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**“The Most Wonderful Day  
of My Life”—  
Sesquicentennial of Don  
Bosco’s Priestly Ordination  
(1841-1991)**

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**Introduction**

The opening lines of Don Bosco’s *Spiritual Testament* read as follows:

I began my spiritual retreat [preparatory to priestly ordination] in the [retreat] house of the [Vincentian Priests of the] Mission, on the feast of St. Philip Neri, May 26, 1841.

Priestly ordination was conferred by our archbishop, Louis Fransoni, at the archbishop’s residence on June 5, that same year.

First Mass was said in [the church of] St. Francis of Assisi on June 6, Trinity Sunday, with the assistance of my signal benefactor and director, Fr. Joseph Cafasso from Castelnuovo d'Asti.<sup>1</sup>

By these simple words, written in his old age in what began as *Memoirs* but quickly became a *Spiritual Testament*, Don Bosco points to his priesthood as to the all important milestone and starting point from which the spiritual journey of a Founder's lifetime might be retraced.

This paper will survey that period in Don Bosco's life that saw him ordained a priest. It will not be a study of Don Bosco the priest. At the risk of turning into an archaeological exercise, or of sounding like a travelogue *cum* calendar combined, it will only attempt to assemble facts and dates relating to the historical circumstances of Don Bosco's ordination. True, it will also 'indulge' in some reflection on the spiritual values arising out of Don Bosco's recollections of that momentous occasion. The aim of this study, however, is modest enough—it is simply that of remembering an anniversary.

In a brief chapter of his *Memoirs*, written some ten years before the *Spiritual Testament*, Don Bosco had likewise written of his ordination—speaking also of the orders that preceded the conferral of the priesthood.

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<sup>1</sup> Francesco Motto, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 pel Sac. Gio. Bosco a' suoi figliuoli salesiani (Testamento Spirituale)* (Piccola Biblioteca dell'ISS, 4). Roma: LAS, 1985 (henceforth cited as *Motto-TS*), p. 20.

This is a critical edition of Don Bosco's manuscript in *Archivio Salesiano Centrale* (henceforth cited as *ASC*) 132: Quaderni-Taccuini 6, cf. *Fondo Don Bosco Microfiches* (henceforth cited as *Micro*) 748 D6-750 E1.

Don Bosco began jotting down these notes in early 1884 and continued at intervals through 1886 [cf. *Motto-TS*, 10f.]. The initial pages have the appearance of a 'memoir' and record scanty data and personal souvenirs. Almost at once, however, the writing changes to exhortation and advice in a testamentary style. Hence the designation 'Spiritual Testament.' From the title (*Memorie [...]*), from the fact that initially years are noted (1841: p. 3, *Micro* 746 D7; 1842: p. 7, *Micro* 746 D11; 1845, struck through: p. 9, *Micro* 746 E1), and from the fact that the first few pages deal with the beginning of Don Bosco's priestly life, it has been thought that the work may have been at first conceived as an autobiographical piece of writing to serve as a complement and a sequel to the earlier writing, *Memoirs of the Oratory*. It should be noted, however, that even the first few pages are wholly personal and contain no reference to Don Bosco's early apostolate.

The year Comollo died (1839), my third of theology, I received the tonsure and the four minor orders. With that behind me, I got the idea of attempting something, permission for which was seldom obtained—to do a year's theology during my holidays. [...] [Archbishop Fransoni] granted the favor I was asking. [...] In two months of study I worked through the prescribed treatises, and was admitted to the subdiaconate at the ordinations of the autumn Ember Days. [...] I made a ten day spiritual retreat at the House of the [Vicentian priests of the] Mission in Turin. [...] On my return to the seminary I was enrolled in the fifth year of theology [...]. On *Sitientes* Saturday of 1841 I received the diaconate. At the summer Ember Days I would be ordained a priest. [...] My priestly ordination took place on the vigil of the feast of the Holy Trinity.<sup>2</sup>

Ordinations were by ancient custom conferred on one of the seasonal liturgical and penitential days called Ember Days.<sup>3</sup> They were also held on other

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<sup>2</sup> *Giovanni Bosco, Memorie dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855. Introduzione, note e testo critico* a cura di Antonio da Silva Ferreira (Istituto Storico Salesiano - Roma, Fonti - Serie prima, 4). Roma: LAS, 1991 (henceforth cited as *MO-daSilva*), p. 108ff.

