

---

# **Journal of Salesian Studies**

---

*Spring 1990*

---

**Volume I**

**Number 1**

**Institute of Salesian Studies  
Berkeley, California, USA**

## ESSAY REVIEW

Arthur Lenti, SDB

**MEMOIRS OF THE ORATORY OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES FROM 1815 TO 1855: *The Autobiography of Saint John Bosco***, Translated by Daniel Lyons, SDB, With notes and commentary by Eugenio Ceria, SDB; Lawrence Castelvechi, SDB; and Michael Mendi, SDB. New Rochelle, New York: Don Bosco Publications, 1989. (lxv+478 pp.; cloth edition, 22.5 x 13.5 cm; 8.75 x 5.5 in.).

NOTE: All references are to this edition. **Ceria-MO** refers to: [*Giovanni Bosco*], *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1955*, ed. Eugenio Ceria, SDB. Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1946. **EBM** refers to: *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco* by Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, S.D.B. An American Edition Translated from the Original Italian, Diego Borgatello, S.D.B., Editor-in-chief. New Rochelle, New York: Salesiana Publishers, Inc., 1966 and ff.

The *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, authored by Don Bosco in mid-1870s remained for a long time unpublished in conformity with his own wishes. The reasons adduced were finally set aside in 1946, when Fr. Eugenio Ceria brought out a fine Italian edition from the original manuscripts, with an introduction and abundant notes. This remained the only edition of this capital work in print, until the revival of Salesian studies in our times. Recent editions in Spanish, French, German, Italian and other languages have since appeared.

The long awaited English-language edition of Don Bosco's *Memoirs* is now a reality. It is an extensively annotated and scholarly edition, one that is bound to become a basic resource for Salesian studies. Thanks are due to Don Bosco Publications of New Rochelle, New York; and in a

special manner to Fr. Lyons for a flowing translation of the original text, and to Fr. Mendl and his predecessors for a superb set of notes and comments--truly, overall, a work of excellence.

Its many features will be appreciated by scholar and lay person alike. A foreword by Fr. Egidio Viganò (p. xi-xix) is followed by a substantial introduction (p. xxi-lv) and a set of maps and charts. The text, with extensive notes and comments after each section, and illustrated by no less than thirty-four plates, takes up the largest portion of the book (p. 1-426). The book closes with additional useful features--a postscript sketching out the further development of the Salesian work (p. 429-434); a basic chronology and two other appendices (p.437-450); an excellent, select bibliography on various areas of Salesian studies, with an additional section on nineteenth-century Italy in English (p. 453-460); and a set of very good indexes that provide references to practically everything in the book but periods and commas (461-478).

#### THE TEXT IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Don Bosco's style and use of language possess a charming quality all their own for their simplicity and lack of artifice; but his frequent rough-hewn sentences and colloquially phrased passages, in addition to the syntactical complexities inherent to Italian style, must have aggravated the trials of the translator. Our translator, however, while sensitive to the mood of Don Bosco's text, has consistently succeeded in avoiding the pitfall of literalism and has produced a flowing translation that reads as good English prose should. The following passage is a good example:

*On December 8, 1844, a day dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the long-awaited chapel was blessed, with the archbishop's permission. It was a bitterly cold day. There was deep snow, and it was still snowing heavily. Holy Mass was celebrated, and many youngsters went to confession and communion. I finished that sacred liturgy with a few tears, tears of joy, because in a certain way I saw that the work of the Oratory was now established... [p. 217]*

*Pertanto l'anno 1844, il giorno 8 Dicembre, sacro all'Immacolato Concepimento di Maria, coll'autorizzazione dell'Arcivescovo, per un tempo freddissimo, in mezzo ad alta neve, che ancora cadeva fitta dal cielo, fu benedetta la sospirata cappella, si celebrò la santa messa, parecchi giovanetti fecero la loro confessione e comunione, ed io compii quella sacra funzione con un tributo di lacrime di consolazione, perchè vedeva in modo, che parevami stabile, l'opera dell'Oratorio... [Ceria-MO, p. 141f.]*

Unfortunately, even a hasty comparison reveals that in numerous instances perfect fidelity to the original is wanting. It's usually a question of small details; and perhaps, the overall quality of the text is not thereby affected. But one would expect that, dealing with Don Bosco's own *Memoirs*, a translator should give attention to even the smallest detail.

