just before leaving Liguria to proceed to Rome, he had Father Berto send him the original documents relevant to the three privileges we have just mentioned; with them he also took along the

printed list of privileges.[6] To come up with definite facts we must jump from spring to autumn. Our account will be quite touching, as it shows us what means he had to resort to so as to finally achieve his aim.

The reader surely recalls the anxious pleas of Messina's archbishop to Don Bosco to breathe new life into his seminary. When the prelate's letters appeared to be penned with tears, Don Bosco proposed a deal: if the archbishop would get him the privileges, he would send the Salesians to his diocese. "A hard bargain!" the archbishop replied, but then added:[7] "Let me try. I'll turn Rome inside out. . . . Meanwhile let me know who are the people in Rome who oppose you and on what grounds. . . . I need some leads because I certainly intend to do my very best."

When the archbishop went to Rome in November, he kept his word. First he took pains to learn how things stood as regards the granting of privileges to the Salesian Congregation, but in no time he became convinced that as long as the cardinal prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars was against it, there was little or no chance of hope. Still, when in audience with the Holy Father, he gradually steered the conversation to the subject. The Pope matched his praises of the Salesians' meritorious undertakings, but, on hearing mention of privileges, he remarked that the other religious orders had acquired them only after centuries of merit and that the Salesian Congregation, but of recent origin, had a long way to go to deserve them.[8]

There was no reply the archbishop could make to this statement. However, Don Bosco asked him to deliver a letter of petition to His Holiness. "Please be convinced," the archbishop wrote back, "that only among your Salesians can you ever find anyone more committed than I to your cause and to that of your distinguished Congregation, even though my concern is not beyond comparison. I speak with my heart on my sleeve. The obstacles you keep running into in Rome originate in Turin."[9]

As on other occasions, the archbishop consulted Cardinal Nina and asked whether on his next visit to the Holy Father he should again bring up the subject and present Don Bosco's petition. Seemingly Cardinal

[6]Letter from Don Bosco to Father Berto, Alassio, April 8, 1881. *See* p. 109. [Author]
[7]Letter to Don Bosco, Messina, October 1, 1881. [Author]
[8]Letter from Archbishop Guarino to Don Bosco, Rome, November 21, 1881. [Author]
[9]Letter, Rome, December 1, 1881. [Author]

Nina advised against it, suggesting that he rather call on Cardinal Ferrieri. He did so, but the cardinal was out. He was quite unhappy over this because he was anxious to hear some sort of explanation from the cardinal's own lips; furthermore, he could not protract his stay in Rome. Nevertheless, he did leave Don Bosco's petition with the Sacred Congregation's secretary. He then wrote to Father Dalmazzo, "Kindly offer Don Bosco my respects and please tell him of the many stairways I have climbed, the endless hours I have sat in antechambers, all the comings and goings I had to go through to help him. I did all this out of deepest love, and I am very much distressed that I made no headway."[10]

Archbishop Guarino's zeal drew attention to the privilege invoked by Don Bosco to issue dimissorial letters for the ordination of his Salesian clerics. Just why this happened at this time we do not know, but the fact is that no sooner did Archbishop Guarino leave Rome than Don Bosco was called to order. In a communication dated December 28, Archbishop Agnozzi, secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, wrote: "The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars requests precise information concerning the privilege and indult of issuing testimonial letters for ordination to holy orders, inclusive of the priesthood, for professed members of your Congregation. Please oblige by sending a copy to this Sacred Congregation." We do not have a copy of Don Bosco's reply, but we have no doubt of its contents. On April 3, 1874 Pope Pius IX, replying to Don Bosco's petition, had graciously granted him the above faculty for a period of ten years in a rescript signed by Cardinal [Joseph] Bizzarri, then prefect of the Congregation [of Bishops and Regulars]. Consequently, the matter was dropped, either to let the rescript expire, or because the resumption of negotiations for privileges in general made it advisable not to suspend one particular privilege.

In 1882 Don Bosco took direct action to obtain the privileges *ad instar* [after the fashion (of religious orders)]. That year he personally pleaded his cause in Rome in a private audience with Leo XIII. The Pope did not seem opposed to the idea but told him to see Archbishop [Innocent] Masotti, newly appointed secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and ask him to bring the matter up in one of his regular audiences [with the Pope]. Some days later, a very good friend

[10]Letter, Rome, December 14, 1881. [Author]

of the Salesians, Cardinal [Louis] Bilio, bishop of Sabina, reminded the Pope of Don Bosco's desire; the impression he got was that His Holiness was inclined to grant his wish. A third attempt came from Don Bosco himself: he personally wrote a petition in Latin, perhaps at the suggestion of Archbishop Masotti. The Pope read it at an audience with Cardinal Nina and praised the Latin style as being simple and direct, yet polished. "Who actually wrote this?" he asked the cardinal.

"Don Bosco," the cardinal answered.

"Really?" exclaimed the Pope. "Don Bosco is not a man of letters."

"Still he wrote that himself."

When telling Don Bosco of this conversation, Cardinal Nina asked if he had done literary studies. "Yes," Don Bosco answered, "I have read all the Latin classics and their finest commentaries." He then went on to list all the books and authors he had read until the cardinal, raising his hands, interrupted with, "That's enough! I'll surely mention this to the Holy Father."

Don Bosco's petition described the Salesian Society's growth during the nine years following its final approval; he emphasized the urgency of being granted the requested privileges, listing several motives on a separate sheet.[11] He then asked to be granted the privileges which Leo XII had given on September 12, 1826 to the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, founded by Father [Pius Bruno] Lanteri. These were the very same privileges which the Redemptorists were then enjoying, and he felt that they would be the best suited to the nature and aims of the Salesian Congregation.

After his papal audience, Don Bosco hastened to call on Archbishop Masotti, who received him most graciously and even appeared pained that Don Bosco had anticipated his own resolve to pay him a personal call sometime during the day. In fact the Pope had already asked him whether he had conferred with Don Bosco and, on receiving a negative reply, had told him, "Well, take good care of him, poor man! He is dear to me. Try to comfort him." After telling this to Don Bosco, the archbishop advised him to keep it confidential and let him handle the whole matter. Don Bosco simply replied that if further clarifications or other information was needed, he could speak to Cardinal Bilio, who was well acquainted with the Salesian Congregation's affairs. Later

[11]We have not found a copy. Probably it contained the arguments put forward in 1875.[12] [Author]

[12]*See* Vol. XI, pp. 175ff. [Editor]

Cardinal Nina told him in confidence that the Pope had secretly appointed a committee of three cardinals, [Aeneas] Sbarretti, [Thomas] Martinelli and [Thomas] Zigliara, to look into the matter.

Don Bosco left Rome on May 9 with hopeful heart. However, back in Turin, he kept up the pressure for his cause even though the case of Father Bonetti was then in its most crucial phase.[13] Archbishop Masotti wanted him to list the privileges he was requesting in a detailed and documented petition.[14] This was time-consuming but he completed it quickly enough and sent it to Father Dalmazzo with a note:[15] "Here are the required papers concerning the privileges. Take them to the cardinal vicar and then to Archbishop Masotti. Also find out whether all or some of the documents need to be printed. Keep me informed of everything, and I will give you instructions."

No sooner did he send those documents than a letter from Attorney [Constantine] Leonori[16] reached him with news neither new nor quite encouraging. "Many pious societies similar to yours," the attorney wrote, "have been founded these latter years, all with simple vows, and yet not all of them have privileges; furthermore, I can say that none of them has all the privileges. . . . I suggest that you get a copy of the constitutions of the Passionist Fathers, who enjoy more privileges than others, examine them, choose those that you feel will most help your own Society, and ask for them. . . . There is no likelihood that you will be granted these privileges; the opposition is frightening. . . ." Don Bosco seems to have paid but little attention to these ominous forebodings. In fact, at the end of July he roused his procurator to action. "Has the matter of our privileges been put to sleep?" he wrote.[17] "If we don't strike while the iron is hot, we labor to no purpose. Call on Archbishop Masotti, pay my respects to him, and ask him to let me know what I am to do or to prepare and, if there are obstacles, to tell us what they are. We have the promise of the Holy Father and Archbishop Masotti. Be patient. If things get too hot, get an ice-cold coach and keep going."

But it all looked like wasted toil. The very same day that Don Bosco was writing from Turin to urge his procurator to act, the latter wrote

[13]*See* Chapter 6. [Editor]
[14]Letter from Father Dalmazzo, Rome, June 7, 1882. [Author]
[15]Letter, Turin, June 19, 1882. [Author]
[16]Letter to Don Bosco, Rome, June 27, 1882. [Author]
[17]Letter, July 29, 1882. [Author]

from Rome to inform him that the privileges *ad instar* could not be granted. Therefore, he was to compile a list of desired privileges properly worded and fully documented and then send it to Archbishop Masotti in ample time before the summer recess. The archbishop would do his utmost to push the matter through.

However, Don Bosco had quite clearly not given up all hope. In fact, not having received an official negative answer, he wrote to Cardinal Nina on August 4:

Your Eminence:

I have already sent in my formal request for the concession of privileges and have adhered to the required formalities which Your Eminence has already seen and the Holy Father repeatedly approved. However, Archbishop Masotti now tells Father Dalmazzo that I must specify the privileges we are requesting. If we ask for only certain privileges, we shall be just as badly hampered at every move as we have been in the past.

If the Holy See wants to normalize the Salesians' status and not expose them to endless conflicts, the formal granting of privileges is necessary, as was the case with the Passionists, the Redemptorists, the Oblates of Mary, the Rosminians and the religious congregations definitively approved by Holy Church. However, should the Holy See decide to grant only some privileges, I must of course be forced to accept that decision and reword my petition.

I hope however that Your Eminence's gracious intervention with the Holy Father will manage to obtain for me what every congregation of this land has enjoyed and continues to enjoy from the day of its definitive approval.

Father Dalmazzo will call upon you, prepared to follow out whatever counsel you will graciously give him.

Please overlook this miserable scrawl. It is the best I can do, and I don't want to dictate this letter to anyone.

In greatest veneration, I am honored to be,

Your obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I have only one copy of the above mentioned formal request; if copies must be made, please let me know.

He followed Father Dalmazzo's suggestion [to list the privileges he needed], and then, as though his mind were free of worry, he wrote him about the approaching feast of St. Joachim [the Pope's name day] which that year fell on August 19.

Enclosed are my greetings to the Holy Father. Read my letter if you have time and either personally or through Monsignor Boccali or Cardinal Nina have them conveyed to His Holiness. If there is no other way, send them through the mail. I am most concerned to know of your health and that of your confreres. Spare nothing to safeguard it. I have drawn up a list of privileges from those of the Redemptorists, the Passionists and the Lazarists, in case our petition to have them *ad instar* gets blown away. You will get it in two days. Just remember that even when the wind blows, it always lets something fall.

He had selected ninety-four privileges and sent all the documents with the following cover letter to Archbishop Masotti:

Turin, August 21, 1882

Your Excellency:

I venture to write to you not officially but more as a son respectfully seeking to do some good, always in accordance with the Supreme Pontiff's sacred wishes which I take for commands. Please let your response be a fatherly one. Last April, at an audience which His Holiness graciously granted me, I told him of the trying situations our little Pious Society had to face in comparison with other congregations in its dealing with some ordinaries. After listening to me, he gave me some hope that we would be granted the privileges *ad instar*. With this in mind I drew up a respectful position paper to be presented to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, of which you are the most worthy secretary. However, I have just been informed that the Holy See rarely grants the communication of privileges, and so I have picked out those privileges and faculties which I judge indispensable for our Congregation to achieve its goal and to hold its own in the various dioceses and parishes, especially in the foreign missions, which here and now are a major concern of ours and enjoy the warm recommendation of the Holy Father.

My formal request and all pertinent documentation have been compiled and submitted to your authoritative Sacred Congregation. Should some clarification be needed, please inform our procurator general, Father Dalmazzo, who will hasten to seek it or provide it in some way or other.

I entrust this matter to your kindly care; ours is certainly a most urgent petition. Our missions in South America keep growing daily. Some of our communities are nearly two months of travel apart. How can we set up clear, abiding norms if they have not been laid down and placed under the control of the Holy See?

Please excuse the trustful informality of this letter.

In a slight token of our undying gratitude, all Salesians and the one hundred

and fifty thousand pupils entrusted to us by Divine Providence will fervently pray for you.

Please remember me in your kind prayers.

In deepest reverence,
[Fr. John Bosco]

He also sent a copy of his latest petition to Cardinal Nina with a covering letter:

San Benigno Canavese, September 3, 1882

Your Eminence:

I hasten to send you a copy of my new request, *no longer ad instar* but *"speciatim"* for those privileges which are most indispensable. I fear that even these few will run into problems. Archbishop Masotti seems to be very well disposed.

The enclosed documents will bring you up to date, if needed, with what has been done. I am now attending a retreat of our priests at San Benigno.

All of us offer humble prayers for Your Eminence and ask for your blessing. In deepest gratitude,

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Having overlooked one document, he wrote again the next day:

San Benigno Canavese, September 4, 1882

Your Eminence:

Probably due to my poor eyesight, I either forgot one document or sent you the wrong one when I wrote to you yesterday requesting some privileges for our Congregation. I enclose that document; you may need it.

Please forgive this added nuisance. I remain in deepest reverence,

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco sent his formal, documented petition to the Pope and enclosed a brief, humble appeal in Latin, making sure that he alluded, but not as explicitly as above, to his request through official channels for the privileges *ad instar*, as though wishing to remind him of the kind words he had addressed to him on his last visit to Rome.

But the Sacred Congregation's reply even to this limited appeal was

to table the request for privileges to a future date. Don Bosco came to know through a reliable source that Cardinal Ferrieri had told the Pope that, rather than grant the Salesians privileges, he meant to conduct an apostolic visitation of all their houses. To this threat the Pope replied, "What? I absolutely will never allow such a thing!"[18]

Father Dalmazzo was given a taste of Cardinal Ferrieri's harsh stand in an audience he was granted at the end of November. Giving no hint that he knew the outcome of Don Bosco's latest appeal, he asked the cardinal for his views on the matter. The latter curtly replied that he knew nothing about it. Father Dalmazzo insisted that Archbishop Masotti must have certainly presented it to him. His Eminence replied, "I took no action on it. When the archbishop gets here, you can ask him." For a moment neither spoke, while the cardinal fiercely glared at Father Dalmazzo. Unimpressed, the latter went on, "Don Bosco, my revered superior, unable to be honored by an audience with you, would like very much to know if you have any observations to make concerning our Congregation because he would gladly take to heart your remarks and advice." A piercing stare was the only answer. Then as Father Dalmazzo moved to leave, the cardinal exclaimed ironically: "Don Bosco has been quite cavalier about this matter!" With that he accompanied Father Dalmazzo to the door, loudly flinging this final remark as he left, "Don Bosco has no religious spirit."[19] A short time later, Archbishop Masotti was quite right to caution Father Dalmazzo that the road was strewn with thorns and that it would be wise to move slowly, for, left alone, the matter would in time resolve itself.[20]

Hardly a month later, the Holy See gave Don Bosco a token of confidence, and he used that opportunity to reiterate his anxiety for the privileges. Bishop Berengo of Mantua, distressed that he could not meet the pressing spiritual needs of his flock, was prepared to make any sacrifice to obtain a few priests for the most needy areas of his diocese. He therefore had appealed to the Holy Father for a band of religious of different congregations. The Pope, averse to this kind of remedy, decided that such a band should be made up exclusively of Salesians and had Monsignor [Gabriel] Boccali write to Don Bosco.

[18]Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, October 25, 1882. [Author]

[19]Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, October 30, 1882. [Author]

[20]Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, undated but written a short time after the one cited above. [Author]

The monsignor did so, extolling the Salesian Society in lofty terms and clarifying the Pope's mind thus,[21] "The Holy Father, relying on your docile compliance even to his wishes, is certain that you will promptly take pains to assent to his request, which is, I might say, more than a mere desire." In reality it was not a work related in any way to the aim of the Congregation, but it was a very ticklish situation. After conferring with his chapter, Don Bosco replied to Monsignor Boccali as follows:

Turin, December 12, 1882

Very Reverend Monsignor:

With great deference I received your kind letter expressing His Holiness' wishes that a few Salesians be sent to minister to the faithful in the diocese of Mantua. I promptly called a chapter meeting to ascertain if suitable personnel could be available in any of our houses for this important assignment. We are all very anxious indeed to comply with the Holy Father's request, but unfortunately we are experiencing difficulties of shortage of personnel in our various houses. In fact, this year we have already had to delay sending more missionaries to [South] America to help out at the centers already opened and to assume responsibility for new houses which are ready to be inaugurated, but for which we have no personnel.

Despite this, however, I immediately contacted the bishop of Mantua, as you suggested, and together we shall study how we can do at least something to meet the revered wishes of the Holy Father.

I must admit that more Salesians could be available if this Congregation of ours were not in an abnormal situation, as I will separately and trustingly explain to you, our well-deserving Salesian cooperator.[22] You might mention this to the Holy Father if you should think it wise to do so.

Let me commend this poor Congregation of ours to Your Reverence. I thank you and ask you to thank the Holy Father in my name for his graciousness in giving us this token of esteem and benevolence. In deepest gratitude, I am

Your most devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

[21]Letter of November 29, 1882. [Author]

[22]The abnormal situation was caused by the denial of privileges. On January 31, 1883, Father Dalmazzo wrote to Don Bosco: "Cardinal Nina asks if you sent a written reply to the Pope about the house in Mantua. If not, he urges you to do so quickly and, in a humble way, make the concession of privileges a condition. He says that on this point you have to proceed even with importunity." [Author]

Using sound arguments, Father Durando convinced the bishop of Mantua to wait until more favorable circumstances would permit the Salesians to meet his wishes.

We have come to the close of this chapter. For the time being, further talk of either a total or a partial concession of privileges was impossible. As for the future, the secretary of the Sacred Congregation advised Don Bosco to let matters ride and the cardinal secretary of state asserted that it was only a matter of time because the Pope was well disposed toward it. The Holy Father himself told Father Dalmazzo: "You have enemies, and you must move slowly and cautiously, because here in Rome even shadows are seen as realities."[23]

We close by stating that time itself—dealing honorably and much more quickly than we could ever have imagined—would eventually resolve the matter.

[23]Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, December 18, 1882. [Author]

# CHAPTER 15

## *1881: Events and Letters*

WE now leave Don Bosco to his journeys, weighty business affairs, and strenuous trials to turn our attention to humbler considerations, to his personal relations and his private correspondence—all of which may have no outstanding historical worth but still are valuable because they give us insight into him. We begin this chapter with a view strikingly unrelated to the rest.

### 1. Expansion of Existing Salesian Houses

Growth was the measure of the vitality characterizing Don Bosco's works. The ever increasing demands upon his hospices and boarding schools made the original buildings inadequate and in need of expansion; this in turn gratified his cooperators who could see at first hand the material results of their charity. We single out but a few of the more noteworthy developments: in 1881 St. Leo's Oratory in Marseille was expanded to more than twice its size; St. Pierre's Hospice in Nice was appreciably lengthened and a pretty church erected; a hospice was added to the festive oratory in Lucca; work on the church at Vallecrosia being at a standstill, two new buildings went up, one to house boys and men teachers, the other for girls and women teachers. At La Spezia the parish church was completed and the school facilities expanded. The same was done for the boarding schools at Este, Cremona and Randazzo.

This flurry of expansion also touched the Valdocco Oratory, whose grounds and buildings Don Bosco enlarged in 1881. For nineteen thousand lire he purchased land suitable for planting and building so that the existing vegetable garden stretched beyond what is now Via Sassari. However, since the city had earmarked the area for a municipal market it would not grant a building permit; in 1932 the land was

expropriated by public domain. Instead, Don Bosco's purchase of the land and the annexed Nelva residence[1] made it possible to erect on the west side of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians a new building matching the one housing the doorkeeper's lodge and there to locate a new school of printing with classrooms and shops.[2] On November 22, 1881 the cornerstone was solemnly laid; the scroll that at Don Bosco's directive was encased in it honoring the building's donor and expressing the Salesians' joy is a clear indication of the importance he gave to this new construction.[3]

Its design matched the exterior of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. Vacating the premises of the old printshop allowed for more space for the increasing urgent needs of other workshops. Above all, the new printshop and its equipment would enhance its capabilities to meet adequately Don Bosco's goals. To publicize far and wide the Oratory's burgeoning activity in publishing and his intent to modernize it to meet the needs of the times, he issued in 1881 an updated ninety-six page catalogue listing all books printed at the Oratory. He sent forty thousand copies of this catalogue all over Italy.[4] Don Bosco indeed firmly grasped even then the power of advertising in the promotion and spread of good literature.

## 2. The First Cooperators' Conference at Casale

The esteem in which the people of Casale and its environs held Don Bosco was deeply rooted. The first boarding school he opened at Mirabello in 1863 immediately became well known for its excellence, a reputation which was further enhanced on the school's transfer to Borgo San Martino in 1870. Then came the schools at Penango and the sisters' convent of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians at Lu. All these foundations made Don Bosco's name a household word throughout the district. Besides, his fame and love were being spread ever

[1] *See* Vol. XIV, p. 407. [Editor]

[2] *See* F. Giraudi, *L'Oratorio di Don Bosco*, Plate IX, D and A. [Author]

[3] The inscription read: "Amid the rejoicing of the Salesians at the laying of the cornerstone of the new printshop on November 22, 1881, Chevalier John Frisetti placed this epigraph." [Author]

[4] *L'Osservatore Romano* of June 15, 1933, in an article by Father Joseph De Luca which centered on the Oratory's publication *Italian Classics for the Young*[5] [now out of print], while pointing out its shortcomings, praised "Don Bosco's literary initiative which proved such a help in most distressing times" and stated: "Certainly an account of this enterprise would make a notable chapter in the history of nineteenth century Italian Catholicism." [Author]

[5] *See* Vol. IX, pp. 51, 195ff. [Editor]

more year by year by the numerous diocesan priests who had experienced his fatherly direction at the Oratory. The many vocations which flourished for both the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians in that diocese as well as the generous donations sent to Turin for several missionary expeditions bore witness to the overall attachment the people of the area nurtured for the Salesian Society. Fresh proof of this fondness was given at the very first conference of Salesian cooperators held in Casale on November 17, 1881. The cooperators themselves went to their ordinary, Bishop [Peter] Ferré, who not only gave his consent but also personally informed Don Bosco of it by letter and then instructed the town's parish priests to announce the conference in their churches. When word got around to the outlying areas, so many people flocked to Casale that on that day the Church of St. Philip, spacious though it was, could scarcely hold the crowd which jammed it to hear Don Bosco.

Adhering to his favorite theme, he first portrayed the activities of the Salesians from the Oratory's earliest beginnings to the recent foundation in Faenza and the forthcoming missionary expedition to Brazil, brightening his presentation by calling their attention to the wondrous, always timely interventions of Divine Providence through the Salesian cooperators. He then dwelt on almsgiving as a religious duty and a real social need.[6]

The bishop, who presided, spoke next, pointing out God's hand in Don Bosco's work and urging the cooperation of both clergy and faithful. He singled out the distinctive merits of Don Bosco and his Salesians in three areas: educating the young, evangelizing the heathen, and building the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Rome.

How warm an affection Bishop Ferré always nurtured for Don Bosco! He held him in fondest regard even though the two did not see eye to eye in regard to the bishop's cherished idea—Rosminian philosophy.[7] The ten volumes he wrote on "Universals" bear out his undying loyal love for Rosminian teachings. He would spend entire nights reading or writing about his favorite philosopher, and whenever he encountered anyone with some smattering of learning, he would within moments of their conversation go directly to the heart of the Rosminian

[6]The December issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano* gave a lengthy account of this meeting. [Author]

[7]*See* Vol. XIII, pp. 7f. [Editor]

question. Neither Don Bosco nor his Salesians were inclined to agree with him, and he knew it, but this did not dampen their cordial relations, as the following edifying anecdote will amply show.

The day before the conference Bishop Ferré went to Borgo San Martino to celebrate the school's patronal feast, and while preparing for lunch, he got into a dispute with Father [Joseph] Bertello, his outspoken, undaunted antagonist in Rosminian philosophy. Father Bertello clinched his argument by saying, "Your Excellency, should the impossible happen and should I become a bishop, I would demand that my seminarians follow the study guides issued by Rome."

"Rome!" exclaimed the bishop. "What is Rome? A lofty rock jutting out into the sea, atop of which stands the Pope, in an unruffled calm, while below him the billows toss and break against each other. It's the Jesuits who wage a war to death against Rosmini and his followers." He then so warmed to his topic that the guests began to fret at the long delay, until Father Bertello finally broke in to say, "Please, Your Excellency, Rosmini is no reason for delaying our lunch any longer."

The next day they renewed their argument at the bishop's residence, where Don Bosco, Father Bonetti, Father Bertello and other members of the clergy were his luncheon guests. From beginning to end of the meal there was never a moment of quiet between the two opponents at the table. Finally, the bishop remarked that Leo XIII, since becoming Pope, had never required anyone to renounce Rosmini's principles and therefore no one was bound to follow the Holy Father's personal opinions. "As for philosophy," he stated, "the present Pope inclines one way, but his successor may incline another, and so, to avoid having to change philosophical systems with every Pope, let each follow what he judges best. As for me I side with Rosmini."

Don Bosco was meanwhile quietly listening to the argument, while the bishop, thoroughly immersed in polemic, had lost sight of his fellow guests at table. Finally, trying to end the argument on a pleasant note, all the more so since the bishop asked him what he thought of his latest remark, Don Bosco stated very calmly, "As a religious superior I would like to leave my confreres a legacy they can follow as a guideline, regardless of the circumstances they may find themselves in. I notice that when it comes to philosophy or theology some philosophers and theologians hold a theory which they judge best while others claim that the very opposite is better. Both theories have learned supporters,

but one of them has also the affirmation of the Pope. As a prudent superior what am I to say to my religious? What path should I counsel them to take? Without hesitation I say: My sons, follow the theory favored by the Pope even as a private philosopher, theologian, and scholar. In addition to showing my respect for the Pope, I also feel I would be on safer ground; I would either not err or I would err with honor."

Bishop Ferré made no rebuttal but merely muttered, "I thought Don Bosco would side with me on this." Still, as we have said, he presided at that evening's conference and later spoke eloquently of the Salesian Congregation, praising Don Bosco to the skies. Indeed, Father Bertello remarked that he had never heard such lavish praise. From that day on, as several have attested, he never again discussed Rosmini when in the company of the Salesians. One day, after giving some suitable exhortations to newly ordained priests, he conversed privately with some of the bystanders, defending Rosminian theories. All were agreeing with him, but two remained silent. On noticing this, he asked, "What do you have to say about this? Why are you silent?" When he learned that they were Salesians, he replied, "I understand," and cut short his argument, without however showing them any unfriendliness.

### 3. More French Pilgrims

In 1881 a French pilgrimage stopped at the Oratory on its return home from Rome after attending the December 8 canonization ceremonies of three Italians: John Baptist de'Rossi, Lawrence of Brindisi, Clare of Montefalco, and Benedict Joseph Labre, their fellow countryman. Father [Francis] Picard and Father Hippolytus, who headed the pilgrimage, made it a point to stop [again][8] in Turin to visit the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, the Oratory and Don Bosco.

They were expected at five in the afternoon of December 15, but, having arrived in Turin that morning, they began to show up at the Oratory in the very early hours of the afternoon. Hoping to speak personally with Don Bosco, most of them had secretly split up into small groups and reached the Oratory from various parts of the city, so that soon the courtyard was jammed with people. Leaving the dining room, Don Bosco paused to chat with the first group, but, once he saw

[8]*See* Vol. XIII, pp. 101f; Vol. XIV, pp. 92, 386ff. [Editor]

how their number kept increasing, he suggested that they break into smaller groups and, escorting the largest group himself, he called others to show the people through the Oratory. His group kept bombarding him with questions about the beginnings and vicissitudes of his work. It was impossible to answer everyone, and so he promised to address them all together in the church.

After Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, Don Bosco stood on a platform and, flanked by Father Hippolytus and other distinguished pilgrims (Father Picard had gone elsewhere), warmly addressed his visitors in French on the nature of the Salesian apostolate and about the Salesian cooperators, inviting them all to become members.[9] His audience listened with rapt attention and then eagerly pressed about him, vying with one another to be enrolled as cooperators.

Father Hippolytus publicly thanked Don Bosco for his hearty welcome, and, alluding to the roses of virtue bloooming in the Oratory garden, continued, "Your gracious, cordial welcome almost makes us unaware that we are more like thorns in the midst of all these roses, having imposed upon you in such great numbers. Still, we take comfort in the thought that saints are different from worldly people. Often indeed do they enjoy what the world abhors. Though we are a bother, Don Bosco rejoices to see us here where he can show us how to help our needy young people. He loves the homeless wherever they may be; that's why we have Salesian houses in France. Please God we may have more! It is our fond hope that these homes be multiplied, that we may have at least one in each province and city, including Paris." Finally he asked Don Bosco to bless the pilgrims. Afterward they exited into the courtyard where the Oratory brass band gave them a send-off.

Since they were not to leave until the following afternoon, the priests returned to celebrate Mass with very many pilgrims, men and women, who wished to receive Holy Communion. The pilgrimage leader and more notable pilgrims then breakfasted with Don Bosco that day, and later he was literally besieged more than the evening before. Eager for a souvenir of Don Bosco, some brought religious articles for him to bless; others presented books or holy pictures for him to autograph. Some switched their pens for those he used in signing to keep them in fond remembrance.

[9]The February 1882 issue of the *Bulletin Salésien* published his entire speech. [Author]

## 4. An Invitation

The patrician families of Turin always welcomed Don Bosco as their dinner guest, even though he could no longer accept their invitations as frequently as in the past. His table talk, edifying and pleasant, cheered many a distressed heart and at times was a blessing for the children.[10] Rarely did his hosts allow him to leave empty-handed but repaid his spiritual efforts with donations for his boys and and works.

Count Caesar Trabucco of Castagnetto[11] wished to hold a New Year's dinner for Don Bosco and some close friends, but, realizing how tight a schedule he kept, left the choice of date to him. The count, who died in 1888, the same year as Don Bosco, had played an active role up to 1870 in the political events of the Italian Risorgimento both before and after his career in the senate. On December 2 of that year, the count, a staunch Catholic, spoke up in the senate in Florence[12] opposing the result of the referendum held in the Roman provinces, and on January 21 of the following year he voted against the Guarantee Law.[13] Then, as did many other members of Piedmont's nobility, he withdrew from politics to devote his full time to charity and Catholic action. Although Don Bosco persistently refused to break off relations with the government which had set itself up in Rome, he did not for that reason lose the respect and trust of persons of that persuasion, so evident was his noble firmness in giving to Caesar only what was Caesar's and to God what was God's. He graciously responded to the count's gentlemanly invitation, as follows:

Turin, January 4, 1881

Dear Count,

You have kindly asked me to pick a day to celebrate with you. I thank you for your courteous invitation.

I would choose the 13th of this month because Thursday is not named after

[10]Don Bosco used to visit the De Maistre family at Borgo Cornalese rather frequently. Count Eugene would happily exclaim on seeing him appear: "Oh, blessed nuisance!" The count was one of the Turin noblemen who in the first days of the Oratory had helped Don Bosco with the catechism classes. [Author]

[11]*See* Vol. XIII, pp. 295ff. [Editor]

[12]At this time, Florence was the capital. [Editor]

[13]A law of the Italian state which guaranteed the Pope's personal immunity, political independence and other prerogatives after the seizure of Rome. [Editor]

the fickle moon or warlike Mars or thieving Mercury, but after Jupiter who, as head of the gods, most likely must have had some uprightness.

God bless you and your family. Pray for me. in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The count went along with the date and asked Father [James] Margotti,[14] whom he had also invited, to arrange the details. What follows is another instance of Don Bosco's ability to win the good will of all. Father Margotti, a former member of the Sardinia parliament and a top-flight journalist, was hailed as the standard-bearer of the Italian Catholics reputed to be unyielding. A sworn foe of liberals and sectarians, he made sure that every issue of his journal, *Unità Cattolica*, battled them. His stance could not have been more opposed to Don Bosco's. Yet both men were sincere friends. True, in later years the journal maintained a certain reserve about Don Bosco, but that was a measure of prudence—possibly suggested by Don Bosco himself—not to arouse the ire of the archdiocesan chancery which was so hostile to him. Their personal relationship was never strained. To obviate future misunderstanding, we quote from a letter written by that brilliant polemicist on that occasion to the gentle man of God. Signing himself "your most devoted friend and servant," Father Margotti wrote on January 8 [1881], "Since I cannot call on you personally, I put my plan in writing. His Excellency, the Count of Castagnetto,[15] is beside himself with joy in his desire to host a dinner for you. To be sure, it will be a *diplomatic*[16] dinner as far as the family, kitchen staff and guests are concerned. You are expected to be accompanied by a companion of your own choice. The count arranged to send his coach for you, but I offered to bring both you and your companion. This is my suggestion: the little theater of the Valsalice College is to be inaugurated on Thursday, the 13th. Go to the inauguration as you promised the boys. I will go too, and we can leave for dinner at five-thirty immediately after the

[14]Founder, editor and publisher of *Unità Cattolica*, a Catholic newspaper. [Editor]

[15]The count could claim the title of Excellency because of the high offices he had held at court under King Charles Albert. [Author]

[16]Certainly a way of saying it would be a very special dinner, but truthfully there were also some diplomats among the guests, such as the count of Donato [a small town in Piedmont], and the Italian ambassador to the shah of Persia [now Iran]. The count's family possesses the original of the above cited letter. [Author]

performance. Take Father Francesia with you; he and the count know each other. After dinner, a coach will drive you back to the Oratory. If this arrangement suits you, just send me two words: '*Seen, Approved.*' If not, make your own plans and let me know what you'd like me to do; whatever it is, I approve beforehand, for it is my greatest boast to be, with the warmest affection and reverence, etc." Perhaps the count's extraordinary delight was due to his conviction that Don Bosco's presence would forestall or meet situations which might arise that would be embarrassing to the host's principles.

## 5. Father Guanella

Father [Louis] Guanella,[17] who had left the Salesian Congregation to return to his home diocese some three years before, was zealously carrying out the works of charity to which he felt the Lord was calling him.[18] But not everyone in Como saw eye to eye with him; in fact, so forceful and tenacious were his opponents that his undertakings were in danger of collapsing. When finally it got so bad that he was losing heart, his mind turned to Don Bosco, and the thought of again leaving home and returning for good to the Salesians came back to him. So strongly did he feel about this that he wrote to Don Bosco about the middle of September asking to be readmitted to the Congregation. Don Bosco, then on retreat with his superior chapter at Alassio, informed them of his request and asked for their opinion. Father Guanella had held a very lofty place in their esteem, and his departure had not been in the least tainted. No one objected. Father Cagliero, charged with admitting candidates into the Congregation, replied in Don Bosco's name, laying down two conditions: Father Guanella was to definitely break all business ties to Como, and he was to return to the Oratory prepared for any assignment. From the letter's wording it is clear that Don Bosco was still thinking of sending him to the Dominican Republic. But by now Father Guanella was so tightly bound to his diocese that severing the ties would only create weighty problems.

[17]Father Louis Guanella (1842-1915) left the Salesian Congregation in 1878 to found two congregations of his own: the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence and the Servants of Charity. His cause of beatification was introduced in 1939 and he was beatified on October 25, 1964. [Editor]

[18]*See* Vol. XIII, pp. 628-631. [Editor]

## 6. Chevalier [Charles] Fava

All of Don Bosco's published letters to the Fava family of Turin bear witness to their generosity[19] toward him. The correspondence we have dates from 1873, when the chevalier was a former secretary of the municipality. In the summer of 1881, while recuperating just above Biella in the Andorno Valley, he received a cordial, humorous letter from Don Bosco:

Turin, July 4, 1881

My dear Chevalier Fava:

I am glad that you and your family managed to set up house in Andorno before we were hit by this intense heat wave which has truly tested our mettle. From here on we can expect a daily routine of perspiring from noonday to noonday in a permanent bath. However, no one has as yet been known to have been boiled.

I am sorry to learn that your health is not yet up to par. I hope that rest, fresh air and care, as well as our daily prayers, will succeed in time to restore you to us in perfect health.

You say that you are not desirous to die; neither do I wish to see you leave us so soon. We still have lots of charitable undertakings to take care of; they cannot be left undone, and so we must live on. You have already accepted my invitation to my golden jubilee Mass to be celebrated on Trinity Sunday in 1891. Would you want to miss an appointment you have personally made? Furthermore I have a matter on hand which I would like to entrust to your wife, and both you and Maria Pia may be of help to her, and so we must repeat: we have to go on living!

Don Bosco is being humorous, you say. True, I am, because writing to you gives me a break from the five hundred letters cluttering my desk which I am about to start answering.

God bless you and your whole family, my dear Chevalier. May He generously grant all of you health and holiness.

Please pray for me too.

Gratefully and respectfully yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

This was Don Bosco's last letter to the chevalier, who passed into eternity at the beginning of 1882. His obituary in the May issue of the

[19]*See* Vol. XI, p. 8; Vol. XIII, p. 647; Vol. XIV, pp. 304 and 450. [Editor]

*Bollettino Salesiano* stated that he had come to the aid of the Oratory in its most trying times and that only God could properly reward him. This referred to the help he gave Don Bosco while employed by the municipality. His widow continued to help the Oratory to the day of her death, which occurred in 1911.

### 7. Mrs. [Bernardine] Magliano

Mrs. Bernardine Magliano-Sollier, a wealthy Turinese widow, was very generous with her aid to Don Bosco, to Father Michael Rua and to Father [Joseph] Pavia for the Valdocco festive oratory. Don Bosco, aware of her sensitivity, lent her a kindly ear, sometimes at great length, and kept up a long correspondence with her. He wrote several letters to her in 1881, the first of them a reply addressed to Susa shortly before the feast of St. Aloysius, in which he humorously invites her to host the festivities.

Turin, June 18, 1881

My dear Mrs. Magliano:

Thank you for your kind letter. I will answer your queries one by one.

I shall be in Turin on July 6 and 7. It is always an honor to have you call on me.

I am glad you found those papers, because they could have caused some trouble had they fallen into other hands.

The *Bolletino Salesiano* was late in coming out this month because the editor had been ill. It is now off the press and you will receive your copy in a day or two.

Your rosary is here waiting for you, but if you delay your visit much longer, someone else may come and snatch it. Hence, it will be hard for me to forgive you if you do not come to host the feast of St. Aloysius as prioress.[20] The celebration is set for June 26. For your own comfort in traveling, why not come and spend the day here with us and bring your sister and niece along? To honor St. Aloysius we will serve dinner to all who will be present—to be sure a very simple meal such as I know you like. All the prayers, all the boys' Communions and poor Don Bosco's own Mass will be offered that day for your intentions.

Besides, I have already published your name as prioress this year. Must I

[20]Originally the prior was a duly elected officer of the St. Aloysius Sodality. (*See* Vol. III, p. 459.) Later on, this title came to be bestowed on any benefactor who agreed to be honorary chairperson of a certain celebration. The prior or prioress responded by treating the boys. [Editor]

now retract my word? Will St. Aloysius like that? Think it over, and then say no, if you can.

God bless you, dear Bernardina! May He keep you in good health and always in His holy grace! Please pray for me, as I will pray for you every morning. Gratefully in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

On July 5 he sent her a little box of candy, most certainly given to him on his name day, with an accompanying note: "To Mrs. Bernardine Magliano, our good mamma in Jesus Christ, from Father John Bosco as a little token of his respect and gratitude." Toward the end of the same month he invited her to make a spiritual retreat at Nizza Monferrato. On the flyer which he mailed that year to several devout women and school teachers to notify them of the retreat he wrote: "Perhaps you would like to make this retreat. I will be there and take part. We shall see how brave you are." In those very days she was scheduled to go on her vacation to Busca not far from Cuneo, but she first wished to see Don Bosco. In writing to him, she probably said that she did not want to cause him any bother by calling on him, but Don Bosco put her at ease with this reply.

Turin, July 27, 1881

Dear Mrs. Magliano:

I will be at home all day today and tomorrow. I'd like to see you again before you go to your villa at Busca. If you cannot come, I will expect you on August 2 or 5 in Nizza. I always have time for you. Is that all right?

Your letters are always a true spiritual delight. God bless you! May Mary, Help of Christians guard you as Her own! Amen.

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

She did not attend the retreat, and so he sent her his best wishes for her name day on August 20. As he was then conducting a retreat for the novices at San Benigno, he added to his good wishes the assurance of their abundant prayers.

San Benigno, August 19, 1881

Dear Mrs. Magliano:

I would personally like to congratulate you tomorrow for your name day, but I cannot since I am giving a retreat here.

Tomorrow I will celebrate Holy Mass for your intentions and the retreatants will receive Holy Communion and offer their prayers for you. This will be our thanks to you.

May St. Bernard grant you the precious gift of sweetness and piety, and may the Blessed Virgin, Help of Christians keep you in good health and lead you on the path of holiness! Amen.

Pray for me. In Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

On the last day of the retreat[21] a young seminarian, Charles Dàllera, who had been sponsored at the Oratory by Mrs. Magliano and was now about to become a Salesian—he was later ordained a priest in South America—wrote her a note of thanks from San Benigno. Don Bosco enclosed a note of his own:

San Benigno, August 24, 1881

Dear friend:

While young Charles Dàllera fulfills a debt of gratitude to you, I take this opportunity to send you my humble respects. Our spiritual retreat, attended by a hundred and sixty young men aspiring to join the Salesian Society, ended today. May God turn them all into good priests!

Please pray for me. As ever,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

[21]The retreat, from the evening of August 17 to the morning of August 25, was preached by Father Michael Rua and Father [Joseph] Lazzero. One hundred and sixty-three, mostly junior seminarians, made the retreat. Don Bosco arrived at noon on August 18. On Sunday August 21, the feast day of St. Joachim, he sent the following cable to the Holy Father: "Salesians gathered on spiritual retreat and their pupils rejoice on your name day." On June 30, at Don Bosco's proposal, the superior chapter decided to hold all the retreats of that year at San Benigno rather than at Lanzo. The clerics took their vacation at the boarding school of Borgo San Martino. [Author]

His last letter to her is dated in October. She was still at her country villa in Busca. Don Bosco appealed to her for help to purchase the cloth needed to make cassocks for his new clerics and also for his needy priests as winter drew nigh.

Turin, October 24, 1881

Dear Mrs. Magliano:

Thank you for your kindness in asking about me. I will answer you personally. Physically I am doing well enough; as to my soul, God knows. However, there's a but. . . . I have too many projects on hand and no money to finance them! Besides the missions and the construction now in progress, I must also provide clothing for some three hundred priests and clerics. If you, my generous benefactress, could feel in your heart to come to my aid in this, think how wonderful an intercessory prayer it would be for all your beloved dead and for all the holy souls in purgatory!

I know you will do what you can. All I need do is to thank you and pray that God will grant you a hundredfold in this life and an everlasting reward hereafter.

I hope you will soon be back in town. May Mary, Help of Christians make your vacation come to a pleasant end and grant you a happy return home to our midst. Please pray for me. Always in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary,

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

## 8. Father Albera in Marseille

At the beginning of the school year 1881-82 Father [Paul] Albera had been transferred to Marseille as provincial for the houses of France; he was succeeded as director of the house at Sampierdarena by Father [Dominic] Belmonte.[22] A few days after Father Albera's departure Don Bosco wrote to Father Bologna:

[Turin, October 28, 1881]

My dear Father Bologna:

I am sorry I could not give Father Albera a letter for the bishop of Marseille. Please let me know how the sisters, the hospice, the parish priest and the new staff are getting on.

[22]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

I have written to Madame Jacques and will write to Madame Prat-Noilly today. God bless us all! Tell Father Albera to write me a nice long letter.

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

Father Albera, who was to become Don Bosco's second successor, was held in high regard at Sampierdarena not only by the clergy who cherished his counsel, but also by the chancery and the archbishop. The vicar general, on wishing him farewell, embraced him warmly and tearfully exclaimed, "I am losing a friend!"

Don Bosco had been preparing the way for this transfer for a full year. He was aware that, among other things, he would have to face the opposition of a noble Genoese lady, Fanny Ghiglini, who nurtured a motherly concern for Father Albera. Don Bosco began writing to her as if to ask her confidentially how she felt about his plan. Then he alerted Father Albera to put his affairs in order so that, should the superiors decide to send him to Marseille, he might leave Sampierdarena without delay.

This forewarning was as shocking to him as it was unexpected. Still somewhat unsure of himself at that time, he fancied running into a host of problems on changing country and language. But Don Bosco was confident he would obey. On her part, Mrs. Ghiglini sent him a long list of reasons why Father Albera's leaving was out of the question. Yet, on second thought, a few days later, she reconsidered and wrote to Don Bosco that her observations were not meant in any way to contravene God's will. True, she cared very much for Father Albera, for he was a well-deserving person, but her attachment was primarily to the Salesian Congregation; therefore Don Bosco was to follow his own judgment.

Father Albera handed over his administration to his successor in October. Then, thinking that he had as yet received no explicit order to leave and fancying that he might still be spared so painful an obedience, he went to Turin to see Don Bosco. "What's this?" Don Bosco immediately asked on seeing him. "Why aren't you in Marseille? Go at once!" He said no more.

Father Albera immediately returned to Sampierdarena and spent one day with Father Belmonte at Mrs. Ghiglini's villa located in the hills back of St. Vincent's Hospice. Advised of their coming, the lady had promptly invited a large group of noble women, all leading cooper-

ators. When Father Albera stood up to leave, a flood of tears broke loose, he too weeping like a child as he strode down the hill with his confrere. The next day he was in France. There was no lack of criticism over Don Bosco's move, but Mrs. Ghiglini kept repeating that no individual should have priority over the Congregation. Don Bosco may have been alluding to these noble sentiments of hers when days later he sent her this note introducing a new cooperator: "Don Bosco warmly thanks you and calls heaven's blessings upon you, as he presents Mrs. Angela Picardo, a worthy Salesian cooperator." It was well known that once he had taken a decision of this kind, he never backed down for purely human considerations.

### 9. A Cooperator's Diploma for a Jew

A gracious exchange of courtesies took place in November. Unknowingly Father [Peter] Pozzan had mailed a Salesian cooperator's diploma to a certain Mr. Augustus Calabia, a Jew, who hastened to write to Don Bosco: "I thank you for the trust you have shown in admitting me to the Salesian cooperators. I will keep both the regulations and the diploma. However, I must tell you that I belong to the Jewish faith—and that says everything. With profound regards, etc."

Don Bosco just as quickly replied:

Turin, December 4, 1881

Dear Sir:

Indeed it is news when a Catholic priest asks a Jew to enroll into a charitable organization of his. Yet the Lord's love knows no limits and takes in all with no regard to age, social standing and creed.

We have always had and still care for many Jewish lads among the eighty thousand boys in our schools. You tell me that you yourself belong to the Mosaic faith. Well, we Catholics religiously follow the teachings of Moses and of the books handed down to us by that great prophet. Our only difference lies in the interpretation of those writings. Moreover, Mr. Lattes, a most zealous Salesian cooperator in Nice, is also Jewish. In any case, I shall continue to send you our *Bollettino Salesiano* in which I am sure you will find nothing offensive to your faith; if you ever want to discontinue the magazine, you have only to say so.

God bless you and keep you in good health.

Respectfully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

## 10. New Threats in France

Toward the end of 1881 religious congregations in France were threatened by new, vexing legislation, to which Don Bosco alludes in a letter for Father [Joseph] Ronchail.[23] Undated, it must have been written at about the same time.[24] To keep harassing the few remaining religious congregations, the radical Gambetta cabinet levied on them a new three percent property tax. However, the cabinet was not in office long enough to enforce the law, and the succeeding government toned down its harsh interpretation, restricting the tax solely to actual income. Thus Don Bosco's financial status remained unaffected; every year his books kept showing a substantial loss, and at the proper time he issued a financial report showing no profit.[25] [Here is Don Bosco's letter.]

[No date]

Dearest Father Ronchail:

1. As soon as I received your letter telling me of the illness of Mlle. Girard's sister, I immediately requested that special prayers be said for her in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians each morning and evening, and we shall heartily continue them. But will her recovery be for God's greater glory? Will it benefit the sick woman's soul? I hope so. Meanwhile have your community pray also, and, God's great Mother willing, we shall witness a miracle. Otherwise may Our Heavenly Father's will be done!

2. The paper work for Mr. Piron's case is just about over; one sticky point remains. His Excellency, [Caesar] Correnti, secretary general of the Order of St. Maurice, has requested a listing of the charitable donations which Mr. Piron has already made or is expected to make. Give it some thought, and if you are close enough to him to mention it, do so; if not, I will send him a confidential note of my own.

Concerning the cleric Reymond keep this in mind: if he was dismissed from

[23]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

[24]The postscript leads us to assume that [Charles] D'Espiney's *Dom Bosco* (1881) had recently been published. His allusion to sending more personnel (three Salesians) would date this letter sometime in the late fall when transfers were usual (school began after November 1, the feast of All Saints), neither prior to, nor later than, 1881. Father Dellavalle's name comes up for the first time in the 1881 Salesian directory as a confrere of the house in Nice. His reference to the tax levied on religious institutes dates this letter at or about the beginning of the [Léon] Gambetta cabinet, which came to power in France on November 15, 1881. [Author]

[25]Financial report, Marseille, March 9 and 23, 1882. [Author]

the seminary because of immorality, he is not to be admitted to any of our houses; if the case is otherwise, get back to me.

3. Dellavalle and Serra should have arrived by now. If you need more, we shall send them, and I will also come myself.[26]

4. We simply have no report to make in reference to the new taxes being levied on religious congregations because, having no ready cash, we cannot submit any budget. If they absolutely insist on having a copy of our rules, give them the Latin edition.

5. As we formerly raised fervent prayers for the engineer Levrot when he was sick, so now we do the same for his wife. We began to pray as soon as we heard of her illness. Let us hope that God has granted our petitions by now and restored her to health.

6. As for the honorary decoration we discussed, I did suggest it to the Pope when I was in Rome (last April), and he gladly consented; the pertinent papers were submitted to the cardinal secretary of state for his validation. Since then I've heard nothing of the matter. However, I do know that, as is customary, the Holy Father has asked for a recommendation from the bishop of Nice. We shall see.

7. I have written to this cardinal three times.

8. The men's and ladies' committees of our hospice are really a blessing. Please assure them of my daily prayers. The Holy Father sends them all a special blessing and a plenary indulgence each time they meet.

9. Please give my humble regards and respectful assurance of prayers to all our benefactors, to Madame Visconti, Baroness Héraud, Madame Daprotis, Madame Guigou, Canon Giovan and Monsignor Tibeau.

10. God bless us all! Pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Get in touch with Father Bologna and have copies of D'Espiney's book sent to some of our benefactors: the parish priest of St. Joseph's, Father Mendre, Madame Prat, Madame Jacques, Monsieur Rostand, Bergasse, and the bishop. Send copies also to the cardinal of Lyon, to Monsignor [Louis] Guiol, rector of the Catholic University and to Monsignor Colle in Toulon. Check with Father Bologna so they don't receive duplicate copies. Please make sure you keep my name out of this. In its own right D'Espiney's little volume is a masterly work, and if it were not about me, I'd recommend it to everyone.[27] I wish I knew how to thank its learned author.

[26]A humorous hint of his own forthcoming visit. [Author]

[27]Father Berto took the trouble to jot on a copy of this letter: "All this solely to get larger donations and funds to promote God's glory and the welfare of souls." [Author]

## 11. Housekeeping and Poverty

The rise in the cost of living caused by the former year's poor harvest raised the anxieties of those who had to provide for the Oratory's needs. In normal times feeding all those mouths posed quite a problem, so we can imagine what it meant in lean times. Don Bosco asked the Oratory prefect, Father [Joseph] Leveratto, and the economer general, Father [Anthony] Sala, together to seek a solution to this vexing situation. He then wrote a memo to Father Leveratto which offered his own prudent suggestions for certain timely cuts in particular areas; he proposed that all renew the spirit of their vow of poverty.

Turin, December 22, 1881

My dear Leveratto:

The financial straits we are now in and the cost rise in food and drink suggest we make some reasonable cuts in our expenses, always safeguarding one's health. This is why I asked you and Father Sala to look into the problem. For the present, start implementing the following policies set by our general chapter.

1. Stop waste of food, bread and wine in the kitchen. Put leftovers to good use. The rich do this; all the more must we who profess the vow of poverty.
2. Keep snacks and special treats down to a minimum, especially wine; enforce the rule of not entering another's room. When a policy is made it must equally apply to all.
3. On festive occasions, an extra course may be served, as we have already decided, but no hors d'oeuvres or post-prandials except fruit and perhaps cheese in due season, and then only one or the other.
4. Vintage wine may be served only on the feast day of St. Francis de Sales, but never undiluted.
5. Be moderate in inviting guests to our table; abide by the old rules.

Talk these things over with Father Lazzero and have due concern for the sick. Never forget that we have taken a vow of poverty and must live like the poor.

Temperance and work are the two most steadfast guardians of virtue.

God bless us all! May He keep us in His holy grace! In Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

## 12. The Five Damascenes in Nice

As long as a novitiate could not be set up in France, the French postulants went to San Benigno, where they remained eight years.

Father Barberis directed this community with a spirit genuinely like Don Bosco's, so that a joyous piety and praiseworthy dedication to duty prevailed; however, as for material comforts, the novices had to learn to do without: no heating in the building notwithstanding the frigid winter; poorly prepared meals; tin bowls; cups instead of glasses; drab furniture; shared personal linen. We can readily understand the French boys' discomfort. The older, more mature novices valued their good fortune to live near Don Bosco and drew very close to Father Barberis, whose untiring fatherliness made up for all their discomfort, but the younger ones, put off by these inconveniences, rarely persevered.

Among the new French novices of 1881 were the five young men of Damascus whom we mentioned in the previous volume.[28] The directories of 1880 and 1881 list them as aspirants at Nice. Within a few months, for whatever reason, they showed signs of discontent shortly before their donning of the clerical habit. One of them, Anthony Homsi by name, wrote to Don Bosco confiding his feelings and probably those of his companions; in return he received a loving letter carefully worded in French.

Turin, October 22, 1881

My dear Homsi:

I appreciate your letter because you opened your heart to me, and now I am in a position to give you some sound advice. I will reply to each of your points.

When God called you very particularly to join us, He certainly had a motive worthy of Himself. He did it for the good of your soul, by freeing you from this world's perils. Your physical health has been well cared for, you have received an education, you have kept your heart for Him. Through all this time I have met all the expenses of your schooling, and in the future you will want for nothing. On the other hand, should you return to the world, many a conflict awaits you and you may well be the loser. Then what will become of your soul? Of paradise? You risk losing both.

Hence I feel you will do better to heed St. Paul's advice: "He who is safe should not endanger himself."[29] "Let every man remain in the calling to which he was called." [1 Cor. 7, 20] However, if you wish to return home and

[28] *See* Vol. XIV, p. 284. [Editor]

[29] He is probably alluding to: "Let anyone who thinks he is standing upright watch out lest he fall!" (1 Cor. 10, 12). [Author]

continue your schooling you should do so before the date set for the reception of the clerical habit, because I cannot give the cassock to one who is not under my responsibility.

Therefore, considering the expense of the trip, the moral and physical dangers, as well as the fact that you are now in a place where you lack nothing for body or soul, with your eternal salvation morally assured, and considering too that Don Bosco is your friend and at all costs seeks naught but your happiness in this world and in the next, my advice to you is: Become a Salesian. Thus you will certainly do God's holy will on earth, and at the end of your life the Blessed Virgin, Help of Christians will lead you to your abundant reward in heaven. Amen.

God bless you and your companions. Pray for me. Ever in Jesus Christ,

Your friend,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco sent this exhortation in a letter to Father Barberis: "Please give the enclosed to Homsi; I hope it may touch the others too." But it did not change their minds. They probably had already made arrangements with their patriarch, who, as we have seen, had tactfully recalled them to France.[30] Perhaps Father Barberis was not sorry to see them go; at least it appears that way from Don Bosco's witty remark to him: "Be good, and don't get uptight when things don't go your way."

## 13. Don Bosco's Thankfulness

Everyone who helped Don Bosco in his mission of charity was certain of his gratitude in word and deed. A certain widow, Mrs. Catherine Ghione, offered him four fifty-lire government bonds plus three hundred lire every now and then under the following conditions: 1. free board and tuition for three secondary school students in the boarding school of Borgo San Martino; 2. laundry and pocket money for one, but no clothing, sheets and blankets; 3. the reserved right to choose another beneficiary to fill out the term should any of the boys leave the school. True, an initial tuition fee of a hundred lire and a monthly payment of about twenty-five lire per boy were a generous donation for the boys, but it brought no financial boon to Don Bosco. Still, he wrote to the lady as follows:

[30]*See* Vol. XIV, p. 284. [Editor]

Turin, October 27, 1881

Dear Madam:

Your pastor, Canon Sisto, has sent me your offering, and I rejoice with you because it was certainly God who inspired you and will light your path to eternal happiness. May He keep you in these generous sentiments, for they will certainly be your comfort in life and your strength at the moment of death.

Please accept this rosary blessed by the Holy Father as a token of my thanks.

God bless you and keep you in His holy grace. Please pray for me. In Jesus Christ,

Yours devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

His warm sense of gratitude is also attested by the following thank-you note for sixty lire:

Turin, November 26, 1881

Dear Father Oreste Pariani:

I imagine you have already received a diploma [of Salesian cooperator] for yourself and one for your aunt. My earnest prayers are for both of you. I thank you for your offering of sixty lire, for we are really in financial straits. May God amply reward you! It would be a pleasure to welcome you to Turin!

God bless us and keep us in His holy grace.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

As the Christmas holidays were rapidly drawing near he summed up his cordial gratitude to his benefactors in Nice in a letter to Father [Joseph] Ronchail, director, whom he asked to be his spokesman and fittingly to extend his greetings to each individual.

Turin, December 22, 1881

My dear Father Ronchail:

Despite the frequent trains running to Nice, the personnel[31] we have sent you is in no hurry to get there. However I believe Father Dellavalle and Father Serra have already assumed their duties.

Please tell Mlle. Guigou that I have asked for daily prayers to be said for the

[31]The Salesians who leisurely were making their way to Nice. [Author]

successful closing of her sale. Please pay her my respects. Best wishes to Madame D'Aprotis for the holidays and health and holiness to her heart's desire. To our good Mama and to her maid, her guardian angel, best wishes for perfect health and a long life.

A blessed Christmas and happy New Year with improved health is my daily prayer for Baroness Héraud.

Is Monsieur de Monremy in Nice?

Please tell engineer Levrot and his family: "You shall receive many times as much and inherit everlasting life." [Cf. Mt. 19, 29]

Tell our dear friend, the notary Saietto, that I am grateful for the kindness he has shown and continues to show us. I shall remember him before God and men.[32]

God willing, I am scheduled to leave Turin on January 10. My route has stopovers in Chambéry, Lyons, Valence, Aix, Marseille, Aubagne, Toulon, Hyères, Fréjus, Cannes, Grasse, and Nice. I hope to be with you at the end of February.

I have just received a letter in French from Father [Alexander] Porani. Tell him that I congratulate him on the improvement he has made in both handwriting and French. Best regards.

God grant you, our confreres and pupils, the sisters, and all our benefactors blessings of good health and perseverance in virtue. Pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Do not forget Madame Girard, her sister and Monsignor Girard. I have written to Madame de Saint-Michel at Lyons about my stopover there. So far I have not heard from her.

Another letter, of which we have an incomplete copy, also overflowed with gratitude. It was addressed to Philomena De Maistre, the youngest daughter of the famous author [Francis Xavier De Maistre] and wife of Count Medolago Albani, whose first wife had been her sister Benedetta. On her husband's death and after her son Stanislaus (the future Catholic economist) finished his studies, Philomena joined the Daughters of the Sacred Heart and died in Rome in 1924. To the very end of her days, she cherished a profound veneration for Don Bosco, of whom she always spoke with deep feeling. What follows is the incomplete copy of the above-mentioned letter.

[32]He must certainly have been thinking of some decoration for him. [Author]

I hastened to thank you and I gave detailed answers to the questions you kindly asked, but now I am utterly dismayed to learn that the letter never reached you.

I apologize. Please forgive me. It was not my fault. I hope I'll be luckier this time.

Just this minute I received the thousand francs you sent me for the Sacred Heart Church in Rome. I will faithfully remember your intentions; I'll say the Mass in honor of Mary as you requested, and I shall pray and have others pray for all the pious intentions you listed. Please know that for several years now I have made a special memento at my daily Mass for you and your family and shall continue to do so until you have all received the reward due to you in heaven for all you did for us.

. . . . . .

At any rate, prayer meets all our needs, and that prayer we shall offer for you day by day, especially on the coming feast day of Mary.

God bless you, Philomena! May He grant you health and holiness in plenty. Please pray for me.

Yours respectfully,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. If you receive this letter, please acknowledge it with your call.

## 14. Heartfelt Condolences

He wrote tender words of Christian comfort to console the lawyer, Guy Donati, of Florence, on the death of his wife. This Salesian cooperator was the father of Sister Celestine Donati, foundress of the Poor Daughters of St. Joseph Calasanctius and of the hospices for the daughters of convicts; she died in the odor of sanctity on March 18, 1925.

Turin, June 20, 1881

My dear friend in Jesus Christ:[33]

Our eighty thousand boys have joined us in praying for you and still do. For a while it seemed that God would grant our pleas for the recovery of your wife Constance, but He willed otherwise. Rather, He willed that her blessed soul should receive the reward of the sufferings she endured during her lifetime. Our prayers did their share in obtaining a holy death for her and cutting short

[33]The Poor Daughters of St. Joseph Calasanctius in Florence (Via Faenza No. 54) own the original letter. [Author]

her time in purgatory. At this moment I feel confident in saying that she has already entered the eternal glory of heaven and is now a powerful intercessor for her family and you, her worthy husband. Meanwhile we shall continue praying for your lamented wife and for her survivors, that we may all imitate her virtuous life and one day join her in praising and blessing God for all ages.

I appreciate the grief your entire family has been plunged into. But in countless ways you can do many things very pleasing to your beloved deceased. You can offer God for the repose of her soul your grief for her loss; throughout your lives you can pray for her. We can comfort one another with the thought that we shall see her again, perhaps soon, in a happier life than that she lived on earth.

God bless you, my ever dear friend. May He keep you and your family in good health. Please pray for me too. Always in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

In another letter he proffers words of Christian comfort to a father mourning the death of his son. This gentleman, Maximilian Flik, was on vacation in Rivoli; other details we glean from the letter.

San Benigno Canavese, September 4, 1881

Dear Sir:

When you graced us for several hours with your company, we felt a flicker of hope for your son's recovery.

God willed otherwise—may He be blessed in all things! Your son gave promise for a happy future. He was a flower on an earthly paradise chosen by God to be transplanted into the heavenly garden, for which he was ready.

I have prayed for him; now I will not fail to pray for you, your wife and your whole family. May God bless you and keep you in good health and in His holy grace.

Thank you for your donation to the Oratory. I look forward to being of some service to you.

Hoping to meet you in Turin, I remain in Jesus Christ,

Your friend,
Fr. John Bosco

### 15. Graciousness and Encouragement

He wrote a lovely letter to Baron Robert Ricci des Ferres, brother of Charles and son of Felician Ricci. The mother mentioned in this letter

had been a Pralormo, a noble family which constantly helped Don Bosco.

Turin, June 10, 1881

My dear Baron:

I would like to speak to Mamma about something I feel will give great glory to God. Should she ever be in Turin or nearby, please let me know so that I may pay her my respects and have a little talk with her.

God bless you, my ever dear Robert, your wife and all your family. Please pray also for me. I remain always in great affection and esteem, in Jesus Christ,

Your servant and friend,
Fr. John Bosco

When the time came to reopen the school at Este, closed down by illness during 1880-1881, the school's director was very worried. Don Bosco gave him new strength and reaffirmed his faith in God.

Alassio, September 25, 1881

Dear Father Tamietti:

Let us put our faith in God and move ahead! Open your school; say the Lord's Prayer each morning and evening to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Do your best to keep your pupils from becoming overheated, and make sure they are snugly covered when going from hot to cold in the morning and evening hours. Remember me to Mr. [Anthony] Venturini and Mr. [Benedict] Pelà; tell Mr. Pelà that perhaps we shall soon meet again.

God bless you all. May He make you healthy and holy—or rather keep you so!

I remember you every day in my holy Mass. In Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

## 16. The Death of Father Chicco

Father Stephen Chicco came to the Oratory at the age of twelve. Despite chronic ill health which, thanks to Don Bosco's encouragement, he endured with unflagging resignation and patience, he reached the priesthood in 1871. He served as prefect at both Alassio and

Magliano Sabino. Gifted with sound judgment and rare leadership qualities, he zealously and fruitfully exercised his ministry of the confessional. He was the first director of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians in their new convent of Nizza Monferrato, leaving in 1879 to open and then direct a new Salesian house at Cremona. He worked hard and suffered much in that position. The renowned Bishop [Jeremiah] Bonomelli held him in high regard and the faithful loved him. His frail health worsened through the summer and autumn of 1881, when he took to his bed for the last time. Don Bosco sent Father [Dominic] Belmonte to Cremona as he was finishing his directorship at Borgo San Martino and was ready to assume charge of the school at Sampierdarena. He went to Cremona as acting director to take care of Father Chicco. From Nizza Monferrato Don Bosco sent him this fatherly letter at the beginning of August.[34]

Nizza Monferrato, August 8, 1881

Dear Father Belmonte:

You are now in Cremona with our dear Father Chicco, whose illness has us all worried. Blessed be the Lord in all things! We are praying for him in all our houses; here at Our Lady of Grace, where he so zealously exercised his priestly ministry, exceptionally fervent petitions rise to the Lord. May God grant us whatever He deems good for His glory and our eternal salvation!

Meanwhile see that he needs nothing; assure him of my special blessing and a remembrance at my morning and evening prayers. Were I not bogged down by a thousand different matters, I would hasten to his bedside. I may be able to do so at the beginning of next week.

God bless our ever dear and beloved Father Chicco, you and our growing family at Cremona. May He keep you all in His holy grace! Pray for me, who remain always in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

He did get to see Father Chicco and comfort him in a last embrace. That precious visit prepared him for the supreme sacrifice of his life, and he died serenely during the night of September 16.

[34] The original is preserved in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence (Box 329, N. 229). [Author]

## 17. To the Salesian Houses on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Don Bosco sent a nosegay of ten practices to all the houses for the novena and feast of the Immaculate Conception for each director to choose and explain to the pupils at the "Good Night."

*To my beloved children of the house of . . .*

*Nosegays for the Novena of the Immaculate Conception*

In honor of Mary, my dearest Mother, with the aid of Her Son, Jesus, and Her protection, I intend during this novena to:

*1st Day* Receive Holy Communion.
*2nd Day* Be fervent in my religious duties.
*3rd Day* Be fervent in my school duties, and obey.
*4th Day* Avoid idleness.
*5th Day* Avoid evil glances.
*6th Day* Avoid bad talk and those who indulge in it.
*7th Day* Avoid whatever offends the holy virtue of modesty.
*8th Day* Examine my conscience in regard to past confessions.
*9th Day* Prepare myself for a holy death.
*Feast Day* Consecrate myself to Mary and to repeat often: "Sacred Heart of Mary, be my salvation."

Fr. John Bosco

## 18. Graciousness Toward His Spiritual Sons

When writing to Father Barberis about the novice from Damascus, Don Bosco had also told him, "Please let Saluzzo know that he may take up his duties any time he's ready unless you can spare Nicoletti and prefer to give him to me as my receptionist." Nicoletti was a cleric from Rimini.

Father Lawrence Saluzzo, first director of the Salesian house in Milan and first provincial of Lombardy, did his secondary schooling at the Oratory and then was sent to San Benigno [for his novitiate] where he made his perpetual vows on October 3, 1881. The following morning, bringing Don Bosco his coffee in his room, he reiterated with filial trust his thankfulness for having been admitted to religious vows. Don Bosco listened graciously and replied, "You know, Lawrence, I'd like to take you back with me to Turin to help out Father Berto. He has lost

his aide, the cleric Aime, and I'd like you to take his place. But first tell me if you'd prefer to stay here and complete your classic studies or whether you'd like to come to Turin, finish your philosophy studies there, and then go with several other clerics for your theology studies in Rome." That year the second general chapter's ruling that all clerics had to complete their college courses was being enforced. Saluzzo, a very good student who was looking forward to resuming his classes, promptly replied that he was at Don Bosco's beck and call. "Well, for the time being keep this to yourself and don't worry. I shall speak with Father Berto first and then drop a note to Father Barberis."

We have seen that note. Though Father Barberis had someone else in mind, he never questioned Don Bosco's clear directive, and the cleric Saluzzo went to Turin. The Oratory community was surprised to see him return after just one year, but Don Bosco took him to the superiors' dining room and introduced him: "Cleric Saluzzo has come to work with Father Berto and me. He is to busy himself only in the tasks we give him." Father Rua, Father Cagliero and all at table joyfully welcomed him.

At times Don Bosco used to entrust him, even as a student, with messages to benefactors in Turin; on festive occasions he had him wait upon the superiors and guests at table. Altogether, then, in different capacities he spent fourteen years at Don Bosco's side, enjoying an intimate closeness with him. Later, looking back upon those days of yore, he wrote: "Both as cleric and priest, I was always helped and blessed by him and was given tokens of special trust, as our dear Father [Stephen] Trione can testify. I was an eyewitness of the favors and miracles he performed; he was like a father to me, bearing with me and comforting me, especially in those trying moments for youth, be they clerics or priests. From my heart, not from vanity, do I pen these lines, and do so solely to express my warmest gratitude and filial recognition to Don Bosco who was more than a father and benefactor to me, and to reaffirm my trust in him and his rules after fifty-two years of Salesian religious life."[35]

In 1881 there was another cleric at the Oratory who is alive and well today [1933] and who also owes our dear father's memory a debt of gratitude. Father [Thomas] Chiapello that year was studying for his

[35]Letter, Sondrio, May 31, 1933. [Author]

examinations and had to concentrate on a subject he had no liking for. He went to Don Bosco and with the frankness customary at that time told him how he felt, adding that he had precious little time to give to that particular subject. Don Bosco gave him one of his disarming glances, bade him sit down, and then replied, "We're friends, aren't we? Well, this is what we shall do. Two or three evenings a week, at this time, six o'clock, come and see me. If Father Berto should object, tell him I have sent for you. Together you and I shall study mathematics, because I need to brush up on it too." Naturally Chiapello was smart enough to decline this unexpected offer and not consume Don Bosco's precious time. Today in reading these reminiscences we can hardly restrain our tears.[36]

[36]Rev. Thomas Chiapello, Salesian, *Il Beato Don Giovanni Bosco nella Visione e nelle Previsioni di Quarant'anni fa* [Blessed John Bosco, in the Vision and Foresight of Forty Years Ago, p. 79, Federico and Ardia Publishers, Naples, 1929. [Author]

# CHAPTER 16

## *Two Months of 1882 in Southern France*

RELIGIOUS orders in France fared better after the upheaval of 1880; they were free of further harassment until mid-October of the following year, when the fierce anti-clerical [Léon] Gambetta formed a cabinet of his own henchmen, all intent on fully enforcing the laws enacted by the radicals against the Church. Consequently new anxieties surfaced at St. Leo's Oratory in Marseille. At their October 28 meeting, Father Guiol urged the troubled committee ladies to trust in Divine Providence as did Don Bosco, imitating as best they could that utter self-abandonment to God's care which sprang from his holiness. "We need neither fear nor falter if we follow Don Bosco and work with him," he told them.