This is a critical edition of manuscripts in ASC A 222: *Oratorio*, original by Don Bosco, *Micro 57 A1-60 A2* (henceforth cited as *MO-DB*) and transcription by Fr. Joachim Berto, corrected by Don Bosco, *Micro 60 A3-63 C8* (henceforth cited as *MO-Berto*). In spite of unanswered questions, most of *MO-DB* may be dated between 1873 and 1875, and most of *MO-Berto* before 1879. For details, cf. *MO-daSilva*, 18ff. and Francis Desramaut, *Les Memorie I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne. Étude d'un ouvrage fondamentale sur la jeunesse de Saint Jean Bosco*. Lyon: Maison d'Études Saint-Jean Bosco, 1962 (henceforth cited as *Desramaut-Mem I*), p. 119ff.

*MO-daSilva* replaces the earlier *S. Giovanni Bosco, Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, [ed. E. Ceria]. Torino: SEI, [1946] (henceforth cited as *MO-Ceria*), whose introduction and notes are still valuable.

English translation based on the *MO-Ceria* text: *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855: The Autobiography of Saint John Bosco*, tr. by Daniel Lyons, with notes and commentary by Eugenio Ceria, SDB, Lawrence Castelvechchi, SDB, and Michael Mendl, SDB. New Rochelle, N.Y.: Don Bosco Publications, 1989 (henceforth cited as *MO-En*), p. 165f.

<sup>3</sup> These were twelve days distributed in four triads (Wednesday, Friday and Saturday), one for each season of the year. The winter Ember Days were observed after the third Sunday of Advent; the spring Ember Days, after the first Sunday of Lent; the

liturgical days, such as *Sitientes* Saturday (the Saturday after the fourth Sunday of Lent, *Laetare* Sunday).<sup>4</sup>

As will be further specified below John Bosco received the tonsure, and minor and major orders as follows:<sup>5</sup>

(1) Tonsure and the four minor orders (porter, lector, exorcist and acolyte), on *Laetare* Sunday, March 29, 1840 (or on *Sitientes* Saturday, April 4?);

(2) Subdiaconate, on autumn Ember Saturday, September 19, 1840;

(3) Diaconate, on *Sitientes* Saturday, March 27, 1841; and

(4) Priesthood, on summer Ember Saturday, June 5, 1841.

John Bosco received all his orders in Turin at the hand of Archbishop Fransoni.<sup>6</sup> This prelate held ordinations, not in the cathedral, but (for political reasons) in the archiepiscopal chapel, that is, the church of the Immaculate Conception attached to the archbishop's palace.<sup>7</sup>

summer Ember Days, after Pentecost Sunday; and the autumn Ember Days, after the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14).

<sup>4</sup> The names *Sitientes* and *Laetare* derive from the opening words of the entrance chant of the liturgy of the day, words taken respectively from Isaiah 55, 1 ("All you who are thirsty [*sitientes*], come to the water"), and Isaiah 66, 10 ("Rejoice [*Laetare*] with Jerusalem and be glad because of her, all you who love her").

<sup>5</sup> This may be determined from the passages of Don Bosco's *Spiritual Testament and Memoirs of the Oratory*, mentioned above, and from seminary records to be referred to below, with the use of chronographic manuals [cf. e.g. A. Cappelli, *Cronologia, Cronografia e Calendario Perpetuo [...]*. Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1930, p. 54f., 76f., 92f.].

<sup>6</sup> Louis (Marquis) Fransoni (1789-1862), was a scion of Genoese nobility. The family suffered exile during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic period until the Restoration in 1814. After an uneven education he was ordained a priest and consecrated bishop in 1821 at 32 years of age. In 1832 he was appointed to succeed Archbishop Chiaverotti in Turin. As the liberal revolution was gathering momentum in the 1830s and early 1840s, he maintained an uneasy peace with the government. The break and confrontation with the liberal movement and reforms came in the later forties and was finalized with his imprisonment and exile, first in 1848 and definitively in 1850. He 'governed' the archdiocese from his exile in Lyons, France, until his death in 1862. All of Don Bosco's seminary and priestly formation took place under Archbishop Fransoni, who remained Don Bosco's personal friend and supporter [cf. *Sussidi 2: Dizionario. Alcune situazioni, istituzioni e personaggi dell'ambiente in cui visse Don Bosco*. Roma: Dicastero per la Formazione (pro manuscripto), 1988 [henceforth cited as *Sussidi 2*], p. 270-274].