In the first place, in sentences where there is an accumulation of two or more items, the order of one or the other of these has at times been changed. This, I will admit, is of no great consequence; but there is no apparent reason for this procedure (unless it be that of obtaining a more flowing rhythm). The following references indicate the chief instances:

page 28, line 19; / p. 29, l. 21; / p. 84, l. 11; / p. 146, l. 15; / p. 209, l. 19; / p. 221, l. 3 & 29; / p. 269, l. 17; / p. 297, l. 21; / p. 303, l. 15; / p. 324, l. 18 & 35; / p. 362, l. 17; / p. 377, l. 29; / p. 401, l. 20; / p. 408, l. 28.

In the second place (and this is of greater consequence) numerous omissions have taken place; that is, concepts that are clearly expressed in the original do not appear in the translation. The following instances may be noted. (A reference to the English text is given together with the Italian word or phrase in question.)

page 33, line 35: *irti*; / p. 35, l. 38: *schietto*; / p. 49, l. 34: *di molte cose*; p. / 79, l. 11: *e percuotere*; / p. 90, l. 1: *dall'amica*; / p. 98, l. 4: *tarocchi*; / p. 98, l. 19: *qualunque argomento*; / p. 132, l. 33: *con molto gusto*; / p. 134, l. 19: *un eccitamento al bene*; / p. 147, l. 11: *Festa della pignatta*; / p. 147, l. 12: *a pranzo*; / p. 166, l. 40: *Durante quella messa egli pianse sempre di commozione*; / p. 175, l. 10: *In paese poi cominciavano pure a farsi compagni ed amici*; / p. 175, l. 18: *e collega*; / p. 177, l. 27: *Non ci fu riguardo che non mi fosse usato*; / p. 209, l. 13: *assai ben messa*; / p. 229, l. 4: *se gli mise attorno*; / p. 252, l. 16: *col dovuto rigardi*; / p. 267, l. 9: *rispondere*; / p. 324, l. 25: *mutande*; / p. 417, l. 3: *il giorno appresso*; / p. 420, l. 12: *soletto*.

In the third place, numerous instances of inaccurate translation can be cited. These may be put down to inadvertence or, at least in some instances, to a failure to construe the original text correctly. The following list will perhaps show the extent and the seriousness of this failure.

[p. 8] "a crust of bread" for *crusca* (bran [husk, chaff]); / [p. 9] "the crisis of that year" for *crisi annonaria* (crisis in food supplies, agricultural crisis); "but this was not easy" for *ma era assai impacciata* ([my mother] felt very uneasy [because of the distance]); / [p. 18] "fairly large yard" for *cortile assai spazioso* (very large yard); / "stopped their laughing" for *cessando dalle risse* (stopped their fighting); / [p. 29] "got myself out of a tight sack" for *cingermi la bisaccia* (tied the pouch [where the equipment was kept] around my waist); / [p. 36] "I'll keep you and your schooling in mind" for *penserò a te e al tuo studio* (I'll provide for you and your schooling); / "completely" for *tosto* (quickly, promptly); / [p. 41] "I should go to school in the morning and work in the fields in the afternoon" for *io sarei andato al mattino per tempo a scuola e il rimanente del giorno avrei impiegato in lavori materiali* (I should go to school early in the morning and work in