Don Bosco also personally encouraged them in a letter written in December, asking for their prayers and Holy Communions and assuring them that, though the horizon loomed threateningly, their devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary, Help of Christians would avert the storm. "Last year we were all full of fears," Father Guiol continued, "but Don Bosco reassured us. The call he issues us to faith and prayer may well be one of those inspirations granted by God to His saints to ward off impending perils by their counsel and prayers. Let us heed such priceless advice and redouble our fervor to merit that God make this storm fade away."

Don Bosco's New Year greetings to Father Guiol and the committee made them feel that their prayers were already beginning to produce results. True, no one knew for sure, but the sky was beginning to clear. In passing on these greetings to the ladies, Father Guiol insisted that they keep praying until calm was fully restored.

Their hopes were not totally dashed. The hostile cabinet held out

barely seventy-two days, from November 15, 1881 to January 26, 1882, and then gave way to slightly less radical forces.

As we have seen, the ladies' committee worked zealously to help St. Leo's Oratory in the true spirit of Don Bosco. Father Guiol, who knew him well, gave them insights into his personality and leadership. "Don Bosco's work," he asserted, "rests fully on his trust in Divine Providence. In allying ourselves with such a vast endeavor, we must follow our venerated founder's example, be imbued with his spirit, and have the unshaken conviction that nothing can take the place of Providence's watchful care elicited by our total self-entrustment. Even supreme generosity on our part is of no avail in our task if we work in any way contrary to this single guiding principle: to trust totally in God, relying on Him for everything rather than having recourse to means and measures which may alienate us from God's solicitous intervention." Given such an excellent spirit, we can easily understand the committee's joy on learning on January 27 that Don Bosco would be in Marseille that very day.[1]

Don Bosco, who had been in France since January 16, was not following his usual travel pattern. He was accompanied by a Salesian cleric, Camillus De Barruel, formerly a lawyer, to whom we are thankful for the precious account of the first phase of this journey.[2] Ten days before setting out Don Bosco had written to the director of the house in Nice:

January 5, 1882[3]

My dear Father Ronchail:

I received a letter from our good Mamma which surprised me no end. Certainly many a university graduate could never have penned such an excellent letter.

Please give her my enclosed reply and my regards. I am due to leave for Lyons on January 16 and shall probably be in Nice by the end of February.

Circumstances unrelated to you or other confreres suggest that we continue printing the *Bulletin Salésien* here in Turin for the time being. We can discuss this when I see you in mid-February. To say that [Salesian] cooperators are

[1]Minutes of committee meeting, October 17 and December 2, 1881 and January 6 and 27, 1882. [Author]

[2]This was published in the March and April issues of the *Bulletin Salésien*. [Author]

[3]Date given in Father Ceria's *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. IV, p. 112, Letter 2262. [Editor]

sending their offerings here is only an excuse for not giving anything. At any rate, I shall find some way to reimburse you.

May God grant every good to you, the confreres and the boys.

Your loving friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Is the Baron of Monrémy in Nice? We have lost a friend in the death of Monsignor.

He also notified Father Albera of his visit. At the beginning of the school year, further to strengthen the Salesian apostolate in France, he had detached the four houses of France from the Ligurian province, to which they had temporarily belonged, and made them the nucleus of a new province, entrusted to Father Albera, who took up residence in Marseille in late October. Father Guiol, who had first met him at Sampierdarena, announced his arrival to the ladies' committee, introducing him as "a priest justly esteemed for his accomplishments and talents," whose "very presence kindled the fondest hopes for the future of St. Leo's Oratory."[4] Meanwhile Don Bosco wrote to him:

Turin, January 7, 1882

My dear Father Albera:

I have received two telegrams from Marseille: one from T. Flandin, the other from M. Ferand, both asking for blessings and prayers for persons seriously ill. Please assure them that we have been praying for them and will continue to remember them every day at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians. They are our benefactors, as Father Bologna knows.

Also tell Father Bologna we will personally discuss the Piron offer, hopefully to our mutual satisfaction.

I hope to celebrate the feast of St. Francis [de Sales] with you, trusting that our patron will break the horns of an entire horde of demons which give us no rest. Pray and ask others to pray. I truly need prayers.

God bless us all.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

[4]Minutes of October 7 and 28, 1881. His arrival was noted in the minutes of October 28: "After the customary prayer, Father Guiol announced that Father Albera had arrived a few days before at St. Leo's Oratory." [Author]

On the eve of his departure, recalling that he had forgotten to acknowledge the greetings sent him by Father [Herminius] Borio's pupils at Lanzo, he sent him a brief note which certainly endeared him to both teacher and pupils.

Turin, January 15, 1882

My dear Father Borio:

Though I have no time to write or even drop in at Lanzo, as your students and I would both like, I cannot set out for France tomorrow without thanking your dear boys and mine for their affectionate Christmas and New Year's greetings. On my return, my very first visit will be to Lanzo, and then we will talk. Meanwhile pray for me, and also have the boys pray and offer their Holy Communions for my intentions while I am away.

My dear Father Borio, God bless you, your efforts and your pupils! Pray particularly for me.

Always yours affectionately in Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Regards to Father Director.[5]

His first stop was at Lyons, where he was enthusiastically greeted by Monsignor Louis Guiol, Father Guiol's brother and rector of the local Catholic university, who had been in Rome in December. So anxious had he been to play host to Don Bosco that he was ready even to anticipate his return. To forestall that, Don Bosco had advised Father Guiol as follows:

Turin, January 6, 1882

My dear Father,

I will take but a moment of your time. I fear that your brother, Monsignor Louis, is rushing his departure from Rome all because I wrote to tell him that I would be leaving for Lyons on [January] 10. I don't have his address with me, and so I am asking you briefly to let him know that I cannot leave Turin before the 16th, and that, in any case, I do not wish him to push up his plans because of me.

[5]The minutes of the Superior Chapter's meeting presided over by Don Bosco on June 5, 1884 pay Father Borio's work at Lanzo this generous praise: "Father Rua noted from personal experience that the overall success in the secondary school senior year always depends on the teacher. Since Father Borio began to teach rhetoric at Lanzo, the Congregation has always had novices who graduated from that boarding school." [Author]

We keep praying for your health, and I fully trust that you are already feeling better.

Please pray for me too, for just now I have some thorny matters to deal with. May everything redound to God's greater glory. Love me in Jesus Christ.

Always your loving friend,
Fr. John Bosco

No sooner did Monsignor Guiol get home than he immediately sent his expected guest a note requesting that he cable the time of his arrival at Lyons. He was thus the first to welcome Don Bosco at the railroad station. Although his reputation preceded him, Don Bosco could not have asked for a more helpful guide in that important city which he was visiting for the first time. His daily routine in Lyons, as on all his journeys, was to solicit donations, visit the sick, and receive people in private audience. On this particular trip we have accounts of only three conferences which he held.

The third largest of France's cities and foremost in the world for its generous charity, Lyons must have been for this great apostle of charity the highlight of his trip. Most of all he was drawn there because it housed the headquarters of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, which had originated there. Several times he had applied for a subsidy to help his missionaries, but to no avail, for each time his Argentinian missions did not meet the Society's guidelines. Now that evangelization in its strict sense was well underway, he personally made a presentation of the mission's accomplishments and its plans for the future at a regular meeting of the board of directors, who gladly received him in full session with the utmost courtesy. Indeed, the board chairman, in welcoming him on his colleagues' behalf, said that his presence would draw God's blessings on their work.

Don Bosco thanked him, and recalled the many gracious replies he had received from him. Then he pleaded the cause of his Patagonian mission, recounting its beginnings, detailing the missionaries' initial efforts and accomplishments, and sketching plans for the future. He made a special point of explaining the new plan they were now following to render their mission work more effective than it had been till then. Rather than venture rashly into perilous savage territory, he said, the Salesians were first settling in established communities on the borders of the Indian lands. They were setting up churches and schools

and, by gentleness and little trinkets, were contriving to win the hearts of the Indian children. Little by little, through the children, the missionaries were making friends with the adults, until they felt they could peacefully venture into Indian lands. They set out by way of the sea toward Carmen de Patagónes, but thirteen days later were driven back to Buenos Aires by a furious storm. "It seems that Divine Providence intervened to block the missionaries' path," Don Bosco remarked, "because the wilderness tribes were not yet acquainted with their 'kindness.'" He then mentioned a recent, more successful venture, remarking that, even as he spoke, his missionaries were traversing the Patagonian pampas, catechizing and baptizing. Plans were underway to set up three apostolic vicariates in those remote regions of South America.

Don Bosco then introduced a related problem. On the one hand the [Sacred] Roman Congregations kept saying, "If you want apostolic vicariates, increase the number of your missionaries," and on the other hand the Society for the Propagation of the Faith was telling him, "If you want a subsidy from us, your missionaries must belong not to a diocese but to an apostolic vicariate." How was he to resolve this dilemma? How could he train missionaries without funds, and where were the funds to come from if the Society for the Propagation of the Faith refused material and moral support? Then, presenting geographic data, he described the vastness of the Buenos Aires diocese to convince his listeners that the Society for the Propagation of the Faith could rightly consider the entire territory beyond the Rio Colorado as mission lands.

Afterward, the Society's president asked him to provide specific data on the actual state of the mission, because the Society's rules did not permit subsidies to European missionary training centers as Don Bosco had requested. The Society, however, could grant traveling expenses for missionaries going directly to their stations. But in any case, no decision could be taken until more precise information was available.

A board member asked Don Bosco how, single-handed, he had so quickly raised funds to meet the flood of the crushing expenses he had to encounter. "Divine Providence!" he replied, raising eyes and hands upward. He then recounted an incident which had occurred just days before in Turin.

The general contractor of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome had traveled [to Turin] to collect fifteen thousand lire, which

were to be ready for him without fail by five that afternoon. At four-thirty the coffers were still empty. What could Don Bosco do? As on many another occasion, he sent some of his boys to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. The results? An out-of-town priest arrived at the Oratory asking to see Don Bosco. Taken to him, he told him that by gradually cutting down on his expenses he had saved eight thousand lire, intending to leave them to Don Bosco on his death; a friend of his, deciding to do the same, had saved seven thousand lire. When they told each other of their plans, they agreed it would be better to give Don Bosco the money immediately rather than let it sit idly by. "This morning I called on my friend," the visitor continued, "meaning to take his seven thousand lire, add them to my eight thousand and bring the entire sum to you at the end of the week. Whatever happened I don't know, but on getting home to put my friend's money into my safe, I became confused. Picking up my money, I absentmindedly set out for the railway station. When I got there I asked myself, *What have I done? I'm not due in Turin today, but next Saturday! Well, let it be*, I thought, and shrugged my shoulders; *better sooner than later*. So here are fifteen thousand lire." Without a word, Don Bosco motioned for him to wait a moment and sent for the building contractor. On entering, the latter immediately demanded the money. Don Bosco replied, "As you see, I don't have fifteen thousand lire, but this good priest has brought the money, and he himself will give it to you." He then turned to his visitor and asked him to tell the contractor what he had just told Don Bosco. All three could hardly restrain their tears.

The board members were visibly moved too. Before leaving, Don Bosco informed them that he had just received a legacy of three thousand lire to be forwarded to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and asked if he could use the money for his own missions. An immediate answer was not possible, but ten days later in a reverent and affectionate letter, the Society's president gave him the requested permission. Don Bosco then had a full report about the Patagonian mission sent to the Society. Rather than being relegated to its archives, it was published in the July 24 issue of its weekly *Les Missions Catholiques*. The editor included a picture and write-up of Don Bosco.[6]

Lyons, like other French cities, was also the seat of another mission-

[6]The *Missioni Cattoliche*, a Milanese publication, gave the Italian version in its issue of November 3 [1882], also including Don Bosco's picture. [Author]

ary organization called *Apostolic Work*, formed by zealous women who supplied poor missions with donations in kind. Don Bosco, one of their beneficiaries, held a conference with them, since they too were eager to meet and hear him. Expecting to find but a dozen or so listeners, he was surprised to face an impressive assembly. He was greeted by the chairlady with "Blessed be he who comes in the Lord's name!" After describing the foundation's aims, size and problems, the chairlady asked Don Bosco to pray that she and her co-workers be granted that secret ingredient of Salesian success—boundless trust in Divine Providence and total child-like reliance on Our Lady, always the Help of Christians. She closed with a realistic description of Don Bosco's needs and urged the ladies to be generous. Thanking them for their great-hearted kindness to him, Don Bosco recalled that, besides other things, they had already donated two portable chapels, telling them how they were being put to good use in Patagonia. He commended their praiseworthy goal of cooperating with the missionaries who heralded the blessings of redemption far and wide. He told them about the difficulties facing the Salesian missionaries in Patagonia and narrated some incidents of the missionaries' latest treks. Asking the chairlady for the names of the women present, he promised to forward them to the missionaries so that they could bestow them on those they would baptize. He also invited them all to become Salesian cooperators, explaining the movement's origin, scope, and growth. In closing he promised that he would soon tell the Holy Father about them; then, saying that he was personally authorized to give them the papal blessing and plenary indulgence under the usual conditions [of confession and Communion], he blessed them. The meeting ended with an exchange of thanks and best wishes.

During his stay in Lyons he was asked to address a special meeting of directors and executives of the city's various Catholic associations. Over eighty persons came to hear him at the personal invitation of the organizing committee. His topic was Salesian educational works, especially hospices for poor and abandoned youth, stressing their religious and social benefits and highlighting their achievements. He did not leave out Patagonia. A listener asked whether these good results remained with the youngsters once they left the hospice. "Generally speaking," replied Don Bosco, "the good seeds sown by our educational method during the boys' early years produce lasting fruits after

they have left school. Many," he continued, "have pursued honorable civil and military careers and are living good Christian lives." The meeting ended with the hope that the charity of Lyons' citizens would enable the Salesians to open a school in a working-class quarter of the city, perhaps in La Croix-Rousse or La Guillotière or in both places.

During his four-day stay in Lyons many sick people asked for him and he went to see them. His approach was always the same: he led the patients to accept God's will, suggested that they pray for healing if it be for God's greater glory, and recited the Hail Mary or Hail, Holy Queen with all present. He also made it clear that these prayers were to be continued for a determined time. He promised that his boys would pray for them, and finally he gave them the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians. A witness' account in the *Bulletin Salésien* reads: "No one can adequately describe the gentleness and awesome majesty of the scene, the emotion of all present, their heartfelt fervor, their reverent demeanor."

He made several visits and received many more. The article continues: "Unaware of their self-concern, people forget that this poor priest is in his sixties and is not terribly strong. He would succumb under their relentless painful burden were it not for the sustaining grace of God and the intervention of those who shield him somewhat from the importunities of visitors who would give him no time even to take a little food. He himself never complains, but always keeps his serenity, unwilling to have anyone sent away." He never asked for a single cent, yet he was showered with offerings usually accompanied by notes spelling out the particular needs of donors seeking his prayers. The worst time was when he left the altar after celebrating Mass. It was quite an achievement to get him out of the sacristy! A host of men and women, all eagerly asking for his blessing or a medal or even just a glance, pressed him on every side and blocked his passage. He once exclaimed, on seeing such trust, "How mighty is the power of faith! A poor priest, a foreigner in France, a stranger to his besiegers, is overwhelmed by signs of unlimited confidence!"

On Saturday evening, January 21, he arrived at Valence, about halfway between Lyons and Marseille on the left bank of the Rhone River. A dedicated cooperator, Amalie Lacombe, had eagerly requested the pleasure of welcoming him to her home, so eagerly indeed that as soon as she learned of his approaching journey, she had written to Turin and

asked for that privilege. In a thank you note [Turin, December 13, 1881][7] Don Bosco told her that he would be staying at the home of his traveling companion, a native of Valence. He took the occasion to add: "I eagerly look forward to seeing and thanking the cathedral rector, Father A. Didelot. Please give him my compliments and assure him that I will do all he feels is needed for God's glory and the good of souls. However, I will first call on the bishop, to whom I ask you to present my respectful regards."

He also spent four days in Valence. After Sunday Vespers he spoke of Salesian work, not in a private hall as in Lyons but in the cathedral, addressing a congregation "which," our correspondent says, "listened to him in a reverent hush, with loving rapt attention." Save for a passing reference to the missions toward the close of his talk, he focused entirely on the regenerating power of Christian education as given in Salesian schools to abandoned youth. His appeal to charity moved their hearts and loosened their purse strings.

The city ran a youth center for young workers, whose staff staged a play for him, all proceeds going to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Rome. Flanked by an honor escort of prominent citizens, Don Bosco attended the performance. Before the play, at the parish priest's pressing invitation, he briefly and very aptly gave a timely talk. Between acts of the performance, the pastor persuaded him to tell the audience the humorous story of how two priests had once tried unsuccessfully to commit him to a lunatic asylum[8] and how he had turned the tables on them.[9]

Passing through Tain and Tournon, where he stopped to preach and take up a collection, he went from Valence to Marseille, arriving there the evening of January 27. We have but a sketchy idea of what happened in Marseille on that occasion. Our first item is dated February 3, when he was invited by the parish priest and the ladies' committee to their regular meeting in the rectory. They waited and waited, but there was no trace of him. The meeting's minutes state: "Blocked by a frenzied crowd reaching out for his blessing, Don Bosco was late in arriving, momentarily causing us to fear we might have to forego the

[7]*Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. IV, p. 417, Letter 2662. [Editor]

[8]*See* Vol. II, pp. 322ff. [Editor]

[9]Erroneous information has spread regarding the identity of these two priests. They were Father Vincent Ponzati, parish priest of St. Augustine's, and Canon Louis Nasi. [Author]

pleasure of his presence. Mrs. Berthou and Mrs. Jacques decided to look for him. They returned with the news that he was on his way but was being held back by a crowd that was overflowing the corridors and stairways of St. Leo's Oratory, all seeking his prayers and blessings, so that it became difficult to pull the revered holy man away."

By God's grace, he finally did arrive. "I thank your committee for its zeal and charity," he told them. "I would like to thank each of you singly, but I wish you to know that I always remember you in my prayers and ask God's blessings on all of you collectively and special graces for you individually. It is truly marvelous that you meet more often than once a year to render glory to God by works of charity. I urge you all to be one in heart and soul in loving and serving God and promoting His glory through deeds of charity. And so I recommend that you renounce your own will. Should one favor a course of action not agreeable to the others, let her give it up and put it aside so as to maintain the bond of peace. Let us lovingly work for God's glory with unshaken faith and firmness in defense of Catholic principles. For your comfort I will say that St. Leo's Oratory shelters many lads aspiring to the priesthood; some are priests now and two have even gone to our South American missions. All to God's glory! Blessed be God!" He made his point with a gesture of genuine, deep humility.

Then he changed topic. On the eve of All Saints Day the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians had taken up residence just a stone's throw from the Salesian house. He commented upon this closeness, saying, "We must be aware that the Salesian apostolate has several very distinct branches, and I wish to bring this to your attention. Here in Marseille we have a hospice and a community of sisters. They are two works which must be kept clearly distinct because of the unseemliness that might arise if there were too frequent contacts. The layout of our house in Turin allowed us to resolve this situation. I am happy to tell you that soon we shall do the same here in Marseille, providing equal facilities."

The ladies' committee also took care of the boys' laundry. The women who could spare the time gave one day a week to work with the sisters. Alluding to one of the above "facilities," a linen room, Don Bosco described the one at Valdocco. "In the sisters' convent in Turin just adjacent to the Salesian residence," he said, "there is a room where two or three sisters and some ladies package linen in need of repair and send it out to kind people who do the mending. The linen is

checked not so much to mend the unmendable but to cut away and save good pieces of cloth, for example, to make one whole shirt from four torn ones."

Then resuming his previous theme, he went on: "St. Leo's Oratory is not only an orphanage but also a residence of religious, priests and clerics, and this calls for a certain prudent reserve. Alas—he continued with deep emotion—if our Salesian houses were not to be what they must be, I'd rather have them cease to exist. Divine Providence will certainly help us do away with the temporary arrangements we were forced into. With about thirty-five thousand francs we could turn the sisters' temporary lodgings into a permanent, suitable residence. We already have a site for their convent." Here Father Guiol interrupted to say that reasonable, realistic plans had already been drawn up. The committee's secretary reports: "Don Bosco's words give us hope that funds will soon be on the way, thanks, of course, to his prayers and holiness."

Don Bosco went on: "Yes indeed, Divine Providence's care is truly wondrous! At the beginning of last year we had not a penny for the Sacred Heart Church in Rome, yet this year alone we disbursed three hundred and fifty thousand lire, thanks to offerings given for graces received; thus, work which conceivably could take ten years was completed in only one. It astonishes me. The stories read like fables; yet they are true and easily verifiable. This is the hand of Divine Providence. Blessed be God, for the glory is all His!"

The meeting ended with the committee expressing its deep appreciation for the saintly, revered founder's words. Their spokesman, Father Guiol, asked for his blessing, which they reverently received.

Within a few days the hopes kindled by Don Bosco that the house would soon be adapted to accord with Salesian lifestyle and to provide more comfortable quarters for the sisters became a reality. With a very brief interval two neighboring homes were successively purchased for occupancy by the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians on the feast of St. Michael. The purchase was legally handled by the Beaujour Society, which likewise reimbursed Don Bosco for the building he had erected on their site while apparently renting the land. To protect itself from the charge of making an underhanded contribution which might invalidate their action, the Society made the reimbursement in shares rather than in cash. Generous goodwill offerings made it possible to meet the first payment for the purchase of the property. On February

17, in his report to the committee, Father Guiol singled out the intervention of Providence in Don Bosco's Marseille project and attributed it to his prayers. To make his point he told them some interesting details of a cure recently obtained through the holy founder's intercession and blessing. "We all know what happened," he continued, "and the person so glad to be healed has expressed her thanks with a donation of five thousand francs. Not all favors received have been this spectacular, but Don Bosco's reputation for holiness, the people's trust in his influence over the heart of God, and their wish to draw God's blessings by works of charity bring him the funds he needs to carry out his works." In fact [Father Joseph Bologna], the director of St. Leo's, who was present, stated that he was ready at that time to pay twenty thousand of the seventy-eight thousand francs owed to the contractor. In response Father Guiol astutely remarked, "Don Bosco has cut back on household expenses, but he seems never averse to keep hold of a few debts so as to contract others. His aim is, while forcing the hand of Providence, to keep the committee on its toes to recruit more benefactors."

The spectacular cure mentioned by Father Guiol is further detailed for us by an account of Father Bologna, who witnessed it. A wealthy young spinster, bedridden for three years, on receiving Don Bosco's blessing, immediately stood up and then walked with him to the door. All present were dumbfounded and then burst into tears. The maids stood in shock, while the young lady herself kept shouting, "The Virgin Mary has healed me! The Virgin Mary has healed me!" Don Bosco could hardly calm the mother down. Everyone, himself included, was in tears.

Of "graces not this striking," Father Bologna has recorded three. A youth who had a serious eye problem received his blessing and two days later was perfectly cured. A woman who had come to ask for prayers for her invalid sister, who had to be carried from bed to armchair, found her on her return home in perfect health. On Sunday, February 19, Don Bosco went to see a woman suffering from advanced pleurisy, on whom doctors had given up. He prayed for her, asked her to recite certain prayers until the feast of St. Joseph, and assured her that she would get well. Three days later she was on her way to full recovery. Another healing that did not make the news is narrated by D'Espiney in later editions of his booklet *Dom Bosco*. A woman, in tears because of the ugly treatment she was receiving from her children

and her in-laws, came to see Don Bosco. "Pray to Mary, Help of Christians," Don Bosco advised, "and receive Holy Communion at my Mass tomorrow morning. I shall offer it for you." She did so. Imagine her astonishment on returning home to find all her children gathered in the drawing room, ready to apologize for their disgraceful behavior and to give her their solemn promise to mend their ways. Tearful embraces sealed their good resolve.[10]

While in Marseille he also made some predictions. Brother Louis Nasi was his personal barber. One morning, as he finished shaving Don Bosco and was taking leave by kissing his hand, Don Bosco held the brother's hand and said to him, "You would like a tip, wouldn't you? Well, the Lord will give you a much more generous one. Meanwhile keep helping Father Bologna as best you can. You will follow him to various houses in France which he will direct, but he will not end his days in France, but in Turin. When you hear of his death, get ready, for you will shortly follow him." Father Bologna died at the Oratory quite suddenly on January 4, 1907, and Brother Nasi followed him on December 7[11] of that same year.

No less a glow did Don Bosco's priestliness cast about him. On one occasion some of Marseille's finest social elite were clustered about him in a magnificent drawing room as he chatted freely with one person and then another, always having something spiritual to say. Marquis de Villeneuve Trans, who kept an eye on him, whispered to Father Albera, "Don Bosco is always preaching."

Much can be said of the extraordinary delicacy with which he handled a situation with the Olive family, prominent Salesian cooperators. One day, Mrs. Olive, yielding to a spontaneous impulse of generosity, slipped a very valuable ring from her finger and handed it to Don Bosco. Realizing that it would be inappropriate to accept it, he immediately turned the offer down very gently with the remark, "Madam, this is a family heirloom, and you must hold on to it." The lady insisted, and so Don Bosco rejoined, "Very well, if you give it to me,

[10]D'Espiney's two-volume biography assigns another event—the healing of Mademoiselle Flandrin—to 1882 (Vol. II, page 530). However, he had already reported it in 1881 in the first edition of his book as having occurred that year. Then too, the circumstances of Don Bosco's departure from Marseille in 1882 do not accord with what actually happened. *See* pp. 41f of this volume. [Author]

[11]According to the *Necrologio Salesiano*, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, Torino, 1951, Brother Nasi died at Saint Genys, France, on September 25, 1907. [Editor]

am I free to do with it as I wish? It is the only way I will accept your gift." At her nod of approval, Don Bosco took the ring in his two fingers and said, "I accept your gift most willingly, and now that the ring is mine, I make a gift of it to you." Moved by such thoughtfulness, she could not refuse. Today that ring is jealously preserved as a precious memento of Don Bosco by the family. Father Bologna was right when he wrote,[12] "Don Bosco's stay in Marseille is truly a wonder. People regard him as a saint. . . . They line the corridors by the hundreds all day long. I have no idea how long Don Bosco can hold up under such pressure." As the money flowed in, so too did admiration for the Salesians grow.

St. Leo's Oratory celebrated the feast of St. Francis de Sales on February 15; it was marked by a Salesian cooperators' meeting, under the patronage of the bishop.

Long before it began there was not a single place unoccupied in the chapel. After expressing his gratitude to his benefactors, Don Bosco reviewed the overall growth of the Salesian Congregation since 1881 with a simplicity known only to saints.[13] In Rome, Florence, La Spezia and Ventimiglia thriving festive oratories formed a veritable bulwark against the Protestants. "Our unfortunate, estranged brothers," Don Bosco said, "have an abundance of funds at their disposal, but our power is that of prayer. Though I urge our cooperators to be generous in almsgiving, I particularly request you to raise fervent prayers to heaven, for if money begets power, prayer obtains everything and triumphs over all." The bishop, making the twofold theme of money and prayer his own, went on to expand it.

On February 19 Don Bosco spoke in St. Joseph's Church; however, we have no particulars of that occasion. Neither the director nor his confreres gave any thought to writing letters during those days, for, in the former's words, "Our dear Don Bosco gave us all plenty of work to do." Now, then, let us take up the account of Don Bosco's trip through the southwest of France.

First he went to Toulouse, at that time some twelve hours by train from Marseille. Cardinal Desprez, the archbishop, desired Don Bosco to have his Salesians direct the local orphanage which was about to

[12]Letter to his brother Louis, a Salesian coadjutor at the Oratory, Marseille, February 23, 1882. [Author]

[13]*Écho de Nôtre Dame de la Garde*, February 26, 1882. [Author]

close for lack of funds and personnel. Its co-founder and director, Father Julien, had suggested the idea to the cardinal after reading the monograph sent him by his friend, Father Mendre.[14] Upon hearing that Don Bosco was in Marseille, the cardinal wrote him a letter and then sent Father Julien to invite him personally to Toulouse. Father Julien's unpublished diary[15] thus describes their first meeting. "Don Bosco received me most graciously at St. Leo's Oratory on the evening of Tuesday, January 31. I briefly told him why I had come, gave him an overview of our background, and made bold to invite him to visit our orphanage—an invitation I was astonished to see immediately accepted. This good priest enjoyed visiting our home and asked if he could take up a collection for his church and hospice in Rome. So there was urgent work for me to do, with not a moment to spare, because he could stay but two days in Toulouse. I returned home by the eleven o'clock train. With the cardinal's consent, I publicized Don Bosco's visit to Toulouse in an article which appeared on February 5 in the *Semaine Catholique*."[16]

The article told of Don Bosco's twofold purpose in visiting the city, announcing also that he would preach in the cathedral. "The faithful are not being invited to attend a scholarly lecture," it asserted, "because Don Bosco, an Italian, does not speak our language fluently. However, if eloquence flows from the heart and if good and holy causes beget eloquence, then Don Bosco's address will surely be most eloquent. Everyone will overlook any slip of language he may make as well as any Italianisms."

The article also appeared in *L'Écho de la Province* and *Les Nouvelles*, two local but weighty conservative dailies. The news generated a reverent expectancy at all levels.

Don Bosco arrived at midnight on February 4 and lodged at the orphanage of the Grande-Allée. At dawn a crowd of people flocked to the chapel to attend his Mass; then a stream of visitors called on him with no respite until, freeing himself with difficulty, he left to pay his respects to the cardinal. The two met that evening after Vespers.

[14]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 71f. [Editor]

[15]This is a quotation from Canon Clément Tournier, the dean of Saint-Sernin, *Le Bienheureux Dom Bosco à Toulouse*, Berthoumier, Toulouse, 1929, p. 37. [Author]

[16]This issue was dated as of Sunday, February 5, though it was on the newsstands earlier in the week. [Author]

Monsignor Lamothe-Tenet, rector of the Catholic University of Toulouse, was due to preach at the same hour in another church of the city. Though it looked like a letdown, it turned out to be a singular coincidence which offered an opportunity of comparing, rather then contrasting, the learned, polished, noble eloquence of the prelate, a spokesman for the French Academy, with the plain, halting speech of a foreigner which was utterly devoid of rhetorical power. Yet expectancy of what he would say created an aura of eventful excitement. The vast nave of St. Stephen's Cathedral was jammed with people who hung on the speaker's every word. The effect was apparent in the collection, for so generous were the donations that he gratefully agreed to celebrate Mass at the orphanage the next day for his benefactors, adding that he would hold an afternoon conference for the Salesian cooperators and all who were interested in them.

At the cathedral he had spoken of the origins and growth of the Salesian work *avec une simplicité charmante* [with charming simplicity],[17] stressing especially the trade schools; at the orphanage he spoke of cooperating with the Salesians. The cardinal graciously attended both meetings. Our account would be incomplete if we omitted a particular incident. Toulouse is still [1934] the home of *l'Academie des Jeux-Floraux* [Floral Games Academy], the oldest of its kind in Europe. Its permanent secretary, Count Ferdinand De Rességuier, after listening to Don Bosco's talk with Count Du Bourg,[18] characterized the speaker as a humble man with little command of French syntax and grammar, but later remarked to his friend:[19] "We must admit that the supernatural flows forth from him and that the supernatural movement of grace makes sport of all our means of persuasion."

On Monday February 6, Don Bosco was tendered a dinner by a select group of people in one of the city's hotels.[20] Count Du Bourg, who had often met him at the home of the De Maistre family, recalled

[17]*Semaine Catholique*, February 12. In 1890 the Capuchin Father Anton Marie, apostle of Toulouse, made the following comparison between Don Bosco's and Father Rua's manner of speaking and dealing with people: "Oh, I heard Father Rua preach; he talks with the same sublime simplicity.. I have seen him in private gatherings; he talks with the same attractive ease. I was sitting beside him during the family festivities in Nice, staged in his honor by the Catholic Workers' Club, and I saw and I heard Don Bosco." (*Bulletin Salésien*, February, 1890) [Author]

[18]We shall again refer to Du Bourg, who is still living (June 1933), in Volume XVI in connection with Count de Chambord, to whose circle he belonged. [Author]

[19]Clément Tournier, *Le Bienheureux Dom Bosco à Toulouse*, p. 57. [Author]

[20]Hôtel Marsac, St. Stephen's Cathedral Plaza. [Author]

to Canon Tournier[21] that Don Bosco sat calmly at his place with a gentle smile, as though dining with the De Maistre family in Turin or at Borgo Cornalese. He also kindly patted and blessed the children and, characteristically of his spirit of mortification, fed more on divine love than on food.

Two priests living today [1934] remember Don Bosco's stay at the orphanage. Along with another classmate, who later died as a priest, they were there studying Latin to enter the seminary. They served his Mass. One evening he gave the "Good Night" to the boarders, rousing them to a fervent devotion to Our Lady. So strong was his impression on them that all memorized the Hail, Holy Queen and kept saying it nightly before retiring. He stressed the need for each either to study or to learn a trade; then, comically putting the index finger of both hands to the sides of his forehead, he said, *Un enfant paresseux sera toujours . . . un "asinus."* ["A lazy lad will forever be a donkey."] After his departure, Father Julien pointed out to the three seminarians that, despite the endless crowds milling around him, Don Bosco always retained his personal dignity and unshakable calm, ever aware of God's presence.

He was to leave Monday evening, but was finally persuaded to stay on and celebrate Mass the following morning in the Basilica of St. Saturninus, a church housing the finest collection of relics in the entire world. He offered Mass in the chapel of St. Thomas Aquinas, which enshrines the head of the saint;[22] he was then escorted by the archpriest and by other clergy through the apse and down into the crypt where he most reverently[23] venerated many sacred relics. Observing a relic of St. Jude, he remarked, "My favorite patron!" No wonder, since Jude is the patron saint of the impossible, whom Turin honors by a public novena

[21]*Le Bienheureux Dom Bosco à Toulouse*, p. 59. [Author]

[22]Canon Tournier in the above cited booklet, page 67, lists several reasons why Don Bosco took delight in praying to St. Thomas, the angel of the schools; he then makes an interesting digression: "A more personal reason likely contributed to Don Bosco's decision to delay his departure. Pope Pius XI states in his decree of Don Bosco's beatification that the Blessed had been opposed by those very persons from whom he had every right to expect aid and support. The learned, zealous archbishop of Turin, who believed it was his bounden duty to block the undertakings of the founder of the Valdocco Oratory, sought solutions for modern problems less in the works of St. Thomas than in certain suspect theories of Rosmini's philosophy. Oh, would that the quiet influence of the angelic doctor, by correcting deviant ideologies and restoring a serene, unclouded vision and self-restraint to a biased soul, had put a stop to that drawn-out conflict which fared ill for the spreading of good—a conflict which rendered Don Bosco the bleeding, silent victim for ten long years." [Author]

[23]*Semaine Catholique*, February 12, 1882. [Author]

in the latter part of October. As Don Bosco knelt in prayer before the relics of Thomas Aquinas' spine and head, a nun who had fixed her gaze on him knelt by him and requested his prayers for a blind woman. He blessed her and promised his prayers. "This scene, in its very simplicity," records *Semaine Catholique*, "demonstrates the lofty esteem in which Don Bosco's holiness is held."

Hemmed in to the very last by all sorts of people, Don Bosco remarked to the bystanders on boarding his train: "I fondly hope that the citizens of Toulouse will donate to the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome a column engraved with Pope Pius IX's praise of their city as *Tolosa fidelis* [Toulouse the Faithful]." Although donations were then being solicited for a pillar in the newly planned Montmartre Basilica,[24] *Semaine Catholique* did not hesitate to sponsor another subscription for the church in Rome, commenting, "Rome and Paris are symbols respectively of the Church and of France, our two fatherlands, our two mothers [. . .]. In both cities Jesus is stricken to the heart; in them we therefore bring the witness of our fervent faith, our atonement and our love to the Sacred Heart." Responding to a French religious who, tallying the millions being swallowed up in fulfillment of a national vow,[25] warned Don Bosco that his fund-raising campaign for the church in Rome would meet with little success in France, Don Bosco replied, "How little you know your own country! France has wealth enough to meet every need, and she gives unstintingly, untiringly. Actions speak louder than words! Despite all her troubled and trying times, she remains for those who really know her, and Don Bosco is one, the ever generous France!"

The facts bore him out. The journal's subscription netted 3,557 francs, somewhat more than the actual cost of the column which was to memorialize for all time Toulouse's generosity.[26]

As for having a Salesian presence in Toulouse, Don Bosco affirmed

[24]The cornerstone had been laid on June 16, 1875 by Cardinal Joseph Hippolytus Guibert who said the first Mass in the crypt on April 21, 1881. Cardinal Richard de la Vergne blessed the church on June 5, 1891 and on October 17, 1899 blessed the cross surmounting the main dome. (Source: *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, Appleton Co., 1911, Volume XI: 488d). [Editor]

[25]During the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 an appeal was made for the erection in Paris of a shrine to the Sacred Heart of Jesus to obtain the salvation of France. On July 23, 1873 the National Assembly passed a law declaring the construction of the shrine a matter of public utility. Source: *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, Appleton Co., 1911, Vol. XI: 488d. [Editor]

[26]Canon Tournier's monograph has an appendix listing the names of donors. The cardinal is featured in it for the sum of twenty-five francs. [Author]

his good will but made no secret that he had ever so much to do before he could fulfill his friends' hopes. He needed adequate premises, and it was imperative that workshops be set up in the orphanage itself in order to keep the boys from having to go out to work. His observations were given serious attention, so much so that some work was immediately begun. The Salesians were asked to come in October, but that was too soon. Besides the former staff had already resigned to seek better paying jobs elsewhere, and so the school could not continue. The result was that in 1883 a religious community was called in. However, there was another situation which more intensely grieved Don Bosco. One of the orphanage's annual reports strongly[27] intimates that its administration was not to be entrusted to the Salesians, who were simply to help operate it. This offered no grounds for negotiations.[28] Don Bosco, who had somehow gotten wind of it, was in no hurry to reach an agreement but bided his time; hence he must have heaved a sigh of relief on learning the final solution. Our files carry further correspondence between him and Father Julien and others in Toulouse, but we find no reference to past events.

None of this however cooled the warm feelings of Toulouse toward Don Bosco. Thanks to Father Julien's zeal, a fine group of Salesian cooperators arose, with him as its first director. The association still flourishes today [1934]. In December 1929 a relic of the newly beatified Don Bosco was welcomed at Toulouse with an enthusiastic celebration by both clergy and laity which the world itself has never seen duplicated on similar occasions. Quite rightly was this hailed as Don Bosco's triumphant return to that historic, glorious city.[29]

Both at Saint-Cyr and La Navarre the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians eagerly awaited the arrival of their beloved father. He started out to satisfy their desire immediately after his con-

[27]*Le Bienheureux Dom Bosco à Toulouse,* pp. 81f. [Author]

[28]The issue did not pass unobserved or without comment. Mrs. Leocadia Orloff, writing from San Remo to Don Bosco on May 12, 1883, remarked: "They were very wrong not to agree in Toulouse; *the house of Father Julien should have been turned over to you.* Building a new institution, I think, would be a very difficult task given the large number of charitable homes in town." [Author]

[29]In recalling this episode in a speech (*Les Ubaldini de Toscane, Dante et Toulouse*, Toulouse, Andrau and Laporte, 1933, p. 48), Canon Tournier writes that at the time "the relic of the gentle Blessed Don Bosco, welcomed with triumphal honors, gave forth the fragrance of a peace-filled sanctity." [Author]

ference [to the Salesian cooperators] in St. Joseph's Church [in Marseille]; however, he first made a few stopovers in the Toulon diocese.

When it was time to leave Marseille, he entered his carriage in the school playground which was filled with people kneeling for his blessing. Gazing about him with deep emotion, Don Bosco was overheard by Father Albera to sigh, "How great is a priest!" In all these acts of reverence he saw only signs of veneration for the priestly state. In fact for the next few days many persons, unable to accept that he had really left, kept insisting that he was hiding in the house.[30]

Don Bosco left Marseille on February 20. It is unlikely that he made any stops until he reached La Ciotat, an industrial seacoast town on the Marseille-Toulon route. He arrived at half-past one. A huge crowd awaited him in the village church, where he preached and then took up a collection. Next he went to the nearby parish of Saint-Cyr, where a surprising thing took place. Having been invited to dinner by the parish priest, he was talking with several clergy guests when a young priest entered the room. Though Don Bosco had never seen or met him before, he went over to him, cordially grasped his hand, and with warm insistence urged him to be resigned to God's will. The young priest did not know what to say and first thought he would give some noncommittal response, but then he openly expressed his surprise at these words because he had no reason to be resigned, since all was going well with him. "Yet that is how it is," Don Bosco replied. "I am glad to know you are happy, but the test can always come sooner than you think." The young priest took his place at the table at a little distance from Don Bosco, who repeatedly made playful reference to their former conversation. Unsure of how he was to understand his words, seriously or in jest, the young priest finally became worried. This was the day after Quinquagesima Sunday. On Ash Wednesday as he was dining with his mother, she took a few sips of soup, then clasped her hands, bowed her head and died. Then he understood. Years later, in 1887, recounting this incident to Father Albera, he spoke most highly of this holy servant of God.

Though the agricultural school of St. Isidore was not far from Saint-Cyr, Don Bosco, who was delayed longer than he had expected by the

[30]Minutes, February 24, 1882. [Author]

conference and other reasons, had to forego his visit because he did not want to miss his appointment with the Colle family in Toulon. He arrived there on the evening of the 21st, and preached the next morning to a crowded cathedral. He spoke on the same topic and, as elsewhere, his congregation gave him its undivided attention. That afternoon, the women cooperators, all eager to help especially St. Isidore Hospice, met with him in the sacristy. At his suggestion they each promised a monthly contribution which would enable the impoverished hospice to meet at least its most pressing needs. He also asked the women to broaden their circle of donors by recruiting their families and acquaintances.

He said he would also gladly meet with the men cooperators, only there was no time. However, he was keen to make one very important point. "It is imperative," he told the ladies, "that you thoroughly grasp the aims of the Association of Salesian Cooperators. Its purpose is not only to support our works, but also for its members to do all they possibly can to join forces for the salvation of their fellow Christians, especially the young. Let them strive to promote children's catechism classes and volunteer to help their parish priests with them. Let them prepare children for First Holy Communion and provide them with proper clothing. Let them spread wholesome literature and forcefully oppose all irreligious, immoral publications. All these things are part of the Salesian cooperators' commitment." These recommendations must have certainly cheered the hearts of those parish priests who had so generously supported his work not only by opening their churches to him and publicizing his conferences in advance, but also by attending and speaking at the conferences and by being the first to personally contribute to the collection.

We will not reiterate all we have already said about the endless, tiresome audiences which he also held in Toulon, but we cannot forget a prodigious event and a prediction, both of them supported by written testimony. The thirteen-year-old son of the Pontevès family in Toulon had been afflicted with frequent fainting spells over the past eighteen months. They gravely upset him, disrupted his schooling and retarded his physical and spiritual development. His mother brought him to Don Bosco, who blessed the boy and told him, "Cheer up, son! You will be cured before the feast of St. John the Baptist." Trusting his words as she would God's own, the mother stopped his prescribed medication.

From that day on the fainting spells ceased, and the boy regained his strength with not the slightest trace of his grave ailment.[31]

The prediction was told us by a nun of the Sagesse still living in September 1932 in the congregation's motherhouse at Saint-Laurent sur Sèvres.[32] Very simply this elderly sister maintained that she could still very clearly recall *ce petit bonhomme noir et maigre comme un clou* [this little man, dark and thin as a rail]. She first saw him at the Toulon's Navy Hospital, which was served by some fifty nuns of the same congregation. Don Bosco called upon them and asked [the superior] to send two sisters for a time to Gien to open immediately an orphanage which they would later pass on to the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. The orphanage was short-lived because of lack of funds and no hope of relief. On entering the hospital Don Bosco greeted each sister in his Italian accent, *"Bon jour, ma soeur, comment ça va*? [Good day, my sister, how are you?"] An elderly nun, the oldest actually, went up to him and replied to his greeting, *"Ça ne va pas. . . . Je suis sourde. . . . Vous devriez me guérir."* ["Not well. . . . I am deaf. . . . You must cure me."] Don Bosco replied: *"Ma soeur, dans huit jours vous entendrez chanter les anges du Paradis."* ["Dear sister, within eight days you will hear the angels singing in paradise."] The good sister could not hear him, but the others did. The next day she was stricken with pneumonia, which exactly eight days later sent her to heaven to hear the angelic choirs.

From Saint-Cyr he went on to Hyères, where he stayed over Saturday and Sunday, spending most of his time in visiting the sick and listening to the crowds who flocked to him. On Sunday he preached at the solemn high Mass in the ancient St. Louis Basilica, where the saintly king [Louis IX] had prayed on his return from the Seventh Crusade [1248-1254] to recover the Holy Land from the Moslems. Don Bosco deeply touched his listeners when, perhaps alluding to some publication or other, he objected to the claim that he possessed the charism of miracles. "Don Bosco," he stated, "would be the lowest of men were he to arrogate such power to himself. Certainly, extraordinary favors have been granted, but by the Blessed Virgin Mary for the benefit of our works. She obtained these graces from Her Divine Son

[31]Letter from Father J. Rostand to Father Ronchail, Antibes, December 16, 1882. [Author]
[32]Letter from Father Pastol to Father Auffray, Liège, September 4, 1932. [Author]

for those who reach out to orphans so dear to Him. Our houses are supported solely by public charity; they would have no chance of survival unless extraordinary favors stirred people to give and to show their gratitude by the donations they send us. Hence, God never denies us miraculous help in our need and comes to our aid with outstanding favors."

After giving some information on the Patagonian missions and listing the benefits of almsgiving, he stepped down from the pulpit and personally took up a collection for the Salesian work of La Navarre. That evening the Lenten preacher asked that a second collection be taken up for the same purpose. After Monday's Mass, Don Bosco asked for a third collection for the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice in Rome. Their donation, he stressed, had a threefold feature: it was at one and the same time an act of faith and of love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and for the Church, mother of all churches; secondly, it was an act of charity for poor youngsters of all nationalities; finally, it was an act of piety and filial, loving reverence for the glorious Pius IX, to whom the new church and hospice would stand as a worthy monument.

On February 27 Don Bosco went on to La Navarre, where he was met by Father Albera, who had come to offer whatever assistance he could in his endless concerns. On March 2 he wrote to Father Rua: "Don Bosco cannot hold up much longer. He is so lionized and overwhelmed by crowds that I can't even get near him to consult with him on some urgent matters or call his attention to important correspondence. Despite all she has gone through, France is truly miraculous in its almsgiving." Gravely concerned for Don Bosco's health, Father Albera then asked Father Rua if it were not time to make him give up his fatiguing efforts.

We have already recounted how on his last year's visit to La Navarre[33] Don Bosco had left instructions for a much larger building to be constructed to accommodate three hundred boys. Father [Peter] Perrot, the director, lost no time; by December 16 the cornerstone was in place, ready to be blessed by Don Bosco on his arrival. The ceremony took place on March 1. In his above quoted letter Father Albera wrote, "Yesterday La Navarre's new building's cornerstone was cemented in place. Don Bosco's name drew such a crowd to the cere-

[33]*See* p. 46. [Editor]

mony that one would have thought this was Marseille or Toulon, not an insignificant place called La Navarre. Day after day we see the Lord coming to his special aid."

The traditional dedication scroll was encased in a sealed glass vial, and placed within the cornerstone; it bore the signatures of several eminent people, who deemed it a singular honor to add their names to Don Bosco's.

The pressing business of the day did not make him overlook or neglect other more distant concerns. We note his solicitude in two letters he mailed from La Navarre. The first was a reply to Father Rua concerning an answer to Archbishop Gastaldi's offer of a wrought-iron fence for St. John the Evangelist Church.[34] Briefly, after reviewing the situation, he made a decision, and put an end to the matter. He listed his travel route for Father Rua, hinting at the hardships this relentless unceasing fund-raising was costing him.

La Navarre, March 2, 1882

My dear Father Rua:

I think we can send an answer to the archbishop, but first get in touch with Count Mella to learn if the gate is in keeping with his plans or whether it has to be disassembled to make it fit properly. The added cost might well make us sorry we ever accepted it. So decline it nicely for any one of the above reasons.

Saturday I leave for Cuers, Monday for Brignoles, then on to Fréjus, Grasse, Cannes and Nice. Today I have a conference at our parish in Sauvebonne.

I am exhausted; yet we have to pay our debts. I have sent Father Dalmazzo five thousand lire and hope to send you something too.

God bless us all. Continue praying for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

In his second letter he gives instructions for the conference to be soon held in Genoa and tells the new director what he hopes to find on his arrival.

[34]*See* pp. 311f. [Editor]

La Navarre, March 3, 1882

My dear Father Belmonte:

Read over the enclosed letter, seal and deliver it to the archbishop, and then work out future details with him. If he asks what was done in the past, tell him that we absorbed the deficit which Don Bosco tried to pay off. This year, however, other commitments make that impossible. Be careful to get his consent and then talk the problem over with the parish priest of his choice. See him morning or evening, when [Lenten] sermons are not in progress.

Send me your reply at Nice as soon as possible and I will take care of the rest. God bless you and all our dear family at Sampierdarena! Tell all that I especially ask them to have their house in good order when I visit Sampierdarena at the end of the month—the confreres observing their rules and doing their work, the students relentlessly fighting the devil, the artisans giving good example. God bless us all and keep us in His holy grace.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Regards to Madame Ghiglini. Tell her that I do not forget to pray for her in my daily Mass and hope to find her in excellent health.

We have no information about every stop listed by Don Bosco in his letter to Father Rua. At Sauvebonne those who flocked from the neighboring countryside to attend the meeting noted a change in Don Bosco from the previous year—his French had improved. He became the talk of the town by an original toast he proposed. One of the prominent farmers gave him a dinner attended by his neighbors. Cordiality and good humor prevailed at table. After several toasts, Don Bosco also arose and asked to speak. Haltingly he told them that his message was somewhat out of place. All protested and urged him to go on. "Well, you will forgive me," he went on, "if, after a few drinks, I may stray a little from the beaten path. Let me tell you what went through my mind as I saw around me the leading homesteaders of this valley. I thought that Sauvebonne should have a special role in building La Navarre Orphanage, whose cornerstone we blessed yesterday. It should be your prerogative to crown this edifice. I feel you would take great pride in putting a roof over the heads of our orphans. So my proposal is that you finance the roof of the new building. What do you say?"

"We accept!" was the unanimous reply.

"In that case," Don Bosco replied, lifting his glass, "I drink to the roof of La Navarre Orphanage and to its generous donors!"

On the evening of March 4 he was greeted by a joyful crowd at Cuers. He had planned to stay there only twenty-four hours, but such was the flow of his visitors that he could not leave until the morning of the 6th. From Cuers he went to Brignoles, where he received a similar welcome. In both towns he held an evening meeting to help Salesian work and after Mass the following morning recommended the Sacred Heart Church [in Rome] to their charity. In February 1891 a lady of Brignoles[35] wrote to Father Michael Rua concerning his visit: "We stood very close to him. He was calm and tranquil despite the vast crowd waiting to speak with him. He blessed my entire family and played lovingly with my sons, teasing them to find the medals he had hidden in his hand. When I said that I wished I could do something for his work, he answered, 'My little birds are hungry, and it takes a lot to feed them!' I promised I would do my share, and since then I have made underclothing and sent it to La Navarre. From time to time I collect funds for my parish priest to send to La Navarre or to Saint-Cyr. My only regret is that I am not richer to donate more."

This same lady tells us that Don Bosco was then barely known at Brignoles, his visit having been poorly publicized. Yet she was surprised to see the church jammed with people when Don Bosco ascended the pulpit to speak about his work. Such a crowd may well have never before been seen in that church. The collection that day amounted to twelve hundred francs, whereas the usual annual church collections barely brought in more than sixty to a hundred and twenty francs. The next morning after Mass Don Bosco spoke about the Sacred Heart Church in Rome, and the collection was close to four hundred francs, even though the second collection had not been announced and the church was far from full. This the good lady called "prodigious."

At five o'clock on the evening of March 7 Don Bosco arrived in Fréjus, and from there went to Nice, arriving at midday of the 8th. St. Pierre's Hospice was still enjoying a reputation for excellence in the entire city. Mr. Beaulieu gave a report at the general assembly of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, meeting in the bishop's residence. While telling the bishop and some seventy members about the institutions benefiting financially from the Society over the past year, he

[35]Madame Lambot-Miraval to Father Rua, Brignoles, February 22, 1891. [Author]

digressed to say, "No sooner do I say 'hospice' than my thoughts immediately run to Don Bosco's hospice. It is not up to me to speak of it here, but I cannot forego the pleasure of hailing it if only in passing. St. Pierre's Hospice keeps making even more impressive strides. A saint's work brooks no obstacles, and you will mark its growth despite the hindrances that block it."[36] Two days after this magnificent ovation, Don Bosco made a triumphal entry into the hospice. It is a pity that our archives have nothing telling us about his stay there.

One incident, however, has come to us from the diocesan process for Don Bosco's beatification,[37] attested to by Father Julius Barberis, who stated that he knew the witness quite well and had heard the entire account from him. A youth unknown to Don Bosco approached him in the playground. Don Bosco looked at him, put his index finger up to the boy's forehead and very softly said, "There is something inside here which I don't like. Come later and see me in my room." The boy went to see Don Bosco, who disclosed all his innermost thoughts. So shaken was the young man that he radically changed his way of life and became a Salesian and later a craftsmaster in one of the Salesian houses in France.

The travel plans Don Bosco sent to Father Rua included Grasse and Cannes. We have no information concerning Grasse; of Cannes we have the report of an incident which most probably belongs to this year.[38] After Don Bosco's conference, an English woman in her twenties went up to him and said: "I hear that you perform many miraculous cures. My father, a physician, sent me to the best known doctors of England and Paris, but their treatments have done me no good." Don Bosco replied that he personally did not heal anyone, having scant knowledge of medicine, and that it was Our Lady, Help of Christians, the Mother of Jesus Christ, who granted such favors and miracles.

The young woman then insisted that she too would love to obtain such a favor through Mary, Help of Christians, but that she feared her

[36]*Report on the Activities of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Nice*, St. Pierre's Hospice, 1882, p. 18. In 1883, on the golden jubilee of the Society's foundation in Nice, an historic publication detailing Don Bosco's relations with the Society appeared entitled *Notices historiques des Conferences et d'Oeuvres de Saint-Vincent de Paul a Nice depuis la fondation en 1844 jusqu' à 1883 année des noces d'or de la Société*. [Author]

[37]*Summarium*, n. 17, De donis supernaturalibus, etc. [Author]

[38]The incident was reported orally by Father Charles Moro to Father John Baptist Lemoyne who put it down in writing. [Author]

prayers would go unheeded because she was a Protestant. Would he kindly pray for her instead? Don Bosco cheered her by saying: "Protestant or not, put your faith and firm hope in the Mother of God. It is for this reason that I give out medals of Her. Here is one for you. Pray to Mary, Help of Christians for nine days and you will be cured."

Just days later her father called on Don Bosco in Nice to thank him and say that his daughter had been completely healed and that he was ready to pay any sum he chose to name. Don Bosco replied that he sought nothing for himself; it was the Blessed Virgin Mary, he said, who had cured his daughter. If he wanted to make an offering for the poor lads in his homes supported by goodwill donations, he would gladly and graciously accept it—not for himself, he repeated, but for the needy destitute lads. The gentleman gave him five thousand gold francs.

Another miraculous recovery which occurred shortly before was that of a daughter of Marchioness Gaudemarie of Lyons. The girl, ill for a number of years, had been transported half dead from Lyons to Cannes in the hope that the mild climate would ease her pains during the winter months, but she soon worsened so badly that by March her family feared her imminent death. In her peril she asked for Don Bosco's blessing, and with it he gave her a medal of Mary, Help of Christians. No sooner did she take it than she immediately began to improve, and on the feast of Mary, Help of Christians she felt so well that she personally went to Turin to thank Our Lady at Her church.[39]

However, the following incident is the one which stirred the most excitement. After dinner with a host family, Don Bosco went to visit the Sacred Heart Orphanage [in Cannes]. As soon as he entered, he met a woman weeping uncontrollably. For three days she had been tormented by a toothache. Don Bosco gave her a blessing and a medal of Mary, Help of Christians. Then, his visit concluded, he went to speak to the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. On arriving he found the courtyard jammed with carriages and countless servants in livery. On entering the convent, he was greeted by a most extraordinary sight. People rushed toward him, threw themselves upon their knees and begged for his blessing. There were the crippled, the blind, deaf mutes, paralytics, victims of tuberculosis and of every sort of disease,

[39]*Bollettino Salesiano*, June 1882. [Author]

who alternately wept, laughed, and shouted while Don Bosco gave them his blessing. Why did such a motley crowd gather in the sisters' convent? As soon as Sister Superior managed to get near Father Ronchail, she told him, "Miss Rohland is inside and wishes to speak to Don Bosco." The mystery began to unfold, but we must first go back a few steps.

Four days earlier Don Bosco had visited the Bel Air Tourist Home, owned by Protestants and run for a Protestant clientele, to call on a Miss Rohland, a twenty-two year old Polish girl who with her brother and a lady companion were the only Catholics in the place. Miss Rohland had been afflicted with a back problem for well over two years, unable to move, let alone walk; she had to be carried from armchair to bed, from bed to armchair. When asked to bless her, Don Bosco agreed and suggested that she say certain prayers until a certain day, probably until the feast day of St. Peter. On leaving he told her, "You will recover in proportion to your faith."

"I have a very firm faith!" she replied.

"If you have faith, you will recover," Don Bosco repeated.

Curious to know what a Catholic priest would be doing in a Protestant tourist home, the guests soon found out about him, had a good laugh at the blessing and hope of recovery, and ridiculed Catholic superstition. These were not low class people; one of them was a preacher.

This happened on Thursday, March 17. The next Saturday, very early in the morning, Miss Rohland's attendant nurse heard footsteps in the young lady's room, and, fearing that a thief might have broken in, peeked into the room. She saw the sick girl walking about, cautiously leaning on a cane. Overwhelmed, the nurse screamed wildly. The preacher was the first to rush to the room, fearing that the girl had suffered a mishap, but when he saw her walking by herself he stood rooted to the spot. Moments later all the guests gathered in her room, overwhelmed by astonishment, while the young lady joyously kept telling everyone, "I am cured."

At that moment Don Bosco was celebrating Mass for the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. The young lady asked her brother to fetch him but not tell him what had happened. Word got back to her that Don Bosco was about to leave for Nice but would return to speak to the same sisters on Monday, March 21, at three o'clock. That afternoon, at

half-past two, the young lady went to the convent walking effortlessly while all watched her. Her acquaintances could not believe their eyes when they saw her crossing the square, but news of the miracle and of Don Bosco's return to the convent had spread throughout the city, and that explained the presence of so many people, well and ill, at the sisters' convent.

On receiving the above mentioned message, Don Bosco went to meet the young lady, who walked up to him, but, setting his eyes on her, he seemed perturbed and asked, "Why are you here?"

"I came to thank you for my cure and listen to you speak."

"No, no! Go back home! You may not be entirely healed yet and suffer a serious relapse. It was unwise for you to come."

"But I am perfectly cured, I tell you!"

"Are you not afraid to tempt God?"

"No, not at all! As for that, both of us have already tempted Him a good deal!"

After sermon and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, Don Bosco had but three quarters of an hour before departing for Nice. He was so pressed by the crowd that Father Ronchail had to use all his ingenuity and strength to clear a path for him through the crowd. Don Bosco seemed quite beside himself. Many men who wished to give him more alms pushed their way through to him as best they could and thrust bank notes into his hands. Father Ronchail had to collect the money lest it be trampled or lost.

As the crowd thinned and he stood by the door, the woman who had been afflicted by a toothache came up to him, joyously and loudly proclaiming that the pain had immediately left her after Don Bosco's blessing. Word spread throughout the house and once more enthusiasm ran high, and again Don Bosco was hemmed in. Father Ronchail had to strive with all his might to wrest him from the clutches of so many people thronging about him. All the while, seemingly bewildered and struggling for breath, Don Bosco kept repeating softly: "Blessed be God in all things!"

By God's grace they got to the railway station, where Father Ronchail had just enough time to push Don Bosco inside a railway coach before the train began to move. For a while Don Bosco was still dazed; then, slowly coming to himself, he inquired, "What happened?" Father Ronchail briefly reminded him of the two cures, and

Don Bosco bowed his head, his eyes welling with tears, and kept repeating: "Blessed be God in all things!"[40]

They finally arrived at Nice. During the process [of Don Bosco's beatification] Father Rua testified that two months after Miss Rohland's cure, he saw her in Turin on a pilgrimage on the feast of Mary, Help of Christians just as she had promised Don Bosco.

Father Bologna, whose testimony comes up but once in the documents of this period, makes another appearance in this very interesting letter written to him by Don Bosco on his name day:

Nice, March 19, 1892
Feast of St. Joseph

Dearest Father Bologna:

These are the first words I am able to write to you over the past two months. I received and answered Madame Prat's letter. She reaffirms her promise to donate fifteen thousand francs at Easter and twenty thousand in September, and you can rely on her. Pay frequent visits to Miss Du Gaz, but do not ask for a donation; just mention that little by little you are paying off your debts.

I regret that we were unable to talk about your community or the Congregation.

Here are a few notes which I would like you to pass on to Father Albera:

1. When the provincial stays in any of our houses, he has the director's authority even when the latter is present. The vice-director[41] takes the director's place, as at Alassio[42] and carries out all the latter's duties, but always in agreement with the provincial.

2. The provincial is especially responsible for the moral, religious, intellectual, scholastic and physical well-being of the Salesian confreres. He must therefore give spiritual talks, receive the confreres' monthly spiritual self-appraisals, hear their confessions and so on.

3. The care of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians is also the provincial's concern.

[40]Our archives have a later account of this incident by Father Ronchail. However, his memory failed him. He assigned this episode to 1881, while it certainly took place in 1882. There is a brief mention of it in *La Gazzette du Midi* of March 27-28, 1882 in a news item from Cannes dated March 25; furthermore, the June issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano* in 1882 speaks of the young lady's visit to Turin for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, remarking that she had been cured during the previous month of March. The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians religiously cherish an amice used by Don Bosco when he celebrated Mass in their chapel. [Author]

[41]This was the director's title in the provincial house. Source: *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. IV, pp. 121f, Letter 2277, footnote 2. [Editor]

[42]The provincial house of the Ligurian province. *See* Vol. XIV, p. 25. [Editor]

4. This structure will enable the director of the house to attend to the complex management of St. Leo's Oratory.

5. The basic rule in everything is that the director should often confer patiently and amiably with the provincial on all matters.

I have no time to write to Father Albera, so pass this information on to him. Once you have both carefully read over these things, send me in writing the observations you consider pertinent and necessary for the smooth running of this house, which is to be a model for all other Salesian houses.

Call on Madame Brouchier, tell her that I remember her at my daily Mass and that she must also pray much for me.

God bless you, my ever dear Father Bologna. God bless you, Father Albera, all the confreres, Borghi and all the pupils.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco[43]

While in Nice, he did not forget to send his usual good wishes to Mrs. Matilda Sigismondi in Rome.

Nice, March 1882

Dear Mrs. Sigismondi,[44]

Happy name day. This must be a short note, but I remember you very often. God grant you good health and keep you always in His holy grace! I hope to pay my respects personally, my worthy friend, to you and my beloved Alexander and your honorable family at Torre de' Specchi by the beginning of April. God bless you all.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

His time to leave France drawing near, he was planning to go directly to Rome, and so he wrote a fatherly letter to Father Berto asking him to go from the Oratory to take over from his French secretary.

[43]Before leaving Marseille he had jotted down these items for Father Bologna:
Windows and dumbwaiter between kitchen and dining room.
Coffee and milk for breakfast.
Bread only for the midafternoon snack.
Regular chapter meetings.
Students are not to attend outside theology courses.

[44]Her name day, feast of St. Matilda, was observed on March 14. [Editor]

Nice, March 19, 1882

My dear Father Berto:

God willing, I shall set out for Italy toward the end of this week, and therefore I need you, my Italian secretary. I don't know your state of health because I haven't heard from you, but I do wish you to do this for me, provided your chest is not giving you trouble and you have no other ailment. I have no time to write more. Answer me at Nice.

My regards to my two friends Franchino and Father Ottonello.[45]

God bless you, my ever beloved Father Berto! May He grant you good health so you can help me work for His greater glory.

Pray for me!

Always your affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco did not list Menton in his itinerary, but we know that he stopped one day there after leaving Nice. He was hosted by Saint-Genest, a well-known French journalist, in his Villa Imberti. As we stated before, Don Bosco used to visit the more popular spots along the Côte d'Azur because they were the winter resorts of the wealthy, both French and others, from whom he was able to draw substantial funds. We think he most likely came to know Saint-Genest through Count [Joseph] Du Bourg, whom he had met at Toulouse; both gentlemen had close ties to the De Maistre family. In 1883 Saint-Genest visited the Oratory hoping to see Don Bosco, who was then in Paris. From Turin the journalist sent a long article to *Le Figaro*,[46] of which we quote one passage, quite apropos of this chapter. The journalist thus recorded his first meeting with Don Bosco: "When I first hosted Don Bosco I was not lucky enough to know the caliber of the man I was honored to meet, but the people certainly knew him, for, as soon as he arrived at Villa Imberti, they were massing at the gate to ask for his blessing. I must admit that at first I was not impressed by the holy man's appearance and demeanor. But Don Bosco is not one to impress you right away. In a group of conversationalists he is the last to come forward. His struggling French causes him to be easily overshadowed. Then bit by bit, certain words uttered in an undertone flash from him. They

[45]*See* p. 456. [Editor]

[46]The Paris newspaper published it in its issue of May 18, 1883 under the title "Dom Bosco." [Author]

become more dazzling. Soon all there focus on him. Then those who gaze upon his countenance see him as a man created by God for a mission [. . .]. One is struck by the finesse of his smile, his knowing eye, his aura of exquisite kindness, his indomitable will."

The fact that Don Bosco was the object of such admiration from so many outstanding members of the French nobility must have worried some overzealous police officers who seem to have brought this to the attention of the republican government, provoking measures against him. Indeed a Paris correspondent of a Turin anti-clerical journal cabled his paper:[47] "Paris, April 24, 5 P.M. Government issued order to police of Nîmes, Toulouse and Marseille to keep surveillance over Father John Bosco of Turin, who, pretending to collect funds in France for a monument to Pius IX, has met with the leaders of the reactionary party for political reasons." This surveillance was ordered too late for anything to be done, because investigating the charges and tracking his movements took too much time. It was like chasing a hare with a coach. But so unconcerned about French surveillance was Don Bosco that in 1883, on returning to France, he resumed his conferences under the very eyes of the suspicious authorities, in broad daylight, under the Paris sun.[48]

[47]*La Gazzetta del Popolo*, April 25, 1882. *L'Unità Cattolica* replied with a sharp retort on the 26th. The article was reprinted in the May issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano*. [Author]

[48]This anecdote provided Professor Alexander Fabre, former Oratory pupil, with a theme for his comic address, later printed, which he delivered at the annual meeting of former pupils. It is entitled *La Politica di Don Bosco* [Don Bosco's Politics]. Crediting with mock seriousness the charge that Don Bosco was a politician, a charge also launched against him by the Turin newspapers, the author remarked at one point: "And we? . . . Thrice foolish were we who lived so many years with this man of mystery, drinking in his kind words thousands of times without ever unmasking his secret manipulation of the shady politics which trouble the great of this earth. How pitiful were we whose eyes were closed to all this! How stupid we were for having believed and for still believing that Don Bosco's only politics consisted in finding some way to keep the Oratory's soup kettle well stocked, to attract hundreds of cooperators to help him in the worrisome care of the Lord's very trying and vast apostolate and keep them always alert and self-giving. His political goals were to imbue the hearts of thousands and thousands of pupils—who came, stayed, and left his home of blessing and peace with a saving fear of evil—with an unselfish love of good, a wholesome wisdom of life, a healthy freedom to be oneself. Thrice stupid indeed, I repeat, were we for having no idea that all this show of goodness meant nothing more to Don Bosco than an assured way of attaining his political goals!" [Author]

# CHAPTER 17

## *Don Bosco's Journey Through Liguria and Back to Turin Through Romagna*

FOR Don Bosco 1882 was a year of conferences with Salesian cooperators and well-wishers. In France he had held many more than the three conferences which we have recorded. Then, recrossing the Alps, he returned to Italy, holding conferences in eight cities, never wearying of reminding the faithful to give "what is over and above" in alms. On returning eventually to Piedmont, he again "in season and out of season" proclaimed the same theme. No other saint has devoted so much time and energy to preaching publicly and privately the grave duty of giving alms, and of giving alms not in the measure set by one's own self-interests, but to the extent which one's means will allow. For well over forty years this was a genuine ministry which he exercised in countless ways, putting aside all human embarrassment. We must honestly say that it was truly blessed by God, who, as it is only too evident, intervened by miraculous signs to lend efficacy to his words.

So worn out was he on his return to Italy that he had to rest a day or two at the home of Mrs. [Frances] Ghiglini.[1] There on March 30 he met with Father Berto and Father Lazzero, who had arrived at Sampierdarena the evening before. The latter had some office memos for him from Father Rua; Father Bonetti had preceded them[2] with some rather sensitive business matters, since Don Bosco planned to go straight on to Rome.

While in Genoa he finalized plans for a cooperators' conference, the first ever held in the capital of Liguria. He alerted the cooperators with a simple flyer dated March 29 from Sampierdarena. "Several times the cooperators of Liguria," he wrote, "have heard or read of meetings

[1]*See* p. 379. [Editor]
[2]*See* Chapter 6. [Author]

held in various places for Salesian cooperators. This year we are overjoyed to invite you to such a special meeting on March 30 at St. Sirus' Church in Genoa." The invitation was also extended, he noted, to anyone interested in this charitable association, and the collection would benefit St. Vincent's Hospice, then in financial straits.

That day Archbishop Salvatore Magnasco of Genoa cordially invited him to lunch at his residence. He was accompanied by Father Bonetti, who stayed by his side until late evening, jotting notes and rushing to the presses of the *Bollettino Salesiano* a full account of the day's events for the coming April issue.