<sup>7</sup> These premises had been built by the Vincentians shortly after their community was established in Turin in 1655. When the Jesuits were suppressed by

Ordinations were preceded by a ten-day spiritual retreat. Candidates from the three diocesan seminaries made their spiritual retreat in Turin at the 'House of the Mission,' as Don Bosco tells us.<sup>8</sup> This was a retreat house run by the Vincentians, or Priests of the Mission, the society founded by St. Vincent de Paul. Archbishop Columban Chiaveroti had especially entrusted to them the preparation of priestly candidates.<sup>9</sup> For this purpose, in 1830, he had given over to them the former convent and church of the Visitation. Under the leadership of the distinguished Vincentian Superior, Fr. Mark Anthony Durando, who remained for many years a major influence in the Church of Turin, the premises were enlarged, and a vigorous retreat program established.<sup>10</sup>

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Pope Clement XIV (1773), the Vincentians replaced them at the church of the Holy Martyrs. Thus it was that in 1777 their house was assigned to the archbishop as his official residence, and the church of the Immaculate Conception became the archbishop's private chapel [cf. Aldo Giraudo and Giuseppe Biancardi, *Qui è vissuto Don Bosco: Itinerari storico-geografici e spirituali*. Leumann (Torino): Editrice Elle Di Ci, 1988 (henceforth cited as *Giraudo-B*), p. 126f].

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Motto-TS*, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Giraudo-B*, 123f.

Columban Chiaveroti (1754-1831), a highly educated Turinese, became a monk at Camaldoli at the age of 22, and lived on at the hermitage through the Napoleonic period and the suppression of religious orders. Subsequently, in 1817, at the age of 63, he was consecrated bishop and almost immediately (1818) appointed archbishop of Turin. On the religious front, his tenure was marked by theological controversy involving the faculties of the university and the seminary, as well as the priests of the *Convitto*; and on the socio-political front, by revolutionary movements. His pastoral action and writings show him as adamantly conservative [cf. *Sussidi* 2, 252-255].

<sup>10</sup> The community of the Visitation (the order of nuns founded by St. Francis de Sales) had been established in Turin in 1638 by St. Jeanne de Chantal herself. The lovely church of the Visitation was built some thirty years later. The convent was suppressed under Napoleon in 1801; and when the community returned it was settled in another location [cf. *Giraudo-B*, 123, 126].

## Part I : The Preparation

## The Seminary

To prepare himself for the priesthood John Bosco had entered the seminary of Chieri in 1835, where he spent "six happy years".<sup>11</sup>

In choosing the seminary John chose the safest and most conservative way of priestly formation. For the seminary was not the only way in which a candidate could study for the priesthood. There was first of all the theological faculty at the university in Turin. A candidate who studied for the priesthood in this way would normally be a resident of Turin and live at home or in lodgings while attending classes at the university; but he would also belong to one of three 'clerical communities' set up in designated parishes. There he would receive priestly formation and be involved in religious services and some pastoral ministry. Secondly, the institution of the 'non-resident seminary' [*chiericato esterno*] enabled candidates to do their theological courses, again, while residing at home or in lodgings, and taking classes at one of the three archdiocesan seminaries (or at the university as described above). In special circumstances theological instruction with an informal seminary program might be available under the guidance of the local parish priest.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the third way of priestly formation was the diocesan seminary for philosophical and theological studies. The diocesan seminaries were thus attended by a certain number of non-resident clerical students. Although Don Bosco in his *Memoirs* makes no reference to the fact, in the 1830s and 1840s the number of non-resident clerical students attending the diocesan seminaries was quite high; in fact, at one point, during this period it surpassed that of the resident seminarians.<sup>13</sup> The 'externs'