the fields the rest of the day); / [p. 47] "the more successful they are" for *tanto più grati ci riescono* (the more satisfying do they turn out to be for us); / "our pastimes" for *le nostre novità* (for us the new attractions); / [p. 48] "as I used to talk with Fr. Calosso. Why shouldn't it be so?" for *Questo conforto l'ebbi con D. Calosso; che nol possa più avere?* (I had such a comforting experience with Fr. Calosso. Shall I never have it again?); / [p. 49] "I faced some drawbacks" for *furono per me uno sconcerto* (this was for me a disconcerting experience); / "I could take the stage to accompany him" for *poteti montare sull'orchestra e fare parti obbligate* (I could go up to the choir loft and sing the solo [obbligato] parts); / "I like to think I became a master tailor" for *mi pareva di essere divenuto un valente capo sarto* (I fancied myself already a master tailor); / [p. 50] "many of the boys' relatives" for *parenti di giovanetti signori* (relatives of well-to-do youngsters); / [p. 60] "One raised in the backwoods finds plenty of novelties to wonder at in even a small country village" for *Per chi è allevato tra boschi, e appena ha veduto qualche paesello di provincia, prova grande impressione di ogni piccola novità* (One who is raised in the backwoods and has never seen anything beyond a few small country towns is [easily] impressed by any little novelty [to be found in a larger city]); / "She used to stay in the city" for *che si recava in quella città* (she moved to the city); / "would correspond to the first year of ginnasio" for *corrisponderebbe alla classe preparatoria alla 1<sup>a</sup> ginnasiale* (would correspond to the class preparatory to the first year of ginnasio); / [p. 68] "to come to me for help because I did them the kindness" for *a far ricorso a me, perchè facessi la carità* (to come to me with the request that I do them the kindness); / [p. 72] "to go to confession and communion more often" for *a confessarmi e comunicarmi colla maggior frequenza* (...as often as possible); / "On autumn weekdays" for *nelle ferie autunnali* (at [the beginning of] the fall [=summer] holidays); / [78] "At that time it was common practice to initiate new students through a dangerous game called cavallina" for *Da quel tempo era già in uso il pericoloso gioco della cavallina*, in *tempo d'ingresso nella scuola* (At that time it was already the students' practice to play the dangerous game of cavallina while waiting to go in for classes); / [p. 79] "I am amazed how strong you are" for *la tua forza mi spaventa* (your strength frightens me); / [p. 99] "my audiences got frightened and even lost their heads" for *o si faceva comparire l'udienza intera di orribile aspetto ed anche senza teste* (or I caused [the people in] the audience to take on a monstrous appearance or even to appear headless); / "to embarrass him thoroughly" for *per fargliene di tutti i colori* (to play all sorts of tricks on him); / [p. 111] "not even a word that could be considered impolite" for *[non] una sola parola che fosse contro ai buoni costumi* (non a single word that could be regarded as immoral); / [p. 122] "Could such people, such society ever identify with one who...?" for *quella gente, quale società poteva mai formare con uno, che...?* (what association could those people have with one who...?); / [p. 131] "The rector and the other superiors usually saw us ..." for *il rettore a gli altri superiori solevano visitarsi...* [It was customary to go see the rector and the other superiors...]; / [p. 140] "I spent a lot of time reading and writing; but not knowing how to organize myself properly, I got little out of it. I tried different kinds of handicrafts as well." for *Io impiegava il tempo a leggere, a scrivere; ma non sapendo ancora trar partito dalle mie giornate, ne perdeva molte senza frutto. Cercava di ammazzarle con qualche lavoro meccanico.* ([During the holidays] I spent my time reading and writing; but not having as yet learnt how to use my days to good advantage, I wasted many of them in fruitless endeavor. I tried to kill time by working