The archbishop personally escorted Don Bosco to the cathedral in his own carriage. The church was jammed. The conference had been announced by Genoa's Catholic paper, *Il Cittadino*, and the Lenten preachers also had spoken of it from their pulpits. As was his wont and as he continued regularly to do, he followed a set program. The gist of his talk was as follows. It is God's will that we all have concern for our neighbor. Today those in saddest need of this care are poor and abandoned youngsters. We can help them with festive oratories, night schools for young workers, free day schools, Sunday school classes, charitable institutions and, above all, hospices. He then spoke of the history and needs of St. Vincent's Hospice [in Sampierdarena], of one's duty to give alms, and how much. Since this aspect made the strongest impression we reproduce the précis of his talk which appeared in the April *Bollettino Salesiano*.

The poor were created by God to gain heaven by resignation and patience, the rich to be saved by charity and almsgiving. Some people believe that they may keep for themselves all the wealth God has granted them and that they may hoard it, invest it, or use it as they wish without sharing a fraction of it with the needy. Others think they have done their duty when they give small change or, rarely and reluctantly, perform a work of mercy. This is self-deception. Jesus Christ commands us to give alms. *Quod superest, date eleemosynam* [Give that which remains as alms]. What kind of alms? Give what you do not honestly need for your own befitting sustenance.

Let no one claim that this is a mere counsel, not a commandment. Gospel in hand, I reply that, yes, it is a counsel to give up everything to become voluntarily poor, as do religious, but it is a command to give in alms what is over and above: *Quod superest, date eleemosynam*. These words are not mine but those of Jesus Christ, our judge, whose tribunal cannot be trivialized with excuses and specious arguments.

That almsgiving is not merely a counsel but a command, as the Lord demonstrates very particularly in the parable of Dives and Lazarus. There was once a rich man, He tells us, who spent his money on lavish banquets and luxurious garments; at the same time there was a beggar who kept pleading in vain for something to still his hunger. After some time they both died. The poor man was borne by angels to Abraham's bosom; the rich man died too, but what happened to him? Let's hear it from the lips of Jesus Himself: the rich man also died and was buried in hell. What was his sin? Was he perhaps a blasphemer or a dishonest man? Might he have been unfair and a thief? All that the Gospel tells us is that he basked in his riches and would share none of it with poor Lazarus. "He used to clothe himself in purple and fine linen and feasted every day in splendid fashion." What else do we need to make us realize that God expects the rich to give alms and to show compassion for the poor at any cost?

Perhaps some of you may say, "These are very weighty and frightening words." I agree with you and regret I had to bring them up to you who probably don't need to hear them. I would rather have said them to others, not here present, who squander a fortune on buying and keeping teams of magnificent coach horses when they could save that money without cutting back too severely on the decorum proper to their station. I am thinking of certain ladies and gentlemen who spend a fortune on dinners and suppers, wardrobes, soirées, dances, entertainment and so on, whereas, were they to live a more Christian life, they might ease so many miseries, dry so many tears, and save so many souls. These are the people who need to have Jesus Christ's terrible words dinned into their ears: "The rich man died and was buried in hell." But I must remind you only of God's comforting promise to the compassionate who use their goods in a Christian manner and sponsor and support charitable causes. "Give and it shall be given to you," says the Lord. And what shall He give you? A hundredfold in this life, and life everlasting in the next.

In closing he told them of the special papal blessing he would impart to all present and of the Pope's wish that Catholics should bestir themselves to make sacrifices and support religious and charitable undertakings; he reminded them too that some city and diocesan works of charity were dying for lack of funds, to the utter grief of their archbishop. Wealth, he explained, should be seen as a key to open the gates of either heaven or hell. He urged his listeners to use their riches well so that at the moment of death their wealth might vouch for them and win them a welcome into an everlasting dwelling.

The collection was taken up by members of the *Gioventù Cattolica* [Catholic Youth Movement]. Don Bosco had hardly stepped off the

pulpit when he was hemmed in by people who jostled their way to kiss his hand or have a word with him, while others fell to their knees and begged a blessing. Back in the sacristy he spent two hours with people who rushed to see and speak with him. Before leaving, the archbishop went to congratulate him and express his best wishes. The collection brought in more than a thousand lire, and in addition he was personally given more than two thousand.

Keeping his promise, he celebrated community Mass for his benefactors at Sampierdarena on the morning of the 31st. A crowd flocked to attend and receive Communion. Later he was mobbed in the sacristy until midday, and after lunch he continued receiving people until nightfall. We single out two of his visitors.

The first was a canon of Genoa, who, feeling that Don Bosco's teaching on almsgiving was too severe and that an open discussion would be to their mutual benefit, called on him. The meeting dragged on endlessly as lines of people in the hallway, tired of waiting, began to grumble and appealed to Father Belmonte, the director. At intervals, sticking his head into Don Bosco's room as a hint that others were waiting to get in, he could see the canon sitting, head bowed, seemingly overwhelmed by Don Bosco's reasoning. Finally he came out, so confused that he lost his sense of direction and mistook both the door and the stairway. Most courteously Father Belmonte walked up to him and gently escorted him all the way to the exit. On taking leave, the canon gave him a generous donation.

The second visitor was a good Capuchin friar for whom this matter of almsgiving had serious repercussions. Don Bosco knew that he was confessor to a very wealthy elderly Genoese nobleman who had no heirs. "Why doesn't this gentleman give alms in proportion to his means?" Don Bosco asked.

"He does. He gives twenty thousand lire a year to help the poor," the priest answered.

"Is that all? If he meant to obey Christ's command to give alms according to his riches, he would have to give more than one hundred thousand lire. What does he plan to do with his money?"

"I realize that, but I can't convince him to give more."

"Still he must recognize his duty and carry it out."

"I don't know how to change his mind. What would you do in my place?"

"I would tell him that I don't intend to go to hell because of him, and

that if he wants to, he can go by himself. Then I'd tell him he has to give alms in proportion to his wealth, or otherwise I'd no longer be responsible for his soul."

"I'll tell him that," the friar answered.

He was true to his word. Having known the nobleman for over twenty years, he did not feel in the least embarrassed to discuss the matter with him, but the old man lent him a deaf ear and, taking offense at his Gospel frankness, dismissed him as his confessor.

Another episode occurring that fall makes Don Bosco's thought all the clearer. A certain Mr. Borgo, a contractor and very close friend of Don Bosco, was a regular contributor to St. Vincent Hospice; in fact, he had loaned sums of money interest-free, had drawn up building plans without charge, and for two years had supervised construction work without payment. He preserved at home all the jewelry and expensive clothing which had belonged to his wife, deceased now some twenty years. He happened to mention this when chatting with Don Bosco, remarking also that he was more than usually anxious to have prayers said for the repose of his wife's soul.

"Well, then," Don Bosco remarked, "what are you doing with all those things in your home? They are of no use there when we have such a crying need to help the poor."

"What should I do with them?"

"Donate them to the hospice. That is the best prayer for your wife's soul."

Mr. Borgo walked away, disturbed and deeply moved. He was reluctant to make such a sacrifice. He walked about, lost in thought, and then returned home, but he could not forget Don Bosco's words. Indeed, for very many good cooperators one word from Don Bosco was God's word! In situations like the above or whenever they sought his advice or discussed their future or past with him, he would concentrate for a moment and then concisely express his opinion in words which had the tone of a divine oracle. Some days passed, and Mr. Borgo, learning that Don Bosco was again at Sampierdarena after a short visit to the Salesian house at La Spezia, brought all his wife's jewelry and clothes to St. Vincent's Hospice. From their sale Father Belmonte realized a total of five thousand lire.[3]

[3]Don Bosco went to Liguria in the fall to preside at the annual spiritual retreat, as we learn from two letters in the last chapter of this volume. This is the only episode we know about this stay of his. [Author]

On April 3 Don Bosco left Sampierdarena for Camogli where he was holding another conference. His two close friends, Father Sebastian Paladino and Chevalier Bozzo, had arranged with the vicar forane, Father Candia, for Don Bosco to spend a day there with them before going on to La Spezia. He could not refuse.

He was moved at the touching welcome. Camogli is a tiny hamlet perched on a rocky ridge overlooking the sea. Some hundred young boys were playing on the beach, but as soon as they saw him arrive at the village square by the waterfront, they ceased their games and raced to him, crowding about him, kissing his hand and chatting with him with the utmost ease and trust as if with an old friend. Doubtless they knew who this priest was. Still, it was a marvelous thing to see how they followed him about and gazed up at him in rapture. Such a welcome is all the more surprising because Ligurians do not so easily warm up to people; even young children usually look upon strangers with disinterest. Don Bosco enjoyed every moment of their youthful enthusiasm.

That afternoon he visited the shrine of the Madonna del Boschetto [Our Lady of the Copse], deferring the conference to late evening when most people would be able to attend. However, all were so eager to see and hear Don Bosco that they could not wait for the set time, and very soon the beautiful church was crowded. The rosary was recited and the Litany of Our Lady sung. Then, as Father Belmonte[4] wrote, "Our dearly beloved father spoke from the pulpit. He was noticeably moved on seeing such a crowd breathlessly hanging on every word from his lips. The children were particularly attentive, entranced as it were by Don Bosco's words."

In substance he repeated the message he had given in Genoa, prefacing his talk with words of praise for the vicar forane and his associates, who took such pastoral care of the parish and of the Salesian cooperators. He thanked them and urged them to continue their efforts. Then he detailed the meaning of "cooperator," described the perils facing youths, and told of what evil people were doing to lead them astray. He went on to tell of the origins of the Oratory, stressing the need of recreational centers, and from there he spoke of Salesian houses, their number and their efforts to train young men for arts and trades, the military service, higher education and the priesthood. All of this, he

[4]Letter to Father Bonetti, Camogli, April 4, 1882. [Author]

reminded them, was a very expensive undertaking, and, thanking them for their past generosity, he asked for their continued help. There too he closed his talk by reminding them of the duty of almsgiving.

Thankful for the collection they gave him, he promised to offer Mass the following morning for the local Salesian cooperators, and he said a few words about the Sacred Heart Church in Rome. As on the previous evening, the people flocked to his morning Mass. After relating the history of the Sacred Heart Church, he went on to tell them of the need to annex a hospice to accommodate five hundred boys in that neighborhood, faced with the grave danger of losing their faith. He spoke of his own personal knowledge of Protestant recreation centers frequented by flocks of boys and girls whom he thought Protestants, but they were Catholics, drawn there by handouts of food, clothing, and pocket money. "If we stand idly by," he cautioned, "Rome, the world's Catholic capital, will become a stronghold of Protestantism. It is imperative, therefore, that concerned Catholics unite to build this church and hospice for the benefit of underprivileged youngsters."[5] A good sized collection was taken up.

"Here as elsewhere," Father Belmonte wrote, "people consider Don Bosco a saint, flocking to see him and kiss his hand as he passes by." Father Berto's diary contains this entry: "It was truly a triumph for the faith! Wherever Don Bosco went, he drew crowds of men, women and children from all walks of life, each longing to have a word with him and receive his blessing." Father Lemoyne takes note of the testimony of Father Luxardo, rector of the shrine of Our Lady of the Copse and former Oratory pupil, who witnessed three healings obtained by Don Bosco while visiting the sick. A consumptive woman and another lady suffering from an incurable progressive nervous disorder were healed through a novena to Our Lady prescribed by Don Bosco. The third healing was of a certain Mrs. Bono, afflicted with paralysis of both arms and and hands. Don Bosco asked her to make the Sign of the Cross, but she protested that she could not. He repeated his request. "But I can't," the sufferer replied. Don Bosco asked others to lift her right hand to her forehead and shoulders, signing her with the cross. They did so easily, and she immediately regained full use of both arms for the rest of her life.

[5]Above-quoted letter. [Author]

Resuming his trip, Don Bosco went to La Spezia, where he gave two talks in the new chapel jammed with people, one on the evening of April 4, the other the following morning. On the 6th, Holy Thursday, he heard confessions of the boys and staff, said Mass for them only, and all received Communion. Leaving for Lucca after midday he met the house's director, Father [John] Marenco, at Pisa.

How Lucca's Holy Cross Festive Oratory had grown! Just two years before[6] everyone was praying for a boarding school and workshops, and now they had a home for over a hundred boarders, students and artisans. But applications kept pouring in, and facilities had to be enlarged. Such bright prospects prompted Don Bosco's opening remarks in his conference to the Salesian cooperators on Holy Saturday, in which he appealed for everybody's help for this and other Salesian works. Coming to the nitty-gritty, he said:[7]

"Suppose you have an income of one thousand lire, and you can live comfortably on eight hundred; the other two hundred come under the category of 'Give alms.'

" 'But how about an unforeseen crisis,' you may ask, 'a bad crop, a business failure?'

"Who can assure you that you will still be alive then? Besides, do you think that God who assists you now will abandon you, particularly if you have been generous for His sake? I say that one who does not give of his surplus is stealing from God and, as St. Paul says, 'will not possess the kingdom of God.'

" 'But my home is a modest one,' you may say. 'I have to replace my shabby and outdated furniture.'

"Well, let me take a look at it. I see some very elegant furnishings, costly dinnerware, a usable rug. Couldn't you forego replacing these articles? Instead of embellishing your floor and walls, put clothes on the backs of so many needy boys who are also members of Christ's body and God's very temple. I see also gold and silver jewelry, ornaments studded with diamonds.

" 'But those are heirlooms,' you tell me.

"Are you waiting for a thief to walk off with them? You neither use them nor need them. Then sell them, and give the money to the poor; you will be giving it to Jesus Christ and will earn a heavenly crown.

[6]*See* Vol. XIV, pp. 376ff. [Editor]
[7]*Bollettino Salesiano*, May 1882. [Author]

Thus you will neither impoverish yourselves nor deprive yourselves of necessities. And what is in that strongbox?

"'Nothing,' you say.

"Really? Let's see.

"'Just a few thousand gold French coins I am holding on to in case of grave illness,' you say. 'Besides, one of my neighbors is a nuisance, and I'd like to buy up his land and improve the looks of my own estate.'

"This, I tell you, is superfluous, and you are duty-bound to take that money which is helping no one and use it as Jesus Christ has told us. Do you still intend to keep it? Then listen: the devil will come and turn that money into a key to open the gates of hell for you. To avert such a misfortune, do as St. Lawrence did and help the poor. Sharing your wealth with the needy is like giving it to the angels, who will make of it a key to open heaven's gates to you at your death."

This excerpt, carried in the *Bollettino Salesiano*, upset a vicar forane in Emilia,[8] who very respectfully wrote his objections to Don Bosco.[9] He felt that the specific cases he had presented did not seem to accord with the prevalent doctrine of very trustworthy moral theologians, including St. Alphonsus Liguori. "I fully appreciate," he wrote, "that a sacred preacher who has so much at heart the salvation of souls and the cause of the poor cannot speak with mathematical precision and therefore has to employ rhetorical devices to bring home his message, but even then I feel he must not deviate from the ambit of truth. This holds all the more in this case when the preacher is unquestionably so pious and eloquent that he can rely on countless other expedients better able to produce the same results." He also expressed concern that ill-intentioned people might dare misrepresent Don Bosco's words or that inexperienced confessors might be misled by them. Hence his letter. Don Bosco delayed to answer, but answer he did. His reply shows that he had forgotten that the talk the priest objected to was the one he had given in Lucca.

Turin, June 30, 1882

Dear Father:

I am sorry I did not answer the letter which you so kindly sent me concerning my talk on almsgiving in Genoa. I was short of time, but now I believe that

[8]A region in northern Italy. [Editor]

[9]Father Raphael Veronesi, Montebudello near Pazzano (Bologna), May 26, 1882. [Author]

I must write not just a letter but an article or perhaps a series of articles for the *Bollettino Salesiano* on this matter. Please be assured I shall not quote names.

Thank you especially for your kindness and charity. I will always be pleased to have your opinion on our undertakings.

May heaven's generous blessings come upon you and your parishioners. Remember me too in your prayers.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

The promised article—a very long one—appeared[10] entitled "Reply to a Kind Critic on the Obligation and Extent of Almsgiving." In spirited language it brought together the general principles of almsgiving and the most commonly held opinions of scholars. The pen of Father Bonetti, editor of the *Bollettino Salesiano*, is obvious, but the editor's hand is definitely Don Bosco's. The vicar forane to whom it was directed answered over a year later,[11] moved to reply, he said, by a conversation he had had with "a diocesan priest, highly respected for both piety and learning." According to him the theories upheld in the article tallied with those of communism. His criticism, focused on the article's three main points and corroborated by authoritative moral theologians, is far from negligible. But in the matter of almsgiving Don Bosco was less concerned with theological arguments and more with the Gospel's commands and threats issued to the rich. Two categories of wealthy people he considered inexcusable, and he focused on them: truly good people who let their wealth lie idle in savings for no good reason, and those not-so-good people who, although they did token charity, freely squandered their money in pleasures and luxuries. "I have lived among the poor and I have also seen how the rich live," he said in 1887.[12] "In general I have noted that almsgiving does not amount to much and that many wealthy persons hardly make rightful use of their riches. No one has even the faintest idea of the strict account the Lord will demand of the goods He gave them for the relief of the poor." Certainly he was aware that theologians would not deny absolution to those who normally donate two percent of their income or

[10]*Bollettino Salesiano*, July 1882. [Author]

[11]Letter to Don Bosco, Montebudello, September 2, 1883. [Author]

[12]Rev. Giovanni Battista Francesia, *L'elemosina ossia il Paradiso assicurato ai ricchi nella persona dei poveri* [Alms or Paradise Assured to the Rich Through the Poor], Torino, Tipografia Salesiana, 1898, pp. 5-6. [Author]

half of what is over and above what they need to maintain their station in life. However, he also knew that to attach oneself at any time to earthly possessions is of itself a grave evil cutting off many heavenly favors which enable us to resist sin as well as the grace of repentance and final perseverance. Hence that love of souls which drove him to make heroic sacrifices in meeting the dire material and spiritual needs of the young also filled him with that far from popular courage to warn the rich to give and give generously, as St. Paul advised Timothy.[13]

One of the several wealthy women who had grasped the significance of Don Bosco's admonition was Mrs. Bernardine Magliano,[14] whom we have already met. He wrote to her from Lucca:

Lucca, April 7, 1882

Dear Mrs. Magliano:

Though I have heard from you several times I have no idea of where you are staying now or how you are doing.[15]

We have always prayed for you, and I daily remember you in my Holy Mass and ask that God may restore you to full health, return you to Turin to see your [spiritual] sons at Valdocco, and join us in a gala celebration of Mary, Help of Christians. How about it?

I am now at our house here in Lucca and leave tomorrow for Florence; thence to Rome to request a special blessing for you from the Holy Father. My address in Rome: Via Porta San Lorenzo, Sacred Heart Church, Rome.

[13]1 Tim. 6, 18. Jacques Bénigne Bossuet in his book *Sur l'éminente dignité des Pauvres* [Concerning the Eminent Dignity of the Poor], Paris, 1659, states: "If the unjust prejudices of our age prevent the rich from understanding the burdensomeness of riches, then, when they shall arrive at that place where excessive wealth becomes an evil, when they shall stand at that tribunal where they must render an account of not only how they used their talents but also of how they buried them and they shall have to *explain to that inexorable judge not only how much they spent, but also how much they saved and hoarded,* then, gentlemen, they will finally come to recognize that riches are but a heavy burden, and they will deeply regret that they did not free themselves of that load." Elsewhere, in *Sur l'impénitence finale* [Concerning Final Impenitence], Louvre, March 5, 1662, he says: "Those whose eyes have been opened to understand the full value of the Son of God's pronouncement, 'No man can serve two masters,' will readily grasp that, regardless of what their hearts are attached to, permissible or not, if they are entirely attached, they no longer belong to God. Therefore there can be a blameworthy attachment to things which in themselves are blameless. If this be so, my fellow Christians—and who will doubt it seeing that Truth Itself assures us of it?—then, you powerful and rich of the world, how your position frightens me!" [Author]

[14]*See* pp. 375ff. [Editor]

[15]*See* p. 549. [Editor] [Author]

God bless you, my dear Mrs. Magliano! May He keep you well and always in His holy grace. Please pray for me.

Your humble servant in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

At Pistoia, on his way to Florence, he was pleasantly surprised to find its Salesian director, Father [Faustinus] Confortóla,[16] who was expecting him with filial impatience. On reaching the City of Flowers, they went directly to visit the Mamma of the Salesians, Countess Uguccioni. As he did the year before, he celebrated Easter in Florence.

He arrived at the Salesian house between ten and eleven on Holy Saturday evening. A feeling of warm happiness flooded his heart because he felt that at last he was standing on property of his own. "Here we are on Salesian soil," he exclaimed on crossing the threshold. "We are home. Blessed be the Lord!"

On Easter morning he heard confessions, celebrated Mass and administered Communion to some thirty pupils, the very first group of youngsters in the hospice. That evening he gave them a sermon and imparted Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Then the countess arrived to take him in her coach on a courtesy visit to the archbishop. The latter gladly offered to preside at the Salesian cooperators' meeting the next evening.

As in the previous year, the meeting was held in the Church of St. Florence which was under the care of the Oratorian Fathers. It was not substantially different from any other conference, apart from the following summary view of the Salesian house in Florence presented by Father Confortóla:[17]

At Via Masaccio 8, outside Porta la Croce, the Salesians opened a festive oratory and a hospice; at great sacrifice they remodeled the buildings and purchased necessary furnishings. A good number of boys are now being cared for in their bodily and spiritual needs. Many other homeless lads keep begging to be admitted and rescued from very grave spiritual harm. But our house is now full, and we have no room even for one more, and so regretfully I am

[16]*See* p. 277. [Editor]

[17]Letter from Father Confortóla to Father Bonetti, Florence, May 3, 1882, published in the July issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano*. [Author]

forced to turn away even the most desperate cases with the distresssful words: "We have no room."

But that is not all. Besides the festive oratory and hospice, there is a crying need for day schools in this remote corner of the city where the only schools are Protestant. But, as for the hospice, so for the school, we need buildings, and how can we take on such an expensive undertaking when we are still saddled with a debt of twenty-four thousand lire just for the land? This notwithstanding, I shall begin building. For the rest I entrust myself to God, to the Immaculate Virgin, who has taken this house under Her special protection, and to your charity, my good friends of Florence.

Indeed it is to your charity that I now look for funds to pay our debts, to build a new chapel, to enlarge our present living quarters, and to meet the expenses of the festive oratory and day school. If we are to draw youngsters, we must provide games and equipment, books, and prizes. I look to you to provide the necessities of life, and whatever is indispensable for a sound civic and Christian education for the boys we now have and for those whom we hope later to accept. In their poverty and abandonment they have no other support than your kind hearts.

That you may meet our needs I earnestly ask you to make a monthly pledge, be it only a few lire or just one lira or half a lira or a few cents—just so that no one shirks from his personal share of aid.

A few volunteers, duly certified, will take your pledges and offerings and pass them on to the Salesian festive oratory's director at the end of each month. It is our hope that our work, thus funded by a steady subsidy and supported by your charity, will make progress and meet all expectations.

The members of the Catholic Youth Movement again volunteered to take up the collection, and then on the morning of April 12 they all gathered at the railway station to see him off. To each he gave a large medal of Mary, Help of Christians.

Father Berto's scanty diary is our only source of information from Don Bosco's arrival in Rome to the day of his audience with the Holy Father. We quote it in full:

Wednesday, April 12. We got to Rome at about 3:40 P.M. On leaving the train we found Mr. Alexander Sigismondi awaiting us in the station; outside stood Father Savio and some of the confreres and staff of the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice. Our parish priest wasn't feeling too well. Marquis Francis Patrizi and the construction superintendent came to see Don Bosco.

Thursday, April 13. Several people called on Don Bosco. In the evening, visit to Marchioness Villarios who is seriously ill.

Friday, April 14. Several French people called, as did Count Vespignani, architectural engineer. In the evening, visit to Cardinal Alimonda.

Saturday, April 15. Countess Stara of Turin called on Don Bosco.

Sunday, April 16. Evening dinner guests of English gentlemen residing in the parish.

Monday, April 17. All day at home. Evening visit to the cardinal secretary of state and to Cardinal Nina, our cardinal protector. Monday evening Chevalier Marchisio, former pupil, now a clerk at the General Post Office, brought a registered letter for Don Bosco containing two French banknotes of one thousand francs each. Attorney Leonori also dropped in at about 1:30 P.M.

Tuesday, April 18. Chevalier Marchisio called again this morning; Don Bosco gave him a postal receipt for a registered letter. Chevalier Marchisio brought it about noon. Don Bosco opened it and found that instead of four thousand lire as noted on the outside and inside of the envelope, it contained five thousand. A few minutes later Father Dalmazzo came in telling Don Bosco that he needed immediately five thousand lire for an overdue bill. We then understood why the envelope held five thousand lire rather than four. At my astonishment at this happy error, Don Bosco remarked, "Do you see now why there were five thousand lire instead of four, Father Berto? It was because we needed that much right now for an urgent bill." Blessed be Divine Providence! That evening Don Bosco called on the sick mother of Mrs. Mary Altini, Via Principe Umberto No. 46, 4th floor.

Wednesday, April 19. Dinner with the Sigismondis. Then visit to the Mother Superior at Tor de' Specchi.

Thursday, April 20. Don Bosco celebrated Mass for the Sisters of the Sacred Heart at Trinità dei Monti. Then he went to bless the son[18] of Countess Stanlein Belga (Trinità de' Monti No. 9, 2nd floor) who gave Don Bosco five hundred francs. The next call was to a clerk of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, Father John Zonghi, to discuss the apostolic vicariate to be erected in Patagonia for the Salesian mission.

Friday, April 21. Dinner at home. In the morning some American ladies dropped in for coffee with Don Bosco; they promised to pay for a column and pedestal of the Sacred Heart Church.[19] In the evening Father [Jerome] Saccheri, of San Remo, secretary of the Congregation of the Council, called; Attorney Leonori also called, but Don Bosco was out.

Saturday, April 22. Don Bosco was a dinner guest of Father Captier and Father Gueneau de Mussy (Quattro Fontane, 113); present also were the bishop of Bayonne and Bishop [Gaspard] Mermillod. Then on to Monsignor

[18]A later addition to the diary stated: "who died last summer." [Author]

[19]Later addition: "A few days later they brought him five thousand francs." [Author]

[Gabriel] Boccali. Then to Monsignor Rota at St. Paul's rectory, who invited us to dinner on Friday.

Sunday, April 23. Dinner with Cardinal [Cajetan] Alimonda, Via Ripetta, 102. Then on to Cardinal [Lucido] Alimonda, Via Cestari, 34. Left copy of Don Bosco's "Statement,"[20] and then went back home.[21]

Monday, April 24. Dinner at home with guests: Alexander and Matilda Sigismondi, Charles and Caroline Ciuti. Between 4 and 5, called on Mrs. Magistrelli, Piazza San Nicola de' Cesarini.

Tuesday, April 25. We were invited to St. Paul's but could not go. Toward 10:30 Don Bosco went to the Vatican. Father Tamietti and I accompanied him.

The unexpected appearance of Father [John] Tamietti is explained in a short letter of Don Bosco, who summoned him to Rome when he realized he would not be able to stop off at Este on his way back to Turin.[22]

Rome, April 17, 1882

My dear Father Tamietti,

It's becoming increasingly unlikely that I can stop over at Este, so I'd be very pleased if you could come to Rome.

Try to put all the hearts of the confreres and pupils into a little sack and make a present of them to me.

Tell Mr. Benedetto that I have prayed and will pray fervently for him and that any time I have requested the Holy Father's blessing for him, the Pope granted it.

God bless you and all our family at Este. Pray for me.

Always yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Three matters drew Don Bosco to Rome in 1882, the same three which had brought him there the year before. They were: the Church of

[20]*See* pp. 174f. [Editor]

[21]In writing about this visit, Father Berto told Father Bonetti: "This evening we saw Cardinal Parocchi who is more Salesian than we are. He is ready to help us in every way and is delighted that as Prefect of the Congregation of Seminaries and Universities and a member of the Congregation of the Council he can help us by championing our cause." [Author]

[22]Don Bosco wrote another letter in French to Madame Guisard[23] of Lyons, comforting her in her distress and recommending the Sacred Heart Church to her. He wrote to her again in November when her situation seemed to be improving. [Author]

[23]The correct spelling is Quisard, as pointed out in the *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco*, Volume IV, bottom of p. 435 after Letter 2691, but Don Bosco always spelled it "Guisard." [Editor]

the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the missions of South America, and various matters pending before the Roman Congregations. The ample coverage we have already given of the first and third concerns will convince the reader of their gravity.[24] The earliest appointment for a papal audience which Don Bosco could get was April 25, but this lengthy delay was due to circumstances unrelated to himself. From all that Father Berto and Father Lemoyne have told us, Pope Leo XIII was very gracious to him, even asking, "Do you have enemies here in Rome?"

"To my knowledge there is only one person who openly avows his hostility."

"Who is that?"

"Cardinal Ferrieri."

"All right. How about in Turin?"

"Just one there too, the archbishop."

"How about Buroni and Professor Papa?" (They were well-known Rosminians.)

"Both gentlemen are courteous, treat me nicely and, at least outwardly, seem to be well-disposed toward me."

"Any philosophical differences?"

"I never discuss those matters because they would immediately lead to a disagreement."

"Good," the Holy Father said with a smile. "Your archbishop has written and told me he wishes to set everything right. Do you object to that?"

"Not at all, Your Holiness. I only wish he would tell me why he keeps opposing our Congregation. I am ready to make any sacrifice. Up to now his charges against me have been vague and referring to people who do not belong to our Congregation, throwing the blame always upon the Salesians. Just once he wrote to me, saying he would restore our friendly relations to what they were before these squabbles if only I were to change my program of studies, that is, if in our schools I would adopt the philosophy and theology textbooks he imposed on his seminaries, namely Rosminianism. But this I'll never do."

"Very well," answered the Pope with a smile. "And now tell me, what can I do for your Congregation, for the Salesians?"

"I would wish that Your Holiness would assume temporary lead-

[24]*See* especially Chapter 13 and Chapters 6, 7, 8, 11 and 14. [Author]

ership of the Salesian Congregation and grant it the privileges enjoyed by other congregations."

"Where does the problem lie?"

"Cardinal Ferrieri."

"Then go in my name to see Archbishop [Innocent] Masotti, newly appointed secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and ask him to speak with me about it. He is an excellent churchman. Likewise call on Archbishop [Dominic] Jacobini, secretary of Propaganda, about setting up the apostolic vicariates in Patagonia."

After a slight reference to the Father Bonetti affair, the Pope asked, "Are you staying in Rome much longer?"

"Nine or ten days."

The Holy Father seemed to be very knowledgeable about the Salesian Congregation. The conversation then turned to the plan of having a standard catechism for every diocese in the world. Don Bosco warmly supported the project because of the difficulties he had run into in having so many boys from different dioceses who had learned different catechisms. He asked if he might express his views on this subject. "Your Holiness," he said, "you have already done so much in this direction, could you not order that this project be brought to completion?"

"It is a very delicate matter calling for lengthy and weighty study," the Pope answered.

"For that precise reason," Don Bosco replied, "the Pope's supreme authority is needed to cancel all delays. Among all your other historic briefs, you might issue one also in this matter. . . . We need this because so many catechisms lack precision of wording and, theologically speaking, even need correcting. For example the Lord's Prayer says *Dimitte nobis debita nostra sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris*. Some catechisms omit the *et*."

"Right."

"And for the Ninth Commandment of God we read in many catechisms: 'You shall not covet your neighbor's wife!' For a woman this is meaningless, and for children it is suggestive."

"How would you word it?"

"Just as I tell my boys to say it: 'You shall not covet somebody else's person.' On this point the French and German catechisms are more sensitive. They state: 'Do not desire the works of the flesh.' But I think that my suggestion is more decorous."

"You are right. What does your diocesan catechism say?"

"'Your neighbor's wife.' I made a suggestion to the archbishop, but he doesn't think it opportune to accept it."

"For the sake of unity, support your bishop in this."

"Of course."

"Do you have any other observations?"

"Many, depending on particular catechisms. I have sometimes come across inaccuracies concerning the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity in reply to the question, 'Who is Jesus Christ?' But it would take up much of our time if we were to go into these details. A uniform catechism composed by papal authority is needed to eliminate every inaccuracy."

"Several committees are now at work on this, you know," the Pope said. "Just a few days ago I was told that the task is moving along nicely. The plan is this: first, to compile a theologically correct catechism for use in seminaries; second, to compile a complete catechism for adults; third, to condense this larger catechism into a smaller one for children."

"That's a great deal of work and ultimately will produce only summaries of theological treatises."

"Certainly it is a lengthy undertaking. Worse still, it has been delayed by the death of two committee prelates."

"I'm sorry to say, Holy Father, that with this method all those engaged in this work will have time to die, and their successors too."

"What would you do?"

"Well, Your Holiness, I would think you might choose an inexpensive catechism used in any diocese and give it to a cardinal or other scholarly prelate. He could read it and properly revise it. Then you could read it yourself or have someone check it out for you and eventually declare it the official text of every diocese."

The Pope listened kindly, nodding in approval, but wisely recognized that there were obstacles to be overcome. Perhaps some such work might be undertaken again when the Vatican Council will be reconvened, all the more so after the publication of Cardinal Peter Gasparri's catechism.

The audience lasted about three quarters of an hour, after which Father Berto and Father Tamietti were asked to come in to greet the Holy Father. Then on arriving home Don Bosco dictated to Father Berto the following letter addressed to all his directors and missionaries.

Rome, April 25, 1882

Beloved in the Lord:

Today, His Holiness, Pope Leo XIII, graciously received me in private audience.

He wholeheartedly bestows his apostolic blessing upon all the confreres and their pupils, upon our Salesian cooperators and benefactors. Please communicate this joyful news to all the friends of our work and to all who volunteer their services to our holy Catholic Church.

May God keep us all in His holy grace! I ask you to remember me in your community prayers.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco[25]

The next most important event of Don Bosco's stay in Rome after the papal audience was the Salesian cooperators' meeting held, as usual, at Tor de' Specchi on the afternoon of April 27. That morning, after celebrating Mass in the church of the Oblates of St. Frances of Rome, he called on Monsignor [Gabriel] Boccali with an important letter. It seems that a priest in Siena had informed Don Bosco that the owner of a mine valued at sixty million lire, which was on his Perugia estate, had, on his death, bequeathed one third of his holdings to the Pope, one third to a man named Piccolomini, and one third to Don Bosco. That is all we know of this bequest; it may have not been a serious proposal at all.

Archbishop Julius Lenti of Sida, vice-regent[27] of Rome, presided at the meeting; present also was Cardinal [Cajetan] Alimonda. Don Bosco opened the meeting with a message from Leo XIII. Two days previously the Pope had asked: "When are you holding your conference?"

"Next Thursday, Your Holiness," Don Bosco answered.

"Tell them to pray and to work."

After stressing the need of uniting work with prayer, Don Bosco presented his customary report of the Salesian apostolate. When he came to speak of Rome, he exclaimed, "This is a hard nut to crack!" Then he described the impasse, or at least as much as he prudently

[25]In turn, the directors informed the more outstanding benefactors that the Pope had granted them a special blessing.[26] [Author]

[26]We omit a sample of such notification. [Editor]

[27]This is the title of a bishop who in Rome assists the cardinal vicar. [Author]

could, asking, "What are we to do?" The answer had already been given by the Pope: prayer and work. Both themes Don Bosco developed in the latter half of his talk.

Cardinal Alimonda did not intend to be a passive listener. He eloquently launched into his theme as follows: "Many who either do not know the Salesian Congregation or have a misconception of it keep asking, 'Is it a good work? Is it in accord with the Lord's Spirit?' And they murmur . . . as did Jesus' disciples." Then, recalling the Gospel episode of the apostles' doubts and mutterings about His messiahship, he quoted Jesus' answer appealing to His deeds, and he applied it to the Salesian Congregation. He again called to mind the facts which Don Bosco had just brought out in his talk and which closely paralleled those of Our Holy Redeemer. *The blind see.* The secularization of the schools had blinded the young to their own inward power of sight in their soul and conscience, causing them to stumble into many pitfalls; the Salesians, without underplaying school instruction, also opened their eyes to heavenly horizons. *The crippled walk.* By being deprived of religious instruction children also had their moral standards destroyed; in their houses and schools, the Salesians reinforced those standards. *The lepers are made clean.* Immorality is the worst leprosy of the young. How many are the schools of immorality! The Salesians instilled purity into the hearts of the young. *The deaf hear.* The worst deafness is to shut one's ears to God's word and to disregard the Church's voice; by gathering the young with motherly concern in festive oratories and enabling them to hear the words of eternal life, the Salesians have restored hearing to children. *The dead rise.* Sin is the soul's death. The world no longer cares for religious practices and sacraments; by accustoming the young to the sacraments, the Salesians have started them off in the life of the Spirit and have breathed into them the breath of new life. *The Gospel is preached to the poor.* Jesus did not go knocking at the doors of palaces or at the homes of kings, but he loved the poor and preached the Gospel to them; the Salesians gathered poor boys together and were ministers of good wherever they went, even to far-off Patagonia. After demonstrating the value of Salesian work, the cardinal asked his hearers to be generous with their offerings on behalf of the Church in the name of Catholic Rome.[28]

[28]This is the précis of an article of May 2 in *Unità Cattolica*, signed A.M., Father Andrew Maggia, a Salesian cooperator. [Author]

From April 28 to May 9, Father Berto's notes are as scanty as his previous ones;[29] the only notation of any substance is dated May 5.[30] Father [Joseph] Daghero had brought with him to Rome from Magliano seven boys, some from the seminary and some from the hospice, to offer Don Bosco their respects and to invite him to visit his two communities. Don Bosco decided to present the lads to the Pope, and on the morning of May 5 he set out for the Vatican with Cardinal [Louis] Bilio, their bishop, in the latter's coach. The cardinal was immediately admitted to the Pope, whom he informed that Don Bosco was waiting in the antechamber and wished to speak with him just for a minute. However, the Pope was due to receive a pilgrimage in a few moments. "I am sorry," he excused himself, "but I need some time to prepare for an audience with an Irish pilgrimage." Then Cardinal Bilio told the Pope of two thorns piercing Don Bosco to the heart. "Holy Father," he said, "Don Bosco begs Your Holiness to grant him the privileges [enjoyed by other religious congregations]. Two thorns pierce his side; one is [Cardinal] Ferrieri, the other is the archbishop of Turin. Don Bosco is a blessing for my seminary, and here in Rome he is building the Sacred Heart Church. Console him, Holy Father!"

"Certainly, certainly," the Pope answered. "We shall console him because I really care for Don Bosco."

That day, through Cardinal Bilio, Don Bosco came to meet Cardinal [Miecislaus] Ledochowski, the newly elevated Cardinal Angelo Jacobini of Genzano,[31] and Cardinal [John] Simeoni. After speaking to the pilgrims, Pope Leo XIII left the Throne Room and found awaiting him kneeling in line Don Bosco, Father Daghero, Father Berto, and the

[29]Surely Father Berto's diary is omitting many other things. For example, we know from other sources that Don Bosco paid several other visits to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. [Author]

[30]It is a note for Father Lazzero, dated the previous day; the envelope is marked: "M.A. Rev. Lazzero." M.A. stands for "Maria Ausiliatrice."

Rome, May 4, 1882

My friend,

Be a good soldier of Christ. The flame of charity burns bright in tribulation. Soon all difficulties will be smoothed. Be manly if you want to be crowned victorious. Regards and greetings to all. Pray for me.

Fr. John Bosco

[31]The other Jacobini named previously was Dominic Jacobini who became a cardinal later. Cardinal Ludwig [Jacobini] had been elevated to the purple in 1879. [Author]

seminarians and boys of Magliano. He walked down the line with Cardinal Bilio, speaking to each one separately and patting the cheeks of the younger boys. Finally, he blessed them and retired.

While in Rome Don Bosco became the means of the Lord's comfort for the great servant of God, Mother Paula Frassinetti, foundress of the Sisters of St. Dorothy.[32] She had known him for several years and admiringly sought to imitate him as best she could in her personal daily life. Learning that she was ill, Don Bosco stopped in to see her. All the sisters were thrilled by his visit, for they hoped that through his presence and blessing their Reverend Mother would be restored to health. "I do not believe that Paula had any thought of recovering," Capecelatro wrote, "but she took heart in knowing that the Lord God was comforting her in her advanced age through this great apostle of charity." She was moved with holy joy at seeing him and recommended herself to his prayers. His Christian love and kindliness and warm friendliness for their mother cheered the sisters, though it did not fully meet their expectations. They were hoping for a miracle, a divine favor, or at least a prophetic utterance to assure them of her recovery. But, standing at her bedside, he spoke only words of Christian comfort. As soon as he left her side, the sisters besieged him with questions to wrest from his lips a single word, a mere hint to ease their fears. But with gentle kindness Don Bosco simply replied, "My daughters, your mother's heavenly crown is ready." "His reply," writes Capecelatro, "was understandably sad and joyful for the sisters. It was sad because it held out no hope of a longer life for their foundress, but it was also joyful because it spoke of the crown awaiting her in the kingdom of heaven."

Don Bosco left Rome the evening of May 9 and went to Magliano, where he stayed with the boys and Salesians until the morning of the 11th, when he left for Rimini by way of Foligno and Falconara.

Changing trains at Falconara, he entered a compartment occupied by a Lieutenant Montanari of Ravenna and an Oratorian priest of Florence. The former was traveling from Ancona to Turin. The priest, who had attended both of Don Bosco's conferences at Florence and Rome, was returning from Loreto. He recognized Don Bosco immediately.

[32]Cardinal [Alphonse] Capecelatro, *Vita della Serva di Dio Paola Frassinetti* [*Life of the Servant of God Paula Frassinetti*, Desclée 1900, p. 496), erroneously ascribes this event to the month of June. [Author]

Both fellow travelers were delighted to share his company; the lieutenant particularly enjoyed listening to him and kept repeating how thrilled he was by this pleasant encounter. He could not accept the fact that the Pope had not chosen a man like Don Bosco for the cardinalate, nor could he understand why he would not be more effective in his work as a cardinal than as a humble simple priest. As they parted, he asked if he might be allowed to welcome him at the railway station upon his arrival in Turin or to call on him at the Oratory.

It was an outstanding young priest of Rimini, Father Francis Cagnòli, who had persuaded Don Bosco to include that city in his travel plans.

For five years after his ordination Father Cagnòli was tutor to the distinguished Massani family. In 1881 he applied to the Salesian novitiate at San Benigno and was accepted. However, in October he fell ill of a throat ailment which gradually degenerated into acute catarrhal bronchial pneumonia that brought him to the edge of the grave. The progressive stages of his illness seemed to have eroded all hopes of recovery, and so Don Bosco was called to give him his blessing and comfort him at the hour of death. Don Bosco instead placed his hand on the priest's heart and told him, "This is no time for you to leave us. You have so much more good to do, my dear Father Cagnòli! Get up for a little while tomorrow, and later we shall send you to Rimini for convalescence." He then gave him the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians. That was the eve of the feast of the Immaculate Conception. From that moment on, the young priest's health improved rapidly without benefit of doctors or medicines; a week later he felt strong enough to set out for Rimini. His parents and relatives, knowing his condition and advised of his arrival, decried the imprudence of making such a trip, but Don Bosco told him, "Go without fear. Trust in Mary, Help of Christians and be at ease because the trip will not fatigue you." So indeed it happened. Father Cagnòli traveled about five hundred kilometers, taking what nourishment he could and enduring considerable strain in the railroad station of Bologna, but on reaching home he felt better than he had at his departure from Turin. Nor was this a momentary burst of strength, because, as he affirmed, his health kept improving so much that from 1868 on he never felt better.[33] In 1887 he

[33]From his report from Rimini, March 1, 1882, published in Lemoyne's *La Stella del Mattino*, p. 69. As propriety required, Don Bosco's part is wisely shrouded in silence, but we also have

succeeded Father [Francis] Dalmazzo as parish priest of the Sacred Heart Church in Rome.

This recent happening was well known in clerical circles in Rimini and elsewhere, and it served to heighten the anticipation of Don Bosco's coming. The clergy was the first to show its admiration of this man of God. On his arrival, the seminary rector met him with the bishop's coach. Bishop Francis Battaglini, who was hosting him at his residence, descended the stairway to meet him. He showered Don Bosco with kindly attention and gave him the bedroom in which Pius IX had stayed during his famous tour of Romagna.

On Friday, May 12, he celebrated Mass in the Church of St. Claire at the altar of Our Lady, Mother of Mercy, where in 1850 on that very day, in the presence of thousands, the Madonna's eyes were seen to move. After Mass, he briefly exhorted his listeners to persevere in their devotion to Mary, Mother of Mercy. His Mass was served by two newly ordained priests, later parish priests, Father Berlini and Father Tendi, who never forgot their fortunate experience.

As Don Bosco was speaking with people who wished to see him in the sacristy, Bishop Battaglini arrived to take him to a meeting of Rimini's noble ladies who dedicated themselves to good works, particularly aiding and visiting the sick. After a personal introduction by the bishop, Don Bosco immediately suggested that they all enroll as Salesian cooperators, a proposal they gladly accepted. He then urged them also to reach out to boys and girls by helping the parish priests in the teaching of catechism. Next he visited the seminary and gave his blessing to about seventy seminarians, some quite young, with a few kindly words. He dined with the bishop as guest of the Priests of the Most Precious Blood[34] [also known as the Buffalini Fathers] at St. Claire's. After lunch he went to the hospital, once the residence of Frances of Rimini, to bless a patient who had been bedridden over the past forty-two years. He was taken to a window from which he could see the spot where St. Anthony had wrought the miracle of the donkey kneeling in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament and the beach where the famous wonder-worker preached to the fish. Afterward Mr. Francis Massani asked him to bless his wife who was ill. Don Bosco told her that she

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other written reports of this incident, among them one by Sister Clelia Genghini, Father Cagnòli's niece and secretary of the superior chapter of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. [Author]

[34]Founded in 1815 in Italy by St. Gaspar del Bufalo (1786-1837). [Editor]

would not be healed of her illness, but would still live a long life—a prophecy which came true, for she died at the age of seventy-two.

He told a young priest, Father Joseph Casicci, who was there at the time, that he would soon be appointed parish priest, and so indeed he was. These visits over, Don Bosco returned to St. Claire's for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and to receive in audience several pious women, among them Marchioness Cima.

On his third day in Rimini Don Bosco celebrated Mass in the cathedral and then resumed his audiences and visits. Wherever he went he was followed by large crowds with whom he conversed familiarly. Many knelt begging for his blessing. On the afternoon of May 13 as he bade farewell to the bishop to go on to Faenza, the renowned bishop asked for his blessing, but Don Bosco anticipated him, quickly kneeling before him to receive his blessing instead.

Several town institutions had sought and obtained the honor of a visit from him, among others the recently opened festive oratory directed by Canon Venturini, the Baldini kindergarten and the city hospital. The kindergarten was named after Count Alexander Baldini, who donated it for the care of poor children. In 1882 it was being directed by Miss Anna Cervellieri, living today [1934]. With vivid memory of recall she expressed her impressions of him in an interview in the year of his canonization, 1934, as follows:[35] "At first I saw Don Bosco as a very serious, thoughtful man . . . and so I stood quite silenced before one whose reputation for holiness had preceded him. But when I saw him play lovingly with the children who instantly took to him as to a father, when at first hand I observed how gentle, simple, and unassuming he was, I felt my spirit rise and my heart fill with admiration for this good priest of Turin. The children recited a few appropriate pieces of rhyme for him, and in reply he thanked them and told them to be good and virtuous. Before leaving he gave me some medals and said these very words: 'Pray for me and my family, and I shall pray for you and yours.'

"'Our family is so tiny,' the orphanage bursar, Mr. Leurini, intervened.

"'Together,' replied Don Bosco, 'our small families make one large one.'"

In the city hospital he met a boy who, orphaned of his father, had

[35]*Don Bosco ritorna!* Memorial issue, Rimini 1934, Garattoni Press. [Author]

recently lost also his mother in this hospital. He was ill with bronchial pneumonia. Sister Superior, feeling deeply for him, extended his hospital stay, keeping him busy with little tasks suited to his age and fragile health. One morning she called him, dressed him in his best, and brought him into the lounge to meet a priest. It was Don Bosco, who talked to the boy in a fatherly way. "How old is he?" he asked the superior.

"Just over ten."

"A bit too young!" Don Bosco replied. "He's got to grow a little more. If he is a good boy, I'll take him with me next year."

The following year Don Bosco, who never made idle promises, asked Father Lazzero to write in his name to the superior of the hospital and tell her that if the lad was still willing to go with Don Bosco, he would gladly accept him. A priest accompanied the boy for part of his journey and, before leaving, told him, "When the train pulls into the Turin station, take out your white handkerchief and wave it. A tall, thin gentleman will meet you. His name is Mr. [John] Garbellone.[36] Go with him." All went well. And thus it was that Peter Cenci, master tailor, whose pupils would later be legion, came to the Oratory. He proudly used to say that he dressed Don Bosco when living, when dead, and when beatified.

A local periodical[37] commented on Don Bosco's visit to Rimini as follows:

> Don Bosco's coming to Rimini was almost unexpected, but no sooner was it announced than the prestige of his name and virtues drew vast crowds of people wherever he went. Indeed, during the two days he was our guest he scarcely had enough time for a brief nightly repose, so tightly was he beset by all sorts of people wherever he went, whether churches or homes of the sick. Those who could catch sight of him or kiss his hand considered themselves fortunate, while those to whom he gave a word of counsel or comfort felt they were highly blessed. People believed that they saw a saint, that they were receiving a saint's blessing and listening to a saint's words.

The memories of Rimini stayed with Don Bosco all the way to Turin, so much so that, back at the Oratory, meeting young Francis Tomasetti,

[36]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

[37]*La Parola* [The Word], Catholic philosophical-literary magazine, Rimini, Malvolti Press, May 1882, pp. 157f. [Author]

today [1934] the Congregation's general procurator in Rome, he told him, "I was in your part of the country, in Rimini. What wonderful people I met there! They gave poor Don Bosco a princely welcome!"

We shall not follow Don Bosco to Faenza because we have already covered that part of his journey in Chapter 10.[38] As his train traveled between Bologna and Turin his secretary noticed that Don Bosco suddenly looked perturbed. "Who knows how Franchino is doing now?" Don Bosco exclaimed. "I fear indeed that he will end up as did Tavella." Then he again fell silent, lost in thought. Tavella was an aspirant who had died suddenly after a brief illness. On the morning of May 16 Franchino also died very suddenly back home in Rubiana, where he had gone to regain his health. As soon as Father Berto, his uncle, got to Turin, he was told that the lad was dying; he rushed to his side only to find him in a coma and close to death. He was a fifth-year student in secondary school. Father Matthew Ottonello, his teacher, had jotted alongside his name on the year's final scholastic report to Don Bosco: "A model for all in every way." Don Bosco, who cared a good deal for the lad, in speaking to the boys two nights after his death, remarked, "I doubt that at his age St. Aloysius was any better."

There were others too who were dear to him and who passed away before his return. We have already mentioned Chevalier [Charles] Fava;[39] in addition, two very saintly priests of the archdiocese also died, Father Robert Murialdo and Canon Francis Marengo. Father Murialdo, a cousin of the Servant of God Father Leonard Murialdo, founder of the Pious Society of St. Joseph, had been a tireless associate of Don Bosco in the festive oratories and for several years had directed the Guardian Angel Oratory in Vanchiglia, Turin. Canon Marengo taught theology in the Turin seminary and from the Oratory's first beginnings had taught catechism to the upper grade boys as well as moral theology to the clerics. In his last years he was extraordinary confessor to the boarders, often hearing confessions for hours at a stretch on Saturday evenings. The May issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano* hailed them as "twin jewels of Turin's clergy, sincere, reliable friends, exemplary priests worthy of all trust."

Don Bosco also mourned the death of two women who had been real

[38]*See* pp. 283-294. [Editor]
[39]*See* p. 374. [Editor]

mothers to the Salesians: Mrs. Pauline Clara née Pollietti, and Duchess Anna Costanza of Laval-Montmorency, who died at Borgo Cornalese; the latter was the daughter of Joseph De Maistre.

We have noticed that Don Bosco had one main preoccupation throughout his long journey through France and Italy, and that was how he might increase the number of his cooperators. By speaking of the Salesian Congregation in minute detail, he hoped to win over to it many helpers who, fully appreciating its mission, would work by its side to foster its growth throughout the world. This was something he was to do to the end of his life, striving his best to have the Association of Salesian Cooperators, not the least of his creations, sink deep and sturdy roots.

Everywhere he went the impression made by his presence was that of a saint. This conviction increasingly took hold of people—not only the less learned, but also the intelligentsia, including clerical circles—so that an overall sense of veneration for him grew with the years. On one occasion in Rome, Father Berto being present, Monsignor Augustine Caprara, promoter of the faith for the Sacred Congregation of Rites, who happened to be in the reception room of Cardinal [Dominic] Bartolini when Don Bosco entered for an audience with His Eminence, pointed him out to a group of priests with the words, "Do you see that priest? I hope that his cause for beatification will be presented to our consideration and that I will be chosen devil's advocate." That honor he did not actually have, but it is to his credit that he recognized Don Bosco's worth and even then unabashedly proclaimed his high regard for him.

# CHAPTER 18

## *1882: Memorable Anecdotes*

MINGLED with the major events of Don Bosco's life in 1882 were also other incidents having no particular relevance to any of them. Since we could not insert them into our narrative without disrupting its flow, we are assembling them, as is our practice, in a chapter of their own, linking them only to the various individuals with whom they are connected. First, we dwell on the feast of Mary, Help of Christians.

### 1. The Feast of Mary, Help of Christians

Don Bosco got back to the Oratory as the novena to Our Lady began. His first thought was to invite all the cooperators in Turin to a conference which he scheduled for men at 7 P.M. on the 21st and for women at 3 P.M. on the 23rd. The invitation read: "I respectfully request the honor of your presence at our conference. Many are the projects we have initiated this past year, and I would like to briefly bring them to the attention of our cooperators who live in Turin and its environs and are able to attend." A postscript underscored three points: the persons invited, the papal blessing, and the purpose of the collection to be taken up. "This invitation," he wrote, "is being sent to the Salesian cooperators and to all who are interested in learning more about this association, men and women alike, each to his or her respective conference. Pope Leo XIII is bestowing his special apostolic blessing on all who will attend, and all may receive the plenary indulgence, in accord with our regulations. A collection will be taken up, and all proceeds will go to the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome and its adjoining hospice. I ask the cooperators to solicit funds for this purpose from their relatives and friends and either to bring the dona-

tions to the conference or to send them to the Rev. John Bosco, superior of the Association of Salesian Cooperators."

The diocesan chancery seems to have raised no objections to the bishop who was asked to pontificate at the feast, though it may well have done so, considering the lateness with which it was being notified. Bishop Jucundus Salvai of Alessandria was invited. His reply witnesses to his lofty esteem and affection for Don Bosco: "I most heartily say yes to your thoughtful invitation to participate in the solemn festivity of Mary, Help of Christians by celebrating the pontifical Mass. Next Wednesday morning, with God's help and Our Lady's, I hope to be with you. Looking forward to greeting you personally, I am cordially yours. . . ."[1]

Don Bosco was overjoyed at receiving a telegram from Rome. It was sent by Monsignor Nicholas Marini, personal chamberlain to His Holiness. He had been Don Bosco's overnight guest on May 22 on his return from Madrid, where he had gone as the Pope's special delegate in bringing the cardinal's hat to Archbishop Joachim Lluch [y Garriga] of Seville, a dear friend of the Salesians at Utrera. Monsignor Marini had purposely stopped at Turin to call on Don Bosco, who took him through the Church of St. John the Evangelist and asked him to celebrate Mass for the community. Having seen for himself the ceaseless stream of pilgrims to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians and their prayerfulness, he sent a cable to the Holy Father to inform him of his arrival in Turin and his forthcoming departure for Rome, requesting also an apostolic blessing for Don Bosco and the faithful. Cardinal Ludwig Jacobini, secretary of state, replied on the day of the feast: "Msgr. Marini, c/o Don Bosco, Turin. His Holiness [is] grateful for sentiments [of] filial affection and prayers of Don Bosco and the faithful of Turin. [He] sends requested apostolic blessing."

France could not have been better represented at the feast of 1882. Count Colle and his wife were the official sponsors of the festivities.[2] Father Mendre of Marseille celebrated the community Mass at which practically all the faithful received Holy Communion. The daughter of Marchioness Gaudemarie and Miss Rohland, both of whom had been miraculously cured in March at Cannes,[3] came to offer their thanks to

[1]Letter to Don Bosco, Alessandria, May 22, 1882. [Author]
[2]*See* pp. 86f. [Editor]
[3]*See* pp. 422f. [Editor]

Mary, Help of Christians. With them was Countess De Corson of Paris, who had surprisingly recovered from pneumonia at Hyères after a novena to Mary, Help of Christians, as was also Miss Claire Louvet, whom we shall meet in the next chapter. Also other pilgrims came from France.

Bishop Salvai spoke with cordial simplicity about the heavenly beauty of the celebration. Later, as he was leaving, the bishop, deeply moved by the day's events, could not help exclaiming to Don Bosco, "I believe that celebrations like this can happen only in paradise!"

Everyone was convinced that God willed this cult of Mary, Help of Christians, for His intervention could be seen in the granting of many wide-ranging favors.

## 2. Heavenly Favors

How trustfully people believed in the power of Don Bosco's intercession with Our Heavenly Queen, Mary, Help of Christians! For instance, how moving is the distressful plea of a Vendôme noble family who in June 1882 sent him twenty-three hundred francs for the Sacred Heart Church [in Rome], begging him to win not one, but six favors from Mary, Help of Christians. "I have lost all hope of obtaining mercy except through your prayers," the woman wrote. "As for myself, I believe, I hope, and I love, whatever may happen to me in the future." On top of the letter Don Bosco jotted a few words for whoever was to answer for him: "Thanks. Priests and boys will pray and receive Communion. We are sure to obtain whatever redounds to God's glory."

Don Bosco was already well known in high Parisian circles. Queen Isabella II of Spain, who had abdicated in favor of her son Alfonso XII in 1870, was then living in Paris and, of course, kept following events in Spain with anxious concern. In 1882 Madrid and Barcelona were rocked with what superficially appeared to be an economic but actually was a political turmoil, causing some fear for the monarchy. During the novena to Mary, Help of Christians Don Bosco received a laconically worded note from Paris: "Her Majesty Queen Isabella II of Spain and *her whole royal family*,[4] Count and Countess Walsh and Mrs. Street of

[4]The words in italics were underlined in the French text which is still in our possession. It is dated: *St. Augustine, Paris, May 17, 1882.* [Author]

Klindworth commend themselves to the powerful prayers of Don Bosco."

People in Italy and abroad reported graces received, giving much of the credit to Don Bosco. For instance, Baron Anthony Manno, commissioner of the Royal Heraldic Council, wrote him, among other things,[5] after having served as "sponsor" of the feast of St. Aloysius: "Last year I was in painful distress and begged for your prayers to Our Blessed Lady, Help of Christians. Now I am *almost* free of my affliction, miraculously I may say. Please add a further Hail Mary for me, that I may fully regain that peace of mind which I so badly need, that I may give thought to my soul, and look after my beloved family. Please say this Hail Mary. I have unshaken trust and firmly rooted hope that I shall receive the comfort I yearn for. Please say it!" Under his signature he wrote "An unworthy Salesian cooperator."

A certain Mrs. Fruero wrote to Father [Angelo] Lago from Nice on June 19: "I was in bed for two weeks with a most painful neuralgic fever. I then remembered having a signed letter of Don Bosco's. I applied that letter to my aching head and from that moment on the pain eased, and, though weak, I feel better. Praised be God!" Mrs. Fruero, who was then translating the novena of Mary, Help of Christians into French, closed with the words: "Please remember me to our revered father. Tell him that if a certain business matter now in hand turns out well, I shall visit him at Turin and pray before the holy altar of Our Mother, Mary, Help of Christians." She signed herself "A loyal cooperator."

Countess de Liniers de Champdeniers had an only child, a six year old boy afflicted with diphtherial angina; his parents had little hope of his recovery. At the height of their distress they called upon Don Bosco's intercession, and their son was saved. From 1882 on the countess annually sent five hundred francs to Don Bosco and later to Father Rua[6] for Salesian works.

Others flocked to beseech the Blessed Virgin for favors through the intercession of the one they considered Her treasurer. Attorney Maurice Joumar, stricken by paralysis of the neck and spine, had not spoken a word for two years. He was taken to Don Bosco, and on receiving the

[5]Letter, Turin, July 6, 1882. [Author]

[6]Father Rua received this written report six years later, on the occasion of Don Bosco's death, from the Chateau du Pont Jarno Champdeniers, Deux Sèvres, February 5, 1888. [Author]

blessing of Mary, Help of Christians he was immediately able to utter the name of Mary. He instantly felt so much better that he wrote on a sheet of paper: "I thank you for my instant recovery; blessed be God. Maurice Joumar." The healing took place in Don Bosco's room on June 14.[7]

Even more astounding is the cure which took place at the Oratory in the fall of 1882.[8] Mrs. Joan Le Mire, living in Misevent in the township of Pont-de-Poitte in the district of Jura, was wasting away with consumption. The foremost physicians of the area and even of Paris had been consulted, but no one could arrest the progress of the consumption; the young woman kept losing weight until she was reduced to fifty-five pounds. They would dress her, and then her husband, Paul Noël, would pick her up in his arms like a child and take her from place to place as she desired. A raw egg with a pinch of salt was all the food she was able to take in the course of a day when she could swallow.

Faith was the hallmark of that family. Having been acquainted for some time with Don Bosco's works, they wrote to him, and in May Paul Noël sent him three thousand francs. Don Bosco's reply, handwritten in his own inimitable style, came in three pages, telling him that on June 29 he would ask his boys to offer their Communions and good deeds for his wife, while he would celebrate Mass for her. This assurance lifted Noël's spirits, so strong was his trust in Don Bosco's intercession.

Still, no progress was noticeable and time was running out for the sick woman. More letters were written, and Don Bosco wrote back, saying: "Bring your sick wife to Turin."

"How can I?" the husband replied. "She is in no condition to travel."

"Bring her all the same," Don Bosco insisted.

A railroad sleeping car was booked, and the woman was brought to Turin by easy stages. On their arrival, the husband notified Don Bosco from his hotel that she was in Turin, alive, as he had assured them. "Very well," Don Bosco answered. "If she is to be cured, you must bring her to my Mass tomorrow morning so that she may pray there."

[7]This original document is in our archives. [Author]

[8]It was not until 1897 that this account was sent to Father Rua at the insistence of Mrs. Le Mire, by her brother-in-law, Mr. Bouillons. He stated that he could no longer recall the month, but declared himself ready to testify to every detail of this cure, even under oath. [Author]

Without venturing an answer, Paul Noël brought his wife to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians the next morning. After Mass they went to the sacristy. Don Bosco told her: "Madame, what we need here is an act of faith. You have been cured. Consider yourself healed; resume your full normal routine." To her own wonderment, she was able to eat. Some days later she returned home overjoyed, beside herself with happiness, once more taking pleasure in life. Her entire family rendered thanks to God, to Mary, Help of Christians, and to Don Bosco.

When Don Bosco went to Hyères as the guest of Count de la Flecheray, later Marquis de Aorillard, a friend of the Le Mire family, he inquired about the lady. He was told that she had relapsed almost to her former condition. "Don't let that worry you," was his answer. "All will be well within a few months." Indeed the predicted recovery was crowned by the birth of a long desired son, and later she gave birth to another child. In 1897, according to a report we received, both children were attending the Jesuit school in Dijon.

Mr. Le Mire saw Don Bosco several times after that; Don Bosco used to say of him, "Mr. Le Mire and I are like two brothers." This, our source remarks, "half canonized him." Mr. Paul Noël Le Mire was indeed a very religious and most charitable person. Our source concludes: "As we see it, Mrs. Le Mire's very survival must be seen as a miracle obtained through Don Bosco, who thus repaid his benefactors with far more than they had given him."[9]

Not everyone agreed with this view of the graces granted by Mary, Help of Christians. As usual, Turin's perfidious newspaper, *Cronaca dei Tribunali*,[10] published an article crudely headed *Don Bosco e la sua bottega* [Don Bosco and His Shop]. Taking a cue from D'Espiney's book, which it characterized as "a biography of Valdocco's so-called saint," containing "a number of miracles" performed by Don Bosco "with the assistance of his Madonna," he claimed to unmask for its readers a "hoax" which some "muddled heads" were using to "turn the youth entrusted to them into so many imbeciles," as well as Don Bosco's own cunning devices "to worm money out of the pockets of credulous people." To back up this second allegation he gave a translation from the French of a letter written by Don Bosco the previous year

[9]In 1882 Don Bosco himself wrote several accounts of graces, giving the glory to Mary, Help of Christians and concealing his own role. [Author]

[10]June 3, 1882 issue. [Author]

to Marchioness Vernon Bonneuil, which the lady's husband had produced in a Paris court in legal proceedings for marital separation. Though the letter had nothing to do with the writer's allegation, it was published anyway. The marchioness had sent Don Bosco five hundred francs for a favor received and promised to send an additional twenty-five thousand if he would obtain another, very dear to her, from Our Lady. Don Bosco replied:[11]

San Benigno Canavese, September 8, 1881

Dear Marchioness:

I received your kind letter telling me that the surgery which so distressed you was successful and that you are now quite fully recovered. May God be thanked and blessed for this grace!

In your letter you enclosed five hundred francs for the Sacred Heart Church in Rome. May Mary, Help of Christians duly reward you, all the more so because in your charity you say that this is the first of others to come. I thank God and shall not fail to pray particularly that He may bring about the union you referred to, as long as it redounds to His glory. However, remind those concerned that I accept their promise of twenty-five thousand francs, *though they should be mindful that the Gospel clearly states*: "Give and it shall be given to you," not, "Promise and it shall be given to you." I would therefore suggest that the best thing to do is to start giving something in advance.

I shall not forget you and your intentions in my daily Mass, particularly that you, your relatives and friends may tread the path to paradise.

God bless you, my charitable marchioness. Please pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Patently, the letter contained nothing, absolutely nothing, blamable in itself or in relation to Don Bosco, not even in the words underlined by the journalist. However, we know only too well: "*To the unclean all is unclean.*" Too lofty was Don Bosco's repute for holiness, far beyond the reach of any base defamers to cast a pall, even for a moment, upon its brightness.

We have no account of St. John the Baptist's feast day,[12] apart from

[11]Unable to trace the original letter, we are giving a translation as published in the Italian newspaper, with minor editing in spots where the style was distinctively French. [Author]

[12]Don Bosco's name day. [Editor]

what the *Bollettino Salesiano* and the city's Catholic newspapers have told us in their usual reporting, which contains nothing new.[13] Don Bosco mentions the day in his letter to Count Colle:[14] "With utmost thankfulness I accept your best wishes for the feast of St. John the Baptist. We had a magnificent celebration, a heartfelt rejoicing which often brought tears to my eyes."

The aura of holiness in which Don Bosco lived became obvious at close range not only to his sons or to simple, good-hearted people, but, as we have seen and shall continue to see more intensely as our narrative unfolds, it radiated out to those who from afar moved in the highest spheres. In 1882 we are particularly struck by an acknowledgment of holiness paid to him by the Duke of Norfolk.

### 3. The Duke of Norfolk

Norfolk is a preeminent name in the annals of English history. The family traces its origins to the Plantagenets, who ruled England from 1154 to 1485; Thomas Plantagenet, second son of Edward I, is the family's founder. During the sixteenth-century [Elizabethan] persecutions, this ducal family did not waver in its age-old loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church and is no less faithful today. Nor did it lose its privileged position at the royal court. Its present head [1934] holds the title of first duke, first marquis, first earl and first baron of England and in official ceremonies assumes first place behind the princes of the realm.

Don Bosco had written to the duke's chaplain, asking him to sponsor a collection in London for the Sacred Heart Church in Rome. The chaplain in his reply, dated August 13, explaining that it was not opportune to grant his request at that time, took the occasion to tell Don Bosco that the duke wished to know if it was true that Don Bosco had sent him a message concerning his only son, a child blind from birth. "Hoping for a cure from Our Lady," he wrote, "the duke has twice taken the boy to Lourdes. Now someone has assured him that Don Bosco wants him to know that he should not give up hope. Is this true? All of Catholic England is praying for the child's cure because the duke

[13]July issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano*, No. 148 of *Unità Cattolica* and No. 149 of *Corriere di Torino*. [Author]

[14]The letter is undated; but the postmark on the envelope reads: "Torino, 4/7/82" [July 4, 1882]. [Author]

is kind and charitable, beloved by all who know him. He will do anything to obtain the recovery of his son, whose very birth was itself a miracle. Please respond at your earliest convenience."

We do not know Don Bosco's reply to the chaplain, but that it was effective is clear from the following two letters written personally by the duke [in English] to Don Bosco in October.[15]

Norfolk House, St. James's Square, S.W., London.
October 6, 1882

Very Reverend and Dear Sir,

We have heard that you yourself and your great army of children have been praying for the health of our little son.

This good news of such great kindness coming as it does from those so far away from us and upon whose generous sympathy we have no claim has touched my wife and myself very deeply. We have heard too of the great works you are carrying on and the account of them has filled us with great interest. May I ask you to accept the enclosed offering of £. 40.00[16] as a small help to your great undertaking.

We both most earnestly commend our son's health to you and yours as an intention for your continued prayers, and we only wish that we could properly tell you how very deeply thankful we are.

I have the honor to be

Your very faithful servant,
Norfolk

The duke's second letter, dated October 26, tells us only that Don Bosco's reply was very encouraging and that he had asked what language he should use in further correspondence. The duke's answer was, "If at any time you are so good as to communicate with me, I beg you to use whatever language you please as I can easily get a friend to translate it for me." We shall meet the virtuous duke again during the course of these Memoirs.

As in the past,[17] Don Bosco's holiness was remembered by bishops when they needed someone to bring wayward priests back to the bosom of Holy Mother Church. One such instance was that of unfortunate Father Paul Orioli.

[15]Taken from the Appendix of the Italian original, Document No. 83. [Editor]
[16]At that time forty pounds were equivalent to forty thousand lire. [Author]
[17]*See* Vol. V, pp. 89f, 433f; Vol. VII, pp. 111f; Vol. VIII, pp. 122f. [Editor]

4. Father Orioli

In 1874 Father Paul Orioli, of the diocese of Mantua, was associate pastor of the parish in Canneto [Pavia], when the parish of Paludano became vacant. The parishioners of Paludano, incited by hotheads who wanted to form a National Italian Church with its headquarters in Mantua, refused to accept the parish priest appointed by the bishop and by a slight majority vote, duly notarized, elected Father Orioli as their pastor. He accepted and took over the parish. Though unrecognized by the civil authorities, he still posed as a spiritual mentor of sorts, residing in the parish rectory and drawing the stipend granted by the state. In 1876 a ministerial decree had raised the parish allotment from eight hundred to two thousand lire. Half of that was to be the priest's stipend; the other half went to the vestry board, which the government considered the legal entity in regard to expenses of worship, school, and works of charity.