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<sup>11</sup> Don Bosco writes in his *Memoirs*, "My six years at the seminary were a very happy period". Later he describes the pain he experienced on leaving the place where he had spent six years of his life [cf. *MO-daSilva*, 91 and 110; *MO-En*, 128 and 166]. But cf. notes 23 and 32 below, and text relating thereto.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Sussidi* 2, 178-181. The number of priestly candidates in the non-resident seminary program, especially in the city of Turin, was substantial. Among such candidates one may mention Archbishops Laurence Gastaldi (1815-1883) and Cajetan Alimonda (1818-1891), Bl. Frederick Albert (1820-1876) and St. Leonard Murialdo (1828-1900). On the other hand, St. Joseph Cafasso (1811-1860) studied as a non-resident seminarian based at the parish of Castelnuovo until his entrance into the Chieri Seminary at its opening in 1829-1930. He was in his second year of theology at the time.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Sussidi* 2., 179.

would obviously bring a different, perhaps a not so desirable, dimension to the life and discipline of the seminary.<sup>14</sup> John Bosco could conceivably have opted for the *chiericato esterno*, that is, for attending the seminary lectures while continuing to lodge in Chieri. This would have been financially advantageous, for he could thus work at lucrative jobs which were denied to him as a resident seminarian. He would also have enjoyed greater freedom to pursue the youth apostolate he had been involved with. Be that as it may, probably for moral and religious reasons, he chose the safer way.

The Turin archdiocese maintained three major seminaries at the time, the principal one in the city of Turin,<sup>15</sup> and two others in the towns of Bra and Chieri. The seminary of Chieri had been established in 1829 in the former monastery of the Oratorian Fathers of St. Philip Neri.<sup>16</sup> It was established primarily to meet the need created by the surge in priestly vocations during the Restoration.<sup>17</sup> But it was also part of a strategy adopted by Archbishop Chiaverotti which attempted to provide greater seclusion for priestly candidates, in a country setting and in a quasi-monastic environment. It was hoped that such isolation would shield the seminarians from the turmoil in the capital—the

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<sup>14</sup> Don Bosco speaks of "bad" seminarians and recalls serious disorders which may have been due to the presence of non-resident students [cf. *MO-daSilva*, 92; *MO-En*, 131f.].

<sup>15</sup> The metropolitan seminary for the archdiocese of Turin had been founded in 1711, shut down during the first period of Napoleonic rule (1800-1806), and reopened in 1807. It continued to function side by side with the theological faculty at the university until it was again shut down in 1848, this time by Archbishop Fransoni in consequence of the seminarians' political involvement, and reopened only in 1863, after his death [cf. *Sussidi 2*, 182-185].

<sup>16</sup> Suppressed like other religious groups by Napoleon in 1801, the Oratorian community had returned to the Church of St. Philip and to the monastery in 1816. But two years later it ceased to exist for lack of vocations, and the premises remained vacant [cf. Secondo Caselle, *Giovanni Bosco [studente] a Chieri 1831-11841. Dieci anni che valgono una vita*. Torino: Edizioni Acclaim, 1988 (henceforth cited as *Caselle-DBStud*), p. 148, 150].

<sup>17</sup> The term 'Restoration' refers to that period in nineteenth-century Europe when the monarchies and the old order were restored after having been swept away by Napoleon Bonaparte. It may be regarded as beginning with the removal of Napoleon and with the Council of Vienna (1814-15). It lasted until the liberal revolutions of 1848. The Restoration was characterized by political repression on the part of monarchs attempting to undo the Napoleonic reforms; and by conservative reaction on the part of the institutional Church, opposing liberal movements and patriotic aspirations.

theological controversies raging between rigorists and benignists, the liberal ideologies, and the growing social and political unrest.<sup>18</sup>

### Framework and Highlights of the Seminary Period

By the time John entered the seminary in 1835 the seminarians numbered close to one hundred, distributed in seven years (two of philosophy and five of theology) under an appointed staff of five "superiors".<sup>19</sup> In addition, senior seminarians were engaged, with appropriate financial compensation, to help with various aspects of the seminary program—supervision in dormitories and study halls, instruction in liturgical chant, care of the sick in the infirmary, management of the sacristy, and the like. John Bosco, in his second year of theology, served as sacristan and, in his last year, held the position of dormitory prefect or supervisor.<sup>20</sup>

In his *Memoirs* Don Bosco does not provide us with a complete framework of the seminary period; but this can easily be established.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco: [I] Life and Work*, 2nd ed. tr. by J. Drury. New Rochelle, N.Y.: Don Bosco Publications (henceforth cited as *Stella-DB I*), p. 35-40; *Sussidi 2*, 181.