at handicrafts.); / [p. 144] "but I could not get the words out" for *ma la mia voce fu soffocata* (but my voice was drowned out [by the din]); / [p. 145] "I felt awful! I did not know how to get out of it." for *Miserabile! Non seppi rifutarmi* (The wretch [the coward] that I was! I did not have it in me to say no); / "they were admiring the dead hare" for *rallegravano per quella preda* (were overjoyed at the kill); / [p. 146] "When I was with him, I modeled myself on his conduct" for *quando era con lui mi sforzava di imitarlo in qualche cosa* (Whenever I was with him, I made an effort to imitate some [special] aspect of his virtuous life); / [p. 151] "and frankly, I treated it lightly enough" for *e confesso che ci fu molta leggerezza* (and I admit that it was an irresponsible thing to do); / [p. 165] "attempting something almost impossible" for *tentare cosa che in quel tempo rarissimamente si otteneva* (attempting something for which at that time one was rarely given permission); / [p.166] "in the summer I would be ordained a priest" for *alle tempora estive doveva essere ordinato sacerdote* (on the Ember Days of summer I would be ordained a priest); / "for many a day" for *da molti anni* (for many a year); / "as my greatest benefactor" for *come grande ed insigne benefattore* (as a great and signal benefactor); / "he assisted me" for *mi attendeva* (he was waiting for me); / [p. 167] "took part in the procession" for *fecit la processione* (I officiated at the procession); / "people of standing in the vicinity" for *i principali del paese* (people of standing in the town); / "they were all glad that everything had turned out well for me" for *ognuno godeva di tutto quello, che avesse potuto tornare a mio bene* (everyone rejoiced in anything that would redound to my good); / [p. 175] "certificates of poverty, and so on." for *certificati di povertà o di altro genere* (certificates of poverty or other kinds of certificates); / "As I had a certain facility" for *Avendo molta facilità* [As I had great facility]; / "determined to win glory from it" for *persuaso di acquistarne gloria* (certain to win glory from it); / [p. 176] "Many a spill I have had going to fairs" for *Oh quante me ne sono accadute andando alle fiere* (Many an adventure I have had going to fairs); / [p. 182] "Fr. Caffasso [...] was especially my spiritual director" for *D. Caffasso [...] fu eziandio mio direttore spirituale* (Fr. Caffasso was also my spiritual director [besides being lecturer]); / "It was he who first took me" for *Per prima cosa egli prese a condurmi* (The first thing he did was to take me); / [p. 187] "You little brat" for *Bestione che sei* (You big blockhead); / [p. 197] "then only lads" for *allora semplici garzoni* (then mere laborers [apprentices]); / "The noisy excitement of the feast can be imagined" for *Ognuno può immaginarsi quanto rumore eccitasse quella festa* (Anyone can imagine the stir that feast caused [the interest it aroused]); / [p. 198] "to meet the youngsters" for *coltivare i giovanetti* (to give special attention to the youngsters); / [p. 202] "or at work" for *ed ovunque ne fosse mestieri* (and wherever there was need of it); / "up to the end of October 1844" for *fino all'ottobre del 1844* (up to October 1844); / [p. 204] "whose...neglect made increasing demands on priests" for *[il] cui abbandono richiamava sempre di più l'attenzione dei sacerdoti* (whose...neglect was coming more and more to the priests' attention [of whose neglect the priest were becoming increasingly more aware]); / [p. 220] "Our chapel... was coming along nicely" for *Nella cappella... l'Oratorio prendeva ottimo avviamento* (At the chapel... the Oratory was coming along nicely); / "It is true that the area we had been using had no internal communication with what was to be the chapel, the school or the recreation center" for *È vero che il locale destinato a cappella, a scuola o a ricreazione dei giovani non aveva alcuna comunicazione coll'interno dello stabilimento* (It is true that the area we had been using as chapel, class rooms and the youngsters' recreation had no communication of any sort with the interior of the establishment