The bishop then had no other choice but to excommunicate him by name and also by the authority of the Sacred Congregation of the Council. This occurrence, coupled to another of the same kind in another parish of the diocese, which incidentally failed because no priest would go along with the plan, was followed by a third instance of the same kind in a section of a parish in Friuli.[18] That was enough to convince Pope Pius IX to have the Sacred Congregation of the Council issue on May 23, 1874, a decree of excommunication, reserved in a special way to the Holy Father, of any priest elected by popular vote in the ecclesiastical provinces of Lombardy and Venice.

As an intruder and a schismatic priest repeatedly excommunicated, suspended and hit with other censures, we can easily imagine how many sacraments Father Orioli administered and how many irregularities he incurred, besides other things that only he and God knew. When he finally came back to his senses and sought forgiveness, the Holy See gave Bishop Berengo all necessary and pertinent faculties to reconcile him to God and to the Church in conscience and in law. The bishop was also authorized to delegate any priest, even from another diocese, to absolve him from the Church's censures and penalties, and to dispense him from any irregularities he had incurred. The conditions imposed on him were that he had to vacate the rectory, make a public

[18]A province in northeastern Italy. [Editor]

retraction and attend a spiritual retreat in a religious house. While the first two were being complied with, the Oratory was entrusted with the third. Rome did not state how long the retreat was to last, but the bishop specified at least twelve days. On sending him to Turin, the bishop wrote:[19] "Here is a man sadly blinded by pride and self-interest. I insert the terms under which I entrust him to the Reverend Don Bosco and his religious. I commend him to you and place all my hopes in you for a genuine and lasting conversion. My gratitude shall never fail, my entire diocese will rejoice with me in holy joy, and the Reverend Don Bosco and his wonderful Salesians will be blessed by all sincere Catholics."

On submitting to his bishop, Father Orioli gave him a written retraction to be made public. Informing his people of the joyous news, Bishop Berengo blessed God for putting an end to the schism in his diocese. On the same day, April 4, he sent to the Oratory the pertinent subdelegated faculties for Father Orioli's confessor. On learning that Don Bosco was away in France at the time, he entrusted the penitent priest with equal confidence to the spiritual care of Father Rua, Father Cagliero and the other "holy religious," for he could see Don Bosco's spirit in his sons.

Father Orioli carried out the conditions in an exemplary manner. During his stay he had the full run of the Oratory and so came to know Oratory life very intimately, later recording his impressions in a pamphlet dedicated to a friend and entitled *La casa di Don Bosco in Torino* [Don Bosco's House in Turin]. "In this home," he wrote, "one cannot help feeling inspired to do good. There is an amazing aura of gentleness and joy emanating from everyone's face. . . . I did not have the coveted privilege of seeing Don Bosco, who has surrounded himself with young priests, loving adopted sons. But even though I did not see him, I am positive that the lifestyle and ambiance of that house is a reflection of this man. Such excellent fruits as these which you see in this house tell you what the tree is like which bears such hardy branches and produces such choice fruits." Then, commenting on the superiors, Father Orioli adds: "If you approach them without knowing who they are, you would never guess that they are men of authority, and this not because you would think them unqualified for the responsibility demanded by their position in this or other houses, but because

[19]Letter to Don Bosco, Mantua, March 30, 1882. [Author]

their way of dealing with others is such that they seem to be trying to remove even the notion that they are superiors. And how your surprise grows when you see them in the midst of their young students or poor artisans, showing themselves to be more friends than superiors. In Don Bosco's house you do not find the oppressive aura of discipline that pervades other boarding schools. It does your heart good to see these degreed professors so modest in manner, so unconcerned about their genuine talents. I could not help remarking to one of them that such an unassuming attitude on the part of those holding such important positions in the running of the house and doing so much for society augurs well for the future. And a canker, as would be an inflated ego, will find it hard, very hard, to wear down the great Salesian Congregation. I am sure that in no other school would a mathematics professor ever condescend to accept such lowly tasks as ringing the church bells. But piety helps in everything. This particular teacher is so modest and selfless that it would never dawn on you that he is a very talented professor.[20] Yet that is the way it is with Don Bosco and his school."

After describing the workshop, Father Orioli then wrote of the music, piety and school curriculum (recall that this was the time when the Oratory secondary school was under attack), and concluded: "I leave this house not without deep feelings. Seeing for myself that where there is a will, there is a way—when the will is animated by love—I would wish that at least one house like this might arise in every town of Italy."

The Oratory's belief in Don Bosco's holiness kept being strengthened throughout his life every time he made a prediction. We record two episodes, both occurring in 1882, which cast a very brilliant light on his prophetic charism. The first concerns [Anthony] Malàn, future Salesian bishop [in Brazil].

## 5. Bishop Malàn[21]

Anthony Malàn, emigrating with his parents from Italy to Toulon [France], had from the age of seven felt a strong desire to become a

[20]He is alluding to the cleric Camillus Quirino, who later became a coadjutor. A man of keen intellect, who had a good grasp of several ancient and modern languages and exceptional skills in mathematics, he humbly refrained from becoming a priest. He always had a high veneration for Don Bosco, who loved him very dearly. He died in the repute of holiness [on August 11, 1892]. [Author]

[21]Anthony Malàn was born at San Pietro Monterosso (Cuneo) in 1864. His father's name was

priest, but, very much aware of his family's limited resources, he did not have the heart to tell his parents, all the more so because he was the eldest of five brothers.[22] "Whenever I saw any of my friends studying for the priesthood," he wrote, "I felt like crying with frustration, and I would tell myself, 'Forget about it!' Then I would squelch the thought, but it would soon come back."

This hurt lasted until he was fourteen. At fifteen he entered the service of the noble Christian family of De Combaud, who later became the Congregation's great benefactors. They were so good to him and so generous to his family that in his happiness he gave the priesthood at best a passing thought. At twenty, however, the idea came back to him, but, with only two winter sessions of school as a boy with the Brothers of the Christian Schools, he most certainly did not have enough preparatory education to get into the seminary. His only chance was to apply to the Capuchins, but he didn't even try because religious orders were then being banished from France.

While mourning his lot, he received a letter from the Italian draft board summoning him to report to Cuneo, the district of his birth, for possible military service. Countess De Combaud, who had always taken a warm interest in his spiritual life, advised him to go by way of Turin and call on Don Bosco. She told him about Don Bosco and gave him a copy of the biography written by D'Espiney the previous year. Anthony avidly read the entire book in one day and night. He also made a novena to Mary, Help of Christians as suggested by Don Bosco.

He could hardly wait to leave. When he did, many people gave him a lot of messages for Don Bosco. He had never breathed a word to anybody of his longing to become a priest. As soon as he arrived in Turin at daybreak on October 29, he hastened to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians for a brief visit, just as Don Bosco was finishing his Mass at St. Peter's altar. As Don Bosco was stepping down from the

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Nicholas Mellano, but since other families had the same last name and their house was commonly known as "Villa Malàn," he decided to adopt Malàn as his family name. Shortly afterward, the family emigrated to France. Their new name fitted very well with the French language and so they decided to adopt it permanently as their last name. (Source: *Profili di Missionari Salesiani e Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice a cura di Eugenio Valentini*, LAS, Roma, 1975. Biographical sketch by Father Guido Borra, pp. 139-143.) [Editor]

[22]A report he left gives us the details of what we are about to narrate, save for one which we obtained from another source: the little flame which Don Bosco saw hovering over Malàn's head. [Author]

altar, he saw a tiny flame leave the altar of Our Lady and go to hover over the head of an unknown young man standing erect nearby. Don Bosco stopped at the altar rail to watch, and then continued into the sacristy where he began hearing the boys' confessions. When he was done, he walked out into the playground and there, mingling with the boys, was Malàn, who had entered the playground through the door-keeper's lodge some half-hour before. As a crowd of boys thronged about Don Bosco, Malàn too stepped forward and kissed his hand. Don Bosco gazed at him as at a long known friend, exclaiming, "Oh!" Then, without giving him time to say anything, he told him in French, "Let's go up to my room; the boys will give us no peace here."

"Do you know me?" the young man asked in French.

"Yes, let's go."

As soon as they reached Don Bosco's room, Malàn gave him the letters he had brought for him. Countess De Combaud could not have written a word about his vocation since she knew nothing of it. Don Bosco ran through the letters, now and then inquiring about the writers, until he had read them all. One woman had given Malàn three francs for Don Bosco to offer a Mass for her, to which the young man had added three more of his own as a small anonymous donation for the Oratory. Don Bosco took three francs out and, looking at him, asked, "*Cela te ne privera pas?*" [Won't you need them?] He then began to answer the notes, some on notepaper, some on cards, some on the back of a holy picture of Mary, Help of Christians without saying a word. Once through with that, he asked his visitor's name and wrote on the back of a picture of Our Lady: "*O Marie, protégez votre enfant Antoine et le conservez dans le chemin du paradis. Abbé Jean Bosco.*" [O Mary, protect Your son Anthony and keep him on the path to paradise. Fr. John Bosco.]

While Don Bosco was writing, Anthony, nonplussed and flustered, wanted to ask him if he could be admitted to the Oratory, but he did not know how to begin. Should he tell him everything or only seek advice about his vocation? He was reluctant to ask because the only time he had dared to mention it in confession to a French religious priest, he had received a discouraging reply. Later he was to write, "Only God knows what went on in my heart at that moment."

Don Bosco finally put down his pen and, facing him, handed him the answers to the people's notes along with the holy picture he had written for him, urging him never to give it away. Then he looked at him with a

smile and said in French: "Now that we have talked about everyone else, let's talk about you. You will soon be coming to stay with me, won't you?" Malàn, who was already deeply moved, on hearing these words, burst into tears, fell to his knees and made an effort to reply, but for several moments could only sob. "Why the tears?" asked Don Bosco. Malàn would have liked to tell him that it was because of his question and that indeed he did so desire to become a Salesian but had not had the nerve to say so. Finally, heedless of the words, he asked Don Bosco if he were serious. Still gazing smilingly upon him, he answered, "*Je dis très sérieusement.*" [I am speaking very seriously.]

Again the tears began to flow. Still smiling, Don Bosco repeated that it was Mary Most Holy, the Help of Christians, who wanted it that way. Malàn writes: "I could no longer tell where I was or what I was doing. My emotional upset, coming from deep within me, lasted a good fifteen minutes. Then I made my confession to this gentle father and told him all. Oh, what comfort, what joy!"

Malàn then took leave of Don Bosco because many people were waiting. His visit had lasted an hour and a half. The next day he returned to see Don Bosco and the matter of his vocation was settled with the utmost calm.

"Where are you coming from now?" Don Bosco asked.

"From Cuneo. I had to check in with the draft board."

"How did you make out?"

"I was exempted."

Don Bosco then told him he should soon don the clerical habit. "But my schooling is nothing," Anthony stammered in dismay.

"Can you write your name?"

"Yes, of course!"

"That's enough."

Don Bosco then offered him the choice to go either to Nice or to La Navarre. One obstacle remained. How was he to leave Countess De Combaud's service without slighting one who had been so good to him?

"Very simply," Don Bosco said. "Just write to her that you are remaining with Don Bosco."

"I will and I'll ask her permission. Then, if you wish, I'll drop everything and come without delay."

"No, I think so highly of her that I would not like you to leave her so abruptly. She may be inconvenienced. Return and tell her that you have met Don Bosco and that he has invited you to become a Salesian."

"I'll also say I am most anxious to do that, and I'll ask for her consent."

"Do it tactfully. Don't rush."

With this understanding, he wrote to the countess and then returned to her residence in Toulon. Dismayed at seeing her painfully moved, he immediately said: "If you want me to stay, I will, but Don Bosco has told me I will be a Salesian." He then explained what had happened during his visit to Turin. "Well, in that case," she answered, "know that Don Bosco is never wrong in these matters for he is inspired by God. You may go back. I am glad and have no objections. Do as Don Bosco says. I will find a way to provide for myself."

Malàn stayed on for three months at the De Combaud residence. Every evening he would go into the estate's woods to pray and weep at the foot of a pillar within which was a small niche graced by a statue of Our Lady. Once, as he was urgently praying to the Blessed Virgin concerning his vocation, he saw a tiny flame sparkling at the right of the statue and then moving toward him. His heart was flooded with wonder and joy at the sight. The first time he met Don Bosco at La Navarre he told him of this happening and asked him what to make of it. "By all means," came the response, "give it serious thought, pay it heed, keep it in mind."

In March 1883 Don Bosco visited the Salesian house at La Navarre where Anthony had gone some three months after his first meeting with Don Bosco. A little assembly was given in his honor, at which Malàn also read a welcoming address. As soon as Don Bosco saw him, he recognized him and exclaimed: "Well, Anthony, have you finally come to prison?"

*"Je suis en paradis"* [I am in Heaven], Malàn replied.

We have no proof whatever that Don Bosco saw in this poor son of the working classes a future bishop of Brazil; but looking back we can safely say that so exceptional a prelude was a harbinger of something very special. The same is true of Father Michael Unia, though in a lesser degree.

## 6. Father Michael Unia

We quote the very first words of the introduction to Father Michael Unia's biography, author unknown,[23] which appeared in 1898. "So far

[23]*Memorie Biografiche del Sac. Michele Unia, sacerdote salesiano* [Biographical Memoirs of Fr. Michael Unia, Salesian priest], San Benigno Canavese, 1898. [Author]

no other Salesian has won the love and admiration showered upon Father Unia." Michael was a farmer. In 1877, at the age of twenty-seven, he went to the Oratory on the feast of St. Joseph to ask Don Bosco to accept him at the Oratory because he wanted to become a priest. He was told to come the following August. He did not really intend to become a Salesian, but he had to reckon with Don Bosco. When Unia arrived on August 1, he was sent to Lanzo for a spiritual retreat in preparation for his studies. There one day Don Bosco asked him what he intended to do when he had finished secondary school. "I mean to go back home," was the resolute answer.

"How about remaining here with me?"

"I always wanted to be a priest at Roccaforte."

"Supposing the Lord wanted you to work in a vaster field?"

"Well, if the Lord showed me that He wanted that . . ."

"Do you want a sign?"

"What kind of a sign?"

"Supposing God revealed your conscience to me and I were to tell you everything you did, would you take that as a sign He wants you to stay with me?"

Michael had never heard of anything like that and wondered if it were a serious proposal or a jest, but Don Bosco kept awaiting his answer.

"All right, then," Michael replied, "tell me what you see on my conscience."

"You still have to go to confession, don't you? Well, let me do it for you. All you have to say is, 'Yes, Father.'"

Don Bosco then began to run through Michael's past life with such exactness and detail that Michael at first felt it was all a dream. Everything was revealed, the number and kind and evil intent of every sin. Deeply shaken beyond all speech, Michael was totally at a loss. "But, Don Bosco," he finally asked, "how do you know all these sins of mine?" Seeing how dejected he looked and probably trying to comfort him, Don Bosco replied: "I know other things too. You were eleven years old when one Sunday during Vespers you were in the church choir, and, noticing that a friend of yours sitting next to you was sound asleep, with his mouth wide open, you took the biggest prune you had in your pocket and popped it into his mouth. The poor fellow jumped to his feet, choking, and dashed around, yelling for help. But you don't have to do any penance for this prank, because the priest, your cousin,

immediately gave you half a dozen slaps for penance." Michael was convinced.

He was accepted as a Son of Mary and, after taking the required courses in Sampierdarena under Father Philip Rinaldi, he was sent to San Benigno Canavese for his theological studies, again under Father Rinaldi's direction. There in 1882 Michael was admitted to the subdiaconate. He did not want to receive this holy order but Don Bosco persuaded him to do so and, within the same year, to be ordained a deacon. However, when his time came for ordination to the priesthood, scheduled for the Sunday before Christmas, the crisis reached a climax. So inflexible did he become that he was allowed to go to Turin and see Don Bosco. He wanted at the very least a postponement because he felt that his studies were inadequate and, as he never tired of saying, he was still too worldly.

Sitting in Don Bosco's room, he told him the reason for his coming and, as he warmed up to his topic, he saw that Don Bosco was silently looking at him with a smile. "So," Don Bosco asked, "you would prefer not to continue, is that it?"

"Exactly! My head is bursting and I just want to stay as I am."

"What would you want to do?"

"Just drop everything and return home to Roccaforte and do a little more studying."

"So you would leave Don Bosco, you of all people?"

"Yes."

"Well, since you tell me your head is bursting, I will fix it up for you right away. Take mine." So saying, he took his biretta from his own head and put it on Michael's head.

"Now go where I send you!" he ordered.

"Even to the ends of the earth?"

"Even to the ends of the earth!"

All fears, doubts and thoughts of returning to Roccaforte vanished in a flash under that magic biretta. He walked out wearing Don Bosco's biretta, which he always kept with him. Today it is a precious relic.

Father Unia really did travel to the end of the world. A very special vocation took him, with the blessing of his superiors, to the vast leper colony at Agua de Dios in Colombia. There his heroic self-sacrifice, which made him contract a fatal disease that prematurely led him to his death in 1895, brought honor to the Salesian Congregation and to the Church. His example, followed by that of other generous souls, opened

up a new field of Salesian apostolate which is still growing today and which has brought comfort and salvation to thousands of lepers. Cardinal [Mariano] Rampolla, papal secretary of state and protector of the Salesian Congregation, voiced the grief of Pope Leo XIII and his own, mourning the tragic loss caused by his death and praising "his exercise of the most sublime charity."[24]

The gift of healing, the discernment of spirits, and prophecy are divine charisms abounding in the life of Don Bosco, and one by one, as they occur, we shall tirelessly record events which came about exactly as he had predicted. The next subtitle will deal with a few which occurred in 1882.

## 7. Visits to Salesian Houses in Italy

In July 1882 Don Bosco went to Borgo San Martino to celebrate the feast of St. Aloysius. Coadjutor Brother John Brigatti was in bed with a painful attack of sciatica which caused him intense pain. Nothing seemed to help. Don Bosco was asked to pay him a visit and give him his blessing. He obliged. "Have you great faith?" he asked.

"Oh yes, Don Bosco."

"Then get up and kneel."

Assisted by others and leaning on a cane, he obeyed, racked by pain, and received Don Bosco's blessing. Then as he reached out for his cane to rise, Don Bosco restrained him. His pain had suddenly vanished never to return again.[25]

It was at that time that Don Bosco unwittingly revealed his identity in the astonishing event narrated by Father John Baptist Lemoyne concerning the boy Charles, whom Don Bosco was said to have raised from the dead in 1849,[26] though there were no supportive arguments to prove that he had wrought the wonder. On the first evening of his stay, wishing to motivate the boys to make a good confession, Don Bosco dramatically related the happening, but, as he spoke, instead of keeping himself out of the narrative as he had done elsewhere at other times, in his enthusiastic account he abruptly switched from "he" to "I." "I

[24]Letter to the Salesian procurator general, December 13, 1895. [Author]
[25]Father Marchisio was a witness and testified to it during the apostolic process. [Author]
[26]*See* Vol. III, pp. 349ff. [Editor]

entered the room," he stated, and continued, "I spoke to him, he answered me."[27] He kept speaking thus for some time, eventually slipping back into "he" and "him" toward the end of his narrative. We can imagine the impression made on the boys and the Salesians. Father Lemoyne, who was present, wrote, "When he finished speaking, he passed along the line of boys to go to his room, and while all crowded round him, it was obvious from his gaze and his words that he had no idea at all of what he had said."

That year too, on visiting the boarding school at Varazze and being welcomed by the superiors in the hall, he spotted the cleric Francis Ghigliotto and asked him puzzlingly: "How do you feel?"

"Quite well, Don Bosco."

"Would you feel up to a boxing match with Pertile?" Pertile was a huskily built cleric.

"Honestly, I've never tried it!" Ghigliotto answered with a chuckle.

Ghigliotto, a full-time teacher who also helped the prefect and supervised the boys in the dining room, was never at table with the rest of the Salesians. But after he had finished his own meal someone told him that Don Bosco had asked Father Monateri, the director, about the cleric's health and the director had answered that Ghigliotto was well.

Moments later, however, Don Bosco asked again, "But is Ghigliotto really well?"

"As far as I know, he is," Father Monateri replied.

Don Bosco's insistence struck the Salesians, but Francis thought nothing of it, considering it no more than a sign of Don Bosco's fatherly concern that he was overloaded with work. Don Bosco was gone from the house hardly two hours when Francis, suddenly feeling unusually tired, asked the prefect for a substitute to take his place in the dining room at supper, feeling confident that he would be well enough to resume his duties the next morning. However, he was bedridden for three months, and was even in danger of death. Obviously Don Bosco did not wish to say all he knew.

The next anecdote happened while he was visiting the Salesian house in Vallecrosia. Mr. Joachim Spinelli of Ventimiglia, a teacher in the city schools, learning that Don Bosco had arrived, immediately rushed to recommend his very seriously ill mother to him. No sooner

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 353. [Editor]

did he enter the room than Don Bosco asked him, "Did you come to ask for a grace?"

"Yes," Spinelli answered and told him why.

"You may set your mind at ease," Don Bosco assured him. "Your mother will recover."

And she did. Some years later, however, when Don Bosco was again in Vallecrosia, Mr. Spinelli once more came to see him because his mother was again seriously ill. Before he could speak, Don Bosco told him, "You have returned to ask for the same favor, but this time it will not be granted. You will see your mother in heaven."[28]

Who could ever assemble all the predictions which Don Bosco made, most of them in an off-handed way but faithfully fulfilled? In the fall of 1881 the cleric Angelo Bologna went back to Italy from Marseille to report for military service and left for boot camp toward the end of the year. Don Bosco, bidding him farewell, told him, "You'll be back before your time is up." Angelo was dumbfounded and, on leaving Don Bosco's room, repeated those words to the coadjutor Mondone.

Incidentally, Don Bosco gave Angelo ten lire, cautioning him not to mention it to the prefect, lest the latter give him no money at all.

Two years of military service passed, and Angelo looked forward to his discharge within the year. Now a corporal major, he had more money and enjoyed greater freedom, so that, entirely forgetting what Don Bosco had told him, he planned to have a great time in Florence, especially going to the theater. At just about that time, rumors spread that in an economic move the Defense Department would draw lots and discharge a certain number of soldiers in their last year of service. Bologna was one of them. He then suddenly recalled Don Bosco's prediction; wasting no time, he unexpectedly appeared at the Oratory, bubbling with joy.

We have seen only too well in the past chapters how Don Bosco's sanctity was severely tried by affliction, but there is more to be said. We have not yet mentioned one incident deeply wounding Don Bosco to the heart when the sectarians exploited the well known incident at our Salesian house in Cremona.[29]

[28]The source of this anecdote is Mr. Spinelli's nephew, Father Joachim Spinelli, a Salesian and confessor of novices in our novitiate at Cuenca, Ecuador. [Author]

[29]*See* Vol. XIII, pp. 497f and Vol. XIV, pp. 254f. [Editor]

## 8. The Cremona Case

The loss of Father [Stephen] Chicco, who embodied the best traits of a Salesian director, winning the good will of the more sensible people, or at least of those who were not tied to the sects, had proven a great disaster for the school. The anticlerical factions, for whom the Salesian work was like smoke stinging their eyes, were ever on the alert to seize the first chance they could find to attack them openly. That chance—better still, pretext—came.

The year 1881 ended peacefully. In July the Superior Chapter had drawn up some basic principles for an agreement making the residence adjacent to St. Lawrence Church their own. So pleased was the bishop that he anticipated Don Bosco and was the first to send him Christmas and New Year's greetings. Don Bosco respectfully and affectionately replied:

Turin, December 30, 1881

Your Excellency:

I am somewhat embarrassed that you were the first to send me best wishes, an honor beyond my merits.

Let this simple note carry out that serious duty of gratitude which binds us all to Your Excellency. Please continue to extend your protection over us, and we shall redouble our efforts to serve and please you in all things that you judge to be for God's greater glory and the welfare of souls.

I trust that when necessary you will kindly give the Salesians appropriate fatherly counsels, or reprimands, if necessary.

As I ask for the favor of your sacred blessing, I am honored to remain with greatest reverence,

Your most devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

The new year also began well. In February the new director called the first meeting of the Cremona cooperators. Hardly did he have time to introduce himself at that first formal presentation of Salesian work in Cremona when all hell broke loose, and he was swept away in the rack and ruin of his house. Don Bosco seems to have had a premonition of the disaster, for during the previous fall vacation (Father Chicco died on September 16)[30] he was inclined to withdraw the Salesians from

[30]According to the *Necrologio Salesiano* he died on September 17, 1881. [Editor]

Cremona. The Superior Chapter, however, did not share his view, and he yielded to them. We should make it clear that Cremona was a hotbed of Rosmini's followers.[31] In addition there were some thirty renegade priests, part-time teachers, living as men of the world. The town itself was controlled fully by the Freemasons. For all of these factions the Salesians were more than an irritant; they were a thorn in the side.

In brief this is what happened. Father Hermenegild Musso, who taught elementary school, had talked some boys into accepting silly and outlandish penances, such as allowing nettles to be placed under their shirts, or hot candle wax to be dropped on their bare backs. He was, obviously, a religious fanatic. Such things could not be kept secret for long. Some of the boys' families complained to the superiors, who promptly dismissed the whole affair as idle talk. One father, whose complaint had gone unheeded, walked out highly indignant. He unburdened himself to the first friend he met, who immediately took him to the police to press charges. On learning of this latest step, the director, in an effort to protect the school, went to the father—a man, incidentally, who bore the Salesians little if any grudge and who later sent his son to the Oratory [in Turin]. The father regretted his hasty action, but it was too late. Justice struck swiftly and mercilessly. Although there was not a shadow of immorality in the case, the charges were based on that allegation. Father Musso luckily managed to leave in time. The sentence passed upon him of imprisonment for only three months clearly shows that he was not found guilty of child abuse. Still, the school was forced to close down, and that was what the Freemasons wanted. Attorney Villa, the defense lawyer, who was paid his fee, wisely let time run out for an appeal to the higher courts in Brescia.

That those who had formerly been friends of the school abandoned the Salesians to the enemy's wrath should not terribly surprise us, considering that the liberal press had widely published the news, blatantly distorting the facts and resorting to the foulest slander.

Father Durando immediately rushed to Rome to consult top officials in the department of education. Friends of Don Bosco introduced him to Monsignor Louis Baccelli, brother of the minister of public educa-

[31]Anthony Rosmini (1797-1855) was a philosopher and the founder of the Institute of Charity. He also served as an advisor to Pius IX, but gradually fell into the Pope's disfavor. Some of his works were condemned by the Congregation of the Index. His philosophical system is known as Rosminianism. [Editor]

tion, who gave him a letter of introduction to the minister, stating: "The bearer of this note is Father Durando. Do all you can for him as you would for me. He is well known in literary circles and has high connections." When Father Durando called on the minister, he was out, but his secretary took the note, read it, and on learning what it was all about confidentially told Father Durando, "I'd gladly help you if I could. The only thing you can do is to try to soothe at least one of those people in Cremona. It is an unwritten policy that the minister does not interfere in these matters. If that is what they want out there (alluding to the Freemasons) we have no way of fighting them." But Father Durando did not give up. That same evening he obtained an audience with the minister himself, who received him courteously but told him, "My secretary has already given you the answer. There is no other way."

Archbishop Gastaldi, who kept a hawk's eye on the Salesians, immediately, without bothering to find out what really took place, notified the Vatican. Leo XIII consulted Cardinal Nina, expressing his grief that a Salesian should have been accused of immoral conduct. Fortunately Father Durando was able to give the cardinal a full account. Quite pleased, the latter promised that the following morning he would clear Father Musso before the Pope.[32] The archbishop's letter did everything short of provoking an apostolic investigation by Cardinal Ferrieri in all Salesian boarding schools, which were being depicted as hotbeds of immorality. It later came to light that Leo XIII had resolutely forbidden any such ill-advised intervention.[33]

At the same time that the Cremona boarding school was being shut down, a new school was being blocked from opening at Castellazzo Bòrmida.

## 9. Castellazzo Bòrmida

The same struggle—only on a much smaller scale—which at Cremona had riled the masonic press and its sympathizers throughout Italy, took place all over again within a more restricted area; in fact it did not go beyond a certain clique or anticlerical journal of the Alessandria province. Basically, it was an attack upon private schools or,

[32]Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, May 15, 1882. [Author]
[33]Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, October 25, 1882. [Author]

rather, upon schools run by priests or religious and particularly Salesian schools, since Don Bosco was the standard-bearer of the Church's renewed activity in the education of youth. One Roman newspaper,[34] vilifying the "notorious Don Bosco" in connection with the Musso affair, had crudely blurted it all out, stating: "Be it as it may, it is to be hoped that this shameful incident will teach a badly needed lesson both to those families who are biased toward certain schools taught by certain priests and to the government which, in the name of tolerance, does not exercise proper surveillance over them."

Briefly these are the facts. Professor [Joseph] Boidi,[35] who had designed the monumental main door of St. John the Evangelist Church in Turin, had worked very hard to get the Salesians to his native town of Castellazzo Bòrmida. With the best of intentions he began to negotiate with the municipal board. The building to be adapted into a Salesian boarding school was a former Passionist monastery, in one room of which, still preserved, St. Paul of the Cross had written the rules of his Congregation. Most of the townsfolk, if not all, wanted the Salesian presence, but, of course, there was that usual core of liberals who in those days—regardless of who ran the government—acted as lords of creation, convinced that the government was at their beck and call. Incensed by the town fathers' decision, they staged a little demonstration of their own, which they claimed to be the people's battle cry against the town board's treason. This prompted a certain Professor Ricagni, who taught in Sicily and posed as a follower of Carducci,[36] to address a literary club on August 6,[37] and later to have his speech published, fueling a dispute between the Alessandria newspapers in favor of the decision and those against it.

The professor faced a scanty audience. For an hour the fuming lecturer raved and ranted, deploring religious schools in modern times, most especially Don Bosco's schools, which subverted youngsters with unsound, inadequate and anti-national teaching. In the last analysis, who was this Don Bosco? A ringleader of the clerical party, who

[34]*Messaggero*, in an article entitled "What a Fine Priest!" March 3, 1882. [Author]

[35]*See* p. 310. [Editor]

[36]Giosuè Carducci (1835-1907), the greatest Italian poet of the second half of the nineteenth century, was awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1906. He was also a renowned author of historical studies in literary criticism. [Editor]

[37]Giovanni Ricagni, *Don Bosco e l'istruzione nei suoi collegi* [Don Bosco and Education in His Boarding Schools], Alessandria, Jacquemod Press, 1882. [Author]

conned the populace with promises of ephemeral benefits. Castellazzo Bòrmida had to be shielded from such a serious peril!

Meanwhile a legal contract had been drawn up between Don Bosco and the municipality, but it meant nothing, for a protest signed by many people and presented to the prefect of the province could blow up the entire project. Alessandria's ultra-liberal *Osservatore* reported in its issue of August 26: "Even two priests, professors of note, whose unprejudiced opinions and well-known untainted integrity are recognized and hailed, have added their signatures to the protest against Don Bosco!" The outcome of it all was forecast by this paper in a piece of journalism typical of the so-called liberal thinking of the day: "We have no doubt that the highest authority in the province, guided by a wisely liberal government, will, with due prudence and customary firmness, come to the aid of our cause. Ours is a holy cause arousing a fruitful discontent and a wholesome unrest here in Castellazzo, which probably has or will have some seventeen churches and must tolerate every so often a pompous pageant of four or five bishops officiating solemnly, and, God only knows how or why, it must open its arms to Capuchin friars (*sic*), though it is second to none in holding liberal principles. As regards obedience to the law, reverence to the royal family of Savoy and love of our liberal institutions, Castellazzo has always won the merited praise of good people and earned the esteem of both government and provincial authorities. No, we shall never have Don Bosco here!" They won, despite the hope expressed by one who knew the facts.[38] "That boisterous lecture was quickly forgotten," he wrote. "The good people of Castellazzo only yearn for the day they will see their town blessed by so precious an institution." Don Bosco, a man of peace, sensing the opposition of some of the local clergy to his Salesians, thought it best to back down and bide his time. He covered his retreat with the excuse of insufficient personnel.

The holiness which gave Don Bosco strength to withstand patiently such shameless affronts also acted like a powerful magnet to draw the hearts of good people. It was to see and hear a saint that French pilgrims, on their return from Rome, stopped off at the Oratory.

[38]Letter from the parish priest, Father John Barizione, to Father Bonetti, Alessandria, August 26, 1882. Father Bonetti exposed Professor Ricagni's fallacies in the September issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano*, but Professor Ricagni was rewarded with a teaching post in a Turin lyceum. [Author]

## 10. French Pilgrims

In October 1882 a group of French pilgrims on their way back from the Holy Land and from Rome, before crossing the Alps, stayed overnight in Turin. They first visited the Church of St. John the Evangelist, brightly decorated for its imminent consecration; then in the afternoon they prayed at the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation and lastly gathered at the Oratory. There, after a church service, they were given an open-air welcome with song, music and speeches. At their request, Don Bosco closed the little reception with a talk which issued straight from his heart and emanated his candid simplicity, revealing once more his profound love for Catholic France and his heartfelt gratitude for the charity continuously shown him by French Catholics.[39]

Private audiences immediately followed the reception. One of the pilgrims asking to see Don Bosco was a Joseph Ciappei of Leghorn. Penniless and wearing the habit of a Franciscan tertiary, he had joined the French pilgrimage intending to live entirely on alms in a spirit of piety, as did the early hermits. Begging a pittance here and there from people on the train and the ship, he got enough money to pay his way. His food he begged from compassionate pilgrims, all of whom had brought baskets of provisions. He probably meant to continue with the pilgrimage as far as Lourdes. After a lengthy wait, his turn finally came to see Don Bosco, but just then the secretary came out to say that Don Bosco was too exhausted and asked to be excused if he brought the audiences to an end. But in their eagerness at least to kiss his hand no one budged.

Shortly afterward, Don Bosco came out on his way to supper. The pilgrims clustered about him. He did not know the tertiary Franciscan, nor did anyone know how terribly hungry the poor traveler was. Leaving the party to visit several churches, he had not joined them at lunch. He intended to call on the Capuchin monastery that evening after his audience with Don Bosco to beg food and a place to rest. Looking at him, Don Bosco exclaimed: "But this pilgrim has had nothing to eat all day and has no place to sleep!" Taking the astonished tertiary by the hand, he brought him to the dining room and bade him sit at table. "Eat, eat, my good pilgrim," he said, "for you need it." After he had

[39]*Bulletin Salésien*, November 1882. [Author]

eaten, Don Bosco said: "This man has no place to sleep," and he had a room prepared for him.

This room opened on to the balcony leading to Don Bosco's room. The following morning the tertiary, very anxious to discuss spiritual matters with Don Bosco, left his room, hoping to learn where Don Bosco might be at that early hour, and as he did so, Don Bosco stepped out of his room. The pilgrim joined him at once and freely engaged in conversation with him, thus fulfilling his every wish.

We cannot pinpoint the date of another anecdote, but it certainly must have taken place between 1880 and 1882.[40] On that occasion Don Bosco disillusioned a woman of her prejudice and taught her a needed lesson.

### 11. A Well-Deserved Lesson

A countess living at Nizza Monferrato entertained doubts about Don Bosco's holiness, specifically expressing disbelief in his supernatural powers. One day she and Don Bosco found themselves dinner guests of Countess [Gabrielle] Corsi; with Don Bosco were Father Lemoyne and Father Francesia. The lady, who had been seated next to Don Bosco, kept breaking into the table talk several times to ask him whether he really could read the secrets of people's hearts. Each time Don Bosco tried to change the subject; he finally told her very gently that certain topics were out of place at the dinner table. Obstinately, however, she kept insisting until she challenged him almost in mockery. "Tell me now," she said, "is there anything you know about me?" Don Bosco felt that it was time to speak up. Leaning slightly toward her and covering his lips with his hand, he whispered a few words in her ear. Instantly she fell silent, ashen gray. She rose to her feet and left the room. Believing she had become ill, someone hastened after her, but all she said was to summon Don Bosco because she wanted to go to confession. Don Bosco was told, but he replied that they were to leave her alone, and he remained seated at the table. Later, it appears, she did go to confession. What is definite is that from that day on she changed her life and became Don Bosco's benefactress. However, it should be pointed out that, though she strove to keep up appearances, it was fairly well known that she was not living a genuine Christian life.

[40]Father Lemoyne told the story to several people, among them Father Angelo Lovisolo. [Author]

# CHAPTER 19

## *Claire Louvet: An Outstanding Salesian Cooperator*

THE holy women who had a good understanding of Jesus "and provided for Him out of their means" (Lk. 8, 3) were but the first of an unbroken series of others who in countless ways sought to aid both the ministerial clergy and the saintly persons raised by God for special missions in His Church. It is difficult, if not impossible, to find a saint more reserved in his relationships to women than Don Bosco, and yet an extraordinary number of wealthy and noble ladies, animated solely by genuine Christian charity, made no end of sacrifices to assist him as best they could in his undertakings. One such providential woman whom we now introduce to our readers is Miss Claire Louvet. Fifty-three letters written to her by Don Bosco, all but three in French, bring out her resplendent personality. Just as we have given ample coverage in these *Memoirs* to Count [Louis Anthony] Colle, so we feel that we should do the same for Miss Louvet. We know very little of the generous aid which Don Bosco received throughout his life from his benefactors in Italy and elsewhere. Often their own left hands did not know what their right hands were doing. The little we do know is so obscure that we could never make a rough estimate of their total contributions. Hence, now that we have been lucky enough to chance upon a veritable treasure of authentic, original documents recording the largesse of a particular generous person, it is only right that we should take advantage of this providential trove and understandably seek to unravel the mysteries of Christian charity—the sentiments inspiring outstanding benefactors to give without stint and the undaunted incessant begging of the ever "poor Don Bosco."

Don Bosco was first told of Miss Claire Louvet by the director of St. Pierre's Hospice in Nice, Father Joseph Ronchail, who praised her

goodness and charity to the skies. Miss Louvet lived in Aire-sur-Lys in the department of Pas-de-Calais, the daughter of a top-ranking military officer. Deeply impressed by the fame of holiness associated with Don Bosco's name, she was very anxious to meet him. It was no problem for her, because she regularly vacationed on the Côte d'Azur at the same season that Don Bosco would go there to solicit aid. They were two souls ideally suited to understand each other, and certainly it was not without a special design that Divine Providence brought them together. From that happy moment Miss Louvet constantly nurtured so profound a reverence for Don Bosco that with charming spontaneity she opened the depths of her spiritual life to him and set no limit to her generosity in his regard. In turn Don Bosco treated her like a daughter, with fatherly kindness, candidly confiding his manifold needs to her.

Their correspondence runs from January 1, 1882 to September 5, 1887. In one of his first letters,[1] Don Bosco asked if she could read his illegible scrawl or if she would rather have his secretary, who had good penmanship, write for him. Her answer was that she preferred to see Don Bosco's handwriting. In fact his letters to her are in his own hand. Nor was she troubled by his French, rather loose in both syntax and style; with exquisite finesse, she religiously treasured all his letters.

Fairly well-off financially, and unwaveringly generous, she never felt she had given enough to charity, as their correspondence amply shows. Miss Louvet first went to Turin toward the end of 1881, accompanied by a Miss Deslyons, and both stayed with the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, who fondly looked forward to their return. On reaching home she informed Don Bosco of her safe arrival and enclosed a note for five hundred francs for his works. But when she went the following year for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians she did much more. She promised to make him a handsome pledge for his name day [June 24]. On receiving her first payment, Don Bosco wrote to her:[2] "You promise to fulfill the pledge which your goodness prompted you to make. I thank you, my very kind lady, and accept your donation most gratefully before God. But please send the rest in your own good time as circumstances will permit." She however chose to keep her word so promptly and solicitously that her pledge was honored a full week before his

[1]Turin, August 5, 1882. [Author]
[2]Turin, May 31, 1882. [Author]

name day. Acknowledging her closing donation, Don Bosco wrote:[3] "A floral bouquet of ten thousand francs to wish me well on the feast of our dear St. John [the Baptist]. O my lady, if everyone coming here that day were to bring similar bouquets, I would soon be another Rothschild!"[4]

Occasionally, so timely were her donations that they seemed inspired by Divine Providence. "Let me tell you an interesting tale," he wrote to her in July 1882. "I was faced with a considerable debt for the seminary where we train young men for the priesthood and, not knowing where to turn, I thought, 'If I did not think it indiscreet I would ask Miss Louvet for the money, but she has already given and continues to give so much that I must be reasonable.' Meanwhile July 14 came around. True, I did manage to scrape some money together, but I was still short two thousand francs. And lo and behold, Divine Providence steps in. The mailman arrives and hands me a registered letter containing two thousand francs. How did that happen? Truly the Lord inspired Miss Louvet to anticipate her gift and send me the exact sum I needed at the time the debt came due. Blessed be God! A thousand thanks to you!"

A similar thing happened at the beginning of 1884. "You have always been a true Providence to us," Don Bosco began his letter dated January 2. "This past week Father Rua was faced with a considerable debt. While he and I were discussing how we might find the money, in comes your registered letter containing two thousand francs. Blessed be God! May He bountifully reward your charity! We shall certainly offer up continuous prayers for you!"

On October 8, 1882, Miss Louvet returned a third time to Turin, again staying with the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. She then volunteered to collect sums for the Sacred Heart Church in Rome, and that December she sent in her report with five hundred francs. "There are only six donors on the list," Don Bosco observed, "and Miss Louvet's name is down for three hundred and ninety-five francs. This contribution squares up everything."[5]

In January 1883 he wrote to her that in April he would be in Paris and

[3]Turin, June 17, 1882. [Author]

[4]A German Jew who founded and gave his name to a powerful bank, which was continued and expanded by his sons. [Author]

[5]San Benigno, October 5, and Turin, December 18, 1882. [Author]

from there might go to Aire to pay her a visit unless she was still away at her usual spa. In that case he would defer his visit to another time. Then humorously he added, "But you will answer me, 'If you come to Aire I have some money set aside for you.' However, this is something we can settle in due time. Let's look for something less expensive but more beneficial to your health. Just have the money ready, and the postal service will certainly come to our aid. But please, don't take me seriously."

Miss Louvet's letters were always a harbinger of bountiful charity, Don Bosco assured her when thanking her for her five hundred francs.[6] In that same letter, praying that the Blessed Virgin would be with her on a pilgrimage to Lourdes, he expressed the hope that Our Lady would lead her to Turin, where the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians always kept a room ready for her. We do not know whether she came or not.

On his trip to France in 1883 Don Bosco agreed to take charge of St. Gabriel's Hospice in Lille in northern France, not far from Aire. Father Albera and Father De Barruel had gone there in December to prepare the house for opening. Miss Louvet immediately asked how she could endow several places for orphans. "Just now don't think of any endowments," Don Bosco advised.[7] "Everything in its own time. At present we have to meet staggering debts for the construction of the new church and hospice in Rome and overwhelming expenses to finance our missionaries and missions among the Patagonian Indians." In due time Miss Louvet set up a trust fund to maintain five orphans, as Father Alvin Ronchail, former director of the hospice, testified.

There was a time when Miss Louvet feared that her donations did not always reach Don Bosco, and she warned him of this. At first, in the above letter, he replied that he had never noticed that any of the envelopes had become unsealed in the mail, but later[8] he had to admit that some of the letters had been tampered with and their money taken. When Miss Louvet felt that she should make good the stolen money, he disapproved. "Never mind," he wrote. "My thanks to you for now. The bulk of mail we receive does not allow us to check and ascertain if any pieces have been opened. Still, we shall not fail to be on guard."

[6]Turin, August 19, 1883. [Author]
[7]Turin, December 21, 1883. [Author]
[8]Turin, February 14, 1884. [Author]

Don Bosco wished that she would come to Rome in 1884 for the blessing of the church's cornerstone, but, since in those hectic years rumors of impending war would periodically circulate and frighten her, he wrote to her,[9] "Do not be shaken by what you read in the French newspapers. You can safely travel to Rome, where you will find Don Bosco waiting for you." It appears, however, that she did not go.

Cholera struck in 1884. Don Bosco spent August of that year at the home of the bishop of Pinerolo, from where he wrote to her: "Here I am in Pinerolo indulging my laziness. The bishop is a kind father to me. Everybody at the Oratory is enjoying good health; so too our Salesians and boys in our houses in France." Miss Louvet hastened to assure him of her prayers and sent him a donation, for which Don Bosco thanked her. "Just now," he wrote, "your prayers are most needed. Please keep praying. Your kind gift of a thousand francs will help some child orphaned by the cholera and will doubtless be your protection. I have some good news for you. Thanks to Mary, Help of Christians, all our orphans' benefactors have been spared from the scourge harassing France. This includes you too, my dear Miss Louvet."[10] Once more, in autumn, he gently appealed to his benefactress' charity for the same cause:[11] "This time it is not my intent to ask you for your charitable aid because you always help us whenever you can. However, just now I am greatly worried by lack of funds. The cholera epidemic has packed our houses with orphans, leaving us to shift for ourselves. Please pray but do only what your means allow. Meanwhile we have prayed and will keep on praying for you, for your health, especially that the evil now harassing both our nations may be kept far from you. O Mary, keep Your daughter Claire on the path leading to heaven!"

His words could not help but touch his generous benefactress' heart, and a week later he wrote to tell her that he had received her very kind letter and the enclosed donation. He also suggested that she could save on postage when sending checks to Turin by marking on the envelope: "Declared value, one hundred francs." Through this simple formality, regardless of the actual sum in the envelope, it always reached the Oratory safely.[12]

[9]Turin, February 26, 1884. [Author]
[10]Pinerolo, August 10 and 18, 1884. [Author]
[11]San Benigno, October 4, 1884. [Author]
[12]Turin, October 12, 1884. [Author]

During the Immaculate Conception novena he received another kind letter from her with a note of five hundred francs. Thanking her for "her boundless charity," he said that he wished God would reward her "a hundredfold over and over again" and once more banished her fears about the current political trends. "Please don't let present day events upset you," he wrote. "Be sure that the Blessed Virgin Mary will guide you and shield you from all life's dangers."[13] Another time, sending her his New Year's greetings,[14] he wrote: "I am very sorry that your health has weakened these past few days. Our priests, clerics and orphans pray for you morning and night at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians. Take heart. Your hour has not yet come. Let nothing frighten you!"

The ravaging scourge of cholera had disrupted normal communications between Italy and France; on their resumption Don Bosco found that he again had to knock at Miss Louvet's door. A fire at the Oratory had caused damage amounting to one hundred thousand lire, but there were no fatalities. He told her about it on February 1, 1885, very delicately, mentioning only his needs. As regards the fire's consequences, he merely stated, "Divine Providence has always been at our side and will not forsake us now in this hour of extraordinary need." A truly Christian letter from her promptly reached Don Bosco with a thousand francs which Father Rua just as promptly put to good use. In return Don Bosco promised that prayers for her intentions would be said every day throughout Lent, especially that God would keep her in good health.[15]

Unfortunately, however, Miss Louvet's condition showed no improvement. For a speedy recovery she mused about a trip to Italy. "You could do no better," Don Bosco urged her on February 27. "As soon as you have made up your mind, let me know. The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians are joyfully awaiting you. Please tell me in advance, and let me know if you will have a companion with you. If Father Engrand should accompany you he is welcome to have his meals and lodging with us during his stay in Turin. Please let me know your plans. I shall consider it my good fortune to be at your disposal in every spiritual and temporal way I can."

Father Engrand, a worthy Salesian cooperator from Aire and a close

[13]Turin, November 30, 1884. [Author]
[14]Turin, January 8, 1885. [Author]
[15]Turin, February 21 and 27, 1885. [Author]

relative of Miss Louvet, would occasionally send Don Bosco donations. We have four letters of Don Bosco to Father Engrand, whom he called his dear friend. We find no further reference to a trip to Italy, but a gap in their correspondence extending from February 27 to August 12 [1885], St. Claire's feast day, may mean that she actually did go to Turin. There is further silence up to October 7. Don Bosco's thanks for new donations show up again in the first line of his letter to her dated October 15. "Thank you for your charity," he wrote. From the letter we also learn that Miss Louvet was unsuccessfully trying to rent or sell a piece of property. "I too regret that," wrote Don Bosco. "The loss is mine, because the less money you have, the less we can do for our orphans. But the Blessed Virgin will put all things right: better health, rain for the fields and a more abundant harvest will straighten everything out." He closed his letter expressing the great comfort he had derived from the hope she gave him of seeing her again. "All the Salesians pray that this will come true," he told her. "Let us hope that public events and your personal affairs will permit it."

In February 1886 he was still waiting for her visit. Following is the letter that he then wrote her:

Turin, February 7, 1886

My kind Miss Louvet,

We have celebrated the feast of St. Francis de Sales and held our conference, but we did not forget to offer many prayers for your health and peace of mind. The newspapers talk of turmoil in France, but keep calm. Nothing will harm you. I do however recommend that you wear a medal of Mary, Help of Christians. Just now we have with us three missionaries from Patagonia who have brought us good news about your protégés.[16] They will stay with us two more weeks.

Won't you drop in to visit us sometime this year? I hope you do, for my health keeps me here in Valdocco all winter long. The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians impatiently await you.

All the Salesians send their regards and are praying for you; we all recommend ourselves to your prayers.

[16]Pagans baptized by the missionaries. He calls them "her protégés" because of her assistance to the missions. [Author]

The Blessed Virgin will shield and guide you always on the path to heaven. Amen.

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. At your convenience please give our Aire cooperators my best wishes and assure them that I shall not fail to remember them in my daily Mass.

Feeling somewhat stronger, Don Bosco cut short his convalescence and went to Spain in the latter part of March,[17] but returned in complete exhaustion. "My state of health," he wrote to her on July 27 [1886], "has forced me to give up any kind of work, but now, feeling that I can do something, I must write to you, my kind friend."

Reading between the lines, we can tell that her contributions far exceeded those we find specifically noted. For instance, Don Bosco's letter dated December 26, 1886, begins as follows: "You are charity personified"—an obvious reference to a handsome Christmas gift from her. There are other instances during that same year. From a sentence of Don Bosco in his letter of July 27, we can infer that Miss Louvet had just successfully completed an important financial deal benefiting the Salesian Congregation. In fact, he wrote: "First, let me say that the transactions concerning us were handled by Father Rua in agreement with the intentions you expressed in your letters to him and personally to me. We are now fully tranquil about those matters." Very simply then he passes on to another matter, asking, "Are your maids doing their work properly? And are you and your family always patient with them?" Since cholera once again had broken out in France, he urged her to have no fears and not to leave her country. "Nothing will harm you," he wrote, "and even though there may be danger about you, it will not touch you." He ended up with some news about himself: "I shall spend a couple of weeks with the bishop of Pinerolo. My health is improving considerably here. All the Salesians are praying daily for your intention. May God bless us and may the Blessed Virgin guard you and help you make out my awful scribble."

We could more exactly calculate her total contributions if we could

[17]Alassio, March 19, 1886. [Author]

know the greater sums of money she gave to Don Bosco when they would meet in France and Italy; however, all of that was swallowed into the vast sea of funds provided by the Salesian cooperators. Furthermore, she personally told Father Moitel, a Salesian she had sponsored through his training, that she had destroyed some of Don Bosco's letters to her. Running through the remaining correspondence, we glean whatever else can tell us more in this regard.

To Don Bosco's appeal to cooperators for funds to finance another missionary expedition, she responded with usual promptness. "Your charity is most timely," Don Bosco wrote on November 6. "Your thousand-franc note has considerably helped speed up preparations for our missionary expedition to Patagonia and Brazil. Not only our missionaries but also the Indians to be saved through your charity will pray for you and win you a great reward. The Salesians and I will offer special prayers for your health and holiness, as also for that of your family and for the success of your business affairs."

The last of Miss Louvet's contributions to Don Bosco which is specifically mentioned in their correspondence—certainly not the last in his lifetime—was that of five hundred francs for the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Indeed, in March 1887 he wrote to tell her of the disaster wrought by an earthquake that most certainly must have touched both her heart and her purse.

Turin, March 15, 1887

My dear Miss Louvet:

Not a word from you about your health after all the disasters threatening us! Just two words would bring me comfort.

The earthquake has sorely tried us. All our houses have felt its effects to some degree, but our church, hospice and school at Ventimiglia are in utter ruins. Thank God, all in the house, priests and pupils, *are safe*. Our heartfelt thanks go to God and to Mary, Help of Christians. Please pray now that the Lord may come to our aid!

Will you pay us a visit this year for the consecration of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome? It is set for May 14.

We always pray for you, for your serenity and peace of mind. Please pray for all our young orphans, our missionaries, and one who will always be in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Your most grateful and humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Though Claire Louvet did not go to Rome, Don Bosco wrote to her immediately upon his arrival there.

Rome, May 3, 1887

My dear Miss Louvet:

I am in Rome for the consecration and inauguration of the Sacred Heart Church and Oratory; God willing, I shall be back in Turin by the 16th of this month. I hope to see you on the 18th at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales to discuss matters which redound to God's glory and the honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians.

May God bless and generously reward your charity. Please pray for our young orphans, who pray daily for your intention, as I too have the honor of doing every morning in a memento during holy Mass.

May God guide us! May the Blessed Virgin protect us and our benefactors in all life's perils. Amen.

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

We think we can rightly guess that the "matters" he refers to concerned investments for charitable purposes. Miss Louvet did go to Turin for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, but she was extremely distressed to find Don Bosco practically drained of all strength! She was sorely grieved by her own presentiment that she would never see him again and by a few words of his to the same effect. As Don Bosco said goodbye to her, he noticed how deeply saddened she was, and so he hastened to reach her by mail:

[Turin] Valsalice College, June 12, 1887

I trust that you had a pleasant trip to Aire and are enjoying good health; that is my prayer for you in my daily Mass.

You spent a few days with us, but as you left I thought that you were upset even to tears. This saddened me. It may be that you did not fully grasp what I have always told you, that our relationship here on earth is not to be a lasting one; only in eternal life will our days be spent in everlasting joy. Forever and ever we shall have what our hearts desire.

Presently, Turin's heat is so intense that it threatens to cook us alive. So I have come here to Valsalice, where the cooler air [of the hills] gives me much relief. All I need now is your presence to boost my spirits a bit. But let's be patient. I shall not leave off saying a special prayer for you every morning at holy Mass; so too for Miss Lyons.

Is Father Engrand's health improving? Can he do any work? The Salesians are all talking about you and your charity, but they also assure me that they pray for you daily.

What about war, you ask? Keep calm. As soon as I see the slightest danger, I will immediately warn you, that is, if I am still among the living.

God bless you, my kind friend. May the Blessed Virgin keep you in good health for years to come and guide you ever securely on the road to heaven.

Your most grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

It was by prayers, Communions and Masses that Don Bosco habitually expressed his gratitude to his benefactress on receiving her charitable contributions, on the principal feast days of the year and on her name day. The extensive documentation left to us—our readers will not mind—allows us to study at length the sentiments he voiced on these three occasions.[18]

We have already seen several examples of his customary expressions of gratitude on receiving a donation, and so we shall add but little to that. On one occasion he wrote to her, "You are far away, and yet a special memento is being made of you each day at holy Mass." Another time he wrote, "The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians often speak to me about you and wish you the best; they remember you particularly every day in their community prayers."

He became more expansive on important celebrations like Christmas. In 1882 he wrote: "Our young orphans send you special thanks for your kindness to them because they are in very dire need. They lack bread and clothing in this cold climate of ours. And so they pray and will keep praying in a special way for their benefactors." The following year he told her: "You are very aware that we offer special prayers every day for your intentions, but on this great day of Christmas please accept our gift of three Masses celebrated at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians, along with many Communions and prayers—all this to repay your charity to us. We shall ask the Infant Jesus to keep you in good health and grant you many days, weeks, months, and years full of happiness, and crown these blessings with a beautiful reward in heaven. Does this please you? Then let it be! All the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians send you their best wishes,

[18]Turin, July 15, 1882; January 18, 1883; December 26, 1886. [Author]

beseeching God to grant you a long life, but always in good health." In 1886 Don Bosco's letters became briefer; by then they knew each other so well that many words would have been superfluous. "Many thanks for your charity to us during the course of the year. Your pious intentions will be carried out."

Great Salesian cooperator that she was, she regarded as her own the feast of St. Francis de Sales. In 1886 Don Bosco wrote to her shortly before the start of the novena, including a holy card of St. Louis, king of France, because he knew that she was tormented with fears. "On the 20th of the month," he told her, "the novena of St. Francis de Sales begins, and I am sending to you the king of France to reassure you that no harm will come to you. Every day of the novena I will say holy Mass for your intentions and our boys will offer their prayers and Holy Communions." In 1887 he wrote, "On the 20th of this month we begin the novena of St. Francis de Sales, and, since we don't want you to feel all alone in prayer, the Salesians will pray with you and offer Communion for you every day, while I will make a daily memento for you at holy Mass." On the 29th he sent her a picture of St. Francis de Sales by [Philippe de] Champaigne,[19] on the reverse of which there was this prayer: "O St. Francis de Sales, grant Our Lord's holy and mighty blessing of peace and serenity to your daughter. She has nothing to fear; for her we pray."

On the last Easter he was to celebrate on earth, his mind set on the coming consecration of the Sacred Heart Church in Rome, Don Bosco sent her the following note: "Happy celebration! Happy Easter! I hope to see you in Turin or in Rome. God bless you and keep you healthy and holy! All the Salesians send their respects." One year, on the feast of Corpus Christi,[20] acknowledging and thanking her for her gift of two thousand francs, he wrote, "On the feast of Corpus Christi, as a token of my thanks, I will offer my Mass and our boys will receive Holy Communion for your intention. Does that please you?" In June,[21] renewing his thanks on the occasion of his name day, he told her: "St.

[19]Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674) was a Belgian painter of the Flemish school. He was commissioned by Richelieu (French statesman and cardinal) to adorn his palace and paint murals for the dome of the Sorbonne; he was also favorably regarded as a portraitist. Source: *Webster's Biographical Dictionary*, G. & G. Merriam Co., Springfield, Mass. [Editor]

[20]Turin, May 31, 1882. [Author]

[21]Turin, June 17, 1882. [Author]

John the Baptist will repay you on my name day. To persuade him I shall offer holy Mass on that day at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians. Our boys will pray and offer their Communions for your intention."

France kept the feast of All Saints more solemnly than did several areas of Italy, and for this reason Don Bosco sent this brief note to Miss Louvet in 1886:

Turin, October 20, 1886

My dear Miss Louvet:

Good day! I want you to know that the entire Salesian family of Valdocco is gathered together. It is All Saints Day, and I would not have you forgotten in our prayers.

Daily throughout this novena a Mass and many Communions will be offered for your relatives living and deceased. However, with special fervor we shall pray for your health and holiness.

O Mary, guide us always on the way to heaven.

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

On days honoring Our Lady he would not fail to let her know that he commended her to the great Mother of God. Thus, on the feast of the Assumption in 1885 he wrote:[22] "On Saturday, the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin into heaven, I shall pray and have others pray to this good Mother of ours to grant you long-lasting good health and holiness. May She reserve a place for you at Her side in heaven. This I ask also for your relatives and friends. I will say Mass for you. Please remember me too. Good-bye, many times good-bye on this earth of ours, but an unfailing reunion in heaven." For the feast of Our Lady's Nativity in 1882 [23] he wrote: "I am not writing for money, but merely to wish you a happy feast of Our Lady's Nativity. My boys and I will pray for your good health and for your intentions. I shall also offer my holy Mass and the boys will offer their Communions for you. Does that

[22]Turin, August 12, 1885. [Author]
[23]Turin, September 5, 1882. [Author]

please you?" In 1885 he wrote her on the Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary:

Turin, October 7, 1885

My dear Miss Claire,

I know that you take every occasion to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary, especially on Her feast days, and I would like to help you as best I can. Sunday, October 11, is the feast day of the Motherhood of Our Heavenly Mother. Our boys will fervently pray and offer their Communions for your intentions, and I will have the consolation of celebrating Holy Mass entirely for you—for your health and holiness and your perseverance on the path to heaven. All this is to repay you in a small way for your charity to us and for the support you give us in our undertakings.

I just received a letter from Bishop Cagliero; he has baptized a young Indian girl on the Rio Negro in Patagonia and named her Claire Louvet in memory of you with the proviso that she pray for you all her life. I hope to send you more news about this orphan child. May she be as good as the sisters would like her to be.

Good-bye, my dear Miss Louvet. May the Blessed Virgin guide you, your relatives and your friends and assure you that we shall certainly be together again in heaven, your poor Don Bosco included.

Remember me and most especially our priests, who never fail to make a special memento for you every morning. Blessed be God!

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The approaching feast day of the Immaculate Conception lent new inspiration to his words. In 1882 he wrote: "The Blessed Virgin Herself urges me to write you. In thanks for your charity we want to do something to please you. On Friday all our boys—a hundred and fifty thousand strong—will offer their prayers and Holy Communions for you, and I, unable to do more in my poverty, will celebrate holy Mass for you, that God may bless you and that Our Blessed Lady may be your shield, your help in peril, your comfort at the point of death, your delight in paradise. Are you pleased? Of course, all things in due time."[24] Then offering her a spiritual treasure in exchange for her

[24]This thoughtful remark was meant to be a gentle disclaimer that her death was not near. [Author]

temporal assistance, he invited her to join the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians in a spiritual retreat at Nizza Monferrato the next summer, adding that the sisters would welcome her with open arms.

In 1884 he wrote to her:

Turin, November 22, 1884

My dear Miss Claire:

Next Saturday we start the solemn novena honoring the Immaculate Conception, and I wish the Salesians to offer fervent prayers that you may long enjoy good health.

We will offer Mass, prayers, and Holy Communion for you at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians.

On that day Father John Cagliero will be consecrated bishop and will particularly remember you at his holy Mass.

Good-bye, Miss Claire. May the Blessed Virgin be your shield and guide. Pray also for the whole Salesian family, especially your poor and grateful

Fr. John Bosco

We have seen that Don Bosco, speaking for his missionaries, promised her, their benefactress, that they would give newly baptized Indian girls her name and would tell them about her, asking them to pray for her. He had already told her this more explicitly: "I will now direct that all our fifteen mission stations in South America, in baptizing Indian children into the Christian faith, shall make sure that at least one girl in each station shall be named Claire and thus be bound to pray for you all her life long." Another time he told her: "These last few days I have been swamped with work. Our missionaries finally left us yesterday morning for Patagonia. They will pray for you, Miss Claire, and have assured me that St. Claire's name will be given to many Indian girls at their baptism; they will tell them that they are to pray for you throughout their lives."[25]

We are touched to see Don Bosco's gracious remembrance of her on her name day, August 12. "We are approaching St. Claire's feast day," he wrote in 1882, "and I certainly will not forget you on that day. This is my simple bouquet of prayers: on that day I shall offer my Mass and our boys will offer their prayers and Communions for you as our gift for your many kindnesses to us." In 1883 he mistakenly sent his best

[25]Turin, July 15, 1882 and November 15, 1883. [Author]

wishes a month ahead of time, although that letter, dated, he said, July 12, is not in our files. Then, on the right day, realizing his error during Mass, he decided to write to her again: "Sorry! Better early than late! However, I did celebrate Holy Mass for you today at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians, and our boys did offer their prayers and Communions for you. God bless you and keep you healthy and holy." A letter of his in 1886 begins with a prayer:

Pinerolo, Bishop's Residence, 1886

St. Claire, pray for us. Pray very especially for your protégée, who worthily bears your name.

God bless you! May the Blessed Virgin obtain peace of heart for you and perseverance in good works. All the Salesians will pray daily for you, that God may generously reward your charity on earth and more generously in paradise.

Please pray for me. In heartfelt gratitude I am always,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Knowing that she would be pleased, Don Bosco sometimes sent her grapes which he had personally picked from the balcony vines shading his window and which he would send to patrician families in Turin. Miss Louvet and her friends considered the grapes as coming to them from the Promised Land itself.

However, when it came to persons who he knew were living a life of fervent faith, Don Bosco would also express his gratitude in a very personal way. He would not stop at words of thanks and the promise of prayers; rather, on receiving donations, he endeavored to return the benefit by encouraging them to a very meritorious detachment from earthly goods. Though material-minded people may find this hard to grasp, it has very lofty moral and Christian worth. Nowhere else in his letters does Don Bosco as clearly reveal this saintly tactic of his as in the following excerpt from a letter to Miss Louvet:[26] "In your last letter," he wrote, "you tell me that you find it hard to neglect putting some money aside for emergencies. But that's not the way to look at it. I want you to keep all your revenues as an investment yielding a hundred percent interest on earth, and then as a guarantee that you will enjoy your wealth forever in heaven. Do you know what I mean? I have

[26]Turin, June 17, 1882. [Author]

always endeavored to do my utmost to free my friends' hearts from the wretched things of this world and to lift them up to God, the eternal Good. You see, my dear friend, I am only striving to make you rich, or, to put it better, to bring to harvest your earthly wealth, which lasts but a moment, and transform it into an everlasting treasure." Then in a more practical vein, putting himself in the background, he wrote, "You ask me in what charities you can best invest your money. I say it would be best used in coming to the aid of the Church and of the Holy Father, who is in so many financial difficulties. Help the works he personally recommends, such as Rome's Sacred Heart Church and Hospice, and support projects which aim at turning out priests who will bring many souls to God. Please patiently try to understand my awful scribble, and I shall later develop this thought further."

However, it seems that there was no need to do so. He had already touched on the topic in his very first letter of our collection. Miss Louvet then had a small sum ready to give him personally and, changing her mind, sent it by mail instead. Don Bosco replied:[27] "It was an excellent idea for you to send us five hundred francs for our work. Yours is all the benefit because the hundredfold repayment began the moment you sent it. Then again, I'm sure, by the time I get to Aire in April you will have time to put another contribution together." He similarly wrote in August of that year: "You say that on some occasion you wish to send me two thousand francs. Well, since we're always in need and particularly so now, I believe it better for you to anticipate your offering, since by doing so you will hasten God's hundredfold reward for yourself, and we shall all the sooner be able to benefit by your help."

Although Don Bosco never again expressed his view as categorically as he did above, he reaffirmed it in practical ways as circumstances required. For instance, when Miss Louvet, weighing his suggestion that she go to Rome in 1884, asked him to whom she should entrust her valuables during her absence from home, Don Bosco replied that she could entrust them with the same person who usually cared for them on similar occasions. But then he added: "However, if you want to be doubly sure, you could deposit them in Don Bosco's *bank*, which will protect them, or, better still, spend them promptly, in such a way that

[27]Turin, January 1, 1882. [Author]

thieves will never be able to lay their hands on them. That is the best way of insuring your wealth. Of course, Miss Claire, you understand that I'm only joking." At another time he went more to the point. In 1886 it seems that Miss Louvet was thinking of setting up a trust for a project to be initiated after her death. However, very many pious foundations had recently been sidetracked from their original aim as a result of the secularistic state laws. So Don Bosco cautioned her: "Concerning the matter you mentioned, here is my advice: whatever good you can do, do it now rather than putting it off for the future. This is what the signs of the present times are telling us: do what you can in the present and make no commitments to the future."[28] This conviction of his he carved in stone, as it were, when writing to his benefactor Father Engrand, saying that he begged for him of God and of the Blessed Virgin the grace of dying in poverty so as to be wealthy in eternity.[29]

Before closing we would like to glean a few notes on spiritual direction which we find scattered throughout this interesting correspondence. All in all, we see that Claire Louvet was a beautiful soul, thirsting for Christian perfection and full of charity. Her trust in Don Bosco was such as one places in a saint. There was a time when she thought of joining the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians and actually consulted Don Bosco, but he replied with a smile: "Your age, health and social standing form an insurmountable obstacle to attaining your quest." She acquiesced.

In his concern for her spiritual life Don Bosco did not take the place of her spiritual director but only helped her put everything together, especially by encouragement. "As for yourself and for your spiritual guide, be patient," he had written in his first letter. "God will put in order your affairs, spiritual and material, unto His own glory. Meanwhile endeavor to receive Holy Communion as often as you can, and if you cannot for one reason or other, do not fret over it. Tell me your worries, and I shall do my best to offer you counsel." As for her fear that her daily Communion might become routine, Don Bosco told her:[30] "Continue receiving Holy Communion every morning. You say that you fear it will become a mere habit. Well, when a habit is good and conducive to virtue, we should continue to keep it."

[28]Turin, January 26, 1884 and December 26, 1883. [Author]
[29]Turin, December 18, 1882. [Author]
[30]Turin, July 15, 1882. [Author]

She also had her trials. One day Don Bosco sent her a holy card depicting a little cross. Wondering what it meant, Claire asked him. He replied:[31] "The little cross I sent you means that among crosses and thorns God is preparing many flowers for you. Do not worry. In due time I will explain it all." Meanwhile he cheered her, continuing: "God bless you, Miss Claire! May He keep you in good health and reserve a place for you in heaven at the side of Mary, Help of Christians!" In January 1883 he once more endeavored to raise her spirits. "Be fully at peace in mind and heart. I shall remember you every day at holy Mass. I trust that you will also pray for me."

It appears—and we know it from other sources too—that God was trying this delicate soul by inner sufferings, and so Don Bosco kept encouraging her:[32] "All I desire is your peace and serenity of mind. Listen to me. Your conscience is clear; the Blessed Virgin Herself has been given to you as your guide; your guardian angel looks after you. Therefore there is nothing to fear."

Eight days later he traced out for her a very practical spiritual program meant to free her from her fear of never doing enough.[33] "Just a few suggestions, but they must be followed diligently. *Every year:* thorough examination of conscience, weighing the progress or regress experienced during the past year. *Every month:* Exercise for a Happy Death with a monthly confession and Holy Communion as though they were the last of your life, and prayers for a holy death. *Every week:* a good confession, great diligence in recalling and carrying out your confessor's advice. *Every day:* Holy Communion, if possible, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, meditation, spiritual reading, examination of conscience. *Always:* look upon every day as if it were your last."

When the cholera epidemic broke out, he swiftly intervened to calm her fears.

Turin, July 9, 1884

Dear Miss Claire Louvet,

Trusting you are in good health, I hasten to prescribe an effective antidote against cholera.

1. Wear a medal of Mary, Help of Christians.
2. Often say: "Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us."

[31]Turin, August 10, 1882. [Author]
[32]Turin, September 9, 1883. [Author]
[33]Turin, September 17, 1883. [Author]

3. Receive Holy Communion often.

I thank you for your donation. May God amply reward your good deeds. We are praying for you. Please remember us and our family. Amen.

Yours most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

Always frail in health, and very sensitive in conscience, Claire wanted to observe the Lenten fast and abstinence in 1885. Don Bosco dissuaded her:[34] "Throughout these days you are not even to think of abstinence or fast. I strictly forbid them. Let real sinners like Don Bosco do penance."

His thirty-eighth letter, giving a detailed itinerary of his trip to Spain, has also some wise norms, brief to be sure, but promising a lengthier treatment to come. It seems that Miss Louvet hesitated to go to the Côte d'Azur that year, probably fearing it to be idle recreation rather than actual necessity. At any rate Don Bosco suggested that she come to Italy and stay with the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians.

Alassio, March 19, 1886

Dear Miss Louvet:

Your gracious dear letter reached me here at our school in Alassio. The matters you mentioned are a mere trifle in the light of eternity. If we get a chance to discuss them personally we can straighten them out; if not, we will do so by letter.