It may be of interest to note that in 1834, the year before John Bosco entered to seminary, Archbishop Fransoni specified that the seminaries of Chieri and Bra were to be reserved for those priestly candidates that did not aspire to a theological degree [*Caselle-DBStud*, 150].

<sup>19</sup> These were: the Rector of the Seminary (Fr. Sebastian Mottura, 40 years of age); the Spiritual Director (Fr. Joseph Mottura, 26 years of age); the Professor of Philosophy (Fr. Innocent Arduino, 30 years of age, temporary substitute for the regular Fr. Francis Tarnavasio, 29 years of age); the Professor of Theology (Fr. Laurence Prialis, 32 years of age, later aided by Fr. Arduino as tutor); and the Rector of the Church of St. Philip (Fr. Matthew Testa, 48 years of age). The lectures were "read" with appropriate elucidations by the professor while the students took notes. In the evening the tutor "repeated" the lesson in summary, during which the students asked questions and revised their notes [cf. *Stella-DB I*, 42, n. 20; *Caselle-DBStud*, 148-151.182ff.; *Giraud-B*, 85ff.; *Sussidi 2*, 186f.].

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *MO-daSilva*, 105, 109; *MO-En*, 156, 166.

There were five dormitory prefects at the time [cf. Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)* (Pubblicazioni del Centro Studi Don Bosco. Studi storici, 8). Roma: LAS, 1980 (cited as *Stella-DBEcSoc*), p. 413.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *MO-daSilva*, 90-111; *MO-En*, 126-171; also *Giraud-B*, 77, 85-90.

In 1835-37 John Bosco completed his two-year course in philosophy with a *plusquam optime* (A plus) in his studies, and an *egregie* (excellent) in conduct.<sup>22</sup>

In November 1837 he began the 5-year theology course, which, however, he would complete in only 4 years (1837-41), skipping the fourth year.

In his *Memoirs* Don Bosco records a number of significant events from those years. The second year of theology (1838-39) is highlighted by John's appointment as sacristan, by his meeting Fr. John Borel on the occasion of a memorable Lenten retreat, and by Louis Comollo's death on April 2, 1839, and his subsequent appearance in the common dormitory.

At this time John experienced a protracted period of ill health and (perhaps also) spiritual crisis. This condition plagued him well into his third year of theology (hence, for the better part of a year) until it became so serious that around March 1840 the physician enjoined bed rest for about a month.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Seminary records cited in *Caselle-DBStud*, 166.

<sup>23</sup> Fr. Lemoyne relates how John Bosco began feeling better after eating the loaf of millet bread and drinking the bottle of good red wine which Mamma Margaret had brought him. The biographer's concluding words are worthy of note: "Traces of his illness lingered, but these eventually disappeared completely during his chaplaincy at the *Rifugio* after some ups and downs and a very serious relapse" [cf. Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, tr. from the Italian original, Diego Borgatello, Editor-in-Chief. New Rochelle, N.Y.: Salesiana Publishers, 1865ff., vol. I and II (henceforth cited as *EBM*), I, p. 357f. (Italian original henceforth cited as *IBM*)]. It is documented that Don Bosco was ill while at Barolo's *Rifugio* (1844-1846). He had in fact been ill since leaving the *Convitto* in 1844, and this was one of the reasons why the Marchioness wanted him to leave his boys and take a long vacation. He refused and finally fell gravely ill in 1846 and nearly died [*EBM* II, 256f., 327-330, 381-387]. This was the bronchial pneumonia from which he never quite recovered. Hence Lemoyne's words about the 'seminary' illness leave one perplexed.