[hospital]); / "St Martin of the Mills, or rather, to the public mills" for *S. Martino dei Molazzi, ovvero dei Molini di città* (St. Martin at the Mill-complex, that is to say, [St. Martin] at the public mills); / [p. 221] "with laughter and din and misgivings" for *fra gli schiamazzi, il riso ed il rincrescimento* (amid din, laughter and regret); / "who enjoyed a popularity more unique than rare" for *con una popolarità che si può chiamare piuttosto unica che rara* (in that common-folk style of his that was more unique than rare); / [p. 222] "He added, finally, that..." for *Si giunse fino a dire che...* ([He [they] went so far as to say...]); / [p. 223] "which was open at that time in Valdocco" for *che si aprì di poi in Valdocco* (which was later opened in Valdocco); / [p. 229] "An undisciplined rabble" for *tutta fior di canaglia* (all of them rascals of the purest water); / [p. 233] "anxious about the location" for *angustiati pel locale* (confined in that [restricted] space); / "are not regular members of parishes" for *non turbano la frequenza alle parrocchie* (do not upset [affect adversely] parish church attendance); / [p. 234] "threatening to withhold their rent" for *dichiarando di smettersi tutti dalla pigione* (telling [him] that they would all together quit their rented quarters [and leave]); / [p. 239] "on a hillock" for *sopra una riva* (on an embankment); / [p. 244] "bordered on foolishness" for *andava alla follia* (bordered on folly [exceeded all bounds]); / [p. 265] "renewed the faculty... to certify that all those who regularly attended our programme had fulfilled their Easter duty" for *rinnovò la facoltà... di poter eziandio soddisfare al precetto pasquale a tutti quelli che avessero frequentata la nostra Istituzione* (renewed the faculty... for all those that attended our institution [the oratory] to fulfill their Easter duty); / [p. 266] "the geographical names and their locations" for *dei nomi geografici dei loro confronti* (the [ancient] geographical names and their [modern] counterpart); / [p. 269] "When we would reach the Rondò, we would sing a verse" for *Fatta la salita del Rondò, si cantava ancora qualche strofa* (When we had walked up the incline to the Rondò, we would sing a few more verses); / [p. 276] "maintained that our assemblies had dangerous aims" for *pretendeva che avessero fine i nostri assembramenti che egli chiamava pericolosi* (demanded that our assemblies, which he claimed were dangerous, come to an end); / [p. 278] "you'll give me an account of what's coming up in the future" for *voi mi darete conto di quanto sarà per avvenire* (you shall render an account [be held responsible] for anything [any disorder] that might happen); / [p. 281] "for some years" for *quasi degli anni* (for years even); / [p. 291] "everything was provided for them" for *ogni cosa fu acconciata e loro somministrata* (everything was prepared [cooked] and given [served] to them); / "I was exhausted and took to my bed" for *fui preso da sfinimento, portato a letto* (I collapsed [had a fainting spell] and was carried to my bed); / [p. 297] "millet... grain" for *meliga... grano* (corn [maize]... wheat); / "towels" for *tovaglie* (table [altar] cloths); / [p. 313] "a stable was prepared" for *avevati preparato un fienile* (a hay loft had been prepared); / [p. 314] "a big sack" for *un saccone* (a straw mattress [paillasse]); / "So passed 1847" for *Correva l'anno 1847* (This was during 1847); / [p. 315] "The renowned musicians... came... to help at my lessons" for *I famosi Maestri... venivano... ad assistere... le mie lezioni* (The renowned musicians... attended my lessons [as observers]); / [p. 323] "the outcome of which nobody could foresee" for *il cui scioglimento non si può ancora prevedere* (the outcome of which cannot as yet be foreseen); / [p. 325] "Castelnuovo, my native country" for *Castelnuovo, mia patria* (C., my native town); / [p. 339] "we began to give recitals" for *si cominciarono a fare funzioni* (we began to hold services [to sing at church services]); / "public performances" for *pubbliche funzioni* (public [church] services); / "Since choirs of boy sopranos with orchestral accompaniment

had not often been heard up till then" for *perciocchè non essendosi fino allora uditi cori di voci argentine sulle orchestre* (Since choirs of boy sopranos had not been heard on choir lofts [in churches] up till then); / [p. 340] "gave rise to rumors" for *facevano gran rumore* (were much talked about); / [p. 346] "he judged it better" for *giudicò bene* (he thought it a good thing to do [he thought he would]); / [p. 561] "It's time we finish with this rubbish" for *È tempo di finirla con questi rugiadosi* (It's time to have done with these sentimental [dewy-eyed] snobs); / [p. 366] "Convinced that..." for *essendomi accorto...* (realizing that...); / [p. 372] "flowed therefrom all day long" for *succedevansi nel corso della giornata* (rose in [endless] succession throughout the day); / [p. 373] "I was able to become manager of the premises" for *poteti diventare arbitro del locale* (I was able to have control [I gained control] of the premises); / [p. 386] "Many buildings... were shaken, and serious damage was reported from it [the explosion]" for *Molti edifizii... vennero scossi, e ne riportarono grave danno* (Many buildings... were shaken and were seriously damaged); / [p. 392] "the danger, as one can imagine" for *il pericolo, che s'immaginava* (the danger [the cause of] which could be guessed); / [p. 393] "we feared that everything lay flattened" for *si temeva che tutti rimanessero schiacciati* (we feared that everyone would be crushed); / [p. 412] "It [the wine] won't hurt you" for *Non le spiacerà* (You won't find it unpleasant [you'll like it]); / [p. 413] "Let's go right away to see the sick man" for *andremo tosto a prevenire l'ammalato* (we'll go [up] at once to tell the sick man); / [p. 416] "I was standing at the fence that we had put up in the Oratory courtyard" for *io stava sulla cancellata che metteva nel cortile dell'Oratorio* (I was standing at the gate that gave access to the Oratory courtyard); / [p. 417] "I had figured out their game right away, namely to jump me" for *Indovinai tosto il gioco, che consisteva nel farmi la festa* (I figured out their game right away, which was to do me in); / "In a moment" for *in quel momento* (At that moment [in that predicament]); / [p. 420] "they suddenly jumped me from behind,... and threw a cloak over my head." for *facendo improvvisamente due salti indietro,... mi gettarono un matello nella faccia* (they took two quick leaps back [in my direction], and threw a cloak up against my face); / [p. 421] "Either eat or drink or otherwise entertain me" for *O mangiare, or bere, o altrimenti stammi allegro* (either eat or drink or otherwise good-bye!).