Give some thought to this: first, the southern climate would do you a world of good; second, you would rid yourself of worrisome distressing thoughts. Each point we shall later discuss together.

My health is fair. God willing, I shall begin my trip from Nice to Barcelona on Saturday, expecting to be back home in Turin by the beginning of May. Please keep addressing your mail to Turin, and it will promptly be forwarded to me wherever I am.

My trip will take me to Nice, Cannes, Toulon, Marseille and Barcelona. I shall return to Italy by the beginning of May.

Good-bye, Miss Louvet. May Our Lady guide us always on the path to heaven.

Your most grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

[34]Turin, February 21, 1885. [Author]

P.S. I believe that a stay at Alassio during the winter and Nizza Monferrato during the summer would benefit you. We have two rooms for you near our sisters' house. Details we can discuss later.

Quite often in the letters of Miss Louvet fears crop up over a turn for the worse in the political situation in France which was causing her spiritual distress. As we have seen, Don Bosco often comforted her, but in 1886, on the day after the feast of the Immaculate Conception, he seemed less optimistic than usual as regards world affairs, though always relying on divine assistance. Thus he wrote: "The world's future looks very dark, but God is *Light* and the Blessed Virgin is ever the *Morning Star*. Trust in God and in Mary and have no fears. *I can do all things in Him who strengthens me*, Jesus Christ. Be patient. Patience is absolutely necessary if we are to conquer the world, gain victory, and enter paradise."

The closing words of a letter dated January 16, 1887, though sounding like a good-bye, have the earmarks of spiritual direction: "Goodbye, Miss Claire. May God preserve your peace of heart, your serenity of soul, and perseverance unto paradise." How often he reminded her of paradise! He did so in the four letters which end their correspondence. Two we reproduce here translated; the other two are in French and photographically reproduced in the Appendix.[35] They are brief, the handwriting very irregular, for, like his whole body, his hand had grown weary. The first two letters were written at Lanzo, where he spent part of his last summer on earth; in each, paradise is mentioned twice.

Lanzo, July 4, 1887

Dear Miss Louvet,

Your place in paradise is ready and, I trust, secure, but you must wait a while.

I received your donation for our orphans. May God reward you bountifully. Father Rua is doing better; not so Count Colle. We keep praying.

God bless you and Father Engrand, and may He guide us on the way to heaven. Amen. Pray for me.

Yours most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

[35]Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

Lanzo, July 25, 1887

Dear Miss Claire:

I am at Lanzo; my health is slightly improved. How is yours? I never fail to pray for you every day. When will paradise come to meet us? We wait in expectation of God's good pleasure.

I commend Father Rua to your kind prayers; his health leaves much to be desired. At present he is in Toulon with Count Colle, who is grievously ill.

God bless us, and may Mary guide us through earth's perils until we reach paradise. Amen.

Yours most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

The last two letters he wrote in Valsalice on September 4 and 5 during the spiritual retreat and the novena for Our Lady's Nativity; their contents are almost identical, probably due to forgetfulness on his part.[36]

On two occasions Don Bosco had words of lofty praise for Miss Louvet. Once, in speaking to Father Engrand, he said, "She is a woman of great virtue." Another time he told Salesian Father [Charles] Bellamy:[37] "She is a great support for us financially, but even more by her prayers."

As for Count Colle, so for Miss Louvet Don Bosco left a note to be sent after his death. To her he wrote, "I must depart before you, but I shall not fail to pray for your eternal happiness. Please keep helping our orphans, and they will form your crown when the angels will one day come to take you to the enjoyment of eternal bliss. O Mary, protect Your daughter always. Kindly pray for my poor soul's eternal rest."

After his death, she lived with his memory, praying to him as her most powerful heavenly patron and mostly trying to imitate his patience in the inevitable distress of advancing age. Throughout the most painful moments of her final illness, all she needed was to have someone mention Don Bosco's name and a smile would return to her lips, serenity to her soul. A Daughter of Mary, Help of Christians, sent by Father Rua to nurse her, always used this unfailing means in critical moments to bolster her courage and acceptance.

A few months after Don Bosco's death, rumors of a certain prophecy

[36]Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[37]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

of his concerning a forthcoming war perturbed her sleep. Father Rua reassured her, while thanking her for her gift of a thousand francs. "We have no knowledge of the prophecy being rumored about and being attributed to Don Bosco," he wrote on December 19 [1888]. "Hence, if he did speak of a war against an enemy next spring, he simply meant the war we wage every spring: our boys gobbling up bread, our suppliers and creditors clamoring for money day after day when more than ever we always lack funds. This is the only war I believe Don Bosco meant; otherwise he would have told us something, but he neither wrote nor said a word about it. So put your mind at ease and your trust in Mary, Help of Christians and Don Bosco, whose protection will shield you from all harm. They both know that you are the great protectress of their children. Have no fear."

For as long as she survived Don Bosco, she put all her trust and reverence in Father Rua, whose rare virtues and supernatural gifts she had already perceived with the intuition of a holy soul. Don Bosco had told her, "When we shall open a house in your district, you will be its mamma." A house was in fact opened at Ruitz in 1891, and until 1903, when religious congregations were expelled, Miss Louvet gave generously to its first director, Father Alvin Ronchail, and to his successors, Father [Emil] Cosson and Father [Charles] Patarelli. Along with other help she always met the deficit year after year. For the rest of her life she kept in touch with the superior chapter, giving as often and as generously as she had done to Don Bosco. Since she had no heirs—she had only cousins—we can understand the generosity of her last years, so much so that Sister Guiot, a Daughter of Mary, Help of Christians, recalled that she once sent Father Paul Albera fifty thousand francs in Miss Louvet's name.

She departed this life on November 11, 1912, to behold once more her two great protectors in heaven.

# CHAPTER 20

## *Don Bosco's Concern for the Missions and Missionaries*

DON Bosco's trip to Rome [in 1882] was a decisive step to gain the official recognition and canonical autonomy of his Patagonian missions. No sooner, therefore, did he arrive than indefatigably he exerted all his efforts with the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith—all the more after an audience with Leo XIII, who gave him a personal mandate.[1] At that time Europeans knew precious little about Patagonia's geography. Even the Roman curia had only the vaguest notion, certainly not enough to set up adequate boundary lines of jurisdiction. For this reason, at Don Bosco's urgent request, a map of Patagonia, drawn to scale, which hung in the corridor outside his room had been rushed to him.[2]

His plan called for not one but three vicariates or at least three prefectures apostolic in Patagonia: one extending from Rio Colorado to Rio Chubut, another from Rio Chubut to Rio Santa Cruz, and a third from Rio Santa Cruz to far-off Tierra del Fuego, including the Falkland Islands. The Pope gradually agreed with him, but made it clear that though the boundaries of three vicariates could be established, it would be wiser, for the time being, to start with one extending from the Rio Colorado to the interior of Patagonia.[3]

Rome, however, moves very prudently and unhurriedly; unless all details are clearly spelled out, Church officials make no commitment. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that in August Don Bosco complained about the obstacles that were hindering the acceptance of his

[1]Letter from Father Berto to Father Costamagna, Rome, April 28, 1882. [Author]
[2]Letter from Father Berto to Father Bonetti, Rome, April 22, 1882. [Author]
[3]Letter from Don Bosco to Father Dalmazzo, Turin, July 29, 1882. [Author]

long-cherished plan. The delay, he feared, might eventually ruin it completely.[4] However, he had very wisely indeed initiated negotiations two years before. Had he not foreseen the situation that early, he most certainly would not have had the joy of seeing his wish gratified in 1884.

We are not to think that his plan met with favor in Argentina. Even the archbishop of Buenos Aires, kind as he was, considered it neither timely nor necessary to set up a vicariate, for, as he maintained, "I give the Salesians on these missions all the faculties I myself have. Then why cut Patagonia off from the archdiocese of Buenos Aires?"[5] Later, when he came to know Rome's mind, he altered his stand. Great caution also had to be exercised in approaching the government, lest its sensitivity be aroused as if the establishment of a vicariate were an arbitrary intervention or a foreign intrusion into the national borders only recently solidified by the army. This explains what Don Bosco meant when he wrote to Father Dalmazzo, his procurator, "about the advisability underscored by the archbishop of obtaining the government's support" in this matter.[7]

Meanwhile in Patagonia the missionaries were striving energetically to create a situation which would justify, if not openly require, a structure which in fact and in law would constitute a distinct moral entity in the organic complex of the Catholic missions. From their center at Patagónes and Viedma Father Beauvoir and Father Milanesio kept pushing ahead in every which way, wherever isolated white colonies were located or wherever Indian tribes or families might be found. By "colonies" Don Bosco meant small settlements erected in areas where people could live by farming or sheep raising. Using them as bases of operation by always erecting small chapels for prayer and worship, the missionaries would set out in search of natives who usually lived nearby in scattered clusters.[8] By erecting a church and two boarding schools at Patagónes—one for boys, one for girls—Father [Joseph] Fagnano, superior of the mission, consolidated his headquarters and then courageously ventured forth into the wilderness, explor-

[4]Letter of Don Bosco to Father Dalmazzo, San Benigno, August 27, 1882. [Author]

[5]So stated Father Vespignani[6] in his already cited but unpublished chronicle of the San Carlos provincial house. [Author]

[6]*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

[7]Letter from Turin, July 29, 1882. [Author]

[8]*See Bollettino Salesiano*, April and July 1882; February 1883. [Author]

ing the most unreachable areas. Every now and then the missionaries sent Don Bosco reports which cheered his heart and reassured his efforts to press negotiations for establishing a vicariate apostolic.

Salesian work in Buenos Aires was also on the ascent. The year 1882 was particularly fruitful for the workshops of our arts and trades school. Orders kept pouring in and the young apprentices had all they needed to meet their commitments. The printshop's three presses were never idle; the woodworkers had a steady flow of orders; a blacksmith shop was opened. The Salesians had made a name for themselves at a recent Continental Exposition, when the printers, tailors and woodworkers won choice prizes. The archbishop's pastoral letter, focusing upon Catholic projects in existence or in the planning stages, commended to the laity's support the Salesian school of arts and trades, which he spoke of with the highest praise.

The school's reputation, spreading throughout the country, brought in requests for similar institutions in other countries. Father James Costamagna, provincial, was flooded with requests from Chivilcoy, Dolores, Salta, Las Flores, Azul, and, very heavily, from Tucumán. The governor and state authorities of that province bombarded him with all kinds of letters and recommendations, inviting him meanwhile to visit their district, promising land, funds, a church, and both material and moral support. Pressed by such overwhelming overtures, he could not put them aside. A four-day journey brought him to Tucumán, where he readily saw that the place was ideal for a new house—except that he lacked the personnel. Four months later the governor gave the archbishop of Buenos Aires authority to negotiate with the Salesians; the federal government was ready to pay passage for any Salesian being sent to Tucumán from Europe. Realizing that it would be unwise to say no, Father Costamagna had half a mind to sail to Turin and personally request personnel. "I am afraid you will scold me," he wrote to Don Bosco on July 7, "deny me my request, and send me back here with my tail between my legs. . . . I know that my feelings wrong Don Bosco's fatherly heart, but what can one expect? Being so far away, not hearing Don Bosco's voice for so long, we are half in a daze. Let that be. If the government really intends to pay our fares and we can all travel together on the same ship, I may very well decide to come over. We should bear in mind that we should not delay because winter would create problems." But Don Bosco immediately answered and very graciously asked him to defer his trip:

San Benigno Canavese, August 9, 1882

My dear Father Costamagna:

It's always a pleasure to receive your letters, which I read to the superior chapter; we give much weight to them.

We recognize the daily increasing rich harvest which God entrusts to us. But two problems stand in the way: lack of personnel and overwhelming pressure of work.

I think we can do as follows. Here we shall organize a regular missionary expedition for the coming year 1883; in July of 1883 you will come here with a confrere to pay us a visit and attend the general chapter scheduled for either August or September.

At that time you can fire us all with apostolic zeal and then return to the land of Cabot with a company of heroes.

This is just my opinion, as I sit here at San Benigno for a few moments of ease. Your proposals, instead, will properly be studied by the superior chapter, and then we can unanimously act upon them as far as is possible.

I am now at San Benigno; yesterday we kept the feast of St. Aloysius with Bishop [David] Riccardi of Ivrea, who pontificated at the services and spent the whole day with us.

In the evening we saw Father Lemoyne's drama "Patagonia." People flocked from all the neighboring villages to see this new kind of play. It generated great enthusiasm and emotion. Everyone wanted to head out for Patagonia!

Please give the confreres my heartfelt greetings. I commend Father Debella to your care; he can be a great help to you in your ministry but needs much kindness and great trust.

I spoke to the priests and clerics here about you. Their reaction was prolonged unanimous applause and greetings from all.

God bless you, my ever beloved Father Costamagna. May God keep you always in His holy grace and bless you, Father Remotti, Father Bourlot, Father Vespignani, and all the rest. I hope to write to them soon.

Pray for me, all of you, for I am always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The high esteem enjoyed by the Salesians in Buenos Aires led the affluent to include them in their wills. In 1882 a very wealthy lady, Mrs. Petronilla Rodriguez, bequeathed five hundred thousand pesos to Father Costamagna on her deathbed without ever having met him personally. Another legacy of one hundred and fifty thousand pesos was bequeathed by Mr. Felix Frías. Father Costamagna passed on the first

bequest to the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, who needed a residence at Almagro. With Turin's permission, he had plans drawn up based on his personal knowledge of the sisters' daily routine, health requirements and needs, and the needs of community life which he had acquired as their director both in Europe and in [South] America. He wanted their chapel to be a miniature shrine of Mary, Help of Christians. The archbishop heartily agreed to bless the cornerstone on May 24; the foundations of the entire building were laid, the walls began to rise, and the design of the structure took shape. Construction progressed rapidly also because Father Costamagna was often there, supervising the work and providing additional help through the aspirants and the older boys.

These material responsibilities, however, did not keep him from looking after the spiritual needs of the houses, particularly of the house at Patagónes, which he had not yet visited. At the end of June he boarded a ship for this long, dangerous journey. At Patagónes he focused his attention on the temporal and spiritual needs of both Salesians and sisters. He preached a retreat to the mission's four priests and three coadjutors and one also to the sisters. A month later he returned to San Carlos, where they celebrated his name day with greater solemnity than ever.

Writing on May 1 to Don Bosco to inform him of his coming trip to Tucumán, Father Costamagna closed his letter with some sad news: "At San Nicolás they had to send the boys home because of a contagious disease. Pray. . . ." Indeed a heavy burden had fallen upon that boarding school. At the end of their spiritual retreat the boys had been taken for the customary outing. On their return home, many were seized with symptoms of what soon proved to be diphtheria. In the dead of night Father Tomatis sent home as many boys as could withstand the journey. It was a fortunate decision, for the next day the army arrived to place the school under quarantine, and no one could either enter or leave. The quarantine lasted two months. Four boys died; the Salesians who cared for them also had to lay out and seal their bodies in coffins. An Irish settler, father of a pupil, who volunteered to stay on in the house, helped out through the virtual imprisonment, nursing the sick and supporting the Salesians. Other colonists brought in food, passing it through an iron grating. Father Costamagna rushed to visit his unfortunate confreres but was halted by a sentry at the gate. Granted permission at least to enter the church, he went to the sacristy and called out

to the Salesians, who anxiously came down, haggard and exhausted by their endless night vigils. After a few words of greeting, Father Costamagna called for a bottle of wine and, fearing what the sentry might do if he found them there, sent for the soldier, and a glass of hearty wine put everything right. Then they all returned to their work, and the provincial went back to Buenos Aires.

Father Tomatis had better news to give Don Bosco on July 15. "After our enforced agonizing trial, we are cheerful again. Thanks to Mary, Help of Christians, our forty patients have all fully recovered, and now all of us, teachers and pupils, have resumed our school activities. In fact, not only did the boys who had temporarily been sent home because of the disease return to school, but, as though compensating for our past afflictions, the Lord sent us more pupils, so that the San Nicolás boarding school is now in excellent shape." The forty boys who had recovered were most probably those who fell ill after the four who died. That was when Father Tomatis sent Don Bosco the first news of the epidemic in an early letter which we have not been able to trace. He referred to it in a second letter dated July 15: "After my last letter that I sent you through Ramòn Quesada, nothing new has happened." This statement is to be interpreted as meaning that there were no further deaths. Certainly, without heavenly intervention, the epidemic might easily have become a horrible disaster.

A month later to the day, Don Bosco was to celebrate his birthday at the Oratory and so Father Tomatis continued: "Now the main reason for this letter: along with all your many other loving sons, I too offer you my congratulations, dearest of fathers, and wish you a happy birthday next August. On that day you will certainly have reason to thank the Lord who has wrought great things through you, nor shall we, your sons in the Lord, have any less reason, for not only has He given us in you the best of fathers and sincerest of friends, but He has also spared the founder of our Salesian Society, our ark of salvation. The Salesians of San Nicolás are fully aware of this truth, which fills their hearts with love and gratitude to the Lord and to you. In union with the Salesians in all our houses, we too will offer our Masses and Communions on August 15, that we may be graced to see your days prolonged by Divine Providence and that you may receive the health and strength you need to continue leading our Society. These, dear Father, are our sentiments; their expression is the only gift we can send

you from this far-off land. Please accept it as a token of our thanks and of our heartfelt affection, and bless us."

Such a show of affection of sons toward their father was typical in the Salesians' letters to Don Bosco; they form a new chapter in the history of the great founders of religious orders and congregations. From Uruguay another example reaches us. Father [Lawrence ] Giordano, writing to Don Bosco from Villa Colón, and describing the welcome given Father [Louis] Lasagna by confreres, friends, pupils and past pupils on his return to the motherhouse, suddenly exclaims, "O dearly beloved father, what a celebration will all your loving sons give you in heaven, what a welcome, what joy will thrill their hearts! How comforting it is for us who have gone so far from you, perhaps forever, to know that you are working, suffering and praying so much for us! May the Lord long spare you for our benefit and that of many souls! On the other hand, may the Lord speed that day of joy and endless celebration in heaven when all your sons will be reunited with you, their beloved father, never again to leave your side!"[9]

At that time the new Uruguayan province entrusted to Father Lasagna had four houses: Pius IX boarding school at Villa Colón, St. Vincent de Paul Festive Oratory at Montevideo, the parish and boarding school of San Isidro at Las Piedras, and the parish of San Isidro at Paysandù.

Pius IX school, the provincial house, received a notable increase of personnel to conduct its many works and to ease it into a promising new field of activity. Its red-letter day of 1882 was the inauguration of the meteorological observatory.[10] The project required much time to set up, but it was ready to go into operation by the beginning of May. The occasion called for the greatest possible solemnity; present were the internuncio of Brazil, then passing through Uruguay, the bishop, and many very outstanding dignitaries. The record of the proceedings, bearing twenty-five illustrious signatures, stated that the observatory was a very important response to the ardent wish of the Third International Geographic Convention held in Venice [in 1881] and expressed a prayer to God that it could carry out successfully its difficult scientific

[9]Letter to Don Bosco, Villa Colón, January 26, 1882. [Author]
[10]*See* pp. 20f. [Editor]

challenge, "reinforcing new discoveries and advanced studies of the physical laws given by God to govern the planet which supports generations of our mortal humanity."

In the Uruguayan capital, Montevideo, the St. Vincent Oratory and Hospice were joyfully frequented by two hundred and eighty poor boys. In fact, as we have stated elsewhere, it became the headquarters of an impressive chain of festive oratories springing up in the city through the initiative of Villa Colón's former Salesian pupils. In Las Piedras, responding to the needs and trust of the people, both the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians expanded their apostolate.

However, the parish at Paysandù had cause for grief. The town was built on the left bank of the Rio Uruguay at the far end of a hill whose summit was crowned by the parish church of San Isidro. On March 26, one year after the Salesians arrived in the city, in the middle of the night, the church caught fire, with damage running to forty thousand lire. Father Lasagna feared that the Protestants would make capital of the disaster, but even in their brief stay the Salesians had so won the hearts of the people that very quickly enough funds were collected to restore the church, which soon arose from its ashes more beautiful than before. The provincial was so heartened that, while organizing catechism classes and new mission stations, he started a fund-raising campaign for the erection of a boarding school for boys and one for girls. Divine Providence thus wrought good from evil.

It was Providence too which seemed to dispose things in ways which would hasten the arrival of Don Bosco's sons in Brazil. We recall that back in 1877 Bishop [Peter] Lacerda had zealously worked for this favor.[11] In December of that year he left Europe in the fond hope that he would soon welcome Salesians to Rio de Janeiro, but as late as May 1882 no action had yet been taken. Don Bosco, however, never forgot his promise; he only needed time to train properly the men he intended to send. In 1881 he had held lengthy discussions about his plans for Brazil with Father Lasagna, who had long been keeping Brazil uppermost in his mind and in his heart. And so Don Bosco instructed him to go to Rio de Janeiro and negotiate with the bishop for the first Salesian house in Brazil.

After settling the affairs of the house at Villa Colón and those of the

[11]*See* Volume XII, pp. 243, 392f. [Editor]

province, Father Lasagna set sail for Rio de Janeiro on May 9. A few days before, he had written to Don Bosco,[12] "As you may guess, my mind and spirit are absorbed in the vastness of the endeavor we are undertaking and in the future awaiting Don Bosco's youthful missionaries in that vast empire. My heart, though quaking with anxiety and fear, is flooded with even higher hopes. . . . Strengthened by your blessing, my most beloved father, and determined to follow your instructions faithfully, I shall set out on this first journey, which will open to our Society the portals of an empire equal to three-fourths of all Europe." He chose to sail on that particular day because he could accompany [titular] Bishop [Mario] Mocenni [of Eliopolis], who was voyaging from Chile to Brazil to assume his duties of papal internuncio to Emperor Peter II.

Two factors were pushing the social problems of abandoned youth to an all-time high in the empire. The emperor, figuring that it was simply impossible to abolish slavery at one fell swoop without also totally wrecking the nation's agricultural economy, which was entirely dependent upon slave labor, chose to follow a middle course, and so, eleven years previously, had promulgated a law freeing, from that year on, children born of slaves. As a result, the city's streets swarmed with hordes of abandoned youngsters. Worse still, recurrent waves of yellow fever orphaned countless children, leaving them homeless. Walking through Rio de Janeiro, Father Lasagna continually came across crowds of young people who, left to themselves, were fast becoming experts in crime. The government was trying to remedy this situation by rounding them up and forcing them upon plantation owners, but most of the young rascals would run away and turn up again in the capital, until their aimless wanderings were cut short by either prison or death. The same was happening in other densely populated cities. Such a plight rent Bishop Lacerda's heart and so moved Father Lasagna to tears that in his flaming zeal he promised the bishop he would move heaven and earth to bring the Salesians to Brazil so they could care for these children of the people. And so a Salesian house was opened in the Niterói hills facing Rio de Janeiro's imposing waterfront.

Father Lasagna was further encouraged by the gracious reception he was given by the government authorities. The emperor himself granted him a special audience at his palace in Petropolis on the feast of

[12]Villa Colón, May 6, 1882. [Author]

Pentecost, engaging him in friendly conversation. He asked for a detailed account of the founding of the Salesian Congregation, the purpose of their mission in the Church, their system of educating the young, the financial support of their many enterprises, and the results of their efforts. Hearing of the festive oratories and hospices, the agricultural and trade schools, the missions of Patagonia and the Pampas, in utter satisfaction he voiced a fervent wish that he might soon have the Salesians working in his vast empire, promising firm patronage and fullest protection.

From Rio de Janeiro Father Lasagna headed out for the states of Pernambuco, Ceará, Maranhão and Pará, and was welcomed everywhere in a show of high esteem by the local bishops, who begged whatever help he could give them in their hour of painful distress. Each of their dioceses extended endlessly to cover more territory than all of Italy; the diocese of Pará, for instance, was six times larger than all of France. Priests were very few, seminaries were empty, religious orders were dead or dying. Don Bosco had asked Father Lasagna to give special attention to the provinces of Pará and Amazonas; there he met one of the Church's finest bishops of the time, Antonio de Macedo Costa. Realizing that he had found in Father Lasagna a man of his caliber, he drew for the priest a graphic and touching picture of his diocese, which was critically short of priests needed to preserve the faith of the Christian population and to evangelize the teeming uncivilized tribes.

The lengthy letter supplying many of these details[13] contains a passage outpouring all the priestly ardor of this great son of Don Bosco to such a degree that we cannot read it without marveling at the wonders achieved by our saintly Don Bosco in training these first co-workers of his. It is a well-known fact that Father Lasagna, who ranks with the most renowned apostolic missionaries, was among the most restive boys at the Oratory, resisting discipline and restraint. He personally—and we heard him—praised with tears in his eyes Don Bosco's untiring patience with him. Here is his letter:

And now, my most beloved father, let me remark that 1882 may well come to a close with not one single Salesian leaving Italy to join his missionary

[13]Letter of Father Lasagna to Don Bosco, Villa Colón, November 24, 1882. We gleaned other details from a letter dated May 24, published in the August issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano*. The original has been lost. [Author]

confreres. Such a thing, which has not happened in recent years, very painfully distresses us. It tells us that Italy's needs are also growing and that obstacles are looming larger and larger. It tells us that, though the zeal of our younger confreres' hearts is not cooling, you may be finding yourself without the basic funds needed to supply and undertake these very costly missionary expeditions. Therefore we must lift our hands in prayer to heaven, begging the merciful God to rush to the aid of our father Don Bosco by raising up many generous souls who, by their sacrifices, will support his enterprising spirit and his works so eminently devoted to charity and evangelization. May God grant that this coming year will be for you one of rich consolation and powerful help, and for us the bearer of the help we have long begged for! May we no longer have to moan and sigh as we await another missionary expedition! May the heroic sacrifices they make to tear themselves away from their loved ones and the endless good they will be able to accomplish for souls in their missionary labors turn into many heavenly blessings for their native soil! Let them come, these many heroes of the Lord, to form the dauntless, bold advance ranks of the undefeated army of Christ's Church! Here they will find already laid out for them a road to great victories, and they will be enabled to crown their brows with immortal laurels. We will need some to go with us at the beginning of the new year to the capital of Brazil, to the Niterói hills, overlooking Rio de Janeiro. A modest home already awaits us there, destined to be one day a spacious hospice for poor and abandoned boys and, perhaps, also a wellspring of future missionaries. The bravest shall bear the cross and Christian civilization into the very hinterland, into the very heart of South America, following the winding course of endless rivers, pushing through virgin forests and alien lands scorched by the blazing sun. It is a daring challenge, and of such great consequence that it cannot but impress even the dullest of minds. Some will go to Cuiabá, a city of Mato Grosso, Brazil's most inland state, the continent's most central and least known region, criss-crossed by many uncivilized tribes. It is bordered on the north by the unexplored basin of the Amazon and Pará rivers, on the west by the dense forests of Bolivia, to the south by the charming woodlands of Paraguay once evangelized by the heroic efforts of the Jesuits, but now again fallen into the hands of Satan and his earthly agents. To the east it borders on other Brazilian provinces, unmapped because no one has dared to break through those forbidding woodlands, the lair of ferocious animals and of men fiercer than the fiercest beasts. Its area is estimated at one million four hundred thousand square kilometers, five times as large as all Italy and its adjacent islands. In this boundless wilderness the Christians barely number sixty thousand, six thousand of whom are still slaves.[14] The natives living in the forests, numerous as they are, are so indom-

[14]The total abolition of slavery in 1888 was Emperor Peter's last historic achievement; it was a

itable and warlike that a census is impossible. . . . The Salesians will not hesitate a moment to take on so challenging a task. . . . Thus, while some of our confreres push forward to conquer the icy shores of Patagonia, we will follow the course of unknown rivers under the blazing rays of the tropical sun . . . to conquer the very heart of South America. . . . And who knows but someday, climbing the ridges of the Parecis Mountains and canoeing down the Arinos and Tapajóz Rivers, we may join hands with our confreres whose task it is to set up missions along the mighty states of Pará and Amazonas.

Obviously, plans were being considered for a mission in the diocese of Pará. Bishop Macedo Costa, unable to win a definite promise from Father Lasagna, appealed to papal secretary of state Cardinal Ludwig Jacobini on June 27 [1882]. A year before, he had written Don Bosco a touching letter asking for a few Salesians. Don Bosco had then thanked him for his trust in the Salesian Congregation, and had assured him that he would send a Salesian from Montevideo to Pará to discuss the situation with him personally. He chose Father Lasagna; his mandate was to study the area and report to him, but to make no commitments. The bishop therefore, unappeased by this gesture, appealed directly to the Holy See[15] and begged Cardinal Jacobini to drop Don Bosco a line in the Pope's name, asking him to consent to set up a Salesian house in his diocese. The cardinal obligingly forwarded a copy of the bishop's letter to Don Bosco and asked him to meet the request as best he could, assuring him that the Pope would look very favorably upon this move.[16]

To come up with a document which exactly states Don Bosco's mind on this matter, we must cite a letter of his, dated September 8, to Father Dalmazzo, his procurator: "You may also inform Cardinal Nina that we have already very decidedly set up two mission centers in Brazil in the dioceses of Pará and of Rio de Janeiro, to fulfill the Holy Father's wish as expressed through his cardinal secretary of state. At Pará new construction and renovation have already begun, and we shall take up residence as soon as the work is finished. At Rio de Janeiro our house is ready; it's in a lovely spot called Niterói, not far from the city, just

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tribute to Leo XIII, whose priestly jubilee was then being celebrated throughout the world. [Author]

[15]The French text of these two letters was published in the September [1882] *Bulletin Salésien*. [Author]

[16]Rome, July 22, 1882. [Author]

north of it, as you can see on the map. Yesterday I signed and returned the agreement drawn up between Bishop Lacerda, Father Lasagna and the seller."

Just the day before, Don Bosco had replied to Cardinal Jacobini's letter. We do not know what his reply actually was, but the cardinal's prompt acknowledgment is a valuable document and we reproduce it in full. It shows us how Don Bosco would not miss any opportunity to insist upon the granting of privileges to his Congregation.

Rome, September 12, 1882

Very Reverend Father:

I took occasion of your letter of September 7 to present the Holy Father with a gratifying report. He was most pleased with your promptness in planning to have your religious open an agricultural school near Pará with the added aim of fostering vocations to the priesthood. The Pontiff also was delighted to learn that, heeding his recommendations for the diocese of Rio de Janeiro, you have already assured Bishop Lacerda of the purchase of a house at Niterói, a short distance from the capital.

The rest of Brazil also feels the dire need of zealous evangelical workers, particularly the vast, sparsely populated area of the Cuiabá diocese. Only recently we received a heartrending account of the situation there from Bishop [Mario] Mocenni, internuncio apostolic at the court of Brazil, pleading with loud cries for priests of your Congregation to help those unfortunate Catholics. Could you respond to that appeal? You would certainly delight the Holy Father, all the more so if, taking to heart those urgent needs, you could begin setting up a novitiate for native vocations in that vast empire.

For the rest of your letter, I assure you that I shall take pains to support your request for the granting of the privileges you need for your Congregation. I am happy to sign myself with high esteem,

Yours most affectionately,
✠Ludwig Cardinal Jacobini

By now the Oratory was looked upon as a great nursery of missionaries and Don Bosco as a man sent by God to further the conversion of infidels and to promote the missionary apostolate in distant lands among the most abandoned of the faithful. In 1882 two missionary bishops, former pupils of the Missionary Institute of St. Calocerus in Milan, visited the Oratory. The second to come, Bishop Simon Volonteri, vicar apostolic of Honan in China, arrived on September 7, together with a priest from Savoy and a Chinese catechist; they spent the

entire day there, warmly feasted by both Salesians and boys. But the bishop, much to his chagrin, did not have the pleasure of meeting Don Bosco, who was then away.

More relevant to our narrative was a visit to the Oratory on April 26 of newly appointed Bishop Eugene Biffi of Cartagena, Colombia. He stayed two days with Monsignor Marinoni, superior of the Milanese Institute. On the morning of September 28, after celebrating the community Mass in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, he expressed his deeply felt gratitude to the boys for granting him a heavenly half hour by their prayerful conduct. But he too did not have the joy of talking with Don Bosco, who was then in Rome, nor could he return for a second visit because he was on his way to Saint-Nazaire to board his ship. He had come to repeat orally what he had asked Don Bosco in writing: to send him Salesian missionaries.

Returning to Turin, Don Bosco immediately had the following letter sent to Monsignor Marinoni: "I regret that I was away from Turin when the bishop of Cartagena visited the Oratory and that I also missed the pleasure of your acquaintance. At present I cannot be of service to you; however, with God's grace, under the leadership of such a zealous shepherd of souls who draws them by his love, how much good can be accomplished by even half a dozen good, earnest workers! But enough. Please join us in praying that I may be given scores of workers who seek God's glory, for in Him I place my trust."

Bishop [Eugene] Biffi, who had begun his heroic missionary career in the province of Cartagena and later went to the Indians of Yucatán, Mexico, and finally to Burma, returned to Cartagena as its bishop; however, he had but one single missionary priest to help him. His entire diocese was laid out like a corpse awaiting a Christian resurrection. Anguished and agonizing over the unfortunate condition of his people and his lack of clergy, he began negotiating with the superior general of the Eudist Fathers for a missionary or two, but he could not resign himself to the fact that Don Bosco had been unable to satisfy his wish. On October 14, 1883, he wrote to Monsignor Marinoni to voice his regrets. "Ah, Don Bosco," he exclaimed, "Don Bosco! How much good your zealous priests would accomplish were they to come here! You may have been told that everybody here is a Freemason. Yes, there are Freemasons in the city, but they have made no headway in the villages, where there are good-hearted farmers, of loose living I admit, but what could you expect from the example set for them? However,

they are open to teaching and would heed a Salesian's voice as that of their shepherd. Ah, Don Bosco, Don Bosco! How could you tell me you have not even one priest for Cartagena? Your words cut me to the quick! I am sorry, but I cannot understand it. We should mistrust the words of those whose self-interest makes excuses for them before men, though they cannot do so with God. Here we have countless souls to be saved. This is the magic word touching the heart of a Francis Xavier! But enough of this! I raise my eyes to heaven and cry to the Lord: I knocked at every door, and none was opened. If this is Your doing, let Your most holy will be done. Poor Cartagena! My poor diocese! But I will keep doing all I can for my children, and may the Lord be my shield!"

The Lord blessed his zeal with an abundant and lasting harvest. Don Bosco at that time, involved in the missions of South America, really could not go to his aid. However, the Salesians did not long delay to initiate work in Colombia, first at Bogotá, heroically dedicating themselves to the care of lepers. This was followed by a parish in Barranquilla, in the diocese of Cartagena, entrusted to them by Bishop Biffi's successor, Bishop Brioschi.

In his letter of 1883 to the Salesian cooperators, after reviewing recent projects and future plans, Don Bosco posed the question: Are we somehow tempting God and being rash by taking on so many enterprises? I say no, he answered, citing several signs of God's approval—for example, the encouragement given him by revered prelates, persons in high places, and even by the Supreme Pontiff himself; the success of his undertakings and the help offered him every year to go into new ones; the good will of many good people and the fervent charity of his cooperators; the flow of graces and outstanding heavenly favors granted by God and His Mother to those who came to his aid by their donations; the charitable rivalry shown by so many people of different cities and towns who personally brought or sent him their savings and the surplus income they did not really need, in order to aid his current works. These he saw as signs of God's approval. "Now," he concluded, "if God is pleased to show His approval eloquently and effectively, we have no cause to fear. Rather, we must open our hearts to the highest hopes and continue to strive for His greater glory, confident that He will not neglect to favor us in our own need." Each page of this our narrative is and shall continue to be an eloquent witness of this divine assistance!

# CHAPTER 21

## *Don Bosco, Letter Writer*

DON Bosco certainly did not intend his letters for the general public, but only for those to whom they were addressed. Written in haste, they responded to single situations which have long since passed; yet they are still meaningful today. They are our remaining record of a grand life whose minutest details keep us spellbound, so that the body of letters seems to breathe a life of its own. In addition they possess psychological and historical value for scholars of every age. However, those who search them for their spiritual worth happily discover and taste in them that supernatural love extolled by the author of the *Imitation of Christ:* "Love is swift, sincere, pious, joyful and pleasant, strong, patient, faithful, prudent, forbearing and manly. It is never self-seeking; whenever a man seeks himself, he falls from love. Love is circumspect, humble and righteous; not sluggish, flighty or concerned with vain things. It is poised, chaste, unwavering, serene and thoroughly cautious."[1]

Throughout 1882 Don Bosco wrote quite a number of letters which did not aptly fit in previous chapters of this volume, and we prefer to group them here according to their contents.

### 1. Letters of Thanks

To Mrs. Sophia Bonola Mattei of Milan, who had sent him a small donation in addition to a payment with certain conditions attached, he most graciously wrote a thank-you note:

[1]Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Book III, Chapter 5, No. 40. [Author]

Turin, January 8, 1882

Dear Mrs. Bonola:

I thank you for your kind wishes, for your Mass offering of fifteen francs and for the six francs owed to the bookstore.

May God reward you for your charity and grant you, your husband and your family a long, happy life.

Please continue to help us financially, and we shall reciprocate especially by praying that heavenly blessings may be showered upon you and your family every day.

Please pray for me. I will always be in Jesus Christ,

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

In his inimitable way Don Bosco expressed his warm thanks to Mrs. Joan Bosio Saladino, who had formed a local chapter of Salesian cooperators in Acqui and had sent him their collective donation.

Turin, January 10, 1882

Dear Mrs. Saladino:

I owe you my heartfelt thanks for your gift of sixty lire sent in behalf of your friends, the good cooperators, and even more for the touching, devout letter you so kindly wrote me. You pointed out that the offering was a small one. But it is not small when we realize the ladies' generosity and our growing needs. At this time every tiny offering is gratefully welcome.

I thank you with all my heart. Please assure the Cooperators of Acqui that I send them my special blessing and remember them daily at holy Mass. I shall also urge all our eighty thousand boys to offer their Communion for the intentions of all of you.

God bless and keep you all in good health and in His holy grace! Please pray for me and especially for our missionaries who are presently braving the stormy waters of the Atlantic.

Believe me in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

When neighboring benefactors celebrated their name day, Don Bosco often enjoyed sending them a token gift—nothing of material value to be sure, but highly treasured because of the giver. On the

occasion of Baron Ricci's name day, finding that he had nothing to send him, Don Bosco compensated as follows:

[No date]

My dear Baron Ricci:

I've hunted up and down for something to send you for your name day but have found nothing. Sorry! However, we have carefully made up for it as best we could.

This morning I celebrated holy Mass for you, and our boys prayed and offered Holy Communion for your intentions.

Please be assured of our renewed fervent gratitude for all the charity you have shown us on many occasions. Daily we shall pray the Lord to comfort you on earth and in due time insure your true reward in paradise.

With heartfelt thanks, I am,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

He would promptly accommodate his benefactors, regardless of the trouble it cost him. Thus, in every possible way he tried not to upset Mrs. [Bernardine] Magliano[2] who, generous though she was, had her peculiarities. He wrote to her:

Turin, July 3, 1882

Dear Mrs. Magliano:

Keep sending me as many youngsters as you wish to make priests or good Christians of them, and I will accept them all. However, when I find myself on the verge of bankruptcy, I'll send my bills to you. Give it some thought . . . but of course I say this in jest.

Please come at your own convenience, and we shall reach an understanding about the students mentioned by the Father Guardian of the Busca Capuchin friars.

God bless you and grant you life to see the fruits of your charity. In Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

[2]*See* p. 375. [Author]

As the following letter to a teacher shows us, he was careful to give due importance to small donations by underscoring the lofty end they would serve.

Turin, August 14, 1882

Dear Mrs. Amelia Sartena:

With genuine gratitude I acknowledge the receipt of twenty-six francs which you sent to help our Salesian missionaries who are bringing the Gospel to the natives of Patagonia.

Fr. John Bosco

It was his regular practice to repay the charity of his donors by praying for them and having others pray, particularly if they sought divine favors; such was the case of Father Orestes Pariani.

San Benigno Canavese, September 5, 1882

Beloved in the Lord:

It was a pleasure to receive your letter and the enclosed one hundred lire. I heartily thank you and shall not fail to pray for all your intentions, especially for your sick sister. Indeed, I shall ask all our one hundred and fifty thousand boys to pray for this grace, so that, in unity of prayer, we shall, as it were, press the Lord to grant all those graces which will not jeopardize your sister's well-being. Should you ever be in Turin, please stop in to see us as brothers; it will be our pleasure.

God bless you, dear Father Orestes, and may He also bless your aunt and your sick sister and keep all of us in His holy grace. Yours gratefully,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Throughout the last five volumes we have remarked that the total number of Don Bosco's boys grew from twenty thousand to forty and then to eighty; now he speaks of one hundred and fifty thousand. It is obvious that Don Bosco certainly inflated these figures. After all, do we not easily exaggerate in common talk and people understand? Don't we easily say "a thousand" as in "a thousand times no," "a thousand years of life," "a thousand obstacles"? This rhetorical exaggeration was Don Bosco's way of effectively demonstrating the enormous discrepancy glaringly visible between the work that one person like himself could do and that being achieved by his entire Congregation. The

ratio of Don Bosco to his boys was one to one hundred and fifty thousand. To comprehend adequately the grandeur of an enterprise that is by nature predominantly moral, most people need a magnifying glass, as it were. Consider too that Don Bosco's hyperbole did rest on a solid basis of fact, for he was counting all the boys and girls in his boarding schools, oratories and missions, as well as all the other young people benefiting from the endeavors of his cooperators—truly an astronomical figure!

The next letter is addressed to Mary Acquarona of Porto Maurizio. We may recall that in 1881 she had been healed by Don Bosco's blessing.[3]

Turin, November 1, 1882

Dear Mrs. Acquarona:

I have duly received Mr. Louis Sartorio's letter, your own, and a donation of one hundred and fifty francs. I humbly thank you, and God in His own time will be your generous paymaster.

I certainly rejoice to know that your health is satisfactory. My boys and I shall pray that it may keep improving until it is perfect. I expect to be in Porto Maurizio next January and will briefly stop over to see you and pray for you and your sister Vincenza.

May God keep you both in good health and grant you perseverance in His service here on earth, that one day the Blessed Virgin Mary may welcome you to heaven's unfailing happiness! I ask both of you to pray for me too. Always gratefully yours in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

Whenever Don Bosco went to Milan, he would call upon a widow, Mrs. Louise Radice, née Vittadini, a zealous cooperator, and on those occasions she would invite those of her relatives who wanted to meet and speak with him. Acknowledging an offering she sent for the consecration of the Church of St. John the Evangelist, Don Bosco wrote:

Turin, November 2, 1882

Dear Mrs. Louise:

Your letter was a delight. I am glad to know you are better, and I bless God. I trust too that your recovery will soon be complete. We have consecrated the

[3]*See* pp. 112f. [Editor]

Church of St. John the Evangelist. What crowds, what rejoicing, how many confessions! Even today at noon people are flocking to confession. Rejoice and give thanks to God! May He bless us all.

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Thank you for your charity. May God reward you.

Mrs. Musso Bensa, originally from Porto Maurizio and living in Turin, wrote to Don Bosco and sent him regards from her father and the two Acquarona sisters. He replied:

Turin, November 17, 1882

Dear Mrs. Bensa:

I shall pray and ask my boys to pray for your intentions to Mary, Help of Christians.

Thank you for the kind greetings of the Acquarona sisters and your father. God willing, I hope to visit them sometime during the winter.

Please give my regards to your husband. May God bless us all and keep us always in His holy grace. Please pray for me too.

Your humble servant in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Recognizing the lofty Christian way of life of Count Guido Lazzoni of Carrara, who had sent him a donation, Don Bosco readily suggested that he invest his money at the usual highest possible rate of interest.

Turin, December 16, 1882

Dear Count:

I received your letter and offering. I heartily thank you, and God will reward you. We shall pray for you and for all your intentions, particularly for your late lamented wife, though I believe that she has now entered into God's glory and has no need of further prayers.

The truly Christian sentiments you express in your letter show you to be a devout, practicing Christian. I commend you and thank God for preserving your health, perhaps that you may benefit His Church. Should you ever come to Turin, I would deem it an honor and pleasure to have you visit us.

I am not sure if you are in a position to help the poor; if so, let me recommend to you my little orphans at St. Vincent Hospice in Sampierdarena. There are some three hundred lads there who need food and winter clothing.

Forgive my frankness. I am grateful for whatever you can do and shall pray for your intentions at my daily Mass.

God bless you. Please pray for me.

Most gratefully yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

## 2. Honorary Recognitions

A good friend of the Oratory, Chevalier Vesme of Turin, who wished to obtain a title of nobility through Don Bosco, wrote to Father Rua to ask how his request was faring. Father Rua in turn wrote to Don Bosco in Marseille. The matter was entirely in the hands of Commendatore [Caesar] Correnti, general secretary of the Order of St. Maurice. One requirement for the decoration was that the applicant must have contributed to the public welfare; in addition, one had to donate no less than twenty-four thousand lire to the Mauritian Hospital, which the Order maintained. A very close friend of Correnti,[4] Don Bosco had already won special recognition for Vesme, and he now suggested some things he might do in pursuing his quest further.

Marseille, February 16, 1882

My dear Father Rua:

To give Chevalier Vesme a proper reply, I thought I had best get information from the person responsible for the final decision. The chevalier must still:

1. Donate ten thousand lire to the Mauritian Order for a church to be built adjacent to the new Knights' Hospital.
2. Donate another ten thousand lire for bread and food supplied to our poor boys.
3. Have a recommendation from a federal or municipal officer on official stationery.

Please send me the letter of recommendation with receipts of the first two items. I will take care of the rest very quickly. Please tell Chevalier Vesme that Commendatore Correnti and I have come to an understanding that in his case an exception will be made to the regular fee of twenty-four thousand lire required for a hereditary title.

[4]*See* pp. 258ff. [Editor]

God bless and keep us in His holy grace. My humble respects to our good, honorable Chevalier Vesme.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

While he was in Rome he applied to the Honorable [Joseph] Zanardelli, Secretary of Grace and Justice, for an official recognition of the free services rendered by a French physician to the Italian community of Marseille and to St. Leo's Oratory.

[No date]

Your Excellency:

A gentleman who has undoubtedly distinguished himself to a high degree for his charity to the Italian community of Marseille is Félicien Bousquet, doctor in medicine and surgery.

At no cost and at any hour of the day or night he treats Italians who come to his office or request house calls.

For the past four years he has been the house physician of St. Leo's Hospice, which cares for over three hundred poor boys, mainly Italians, and he has done so free of charge and most willingly, regardless of the hour.

He enjoys a well merited reputation for integrity and philanthropy, as can be attested by both the city officials and the Italian consul of Marseille.

In view of these and other merits, I think he well deserves a decoration of honor from our government if and when you deem it advisable.

This would be a well deserved recognition of his merit as well as an inducement to continue his kind and generous aid to the many Italian families of Marseille.

Enclosed please find copies of the required documents.

You will promptly be sent whatever recommendations you may require.

Fr. John Bosco

### 3. Vocations

To Stephen Quartino, a freshman attending classical courses at the Salesian junior college in Alassio, who sought his advice about his vocation, he wrote:

Turin, June 4, 1882

My dear friend:

I was happy to receive your letter so expressive of excellent planning and holy sentiments. I must praise the lofty thoughts you voiced. However, it is not

clear to me if you wish to become a diocesan or a Salesian priest. In the first case there would be hurdles to overcome; in the second you could deal directly with me. Talk it over with your director, Father Cerruti, and he will explain everything.

At all events we can talk about it during the summer vacation and consider what will best benefit your soul.

God bless you. Pray for me always in Jesus Christ.

Your friend,
Fr. John Bosco

Stephen Quartino donned the clerical habit at San Benigno in October of that year and died prematurely in 1901 as director of a new house in Syracuse [Sicily], which also was short-lived.

Making the San Benigno retreat with Quartino was twenty-year-old Theodore Harmel, nephew of good Father Léon of Val des Bois. He had previously discussed his vocation with Don Bosco in France. When Theodore asked Don Bosco if he might equally reach salvation by living in the world or in a religious congregation, the reply was: "I'm not saying you would do wrong by returning home. If you lead a good life you can save your soul even in the world. Nevertheless, I suggest that you stay here with us." Being left totally free, Theodore did return to his family.

Later, in August, he had second thoughts, and with his parents' consent, he went back to San Benigno to get himself ready for his novitiate, but at the end of the spiritual retreat he was so overwhelmed by homesickness that he decided once more to leave. He wrote to his father asking how he could get home and where he should get the money. In Theodore's presence Don Bosco added a note in his own hand in Italian:

[No date]

Dear Mr. Harmel:

Your son Theodore came here very willingly; he is well in health and has been contented with everything. The retreat, he says, did him a world of good. Without giving me any reason, he says that he wants to return home. I would like him to remain, but he insists, and I cannot force him to stay. I will write you soon.

My regards to your whole family. God bless us all!

Your friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Do not worry about the money. If necessary, we shall supply him whatever he needs.

The boy added a long postscript of his own, saying among other things: "Don Bosco has shown me his note and says that I should remain, but I do not feel I am called. I foresee that if I were to stay, I could not live with this depression. . . . I cannot take it anymore. Please stop all this, and give me a final answer."

He left. Seven years later, however, in January 1889, a year after Don Bosco's death, he made his postulancy and novitiate at Marseille, and at present [July 1933] he is an exemplary Salesian priest.[5]

For Father Nicholas Fenoglio it was not so much a matter of following his Salesian vocation as of persevering in it. After completing his theological studies at the diocesan seminary of Turin he went to San Benigno in 1880; he was at the Salesian house of Este when he was ordained in Padua in March 1882. Before joining the Congregation he used to practice such bodily penances that his health was jeopardized, but on his becoming a Salesian, Don Bosco and his superiors imposed due limits. However, he could not accept their restrictions.[6] In the following letter, Don Bosco tried to win him over to clearer thinking.

Turin, July 13, 1882

My dear Father Fenoglio:

Your wish to work and suffer for God's greater glory is praiseworthy, but before you do so, I would like to talk it over with you sometime. We can do so during a spiritual retreat at your own convenience.

Meanwhile, 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.

I will say more when I tell you of my plans for you.

May God bless and assist you on the path to heaven. Pray to the Lord for me.

Always your friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

What Don Bosco told him during his retreat did not succeed in restraining him, and he had it in mind to change over to another

[5]He died at Caen, France, on October 22, 1935, at the age of sixty-three. [Editor]
[6]Fenoglio's letter to Father Rua, Este, October 21, 1881 (File No. 4945). [Author]

congregation, perhaps the Oratorians [founded by St. Philip Neri], which might give him more leeway in this matter. Convinced that this was but a temptation, Don Bosco tried to dissuade him.

Turin, October 14, 1882

My dear Father Fenoglio:

Father Riva passed your letter on to me. Don't be worried about your vocation. To think of another vocation after having made your profession would be yielding to temptation.

Remain in the calling to which you were called. The devil seeks to claim for his own the souls God entrusts to you. Don't be tricked. I'll say more when I see you.

God bless you. Work hard to win souls. Pray for me.

Always your friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Father Fenoglio was faithful to the Congregation until his unexpected death at our house at Malaga, Spain. Don Bosco himself had sent him to Spain, where he did much good from 1886 to 1910.[7]

### 4. Warm Friendliness

Warmth characterized eleven of the following twelve letters written by Don Bosco to distinguished persons who sent him funds and whom he addressed with his heart on his sleeve and with the freedom of the saints.

At the beginning of 1882, with disarming assurance, he began to besiege Monsignor [Melchior] Fantini, a Salesian cooperator of Liguria, to win from him the gift of a trifling fifty thousand lire.

Turin, January 8, 1882

Dear Reverend Monsignor:

I duly received your dear letter and am delighted to know that your health is improving. I have always asked our boys to pray for you, and every day I include you in the memento of my holy Mass. I trust that God will heed our humble prayers and renew your former vigor.

[7]According to the Salesian necrology his first name was Francis. He died on May 20, 1910, at the age of fifty-six. [Editor]

However, you yourself could with a single blow wrest this grace from the Lord's hands. Let me tell you how. Our hospice at Sampierdarena is in sad straits. Our boys there are experiencing hunger. I've already sent all I can and I keep sending more, but it is not enough. Their bills now total one hundred thousand lire. Couldn't you, therefore, solely for love of God and the assurance of your bodily health and spiritual salvation, do something? For instance, couldn't you take fifty thousand lire in bank notes or stocks and bring them to the hospice, where you will find the poor director floundering in a sea of debts? Bring him comfort and relieve the poor and the hungry.

You will say it is a huge sum. True, it is, but the reward is much greater. Besides, our life, like a swift steed, rushes to its end, and we never know whether others will do what we have left undone.

I immediately prayed and got others to pray for the family you recommended; I hope God will shower His comfort upon them.

I shall gladly pray for you, my dear monsignor, and for little Nicole and your nephew in the seminary. God bless us all and keep us in His holy grace! Please pray for me.

Always your affectionate friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco was practically a member of the De Maistre family, as the next two letters show us.

Turin, June 4, 1882

My dear Count Eugene:

I shall certainly pray and ask others to pray for your nephew Henry de Menthon's successful examinations on the days you cited. Nor shall I forget you, my dear Eugene, and your family.

I saw Lady Annunziatina for a few minutes in the sacristy; she says your health is good and that you are very pleased with the way she is managing her part of the family.[8]

You may have heard of Countess Philomena Medolago's decision to enter the convent of the Ursulines at Bergamo. I heard about it when it had already been done. She chose the better part.

[8]Annunziatina, whom Don Bosco, with tongue in cheek, calls "Lady," was Maria Annunziata, Count Eugene's daughter, who had recently been asked to care for her brothers and sisters in Turin. She had often acted as secretary to Don Bosco when he was their guest at Borgo Cornalese. [Author]

God bless you, dear Count Eugene, and your whole family with you. Please pray for me, who shall always remain in Jesus Christ,

Your devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco had been misinformed about Countess Philomena Medolago, née De Maistre; she had joined not the Ursulines but the Daughters of the Sacred Heart,[9] whom she had known in Bergamo.

Don Bosco's second letter expresses his fond hope for a brief meeting with Count De Maistre. Traveling from Alassio to Turin on the Savona line, Don Bosco intended to stop at Villastellone, where passengers who were headed for Borgo Cornalese—which today [1934] is still the country home of the De Maistre family—would get off the train.

Alassio, September 25, 1882

My dear Count Eugene:

I've gone over my timetable and hope it will fit into your schedule. I arrive at Villastellone at 9:53 on the evening of the 29th. If you can, please send a coach to meet me. If not, or if you have already left, there will be no need. If I do not hear from you it means that our schedules do not mesh and I shall continue directly to Turin.

May abundant heavenly blessings come to you and your family! Please pray for me.

Your most devoted friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

We possess the original of the following letter but are not sure whom he was writing to, since Don Bosco used to call both Countess Callori and Countess Corsi of Piedmont "my good Mamma."

Turin, June 28, 1882

My good Mamma:

For several days I've meant to write to you, if only to get a word from you in reply. Are you still in this wretched world of ours, or have you already flown off to paradise without even asking if I had any messages to give you? But I

[9]See p. 387. [Editor]

am very happy to know you are still here, sharing our exile. Fine! We'll do all we can to help you, and I shall remember you in my daily holy Mass.

Stay peacefully at Mount St. Victor;[10] elsewhere, what will be, will be, and you shall not be harmed. God bless you, my good Mamma, and may He keep you in good health. Please pray for this poor soul of mine.

Devotedly in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco's letters to Countess Callori are all marked by an easy familiarity, as is the following:

San Benigno Canavese, August 29, 1882

My good Mamma in Jesus Christ:

I received your note from the Oratory. I wish I could have welcomed you and chatted with you a while, even just small talk. If you are still in Turin next Monday, I may come to see you.

You sent me word that Countess Damincourt (did I spell it right?) has won a very important lawsuit. I knew nothing of it and cannot recall the details, but I believe she promised a generous offering if she won a court case she thought would be lost. Let me know what you remember about this. I'll repay you with a Hail Mary.

The best of all to you and your family. Please pray for me.

Fr. John Bosco

His letters to generous Marchioness [Mary] Fassati are equally informal:

San Benigno Canavese, August 30, 1882

Dear Marchioness:

I gladly send you a few medals, or rather holy pictures, of Mary, Help of Christians for you to distribute freely. On one picture I have written you a few words in Latin, for both Our Lady and you are well acquainted with that language.

Last year I wrote a booklet entitled *L'Orfanella degli Appennini* [The Little Orphan Girl of the Apennines] and asked you to translate it into French and have it published. But I do not know if you ever received it. If it has gone

[10]We cannot make out whether he wrote St. Victor or St. Victoria. [Author]

astray and so has not been translated, I will immediately send you another copy, since I have had several requests for a French version of this little work.

I thank you for your good news about the young De Maistre grandchildren. I shall not fail to pray for them, particularly for Rudolph, that he may be enlightened in his choice of a career.

I am here at San Benigno with a division of my Salesian army. Our series of annual retreats began in August and will run, back to back, to October 9. I hope I can relax and breathe a little fresh air in peace at Pessione[11] between the 10th and 15th of this month, and put some kind of order in the papers cluttering my desk. That way I shall both keep my word and enjoy your charity as I have done on so many other occasions.

God bless you, my well-deserving marchioness. May He keep you in good health, but always on the way to heaven. Please pray for me.

Your gratefully in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. If Baroness Azelia and Baron Charles are with you at Pessione, please give them my regards and ask them to pray for me.

The title of the "booklet" he refers to, written the previous year and sent to the marchioness to translate into French, was *Angelina o l'Orfanella degli Appennini* [Angelina, or The Little Orphan Girl of the Apennines]. It had been published as Number 203 in the *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings] series. It was the biography of a wealthy young lady who, having been denied her wish to become a nun, fled her father's house and for the rest of her days lived a hidden life as a servant in a peasant family. We have not come across a French translation.

To Mrs. Angela Piccardo, a faithful cooperator from Mele, near Voltri, he wrote a hasty letter answering her questions and asking some of his own.

San Benigno Canavese, August 31, 1882

Dear Mrs. Piccardo:

I like what you say about the cleric Artana and shall gladly see him. But since I must be at our hospice in Sampierdarena from September 13 to September 20, it would be easier if he met me there.

[11]A hamlet of Chieri, where the Fassati family had a villa. [Author]

I shall gladly continue to pray for your good health, as I have always done since I first had the honor of making your acquaintance.

I hope you will honor me by a visit to Sampierdarena, and when you come please remember to bring me a little bag of *marenghi*,[12] which I can really use.

God bless you, Mrs. Piccardo! May He keep you in good health and in His holy grace! Please pray for me.

Always yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

With confident simplicity he asks the parish priest of Loranzé, diocese of Aosta, for a donation and for a list of people he can write to.

San Benigno, September 7, 1882

My dear Father Peronino:

At the present time I am in urgent need of funds. Without a penny to my name, I owe a lot of money for the paper mill at Mathi, for construction being done at the Turin Oratory and at San Benigno, and for the bread already consumed by some one hundred and fifty thousand boys.

Please help me out, first with your own donation and later by asking your uncle, the parish priest, as well as Mr. Pagliassotti, to do all they can to ease this emergency.

"What is over and above give in alms," says the Gospel. Explain the "over and above" to Mr. Pagliassotti.

I am presently at San Benigno for another retreat. Give my regards to your uncle and his sister. Please pray for me.

Always your friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Please give the enclosed to Mr. Pagliassotti and briefly ask him to help my cause.

Readers of the March issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano* would readily understand his reference to the paper mill at Mathi, which had been the scene of a terrible mishap on February 3. At about five that morning a thunderous explosion rocked and terrified the quiet community. While two employees were working at the papermaking machine, the steam

[12]The *marengo*, a gold coin worth twenty francs, was minted by Napoleon I to commemorate his victory over Austrian and Russian troops on June 14, 1800, near the village of Marengo in the province of Alessandria in northern Italy. [Editor]

boiler used to wash the rags exploded; ceiling and walls were blown clear through the roof, destroying the entire works and crushing the two luckless workmen under the wreckage. The entire building and all equipment were a total loss.

He mentioned the Mathi disaster in his letter to Mrs. [Bernardine] Magliano; despite its endless begging refrain, it is an example of skillful writing.

San Benigno Canavese
Nativity of Our Lady, 1882

Dear Mrs. Magliano:

On birthdays mothers usually give their children presents, even if they don't really deserve them. And so I am reaching out to Our Blessed Lady through you for a very special gift. As I told you in Turin, I am being swamped with the expenses for the rebuilding of the Mathi paper mill, the final payment on the Church of St. John the Evangelist, the repair work on the buildings adjacent to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, and the financing of our South American missions. Right now the very least I need is twelve thousand lire; however, I gratefully welcome any donation if I cannot possibly come up with the whole amount.

You see how I trust in you; please work things out with Our Lady. Meanwhile I shall pray for you to this heavenly Mother of ours and ask Her to keep you in good health and always on the way to heaven. With all my heart I hope you will attain it—yet not too soon, because I wish you to die poor, totally freed from this world's goods so you can take with you the harvest you will reap from all your works of charity.

I want you to know that I will be at Sampierdarena on September 13 for another spiritual retreat. From there I'll go to Alassio and San Benigno Canavese, and finally I'll be back in Turin for good by October 9. Always address your mail to Turin; it will promptly be forwarded to wherever I may be.

God willing, Father Pavia will leave for Busca on Monday. The poor man has been working hard and is exhausted. I entrust him to you to restore him for me.[13]

God bless you. Please pray for me too.

Most gratefully yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

[13]Father [Joseph] Pavia received from Mrs. Magliano considerable help for the Valdocco Festive Oratory, where he was director for over thirty years. At this time Don Bosco was sending him to the Magliano family for a short rest. [Author]

Don Bosco had developed a warm friendship with Canon [Edward] Martini of Alassio,[14] with whom he exchanged many favors.

San Benigno Canavese, September 11, 1882

My dear Canon Martini:

From September 22 to the 29th I shall be at Alassio for a retreat. Come and join me for a few days so we can talk together and spend some time in friendly relaxation. You will come, won't you?

God bless us all and keep us in good health, yet always on the road to heaven. Amen.

Please pray for me.

Always your friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Father Joseph Apollonio, Salesian cooperator and dear friend of Don Bosco, whom Father John Baptist Lemoyne often mentions in his later volumes[15] of these *Memoirs*, had been elected bishop of Treviso. Don Bosco was most pleased with this choice, one reason being that the house at Mogliano was in his diocese.

Alassio-Turin, September 23, 1882

Your Excellency, my dear Father Apollonio,

God knows we need to be in your hands. Just recently we opened a house at Mogliano in your new diocese. Blessed be the Lord in all things!

Most heartfully I shall celebrate holy Mass and say a Hail Mary for you! It will be my particular intention that God will keep you in good health for years to come. Soon, God willing, I will call on you and spend an hour or two with you.

I thank you for your offering of fifteen francs which I received.

My writing is atrocious. Here I am sixty-seven years old and I still have not learned to write! Will I do better in the future?

May God keep us all in His holy grace! Please give your sacred blessing to all the Salesians who, through me, pay you reverence.

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

[14]*See* Vol. XIII, pp. 139f. [Editor]

[15]Father Lemoyne authored Volumes I through IX. He went to his reward in 1916. [Editor]

With much cordiality he wrote to a Turinese benefactor, Mr. Joseph Ceriana:

Turin, December 7, 1882

Dear Sir:

I thank you for your gracious letter. For some days I could not leave the house, but I am now ready to receive you on any day and at any time you care to stroll out here—always, however, at your own convenience. I would very gladly have you tour the Church of St. John the Evangelist. When you find time to come, please have someone call for Father Marenco, the director, who will certainly be happy to take you through the church.

It is my pleasure to call the blessings of heaven upon you and your family. I am highly honored to be

Yours most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

## 5. Death of Count Cays

On the eve of the feast of Mary, Help of Christians Don Bosco's thoughts turned to Count [Charles] Cays, who could not be present for the solemnities. Lack of appetite and sleeplessness had forced him to seek the bracing air of his home at Caselette.

Turin, May 23, 1882

My dear Count:

It was a pleasure to receive your letter. From what you say your health seems to be considerably improved, for which I thank God with all my heart.

I would be most delighted to have you with us these days which, as the French say, provide work for *tout le monde*. I hope I shall soon have an opportunity to speak with you personally either here in Turin or there in Caselette.

You know my great love for you in the Lord. I pray and ask others to pray for you. Everything we have is at your beck and call.

God bless you, my ever beloved count, and may He grant you the best of health. Please remember me too, ever in Jesus Christ.

Yours most affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The count never regained his health.[16] During the summer he had sought relief in the thermal baths of Saint-Didier near Aosta. At the beginning of September he made his retreat at San Benigno. On September 28 he spent some morning hours hearing confessions in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. That evening he ate supper with appetite, a rare occurrence for him, and his condition seemed to be improving. During the night, however, he experienced difficulty in breathing and could hardly sleep. Sensing that this was a sign of approaching death, he centered his thoughts on God alone and his soul.

He possessed a relic of the true Cross which he used to wear about his neck when attending parliament, because there in that exalted chamber he stood face to face with the adversaries of the Cross. He now had placed the precious fragment of wood in a small sachet and had it attached to his arm. From time to time he kissed it while meditating on the passion of Our Lord and pleading with the Divine Redeemer for strength to suffer for His love.

Don Bosco, returning to Turin late on the night of September 29, went directly to see him shortly before midnight. Count Cays asked him to hear his confession. Some time later, with urgent insistence, he asked to receive Holy Viaticum. Before doing so, he asked pardon for any displeasure or scandal he might have caused his confreres and for any trouble he might have given them, moving those present to tears.

He then asked that a telegram be sent summoning the young count, his son, to whom he imparted serene counsel and his priestly, fatherly blessing. Later he asked for and received the anointing of the sick, as well as the papal blessing, though death did not appear imminent. Dr. [Lawrence] Bruno, who examined him, however, said that medical science had done all it could.

On Sunday, October 1, the feast of the Holy Rosary, he prayed that Mary might open heaven's portals to him that day. Although Don Bosco was due in San Benigno for the season's last retreat, he postponed his departure in order to assist him in his last moments, if the Lord should call him to Himself on that day. A slight improvement suddenly set in, and Don Bosco left Caselette for San Benigno, where a crowd awaited him for confession, but he did not leave before saying

[16]*See* Vol. XIII, Chapter 8. [Author]

good-bye to his old friend, comforting him with inspired words of affection and faith. Despite his eager desire to have Don Bosco assist him at the hour of death, the virtuous count serenely offered this sacrifice to God with full resignation to the divine will.

Throughout life he had often asked God not to let pain or suffering torment him during his last illness because he feared he might not be able to endure that. God heard his prayer, for his only suffering was a heavy weariness, a total exhaustion, with no physical or moral pain. This grace he attributed to Mary's motherly intercession.

On the morning of October 3 he again received Holy Communion, after which he spoke only of his journey into eternity. He had the prayers for a happy death read to him from the *Giovane Provveduto* [The Companion of Youth],[17] often calling upon the Blessed Virgin Mary and his saintly patrons, fervently kissing the crucifix which he had kept by his bed for the past two days. That evening he said with serenity and deliberation: "I shall not die tonight, but tomorrow will not find me here."

Noting how visibly he was sinking, Father Rua would not leave him but spent the night at his side with the count's nephew, Baron Albert della Torre, very dear to the count because of their long intimacy, his religious sentiments, and his solicitous charity to his neighbors.

At ten-thirty the count asked that the prayers for a happy death be read to him again and that he be given sacramental absolution. As Father Rua shaded the burning candle to darken the room and walked out for a few moments, the count dropped into a peaceful sleep. Awaking suddenly, he cheerfully asked Baron della Torre, "What time is it?"

"Midnight," the baron said.

"Impossible! Can't you see it's already light?"

"Midnight has just struck."

"It does not seem possible. The room's too bright."

Was he beholding the immortal light he was soon to enter? Be that as it may, the light he saw flooded him with unspeakable joy, as he seemed to be basking silently in a vision known to him alone.

Urged to rest, he again fell asleep, his face bathed in a mysterious serenity. On reawaking, he began murmuring fervent ejaculations. At one-thirty he made the sign of the cross several times until he no longer

[17]A prayerbook for boys compiled by Don Bosco and first published in 1847. *See* Volume III, pp. 7-18. [Editor]

had the strength to raise his right hand to his forehead. The few invocations suggested to him he repeated fervently in a hardly audible voice. He was now nearing his end. His son, his daughter-in-law and her brother, Baron Garofoli, who were all staying at the Oratory, were immediately summoned. Father Rua told him that his dear ones were there and asked him to bless them once again. The count nodded in response. Moments later, holding the crucifix in his right hand, he rendered his soul to God. The clock stood at twenty minutes after three. He was sixty-nine years old.[18]

## 6. To Superiors of Salesian Houses in France

As his correspondence shows, Don Bosco kept the needs, problems, and persons of his houses in France always in mind and heart. However, it was upon the festive oratory in Marseille that he looked if not with predilection at least with more vigilant attention, considering it, we might say, as his base of operations. He wrote to its director:

Turin, July 16, 1882

Dear Father Bologna:

Please tell Countess De Sobran that every day we remember and shall continue to remember her and her whole family in prayer.

Assure Madame Jacques that I make a special memento of her every day at holy Mass and that in this she takes the place of my mother, who is no longer on earth.

I am puzzled by something. Mrs. Mary Loyton of Thournon has written me three times, complaining that she gets no answer, and yet I have each time faithfully written to her at the address she gave me. How can I be sure she receives my letters? Is anything wrong?

Lest I forget, tell Mrs. Broquier that we still revere her as a mother and fervently pray for her and her husband.

[18]A Latin inscription, written by Father John Baptist Francesia, was carved on his tombstone. [Author]

The English translation is as follows:

Here in the peace of Christ rests Charles Cays of Turin, count of Giletta and Caselette, doctor of civil and canon law, inscribed by Charles Albert as a city father and several times elected as the people's representative in the legislature. He was a shining example of integrity and justice. At sixty, summoned by heaven's call, he entered the Salesian Society in Turin and, ordained a priest, excelled in piety and other virtues. Dear to all, he lived sixty-nine years, dying a holy death on October 4, 1882.

Placed by his son Aloysius, in deep mourning for his deceased father. [Editor]

I understand that Father Albera has some money he doesn't know how to spend. Father Rua is delighted to hear of this and is hopeful.

God bless us all. Always in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I am told that the parish priest of St. Joseph's is to leave Marseille on vacation. If he hasn't already done so, ask him to come to Turin directly or to stop off here on his trip. We would be delighted to host him, and I would do my very best to accompany him on a pastoral visit to those of our houses he has not seen for some time. Also, is Mrs. Prat's name Ann?

Unfortunately we as yet have no idea what happened to the letters which Don Bosco must certainly have written to Father Albera both before and after appointing him as provincial of the French houses. We have only a few. The two we present here are only copies and we don't know whence they came.

Turin, November 26, 1882

My dear Father Albera:

Enclosed please find some letters to read and forward. The rest will come, until you receive them all. Heartfelt regards to Father Bologna, all the confreres and all our boys and benefactors.

Father Cagliero will send you instructions regarding the four or six Salesians who will be passing through on their way to Spain.