This illness, which is poorly reported, is said to have been a consequence of the frightening experience of the death and appearance of Comollo [cf. *MO-daSilva*, 104; *MO-En*, 152]; but other causes are rightly suspected. P. Stella views it rather a consequence of the ascetic tension inherent in seminary formation, an experience which could drive to the brink any seminarian who took matters seriously: "This ascetic tension helped to drive his friend Comollo to his death, and John Bosco himself to the very limits of his strength" [*Stella-DB I*, 66]. Stella also cites, with due cautions, Fr. John Francesia's testimony, according to which the crisis and illness suffered by John Bosco were due to obsessive fears for his own salvation. This anxiety arose out of an emphasis placed on the theological questions regarding predestination. In this respect, therefore, John Bosco's trial would have paralleled

*Tonsure and Minor Orders*

In spite of his weakened condition, John Bosco received the tonsure and the four minor orders. As to date and place, official certificates bearing Archbishop Fransoni's signature are clear:

We hereby state and certify that [cleric John Melchior Bosco] was thought worthy of being promoted and ordained to the four minor orders of porter, lector, exorcist and acolyte, [...] and that he was promoted and ordained by us on *Laetare* Sunday, March 29, 1840, in Turin in our archiepiscopal chapel, at a [non-pontifical] celebration held [specifically] for the conferral of sacred orders.<sup>24</sup>

that endured by St. Francis de Sales for the same reason [cf. *Stella-DB I*, 50-54 and n. 36].

<sup>24</sup> Certificate in *ASC* 112: Documenti personali-Ecclesiastici, *Micro* 73 D12. A separate certificate makes an identical statement with regard to tonsure [cf. *Micro* 73 D11. Cf. also *MO-daSilva*, 108, note to line 539.

However, a seminary document cited in *Caselle-DBStud*, 203 states that the conferral of tonsure and the four minor orders was to take place on *Sitientes* Saturday [cf. notes 4 and 5 above, and text relating thereto], which in 1840 fell on April 4. Of itself, *Sitientes* Saturday would be the more likely liturgical choice for the conferral of orders. But the archbishop's certificate is unambiguous.

Lemoyne states that these ordinations took place on *Laetare* Sunday, March 25, 1840 and were held in the Turin Cathedral [cf. *EBM I*, 358]. But *Laetare* Sunday, that is, the fourth Sunday of Lent, in 1840 fell, as already indicated, on March 29. And understandably Lemoyne assumes that ordinations were held in the cathedral. The practice, however, had been discontinued for political reasons, and ordinations were being held in the church of the Immaculate Conception attached to the archbishop's residence [cf. note 7 above, and text relating thereto].

S. Caselle, in spite of the document which he adduces, follows Lemoyne as to the date, though not as to the place. *Giraud-B* does the same on p. 77, but emends it to March 29 on p.126. This is also the date given in *MO-Ceria*, 112, n. to line 3.

The editors of *MO-En*, 167, n. 1, give "Saturday, March 28, 1840, the day before the fifth Sunday of Lent" as the date. In 1840 March 28 was the Saturday before the fourth Sunday of Lent, or *Laetare* Sunday.

As elsewhere in his *Memoirs*, so here also Don Bosco's date is less than exact: "The year Comollo died (1839) I received the tonsure and the four minor orders" [*MO-daSilva*, 108; *MO-En*, 165]. Louis Comollo died on April 2, 1839 [cf. certificate of death cited in *Caselle-DBStud*, 199].

Previous to admission to orders, a scrutiny was held by the seminary staff, and candidates were evaluated as well as examined. On this occasion John Bosco received high, but not highest, marks.<sup>25</sup>

Shortly thereafter John "got the idea of attempting something, permission for which, was seldom granted in those days."<sup>26</sup> He wanted to do fourth theology on his own during the summer holidays of 1840. He went to the archbishop with this request, giving his "advanced" age as a reason. After appropriate inquiries, the archbishop granted the favor on condition that John should take examinations in all required subjects before beginning the next regular term. After two months of hard study John took examinations from Fr. Cinzano, the parish priest of his home town of Castelnuovo, who had been delegated for the purpose. This also paved the way for his admission to the subdiaconate, which he received, following a spiritual retreat, on the Ember Saturday of autumn.<sup>27</sup> In 1840 this Ember Saturday fell on September 19.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. The above cited seminary document in *Caselle-DBStud*, 203. The document bears the title, "Evaluation of reverend seminarians, candidates for ordinations on *Sitientes* Saturday, 1840." It records notes earned by candidates in various categories. It shows that John Bosco received *ferè optime* (A minus) for ability, *optime* (A) for application, *ferè optime* for piety, and *ferè optime* in the examination. Several seminarians had higher scores.