Other less significant flaws could be pointed out, such as additions to the text (few in number) and the penchant for paraphrasing even when it does not appear to have been required by good English prose style. But, when all is said and done, all the above-mentioned imperfections put together do not seem seriously to affect the basic soundness of the English translation.

## THE COMMENTARY--INTRODUCTION, NOTES AND COMMENTS

In his Introduction Fr. Michael Mendl writes:

The extensive commentary offered here corrects errors of fact; clarifies the now-distant memories of our Salesian beginnings and makes them more intelligible to the new generations who did not live with Don Bosco; explains various points of Italian history, geography, or culture;



familiarizes the general public with matters of Saint John Bosco's and the Salesians' history, spirituality and methodology that the Salesians themselves take for granted; and identifies Catholic practices for readers who may not be familiar to them [p. xxxi].

Fr. Mendl's commentary accomplishes all these aims and more. We have before us a scholarly, yet extremely readable and interesting, work. It is massive more than it is extensive for, within the compass of a little more than 200 small pages, the author has assembled, from the sources and from the most reliable literature available, a wealth of material that beautifully elucidates Don Bosco's text from every conceivable point of view. One may argue, and perhaps disagree, about the amount of attention given to, and the emphases placed on, any of the commentary's areas of concern; but there is no denying the fact that the author has given us a scholarly, yet manageable tool that will serve every category of readers well.

The *Introduction* incorporates the substance of Fr. Ceria's original introduction of 1946. In addition [p. xxxv-liii] it presents a handy and well conceived historical summary, covering the period of the liberal revolutions and of the Italian *Risorgimento*, to serve as a background to the "story" told in the *Memoirs*.

The *Notes* that follow each short chapter, or section of text, provide an abundant commentary designed to illuminate every aspect of it and to help the reader to understand it in context. Again, they incorporate the best of Fr. Ceria's notes of 1846 and, I suppose, also Fr. Castelveccchi's contribution. But, as they lie, one can see that Fr. Mendl has greatly extended the work of his predecessors. These notes are a veritable mine of information, and the reader will be greatly rewarded for working this mine diligently. They are of various kinds and designed to serve various purposes. There are text-critical notes to inform the reader of particular problems in the original manuscripts. There are historical critical notes discussing disputed points and correcting inaccurate dates, chronology and sequence of events in the life of Don Bosco. There is an abundance of geographical information given at every step, so that every geographical reference in the text is elucidated. There are notes that provide useful information on the culture of the times and of the people involved. There are abundant and detailed historical notes, that discuss relevant aspects of contemporary events. Biographical sketches of important, and even of some secondary persons mentioned in the *Memoirs* are provided. Religious, social and other practices are carefully explained. The author's meticulous concern in such areas as local geography or Catholic devotional practices may appear exaggerated; but some readers will appreciate this information and the labor entailed in such a research.