God bless us all. Believe me always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The Salesians he mentions had been assigned to the house at Utrera, where the confreres had done wonders during their first year there and were badly in need of reinforcements. The second letter opens on an affectionate tone.

Turin, December 4, 1882

My dear Father Albera:

You may keep the thousand francs which Madame Fabre donated, but on condition that you be good and always remain Don Bosco's close friend.

However, at the opportune moment you might do well to say that, despite our financial straits here, we are still ready to help the house in Marseille with its money problems.

Do all you can to help the house at Saint-Cyr.

I have written and received a reply from Mrs. Jacques. Get to see her, thank and reassure her that we pray much for her, and say that Father Cagliero hopes to pay her a visit before leaving. Give Miss Dugaz the enclosed note.

Thank Mrs. Rocca and Mrs. Fabre and tell them both we remember them in our prayers and shall have a Mass said for them at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians on the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

God bless you! Regards and greetings to the parish priest and our confreres, with the assurance of our prayers.

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco expected to be in Nice by the end of January 1883, but his plans went awry; he got there only in the latter part of February.

Turin, December 25, 1882

My dear Father Ronchail:

I was pleased to know that Mrs. Ferrant got to Nice. I am very happy indeed. Please give her my sincerest regards and tell her that, while I hope to pay her my respects in person at the end of next month, I continue to remember her in my daily Mass. Send me detailed information about this distinguished benefactress of ours.

Fond regards and best wishes to the family of Baron Héraud, to our good Mamma, to Attorney Michel, and to the parish priest Father Germon; tell him to get a lot of money ready for the Sacred Heart [Church].

What about the "Mamma" of Saint-Jean de Villefranche, Mrs. D'Aprotis, and Miss Guigou? How are Marquis D'Avila[19] and Chevalier Levrot?

Do you have many tourists there? Has Mrs. Fauche sold her estate? I understand that the prince of Vallombrosa is very sick. Is he?

Heartfelt regards to Father [Louis] Vincenti and Brother [Jules] Reimbeau.

[19]We are grateful to the Marquis D'Avila for copies of three letters which Don Bosco wrote in French. [Author]

I pray for heaven's blessings on you, my dear Father Ronchail, and on all the priests, clerics and boys with you. Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. If Father Lambert calls on you, don't get upset.

### 7. Don Bosco's Fatherliness

We now center on Don Bosco's fatherly kindness toward his sons. We will reproduce only two letters which much more reflect that disposition of soul that we unhesitatingly style "fatherliness," and how can we help but feel the throb of fatherly love when he writes to the humblest confreres? With fatherly concern he asks about the health of Father Confortóla, director of the Salesian house in Florence, for whom he used the third person polite form of address because he had joined the Congregation after his ordination.

San Benigno Canavese, August 28, 1882

My dear Father Confortóla:

Thank you for your letter teliing me your health has somewhat improved. Blessed be the Lord! Do what you can for the time being, but take good care of yourself and use every precaution. I'd like you to stay where you are in Florence. Father Bruna has only been substituting for you, and as soon as you feel you can do without him, I will send him to the new position awaiting him.

There is no need for you to make another retreat, all the more so because you are not completely recovered. Every now and then read snatches from our rules as daily food for meditation until you have read them all.

I will see that you get the staff you need, but concentrate—or, better, help the others to concentrate—on the oratory, so much in demand in your city.

Please extend my loving regards in the Lord to all my beloved sons who live with you in Via Masaccio and commend me to their community prayers.

God bless you, dear Father Confortóla. May He grant you good health and keep you always in His holy grace. Please pray for me.

Yours most affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

However, his fatherly heart is magnificently revealed in this second letter addressed to Father Joachim Berto, who for reasons of health had gone to his home that August. We do not think it irrelevant to recall

that Father Berto's disposition was far from likeable and that, had not Don Bosco in his more than natural goodness kept him as his secretary for well over twenty years, the good man would hardly have found his place in life. The following shows us how Don Bosco treated such a difficult member of his family.

San Benigno, August 31, 1882

My dear Father Berto:

I haven't heard a word from you since I left Turin. Please tell me how you are feeling and if you have started some kind of hopeful cure. Do you think that the mountains or the seashore or some other place could bring you some relief?

I am writing during a superior chapter meeting. All the members send you their regards and best wishes, praying God to grant you excellent health.

If you need anything, let me know. We are all concerned that you lack for nothing; it would not speak well for our Congregation if you had to ask others.

God bless you, my dear Father Berto! May He restore your health. Pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Most affectionately yours,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Give my regards to your parish priest and all your relatives.

## 8. A Comforter

Mrs. Magliano had suffered a serious accident while at her estate in Busca over the end of December and the beginning of the new year. Don Bosco was informed of it by the Capuchin superior, to whom he wrote in reply:

Turin, January 2, 1882

Beloved in Our Lord Jesus Christ:

I was afraid something would happen to Mrs. Magliano, and now it has. I am writing a note to her directly; please read it to her if she cannot do so.

Thank you for your kindness. Please continue praying for me and my large, growing family.

Gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

To Mrs. Magliano he wrote:

Turin, January 2, 1882

Dear Mrs. Magliano:

Lack of news from you had me really worried. Several times I had people inquire for you at your home, but to no avail. My fears were well founded; the Capuchin superior wrote to tell me of your accident. Blessed be God in all things! The harm could have been worse. Ever since you left for your villa we have been praying for you, but now we shall continue praying mornings and evenings until God has fully restored you to health and, like a kindly mother, you come to visit us. Our whole family at Valdocco, particularly Father Rua, Father Lazzero, Father Bonetti, Father Pavia and others, wish to be remembered to you, assuring you of their prayers at daily Mass. I hope that your return to Turin will not long be delayed, and then how many things we shall have to talk about!

God bless you, my deserving Mrs. Bernardine. May He grant you good health and a holy life and death. In your charity, please pray for me.

Yours gratefully in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

In September and October, floods inundated all northern and considerable portions of central Italy. For about a month, newspapers ran accounts of continual disasters in a column entitled *L'Italia sotto l'acqua* [Italy under Water]. The region hardest hit was Veneto,[20] where swollen rivers flooded vast areas, forcing people to leave cities and towns, their homes in ruins and buried in mud. The countryside around Este was also badly damaged and, like so many others, Chevalier [Benedict] Pelà, a generous Salesian cooperator,[21] suffered great loss. Our boarding school was spared harm, but the outlook for the new school year was a dreary one, indeed. Don Bosco wrote words of comfort to the director and to Mr. Pelà, offering also suggestions for reaching out to aid the flood victims.

Turin, October 12, 1882

My dear Father Tamietti:

Tell Chevalier Pelà that we attain to glory through the crosses of life. We must not lose heart. Keep going as you did last year, with tranquility, entrust-

[20]A region in northern Italy covering seven provinces: Belluno, Padova, Rovigo, Treviso, Venezia, Verona and Vicenza. [Editor]

[21]*See* Vol. XIII, pp. 529f. [Editor]

ing yourselves into the hands of Divine Providence. Do not be afraid. Assure Chevalier Pelà that the present thorns will bloom into roses before his very eyes. If the flood should demand some sacrifice, do not begrudge it.

God bless you and our confreres, the sisters and all our young friends, pupils and others! May He deliver them from all evil. Amen.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

He expressed comfort and thoughtful concern to Marquis Cantono Ceva of Vercelli, who was then having family troubles.

Turin, November 14, 1882

My dear Marquis:

I feel personally touched by the distress which the Lord has laid upon you. I assure you that I shall exercise discretion and reserve in using the information you pass on to me from time to time. But loads of patience are needed, along with great prudence. Meanwhile I shall pray and ask others to pray that the good Lord will touch the heart and enlighten the eyes which cannot see.

I shall follow your suggestions concerning the young lad at Lanzo.

I am grateful for your donation of one hundred lire for the Church of St. John the Evangelist. I heartily thank you. Incidentally, let me inform you that St. John is awaiting your visit to his church. Could it be that he means to grant you some special favor, maybe that which we both have so much at heart?

God bless you, my ever dear marquis, and may He grant you the priceless treasure of family peace and serenity.

Please pray for me, who am ever in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Yours most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

Mr. Joseph De Paolini must have been a devout soul and a close friend of Don Bosco, because the latter pens but a few lines to comfort him, much as two spirits who need not many words to understand each other.

Turin, December 27, 1882

My dear friend in the Lord,

Be patient. Thorns most certainly lead into the realm of flowers. I shall pray fervently for you and your sister. My family will too.

Pray for me and for the host of youngsters—one hundred and fifty thousand strong—whom Divine Providence has willed to entrust to me.

God bless us all and keep us in His holy grace. Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

## 9. Patience in All Things

In the years covered by this volume Don Bosco preached patience more in practice than in word. Nevertheless, words too have a great value when the preacher advising patience also has the opportunity of actually practicing it abundantly.

In a brief note to Father Dalmazzo Don Bosco packs every phrase with meaning. During that summer of 1882 how many trials put to the test the patience of this man of God! Three sources of distress pop up: domestic problems, delays slowing down negotiations for the Patagonian missions, and nasty gossip about the construction of the Sacred Heart Church [in Rome]. Speaking only of these ready detractors—now that we have seen Don Bosco's more than heroic efforts as he strained under that Roman burden, a burden heavier than Mount Etna—we can understand the anguish underlying his mild lament.

San Benigno Canavese, August 27, 1882

I received your letter. Patience in all things. Everything will turn out well. Set up your staff. I am not happy at all about the decision of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. This delay can ruin everything. I shall write to Cardinal Jacobini.

I wish that instead of criticizing what we are building in Rome, certain people would think of giving us money.

Nevertheless, your health always comes first.

Most affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Try to speed up the dispensation for Bielli.[22]

We find a second hint of the problems caused Don Bosco by the strong-headed contractor of the Sacred Heart Church, as well as an-

[22]Don Bosco refers to Albert Bielli who, born in December 1858, was some two and a half months below canonical age for the priesthood. He was ordained on September 23, 1882. Albert had a brother named John. He too was a priest. [Author]

other indication of his patient long-suffering in a second note to Father Dalmazzo. Father Angelo Savio was Don Bosco's legal representative for all matters of administration and law.

Turin, December 6, 1882

My dear Father Dalmazzo:

Our confreres Father [Charles] Farina and [Brother Joseph] Mainardi—both very dear to me—are stopping off at Rome. Please give them anything they need. I have it at heart that those books get into the Holy Father's hands somehow or other.

Is there no way we can settle our differences with the contractor? You and Father Savio may possibly come up with something in a spirit of friendship. God bless us all! Always in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

## 10. The Religious Sisters of the Sacred Heart [of Jesus]

As one ascends the gentle slope leading from the Po River to the Valsalice College, one will find an icon of Mary, Help of Christians about three-fourths of the way up. Ensconced in a small wayside shrine, it looks like a heavenly vision in that lonely corner of the shady valley near the murmuring brook which gives its name to it. Behind the shrine stretches a wooded area which encloses an elegant institute run by the Religious of the Sacred Heart [of Jesus].[23]

Before 1848 the sisters' convent was located in Via dell'Ospedale in Turin, but was confiscated by the government during the stormy revolution of 1848.[24] Today it is the site of the Polytechnical Institute. As partisan rivalry calmed down with the years, Mother Christine Gazzelli, a relative of the counts of Rossana and sister of Canon Stanislaus Gazzelli, an eminent Turinese churchman of the past century,[25] was sent from France to re-establish her congregation in Italy. As her congregation's provincial vicar for Italy, she founded and directed the convents at Avigliana, Portici, Florence and Turin. From Florence she got in touch with Don Bosco.

[23]Founded in France in 1800 by St. Madeleine Sophie Barat, 1799-1865. [Editor]

[24]*See* Vol. III, pp. 202, 208, 293. [Editor]

[25]Father Louis Di Robillant, a count, wrote a fine biography of Canon Gazzelli: *Il canonico Stanislao Gazzelli di Rossana e San Sebastiano con documenti inediti,* Torino, Tipografia Salesiana, 1901. [Author]

Being quite knowledgeable of the educational needs of the daughters of Turin's patrician families, Don Bosco looked forward to having these well-trained teachers return to their apostolate; in fact, it would appear that Our Lord gave him particular insights in this matter. One day in 1880, on meeting a group of the sisters' students who had been chaperoned to Turin from the Sacred Heart School in Chambéry by a sister to spend their vacation with their families, he walked up to them with the words, "You have just passed your school." The young ladies looked at each other in surprise, for they knew very well that the sisters had no convent in Turin. He continued, "Yes, your school, not the one that used to be here, but the one you will later have."

In 1881 the mother general of the order was planning to reopen a convent of the Sacred Heart in Turin, but the time was not ripe. In 1882 Mother Gazzelli wrote to Don Bosco for the first time to ask for his prayers. He seems not to have realized at first that she was a religious and a superior.

San Benigno Canavese, August 29, 1882

Dear Madam:

Thank you for your letter informing me of your long cherished plan to have a convent of the Religious of the Sacred Heart here in Turin.

Our Blessed Lady, the Help of Christians, will have no problem providing needed land or building. However, after being granted this favor, the mother general should show her appreciation by extending her patronage over the church and orphanage now under construction in Rome in honor of the Sacred Heart.

If you'd like, I'll willingly do what I can and, once I've found a suitable house, I will immediately get back to you but will leave all negotiations to you.

To this end, I will start a fervent novena of prayers, Communions and Masses from September 8 to the 20th. I thank you for your donation of fifty francs. Please forgive my scrawl; at sixty-seven I have still to learn how to write and have no idea when or how I shall improve my script.

May heaven's blessings shower you and the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Please pray for me.

Your humble servant in the Lord,
Fr. John Bosco

A month later Mother Gazzelli sent Don Bosco a generous offering

but still did not clarify her religious identity, and so he wrote to her much as he would have to any benefactress of his.

Alassio, September 26, 1882

Dear Madam,

God bless you. How wonderfully thoughtful of you! Our boys are going hungry, and I know not how to provide bread for them. Your offering came as a true relief.

On my return to Turin I shall do my very best to look for a suitable building and Our Lady will doubtless assist us.

I shall not fail to pay my respects to you in person when I next go to Florence.

May the Lord's grace always be with you and your family. Please pray for me, ever in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco's third letter makes it clear that both Mother Gazzelli and he were making headway with their project.

Turin, November 12, 1882

Dear Mother Superior:

Enclosed is the holy picture you asked for. I thank you for your offering to our young orphans, who pray fervently for you and your community.

There are any number of buildings available, but each has its drawback of either too much or too little. Baron Ceva has a house which I am told might suit your purpose.

I have spoken to Baron Ceva and to Count Orsara, who enjoys our mutual confidence. Please pray for me.

Yours gratefully in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Their correspondence ends here. However the elderly nuns tell us that in 1882, as Don Bosco worked for and supported the foundation, he assured them that it was all inspired by Mary, Help of Christians and urged the sisters to go to Turin in May of the next year. In fact, on May 24, 1883 the deed was signed for the house in Via Legnano 11, where the convent remained until June 1885, when it was moved to its present site at Villa Rolle. It is striking that embedded in the villa's surround-

ing wall was an icon of Our Lady, covered by a grill. As far back as 1830 two daughters of Count Gazzelli, who owned a villa on St. Margaret's hill, used to pick a handful of flowers from their garden whenever they went to town, and on their way they would have their coach stop momentarily by the little shrine and slip flowers through the grill at Our Lady's feet. One of the girls was Christine. Today the painting portrays Mary, Help of Christians. The painting, which had been restored by one of the nuns in 1930, was very old, but we cannot determine if it is the one to which the girls brought their flowers. Nor do we know Don Bosco's role in the choice of this house: he may have been influenced by its proximity to the Valsalice College for wealthy students.[26]

He visited the new convent twice. The first time was September 29, 1885, toward ten in the morning. He was in the company of three priests. He expressed his joy at seeing the nuns in such a delightful setting, telling them that he thanked the Lord and Our Lady for having called them back to Turin. One sister remarked, "Father, you predicted we would come to Turin in May 1883, and it was precisely on the 24th of May that we found the house in Via Legnano." "Oh, very often we just say things and the Lord lets them come true," he replied. "The fact is, however, that this was the time Our Lord willed you to come here and He gave His blessing. Had you delayed even a little, you would have run into serious difficulties. But now you are here, and nothing can stop you. The Lord wants you to do His work, and there is much to do."

To the mother superior who thanked him for sending his priests for the sisters' Mass and Benediction [of the Blessed Sacrament], he replied: "It is our pleasure. I'd gladly come myself if I could." The school's principal requested, "Don Bosco, please pray for the physical and spiritual well-being of our young girls." "There is no need to pray for that," he answered. "Your pupils will be healthy and holy." As he entered the coach to depart, he said to Mother Gazzelli: "Let us do all we possibly can to save souls." The chronicle states: "He left all there with the pleasant feeling that they had been visited by a saint."

His second visit was on October 2, 1887, the feast of Our Lady of the

[26]Don Bosco was practically forced by Archbishop Gastaldi to accept this schoool in 1872. *See* Vol. X, pp. 68ff. [Editor]

Rosary. He came at the filial insistence of Mother Gazzelli, who was most anxious to have him visit. He arrived at five-thirty in the evening, immediately after Benediction, supported by Father [Charles] Viglietti, his secretary, and Father Caesar Cagliero, the sisters' confessor and director of the Valsalice College. Throughout those last few months of his life, Don Bosco could walk only with the greatest difficulty. Despite his visible weariness, he showed lively interest in the house and the boarding school then nearing completion. "I see you have accomplished a mighty task here," he remarked. When the mother superior told him that they had placed their convent under the protection of Mary, Help of Christians as he had suggested, he answered with a smile, "Oh, Mary, Help of Christians is an awesome patron: frightening to those who try to oppose Her work, but all-powerful for those who stay beneath Her mantle."

Before getting back into his coach, standing before the main entrance, he looked up, took the whole building in his glance, and, pointing with his right hand to the topmost story, said, "That floor will be full of postulants." The sisters thought he meant boarding students; only later did they realize that he spoke prophetically. That top floor, meant as a dormitory for the older girls, was used to accommodate many young ladies who were blessed with a call to serve God and are now among the Religious of the Sacred Heart or in other congregations.

## 11. The Bonmartini Family

On a tragic night in 1904 Count Francis Bonmartini of Padua returned home late, only to walk into an ambush awaiting him in his bedroom. Men whom he knew and even some relatives pounced upon him and viciously stabbed him. For a long time the public took an intense interest in this atrocious crime, the mystery first surrounding it, the discovery of the assailants, the unknown motivation behind the deed, the dramatic unfolding of the trial and the overt Masonic attempts to rescue the culprits from justice. At the same time the public bewailed the poor victim's fate and abhorred his vicious attackers.

Apart from very few people, no one then knew that some twenty years before, Count Bonmartini had started a relationship with Don Bosco. The count had been but a child when he lost his father. His

mother, a very pious lady whose maiden name was Mainardi,[27] eager to see her Francis grow up to be good, had found a conscientious and holy tutor for him, a Father Tullio De Agostini, who in turn introduced her to Don Bosco. A spiritual friendship was immediately formed, which is attested to by seventeen letters from Don Bosco; seven of them are addressed to the countess, two to her son, and eight to his tutor. Although they were not all written in the two year period of our present account, we have found it more convenient to keep them together.

In October 1881 Countess Bonmartini sent Don Bosco an offering from Padua with a request for prayers for herself and her son and for a special favor from the Holy Father. Don Bosco replied:

San Benigno Canavese, October 1, 1881

Dear Madam:

I thank you for both your offerings amounting to one hundred lire. Just now I am busy presiding over our eighth spiritual retreat, and my time is all parceled out. However, I shall not fail to pray for you and your son.

Your request must be presented personally to the Holy Father. I shall certainly take care of it on my next visit to the Catholic world's capital.

God bless you and your family! May He keep all of you in good health! Please pray for me,

Yours most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

Another offering for the Sacred Heart Church shortly afterward called forth a response from Don Bosco:

Turin, November 19, 1881

Dear Madam:

I hasten to acknowledge your kind letter of October 15 and the enclosed offering of one hundred lire for the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus now being built in Rome. Please accept my heartfelt thanks to you and to those who contributed to the offering. Be assured that I shall continue to pray for you, your son, and your relatives both living and deceased.

In reply to Father Tullio De Agostini's question, please tell him that he can

[27]For the rest of this long episode the maiden surname of the widowed countess is intermittently used instead of her deceased husband's name. [Editor]

always help us by celebrating Masses for my intention. Whenever he does, however, he should let me know so I can record it as having been done and for his own merit.

Please keep up your charitable contributions. I shall always pray that the Sacred Heart of Jesus reward you with heavenly blessings.

Please accept my regards and best wishes for your happiness. Pray for me.

Yours most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

Going on a pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1882, the countess, accompanied by Father De Agostini and her son, stopped off at Turin so that she might personally make Don Bosco's acquaintance and consult him on spiritual matters. The boy impressed Don Bosco favorably, while his mother, deeply touched by Don Bosco, felt the need to rely on his spiritual counsel. This we can tell also from a letter of Don Bosco to Father De Agostini:

Turin, October 17, 1882

My dear Father Tullio:

Mrs. Beltramini [Antico] has made several requests of me which I shall try to obtain by my poor prayers.

As for the confidential matters she mentions in her letter to me, it is wholly indispensable that she abide by her spiritual director's advice. My own opinion I shall express more clearly if I ever have the opportunity of speaking with her.

Meanwhile, how is young Francis doing? Is he behaving? Is he working miracles? Give him no rest until, willy-nilly, he becomes a real St. Francis de Sales.

How is Mrs. Mainardi? Please assure her of my daily remembrance at holy Mass.

I hope that the floods have not damaged her real estate, because ultimately this would hurt the poor of Jesus Christ.

God bless you, salt of the earth and light of the world! May He grant all good things to Mrs. Bonmartini, her son, and Mrs. Beltramini.

Your friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco had an effective ally in the Bonmartini household, and he availed himself of Father Tullio De Agostini's help to give the countess spiritual counsel.

Turin, December 14, 1882

My dear Father Tullio:

By this letter I appoint you my secretary general and plenipotentiary!

Please give the enclosed note to my good friend, Mr. Antico. Tell Mrs. Bonmartini that her first concern is to keep in good health. I hope it will not suffer either by her remaining at Cavarzere or by her returning to Padua. Still, I think she would do better to return to the city, where accommodations are better suited to winter and where Don Bosco can also go for a good meal or two. I shall particularly pray for this intention.

Please tell Master Francis that St. Francis de Sales is waiting for him to become a saint either in Padua with Mamma or with Don Bosco in Turin. Ask him to think it over and give me his answer personally.

May the Child Jesus grant you and your family health and holiness. My wish to you in particular is: *Esto sal et lux.*

During the Christmas novena I shall make a special memento in my daily Mass for Mrs. Mainardi, that God will grant her health, happiness and peace of mind.

God bless us all! May He keep us in His holy grace. Please pray for me.

Your humble servant in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

In 1883 Francis took up Don Bosco's invitation to join him in becoming a saint. That summer his mother, planning to spend some time in Turin so as to enjoy at greater length the benefit of Don Bosco's spiritual direction, asked if she might stay with the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. Don Bosco sent her a reply through Father [Peter] Pozzan, manager of the *Bollettino Salesiano*, on June 25: "The Oratory's facilities are, as always, open to Father Tullio and to your very dear son, but you must follow your doctors' directions. The sisters' residence has no available room, cramped as they are themselves in tight quarters. Even if they were to set up a tiny room for you, it would be so confining and the ceiling so low that you could not endure the summer heat. Should you care to find other lodgings for yourself and your son while you are under Don Bosco's spiritual direction, he assures me he has no objections but merely wishes to advise you that he will be in Turin only until the end of July, when he will have to leave for the spiritual retreats, which will end on October 15. He thanks you again for your offering and best wishes, assuring you of his prayers for you and your intentions."

Her best wishes had been sent for his name day. "Again" tells us that Don Bosco had already thanked her, but we have no letter showing this. The overall tone of the above letter suggests strongly that he was not encouraging the countess to prolong her stay in Turin.

Father Pozzan then added this message from Don Bosco to her son: "Tell young Francis to study hard while he is in Padua; when he comes to Turin he can talk personally to Don Bosco. Meanwhile, tell him to keep busy." Why this advice? Is it a hint to the lad's future? In August he and Father Tullio accompanied his mother to Turin; then the two of them joined the novices in their spiritual retreat at San Benigno, while the countess stayed with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd not far from the Oratory. Later, when she responded with a "generous offering" to Don Bosco's appeal for missionaries, Don Bosco wrote to her:

Turin, November 1, 1883

My kind lady,

I am sincerely grateful to you for the generous offering you were so kind to send for our missionaries. They will be leaving for Patagonia on the tenth, but even there in those far-off lands, they will continue to call down God's blessings upon you, your relatives and your friends.

I shall endeavor in my little way to join them in prayer along with the homeless lads Divine Providence has deigned to send to our houses.

God bless and keep you in good health. In Jesus Christ,

Yours most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

He had also a special reason to thank the countess during the Christmas novena. She had obtained permission from the bishop of Padua for Don Bosco to set up a conference of Salesian cooperators in that city on January 20. He calls her son Francis his "guardian angel," probably because the young man sometimes escorted him.

Turin, December 18, 1883

Dear Mrs. Bonmartini Mainardi:

At least at this season I feel I must write you a few lines.

Please let me thank you for your steadfast concern for our poor boys both by proposing a cooperators' conference to the most reverend bishop and by keeping in such close contact with several charitable persons. In due time I

shall certainly write to His Excellency, the bishop of Padua, and ask him kindly to let me know what he plans to do for us.

However, I have reason to take issue with my guardian angel, young Francis, certainly well known to you. He has promised to write me wondrous letters often, but as yet, as far as I know, not a word has reached me. He may excuse himself by saying that he has prayed for me and that should be enough. Well, I believe he has, but maybe not hard enough because my heart—true, it's not so soft—has felt nothing at all. I shall be happy to know what kind of excuse he will make.

I have also been somewhat lax in writing, but I have not forgotten to pray for you and your family in my daily Mass.

The last time we spoke together, I seem to remember that, just to humor me, you promised me—though I can't recall the exact sum—a gift of ten or twelve thousand lire. My memory is somewhat hazy. However, either sum I will gladly accept—preferably the latter.

In this season we intend to pray a great deal for you that you may have perfect health. Yes, may God bless and keep you! May He grant you many years, all of them most consoling!

Sincere regards from all the Salesians who personally know you. We all commend ourselves to the kindness of your holy prayers. Writing for all, I am honored to be in Jesus Christ,

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

On December 27 he thanked Father Tullio for sending his greetings and two offerings, one from himself, the other from another donor he had contacted.

Turin, December 27, 1883

My dear Father Tullio:

I have received your kind letter with your Christian greetings. May God reward you a hundredfold, you and your family and your work.

Please thank Mrs. Beltramini Antico for her kindness to us in this hour of dire distress. I shall particularly pray for her family, relatives, and friends.

Tell Mrs. Mainardi I am pleased that she has persuaded you and young Francis to write to me.

God bless you, my dear Father Tullio. May He reward all your efforts to help our young orphans. Love me in Jesus Christ and pray for me.

Ever most devotedly yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco had also asked the countess to finance the cost of a column in the Sacred Heart Church. He mentions this and the cooperators' meeting in two letters he wrote to Father Tullio De Agostini.

Turin, January 4, 1884

My dear Father Tullio:

With renewed joy I received your letter and the fifty francs you enclosed. Thanks for everything. May God repay you!

I was very happy to learn from you that in view of our special need, Mrs. Mainardi is willing to anticipate her offering for a column in the Sacred Heart Church. I leave the matter entirely up to your decision. If you see that anticipating her donation will not inconvenience her, please let her know that I will gratefully accept the money, all the more so because the column is already in place and construction above it is in progress. But if this should in any way burden her, don't even mention it.

I cut this letter short because I am having stomach pains.

May the Lord's favors fall generously upon you, upon our dear Francis, and most especially upon our good Mamma Mainardi, whom I remember every morning at holy Mass. All of you, please pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. When you send me money in the mail, just make sure it is securely sealed and send it, as bankers do, by registered post.

Turin, January 12, 1884

My dear Father Tullio:

Your packet reached me safely with one thousand francs from Mrs. Mainardi and one hundred and twenty francs from the kind donors you mention in your note. I ask the Sacred Heart of Jesus to reward them each befittingly; this is my prayer. Please extend my regards and thanks to all. Make a saint of our dear Francis. The good reports I receive about him make me rejoice.

I have written to the most reverend bishop of Padua. I have received his kind permission to hold our meeting on January 20 and his promise to attend. I have also written to Father [John] Tamietti, director of our boarding school at Este. He will stop in and discuss things with you and Mrs. Mainardi.

An appropriate letter will be drawn up and mailed to all our cooperators in Padua and its environs; you will receive a packet of them. For this purpose

Father Pozzan will go to Padua several days before. I hope that all will promote God's greater glory. May Mary shield and help us save our souls.

I shall write again soon. As regards Mrs. Mainardi, all goes well. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

The name "Countess Bonmartini" is inscribed on the base of the first column which one sees on the right on entering the Sacred Heart Church.

Though the countess felt rather embarrassed by the way the first Padua conference turned out, Don Bosco's outlook was, as usual, optimistic.

Turin, February 4, 1884

Dear Countess:

I feel I must thank you for all the kindness you have shown us on many occasions, most especially at our recent first conference held in Padua.

It is your impression that the city did not turn out as expected. However, the bishop is the religious representative of the whole city; furthermore, several of Padua's finest citizens were there. Be at ease; this was a good, profitable beginning for God's greater glory. I shall not omit to pray and have our boys pray for Marchioness Robustalla's son, whom you have so often recommended to us. I do not judge it wise to enroll Mr. Bamboni as a cooperator just yet; I shall however gladly send a diploma to Count Camerini, who, I am told, is a practicing Catholic.

I am glad that our dear Francis is eager to get involved in doing good. I know it's true especially from what I heard from Father Pozzan about our cooperators' conference. No, I do not forget to remember Francis in my daily Mass and pray that he will persevere in goodness, and that he will help save many souls and thereby save himself.

My health is neither bad nor really good. I am always exhausted. Do not worry about keeping your pledge of three thousand lire for the construction of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome. Give what you can, always without personal inconvenience.

We all cherish your stay with us in Turin; the entire Salesian family is praying for you.

God bless you, and may Mary make another St. Aloysius of Francis.

My respects to all, including Father Tullio. Please pray for me.

Yours gratefully in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

While in Rome for the laying of the cornerstone, Don Bosco sent this note to Mrs. Bonmartini:

Rome, April 23, 1882

Dear Countess:

For your peace of mind let me assure you that I have just received your bank note of one thousand lire which you kindly sent for the Sacred Heart Church. May God amply reward you for your deeds of charity. I shall continue to offer my humble prayers for you, our dear Francis and Father Tullio.

I shall not omit to say special prayers for all the people you recommended. In fact, I shall entrust them to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary, that God may grant them all those favors which He judges beneficial to their souls. Should they wish to do something practical, ask them to unite with me as I remember them in my daily Mass and to make any offering they can afford for the construction of the Sacred Heart Church.

Please pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

Some time later the countess sent another offering to Rome. On May 10 Don Bosco asked Father Lemoyne to respond for him: "A thousand thanks in Don Bosco's name for the money and gifts; they arrived safely. By Saturday we expect to be back in Turin, dear countess, where Don Bosco hopes to see you again with Francis and Father Tullio. He requested and has obtained a special papal blessing for you and your family. Thank God, his health is much better." The gifts were prizes for Don Bosco's lottery.

The Anticos, loyal Salesian cooperators in Padua, who had promised him a donation, later stated that they could not meet their commitment. Don Bosco, however, was not quick to excuse such promises unless he saw good reasons to do so.

Turin, May 24, 1884

Dearest Father Tullio:

If the Antico brothers cannot honor their commitment, they do not have to, but they will do well to inform their mother and abide by her decision.

I shall remember the Antico family today and pray for Mrs. Mainardi, Francis and you.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Three months later he wrote again to Father Tullio:

Turin, September 2, 1884

My dear Father Tullio:

I received Mrs. Mainardi's letter and will carefully save it for proper use at the right time.

I am here at San Benigno Canavese, quite exhausted, but I pray unceasingly for our good Mamma, for you and for our dear Francis.

The more often you write, the happier you make me. How gladly I would welcome you all to our retreat here, and how much the countess would enjoy it! But God, who created us, wills us all to be with Him in paradise; there we shall have time to talk at length over our doings.

May Our Lord's grace accompany us and may Mary lead us to paradise! God bless us all. Please pray for me,

Your sincere friend,
Fr. John Bosco

In September Mrs. Bonmartini sent Don Bosco her final offering for the column, for which he sent his thanks from Valsalice.

Turin, September 1884

Dear Countess Bonmartini-Mainardi:

I believe you have already received my note of thanks, dated August 19, for your generous donation of one thousand and fifty-three lire to complete your commitment to the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. May God reward you generously!

In my daily Mass I particularly remember Mrs. Antico and pray for her family's spiritual and temporal welfare. Let her rest assured that God will most certainly and abundantly grant all that does not conflict with their eternal salvation.

I have just received your letter of August 29. All goes well. Let's try to save souls. God will bless our efforts and give us strength, willpower and grace.

I am here at Valsalice for the spiritual retreat. Thank God, my health is steadily on the mend.

Fond regards to my two dear friends, Father Tullio and Francis.

Cholera is all about us but so far God has shielded us from it. May the Blessed Virgin continue to assist and protect us.

May God's blessing be with us always!

Yours most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

As Don Bosco had Father Pozzan inform the countess, he was expecting Francis and Father Tullio in November. However, it was too late because Francis, then in his fifth year of secondary school at the Padua seminary, had to resume classes. His mother, almost certain of a refusal, did not dare ask the bishop for an exception. One time, on hearing her speak of Don Bosco, the bishop had remarked: "I ask your ladyship to have high regard not only for Don Bosco, but for all priests." Her response was, "Yes, Your Excellency, I hold all priests in high esteem, but you will admit that one does not very readily find priests like Don Bosco. And, Your Excellency, do you know what I think? One never errs in doing what Don Bosco says because I am convinced that he often sees the Madonna. That's why no one will ever persuade me to pay no heed to Don Bosco's advice to me or to my son."[28]

The above letter was the last Don Bosco wrote to Mrs. Bonmartini. Two other letters remain, addressed to her son. The first was written in 1885, when the boy's mother was dying. Don Bosco wrote:

Turin, December 15, 1885

My dear Francis:

You tell me that Mamma is very seriously ill. This news grieves me. In all our churches, our boys are unceasingly praying for her.

Whatever happens, you know that Don Bosco has promised you, your Mamma and Father Tullio that he will be a father to you, especially a spiritual father. In any event we are never too far away.

If Mamma is conscious, tell her that we shall together talk over our affairs in eternal blissfulness.

I have rooms ready for you and Father Tullio. May Mary lead us in all things to paradise.

Your most affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

There are no other letters until January 1887, when Don Bosco wrote to Father Tullio to acknowledge some votive offerings which he sent for a favor received.

[28]Letter from Mrs. Bonmartini to Father Pozzan, November 8, 1882. [Author]

Turin, January 7, 1887

My dear Father De Agostini:

Many thanks for your greetings. With all my heart, I shall pray that the Lord will shower upon you all the favors you asked for me: that He grant you health, contentment, and peace and bless your ministry. May He render your soul very pleasing to His eyes by ever more strengthening its good will and purity so that, when the time comes, you may be worthy of that great God to whose service we priests and religious are most especially consecrated.

As you asked, the votive pictures and hearts will be hung up in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. We rejoice that our good Mother has shielded and preserved the donors from such a tragedy.

We shall thank Our Lady and continue to pray for you, for Francis and his relatives, for all your intentions, and particularly for your brother.

Yours most affectionately in Jesus and Mary,
Fr. John Bosco

The next day Don Bosco answered Francis' greetings and gave him some precious counsels.

Turin, January 8, 1887

My dear Francis:

I was very happy to receive your best wishes, and I thank you with all my heart.

You tell me that you have already studied Italian, but now you must deepen your knowledge: correct spelling, vocabulary, self-expression, essays. These are things you must still give much thought to.

Choose your friends well. Shun like the plague those who do not go often to Holy Communion. Faithfully follow Father Tullio's advice, and you may be sure that all will go well with you. Pray for your mother; I hope to see her before long. May Mary lead us to heaven. Amen.

My regards to Father Tullio.

Your friend,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco was longing to see again Francis' mother before long, of course, in paradise. Poor Francis! We have every right to believe that Don Bosco had seen in him all the requirements of a good priest and maybe a good Salesian. He never told him openly, but, as it were, he took him by the hand and led him to the very threshold, but never

forced him to enter. We might say that our good father had a hidden presentiment of the ill fate awaiting his young friend were he to remain in the world.

## 12. Roman Affairs

Don Bosco's letters to Father Dalmazzo, his procurator [in Rome], generally dealt with business matters. We have quoted from them either in their entirety or selected passages. We will now consider only two.

The first one, very important, concerns several matters: a priest being assigned as Father Dalmazzo's assistant, books written by Don Bosco or Father Lemoyne to be presented to the Holy Father as tokens of Don Bosco's devotion to the Vicar of Christ, the hope that the tabling "to a future date" of the request for privileges[29] might not close the door upon any privilege, and finally a revelation of Don Bosco's extraordinary spiritual greatness. A fatherly note begins and ends the letter.

Turin, November 26, 1882

My dear Father Dalmazzo:

This time our mailman is our confrere Father [Joseph] Manfredi, formerly a parish priest. He has all the good will in the world and is not afraid of work. However, he is still new to the job, and so try to be his teacher in word and deed and in Roman practices. If an examination is needed, he will take it. He did excellently at San Benigno.

Now to other matters. Let me know whether my books and those of Father Lemoyne were given to the Holy Father and whether he had anything to say as guidelines for us.

You will do well to talk to Archbishop Masotti and seek his counsel and have him tell us if we have a chance for the privileges either by concession of the Holy Father or by a postponement—but something definitive. Then report fully to Cardinal Nina, and we shall readily comply.

Let others gab about our affairs in Rome. I pay them no mind because we are sure of what we are doing. Nevertheless, you will do me a great favor if confidentially you will tell me how we stand in regard to the Holy Father, the cardinal vicar, the Sacred Heart Church, and so forth.

[29]*See* p. 362. [Editor]

Enclosed is a letter about La Spezia for you to read, seal and deliver. I realize it is poorly written; the cardinal[30] must forgive me, for I could do no better. My sight is weakening ever more day by day. My dear Father Dalmazzo, work always, but with the gentleness of St. Francis de Sales and the patience of Job. My regards to Father Savio and all our confreres. Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours most affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Father Dalmazzo's full reply to all the points came necessarily late, and it is essential that we read just about all of it.[31]

Rome, December 18, 1882

My most revered Father:

I am finally able to answer your letter and give you some news. Yesterday evening, thanks to Cardinal Nina's kind intervention, I was at last able to have my long awaited private audience with the Holy Father. He received me with customary kindness, possibly even more obvious than usual. He took the letter and unsealed it but did not read it. He may have found the writing too hard to make out.

Then, seated at his desk, he asked me to remain standing and looked through almost every book, praising Don Bosco for having written so much. He had particular words of praise for the *Storia d'Italia* [History of Italy], which he said he already knew. Your *Storia Ecclesiastica* [History of the Church] was missing, but it can be sent later on. Then he asked me how you ever found time to write so much. I replied that for many years you labored unstintingly to benefit young people. "But how does he manage now when he can no longer see?" he asked. "Holy Father," I answered, "now that his eyes have been so overstrained and weakened, he dictates." He told me to thank you and assure you that he was most pleased with your gift and he would go through it all at leisure. Then he asked me about the archbishop [of Turin], and I replied that, though he had come to consecrate our church, his attitude remains hostile. He deeply regretted this and told me to pray. Then he asked me about the parish, urging me to go forward in spite of all rising problems. At my request, he also said that he was giving his blessing to Don Bosco, to

[30]Cardinal Jacobini, secretary of state. [Author]

[31]A previous but undated letter from Father Dalmazzo must certainly have some connection with Don Bosco's above letter. [Author]

the Congregation, and to all who asked for it. Finally, he most graciously walked me to the door of the antechamber.

This adequately answers your question of how we stand with the Holy Father. Save for the usual sole exception, our relations with the cardinals are better than they have ever been. Cardinal Jacobini, whom I called upon last evening to give him Don Bosco's greetings and those of the Congregation, although he was very busy and knew why I had come, received me with fatherly gentleness and asked in detail about you, the missions and the archbishop. He regrets the present situation and tells us to hope and pray. I ventured to ask him to consider our privileges, and he assured me that it is only a question of time and that the Holy Father's favorable attitude is a positive guarantee for us. Then he asked about Passaglia, who had called on him, promising great things, but getting nothing done. On taking leave of me, he said he would again mention our privileges to the Pope as soon as he could and insisted that I write and tell you that he requests a Hail Mary to Our Lady for himself, but that it be said *by Don Bosco himself.*

Cardinal Nina likes us so much that, since my last visit, he has called on us twice, and he stayed an hour on Sunday. He told me of some nasty remarks made by some adversaries of ours in an attempt to overthrow us, and he let me understand that they originated with Cardinal Ferrieri, who described us to the Pope in the darkest colors. On my last visit, when I handed him the last letter I was bringing, he introduced the topic and began to talk against it, even passing some caustic remarks about Ferrieri. The Pope said [to Cardinal Nina]: "Of course! They have many enemies and must tread on thin ice because in Rome even shadows look real!" He then talked about La Spezia. He nodded when I asked him to aid us with a subsidy for that holy undertaking, and now I will keep after the cardinal to make sure he collects it. In talking with him, the Pope highly praised Don Bosco and his works and showed he was greatly pleased with everything and everyone. Since the question of our privileges was again brought up at this time, and very emphatically, the Holy Father stated: "But this is a new Congregation, and we must proceed slowly and grant the privileges one by one." The cardinal immediately replied, "But it's high time we began at least with 'that one' if we are to catch up to the others."

So now please try to appeal again for the one most needed in our missions, and with Cardinal Simeoni's support we'll get them. In one week's time I must have spoken some three hours with Cardinal Nina, who with incredible trust let me in on many things, many intrigues, many abuses, which I pass on only to you. . . .

I'll be able to tell you many more things in person better than in writing. All goes well here. Everyone sends you through me regards and best wishes for happy festivities, a happy ending of one year and the beginning of another. I

send their wishes gladly, knowing that they will be accepted by that fatherly heart which so rejoices and calms the hearts of your most loving sons, of whom I proudly claim to be the naughtiest!

Father Francis Dalmazzo

P.S. Bishop Manacorda arrives today; we will give him the best welcome we can.

Bishop Manacorda of Fossano went to Rome in December. Don Bosco's friend in every meaning of the word, he was richly experienced in dealing with the Roman Congregations, where he had made his career, and he succeeded considerably in furthering Don Bosco's interest during his stay, even though that was not the purpose of his trip. Don Bosco wrote to Father Dalmazzo of this, enhancing his news with some precious advice. The lottery we shall discuss later.

Turin, December 18, 1882

My dear Father Dalmazzo:

Our good friend Bishop Manacorda will be spending some time in Rome to dodge our frigid weather. He will give you detailed news of us.

I wish you and all the confreres with you all spiritual and temporal joys. Make sure you pass on to them my best wishes and my recommendations: exact observance of poverty, chastity and obedience, which have consecrated us to God. It will be a perfect day for us when full charity reigns among you, when our problems with the contractor are all settled, and when we can resume our work for the [Church of the] Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Is the lottery asleep? Get it going from your end and we'll help out from ours.

God bless you all. Tell each of our benefactors that Don Bosco prays and has others pray for them.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always! Amen.

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

## 13. The Strenna

Before the end of the year Don Bosco sent the directors of each house his strenna for the New Year in a circular letter addressed to each one. To the letter sent to Father Lemoyne, director of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians at Nizza Monferrato, he added a personal

note, as if in special token of appreciation for his recently completed biography on St. John the Evangelist.[32]

Turin, December 28, 1882

My dear Father Lemoyne:

I am sending a general strenna to all, but to the renowned author of *St. John the Evangelist* I send a separate greeting: take good care of your health and your holiness, as well as that of all in your community. Love me in Our Lord.

Always yours most affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The letter [addressed to the director of each house] read:

We have come to the end of the old year and the beginning of a new one. Please thank very cordially all who wrote and prayed for me in these days. In turn, I ask of God health and the grace of a happy life for all of you.

This is my strenna:

1. To the director: kindness and gentleness to all.
2. To the confreres: strict observance of the vows which have consecrated us to God.
3. To all our boys: frequent confession and devout Communion.
4. In my name tell all that I am anxious to know what they individually and as a group mean to do to aid me in saving their souls. This has been and will always be the main object of my concern to the very end of my days.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always!

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Send me their response to my fourth point.

A sample of those replies we will give in a few words from Father [Nicholas] Cibrario, director of the house at Vallecrosia.[33] "The answer is the same for us all," he wrote. "Our soul's salvation is intimately linked to and depends upon the observance of the vows we have taken. As a result, we are all ready to observe them until death. This we hope to do with God's grace. And this is the aid, the cooperation which we all desire and want to give you, that you may save our souls."

[32]*See* pp. 329f. [Editor]
[33]Letter to Don Bosco, January 23, 1883. [Author]

# APPENDICES

*Appendix 1*

## SALESIAN BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY

ALBERA, PAUL (1845-1921) Fr., *Rector Major*

Paul Albera was born at None (Turin) on June 6, 1845 and entered the Oratory in the fall of 1858. He made his profession on May 14, 1862. After his ordination to the priesthood on August 2, 1868, he was appointed prefect of the Oratory, a post he held until 1871, when he was sent to Marassi (Genoa) as director of the Salesian Hospice, and later transferred to Sampierdarena. There he had the responsibility of the Sons of Mary and helped Don Bosco in preparing for the first missionary expedition. The printshop which he initiated in 1877 printed the *Bollettino Salesiano*. In 1881 Fr. Albera was appointed provincial of the Salesian houses in France, with headquarters at Marseille. He remained in that position ten years, and, despite the harassment of the times, the houses in France grew from three to thirteen.

Fr. Albera was called "the little Don Bosco." A man of action—above all, interior action—his main concern was spiritual formation. He became spiritual director of the Salesian Society and a member of the superior council.

In 1896 Don Rua asked him to compile the *Director's Manual*. In 1898 he visited France, Spain, and Belgium. In 1900 he traveled through the South American Salesian missions—a journey of three years. He returned to Turin on April 11, 1903, in time to head preparations for the crowning of the picture of Mary, Help of Christians in the basilica.

In fulfillment of a prophecy of Don Bosco, known only to Fr. Philip Rinaldi, Fr. Albera was elected superior general on August 16, 1910, Don Bosco's birthday. He headed the Congregation during the trying years of World War I.

The depth of his personal piety and asceticism imbued the numerous circulars which he wrote to the Salesians, as well as the *Director's Manual*, published in 1915.

In 1918 Fr. Albera celebrated his golden jubilee of ordination. He inaugurated the monument of Don Bosco which dominates the square of Mary, Help of Christians and presided over the Congress of Alumni and Cooperators in 1920.

Exhausted by his many journeys as rector major in visiting the houses and strengthening the confreres and Salesian cooperators, Fr. Albera passed the last years of his life in precarious health. He died on October 29, 1921. He was interred at Valsalice, alongside Don Bosco and Fr. Rua, whose sterling virtues he so faithfully reflected.

BARBERIS, JULIUS (1847-1927), Fr.

Fr. Barberis had the distinction of being the first novice master of the Salesian Congregation, a post assigned to him by Don Bosco himself. "We will always be friends," the saint told fourteen-year-old Julius on his entrance into the Oratory in 1861. "One day you will be my helper," he added. Fr. Barberis was a quiet, gentle person, very much attuned to Don Bosco's spirit, prudent and kind with his young charges, demanding yet patient and understanding.

He was born at Mathi (Turin) on June 7, 1847. He made his first vows in 1865. Ordained in 1870, he attended the University of Turin and earned his doctoral degree in theology in 1873. The following year Don Bosco personally appointed him novice master, a position he held for twenty-five years. As master he formed a veritable host of young men into zealous, hard-working Salesians who looked up to him for inspiration and guidance, among them the servants of God Andrew Beltrami and August Czartoryski. Don Bosco utilized his experience in setting up novitiates throughout Europe. From 1892 to 1900 he was a member of the superior chapter. From 1902 to 1911 he was provincial of the central province and in 1910 was named spiritual director of the Congregation, a position he held to his death on November 24, 1927. Truly a man of God, gifted with enviable simplicity and extraordinary goodness, he mirrored the fatherliness of Don Bosco to all his novices. His *Vade Mecum*, the first textbook on Salesian spirituality, is still a valuable introduction to religious life.

BELLAMY, CHARLES (1852-1911), Fr.

Born in Chartres, France on December 19, 1852, Charles Bellamy was ordained to the priesthood there on June 11, 1881.

Since his fond desire was to minister to young workers, he consulted his pastor, who retrieved from his trash basket a brochure he had recently received and gave it to him. Father Bellamy read it and pursued his calling. Later, he used to quip that he found his vocation in a wastepaper basket! In 1882 he first met Don Bosco in Paris. The following year he made his novitiate and was perpetually professed on October 4, 1884.

Father Bellamy founded the Salesian oratory, secondary school and trade school at Menilmontant in Paris. In 1891 he opened the first Salesian house in Algiers, Africa, at Oran-Eckmühl. Some years later, ill health forced him to retire to the Salesian house at Charlemont, near Geneva.

A man of keen intelligence and an excellent speaker, he wrote several books about Don Bosco. On May 29, 1911 he died at a nursing home run by sisters at Lausanne, Switzerland.

BELMONTE, DOMINIC (1843-1901), Fr.

Dominic Belmonte, born in Genoa on September 18, 1843, went to the Oratory in 1860 and, although seventeen, was advised by Don Bosco to begin high

school. He studied music and became a proficient choir director and composer. Professed in 1864, he was ordained in Turin in 1870. After being prefect at Borgo San Martino, he was sent to Alassio as catechist in 1873. Four years later he returned to Borgo San Martino as director, succeeding Fr. Rua and Fr. Bonetti. In 1881 he was appointed director of the school at Sampierdarena, where he also taught theology, headed musical activities, and became first pastor at the Church of St. Cajetan. In 1886 Fr. Belmonte was chosen prefect general of the Salesian Society. In 1891, on the death of Fr. Bonetti, he was named postulator of Don Bosco's cause. Though he gave up his active musical career, he sponsored the musical training of the Congregation's most noted musician, Fr. John Pagella.

Don Bosco had told Fr. Belmonte that, if he took care of himself, he would live beyond sixty. However, he felt that he could not spare himself any work. He died in Turin on February 17, 1901 at the age of fifty-eight.

BERTELLO, JOSEPH (1848-1910), Fr.

Joseph Bertello entered the Oratory in 1862, donned the clerical habit in 1865, made his perpetual vows in 1868 and was ordained a priest in 1871. He earned his theology doctorate at the University of Turin in 1873, and on November 27 of that year he became a member of the Arcadia. In 1879 he earned doctorates in literature and philosophy. From 1881 to 1894 he was director of the junior seminary of Borgo San Martino, and from 1894 to 1898 he was provincial in Sicily. In 1898, at the Eighth Salesian General Chapter, he was elected Councilor General of the Salesian Technical Schools. Finally in 1909 he was appointed Economer General of the Salesian Society. He died in Turin on November 20, 1910.

BERTO, JOACHIM (1847-1914), Fr.

Joachim Berto entered the Oratory in 1862. He was one of the privileged few who witnessed many of Don Bosco's wonderful deeds. He joined the Salesian Congregation in 1865. Even before his ordination in 1871, he was chosen by Don Bosco to be his secretary—a post he retained for the next twenty years until ill health forced him to retire. During these years he accompanied Don Bosco on his most important trips to Rome on the Congregation's affairs and to Rome and Florence in delicate negotiations between the Italian government and the Holy See. He was a great help to Don Bosco in carrying out his voluminous correspondence and in safeguarding confidential documents concerning the above negotiations. His accounts of these journeys constitute some of the most precious archives of the Salesian Society. While carrying out his secretarial duties, Fr. Berto also carefully kept a diary and authored several devotional and ascetical booklets. As catechist for the Oratory students, he cultivated the

sodalities of the Blessed Sacrament and the Altar Boys. To his last days he was a skilled and well-loved confessor. He died at the Oratory on February 21, 1914.

BODRATO, FRANCIS (1823-1880), Fr.

Francis Bodrato was born at Mornese on October 18, 1823. He first met Don Bosco in 1864 on one of the latter's fall picnics to Fr. Pestarino's parish at Mornese. Francis, a teacher, was anxious to learn Don Bosco's secret of winning the hearts of boys. His own heart was won and, though a widower with two children, he came to Don Bosco, who, wise judge of character, immediately accepted him. He received the cassock and was sent to teach at Lanzo. He made his perpetual profession in 1865. Ordained a priest in 1869, he held various offices at Alassio, Borgo San Martino and the Oratory. In 1875 Don Bosco recalled him to the Oratory to be economer of the Congregation. In November of the following year he was appointed to head the second missionary expedition of twenty-two Salesians to Argentina. He was named pastor of Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Buenos Aires for immigrant Italians; within its limits was the infamous "Boca del Diablo" quarter, where even the police trod warily. Under Fr. Bodrato's leadership the neighborhood changed marvelously. In 1877 Don Bosco appointed him provincial of the Salesians in South America. In 1880 civil war broke out in Argentina. After an extended period of unknown and painful illness, Fr. Bodrato died in Buenos Aires on August 4, 1880, mourned by the entire city.

BOLOGNA, JOSEPH (1847-1907), Fr.

Joseph Bologna was born at Garessio (Cuneo) on May 15, 1847, and entered the Oratory in 1863. He was a companion of the saintly lad, Francis Besucco, whose virtues he made his own. He joined the Salesian Congregation in 1868 and was ordained a priest in 1872. In 1878 Don Bosco sent him to Marseille to open the St. Leo's Festive Oratory, which he directed until 1892, when he was appointed provincial of the houses in southern France with headquarters at Marseille. Six years later he was sent to Paris and named provincial of northern France and Belgium. His last days were saddened by the government's anti-religious legislation closing even Salesian houses. He died in Turin on January 4, 1907 while on a visit to the Oratory.

BONETTI, JOHN (1838-1891), Fr.

John Bonetti was born at Caramagna (Cuneo) on November 5, 1838. He came to the Oratory in 1855 at the age of seventeen. Fr. Matthew Picco, who taught him in his senior year, called him "a priceless youth." John was one of the young men who in December 1859 banded with Don Bosco to found the Salesian Congregation. He was elected a member of the first superior council. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f) He won high honors in philosophy and theology and

soon became a well-known writer. His book, *Cinque lustri di storia dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales* [The First Twenty-Five Years of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales], merits special mention. Its wealth of detail constitutes a small library of Salesiana.

Fr. Bonetti was a capable public relations man. Gifted with a fine intellect and a brilliant imagination, he was also a great story teller. Like Don Bosco, he defended the Catholic Church against attacks of vociferous Protestant leaders. A man of balanced zeal, warm piety, and deep spirituality, he was elected spiritual director of the Salesian Congregation in 1886.

He died at the Oratory at the age of fifty-three on June 5, 1891, fulfilling Don Bosco's prophecy that he would be the first member of the superior chapter to follow him in death. Blessed Michael Rua hailed Fr. Bonetti as "a tireless apostolic laborer, a valiant champion in promoting God's glory and the salvation of souls, an amiable counselor in comfort and advice."

BRANDA, JOHN BAPTIST (1842-1927), Fr.

John Branda came to the Oratory in 1868 at the age of twenty-six after completing his studies as a surveyor. Patiently he took up Latin, donned the clerical habit and made his first vows as a Salesian in 1869. Ordained a priest in 1873, he was first assigned to Marassi, then to the Valsalice College in Turin and finally in 1880 to Spain to open a Salesian house there. On this occasion Don Bosco told him, "Go to Utrera, but you will be there for only a short time. A lady from Barcelona will call us and will provide the means for opening a large school there." In fact, in 1885 Doña Dorotea de Chopitea, as Don Bosco had predicted, wrote to him, and soon afterward work started on a technical school at Sarriá, Barcelona. In 1889 Father Rua called him back to Italy to direct the St. Theresa Festive Oratory for girls in Chieri. The following year he was sent to Zurich and in 1908 to Lorraine to assist Italian immigrants. In 1918 he was recalled to the Oratory where he spent his last years as spiritual director to countless souls. Outstanding at all times was his love for Don Bosco, also because of extraordinary events he himself had witnessed. He died at the Oratory in 1927 at the age of eighty-five.

BRETTO, CLEMENT (1855-1919), Fr.

Born at Montanaro (Turin) in 1855, Clement Bretto received his elementary and secondary education at the Cottolengo school. After studying theology at the Turin diocesan seminary for two years, he transferred to the Oratory in 1874 and became a Salesian. He made his perpetual vows in March 1877 and was ordained in December of the same year. He was then appointed spiritual director of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians at Nizza Monferrato. He did so well that, eleven years later, Fr. Rua did not hesitate to name him director general of the Institute. After a few years as provincial in Piedmont and Lombardy,

the new rector major, Fr. Paul Albera, appointed him economer general, an office he held to his death in 1919. He was distinguished for his efficiency, prudence, common sense and Christian wisdom.

CAGLIERO, JOHN (1838-1926), *Bishop and Cardinal*

John Cagliero was born in Castelnuovo d'Asti on January 11, 1838. He was received by Don Bosco in the Oratory in 1851. (*See* Vol. IV, pp. 200ff) He became a Salesian on May 14, 1862. A month later he was ordained a priest in Turin and appointed spiritual director of the Oratory. He soon showed an exceptional talent for music, and from that talent came a steady flow of sacred and recreational music which was the delight of the Oratory. Even such composers as Giuseppe Verdi and Lorenzo Perosi praised his art.

Cagliero obtained his doctorate in theology at the University of Turin in 1873; the following year Don Bosco appointed him spiritual director of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. Cagliero is best remembered as an intrepid missioner. In 1875 he led the first group of Salesian missionaries to Argentina, where they carried out their ministry to the Italian immigrants of Buenos Aires. Soon, however, Fr. Cagliero penetrated the interior of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. Then he opened a trade school at Almagro and another at Villa Colón, Uruguay. He was recalled to Turin in 1877 to become spiritual director of the Congregation, an office he fulfilled until 1884, when Pope Leo XIII nominated him vicar apostolic of northern and central Patagonia. He was the first Salesian bishop and was consecrated in the Basilica of Mary, Help of Christians in Turin on December 7, 1884, in the presence of Don Bosco. Immediately afterward he returned to South America and was welcomed by Fr. Joseph Fagnano, with whom he explored Tierra del Fuego, meeting up with the various Indian tribes. In 1887 he crossed the Andes to inaugurate the first Salesian house in Chile, at Concepción. In December of that year he returned to Turin to assist Don Bosco on his deathbed.

After Don Bosco's death Bishop Cagliero returned to Argentina. Years later, in 1908, he founded Patagonia's first hospital at Viedma. Pope St. Pius X appointed him minister plenipotentiary of Costa Rica and apostolic delegate to the countries of Central America. In 1915 Pope Benedict XV nominated him cardinal and assigned him to the Sacred Congregations of Religious, Propagation of the Faith and Sacred Rites. In 1920 he was named bishop of Frascati.

He died in Rome in 1926. In June 1964 his remains were brought back to Argentina and solemnly laid to rest in the cathedral of Viedma, his first episcopal residence. For further details see the Indexes of Volumes II through XIV.

CARTIER, LOUIS (1860-1945), Fr.

Born in Colomban, France on February 7, 1860, Louis was studying at the seminary of St. Jean de Maurienne when, attracted by Don Bosco's fame, he

went to Turin and made his novitiate at San Benigno Canavese. After his ordination in 1883 he was sent to Marseille as the first master of novices and director of the novitiate. From 1886 to 1923 he was director of the Salesian house at Nice. By prudence and fortitude he withstood the anticlerical persecution and confiscation of religious property by the French government. He was a staunch promoter of religious and priestly vocations. His crowning work was building the Church of Mary, Help of Christians in Nice. In his later years he was a familiar figure in the city as, white cane striking the pavement, for he was practically blind, he made his way to wealthy friends to beg funds for the Salesian works. He died in Nice on December 29, 1945.

CERRUTI, FRANCIS (1844-1917), Fr.

Francis Cerruti, born in Vercelli on April 28, 1844, entered the Oratory in November 1856, and immediately fell under the influence of Dominic Savio. He completed the five-year secondary school course in three years and was chosen by Don Bosco for teacher certification studies. He was among the first seventeen young men who joined Don Bosco and his fledgling Salesian Congregation in 1859. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f) In 1865 his life was threatened by a severe bout with pneumonia, but, as Don Bosco predicted, he miraculously recovered. In 1866 he made his perpetual profession, received a Ph.D. in literature, and was ordained a priest. A scholar by talent and training, he compiled an Italian dictionary for school use at Don Bosco's request. In 1870 he became the first director of the Salesian school in Alassio and in 1879 he became the first provincial of the Liguria province. In 1885 Don Bosco personally chose him to be prefect general of studies, a position which enabled him to put his educational and administrative expertise to good use for the schools of both the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. He was also a prolific writer. He died at Alassio on March 25, 1917, just shy of his seventy-third birthday.

COSTAMAGNA, JAMES (1846-1921), *Bishop*

James Costamagna was born at Caramagna (Cuneo) on March 23, 1846. At the age of twelve he began his studies at the Oratory. On September 27, 1867 he made his first profession, and less than a year later was ordained a priest. In 1874 Don Bosco sent him to Mornese as spiritual director of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, a post he held for three years. In 1877 he headed the third missionary expedition. In Argentina he accompanied General Julio Roca as chaplain on a military expedition calculated to subdue the uprising tribes of the Pampas. He saved many Indians from the vengeful attacks of the soldiers and brought them to the faith.

In 1880, on the death of Fr. Bodrato, he was named director of San Carlos School in Buenos Aires and provincial of South America. He was a stern per-

son. "I want sterling Salesians" was his motto. He himself set the example in promoting the genuine spirit of Don Bosco, correcting all deviations and weaknesses. He brought in the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians for the care of the girls of Almagro. In 1882 he began publishing the Argentine edition of the *Bollettino Salesiano* and, two years later, that of *Letture Cattoliche*. To counteract the anticlerical spirit of the public schools of Buenos Aires, he opened more festive oratories for the teaching of catechism. He was also in demand as spiritual director of religious communities. In 1887 he began the Salesian work in Chile with a school at Talca, and the following year he toured neighboring countries for future Salesian foundations.

Appointed apostolic vicar of Mendez and Gualaquiza, Ecuador, he was consecrated bishop in the Basilica of Mary, Help of Christians on May 23, 1895. Since his return to Ecuador was blocked by its government, he went to Buenos Aires, where he was appointed by Fr. Rua to be visitator to the Salesian houses of South America, with residence in Santiago, Chile. In 1902 he was granted permission to visit his vicariate for three months, a visit he repeated the following year. Eventually he obtained permission to enter Ecuador and set up his residence among the Jivaros.

In 1918, suffering from a heart condition, he ceded his post to Salesian Bishop Dominic Comin and retired to the novitiate house at Bernal, Argentina, where he died on September 9, 1921.

DALMAZZO, FRANCIS (1845-1895), Fr.

Francis Dalmazzo entered the Oratory in 1860. After a few days, unable to adjust to the frugal meals, he wanted to return home. On the morning of his departure, after going to confession to Don Bosco, he saw him perform a miracle by multiplying a few buns into hundreds for the boys' breakfast. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 453ff)

Astounded, he decided to remain at the Oratory, became a Salesian and was ordained a priest in 1868. From 1872 to 1880 he was director of the Valsalice College; subsequently he was appointed director and pastor of the school and Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome and procurator general of the Salesian Society at the Vatican. Toward the end of 1887 he was sent to London to open a Salesian house; afterward, from 1888 to 1894, he was rector of the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Turin. In all these undertakings he won the admiration and good will of all who came in contact with him. Finally, in 1894, in deference to the wishes of the bishop of Catanzaro, he assumed the direction of that diocesan seminary staffed by Salesians and within a short time opened also a small secondary school. A tragic death, however, awaited him at the hand of a murderer; a victim of duty, he died on March 10, 1895, forgiving his assailant.

DURANDO, CELESTINE (1840-1907), Fr.

Celestine Durando, born at Farigliano di Mondovì on April 29, 1840, entered the Oratory in 1856, and on his very first day met Dominic Savio, with whom he later founded the Immaculate Conception Sodality. On December 18, 1859, with other young clerics, he joined Don Bosco in forming the Salesian Congregation. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f) He was ordained a priest in Mondovì in 1864. The following year he became a member of the superior chapter and held that office for nearly forty years.

Fr. Durando was well known for his several, greatly praised school publications. In 1869 Don Bosco directed him to compile *La Biblioteca della gioventù italiana* [Italian Classics for the Young]. (*See* Vol. IX, pp. 51, 196f, 391) From 1869 to 1885 two hundred and four volumes were published, nineteen of them edited by Fr. Durando. He also authored an excellent Latin grammar and dictionary.

From 1886 to 1903 he served as provincial to a wide range of Salesian houses in Europe, Africa and Asia, loosely linked into one unit. A zealous priest, he distinguished himself in the ministry of the confessional. He died at the Oratory on March 27, 1907. "A silent man," wrote Fr. Rua, "Fr. Durando lived a career of good works, rich in merit. Wherever he passed he left the image of a truly priestly Salesian spirit."

FAGNANO, JOSEPH (1844-1916), Fr., *Prefect Apostolic*

Joseph Fagnano was born in Rocchetta Tanaro (Asti) on March 9, 1844. At twelve he enrolled in the diocesan seminary of Asti. When the seminary closed in 1859, due to a shortage of students, the seminarians were encouraged to transfer to the Oratory in Turin, but Joseph returned home. After serving as an orderly in the army hospital at Asti, he decided to resume his priestly studies under Don Bosco's care. He was soon won over by the happy family life he found at the Oratory and by Don Bosco's serene fatherliness. What most impressed him, however, was Don Bosco's telling him his sins, circumstances and all, during his general confession. That convinced him that he was talking to a saint, and he decided to stay with him.

Joseph made his first vows in 1864 and was ordained on September 19, 1868. On November 14, 1875, since one of the ten Salesian missionaries who were assigned to the first missionary expedition was unable to go, Don Bosco asked Fr. Fagnano to replace him, and he gladly did.

From Buenos Aires he went to San Nicolás de los Arroyos and converted an old home to a boarding school. The following March it was ready for occupancy by a hundred and forty-four boarders and as many day students. In April 1879, while director at the school, Fr. Fagnano contracted typhoid. After his recovery six months later, he was made pastor at Patagónes, in northern Patagonia, where

he built a church and two schools, one for boys, one for girls. He formed a school band and set up a meteorological station, soon given official status by Argentina. When a military expedition was sent out against the Indians, Fr. Fagnano zealously volunteered his services as a chaplain so as to extend his pastoral care to the hunted natives, of whom he baptized thirty.

Appointed prefect apostolic of southern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, he sailed to Punta Arenas in 1887 and then to Dawson Island, where he established St. Raphael Mission, which the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians staffed in 1890. At Punta Arenas he set up a weather station and a church. In Tierra del Fuego, where a lake has been named after him, he founded a mission which became an Indian settlement. It burned down three years later, and Fr. Fagnano rebuilt it, but, when the government withdrew funds, he had to abandon the project.

Fr. Fagnano died in Santiago, Chile on September 18, 1916.

FRANCESIA, JOHN BAPTIST (1838-1930), Fr.

John Baptist Francesia, who was born in San Giorgio Canavese (Turin) on October 3, 1838, began attending the Valdocco Festive Oratory when about twelve; two years later he became a resident student at the Oratory. In 1859 he was one of the sixteen young men who joined Don Bosco in forming the Salesian Society. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f) He was also the first Salesian to earn academic degrees at the University of Turin. Ordained a priest in 1862, he soon filled critical administrative positions, distinguishing himself by his fatherly kindliness. In 1865 Don Bosco named him spiritual director of the Congregation. From 1878 to 1902 he was provincial of the Piedmont-Lombard province. Characterized by a gentle fatherliness which he had acquired from Don Bosco and by a heartwarming smile, Fr. Francesia was a prolific writer and a distinguished Latin and Italian scholar. A man of letters he also wrote plays and poems which Don Bosco had the boys perform on the Oratory stage. His last forty years were spent at the Oratory, and over those years hardly a feast or commemoration was observed without a celebration of Salesian annals in fluent Latin or Italian by Fr. Francesia. The long list of his writings is a very impressive one, ranging from Latin and Italian literature to biography and devotional works.

Besides being a witness of the first years of Don Bosco's work for youth, which he recorded in a biography of our founder, Fr. Francesia was an historian and a poet, writing fluently in Latin and Italian. He also wrote brief accounts of the lives of deceased Salesians. Fr. Francesia was very much the oral historian of the Salesian Congregation's beginnings, recalling events in detail and holding his audience spellbound in the many "Good Nights" he gave to the Oratory's large communities over the years. He died at the Oratory on January 17, 1930. For further details *see also* the Indexes of Volumes IV through XIV.

GARBELLONE, JOHN (1859-1928), Br.

Born in Crottas, France in 1859, John Garbellone was one of the best known and loved characters of the Oratory, which he began to attend in 1873. He became a Salesian in 1877, and for more than thirty years, until 1920, was entrusted with gathering supplies for Salesian missionary expeditions. He also organized a brass band in 1884, remaining its conductor to the very end of his life.

However, his most loved mission, assigned him by Don Bosco himself, was the festive oratory. At this school of Don Bosco he learned to love souls. To him was reserved the preparation of First Communion, and through the years he prepared over six thousand children for First Communion. In 1925 he set up and directed the Salesian exhibit for the Holy Year's Missionary Exposition in Rome. It was his swan song. He died in Turin on May 6, 1928.

Br. John Garbellone was a character from the pages of the "fioretti" of St. Francis: deeds and words dressed in simplicity and holy shrewdness, yet always imbued with uprightness and goodness of heart.

GROSSO, JOHN BAPTIST (1858-1944), Fr.

Born in San Pietro in Val Lemina (Turin) on February 8, 1858, John was ten when he was received into the Oratory by Don Bosco himself. He was gifted with an exceptional talent for music and, as a cleric, he was sent to Marseille to study music. He made his first profession in 1876 and was ordained in 1881. He began a brilliant musical career by founding the famed St. Joseph Choir School in Nice. When religious were banned from France in 1900 he was first sent to Lombriasco, and then to Foglizzo as director of the theology students, and finally to the Oratory.

In 1923 he became director of music at the Salesian International Theologate in Turin, where he trained numberless confreres in sacred polyphony and Gregorian chant. A man of unquestioning fidelity to his vocation as a Salesian, musician and liturgist, Fr. Grosso was truly the founder of the liturgical music movement in the Salesian Congregation. He had the gift of uniting prayer with song. He died at Bagnolo (Cuneo) on November 21, 1944.

GUIDAZIO, PETER (1841-1902), Fr.

Born in Turin on April 23, 1841, Peter Guidazio entered the Oratory at the age of twenty-two. In 1864 Don Bosco sent him to the newly opened school at Lanzo where he remained six years and proved his ability as a good teacher. In the meantime, in 1867 he took his vows and seven years later was ordained a priest and appointed director of studies at the Oratory. In 1878 Don Bosco sent him to direct the high school department of the diocesan seminary at Montefiascone (Viterbo). A year later he opened the first Salesian school in Sicily at Randazzo and was its director from 1879 to 1885. He was also director at Lanzo

from 1885 to 1901. His expertise, prudence, and determination gave the Salesian schools in Sicily particular eminence. He died at Randazzo on July 12, 1902.

LASAGNA, LOUIS (1850-1895), *Bishop*

Louis Lasagna first met Don Bosco in the summer of 1862 during one of the latter's outings with the Oratory boys. (*See* Vol. VII, pp. 164, 166, 179f) He received the clerical garb in 1866, made his first vows in 1868, was ordained a priest in 1873, and joined the second missionary expedition to South America in 1876. As director and provincial, he achieved marked success in the fields of education, social action, agriculture, priestly vocations, and church construction or renovation. In 1893 he was consecrated bishop and entrusted with the evangelization of the Indians of Mato Grosso (Brazil). He died in a train wreck at Juiz de Fora (Brazil) on November 6, 1895.

LAZZERO, JOSEPH (1837-1910), Fr.

Joseph Lazzero was born in Turin on May 10, 1837 and entered the Oratory at the age of twenty. In 1859 he was one of the first young clerics to join Don Bosco in forming the Salesian Congregation. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f) He made his first vows in 1862 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1865. In 1870 he made his perpetual profession. In 1874 Don Bosco appointed him to the superior chapter and put him in charge of technical schools, a post he held until 1898. In 1877 Don Bosco chose him and Fr. Barberis to represent the Salesian Congregation at Pius IX's golden jubilee as bishop. Stricken in 1897, he retired and died after a long illness at Mathi (Turin) on March 7, 1910.

LEMOYNE, JOHN BAPTIST (1839-1916), Fr.

Fr. John Baptist Lemoyne was the first great chronicler of the life of St. John Bosco and of the first decades of the Salesian Congregation.

From their first providential meeting in 1864, Fr. Lemoyne esteemed Don Bosco as a person of outstanding character and holiness. He not only strove to understand and acquire his spirit, but also took upon himself the task of committing to writing anything of significance that Don Bosco did or said. Information concerning earlier events he painstakingly gathered from eyewitnesses and other sources.

In 1883 he came to the motherhouse as editor of the *Bollettino Salesiano* and secretary of the superior chapter. The five years that followed he spent in cordial intimacy with Don Bosco and heard from the saint himself the story of the arduous road he had to climb in his youth to arrive at the priesthood, and of the wonderful manner in which Providence guided the Salesian work.

After Don Bosco's death in 1888, he was formally charged with the compilation of available materials for the life of the saint. Forty-five large volumes of

galley proofs bear witness to his dedicated research and provide the material for the nineteen volumes of *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, the first nine of which he authored. Noteworthy among his other works are the *Life of Don Bosco* in two volumes and the *Life of Mamma Margaret*, Don Bosco's mother. He died in Turin on September 14, 1916 at the age of seventy-seven.

MARENCO, JOHN (1853-1921), *Bishop*

John Marenco was born in Ovada (Turin) on April 27, 1853. He applied to Don Bosco to become a Salesian in 1873, while he was a third-year theology student. Discerning his fine personal qualities, Don Bosco accepted him as a novice without further discussion and admitted him to his religious vows the following year. He was ordained a priest in 1875. Five years later Don Bosco sent him to Lucca to open a new house. The talents he showed as a director induced Don Bosco to recall him to Turin and entrust to him the construction of the Church of St. John the Evangelist. In 1888 Fr. Rua sent him to Sampierdarena as director; in 1890 he appointed him provincial of the Salesian houses in Liguria and Tuscany, in 1892 he made him vicar general of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, and finally in 1899 he sent him to Rome as procurator of the Salesian Society with the Holy See. He filled that office until 1909, when Pope Benedict XV named him bishop of Massa Carrara and eight years later titular bishop of Edessa and apostolic internuncio to the republics of Central America. Within four years he established an archdiocese and a vicariate apostolic in Costa Rica, reopened diplomatic relations between El Salvador and Honduras, founded two interdiocesan seminaries in Nicaragua and San Salvador, and strengthened ecclesiastical discipline. In 1921 Bishop Marenco returned to Turin because of failing health, and there he died a few months later on October 22.

MONATERI, JOSEPH (1847-1914), Fr.

Joseph Monateri was born in Crescentino (Vercelli) on March 3, 1847. Don Bosco personally accepted him into the Oratory in 1860. Seven years later he made his first profession at Trofarello. After teaching at Mirabello and Borgo San Martino, he was ordained a priest in 1869. Don Bosco then sent him as director to the new house of Albano (Rome) in 1877. He was among the twenty-three confreres who formed the First General Chapter at Lanzo in 1877. In 1898 he was appointed provincial of the Salesians in Sicily and director of the house at Catania. For reasons of health he left Sicily in 1903 and became director of Lanzo. He died at Colle Salvetti (Leghorn) on September 22, 1914, at the age of sixty-seven.

OBERTI, ERNEST (1854-1904), Fr.

Born at Racconigi, Italy, Ernest Oberti was professed as a Salesian at the Oratory on September 20, 1872, and was ordained a priest at Casale on June 23,

1876. In 1881 Don Bosco sent him to Spain. From 1883 to 1899 he served as the director of the house of Utrera. In 1900 he moved to Madrid as director. In 1902 he was named provincial of the Celtic province of St. James (1902-1904). Soon after, due to serious illness, he was advised to return to Italy. After a life characterized by an exemplary religious spirit and spent in untiring activity, he died in Rome on October 28, 1904.

PANE, CHARLES (1856-1923), Fr.

Born at Grana (Asti) in 1856, Charles Pane came to the Oratory as a young adult, donned the clerical habit and took his first vows in 1874. Upon completion of his theological studies, he was ordained a priest in 1879. Two years later he was sent to Spain and, with youthful enthusiasm, worked for ten years in our school at Utrera. His particular field of apostolate, however, was to be South America. In 1891 he and two other Salesians were sent to Peru to start a Salesian foundation, From 1909 to 1915 Fr. Pane was director of our school at Callao. He then spent the rest of his life in Lima where he launched a fund-raising campaign for the construction of the monumental church of Mary, Help of Christians. He died in Lima on March 20, 1923.

PERROT, PETER (1853-1928), Fr.

Peter Perrot, born at Laux-Usseaux (Turin) on October 23, 1853, made his first vows as a Salesian on September 27, 1872, and was ordained a priest in Turin on June 10, 1876. Two years later Don Bosco sent him as director to La Navarre in the township of Hyères in southeast France, where the young priest overcame serious difficulties and earned everybody's esteem and confidence. With the help of generous benefactors he built a chapel and part of a new school building, which he completed in 1884. He wrote a manual on farming for the agricultural department of the school. In 1898 he was appointed provincial of the Salesian houses in southern France with headquarters in Marseille. During the government's persecution of religious he sought refuge in Italy, but eventually returned to La Navarre where he died on February 24, 1928.

PICCONO, ANGELO (1848-1913), Fr.

Born at Albiano (Turin) in 1848, Angelo Piccono came to know Don Bosco later in life when at the age of twenty-nine he was a police captain in the precinct of Borgo Dora quite near the Oratory. In 1877, through acquaintances there, he heard that Don Bosco had predicted the deaths of eight Oratory residents within that year. Deeply impressed by that, he kept careful count throughout 1877 to test the prediction's truthfulness. As narrated in Volume XII of *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco* (p. 442), when the eighth death occurred on the last day of 1877, "he abandoned the world and became a Salesian." On May 30, 1878 he took his vows and was ordained a priest on

November 22 of the same year. In 1881 he joined our missionaries in Argentina where he worked for ten years until Father Rua sent him with four other Salesians to Mexico to start a Salesian foundation. In 1896 he was also entrusted with negotiations for the opening of a Salesian school in San Salvador.

After returning to Italy a few years later, he was appointed director at Naples (1901-1905) and then at Castellamare di Stabia (1905-1910). Among other things he also wrote several articles about Patagonia and Mexico for the *Bollettino Salesiano*. He died at Caserta on January 1, 1913.

RONCHAIL, JOSEPH (1850-1898), Fr.

Joseph Ronchail, born in Laux-Usseaux (Turin) on May 21, 1850, first met Don Bosco in 1868. (*See* Vol. IX, pp. 148ff) Convinced that Don Bosco was inspired by God, he entered the Oratory and joined the Salesian Congregation in 1869. Ordained in 1872, he distinguished himself as a hard worker and zealous priest. He was director of the Salesian school at Nice from 1876 to 1887 and at Paris in 1888. He was also acting provincial of northern France and Belgium until his death in Paris in 1898.

ROSSI, JOSEPH (1835-1908), Br.

Joseph Rossi was born in Mezzanabigli (Pavia) in 1835. His reading of Don Bosco's prayerbook, *Il Giovane Provveduto* [*The Companion of Youth*], led him to Don Bosco himself at the age of twenty-four.

He was among the first to seek admission into the Salesian Congregation and made his profession as a lay religious on September 29, 1864. Noting that the young man had the qualities of a good administrator, Don Bosco carefully cultivated him and entrusted more and more of the Congregation's business matters to him. He also called him to attend the First and Fourth General Chapters as consultor. Even after Don Bosco's death Br. Rossi had the full trust of Fr. Rua He died in Turin on October 28, 1908.

RUA, MICHAEL (1837-1910), Fr., *Rector Major, Blessed*

Michael Rua was born in Turin on June 9, 1837. As a pupil of the Christian Brothers' school he first met Don Bosco at the age of seven, and an unbreakable bond was forged between the two. In 1852 he donned the cassock, and from then on his life was so closely intertwined with that of the founder that he has often been dubbed "Don Bosco's double." On January 26, 1854 he and three other boys of the Oratory gathered in Don Bosco's room to band themselves into what was to become the Salesian Congregation. (*See* Vol. V, p. 8) The following year he took his first vows. While studying theology he took charge of the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory in Turin. In 1859 he accompanied Don Bosco on his first visit to Rome, and that year, when the Congregation was approved by Pius IX, Michael Rua, though a subdeacon, was elected by his peers to be spir-

itual director of the new-born Society of St. Francis de Sales. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f)

He was ordained a priest on July 29, 1860 and three years later became the first Salesian director, assuming charge of the junior seminary at Mirabello. On the death of Fr. Victor Alasonatti in 1865, Don Bosco recalled Fr. Rua to the Oratory in Turin to assume financial responsibility for the Salesian Society. He was Don Bosco's right-hand man. As Fr. Eugene Ceria states: "Don Bosco could not have asked for a more devoted son, a more loyal interpreter of his every wish, a more tireless and intelligent worker, a more enlightened mind and a superior of more unchallenged authority . . . fully dedicated to his mission, totally imbued with his ideas and amply qualified . . . to be the founder's worthy spokesman at all levels." (*See* Vol. XIV, p. 1)

In 1884, at Don Bosco's request, he was appointed his vicar by Pope Leo XIII, and four years later, at the founder's death, he became rector major, a position he held for twenty-two years. During that time the Congregation grew from sixty-four houses to three hundred and forty-one, reaching out to Europe, North, South and Central America, Africa and Asia.

Fr. Rua was often defined as "the living rule" because of his fidelity to Don Bosco's concept of Salesian life and mission. Though he may have externally given an impression of strictness, he was a gentle, warm, and thoughtful superior, so much so that he seems to have rivaled Don Bosco in gentleness and fatherliness.

Fr. Rua died on April 6, 1910 at the Oratory. In 1922 the diocesan process for his beatification and canonization was begun, and in 1926 the cause was taken up in Rome. He was declared Venerable in 1953 and was beatified on October 29, 1972 by Pope Paul VI. His feast day is observed on October 29.

SALA, ANTHONY (1836-1895), Fr.

Anthony Sala, born near Como on January 28, 1836, entered the Oratory in 1863 at the age of twenty-seven after giving up the management of his family's silk mill. He was God's gift to Don Bosco. Entrusting himself to Don Bosco's guidance, he made his profession on December 29, 1865 and in little more than six years became a priest. Showing special administrative talent, he was assigned to help Fr. Alasonatti, who was then in poor health.

In 1875, Fr. Sala was appointed counselor of the superior chapter, replacing Fr. Ghivarello. Recognizing his particular ability, Don Bosco put Fr. Sala in charge of remodeling the motherhouse of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians in Nizza Monferrato and in constructing the new houses at Este, Cremona, Chieri, and Randazzo. In 1880 Don Bosco appointed him economer general, a post to which he was re-elected almost unamimously in both 1886 and 1892. He supervised the construction of St. John the Evangelist Church and school and directed the planning of the Salesian exhibit in the National Exposition of 1884

in Turin. He also lightened Don Bosco's burden in building the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome. During Don Bosco's final illness he offered the lowliest of services in the sick room.

Fr. Sala worked restlessly to his dying day. He went to his eternal reward on May 21, 1895 after a brief illness.

TOMATIS, DOMINIC (1849-1912), Fr.

Born at Trinità (Cuneo) in 1849, Dominic Tomatis entered the Oratory at the age of thirteen. In 1864 he witnessed the fulfillment of two predictions by Don Bosco (*see* Vol. VII, pp. 386-389) and also had a dream about his future Salesian vocation—a dream which Don Bosco confirmed a few days later when Tomatis went to him for confession (*see* Vol. VIII, pp. 212f). Two years later, however, during the summer vacation, Tomatis decided to become a Jesuit like two of his uncles. Before leaving for the novitiate, he went to Turin to make his confession to Don Bosco and bid him farewell. Don Bosco reminded him of the dream Tomatis had had and suddenly the young man decided to stay with Don Bosco (*ibid.*, pp. 213ff).

In 1867 he took his first vows and in 1870 he made his perpetual profession. Ordained a priest in 1872, he was assigned to our school in Varazze as teacher and principal.

In 1875 Don Bosco chose him as a member of the first missionary expedition to South America. There he distinguished himself for his zeal and fearlessness. After Don Bosco's death, Father Rua sent him to Chile to open a school at Talca; later on he was appointed director at Santiago. In 1894 he returned to Italy to seek and obtain more personnel. Two years later, however, he suffered a stroke. It was the beginning of his calvary which lasted until his death in Santiago on October 8, 1912.

UBALDI, PAUL (1872-1934), Fr.

Born in Parma, Italy, on August 30, 1872, Paul Ubaldi entered the Oratory in 1882 as a resident student. There he studied, taught, and was ordained to the priesthood in 1895. Having earned doctorates in literature, philosophy, and theology, he taught the Greek classics at Liceo Valsalice and then at the University of Turin (1909-1913) and Catania (1919-1924). He was later professor of Latin and Greek Christian literature in the Catholic University of Milan (1924-1934) and in the seminary of Venegono (1932-1934).

To promote in Italy an appreciation of ancient Christian literature as a discipline in its own right and not as a dispensable appendage to the classics, together with Father Sisto Colombo, S.D.B., Father Ubaldi founded in 1912 the review *Didaskaleion* and the *Biblioteca del Didaskaleion*. With courage, competence, and sacrifice both founders edited the review until 1931. The publication of *Didaskaleion* and Father Ubaldi's tenure as professor in the Catholic

University of Milan resulted in the establishment of departments of ancient Christian literature in many universities of Italy.

Father Ubaldi also published critical editions, commentaries, and translations of the ancient classics, as well as many learned studies in various reviews.

Above all, Father Ubaldi was a true priest among the university students. He brought to the halls of the university the educational method of Don Bosco, which seeks to make of each student a friend to be brought to Christ. He died in Milan, Italy on July 22, 1934.

VACCHINA, BERNARD (1859-1935), Fr.

Born in Revignano d'Asti on March 19, 1859, Bernard Vacchina entered the Oratory in 1871 and grew under Don Bosco's eye. In 1876 he donned the clerical habit during his spiritual retreat in Lanzo. While his fellow novices remained there for a while, Don Bosco called Bernard to the Oratory to assist the newly entered pupils. Volume XIII of these *Memoirs* (pp. 639-645) has a charming description of his vicissitudes as a teacher under Don Bosco's fatherly guidance. In 1877 he made his perpetual vows and, volunteering for the missions, was two years later sent to Uruguay. After a brief stint at Villa Colón, he became secretary of the internuncio at Buenos Aires, where he was ordained on May 5, 1882 and exercised his priestly ministry in the difficult parish of "La Boca." Five years later, the vicar apostolic of Central Patagonia appointed him director at Viedma. After some thirty years of zealous missionary work, he retired to St. John the Evangelist school in Buenos Aires, where he continued his priestly work, which was made ever more fruitful by his physical sufferings, until his death in 1935.

VESPIGNANI, JOSEPH (1854-1932), Fr.

Born at Lugo, Italy in 1854, Joseph started his secondary schooling with the Benedictines at Cesena and then entered the seminary of Faenza for his philosophy courses. While there, a virulent pneumonia nearly took his life. After an uncertain recovery, he continued his theological studies and, though still sickly, was ordained a priest in 1876. He barely hoped to live long enough to say at least three Masses, and yet, three months later, he felt strong enough to go to Turin to see Don Bosco. So impressed was he by the fact that Don Bosco could read his conscience that he stayed with him for a whole year. He made his religious profession on Christmas Day 1876, and the following year Don Bosco sent him to Argentina with the third missionary expedition to be novice master. After spending seventeen years with Bishop James Costamagna, he succeeded him in 1894 as director of Pius IX School in Buenos Aires and, later, as provincial.

In 1922 he was recalled to Turin as a member of the superior chapter and remained in office until his saintly death on January 15, 1932. In 1948 his remains were brought to Buenos Aires and entombed in San Carlos Church. As

novice master, confessor, writer, and founder of nineteen Salesian houses, he earned the admiration of all. Outstanding is his book *Un Anno alla Scuola del Beato Don Bosco*.

VIGLIETTI, CHARLES (1864-1915), Fr.

Charles Viglietti was born at Susa (Turin) on May 28, 1864. He received the clerical habit from Don Bosco himself in 1882 and made his perpetual vows on October 6, 1883 at San Benigno Canavese.

On various occasions Don Bosco entrusted him with special tasks that offered the young cleric opportunities to assimilate Don Bosco's spirit. Soon enough, Viglietti became Don Bosco's secretary in our founder's last years and, as such, accompanied him to Spain in 1886. On December of that same year, Viglietti was ordained a priest and from then on he took filial care of Don Bosco as his health gradually took a turn for the worse in 1887. He lovingly assisted him until his death on January 31, 1888.

In 1896 Father Rua sent him to Bologna to open the first Salesian house, which he directed until 1904. During those years he also erected a monumental shrine to the Sacred Heart of Jesus next to our large school. From 1904 to 1906 he was director at Savona and from 1906 to 1912 at Varazze. In 1907 he undauntedly faced vicious lies and attacks from the freemasons against the Salesians, but in the end truth triumphed.

He was also a talented and prolific writer. He spent his last years at the Oratory and, after a painful illness, went to his eternal reward on November 8, 1915.

*Appendix 2*

## SALESIAN HOUSES AND MISSIONS IN SOUTH AMERICA
(*See* page 3, footnote 8)

On January 15, *L'Unità Cattolica* published the following list, an offical copy of which had just been sent to His Holiness Leo XIII, in order to acquaint people with the Salesians' accomplishments in South America within a brief period of five years:

## SALESIAN HOUSES AND MISSIONS IN SOUTH AMERICA: 1875-1881

BUENOS AIRES. *San Nicolás:* boarding school for boys; parish at Ramallo; ranch mission; parish of San Carlos. *Almagro*: boarding school and hospice; provincial house of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. *In midtown*: Italian parish of Our Lady of Mercy; parish of *La Boca* at Rachuelos. *South Side*: boys' school; girls' school (Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians). *San Isidro:* girls' school, festive oratory.

URUGUAY. *Montevideo*: Italian parish of Our Lady of Charity; St. Vincent school. *Las Piedras*: parish; boys' school; girls' school (Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians); mission; apostolic work in outlying localities. *Villa Colón*: boys' boarding school; girls' school (Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians).

*Entre Rios*. Libertad Colony, 1877-78.

PARAGUAY. Mission, 1878.

PAMPAS. Mission; catechetical instruction and baptism of Indians.

PATAGONIA. Colonies at Fiscomenoco, Choele-Choel, Catriel tribe, Conesa, Guardia Mitre, Linares Indians, San [Francisco] Javier. *Carmen de Patagónes*; parish, boys' school; boarding school for girls at Santa Maria de las Indias. *Mercedes*: parish. *Viedma*: boys' school.

The following letter, published in French by the *Société Anonyme de la Maison Beaujour,* was sent by General [Julio] Roca, president of Argentina, to Don Bosco. This translation arrived at the Oratory in January.

Buenos Aires, December 10, 1880

Reverend Father:

I received your letter of November 10, and deeply appreciate your fine sentiments. Be assured that your missions in the Pampas and in Patagonia will always be worthy to be ranked with the lofty endeavors of civilization and that your religious will everywhere merit the respect they have won so far in the eyes of this nation's civic and political authorities. Please pray for me that I may more graciously bear the heavy load of government. I remain in greatest esteem,

General [Julio] Roca
*President of the Republic*

The original, known to be missent by General Roca to Milan and forwarded to Don Bosco in Marseille in February [1881], has been lost.

*Appendix 3**

## LETTER FROM FATHER LOUIS FIORE TO POPE LEO XIII

(See page 173, footnote 22)

Turin, November 12, 1881

Most Holy Father:

I am a diocesan priest of the archdiocese of Turin. Since my boyhood I have known the Oratory and the works of Don Bosco, a most charitable and zealous priest of Turin. I cannot help but voice the intense grief which I shared with so very many other diocesan priests while attending the diocesan synod summoned by our most reverend archbishop on November 10.

Aware of what had happened on several other occasions, I went to the meeting fearing that I might again be distressed to hear the archbishop deliver regrettable remarks; unfortunately, I was right.

He addressed the clergy twice that day, once in the morning and again in the afternoon; both times the archbishop made it clear how firmly he had shut his mind to genuine merit. For example, he stressed the importance of festive oratories or youth centers for boys. He might very well have cited the example of the festive oratories founded by Don Bosco forty years ago in the main area of Turin and still maintained by his Salesians at their own expense. But, no, with hardly concealed deliberation, he singled out the oratories of the city of Brescia, as though Don Bosco and his Salesians did not even exist in Turin. Most Holy Father, the clergy, which has known Don Bosco's work for the diocese over the past forty years, received a very bad impression at seeing their leader so crassly ignore a priest who is so well deserving not only in Turin, but in Piedmont, Italy and elsewhere. This is the best way to destroy the clergy's morale and cause it to lose its wholesome esteem for its archbishop.

More upsetting was his evening address. In strident tones he attacked those who flaunt extreme reverence for the Pope at their bishop's expense, who vow their allegiance to the See of Peter but not to that of St. Maximus. He then violently inveighed against the Catholic press, charging that it interfered in matters

**Memorie Biografiche del Beato Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. XV, Document 21, pp. 716f. [Editor]

outside its field, and, barring none, he branded as "insolent rags" those journals which call themselves Catholic and do more harm than irreligious and evil newspapers. In a word, we thought that we were hearing poor Father Curci[1] declaim certain passages of his regrettable defamatory booklet *The Old Zealots*. Some of his remarks were downright cruel and shocking. God help us if the laity had heard that address! Woe indeed had the faithful heard it! But still, is it not already a very sad situation that so many of the clergy did hear it and know about it?

I will say nothing of the way he defends in both speaking and writing the philosophical system of Father Rosmini, as he most recently did in his pastoral letter of last October 24, and this even though he is aware that the Holy See frowns upon it. I close by assuring Your Holiness that this archbishop is doing vast harm to this unfortunate archdiocese. Most Holy Father, unless you take action, the damage will be beyond repair, for God help us if the minds, especially of the younger clergy, become tainted.

Most Holy Father, forgive me, a simple priest, for baring my soul. I would never have hazarded such a letter if I did not realize I was entrusting it to the Vicar of Jesus Christ, who will use it only for God's greater glory and the Church's good.

In spirit I kneel in honor to Your Holiness and ask for your apostolic blessing. In deepest veneration,

Your most humble and obedient son,
Fr. Louis Fiore

[1]*See* Vol. XIII, p. 390. [Editor]

*Appendix 4**

## EPISODES IN DON BOSCO'S LIFE AS NARRATED BY HIM TO FATHER JULIUS BARBERIS

(*See* page xiv, footnote 1)

"For a full twenty years I assiduously visited Turin's city prisons. I continued my visits later, though not as regularly. One day a sick convict sent for me to hear his confession. I went, and while he was pulling his bed clothes over himself, I spotted a long sharp-pointed jackknife at his side. Quietly I snatched it, closed it and slipped it into my pocket. The prisoner then turned toward me and began rummaging under his blankets and pillow.

"'What are you looking for?' I asked.

"'Something that I had here a few moments ago,' he replied. And he kept searching. Not finding his knife, he called for the orderly.

"'Did you take anything from here?'

"'Nothing! What are you looking for?'

"'Something I had here.'

"Ill and in his nightshirt, he got up and began hunting everywhere with no success. Returning to bed, he let loose a stream of blasphemies and curses, with no regard to my protests.

"'Tell me what you are looking for,' I said.

"'A knife.'

"'What for?'

"'To plunge it into your heart.'

"'Did I ever do you any harm?'

"'No, but I have been rotting away here too long. They refuse to execute me. If I were to kill you, they'd sentence me to death immediately, and I wouldn't have to suffer any longer.'

"I calmed him down and finally got him to make his confession.

"On another occasion, I was returning from Capriglio to Becchi shortly before dark, reading my breviary as I walked. At a spot called 'La Serra' where the path turns and slopes downward, a man suddenly stepped in front of me. 'Give me money!' he growled, and drew a weapon from under his left armpit.

*For the original Italian *see Memorie Biografiche del Beato Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. XV, Document 14, pp. 705ff. [Editor]

"I took a close look at him and, recognizing him, said: 'Cortese, have you forgotten all the promises you made me?' He was dumbfounded.

"'Oh, Don Bosco! Please, forgive me. I did not know it was you.'

"'Are you back to your evil ways again?' I continued. 'When you were in prison in Turin, you told me many times that if you ever got out, you would never return to such a life.'

"Without moving away from the spot, I induced him to make his confession. He briefly prepared himself as I finished my prayers, and then, kneeling on the ground while I sat on a stone, he made his confession. Then he went his way in peace with God, and I trust he never again returned to his former way of life."

* * *

*One day, after a rather long and very friendly after-dinner conversation, we [Don Bosco and Father Barberis] got to talking about how smoothly the house was running and I said I had high hopes that Don Bosco would find everything to his liking. We went on from one thing to another, and Don Bosco commented,* "Going like this from house to house I never find things as they should be. It's a blessing if matters are not worse. I recall that in the early days of the Oratory—it's some thirty years ago—I thought I had won all the boys' hearts, and indeed they really did love me in a special way. One day Father Anthony Belasio [a missionary] came to preach the annual spiritual retreat. At its end, I asked him how he had found things in general and whether he had come across any disordered consciences. . . . He replied: 'I have never yet preached a mission or given a retreat without coming across some. The difference only lies in the number.'

"This shocked me; I felt it couldn't be true. However, with the passage of time, I realized he was right. The difference was merely in the number of such cases. Some always stubbornly keep their silence. This condition goes on for months and even years, also among adults and priests as well."

*I remarked that I was the only confessor in the house and that, although I believed I was much liked and enjoyed everyone's trust, I was nevertheless afraid. . . . His reply was:* "Never flatter yourself that you have everyone's trust. There will always be the few who put on a false front. Neither do you have to go searching for other priests as ordinary confessors. Those who have decided to clam up or are inclined to do so will say nothing to other confessors as well. Nevertheless, see to it that extraordinary confessors come in often."

*When I replied that I was doing so, insisting in fact that a superior should come frequently from Turin, he made it clear to me that this was the only remedy and that unfamiliar diocesan priests would not do.*

# INDEX

*Compiled by*
*Rev. Michael Mendl, S.D.B.*

## ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| abp. | archbishop |
| bp. | bishop |
| BS | *Bollettino Salesiano* |
| Card. | Cardinal |
| CBR | Congregation of Bishops and Regulars |
| cl. | clerical brother (seminarian) |
| coad. | coadjutor (lay) brother |
| COC | Congregation of the Council |
| Cong. | Congregation |
| CSH | Church of the Sacred Heart |
| CSJE | Church of St. John the Evangelist |
| DB | Don Bosco |
| dir. | director |
| Dtrs. | Daughters |
| FMA | Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians (*Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*) |
| MHC | Mary, Help of Christians |
| pref. | prefect |
| Sal. | Salesian |
| SC | Salesian cooperators |
| SH | Sacred Heart |
| SS | Salesian Society |


### A

Acquarona, Mrs. Mary (SC), 112-13, 123-24, 528-29
Africa, 70, 144
Agnozzi, Abp. (sec'y of CBR), 193, 356
Alassio: charges of immorality, 110-11, 286; DB at, 106-11, 114-15, 161, 331, 341, 355n, 505, 536, 540-41, 555; FMA at, 505-06; provincial house, 426; retreats, 541; SS at, 390, 505; school, 124, 284, 531
Albera, Fr. Paul: advises following DB's advice, 116; apost. delegate for FMA, 295n; Bonetti complains to, 232; dir. at Sampierdarena, 116, 146-47, 378-80, 397; DB's second successor, 379, 508; excess funds,

*Albera, Fr. Paul (continued)*
546; letters, 397, 418, 546-47; pastoral ministry, 146-47; provincial in France, 378-80, 397, 426-27, 489, 546; reputation, 379, 397; testimony about DB, 39, 214, 233, 408, 415, 418
Alimonda, Card. Cajetan, 126-27, 443-44, 448-49
Alumni, Salesian: apostolate of, 516; doctor, 18; DB's expectations of, 145; government official, 443; meetings, 429n; priests, 144, 183, 191, 201, 237-38, 310, 316, 335-36, 436; scholar, 429n; seminarians, 180, 324; tradesmen, 142, 195, 238, 303, 309
American women call on DB, 443
Andolfi (contractor for CSH), 345, 347, 400-01, 552-53, 572
Anfossi, Fr. John Baptist (alumnus), 199n, 237-38, 310
Anointing of the sick, 177, 261, 298, 543
Anticlericalism: in France, 26, 36, 40, 52, 285, 381-82, 395, 429, 470; in Italy, 262, 288, 304, 313, 318, 321, 325-28, 372, 429, 449, 479-83, 553
Antico family (SC), 559-60, 562, 565-66
Apollonio, Fr. Joseph (SC), 541
Apparitions: Louis Colle, 61-71; pastor of Castelnuovo, 65-66
Aquinas, St. Thomas, 412-13
Argentina: FMA in, 296, 304, 513; government, 19, 22, 24, 510-11, 513; pilgrims from, 22, 24; SS in, 2, 23-24, 296, 399, 509-15; vicariates apostolic, 400. *See also* Patagonia; individual cities
Assistants in Sal. schools, 115, 136
Asylum: attempt to commit DB, 404n
Aubagne, France, 38, 41, 43-44, 47, 387
Audisio, coad. Charles (missionary), 15-16
Augustine, St.: quoted, 73, 129
Authorities, civil, 115. *See also* Government

**B**

Babini, Fr. (pastor at Urbecco), 284-85
Baccelli, Guido (minister of education), 124, 262, 480-81
Ballesio, Canon Hyacinth (alumnus), 335-36
Baptism, 22, 93, 400, 402, 492n, 499-500
Barberis, Fr. Julius: character, 384; and DB, 76, 84, 93, 153; journeys, 283; letters from, 57n, 59n; letters to, 103, 105-06, 267, 385, 392-93; master of novices, 84, 384-85, 392; testimony about DB, 54, 422
Barcelona, 8-9, 274, 460, 505
Bari: request for Sal. school, 251-52
Bassignana, coad. Paul, 287
Beatification of DB: celebration of, 412n, 414; hoped for, 457; testimony, 113-16, 184, 196, 206, 211, 214, 233, 235-37, 293, 316, 350, 422, 426, 476
Beaujour Society, 122, 406
Beauvoir, Fr. Joseph (missionary), 510
Belmonte, Fr. Dominic: care for Chicco, 391; dir. at Sampierdarena, 378-80, 419-20, 433-34, 535; letters, 391, 419-20, 435-36
Benedict XV, Pope, 295n

Bertello, Fr. Joseph (dir. at Borgo San Martino), 19, 251, 303, 368-69
Berto, Fr. Joachim: archivist of SS, 173, 353-54; character, 549; coauthor of defense of SS, 173-74; DB's companion, 430, 436, 442-45, 447, 450, 456-57; DB's sec'y, 173-74, 192n, 209n, 217, 340, 382n, 392-94, 427-28, 487, 549; health, 548-49; letters, 28, 109, 302-03, 312n, 315, 427-28, 509, 548-49; testimony about DB, 115-16, 293, 340
Besson, Chevalier (teacher at Valsalice), 216
Biblical allusions: heavenly Jerusalem, 71; New Testament, 110, 132, 256, 309, 311, 330, 371, 384, 439, 449, 468, 502, 559-60; Old Testament, 35, 137, 149, 333
Biblical citations: New Testament, 35, 128, 145, 148-50, 231, 238, 311, 330, 387, 430-32, 437, 440, 464, 486, 506, 539; Old Testament, 101-02, 149, 151, 322, 402
Biblical persons: Aaron, 136-37; apostles, 95, 309, 412-13; Job, 28, 219, 570; Michael the Archangel, 406; Moses, 136, 380; patriarchs, 50, 432; Simon Magus, 135. *See also* John the Apostle, St.; John the Baptist, St.; Joseph, St.; Mary, Blessed Virgin; Peter, St.
Bielli, Fr. Albert, 552
Bilio, Card. Louis (bp. of Sabina), 242, 356-57, 450-51
Bishops, relations of DB and SS with: China, 521-22; France, 34, 44, 81-82, 353, 378, 382, 409-11, 413n, 421; Geneva, 443; Italy, 21, 96, 139-40, 199, 202, 208-09, 216, 251-56, 274, 283-84, 287-88, 325, 337-38, 343, 353, 362-64, 367-69, 391, 420, 431-33, 446, 448, 453-54, 459-60, 467-68; Oporto, 271, 273; Sicily, 245-46, 249-50; South America, 17, 19, 21, 24-25, 310, 510-11, 515-18, 520-23; Spain, 265-71, 459. *See also* names of individual bishops
Blessed Sacrament: Benediction, 117, 134, 138, 140, 288, 324, 333, 370, 425, 441, 454, 556-57; feast of Corpus Christi, 332, 497; miracles, 453; presence of, 264; public adoration, 169, 325, 395; as sermon topic, 35; Turin the city of, 322; visits to, 148, 401, 504. *See also* Communion, Holy
Boccali, Msgr. Gabriel (papal chamberlain), 180-82, 184, 207, 323, 360, 362-63, 443-44, 448
Bodrato, Fr. Francis (missionary), 11
*Bollettino Salesiano*: accident at Mathi reported, 539-40; almsgiving discussed, 431-32, 437-39; Bonetti writes in, 269, 431-32, 439-40; CSH covered, 331, 338, 342-43; CSJE covered, 317, 319-20, 325-26; conferences by DB reported, 367, 431-32, 437-38; Confortóla writes in, 127-28, 441-42; Convitto Ecclesiastico mentioned, 187; cures by DB reported, 139, 423, 426; defamatory pamphlets disowned, 162-63; DB in France reported, 423, 426, 429; DB called the worker's friend, 303; DB writes in, 2, 118-20, 122, 299, 439-40, 463n; DB's name day celebrated, 465; Fava's death reported, 374-75; Gastaldi mentioned, 223, 225; history of the

*Bollettino Salesiano (continued)*
Oratory published, 269; Marengo and Murialdo praised, 456; Mazzarello praised, 299; missions covered, 22, 29, 510, 518n; papal audience reported, 304; Ricagni's fallacies exposed, 483n; staff of, 29, 50, 118n, 127, 337, 375, 560; Vallecrosia mentioned, 169; subscriptions to, 375, 380
Bologna, cl. Angelo: DB's prophecy to, 478
Bologna, Fr. Joseph: character, 7; dir. at Marseille, 27, 38-39, 47, 382, 397, 407, 409, 545; letters, 8n, 28, 35n, 43-44, 122, 378-79, 409, 426-27, 545-46; relations with DB, 28, 33, 41, 407-08
Bonetti, Fr. John: author, 173-74, 232-34, 269; character, 210, 223, 232; and CSJE, 312, 325; and DB, 223n, 430-31; editor of BS, 29, 50, 118n, 127, 368, 431; journeys, 161-62, 284; letters from, 93, 161, 168, 185, 201, 209, 219, 233-34, 284, 312n, 315; letters to, 28-29, 50-51, 161-64, 168, 176, 180n, 185, 190, 199n, 208, 233-34, 315, 435-36, 483, 509; preacher, 19, 161
Bonetti case: B. alleged to be pamphleteer, 155, 159, 189-90, 193, 203, 206, 221, 224, 228-30, 235, 238; B. apologizes to Gastaldi, 182-83; B. challenges legality of diocesan court, 208; B. suspended, 108, 117, 153-85, 193, 218-39; B.'s draft letter to Leo XIII, 204n; B.'s remarks about Gastaldi, 223; B.'s reports to Rome, 184, 211, 214; and B.'s reputation, 157, 159-62, 225, 227; DB pleads for resolution, 202; DB's reports to Rome, 174-75, 199-203, 214-15, 224, 444; Gastaldi claims victory, 180-81; subpoenas from archdiocesan court, 203-04, 208, 235; suspension revoked, 157, 163-65, 179, 221-22, 224, 230; trial at Rome, 166-67, 177-79, 185, 194, 197-200, 295, 358, 430. *See also* Bonetti, Fr. John: letters; Leo XIII, Pope: and Bonetti case
Bonetti case settlement: B.'s reaction to s., 227-28, 232-35; DB's acceptance of s., 228-29; effect of Gastaldi's death, 234-35; effect on public opinion, 231-32; Gastaldi rejects proposals, 182, 184-85; humiliation to DB and SS, 228, 231-33; ordered by Holy See, 176, 178-79, 181-82; simultaneous problems, 318, 323, 347; various proposals made, 157-71, 176-77, 201-02, 209-15, 219-28
Bonmartini family (SC), 557-69
Bonola Mattei, Mrs. Sophia (SC), 524-25
Bonzanino, Joseph (professor), 263
Books: about DB or SS, 2n, 34-36, 51-53, 173, 274, 381-82, 394n, 410, 454, 463, 468, 482; by DB: 120-21, 141, 174-75, 189, 254, 302-03, 327, 353-55, 537-38, 544, 553, 569-70; ecclesiastical approval of, 133, 234; printed at the Oratory, 366
Bordighera: SS at, 118
Borgo San Martino: SS at, 92, 366, 368, 377n, 385, 391, 476
Borio, Fr. Herminius (teacher at Lanzo), 398
Bosco, Sr. Eulalia (DB's grandniece), 302

Bosco, Fr. John: adversities facing, 142, 153, 160, 178, 186, 189, 202, 204, 217, 239, 263n, 331, 351-53, 478, 552; advice on choosing friends, 568; apostle of the press, 134, 366, 416 [*See also* Books by DB]; assists dying confreres, 391, 543-44; attempts on his life, 329; audiences in France, 33, 48, 51, 253-54, 399, 403, 409-10, 416; audiences in Italy, 433, 442-43, 453-54; audiences with Leo XIII, 82, 95-96, 118-20, 122-23, 137, 356, 360, 382, 440, 442, 445-48, 509; biographies, 51-55, 274, 381-82, 401, 404, 407-08, 410-14, 428, 463, 470; birthday, 131, 141, 514; business sense, 257; concern for health of boys and confreres, 20, 383-84, 390-91, 426, 428, 542, 548-49, 552, 573; conferences, 30-32, 289-90, 300, 303, 370, 399, 402-04, 410-11, 414, 421-23, 429 [*See also* Cooperators, Salesian: DB's conferences]; criticized for moving Albera, 380; customs, 10, 17; and death of Mazzarello, 298-300; description, 45, 315, 417, 428-29; effects of his absences, 245; encourages coworkers, 142; ends a quarrel, 115-16; exaggerates number of boys, 527-28; fame, 33, 41, 48, 274, 326, 366-67, 369-70, 399, 403-05, 410-13, 415, 417-25, 428, 435-36, 453-55, 487 [*See also* Opinions about DB]; founder, 295, 297-98, 302, 368-69, 396, 406-07, 514-15; Gastaldi, relations with, 155, 262, 316-19; gifts from, 87-88, 375-76, 386, 501, 525-26; godfather for Villeneuve, 341; golden jubilee Mass anticipated, 374; good nights, 302, 392, 412; harassed by chancery and police, 195-96, 201, 204; holiness, 104, 118, 161, 246, 370, 395, 407, 409, 413, 436, 457, 465-66, 478, 483, 503 [*See also* Opinions about DB: holiness]; influence on public charity, 263, 434; insistence on independence of operation, 243, 245-47, 252, 258-59, 277-78, 294, 351, 359, 414; itinerary in France, 387, 419; legacy to SS, 368-69, 406, 468; mail, 33, 374, 418, 489, 505, 540, 563; method of revenge, 120-21; name day, 83, 131, 255n, 376, 464-65, 487-88, 497-98, 561; opinion about France, 413; opinion of himself, 302; and politics, 329, 429n; proposes new parish church at Turin, 259-60, 263; publicist, 29, 85, 314, 366; psychological insights into, 524; reader of hearts, 422, 471-72, 474-76, 485; and St. Maurice Hospital, 258-64, 530; schooling, 357; sense of mortality, 352; sermons, 7, 45, 325, 404, 408, 417, 425, 430-32, 437-38, 441; spiritual direction, 384-85, 503-06, 559-60, 568; spirituality, 524, 569; table talk, 371; thoughts on letter writing, 12-13; threatened with suspension, 158, 179, 202, 210, 222, 224, 230-31; "to each his own, and no unnecessary publicity," 263; use of French, 29, 34-35, 43, 45, 57n, 58n, 370, 384, 410, 412, 417, 420, 427-28, 463-64, 471-72, 487, 542, 547n; use of Latin, 96, 271, 333, 357, 361, 537; visitors received at

*Bosco, Fr. John (continued)*
Turin, 251, 262, 283, 338, 369-70, 375-76, 389, 401, 459, 462-63, 470-73, 484, 540, 559; workload, 105, 333
Bosco, Margaret (DB's mother), 545
Bosco, Mary (DB's grandniece), 302
Bosio Saladino, Mrs. Joan (SC), 186-87, 525
Branda, Fr. John Baptist (dir. at Utrera), 9, 107, 269, 274
Brazil: geography, 518-21; government, 517-18; missionaries bound for, 367, 494; need of priests, 518, 521; novitiate suggested, 521; opening of Sal. work, 19, 23, 516-21; papal internuncio, 515, 517; social problems, 517, 519-20
Bretto, Fr. Clement, 284
Brigatti, coad. John, 476
Bruna, Fr. Dominic, 548
Buenos Aires: archdiocese, 510; churches, 13-14; FMA at, 24, 296; pilgrims from, 22, 24; SS at, 7, 14n, 146, 400, 511-13
Buffa, Albert (architect of CSJE), 328, 330
Buffa, Fr. Stephen: death of, 105-06
*Bulletin Salésien*: Brazilian missions, 520; CSJE, 325; cure by DB, 46; DB's trips through France, 46, 49, 396, 403-04; DB's words to French pilgrims, 370, 484; Rua compared with DB, 411n; St. Leo's Oratory, 35n
Buzzetti, coad. Joseph, 313

## C

Cafasso, Fr. Joseph: DB's mentor, 188
Cagliero, Fr. Caesar, 476n, 557
Cagliero, Fr. John: bishop, 79-80, 93, 500; and the Colles, 90, 93, 102; dir. gen. of FMA, 298, 300, 304; enrolls SC, 267, 270; has DB's spirit, 468; journeys in Europe, 107, 265-70, 272-74, 298, 331, 547; journeys in Italy, 18, 93, 284-85, 287, 241, 287, 304-05; letters from, 7-9, 19, 241, 267-70, 272, 274, 300, 373, 499, 546; letters to, 107, 241, 271, 284, 287, 331, 343; member of superior chapter, 228, 271, 373, 393; missionary, 5, 79, 93, 97; musician, 313, 343; retreat preacher, 304; sense of humor, 272
Cagnòli, Fr. Francis: DB's care for, 214, 452-53
Calasanctius, St. Joseph, 2n, 191n, 388
Calcagno, cl. Peter (missionary), 16-17
Callori family (SC), 17-18, 335, 536-37
Calvi, cl. Eusebius, 304
Camogli, Italy: DB at, 435-36
Campolari (Campolini), Canon Justin (SC), 127, 275-76
Cannes: DB at, 48-50, 422-26, 459; FMA at, 423-24, 426; people of, 422-24; resort, 48-49, 423-24
Canon law: dispensations, 301, 552; excommunication and reconciliation, 467; liturgy, 316-19; and religious congregations, 295n, 312, 316-17, 319; reparation according to, 171; violated by Gastaldi, 158, 161, 170-71, 174, 185, 222
Cardinals: relations of DB and SS with, 168, 173, 177, 248-49, 285, 356, 358, 382, 444, 450, 457, 476, 571. *See also* names of individual cardinals
Carnival season, 17

Caroglio, Martin (aspirant), 28
Cartier, cl. Louis, 38, 52n
Casale, Italy: DB at, 366-69
Castellazzo Bòrmida: controversy over SS, 481-83
Castelnuovo d'Asti: in DB's dreams, 65-66, 305-07
Catania, 241, 296, 304, 343
Catechisms *see* Religious instruction
Catechist, office of, 115
Caterini, Card. Prospero (pref. of COC), 154, 165, 168, 172, 190
Catholic action, 371
Catholic Church: censures of, 158, 179, 185, 202, 204, 210, 222, 224, 230-31, 256n, 467; corruption of youth an affliction to, 188, 271; defense of, 81; enemies, 120, 205, 335, 465 [*See also* Anticlericalism]; faith and doctrine of, 126, 128, 198, 200, 204-05, 207, 210, 216, 223-24, 256n, 310, 322, 326, 330, 332, 436, 449, 518; financial support for, 32, 72, 331, 337, 449, 502; love for, 413, 418, 448, 529; poverty, 252; prayer for, 182, 323, 349; relations with Jews, 380; role of SS in, 145, 184, 366n, 468, 475, 518-19; sacraments, 256n, 280, 449, 467; schism in Italy, 467-68; struggle against error, 119, 126; vitality, 2. *See also* Canon law; Holy See; Papacy
Catholic workers' organizations, 142, 270-71, 274-75, 278-79, 303, 411n
Catholic youth organizations, 142, 314, 432, 442
Cavina family (SC), 289-94
Cays, Fr. Charles (Count Cays), 52, 150, 542-45
Cecconi, Eugene (abp. of Florence), 117, 129, 274-78, 280-83, 441
Cenci, coad. Peter, 454-55
Censor, ecclesiastical, 238-39
Ceriana, Joseph (SC), 542
Cerruti, Fr. Francis: dir. at Alassio, 105-06, 110-14, 124, 532; provincial in Liguria, 114; testimony about DB, 113-14
Ceva family (SC), 551, 555
Charisms of DB: 198, 288, 302, 327, 393, 415, 422, 430, 456, 470-71, 475-77, 484-85; raising of Charles, 476-77. *See also* Cures by DB; Dreams of DB; Predictions by DB
Charles Albert (king of Sardinia), 273, 372, 545n
Chestnuts, dream of, 305-07
Chiapello, cl. Thomas, 393-94
Chicco, Fr. Stephen: death of, 390-91, 479
Chieri: Bonetti banned from, 157-60, 171, 181; DB will not assign Bonetti to, 201, 210, 221, 224-26, 230-31, 234; FMA at, 177, 300; girls' oratory, 117, 136, 153, 155-56, 165, 170, 178-79, 183, 188; "libel" case, 162-63, 186-217; parish rights at, 155, 170-71, 177-79
Chiesa, Philip (bp. of Pinerolo), 79, 90-91, 218, 490, 493
Child care centers, 136, 454
Chile, 22, 97
China, 70, 350, 521
Chiuso, Canon Thomas (chancellor of Turin), 154, 191, 235-37, 263n, 317
Cholera, 76, 90-91, 490-91, 493, 504, 566
Chopitea de Serra, Mrs. Dorotea (SC), 274
Christmas, 89-90, 180, 203, 205, 292, 332, 386-87, 398, 475, 479, 493, 496, 560-61

Church of MHC: buildings near, 366, 540; and Gastaldi, 132, 140; painting of MHC, 132; pilgrims, 140, 336, 369-70, 423, 459, 463, 568; place of community prayer, 292, 381, 522; rites and ceremonies, 4, 140, 370, 543
Church of the Sacred Heart: art and furnishings, 342, 348; building committee, 116, 343-45, 348; cause of worry for DB, 331, 345-50; and Colle family, 63, 72, 77-78, 80-82, 95-96; consecration, 94-96, 332, 349, 494-95, 497; construction, 23, 74-75, 116, 118-19, 122, 133, 135, 333, 337, 342-49, 367, 442, 450, 489, 558, 563-65; contract, 116, 343-44, 348; Dalmazzo pastor, 220, 453; debts, 118, 291, 334-35, 337, 339-40, 345, 400-01, 406, 443, 489; funds for, 18, 28-29, 50, 107-10, 116, 118-19, 126-27, 207, 252, 271, 273, 289, 291, 331-43, 345-50, 388, 400-01, 404, 406, 410, 413, 418-19, 421, 436, 443, 458-60, 464-65, 488, 502, 547, 554, 558, 563-66; gossip about, 552; hospice, 74, 95, 116, 119, 207, 273, 291, 332, 335-39, 349-50, 436, 442, 458, 489, 495, 502, 554; Leo XIII's interest in, 4, 72, 119, 122, 207, 273, 289, 291, 331, 334-35, 337-40; Mass celebrated at, 332, 334; obstacles, 343-49, 552-53, 572; oratory, 75, 332, 495; parish church, 220, 332, 334-35, 340-41, 344-45, 442, 570; press coverage, 331, 338, 342-43; school, 75, 332; staff, 552, 569; workers, 119, 337, 344, 348
Church of St. Francis de Sales, 76, 135
Church of St. John the Evangelist: artwork, 132, 308-12, 322-23, 330, 482; bells, 308, 311, 325; consecration, 216, 232, 315-26, 329-30, 484, 528-29, 570; construction, 23, 124, 132, 135, 316, 329; controversies about, 316-20, 329; SCs' interest in, 23, 135, 308; description, 308-12, 317, 328, 330; funds for, 72-73, 80, 124, 309-12, 315, 321-23, 528, 540, 551; and Gastaldi, 132, 216, 311-12, 315-21, 323-24, 419, 570; history, 328, 330; hospice, 72, 80, 135, 311; monument to Pius IX, 308, 310, 312-15, 325-26, 328; music, 308, 311, 313-15, 323, 325; press coverage, 317, 319-20, 325-26, 328, 330; Sons of Mary at, 73; visitors, 459, 484, 542, 551
Cibrario, Fr. Nicholas (dir. at Vallecrosia), 50, 573
Cicero: cited, 196
Circulars, promotional, 28-29, 109, 113, 127, 135, 260, 271-72, 281, 321-23, 331-35, 337, 340
Clergy: of Aosta, 539; of Chieri, 155-56, 170-71, 177-79; coolness to DB or SS, 234, 483; cooperators, 285, 287; education, 144, 199, 242, 368, 412, 445; of Emilia-Romagna, 284-85, 287-89, 438-39, 452-55; of France, 409-12, 414-16, 521-22, 547; fundraising for CSH, 332-33, 335, 342, 547; of Liguria, 379, 420, 433, 541; of Mantua, 362, 467-68; opinion of DB, 457; of Piedmont, 303, 334, 339, 367, 369, 483; popular election of, 467; of Rome, 127, 168, 173, 177, 193, 237, 304, 342, 354, 457; scarcity of, 266, 362, 518, 521-23; of Seville,

270-71; of Sicily, 240, 242-43; support for Sal. work, 416; trained by DB, 367 [*See also* Alumni, Salesian: priests]; of Turin, 5, 173, 234, 260, 263n, 311, 325, 342, 404n, 456, 553; of Tuscany, 127, 281, 448, 451-52
Clerics, Salesian: authors, 58, 396, 404; episodes involving individuals, 26, 48, 103, 106, 377, 392-94, 469, 477; as a group, 100, 321, 356, 378, 456; letters from, 35n, 57, 105-06, 286-87; letters of DB to, 14-17, 105
Coadjutor brothers, Salesian: episodes involving individuals, 261, 265-66, 287, 313, 408, 454-55, 469, 476; letters of DB to, 15-16
Colle, Louis (son of Count Louis): apparitions, 61-64, 66-69, 71; biography, 57-59; death, 56-57; description, 63-64, 70; in paradise, 89, 100; rebukes DB, 64; virtues, 58, 60-61, 68
Colle, Count Louis Anthony: death, 100-02; devotion, 81-82; health, 92-100, 506-07; papal honors, 80-87, 93
Colle, Baroness Marie Sophie (wife of Count Louis): health, 97-98; notes, 57n, 71; saved by Louis, 71
Colle family: and CSH, 63, 72, 77-78, 80-82, 95-96; generosity, 56, 63, 71-80, 82, 85-87, 92-93, 96, 100-02; interest in missions, 97, 99, 101; letters, 56-63, 68-69, 72-100, 465, 507; meetings with DB, 56-57, 74, 80, 416; memorials to, 73, 95-96; names given to Indian converts, 97; papal blessing, 93, 96; prayers of, 71, 87, 91, 97; Salesians' love for, 80, 86-102; virtues, 56-57, 73, 75, 78-79, 81-82, 84, 94; visits to Turin, 56, 60, 69-70, 74, 86-87, 90, 92-94, 97, 459
Colombia, 475, 522-23
Colomiatti, Canon Emanuel: audiences with Leo XIII, 214, 223, 225-27; and Bonetti settlement, 108, 157-59, 161-68, 220-27, 231; character, 165-68, 171, 197, 201, 212; and CSJE, 317-18; and controversial pamphlets, 157-59, 162-63, 190-91, 196-97, 206, 212, 215, 235; and DB, 164-65, 167, 171, 184, 190, 235-37, 318; and Gastaldi, 183, 201, 217; judge in Bonetti case, 203-04, 208; letters from, 160-61, 163, 165, 196-97, 218, 317-18; letters to, 161-63, 166-68, 320; trips to Rome, 156-58, 171, 193-95, 212, 214-15, 220, 223
Communion, Holy: for children, 66-67, 416; frequent, 14, 66-67, 273, 503-05, 568; indulgences, 323, 339, 402; key to salvation, 14, 43, 67; preparation for, 43, 67, 416; rarely received, 272-73; received for cooperators, 71, 86-89, 91, 99-100, 375, 377, 460, 462, 496-501, 525-26; received for DB or SS, 109, 395, 398, 514; received for other intentions, 182, 203, 554; reception of, 9, 12, 34, 67, 288-89, 325, 370, 392, 408, 433, 437, 441, 459, 544, 573; Viaticum, 298, 543. *See also* Blessed Sacrament
Communism, 439
Concupiscence, 149-50
Conferences of St. Francis de Sales, 6, 290, 492
Confession: benefits, 43, 472, 476; Bonetti's faculties, 158-60, 163,

*Confession (continued)*
170-71, 176-79, 182-83, 185, 210, 221-25, 230; DB as confessor, 302, 437, 441, 471-72, 474, 543; examination of conscience, 392; Gastaldi violates canon law on faculties, 160, 171, 174, 177; Salesians harassed about faculties, 134, 174; frequent, 504, 573; and indulgences, 323, 402; penances, 474-75, 480; priestly ministry, 391, 433-34, 437-38, 441, 456, 468, 471, 543; reception, 261, 280, 302, 325, 426, 471-72, 474, 485, 529, 544; spiritual direction, 471, 504
Confirmation, sacrament of, 134, 167n
Confortóla, Fr. Faustinus: apostolate, 107, 117, 282; author, 127-28, 441-42; dir. at Florence, 127-28, 277, 280-82, 441, 548; letters from, 104, 129, 279-80, 441-42; letters to, 127, 278, 282-83, 548
Cong. for the Prop. of the Faith, 11, 31, 443, 446, 450n, 509, 552
Cong. of Bishops and Regulars: canonical privileges, 243, 318-19, 351-58, 360-62; decrees, 158, 295n, 318-19; DB's reputation with, 193; Gastaldi's suits against SS, 171-72, 193-94, 199. *See also* Agnozzi; Ferrieri; Masotti
Cong. of Rites, 189, 235-36, 238-39, 317, 457
Cong. of the Council: DB's report to, 199-203, 214-15, 222, 224; excommunications of clergy, 467; Gastaldi suit against SS, 154-57, 162, 164-66, 170-171, 175, 190, 199, 206, 208; letter to Gastaldi, 154; Nina appointed prefect, 172; Salesian appeal to, 154, 156, 158, 166, 168-170, 176, 184-85, 194, 201, 208; trial of Bonetti case, 176-183, 185, 197, 199-200, 202, 204, 214, 221, 226, 234-35, 444n; works for settlement of Bonetti case, 202-203, 206, 209, 211
Convitto Ecclesiastico, 187-88
Cooperators, Salesian: in Argentina, 339; DB's conferences, 6, 34, 44, 46, 48, 57, 118, 125-29, 135-38, 255, 288, 367-68, 409, 415-16, 419, 422, 430-32, 435-38, 441, 448-49, 451, 458-59; DB's letters to, 308, 311, 321-23, 329, 334 [*See also* Letters of DB to cooperators]; enrollments, 8, 25, 34, 118, 138, 141, 267, 270, 370, 380, 386, 453, 457; at Este and Padua, 390, 444, 550-51, 557-65; at Faenza, 284-87, 289-90, 294; in France, 44, 50-51, 334-35, 415-16, 419-20, 457, 486-508, 545; funds for CSH, 118-20, 331-35, 337; funds for CSJE, 23, 135, 308, 321-23; funds for Sal. works, 2, 365, 367, 494; in Italy, 251, 453, 457, 486; Leo XIII's interest in, 122, 353-54, 448; in Liguria, 103-04, 111-12, 123, 379-80, 414n, 419, 430-37, 528, 534-35, 538-39; in Lombardy, 479; at Lyons, 398-99, 402-03, 444n; at Marseille, 34-35, 44, 138-39, 382, 395-97, 404-09, 545-47; at Nice, 44, 48, 198-99, 340, 380, 382, 386-87, 421-22, 461, 547; objectives, 416, 435, 457; in Piedmont, 186-87, 257, 366-69, 525; promoted by DB, 370, 402, 411, 416, 429n, 453, 457; regulations, 380, 458; at Rome, 125-27, 186, 243, 363, 427, 442-44, 448-49; in Sicily,

240-42, 248; in Spain, 107, 265-70, 272; at Toulon, 34, 44, 46, 57, 416, 470-73; at Toulouse, 411, 414, 428; at Turin, 135-37, 374-78, 458-59; in Tuscany, 127-29, 255-56, 275-76, 437-38, 441, 529-30; virtues of, 119, 187. *See also* Prayer, DB's
Correnti, Commendatore Caesar (royal counselor), 258-64, 341, 381, 530
Corsi, Countess Gabrielle (SC), 485, 536
Cosson, Fr. Emil (dir. at Ruitz), 508
Costamagna, Fr. James: dir. of FMA, 513; letters, 17, 24, 509, 511-12; provincial in Argentina, 10-11, 13, 511-14
Cottolengo, St. Joseph, 161, 236
Courtesy recommended, 178
Cremona: SS at, 365, 391, 478-81
Crocetta (Turin), 259-60
Cures by DB: angina, 461; bedridden women, 45-46, 112-13, 123-24, 407, 424-25, 459-60; cripples, 51, 130, 476; DB denies he has this charism, 417, 422; dying people, 27-28, 41-43, 104, 408n, 423, 459-60; eye problem, 407; fainting spells, 416-17; fever, 461; paralysis, 436, 461-62; pneumonia, 139, 452-53; Protestants cured, 130, 422-23; toothache, 423, 425; tuberculosis cases, 39-40, 436, 462-63; unspecified illnesses, 38-39, 129-30, 461
Curia, Roman: and Bonetti case, 168, 175, 199, 204, 295; and Gastaldi, 144-45, 192-93, 204, 211, 216, 232, 316, 481; Manacorda helps SS with, 572; property matters, 244, 285; and Sal. missions, 400; SS's relationship with FMA, 295, 299; teaching authority, 200

## D

Daghero, Sr. Catherine, 296-97, 300-05
Daghero, Fr. Joseph, 450
Dàllera, cl. Charles, 377
Dalmazzo, Fr. Francis: audiences in Rome, 4-5, 362, 364, 570-71; and Bonetti case, 168n, 170, 176n, 177n, 208, 215, 219-20, 223, 225-27, 229; and CSH, 4, 75, 220, 332-34, 339-50, 419, 443, 453, 569; illness, 442; journeys, 215, 218, 275, 347; lack of faith, 130; and leaflet attacking DB, 146; letters from, 168n, 213, 218, 233 [*See also* Letters to DB from Salesians]; letters to, 213, 216, 219-20, 358 [*See also* Letters of DB to Salesians]; and papal honors for Count Colle, 85-87; procurator gen., 315-16, 343, 358-60, 569-72; testimony about DB, 129-30
Damascus, five candidates from, 384-85, 392
Dante: cited, 182, 329
Daprotis, Mrs. (SC), 104-05, 382, 387, 547
Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians: canonical status, 171, 295, 299; care for a poor woman, 147; Chicco their director, 391; constitutions, 295-96, 299, 301, 306; DB's dealings with, 295, 299-302; in dream of DB, 305-07; elections, 297, 299-301; founding and formation, 295-98, 302; gen. chapter, 300-02; gen. directory, 295-96;

*Daughters of Mary (continued)*
growth, 136, 240, 244, 256, 296-97, 301, 305, 328, 366-67; houses, 136, 296, 304-05; and Louvet, 487-89, 491-92, 496, 505-08; missionaries, 2, 5-6, 8, 135; novices, 296; obituaries, 296, 299; papal audience, 304-05; public relations, 303; religious habit, 296; requests for foundations, 250; SS's care for, 9, 11, 30, 248, 295, 426; spirit, 296; students, 300. *See also* individual cities and countries
De Agostini, Fr. Tullio (SC), 558-68
Death: allegory about, 297-98; comfort of Mary at, 499, 544; preparation for, 142, 261, 386, 388, 391-92, 432, 437, 440, 504, 543-44
De Barruel, cl. Camillus, 57-58, 90, 396, 404, 427, 489
Debella, Fr. Anthony (missionary), 512
De Combaud family (SC), 470-73
Delicati, Msgr. Pio (consultor to the Holy Office), 120-21
De Maistre family (SC), 122-23, 137-38, 371n, 387-88, 411, 428, 457, 535-36, 538
De Paolini, Joseph (SC), 551-52
De Paul, St. Vincent, 295, 327
De Sales, St. Francis: feast of, 29, 34-35, 44, 90, 208-09, 266-67, 383, 397, 409, 492, 497; as model, 559-60, 570; patronage of, 286; portraits of, 309, 497; prayer to, 497; virtues of, 533, 570
D'Espiney, Dr. Charles (biographer), 49, 51-53, 381-82, 407-08, 463, 470
Devil: activity attributed to, 54-55, 174, 239, 304, 313, 325-26, 346; DB at war with, 43, 293, 397, 420; snares of, 149, 289, 438, 519, 534; souls to be saved from, 126, 128, 280
Directors, Salesian: canonical privileges, 352; DB's letters to, 392, 447-48, 572-73; effect of Gastaldi quarrel upon, 232; meetings, 79, 290; regulations, 114-15, 426-27; training, 136
Doctors, 18, 76, 90, 422, 462, 531, 543
Domestics in Salesian houses, 115
Dominican Republic, 373
Dreams of DB: FMA, 305-07; fulfillment of, 39; house at Marseille, 37-39; interpreted by Lemoyne, 306; Louis Colle and the missions, 69-70; Louis Colle and South America, 68; ten diamonds, 147-52
Dupanloup, Felix (bp. of Orléans): cited on youth, 126
Durando, Fr. Celestine (pref. gen. of studies): and bishop of Mantua, 364; and the Colles, 84, 90; and Cremona case, 480-81; DB's companion, 103, 106; in dream of diamonds, 149; journeys, 26, 33, 47, 241, 243, 249-50, 284-86, 480-81; letters, 209, 243, 249-50, 254-55, 284, 286; tries to mediate between DB and Gastaldi, 209

## E

Earthquakes, 80, 242, 494
Easter, 117, 163, 234, 272, 426, 441, 497
Ecuador, 16, 478n
Education: benefits to Church and

State, 129, 402-04, 442, 469; clerical, 144, 199, 242; preventive system, 105, 402-03, 469, 518; repressive system, 248; of Salesians, 144-45, 393-94, 426-27; of the will, 59
England: Catholics, 106, 465-66; Eng. benefactors, 48-49, 106, 423, 443; hope for Sal. work in, 106, 240
Engrand, Fr. (SC), 491-92, 496, 503, 506-07
Este, Italy: FMA at, 551; SS at, 99, 365, 390, 444, 533, 550-51, 563
Examination of conscience, 392, 504
Excommunication, 256n, 467
Exemption, canonical, 171, 174, 352. *See also* Privileges, canonical
Exercise for a Happy Death, 13-14, 16, 153, 504

## F

Faenza, Italy: DB at, 288-91, 454; misunderstandings about SS, 293; origins of Sal. work, 283-94, 367; Rinaldi shot at, 293; seminary, 283-84, 286-90
Fagnano, Fr. Joseph (missionary), 12, 16, 22-23, 149, 510-11
Falkland Islands, 509
Fantini, Msgr. Melchior (SC), 534-35
Fassati family (SC), 122-23, 537-38
Fasting, 342
Faults, dealing with, 7
Fava family (SC), 374-75, 456
Febbraro, Fr. Stephen: raises funds for CSH, 337-38
Fenoglio, Fr. Nicholas (Francis): DB's care for, 533-34
Ferrieri, Card. Innocent (pref. of CBR): and Bonetti case, 171, 193-94; and canonical privileges, 352-53, 355-56, 445-46, 450; and Cremona case, 481; hostility toward DB, 362, 571
Festive oratories: general, 135, 251-53, 257, 274, 277, 279, 281-83, 287, 293, 365, 409, 431, 454, 456, 515-16, 518, 528; enrollments, 18, 136, 182, 184, 205, 254, 279, 281, 287, 328, 361, 380, 388, 499, 516, 525, 527-28, 539, 552; games, 277, 280; music, 41, 58n; operation, 136; purpose, 30
Floods, 338, 347, 550-51, 559
Florence: DB at, 108, 117-18, 127-29, 274-75, 278-79, 299, 440-42; FMA at, 256; opening of Sal. work, 107, 117, 169-70, 274-83, 299; people of, 280-81, 388; Sal. church, 280, 442; Sal. fund-raising, 127-29, 281-82, 442; Sal. oratory, 117, 129, 135, 274, 277, 279-83, 409, 441-42, 548; Sal. public relations problems, 144, 278-79; Sal. school and hospice, 117, 126, 129, 277, 280-83, 441-42; seminary, 129, 282
Foglino incident resurrected, 10
Foglizzo: novitiate at, 79-80, 100
Foschini, cl. Henry, 286-87
France: DB in, 26-55, 66-68, 74, 76, 107, 157, 185, 207, 387, 395-430, 457, 468, 489, 494, 505, 532; FMA in, 136, 296-97, 417; fund-raising, 341, 487; language, 379, 387, 461 [*See also* Bosco, Fr. John: use of French]; national pride, 125, 413; national shrine to SH, 342, 413; nobility, 83-84, 336, 340, 387, 397, 411-12, 428, 460, 463, 545 [*See also* Colle,

*France (continued)*
Count Louis Anthony]; people of, 315, 413, 418, 428-29, 443, 459, 484; pilgrims from, 125, 138, 369-70, 398, 460, 483-85; politics, 381, 395-96, 429, 490-92, 496, 506, 508; requests for DB's writings, 538; requests for Sal. foundations, 240; SS in, 7-8, 36-39, 54, 78, 109, 119, 173, 204, 340, 370, 378-79, 383, 397, 408, 427, 490, 508. *See also* Government, French; individual cities
Francesia, Fr. John Baptist: author, 439; dir. at Valsalice, 134, 208-09, 215-16; DB's companion, 373, 485; Latinist, 215, 312, 545n; letter, 216; loyalty to Pope, 216; problems with Gastaldi, 134, 167n, 216
Franchino (Berto's nephew), 428, 456
Franco, Fr. Secondo (Jesuit), 196-97, 244, 280
Frassinetti, Mother Paula (foundress): visited by DB, 451
Freemasons, 288, 304, 313, 328, 480-81, 522, 557
Fund-raising by DB: general, 18, 71-72, 76, 78, 84, 87, 129, 133, 135-37, 207, 235, 302, 327, 331, 378, 382n, 428, 559; for CSH, 18, 29, 50, 72, 75, 77-78, 108, 110, 118-19, 135, 207, 289, 331-41, 345-46, 349-50, 400-01, 410, 413, 418-19, 421, 429, 436, 443-44, 458-59, 465, 547, 554, 563, 565; for CSJE, 72, 321-23, 540; effect on DB's health, 419; in France, 44-53, 108, 341, 399-404, 411, 413, 415, 421, 435-36, 487; in Liguria, 111-14; for the missions, 3, 5-6, 72, 77-78, 84, 135-36, 235, 399-402, 494, 519, 540; for orphans, 490, 529, 554-55, 562; for poor boys, 253-54, 342, 402, 404, 418, 420-21, 423, 431-34, 437, 539; for the Pope, 44, 290; for schools, 404; for Sons of Mary, 72; for works in France, 30-34, 43-45, 47-48, 50, 72, 77, 104, 405-09, 416, 418, 420-21; for works in Liguria, 114, 135, 420, 431-33, 529, 535, 539, 571; for works in Parma, 253-54; for works in Piedmont, 72, 84, 136, 539-40; for works in Turin, 72, 77, 135-36, 235, 259-60, 263, 396-97, 539-40; for works in Tuscany, 135, 169-70, 278-79, 281, 437-38, 441-42