One useful and important feature of the book are the fourteen separate *Comments*, inserted into the notes apparatus [cf. *Table of Contents*, p. viiff.]. These are substantial essays on special persons or topics. The

Notes already contained fairly extended sketches on many persons and topics. (cf., e.g., Rosmini, p. 366f.) But apparently the ones awarded a comment were thought deserving of separate and more extended treatment. And rightly so, generally speaking--though the choice of subject for a separate comment, as well as the extent of its treatment, seems to have been largely a matter of subjective judgment. For instance, a separate comment is devoted to Catholicism and Judaism (p. 96f.), which seems to be motivated by an apologetic concern; one to Camillo Cavour (p. 310ff.), which bears no clear relationship to the matter at hand; and one (the most extended of all) to the "Fall outings" (p. 332-338), which, it seems to me, receives a treatment that exceeds its historical importance. On the other hand, there is no separate comment on such persons as Fr. John Borel and the Marchioness Barolo, nor on such subjects as Don Bosco's activity as writer and publisher, though the notes themselves are by no means silent on these subjects.

These critical reflections notwithstanding, one can only express admiration for what is, overall, a painstaking work of excellence and for what has been evidently a labor of love.

The many *other features* offered in the book have already been listed at the beginning of this review. Each of them adds to the value of the book. But one feature is deserving of special mention--the well selected, basic bibliography in the area of Salesian studies (p. 453-459). Although many of the titles in this area are in Italian, as is to be expected, English language literature is not altogether absent. For this we owe a debt of gratitude to Don Bosco Publications and to Salesiana Publishers for their past, present, and (hopefully) future contributions.

#### THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF SAINT JOHN BOSCO?

The *Memoirs*, in this English edition, but not in Fr. Ceria's classic edition, much less in the original manuscripts, bear the subtitle, *The Autobiography of Saint John Bosco*. I realize that it has become fashionable to dub this work an autobiography. This would place Don Bosco among the great historical figures who have regaled posterity with their autobiography. The fact is, however, that Don Bosco had no intention of writing his autobiography, and that is why he entitled the work, *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*.

The genesis of the work must be sought in Pius IX's words to Don Bosco, during the historic audience of 1858, when the latter first manifested to the Pope the idea of founding a religious congregation.

This disclosure regarding Savio [his vision concerning England] brought another thought to the Pope's mind. Looking fixedly at Don Bosco, he asked if he, too, had ever had *any supernatural revelation about his undertakings*. Then, seeing that Don Bosco was apparently ill at ease, Pius IX insisted that he be told of any event, no matter how slight, which might have even the appearance of the supernatural. In filial trust, Don Bosco told him *everything he had seen in his extraordinary dreams--*

*which had already been verified in part--beginning with his dream at the age of nine. The Pope listened with great attention and emotion[...] He then said to him more or less in these words: "[...] Write down these dreams and everything else you have told me, minutely and in their natural sense. Save all this legacy for your congregation, so that it may serve as an encouragement and norm for your sons" [EBM 5, p. 577, italics mine].*

Don Bosco eventually did what the Pope had told him to do. From the vantage point of the mid 1870s, looking back, Don Bosco could discern the clear line of extraordinary events and the supernatural guidance that led to the establishment of the work of the Oratories. And within this interpretative horizon, he set down the amazing story in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*. In doing so, he regretfully had to speak of himself: "I found it hard actually to set about my task because it meant too often speaking about myself" [p. 3]. But he did it. "*It will serve to make known how God himself has always been our guide*" [p. 3].

The writing, therefore, is autobiographical *materially*, because Don Bosco writes about himself; but the work is not an autobiography *formally*, that is, in nature and intent. Its object is to describe the supernatural origin of the work of the Oratories, and hence of the Salesian Society.

In telling the story, Don Bosco is bound to speak of himself and to reveal something of himself; but he reveals only the minimum necessary to keep the story going. Obviously, we can learn a lot about Don Bosco from the *Memoirs*, but not through autobiographical communication. In his foreword, Fr. Viganò, who never uses the term autobiography, writes:

[The Memoirs] have a very special place, a particular significance among Don Bosco's writings. *When his memoirs are read in terms of Don Bosco's sanctity--which is essential to understand them fully--they reveal a substance that is quite surprising. [...] He reveals [...] a keen awareness that God was using his humble person to establish a great project [...].* Don Bosco concluded that "*it will serve to make known how God himself has always been our guide*" [p. xif., italics mine].

To end on an amusing note--I am not sure whether the copy I have been working with is the "perfect-bound cloth edition" or the "Smyth-sewn deluxe cloth edition". I suspect it's the latter. Well, I have had the book open on my desk for a few days, while doing this review. The binding has come unglued.