## G

Gargallo, Marchioness Mary Carmela, 244-48
Gastaldi, Lawrence (abp. of Turin): attacks Catholic press, 173; attacks Valsalice College, 215-16, 219; attitude toward DB, 189, 198-99, 206, 211, 236-38, 324, 333; and Church doctrine, 223, 237; concern for his authority, 132-33, 312, 237n, 260; and confirmation, 134, 167n; death, 216n, 234-35; and diocesan catechism, 446-47; discussions about, 192, 231-32, 571; DB's consideration for, 169, 174-75, 178, 182-84, 200, 217, 262; DB's relations with after Bonetti case, 209, 218, 232, 445; downplays religious life, 188; and feast of MHC, 132-34, 140; former friendship with DB, 154-55, 164, 176, 188, 221, 224, 228; former

liberal ideas, 187; a hindrance to pastoral work, 174, 176-78, 203-05, 207, 210, 412n; hostility toward SS, 132-33, 144-45, 154-55, 165, 172-77, 200-04, 216-17, 220, 321, 347, 353, 355, 412n, 445, 450, 481, 570; inconsistent behavior, 157, 164-66, 170-71, 176-77, 179-80, 183, 202, 237; learning, 237n, 412n; letters from, 144, 165-66, 182, 184-85, 190, 193, 206, 210, 212-13, 216-17, 229-31, 311-12, 317-18, 320, 323, 445, 481; letters to, 179, 193-97, 212, 218, 228-30, 316-17, 320-21, 323-24; new admonition of Bonetti, 180-81; plan to trap Bonetti, 203; and priestly faculties, 134, 170-71, 174, 176-77, 179; and proposals to settle the Bonetti case, 182, 202-03, 210-11, 219-26, 233; refutes DB's report on Bonetti case, 214; relations with Holy See, 185, 199-202, 204, 211, 316; relations with other bishops, 140, 208-09; reputation of, 160, 175, 206, 223, 237-38; and Rosmini, 133-34, 173, 188-89, 198; and St. Maurice Hospital, 260, 262-63; trips to Rome, 171, 175-76, 180, 196-97, 199. *See also* Bonetti case; Church of St. John the Evangelist; Pamphlets, controversial

Gazzelli, Mother Christine (Sister of SH), 553-57

Genoa: diocesan charities, 432; DB at, 26, 419, 430-33; FMA at, 296; people of, 379-80, 433-34

Germany, 78, 216, 447

Ghiglini, Mrs. Frances (SC), 379-80, 420, 430

Ghigliotto, cl. Francis (teacher at Varazze), 477

Ghione, Mrs. Catherine (SC), 385-86

Ghivarello, Fr. Charles (dir. at Saint-Cyr), 43, 149

Giordano, Fr. Lawrence (missionary), 515

Giordano, Fr. Peter, 110

Glory of God: DB's objective, 210, 230, 291, 390, 399, 403-05, 428, 460, 464, 495, 503, 522, 564; equivalent of heaven, 529, 550; objective of Catholic Church, 210, 354; objective of SC, 405, 523; objective of SS, 11, 231, 533. *See also* Salvation of souls

Gonzaga, St. Aloysius: feast of, 97, 131, 141, 375-76, 461, 476, 512; model for youth, 57, 456, 564; patron and helper, 62, 73

Government, French: appealed to, 36, 54-55; attacks religious, 26, 381-82, 395-96, 470, 508; police shadow DB, 429; regulation of charities, 503

Government, Italian: DB's secret negotiations with, 258-62; ecclesiastical matters, 144, 242, 371; ministers, 2, 108, 124, 153, 173, 190-91, 194, 196, 262, 336n, 341-42, 372n, 478, 480, 530-31; regulation of charities, 247, 467; regulation of schools, 10, 124-25, 153, 243, 248, 250, 258, 282, 285, 467, 469, 481-82; relations with SS, 2-3, 124-25, 256, 327, 341, 371

Greek language, 255, 311

Gregory XVI, Pope: favors granted to SS, 353

Grosso, cl. John Baptist (choirmaster at Marseille), 29

Guanella, Fr. Louis (former Salesian), 373
Guardian Angel Oratory, 456
Guardian angels, 504
Guarino, Joseph (abp. of Messina), 239, 242-44, 340, 352, 355-56
Guidazio, Fr. Peter (dir. at Randazzo), 150, 242-43, 336
Guiol, Canon Clement: cooperator, 29, 31-35, 37-40, 139, 378, 382, 395-97, 404, 406-07; letters to, 47, 122, 398-99; pastor at Marseille, 33, 35, 37, 382, 404, 546-47
Guiol, Msgr. Louis (SC), 382, 398-99

## H

Harmel family (SC), 26, 49, 532-33
Health, DB's: confreres' concern about, 418, 514; and doctors, 76, 90; effects of age, 53, 77, 403; effects of weather, 77, 90, 492, 495; effects on his travel, 76-78, 95, 213-14, 218-20, 336; eye problems, 78, 320, 346, 361, 570; leg problems, 98, 213-14, 350, 557; hemorrhoids, 213-14; improvement in h., 69, 74, 91, 98, 100, 106, 378, 493, 505, 507, 565-66; last illness, 100, 336; spiritual h., 378; stomach pains, 563; worn out, 33, 69, 74, 77, 79, 95-96, 114, 218, 226, 350, 418-19, 430, 484, 493, 495, 506, 564, 566
Heaven, 13, 76, 293, 432, 437, 451, 460, 471, 473, 478, 493, 526, 528, 533, 536, 542, 548, 566-68. *See also* Salvation of souls
Hell, 432-34, 438
Héraud family (SC), 198-99, 382, 387, 547
Historiography, 351-52, 365, 524; DB's concern for history, 59, 75, 83, 85
Holiness: for seminarians, 289; for youth, 188; of the Gospel, 326
Holy See: DB's appeal for protection from Gastaldi, 174-75; Holy Office, 121, 144n, 189; honors bestowed, 143; Index of Forbidden Books, 121, 144n, 189, 480n; and Italian government, 263, 371; Papal States, 262, 284, 371; Vatican grounds, 146, 304, 450; and vicariate apostolic in Patagonia, 509-11, 552. *See also* Curia, Roman; Papacy; individual Congregations
Holy Spirit, 1, 248, 300, 449
Homsi, Anthony (aspirant), 384-85
Humbert I (king of Italy), 258-63, 341
Hyères, France: DB at, 47, 64, 417, 463

## I

Idolatry, 136
*Imitation of Christ*: cited, 524
Immigrants, Italian, 2-3, 6, 339, 531
Indians: of Brazil, 518-20; of Chile, 22, 97; conversion of, 22, 79, 97, 492n, 494, 499-500; of Patagonia, 3-4, 6, 16, 22-23, 399-400, 489, 499, 510; of Tierra del Fuego, 6; violence among, 22-23
Indulgences, 289, 323, 327, 339, 354, 382, 402, 458
Ireland and the Irish, 450, 460-61, 513

Italy: bishops, 173, 199, 252, 333n; Church and State, 144, 242, 262-63, 326-28, 332, 336n, 371-72, 467; economy, 252, 257, 383; FMA in, 136; future of, 126; language, 568; modes of building operation, 349; nationalism, 327-28; 19th-century Catholicism, 366n, 461, 519; politics, 258n, 288, 371; requests for Sal. foundations, 240-64, 362-64; SS in, 204, 340, 352, 366n, 469. *See also* Government, Italian

J

Jacobini, Card. Ludwig (sec'y of state): and Bonetti case, 193-94, 212, 220, 227; and canonical privileges, 364, 521, 571; and CSJE, 317; letters to, 521, 552, 570; and the missions, 520, 571; and papal honors, 82, 85-86, 382, 459
Jacques, Mrs. (SC), 43, 138-39, 379, 382, 405, 545, 547
Jews enrolled as SC, 380
John the Apostle, St.: biography, 329-30, 573; patron of CSJE, 551; portrayed in art of CSJE, 308-09, 311
John the Baptist, St.: feast, 86-87, 90, 92, 97, 141, 246, 416 [*See also* Bosco, Fr. John: name day]; invocation of, 98
Joseph, St., 49, 112, 309-10, 342, 407, 426, 474
Journals (magazines), 22, 188, 455
Judgment, divine, 431-32, 439-40
Jurisdiction, episcopal, 171, 260, 299, 318, 353-54
Justice of God, 147

K

Kingdom of God, 352, 437, 451
Knighthoods, 80-87, 93, 143, 263, 309-10, 382, 387, 461, 530-31

L

Ladies' Committees, 26n, 29-33, 40, 47, 122, 138-39, 382, 395-97, 404-07
La Navarre: Colles' generosity, 72, 76-77, 81-82; DB at, 46, 76, 418-20, 473; FMA at, 71, 296; people of, 419; SS at, 45-47, 81, 83, 418, 420-21, 472; Sons of Mary at, 32
Lanzo: DB at, 99, 506-07; Sal. pupils, 18, 398, 551; Sal. retreats, 377n, 474. *See also* St. Ignatius Shrine
Lasagna, Fr. Louis: character, 340, 518; illness, 17-21, 340; leader of missionaries, 79; letters, 517-20; opening of work in Brazil, 516-21; provincial in Uruguay, 23-24, 340, 515-16
La Spezia: DB at, 107, 434-35, 437; SS at, 118-19, 126, 135, 169, 282, 365, 409, 570
Law, respect for, 195
Lawsuits against DB, 143, 171. *See also* Bonetti case; Colomiatti; Gastaldi; Pamphlets, controversial
Lawyers, 72, 193-94, 248, 275, 461-62, 547. *See also* Leonori; Menghini
Lazzero, Fr. Joseph: journeys, 283, 430; letters, 117-18, 129, 274, 450n; preacher, 377n; responsibilities at the Oratory, 383, 450n, 455

Lazzoni, Guido (count of Carrara), 529-30
Lemoyne, Fr. John Baptist: author, 75-76, 132-33, 139, 141, 329-30, 452n, 476-77, 512, 541, 553, 569, 573; dir. of FMA, 300, 572; DB's companion, 69, 90, 218, 325, 565; eyewitness to events, 54, 56, 477, 485; letters, 27, 48n, 68, 572-73; missionaries' companion, 23; notes, 258, 422, 436, 445; records dream of DB, 305-07, 565
Leo XIII, Pope: advice sought by DB, 175, 205, 569; appointments by, 18, 21, 93, 172; and Argentina, 11, 19, 24, 31, 93, 509; audiences (general), 4, 22, 304-05, 355-57, 364, 450, 570; audiences with Colomiatti, 156, 193, 223, 225-26; audiences with DB, 82, 95-96, 118-20, 122-23, 137, 356, 360, 382, 440, 442, 445-48, 509; and Bonetti case, 156, 170, 172, 175-78, 181, 185, 200, 205, 211-14, 219-20, 223-33, 235, 238, 318, 323; books sent to as gifts, 233, 553, 569-70; and CSJE, 317, 320, 323; and controversial pamphlets, 192, 200, 210; distressed by Cremona case, 481; DB's alms to, 44; encyclical of, 1, 23, 25; favors asked of, 81-82, 450, 558; honors conferred, 80-86; interest in Salesian works, 4, 26, 31-32, 119, 122, 176, 284-85, 288, 304, 360, 362, 446, 476, 570; jubilee, 119-20, 125, 520n; kindness toward SS, 5, 118, 122, 176, 290, 304-05, 362-64, 445-46, 523, 570-71; letter from, 180-81; letters to, 81, 86, 196-98, 204-05, 212-13, 219-20, 323, 355, 357, 360-61, 377n, 459, 570; opinion of DB, 176-77, 181, 304, 340, 357, 450, 570-71; opinion of SS, 569, 571; opinion regarding privileges, 355-57, 359-61, 364, 571; relations with Gastaldi, 172-73, 175-77, 180-81, 192, 198, 223, 570; and Rosminianism, 368-69; SS's supreme moderator, 204; virtues, 198-99, 207, 227, 228, 230. *See also* Church of the Sacred Heart
Leoncini, Fr. Louis (Piarist), 191-93, 201, 206, 211-12
Leonori, Fr. Constantine: author, 173; lawyer for SS, 169, 176, 185, 199, 208, 295, 358; letters, 168-69, 185, 199, 234, 295, 352, 358
Lepers: Sal. work with, 475-76, 523
Letters of DB to bishops: Agnozzi, 356; Cecconi, 276-77; bp. of Cremona, 479; Della Bona, 337-38; Gastaldi, 228-30, 316-18, 320-21, 323-24; Guarino, 355; Lluch y Garriga, 267-68, 271; Macedo Costa, 520; Magnasco, 420; Masotti, 360-61; bp. of Padua, 563; Pianori, 286; Verga, 166, 168, 201
Letters of DB to cardinals: Caterini, 164-65; Jacobini, 521, 552; Monaco La Valletta, 82, 315-16, 334, 344-46, 348-49; Nina, 3-4, 44, 157-58, 169-70, 172, 179-80, 183-84, 199-203, 207, 210-11, 213-15, 220, 226, 229, 231-32, 319-21, 359, 361, 571
Letters of DB to cooperators and benefactors, 123-24, 135, 287, 290-94, 303, 308, 311, 321-23, 329, 334, 337, 374, 379-80, 386, 388-90, 395, 404, 426, 430-31, 444n, 462, 466, 471, 494, 523-29, 536-38, 542, 545, 547, 551-52,

560, 563; Bonmartini, 558-62, 564-66; Callori, 17-18, 335, 537; Colle, 56-63, 68-69, 72-100, 465, 507; De Maistre, 137-38, 388, 535-36; Fassati, 122-23, 537-38; Harmel, 532-33; Louvet, 325, 487-507; Magliano-Sollier, 375-78, 440-41, 526, 540, 549-50; Sigismondi, 50, 427; Uguccioni, 279-82; Ulloa, 267-68
Letters of DB to government officials, 124-25, 195, 310n
Letters of DB to nobility, 53, 245, 335-36, 344, 371-72, 464, 466, 529-30
Letters of DB to Pope Leo XIII, 81, 86, 196-98, 204-05, 219-20, 323, 355, 357, 360-61, 570
Letters of DB to priests and religious, 5, 192, 284, 317, 386, 438-39, 465, 492, 503, 522, 527, 530, 534-35, 539, 541, 549, 554-55; Boccali, 181-82, 207, 363; Colomiatti, 161-62, 166-68; De Agostini, 558-60, 562-66, 568; Guiol, 47, 122, 398-99; Leonori, 169; Mendre, 36-37
Letters of DB to Salesians: Albera, 397, 546-47; Barberis, 105-06, 385, 392-93; Belmonte, 391, 420; Berto, 28, 109, 302-03, 354-55, 427-28, 548-49; Bologna, 43-44, 378-79, 426-27, 545-46; Bonetti, 28-29, 50-51, 163; Borio, 398; Cagliero, 107, 271, 287, 331; Cays, 542; circulars, 353-54, 392, 447-48, 572-73; Confortóla, 127, 278, 282-83, 548; Costamagna, 11, 19-20, 511-12; Dalmazzo, 108-09, 214-15, 226, 232, 324, 333-34, 339-41, 346-50, 352-53, 358, 360, 509-10, 520-21, 552-53, 569-70, 572; Durando, 250; Fenoglio, 533-34; Homsi, 384-85; Lazzero, 450n; Lemoyne, 68, 572-73; Leveratto, 383; missionaries, 12-17, 339-40; Perrot, 85; Rinaldi, 287; Ronchail, 104-05, 381-82, 386-87, 396-97, 547-48; Rua, 106-07, 158, 209, 251, 419-20; Savio, 345-46; Tamietti, 390, 444, 550-51, 563
Letters of DB to students, 531-32, 558, 561, 567-68
Letters of DB to *Unità Catt.*, 319-20
Letters to DB from bishops: Agnozzi, 356; Aneyros, 24; Berengo, 468; Capponi, 256; Cecconi, 275-76; Ferré, 367; Gastaldi, 164, 210, 229-30, 320, 323, 445; Guarino, 239, 243, 340, 352, 355; La Vecchia, 245-46; Lluch y Garriga, 268-69; Macedo Costa, 520; Salvai, 459
Letters to DB from cardinals: Desprez, 410; Jacobini, 82, 520-21; Monaco La Valletta, 348; Nina, 157, 160-61, 172, 178-79, 205-06, 225, 227-28, 231, 235, 318-20
Letters to DB from cooperators and benefactors, 43, 186-87, 198-99, 290-93, 379-80, 397, 403-04, 414n, 426, 460, 462, 470-71, 525, 527-29, 542, 545, 547, 559; Bonmartini, 558, 561, 566; Colle, 87; Ghiglini, 379; Louvet, 486-91, 493-94, 501-02, 504-06; Magliano-Sollier, 376, 440
Letters to DB from nobility, 244, 246-47, 460-61, 466, 529
Letters to DB from Pope Leo XIII, 180-81
Letters to DB from priests and religious, 27-28, 186, 251, 257,

*Letters to DB (continued)*
275-76, 284, 336, 414, 438-39, 459, 465-66, 491-92, 527, 534, 541, 554-55; Boccali, 184, 207, 323, 362-63; Colomiatti, 161, 165-66; De Agostini, 562-63, 567; Guanella, 373; Leonori, 295, 352, 358; Margotti, 372-73
Letters to DB from Salesians: Bonetti, 93, 163-64, 185, 209, 315; Cagliero, 267, 270, 272, 499; Cays, 542; Cibrario, 573; Confortóla, 104, 129, 280, 548; Costamagna, 511, 513; Dalmazzo, 176-77, 211, 213, 225-27, 232n, 316, 320, 345, 347-48, 358-59, 362-64, 481, 570-72; Durando, 209; Fagnano, 23; Fenoglio, 534; Giordano, 515; Graziano, 339; Lasagna, 517-20; Marenco, 277; Pozzan, 338; Rabagliati, 339; Rua, 107, 159, 430; Tomatis, 514-15
Letters to DB from students: 531, 568
Letters to DB from others: friend of Gastaldi, 168; Meteorological Assn., 20-21; Society for Prop. of Faith, 401; Squarcina, 344-45
*Letture Cattoliche*, 134, 327, 538
Leveratto, Fr. Joseph (pref. of the Oratory), 150, 383
Liguori, St. Alphonsus, 309, 438
Liguria: DB in, 21, 103, 354, 430-37; SS in, 80, 103, 304n, 397, 426, 434n
Lille, France: SS at, 489
Lombardy: SS in, 99, 392
Lotteries, 259-62, 347, 565, 572
Lourdes, 465, 484, 489, 559
Louvet, Miss Claire (SC): character, 487, 503, 507; charity, 487-97, 499-502, 507-08; and CSH, 488, 490, 502; destroyed some of DB's letters, 494; DB counsels against joining FMA, 503; esteem for Rua, 508; fears, 492-93, 495-97, 503-08; health, 491, 494-501, 503-05, 507; last years, 507-08; letters from, 486-91, 493-94, 501-02, 504-06; letters to, 325, 487-508; name given to Indian girls, 499-500; spiritual relationship with DB, 486-87, 497, 503-06; visits to Turin, 460, 487-88, 494-95
Lovatelli, Fr. Peter (SC), 334, 339, 341
Lucca: DB at, 139, 255, 437-38, 440-41; SS at, 126, 169, 265, 275-77, 282, 365, 437
Lyons: DB at, 396, 398-403; hqtrs. of Soc. for Prop. of the Faith, 11, 399-401; renowned for charity, 399

## M

Magliano Sabino: SS at, 125, 284, 304, 391, 450-51
Magliano-Sollier, Mrs. Bernadine (SC), 375-78, 440-41, 526, 540, 549-50
Mainardi, Countess *see* Bonmartini family
Malàn, Anthony (future missionary), 469-73
Manacorda, Emilian (bp. of Fossano), 325, 572
Mantua diocese: request for Salesians, 362-64
Marenco, Fr. John, 275-77, 437, 542
Marengo, Canon Francis (priest of Turin), 456
Margotti, Fr. James (editor), 10, 114, 209, 232, 328, 372-73

Marini, Msgr. Nicholas (papal chamberlain), 201n, 215, 219, 459
Marseille: DB at, 26-43, 44, 55-56, 78-79, 267, 396, 404-10, 415, 426n, 429, 530; FMA at, 5n, 30, 40, 296-97, 378, 405-06; model Sal. community, 427; monograph about Sal. work, 35-36; municipal government, 531; new Sal. province, 378-79, 397; oratory, 26-28, 30, 34-37, 39-41, 365, 395-97, 405, 409, 427, 531, 545; people of, 32, 40, 122, 408, 531; St. Joseph's Church, 33, 35, 37, 58n, 382, 404, 409, 415, 546; Sal. debts, 26, 31-32, 381, 407, 426-27, 547; Sal. school and hospice, 30-32, 37-38, 44, 47, 58n, 122, 378, 405-06; Sal. seminary, 32, 37-38, 44, 109, 122, 405, 533
Martini, Canon Edward (priest of Alassio), 541
Mary, Blessed Virgin: favors of, 45-46, 51, 141, 211, 407, 417, 523, 544, 556; feast of the Assumption, 88, 131, 141, 498; feast of the Holy Rosary, 543, 556-57; feast of the Immaculate Conception, 89, 174-75, 283, 392, 452, 491, 494, 499-500, 506, 547; feast of her Nativity, 88, 99, 498, 507, 540; feasts: other, 148, 151, 288, 332, 499 [*See also* Mary, Help of Christians: feast of]; glory, 129, 495; guidance, 78, 87-88, 96-97, 100, 490, 496, 498-500, 504-07, 540, 555, 564, 566-68; honor toward, 130, 342, 388, 392, 412; hymns, 298, 333; Immaculate Conception doctrine, 309-10; invocation of, 14, 46, 48, 70, 95-96, 99, 112, 241, 254, 280-81, 291-92, 381, 403, 436, 459, 501, 540, 565, 571; in Lemoyne's book, 330; medal, 49; paintings, 308-09; popular devotion, 453; protection, 9, 30, 86-91, 98-100, 286n, 333, 390, 392, 442, 489, 491-93, 495-96, 499, 503, 507, 543, 564, 566; shrines, 435-36, 473, 556; thanks to, 43, 98; Turin her city, 322; welcomes faithful to heaven, 302, 528
Mary, Help of Christians: altar, 89, 99, 137, 281, 290-91, 397, 461, 491, 496, 498, 500-01, 547; blessing, 129-30, 403, 452, 461-62; favors attributed to, 78, 133, 407-08, 422-23, 554-55; feast, 70, 82, 92-96, 131-34, 137-41, 245, 283, 285, 333, 423, 426, 440, 458-60, 487, 494, 542; invocation, 460-61, 464, 504, 508, 529; medal, 442, 492, 504; miracles attributed to, 132-33, 139, 141, 459-61, 463; novena, 69, 96, 123, 134, 245, 458, 460, 470; pictures, 537, 553, 555-56; place in heaven, 504; popular devotion, 140, 273, 395, 402, 460-61; protection, 300, 376-78, 385, 452, 490, 514, 557, 568; shrines, 513, 553, 556; wants Malàn to be a Salesian, 472
Masotti, Abp. Innocent (sec'y of CBR), 356-62, 364, 446, 569
Mass: celebration of, 7, 9, 43, 79, 148, 208, 319, 329, 325, 332, 334, 370, 459, 556, 558-59; DB's celebration of, 45, 49, 51, 79, 125, 130, 138-40, 288-91, 324-25, 390, 408, 410-12, 424, 426n, 433, 436-37, 441, 443, 448, 453-54, 470, 493 [*See also* Colle, Louis (son of Count Louis): apparitions];

*Mass (continued)*
faculties for celebrating, 174; remembrance at, 13, 50, 76, 78, 86, 88-90, 94, 290-93, 499-500, 514, 550, 554; remembrance of SC, 71, 76, 78, 86, 89-90, 95, 98, 123, 137, 339, 375, 377, 388, 411, 420, 427, 436, 440, 462, 464, 471, 493, 495-501, 504, 525-26, 530, 534, 537, 541, 545, 547, 559-60, 562-65; stipends, 3, 5, 471, 525, 559
Mathi: SS at, 72-73, 77, 539-40
Mazzarello, Mother Mary: beatification, 299; biography, 297-99; bitter macaroons for successor, 301-02; death, 296-300; sees missionaries off, 5n, 297; superior gen., 296-99; virtues, 297-99, 301
Medolago Albani, Countess Philomena, 387-88, 535-36
Mendre, Fr. Louis (curate at Marseille): anecdote about DB and boys' music, 58n; author, 34-36, 52, 274, 410; description of DB, 34-35, 58n, 274, 410; and DB's cure of Flandrin, 41-43; letters, 36-37; visit to Turin, 459
Menghini, Canon Charles (lawyer), 168, 170-71, 176, 194-95, 199
Men's Committees, 47, 382
Mercy of God, 151, 257
Merigi, Fr., 105-06
Milan, 255, 286, 314, 392, 401n, 521-22, 528
Milanesio, Fr. Dominic (missionary), 16, 510
Military service, 27, 54, 435, 470, 472, 478
Mirabello, Italy: SS at, 140, 366
Miracles: Piscetta and Merigi should work, 106. *See also* Cures by DB
Missionaries: delay in sending, 363, 518-19; departure ceremonies, 6-7, 23, 29, 197, 199-200; DB speaks of, 135-36, 335, 500; letters, 4, 23, 97, 271, 339, 447-48, 511; prayers for, 84, 494, 525; sacrifices of, 519; training, 136, 144, 400; visit to Oratory, 492
Missionary expeditions: of Feb. 1881, 2-9; of Dec. 1881, 23-24, 197, 199-200, 205, 525; of 1883, 500, 512, 561; of 1885, 77; of 1886, 494
Missions: counting boys and girls, 528; funds, 2, 78-80, 84, 235, 247, 252, 367, 377, 399-402, 489, 494, 519, 527, 540, 561; general interest in, 273-74, 404, 512, 571; interest of Colles in, 72-73, 77, 97, 99, 101; matters before the Holy See, 292, 360, 571; Sal. work praised, 367
Moitel, Fr. (seminarian sponsored by Louvet), 494
Monaco La Valletta, Card. Raphael: card. vicar of Rome, 82, 146, 332, 334, 341, 345, 348, 358, 569; letters, 315-16, 334, 344-46, 348-49
Monateri, Fr. Joseph (dir. at Varazze), 21, 477
Morality: public, 128, 205, 270, 273, 281, 327, 332, 337, 416, 449; Salesians charged with immorality, 111, 480-82; in schools, 31, 115, 216; in seminaries, 381-82
Moro, cl. Charles: account of DB's trips to France, 48, 422n
Mortara, Fr. Pius (Canon Regular), 26-28
Murialdo, Fr. Leonard (founder), 456
Murialdo, Fr. Robert (SC), 456
Musso, Fr. Heremenegild (teacher at Cremona), 480-82
Musso Bensa, Mrs. (SC), 529
Mythology, 371-72

## N

Nasi, coad. Louis: DB's barber at Marseille, 408
National Italian Church, 467
Neri, St. Philip, 127n, 172, 188
Newspapers: attacks on DB or SS, 9-10, 36, 54-55, 111, 142-47, 214, 216, 222, 231-32, 286, 288, 312, 321, 326-29, 463-64, 480-83; attacks on religious, 26, 36; Cagliero's use of, 272; Catholic, 22, 29, 45, 81, 111, 126-27, 143, 173, 188-89, 269, 274n, 313-14, 333, 366n, 401, 409-13, 431, 465 [*See also* Journals; *Unità Cattolica*]; comments on papal encyclical, 2; coverage of mission expedition, 5-6; DB's sensitivity regarding, 37, 143, 263, 372; DB's use of, 29, 85, 314, 319-20; French, 45, 81, 401, 409-13, 426n, 428; Gastaldi's use of, 214, 222, 321; Italian secular, 9-10, 54-55, 143-46, 231-32, 234, 286, 313-15, 326-29, 429, 463-64, 480-83; Portuguese, 274n; Spanish, 269; speak of turmoil in France, 490, 492
Nice: DB at, 7, 26, 38, 47-50, 53, 78-79, 103, 161, 253-54, 267-68, 297-98, 396, 421-28, 547; FMA at, 296-97; public health, 78; SS at, 38, 270, 365, 386, 396, 411n, 472; Sal. hospice, 48-49, 104, 126, 244, 365, 382, 384, 421-22, 486
Nina, Card. Lawrence: advice in Bonetti case, 157, 160, 178, 206, 231; Bonetti sends books to, 233; and canonical privileges, 44, 177, 355-61, 363n, 569, 571; card. protector of SS, 3, 157, 169, 177, 182, 184, 203, 219, 228-29, 234, 570; and CSJE, 232, 316-21; contacts with Colomiatti, 156-57, 160-61, 168, 317-20; and Cremona case, 481; and Gastaldi, 160, 176, 182, 206; letters from, 177, 219-20, 233-34 [*See also* Letters to DB from cardinals]; letters to, 182, 185, 218-19, 223, 233-34, 317-18 [*See also* Letters of DB to cardinals]; love for SS, 571; pref. of COC, 172, 178-80, 182-85, 193-94, 199-203, 209-11, 213-14, 223, 225-26; relations with DB, 177, 184, 226-28; and Sal. missions, 3-5, 520
Nizza Monferrato: alumni from, 142, 303; countess doubts DB's charisms, 485; DB at, 300-03, 391; FMA gen. chapter, 300-01; FMA motherhouse, 296, 298, 505-06, 572; FMA school, 300; retreats, 300, 302, 376, 500
Norfolk, duke of (SC), 465-66
Novices, Salesian: admission and training, 151, 352, 373, 382, 398n, 452; clothing, 100, 153; Damascenes, 383-85; DB and n., 153, 170, 276, 376, 384-85; French novitiate, 37-39, 109, 383; future Salesians, 12, 19; life in the novitiate, 384; numbers, 19, 79, 100, 153

## O

Oddenino, Fr. Anthony (rector of Chieri cathedral), 155-56, 170-71, 178-79
Olive family (SC), 408-09
Opinions about DB: apostle, 451, 521; con artist, 54, 145, 211, 327, 463, 482-83; dealer in knighthood, 143;

*Opinions about DB (continued)*
disrespectful toward his superiors, 172-73, 189, 233, 362; enemy of Italy, 326-27, 482-83; exceptional man, 236, 314-15; fund-raiser, 133, 145, 258; guilty in Bonetti case, 231-32; hardworking, 176, 187; highly esteemed, 48, 338, 367, 369, 415, 419, 459, 567; holiness, 45, 52, 143, 155, 161, 176-78, 289, 302, 304, 326-28, 370, 395, 405-07, 409, 413-14, 422, 428, 436, 454-55, 457, 463-66, 469, 483, 485, 487, 556; humble, 187; ignorant, 189, 235, 357; international idol, 145-46; magnetic person, 55; man of God, 141, 186, 288, 328, 340, 402, 407, 411, 429, 434, 438, 453, 473, 521; miracle worker, 45, 56-57, 146, 250, 255, 327; model priest, 141, 173, 176; oracle of Mary, 567; politician, 143, 429n; preacher, 45, 408, 438; priestmaker, 54, 328; reliable, 259; reserved, 372; selector of talent, 145; serious man, 454; servant of the Pope, 181; virtues at the Oratory reflect DB, 468-69; writer, 121, 570

Oratory (Valdocco): alumni, 144-45, 180, 183, 236-38, 309-10, 324, 335-36, 429n, 436; Bellezza house, 75-76; benefactors, 72, 440, 550; bookstore, 525; boys of, 270, 290; catechism classes, 371n; economy, 146, 365, 375, 383, 389, 405-06, 478, 539; expansion, 75-76, 365-66; festive oratory, 15, 30, 75, 337, 375; food for boys, 235, 383, 429n, 530; Gastaldi's praise of, 188; general headquarters of SS, 28, 117, 173, 189-90, 192, 205, 232, 283, 285-86, 296, 310, 337, 373, 379, 408, 478, 494, 511; history, 218, 269, 274n, 367, 370, 375, 404, 412n, 435; holidays, 131, 180; hospice, 36, 75, 88, 99, 253, 310, 332, 390, 456, 480, 496; invitation to Riccardi, 208-09; model for imitation, 332, 405; music, 312, 321, 370, 469; repairs, 491, 539-40; retreats, 468-69; return of DB, 134-35, 333; Sal. community, 90, 151, 393; Sal. family, 498, 550; school, 10, 36, 75, 124, 153, 180, 255, 258, 289, 304n, 321, 392, 469; school of virtue, 370, 468; seminary, 237, 367, 377, 456, 521; visitors, 24, 138, 141, 369-70, 428, 483-85, 521-22, 537, 545, 564; workshops, 75, 366, 396, 469

Order of St. Maurice, 124, 257-64, 341, 381, 530

Orders, Holy *see* Salesian Society: ordinations

Orioli, Fr. Paul (priest of Mantua), 466-69

Ottonello, Fr. Matthew (teacher at the Oratory), 428, 456

## P

Pamphlets, controversial: authorship, 189-92, 201, 212, 236-38; disclaimer in BS, 162-63; DB's alleged responsibility for, 157-58, 161, 191-96, 199-201, 206-07, 210-12, 221, 224, 228-30, 232, 235; DB's opinion of, 158, 198, 200, 222-24; Gastaldi considers civil suit, 157, 190-91; irrelevant to Bonetti suspension, 159, 163, 199-200, 214; and matters of Catholic faith, 198, 200, 207, 210, 223-24; suit against DB, 153, 157,

159, 193-99, 202, 206-07, 223-24, 230, 235, 238; titles and summaries, 155, 187-89, 191, 198, 203, 237-38. *See also* Bonetti case
Pampirio, Dominic (bp. of Alba), 132-34, 140, 325
Panaro, cl. Bartholomew (missionary), 16
Papacy: financial aid to, 502; papal documents, 1, 23, 25, 171; papal ministry, 120, 182, 205, 331, 368, 446-47; Peter's Pence, 119, 193, 290; public insults to, 304, 313, 334; reverence for, 22, 80-81, 125, 143, 304, 313-14. *See also* Holy See; Virtues, DB's: reverence for the Pope; Virtues, Salesian: reverence for the Pope
Paraguay, 519
Pariani, Fr. Orestes (SC), 386, 527
Paris: churches, 67-68, 342, 413; DB at, 67-68, 428-29, 488; hope for Sal. work at, 370; newspapers, 428-29; people, 422, 460, 462, 464; symbol of France, 413
Parma: request for Sal. house, 253-55
Paseri, cl. (missionary), 14
Patagónes, Argentina: SS at, 146, 296, 510, 513
Patagonia: allusions to, 103, 335; Catholic Church in, 22, 31; Colles' support for Sal. missions, 73, 79-80, 84; DB speaks of Sal. missions, 399-400, 402, 418, 509; DB's missionary plans, 2-3, 6, 44, 509-10; FMA in, 304-05, 499; geography, 16, 22-23, 66, 400, 499, 509; enthusiasm for the missions, 512; need for missionaries, 31, 44; Sal. expeditions bound for, 197, 199, 205, 494, 500, 561; Sal. missionary activity, 16, 22, 126, 135-36, 294, 399-402, 449, 489, 492, 510, 518, 520, 527; vicariate apostolic, 11, 19, 24, 93, 443, 446, 509-11, 552
Patarelli, Fr. Charles (dir. at Ruitz), 508
Pavia, Fr. Joseph (dir. of Valdocco festive oratory), 375, 540, 550
Pelà, Chevalier Benedict (SC), 390, 444, 550-51
Pelazza, coad. Andrew, 261
Pellicani, Fr. Anthony, 191-92, 196-97, 200-01, 211-12
Peretto, cl. Charles (missionary), 15
Peronino, Fr. (pastor at Loranzé), 539
Perosa Argentina, Italy: request for Salesians, 256-57
Perrot, Fr. Peter: dealings with the Colles, 57n, 77, 80, 83-85, 98-100; dir. at La Navarre, 46, 77, 85, 99, 418; letters, 85, 99-100; visits to Turin, 46, 100
Peter, St., 95, 120-21, 135, 172, 309, 424
Philosophy: study of, 38, 368-69, 393, 412n, 445. *See also* Rosminianism
Pianori, Angelo (bp. of Faenza), 284-86, 288-89
Picard, Fr. Francis (Assumptionist), 138, 369-70
Piccardo, Mrs. Angela (SC), 380, 538-39
Piccono, Fr. Angelo (missionary), 9, 17
Piedmont: confiscation of religious properties, 553; local idioms, 276, 291; nobility, 273, 303, 371, 536, 542-45, 553, 555; parliament, 372, 545n; pilgrims at Rome, 304; regional pride, 273; SS in, 204, 287

Pinerolo, Italy: DB at, 79, 90-91, 218, 490, 493, 501
Pirro, Fr.: dispensed from vows, 28
Pisa, 96, 255-56, 437
Piscetta, Fr. Louis, 105-06
Pius IX, Pope: attacks on, 304, 313, 326-28, 334; eminent benefactor of SS, 174-75, 189, 308, 312, 352-54, 356; holiness, 273; illness and death, 110, 212n; monuments to, 275, 313, 332, 418, 429 [*See also* Church of St. John Evangelist: monument]; and popular election of clergy, 467; pronouncements, 309-10, 413; relationship with DB, 110, 121; and Rosmini, 134n
Pius XI, Pope, 412n
Poland, 54, 78
Porani, Fr. Alexander, 387
Portugal, 270-71, 273-74
Pozzan, Fr. Peter: dir. of Valdocco festive oratory, 337; editor of BS, 337, 560; raises funds for CSH, 337-38, 341; work with SC, 380, 564, 567; writes for DB, 560-61
Prat-Noilly, Mrs. Ann (SC), 40-41, 379, 382, 426, 546
Prayer: for career guidance, 538; for the dead, 234, 325, 333, 378, 434, 498; for DB, 514-15; to DB, 507-08; for enemies, 326; for family, 568; for God's glory, 68, 123; for God's graces, 67, 120, 234, 286-87, 300, 322; for a happy death, 544; of Leo XIII, 448-49, 570; to Mary, 112; of Mazzarello, 298; meditation, 504, 548; for the missions, 519, 523, 525; for the Pope, 323; power of, 18, 67-68, 104, 252, 409, 460-61; requested by DB for himself, 170, 229, 301, 361, 439, 454, 554 [*See also* Letters of DB to cooperators; Letters of DB to Salesians]; requested by DB for SS, 29, 87, 105, 118, 203, 229, 277, 293, 302, 332, 395, 401, 409, 454, 490, 492, 494-95, 499-500, 505, 507, 522, 552, 562; requested of DB, 71, 116, 172, 247, 261, 268, 290, 292, 338, 343, 397, 402-03, 405, 413, 423, 451, 460-62, 464, 466, 477-78, 554, 556, 558-59, 571; for royal family, 336; for Salesians, 340, 570-71; for the sick, 381-82, 388, 391, 397; for vocations, 522; weapon against heresy, 118
Prayer, DB's: for the Bonmartinis, 558-66; for the Colles, 60, 62, 86-87; for conversion of sinners, 40-41; for the dead, 60, 71, 122-23, 279, 300; for FMA, 300-01; for heavenly favors, 42, 47-48, 70, 104, 123, 153, 167, 290; for his enemies, 162, 229; insufficiency of, 40-41; for Louvet, 488-97, 499-501, 503-07; prevented by crowd, 67; for SC, 29, 105, 120, 125, 184, 202, 229, 254, 340, 372-90, 405, 566 [*See also* Letters of DB to cooperators]; for Salesians, 162, 377, 406-07, 471, 493, 506-07, 515 [*See also* Letters of DB to Salesians]; for Sisters of SH, 554-55; for workingmen, 303
Preaching: at CSJE, 325; during Lent, 252, 418, 420, 431; faculties, 174, 221, 224; style, 438. *See also* Bosco, Fr. John: sermons
Predictions by DB: deaths, 408, 417; future of individuals, 255, 478,

569; future of Sal. works, 274, 287-89; future of Sisters of SH at Turin, 554-57; health of individuals, 453-54, 477-78; vocations, 469-73, 473-76; no war involving France, 507-08
Prefect, office of, 115
Prefect of studies, office of, 115
Priesthood: DB's priestliness, 408, 451; DB's respect for, 415, 568; models of priestly ministry, 141, 173, 176, 391, 456; renegade priests, 466-68, 480. *See also* Seminaries; Vocations: priestly
Privileges, canonical: customary p. for religious congregations, 117; DB asks help in Rome, 243, 355-56, 446, 450, 521, 569; DB selects most useful p., 357-61, 571; DB takes direct action on, 356-60; DB's haste to obtain, 352, 357, 359-60, 362-63; DB's request tabled by CBR, 361-62, 364, 569; DB's use of, 174, 353-54; Holy See's reluctance to grant, 351-53, 355, 358-60, 364, 571; temporary grants to SS, 174, 352-54, 356
Propagation of the Faith, Society for the, 1, 11, 399-401
Property: negotiations about, 30, 245-48; purchase, 30, 38-39, 75-76, 253-54, 280-81, 365-66, 406; rights, 326
Protestants: attacks on DB, 143-44; at Bari, 252; converts to Catholicism, 130, 216; DB's dealings with, 48-49, 129-30, 422-24; at Faenza, 286; false teaching of, 266, 276, 280-81, 327; favored by an author, 2n; funds, 276, 409, 436; in Liguria, 114, 118, 126, 169, 409; mockery of Catholicism, 424; in Portugal, 273-74; at Rome, 118, 126, 335, 409, 436; SS combats P. errors, 114, 118, 126, 128-29, 144, 169, 266, 274, 280-81, 293, 409, 436; in Spain, 266; in Tuscany, 118, 126, 128-29, 169, 255, 274-76, 280, 409; in Uruguay, 516. *See also* Sects, religious; Waldensians
Providence, Divine: and apparitions of Louis Colle, 64; cooperation with, 334, 340; DB's intimacy with, 25, 34-35, 102, 198, 340, 419, 514, 552; examples of, 133, 400-01, 443, 514; gathers boys into Sal. houses, 205, 561; gratitude to, 270, 341; helps and protects SS, 30-31, 80, 219, 225, 265, 273, 282, 287, 400, 418, 516, 523; refines virtues of saints, 351-52; Rua an agent of, 152; SC are agents of, 30, 32, 74, 78, 80-81, 102, 136, 339, 487-88; SS are agents of, 30, 81, 127, 186, 244, 268, 282; trust in, 31-32, 46, 80, 84, 91, 129, 136, 169, 282, 300, 367, 390, 395-96, 400-02, 406-07, 418, 437, 442, 491, 550-51; wonders of, 328
Provincial, office of, 426-27
Psychology, educational, 59

## Q

Quaranta, cl. Joseph Joachim (missionary), 14
Quartino, Stephen (aspirant), 531-32
Quirino, cl. Camillus (math teacher), 469

## R

Rabagliati, Fr. Evasio (missionary), 339
Radice, Mrs. Louise (SC), 528-29
Railroads: half-fare for students, 283
Randazzo, Sicily: SS at, 242, 248, 251, 287, 336, 352, 365
Reformatories, 252
Reimbeau, cl. Jules, 26, 29, 35n, 103, 106, 109
Relics, 9, 412-13, 543; r. of DB, 52, 327, 370, 409, 414, 426n, 475, 487
Religious instruction: abandoned by youth, 257, 449; bishop's authority over, 283; DB urges a standard catechism, 446-47; helpers in the Oratory's early days, 371n, 456; in the missions, 400, 516; provided by Sal. oratories, 30, 117, 270, 283, 319, 449; SC should promote, 416, 431, 453
Religious life, 188, 277, 538, 568
Religious orders and congregations, 117, 351, 354-56, 358-60, 362, 381, 413-14, 471, 515, 518; Assumptionists, 138, 369-70; Barnabites, 20, 110n, 126; Basilians, 248-49; Benedictines, 253; Bros. of St. John of God, 27; Canons Reg. of the Lateran, 26; Capuchins, 244-46, 411n, 433-34, 470, 483-84, 526, 549-50; Carmelites, 265; Christian Bros., 155, 333n, 342-43, 470; cloistered, 171; Conceptionists, 110n; Corpus Domini priests, 236; Dtrs. of Charity, 295; Dtrs. of St. Joseph Calasanctius, 388; Dtrs. of St. Mary of Providence, 373n; Dtrs. of the Sacred Heart, 387, 536; Dtrs. of Wisdom (La Sagesse), 417; Dominicans, 31; Eudists, 522; Franciscans, 31, 249, 484-85; hospital staff, 264, 455; Institute of Charity (Rosminians), 2n, 134n, 359; Jesuits, 12, 31, 196-97, 200, 236-37, 244, 255, 267, 280, 285, 350n, 368, 463, 519; Marists, 265; Oblates of the Virgin Mary, 357, 359; Oblates of St. Frances of Rome, 108, 443, 448; Oratorians, 127, 172, 248, 441, 451-52, 534; Passionists, 358-60, 482-83; Piarists, 191-93, 201, 206, 211-12; Pious Society of St. Joseph, 456; Priests of the Most Precious Blood, 453; Redemptorists, 357, 359-60; Servants of Charity, 373n; Servites, 288; Srs. of the Good Shepherd, 561; Srs. of the Sacred Heart, 443, 553-57; Srs. of St. Dorothy, 451; Srs. of St. Thomas of Villanova, 51-52; Ursulines, 535-36; Vincentians, 295, 360; Visitation Nuns, 106, 256
Remotti, Fr. Thaddeus (missionary), 13, 512
Retreats, spiritual: for clergy, 317, 468; directed by DB, 38, 302, 376-77; directed by Rua, 99, 377n; for FMA, 300, 304, 513; in France, 38, 77-78; for novices, 19, 170, 376-77, 561; for Salesians, 17, 24, 78-79, 99, 105, 148, 170, 287, 321, 347, 361, 373, 376-77, 434n, 507, 532-33, 538-41, 543, 548, 558, 560-61, 566; for students, 377, 474, 513, 532; for women, 302, 376, 500
Riccardi, David (bp. of Ivrea), 106, 208-09, 216, 353, 512

Ricchino brothers (diocesan priests), 146-47, 328
Ricci family (SC), 123, 389-90, 526
Rimini, Italy: DB at, 451-56
Rinaldi, Fr. John Baptist (dir. at Faenza), 287, 293
Rinaldi, Fr. Philip, 267, 475
Risorgimento, 258n, 371, 553
Roberto (duke of Parma), 253-54
Rocca, Fr. Louis (Cerruti's vicar), 114
Rome: capital of Italy, 262, 371; center of the Church, 413, 436, 558; churches, 125, 138, 216, 304, 334, 444 [*See also* Church of the Sacred Heart]; customs, 569; DB at, 74-75, 82, 95-96, 103, 106-09, 118-23, 124-27, 131, 137, 161, 164, 185, 210-12, 244, 271, 274, 278, 290, 312, 315, 340, 344-45, 347, 354, 356-58, 360-61, 382, 427, 430, 440, 442-51, 457, 490, 495, 509, 522, 531, 565; DB and Bonetti case, 108, 161, 164, 185, 430, 444, 446; DB and canonical privileges, 124, 354, 356-58, 360-61, 445-46; DB and CSH, 74-75, 82, 95, 444-45, 490, 495, 565; DB and curia, 103, 108, 445-46, 450n, 457, 509; DB and government ministers, 124-25, 531; DB's meetings with SC, 74-75, 125-27; DB's papal audiences, 82, 95, 118-20, 122-23, 137; DB's social calls, 442-44; eternal city, 78, 82, 509; Gastaldi at, 171, 175-76, 180; gossip, 569, 571; municipal government, 108, 342; pagan, 126; people of, 126, 342, 345; pilgrims at, 22, 125, 369, 398, 450, 483-84; Rua DB's guardian angel, 106-09, 118, 131, 161; SS at, 75, 97, 107, 118, 130, 199, 334, 348, 360, 393, 409-10, 418, 440 [*See also* Church of the Sacred Heart]; sections of city, 4, 81, 119, 126, 304, 332, 335, 337, 350n; "even shadows are real," 364, 571; "tough nut to crack," 345-46, 448. *See also* Tor de' Specchi
Ronchail, Fr. Alvin (dir. in France), 489, 508
Ronchail, Fr. Joseph: dir. at Nice, 48, 50, 244, 386, 396, 486-87; DB's companion, 424-26; letters, 48-49, 104-05, 244, 381-82, 386-87, 396-97, 417, 547-48
Rosary: in DB's dream, 150; gift from DB, 375, 386; praying the r., 91, 150, 333, 435
Rosmini, Fr. Anthony (founder and philosopher), 133-34, 189, 480
Rosminian philosophy: advocated by Ferré, 367-69; advocated by Gastaldi, 134, 188-89, 412n, 445; attacked in the press, 188-89; disapproved by the Holy See, 204, 412n, 480n; DB follows the Holy See, 198, 204, 207, 368-69, 445; SS follows the Holy See, 368-69, 480
Rossi, coad. Joseph, 183, 265-66
Rua, Fr. Michael: assists at Cays' deathbed, 544-45; and Bonetti case, 158-59, 161-63, 190; book reviewer, 52-53; and CSJE, 316; and the Colles, 90, 97-100, 102; compared with DB, 411n, 468; DB's assistant, 84, 107-09, 115-18, 129, 162, 244, 299; has DB's authority, 105, 132, 161-62; DB's successor, 152, 249, 257; and Faenza committee, 285-86; financial administrator, 74-75, 77-78, 87, 116,

*Rua, Fr. Michael (continued)*
488, 491, 493, 546; health, 506-07; journeys, 78, 98, 118, 125, 131, 278, 280, 299, 507; letters from, 57n, 80, 95, 99, 117-18, 129, 131, 159, 162-63, 190, 213, 218, 286, 430, 508, 530; letters to, 7-9, 28, 48-49, 134, 161, 163, 208, 213, 244, 246, 250, 267, 269, 279, 311-12, 348, 418-19, 421, 461-63, 493, 533 [*See also* Letters of DB to Salesians]; and Louvet, 507-08; member of superior chapter, 115, 117, 398n; and new Sal. works, 249, 251, 257; praises Borio, 398; preacher, 99, 151, 377n; superior of the Oratory, 208, 375, 393; testimony about DB, 350, 426; virtues, 107, 125, 152, 163, 508
Russia, 78

## S

Sacred Heart: devotion to, 63, 67, 332-33, 335, 342-43, 413, 418; DB's references to, 14, 280, 291, 339-40, 378, 559; feast of, 332; prayer to, 119, 390, 547, 563, 565
Saint-Cyr: DB at, 43, 46, 414-16; FMA at, 296-98, 414; SS at, 45, 47, 414-16, 421, 547
St. Ignatius Shrine (Lanzo), 229, 231, 317
St. Maurice Hospital (Turin), 18, 257-62, 530
St. Vincent de Paul Society, 81, 103, 289-90, 421-22
Sala, Fr. Anthony (economer gen.), 46, 131-34, 286, 310, 349, 383
Salesian cooperators *see* Cooperators, Salesian
Salesian family, 135, 287, 405, 498, 505, 551
Salesian Sisters *see* Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians
Salesian Society: approved by God, 523; archives, 260, 353-54; aspirants, 12, 109, 353, 377, 383-84, 405, 513; attacked in the press, 54, 214, 222, 286, 288, 327; attacked physically, 293; canonical approval, 295, 312, 354; care for members, 549; constitutions, 13, 114-15, 151, 295, 318, 382, 393, 420, 426-27, 548; enemies, 180, 186, 194, 214, 343-44, 362, 364, 445, 571 [*See also* Gastaldi: hostility toward SS; Newspapers: attacks on DB or SS; Turin archdiocese]; enrollments, 8n, 19, 32, 44, 73, 79, 100, 144, 153, 377; expulsion from, 162; founded by royal family, 341; future of (dream of DB), 147-52; Gastaldi's opposition to ordinations, 174; gen. chapters, 115, 251, 350, 383, 393, 512; gen. directory, 295, 384; growth, 136, 151, 173, 240-64, 328, 351, 357, 360, 365-67, 409, 411, 476, 523; history, 354, 367, 370, 411, 518; hospital chaplaincy considered, 257-62; house chapter, 105, 427n; living quarters, 75, 103, 117-18, 130, 252, 266, 276-77, 280, 348, 384, 405-06, 440, 442; morale problems, 232, 234; non-profit organization, 37, 381-82; objectives, 270, 289, 342, 363, 370, 449; ordinations, 174, 352, 356, 475, 533, 552n; personnel problems, 2, 105, 241, 244, 248-50, 257, 275, 286, 334, 363-64, 511-12; promote the physical sciences, 20-21,

515-16; provincials responsible for well-being, 426; religious habit, 378, 384-85, 532; reputation, 144, 154, 160, 172-76, 178, 180, 186, 214-15, 228, 232-34, 267, 283-84, 286, 338, 343-45, 355, 362-63, 366-67, 369, 379, 409, 449, 475, 512, 516, 523, 569, 571; reward promised, 148-50; rights granted by Pius IX, 174, 352-53, 356; seal, 332; self-identity, 351; spiritual direction, 426; success, 34, 151; traditions, 150-51; transfer of personnel, 287, 379-82, 386, 548, 569; unity, 114, 351; war to feed boys and pay creditors, 508

Saluzzo, cl. Lawrence: DB's sec'y, 392-93

Salvation of souls: at stake in America, 523; and choice of vocation, 384-85, 532; DB's objective, 53, 76, 182, 259-60, 291, 302, 334, 347, 382n, 384-85, 434, 438, 440, 490, 494-99, 501-02, 504-07, 535, 538, 540, 550, 556, 560, 563-66, 568, 573; equivalent to God's glory, 6, 200, 245, 280-81, 322, 344, 354, 381-82, 384-85, 391, 404, 479, 564; missionary objective, 6, 13-16, 79, 402; objective of SC, 416; objective of SS, 179, 207, 215, 252, 287, 332, 449, 476, 494, 514-15, 534, 573; Salesians to look after their own souls, 6, 13-15, 79, 354, 384-85, 534, 573. *See also* Gastaldi: hindrance; Prayer, DB's

Sampierdarena: Albera at, 146-47, 397; DB at, 7, 109, 115-17, 162, 309-10, 315, 321, 334, 341, 419-20, 430-31, 433-35, 538-40; FMA at, 296-97; SS at, 6-7, 134, 270, 282, 321, 378-79, 391, 431, 434, 529, 535, 538, 540; Sons of Mary at, 475

San Benigno Canavese: DB at, 19, 62, 74, 84, 281, 352n, 361, 376-77, 389, 464, 512, 527, 537-41, 548-49, 552, 554, 558, 566; SS at, 84, 106, 136, 245, 384, 475, 533, 539, 569; novitiate, 79, 153, 383-85, 392, 452, 532, 561; retreats, 148, 170, 361, 376-77, 532, 538-39, 543, 558, 561, 566; Sal. school, 24, 26, 72-73, 80, 84, 97

San Carlos (Almagro), Argentina: SS at, 12, 114, 296, 510n, 513

San Nicolás de los Arroyos, Argentina: SS at, 12-14, 16, 339, 513-14

San Remo, Italy: DB at, 106, 109, 113-14

Sappa, coad. (missionary), 15

Sartena, Mrs. Amelia (teacher), 527

Sartorio, Louis (SC), 528

Savio, Fr. Angelo (Superior Chapter member), 344-48, 442, 553

Savona: scandal at, 110-11

Savoy, House of, 257, 273, 335-36, 372, 483

Schools: agricultural, 136, 415; boarding, 118, 241, 243, 248-49, 251, 257, 469, 557; Christian Bros., 342-43; private, 263n, 481-82, 553-57, 567; Protestant, 118, 257, 442; public, 110-11, 251-52, 256, 284, 449, 477; secularization of, 449; trade, 241, 246n, 251-52, 412, 414

Schools, Salesian, 20, 204, 252, 254-55, 258, 449; admissions, 30, 115, 283, 380, 455, 526; agricultural, 518, 521; awards ceremony, 141, 442; curriculum, 26;

*Schools, Salesian (continued)*
discipline, 115, 383; donations to CSH, 336, 339; enrollments, 18, 30, 36, 44, 121-22, 126, 136, 144, 169, 182, 184, 205, 254, 282, 328, 361, 380, 388, 418, 436-37, 441, 499, 514, 525, 527-28, 531, 539, 552; evening classes, 277, 332, 431; fees, 282, 342, 385; hospices, 129, 265, 274, 289, 336, 365-66, 377n, 385, 392, 398, 402-03, 437, 456, 469, 477, 481-82, 510, 513-16, 518-19, 528, 550; illnesses in, 90-91, 390, 513-14; morality in, 31, 115, 216, 480-81; orphanages, 36, 88, 99, 253, 406, 417, 490, 529, 554-55, 561; piety in, 15, 115; social classes of pupils, 144, 281, 332, 403; teachers, 100, 115, 136, 216, 398, 428, 456, 469, 477, 480-82; trade, 32, 75, 275, 282, 332, 366, 411, 420, 435, 437, 469, 511, 518. *See also* Seminaries: Salesian; individual cities
Sects, religious, 261, 280, 286, 293, 327, 372, 478-79
Seminaries: admission to, 470; Brazil, 518; dismissal from, 381-82; in Emilia-Romagna, 253, 283-84, 286-90, 453; Florence, 129, 282; funds for, 502; in Italy, 144, 188, 199; at Magliano Sabino, 450-51; at Padua, 567; Salesian, 32, 44, 73, 80, 84, 136, 144, 199, 204, 237, 367, 377, 400, 405, 427n, 435, 445, 450-51, 456, 475, 488; in Sicily, 242-43, 343, 355; at Toulouse, 412; of Turin, 144, 180, 188, 237, 324, 456, 533. *See also* Theology: study of
Sermons: topics for, 128, 149-52, 430
Sexual abuse: charges of, 111
Sicily: FMA in, 240, 244, 248, 250, 296, 304; SS in, 240-51, 287, 304, 532
Sigismondi family (SC), 50, 108, 427, 442-44
Skepticism about religion, 113
Sodality of St. Aloysius, 375n
Sons of Mary, 31-32, 72-73, 475
Sorasio, Fr. Michael (sec'y of Turin chancery), 202-03, 235-36
South America: character of the people, 522-23; Continental Exposition, 511; difficulties of communication, 360; DB urged to "forget" America, 243; DB's feelings for SS in, 511, 514-15, 518; FMA in, 136, 297; growth of Sal. work, 173, 204, 360, 377, 511, 513, 522-23; need of priests, 518, 521-23; new Sal. province, 19, 23, 515; retreats, 17, 24, 513; SC's support for Sal. work, 73, 77, 119; Sal. missions, 2n, 4-5, 144, 173, 197, 199, 204, 360, 400, 405, 500, 519-20, 523. *See also* Cagliero, Fr. John; Costamagna; Lasagna; Missionaries; Missions; Patagonia; individual countries
Spain: and CSH, 271-72; DB in, 78-79, 493, 505; land of saints, 267; language, 272; politics, 270, 460-61; SS in, 2, 5n, 7, 31, 119, 204, 265-71, 273-74, 340, 459; youth of, 270
Spiritual reading, 504
Strenna for 1883, 572-73
Superior Chapter (FMA), 296, 298, 453n
Superior Chapter (SS): and Bonetti settlement, 228; and Cremona, 479-80; election of provincials, 11, 13; and Louvet, 508; manner of ex-

ercising authority, 468-69; meeting at Sampierdarena, 115; and the missions, 475, 512-13; opening new works, 241, 243, 245, 276, 283, 285-87, 363; praises Borio, 398n; and retreats, 373, 377n
Superiors, religious: relations with, 7, 19
Suspension: DB threatened with, 158, 179, 202, 210; Orioli suspended, 467; threat removed from DB, 222, 224, 230-31

## T

Tamietti, Fr. John Baptist (dir. at Este), 390, 444, 447, 550-51, 575
Taroni, Fr. Paul (SC), 283-84, 286-90
Teaching: weapon against heresy, 118
Teresa of Avila, St., 187, 267, 274
Testimonial letters, 352-53, 356
Theology: study of, 368-69, 393, 412n, 427n, 445, 447, 456, 475, 533
Tierra del Fuego, 6, 31, 84, 509
Tomasi, Count (government official), 124-25
Tomatis, Fr. Dominic (dir. at San Nicolás), 12, 19, 339-40, 513-15
Torazza, Fr. Matthew (teacher at Alassio), 110
Tor de' Specchi (Rome), 108, 118, 126-27, 332, 427, 443, 448
Toulon: DB at, 45-47, 57, 77, 92-94, 108, 415-17
Toulouse: DB at, 409-14, 428-29
Tournier, Canon Clément (biographer), 410-14
Trabucco, Caesar (count of Castagnetto), 371-73
Turchi, Fr. John (alumnus), 191, 236-38, 316
Turin: artists, 308-10, 314; churches, 140, 155, 259-60, 263, 311-13, 326, 404n, 484 [*See also* Church of Mary, Help of Christians; Church of St. Francis de Sales; Church of St. John the Evangelist]; FMA at, 136, 405, 487-89, 491-92, 496, 560; growth, 258-59; heavenly patrons, 322, 412-13; municipal government, 195-96, 201, 245, 262n, 311, 314, 365-66, 530; need for new hospital, 258-64; people of, 6, 273, 310, 312, 314, 319-20, 325, 342, 371, 374-75, 412, 443, 501, 529-31, 542, 554; Sal. works in, 270
Turin, archdiocese of: claims victory in Bonetti case, 232; and controversial pamphlets, 189-90, 193, 201, 222, 224, 230; former harmony with DB, 224; Francesia rebuked by, 216; hostility toward DB, 173, 195-96, 201, 233-34, 236-38, 352, 372; lawsuit against DB, 154, 156, 161, 194, 196, 203-04, 206-08, 211, 223-35, 238; and priestly faculties, 131, 156, 163, 221-22, 224, 316-17, 319, 459; liturgical calendar, 131-32, 187; and publications, 164, 225, 234; synod, 172-73

## U

Ubaldi, Fr. Paul (professor), 255
Uguccioni, Countess Girolama (SC), 117, 274, 279-82, 441
Ulloa, Marquis Diego (SC), 107, 265-68, 270, 272

Unia, Fr. Michael (missionary), 473-76
*Unità Cattolica*, 3n, 5-6, 10, 140-41, 188, 209, 232, 261n, 262n, 319, 329n, 372, 429n, 449n, 465n
Universities and colleges: Catholic, 196n, 255, 262, 382, 398, 411; secular, 144, 309, 321
Uruguay: bishops, 17, 21, 24-25, 310, 515; FMA in, 135, 296, 304, 516; SS in, 2-3, 7, 9, 16-17, 20-21, 23-24, 135, 271n, 515-16
Utrera, Spain: economy, 266; municipal government, 266-67; people of, 266, 272; SS at, 5, 265-69, 272-74, 459, 546

## V

Vacation, summer, 288-89, 321, 377n, 532
Vacchina, Fr. Bernard (missionary), 2
Vallauri, Fr. Peter (friend of DB), 5
Vallecrosia: DB at, 103-06, 477-78; FMA at, 300, 365; SS at, 80, 103, 114, 119, 124, 135, 169, 365, 573
Valsalice College (Turin): Colles visit, 97; DB at, 54, 78-79, 97, 99, 372-73, 495-96, 507, 566; feasts, 208-09, 324; and Gastaldi, 134, 154-55, 167n, 208-09, 215-16, 219; retreats, 78-79, 507, 566; shrine to MHC, 553; sisters' chaplaincy, 556-57; students, 556
Varazze: SS at, 21, 106, 109, 477
Vatican Council I, 447
Ventimiglia: SS at, 119, 126, 409, 494
Verga, Abp. (sec'y of COC), 156, 166, 168, 201, 232n
Vernon Bonneuil, Marchioness (SC), 464
Veronesi, Fr. Ralph (vicar forane of Montebudello), 438-39
Vespignani, Fr. Ernest (architect), 12
Vespignani, Count Francis (Roman architect), 116, 333, 344-45, 348-49, 443
Vespignani, Fr. Joseph (missionary), 12, 17, 510n, 512
Viancino, Count of (SC), 52-53
Vice-director, office of, 114-15, 426
Vices: alcoholism, 22-23; avarice, 431-34, 437-40; comfort, 150; extravagance, 64; fickleness, 151; gluttony, 150; materialism, 128; neglect of duty, 150; pleasure, 135; pride, 468; scurrility, 150; self-gratification, 59, 128, 149-50; sloth, 150; tartness, 307; theft, 150; vanity, 137, 307; violence, 22-23; worldliness, 475
Victor Emmanuel II (king of Italy), 261n, 273, 335
Viglietti, Fr. Charles (DB's sec'y), 77, 343n, 557
Villeneuve family (SC), 43, 98, 139, 341, 408
Violence among Indians, 22-23
Virtues, Christian: almsgiving encouraged by DB, 128-29, 135-37, 335, 367, 409, 418, 430-40, 501-03, 539; almsgiving practiced by benefactors, 425, 433-34, 436, 502; atonement, 413; charity, 126, 339, 404-05, 407, 416, 421, 429n, 442, 464, 484, 487-97, 499-500, 507-08, 519, 523-26, 535, 538, 540, 544, 550, 561, 565; faith, 405, 413, 424, 463, 501, 524; fervor, 392; fortitude, 405, 524; frankness, 434, 524; generosity, 6,

48-49, 402, 408-09, 413, 418, 420, 436-37, 440; gratitude, 459-60, 462-63, 466, 468, 508, 522; hope, 389, 523; humility, 335, 524; integrity, 545n; joy, 524; justice, 545n; kindness, 377, 564; obedience, 392; patience, 431, 506-07, 524, 551; peace, 405; performance of duty, 392; piety, 377, 459, 484, 524, 544; poverty, 501, 503; practiced at the Oratory, 370, 468; prudence, 551; purity, 392, 449, 524; self-denial, 405, 524; wisdom, 289, 429n; work and prayer, 448-49; zeal, 405, 523. *See also* Colle, Louis: virtues; Colle family: virtues; Providence, Divine: trust in

Virtues, DB's: candor, 71, 75, 84-85, 231, 484, 529-30; charity, 27, 37, 45-46, 239, 314, 338, 380, 399; charm, 6, 117, 303, 372-73, 420; cheerfulness, 111, 371; common sense, 200, 345; confidence, 569; consideration for others, 49-50, 79, 341, 398, 408-09, 472, 478, 491, 526, 564; courage, 239; courtesy, 314, 344; detachment, 207; determination, 169, 352, 380, 429; faith, 31-32, 87, 130, 544; fatherliness, 105, 367, 384, 391-94, 427-28, 454-55, 468, 487, 511, 514, 548-49, 572; friendship, 534-42, 544; gentleness, 145, 454; gratitude to confreres, 573; gratitude to God, 30, 43-44, 47, 51, 74, 90-91, 99, 230, 293, 322, 334, 341, 405-06, 425-26, 441, 443, 464, 488, 494, 528-29, 548, 550, 556, 566; gratitude to Mary, 91, 99, 494, 556, 568; gratitude to SC, 30, 45, 51, 73-74, 76-78, 80, 84, 86-87, 91-92, 102, 142-43, 179, 184, 267, 277, 281, 287, 290, 292, 303, 338, 340, 360-61, 363, 376-78, 380, 382, 385-89, 402, 405, 409, 439, 465, 479, 484, 487-501, 505-06, 524-30, 547, 549, 551, 558, 560-66, 568, 573; holy impatience, 346; hope, 77; hospitality, 91-92, 376, 386, 484-85, 491, 527, 529, 539, 541-42, 546, 560, 567; humility, 40-41, 53-54, 76, 86, 114, 141, 231-33, 239, 259, 403, 405, 411, 417, 422, 456, 505; kindness, 105, 429, 451, 487; liturgical spirit, 314; measured strength, 145; modesty, 258, 382, 428, 446; mortification, 412; obedience, 168, 175, 181, 198, 229, 231-33; optimism, 360; patience, 112, 174-75, 179-80, 232-33, 321, 324, 483, 507, 552-53; piety, 45; poverty, 54, 314; prudence, 111-12, 163-64, 178, 225, 263, 326, 329, 347, 372, 483, 551; purity of intention, 76; respect for civil authority, 125, 259, 261; reverence for Church authority, 169, 175, 178, 210, 222, 224, 228-30, 239, 262, 283, 321, 323-24, 353-54, 359-61, 447, 541; reverence for the Pope, 4, 72, 81, 110, 125, 168, 172-75, 178, 182, 198, 204-05, 207, 210, 219-20, 226-29, 262-63, 354, 360, 363, 369, 418, 446, 459, 520-21, 569; sacrifice, 181; self-confidence, 314; sense of humor, 31n, 37, 51, 53, 109-10, 261, 350, 371-72, 374-75, 382, 385, 412, 489, 502-03, 526, 537, 541, 546, 554, 559-60, 569; serenity, 331, 346-47, 352, 403, 412, 421; simplicity, 6, 409, 411,

*Virtues, DB's (continued)*
454, 484, 539; submission to God, 142; sympathy, 388-89, 551; tenderness, 45; trust in God, 201, 217, 268, 292, 395-96, 400-01, 506, 522; trust in men, 164, 276, 540; zeal, 259-60, 263-64, 430
Virtues, religious: among the Christian Bros., 342-43; among the FMA, 297-98, 300, 307; metaphor for, 307; poverty, chastity, and obedience, 347, 431, 572-73
Virtues, Salesian: charity, 11, 118, 148, 150, 347, 449, 476, 533, 572; chastity, 148-50, 347, 572-73; cheerfulness, 103, 267, 384; courage, 43; faith, 148, 150; fasting, 148-50; friendliness, 243; good will, 43; gratitude, 377, 514-15; hope, 148, 150; hospitality, 339; humility, 469; joy, 468; kindness, 11, 243, 468, 533, 570, 573; "light," 11, 43; manliness, 267; obedience, 15, 17, 148-50, 347, 379, 393, 572-73; patience, 11, 358, 362, 364, 533, 552, 570; perseverance, 43, 533-34; piety, 14, 16, 31, 384, 469, 522, 543-45; poverty, 103, 117, 148-50, 169-70, 347, 383, 406, 572-73; prudence, 312, 354; reverence for the Pope, 3, 205, 216, 219, 226-28, 231, 233, 304; sacrifice, 16; "salt," 11; sense of humor, 572; study, 14, 16; temperance, 16-17, 148-50, 383; tranquility, 550; trust in God, 390, 550-51; wisdom in speech, 43; work, 7, 11, 15-16, 148-50, 383-84, 420, 570; zeal, 517, 519, 522
Vitelleschi family (SC), 108, 252, 342
Vocations: discernment of, 297, 299, 306, 532-33, 568-69; in France, 32, 52; missionary, 31-32, 44, 521; perseverance, 17, 384-85; priestly, 32, 122, 199, 304n, 309, 405, 469-71, 475, 521, 526, 531-32; religious, 233-34, 297, 304n, 306, 367, 377, 384-85, 503, 545n; Salesian, 398, 422, 455, 472-74, 521, 532-34; in Turin, 32
Vows: consecration to God, 347, 572-73; dispensation from, 28; perpetual, 296, 392; profession of, 19, 170; simple, 318, 358; triennial, 296

## W

Waldensians, 169, 256-57, 311
Will of God, 227, 291-92, 300, 379, 381, 385, 387-89, 403, 415, 428, 431, 460, 495, 523, 529, 556
Women: DB's reserve with, 299, 486; importance of their cooperation, 289, 335, 486, 525
Working classes, 270-71, 274-75, 303, 332, 403-04, 473
World: danger of the, 306, 370, 384-85, 506

## Y

Youth, DB the father and teacher of: examples in action, 91, 289, 310, 336, 384-85, 435, 444, 454-55, 471, 567; exhortations to SC, 71, 119, 322, 332, 404, 418, 420, 423, 431, 435, 490, 492, 507, 529, 555; held up as public example, 34, 309, 327, 367, 370, 429n, 440; public relations on behalf of y., 36-37, 342, 402