The examination taken before admission to orders must be distinguished from the one taken by seminarians in academic subjects upon returning to the seminary in the fall and at mid-year. In these examinations John Bosco apparently always earned the highest grades and a prize [cf. *MO-daSilva*, 105; *MO-En*, 156 and *EBM* I, 382].

<sup>26</sup> *MO-daSilva*, 108f.; *MO-En*, 165.

<sup>27</sup> *MO-daSilva*, 109; *MO-En*, 165.

An ecclesiastical dowry was required before admission to the subdiaconate. About a century earlier synods and Papal instructions had legislated on the dowry. It was intended to serve the priest as a kind of social security. It was to be constituted by real estate, and it had upper and lower limits as to its annual yield. The dowry requirement presented a serious problem for John, for he and his brother Joseph jointly were worth considerably less than even the lower limit. Joseph's former partner at the Sussambrino farm, John Febraro, came to the rescue by putting up some of his property. (Anthony was not heard from in this matter.) John's ecclesiastical dowry was set up by deed dated March 23, 1840. The signatures appear as follows: "Bosco Giovanni; cross sign by Giuseppe Bosco, illiterate; Febraro Giovanni Agostino" [ASC 112: "Costituzione di Patrimonio", *Micro* 74 C11-D7]. For a fuller discussion of the matter, cf. *Stella-DBEcSoc*, 19ff. and 36ff.

Don Bosco in his *Memoirs* does not mention the dowry. But Lemoyne quotes him as though he did: "Since September was not far off, John was notified by

Obviously all spiritual retreats prescribed for ordinations were important exercises, for they afforded the candidate an opportunity to consider with all seriousness the step he was about to take and the responsibilities that went with his decision. But the one preparatory to the subdiaconate was perhaps the most important. For with the reception of that order the candidate made a definitive commitment to the priestly life by taking the vows of celibacy and obedience and by assuming at the same time the obligation of the divine office. Here is how Don Bosco in his *Memoirs* describes his feelings on that occasion.

When I think now of the virtues required for that most important step, I am convinced that I was not sufficiently prepared for it. But since I had no one to care directly for my vocation, I turned to Fr. Cafasso. He advised me to go forward and rely on his word. I made a ten day spiritual retreat at the House of the [Vincentian Priests of the] Mission in Turin. During it I made a general confession so that my confessor would have a clear picture of my conscience and would be able to give me suitable advice. [...] I quaked at the thought of binding myself for life. Before I took the final step I wanted to receive the full approbation of my confessor.<sup>28</sup>

At the beginning of fifth theology (1840-41), his last year at the seminary, John was appointed prefect, the highest possible appointment for a seminarian.

On *Sitientes* Saturday (March 27), 1841 he received the diaconate. Again, in the scrutiny and examination, he received high, but not the highest, marks. The examiner was Canon Lawrence Gastaldi.<sup>29</sup>

his Superiors at the seminary to prepare himself for the major order of subdiaconate. This is how he describes in his memoirs this most important and decisive event in his life: 'Since my share of inheritance from my father's estate was insufficient for the required ecclesiastical dowry, my brother Joseph gave all the little he had. I was ordained a subdeacon at the autumn Ember Days Ordinations [...]'" [EBM I, 366].

<sup>28</sup> *MO-daSilva*, 109; *MO-En.*, 165f.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Seminary records cited in *Caselle-DBStud*, 207. The document, entitled "For Ordination on *Sitientes* Saturday, 1841," shows that John Bosco received *optime* (A) in ability; *ferè optime* (A minus) in application; *optime* in piety; *ferè optime* in the examination. By way of comparison, the "other Bosco" (James Bosco from Rivalta) [cf. *EBM* I, 302] received *optime* (A), *optime*, *optime* and *egregie* (outstanding) in the same categories.

By this time he must have been counting the days, perhaps even the hours and the minutes, to his priestly ordination. This was to take place on the summer Ember Saturday, which in 1841 fell on June 5. A final evaluation and a final examination took place before the candidates, sixteen in number, moved out of the seminary and to Turin for their spiritual retreat, May 26-June 4.<sup>30</sup>

In a touching passage of his *Memoirs*, Don Bosco writes of his feelings on leaving the seminary:

Having to leave the seminary for good was a most distressing experience for me. My superiors loved me and had shown me continual marks of benevolence. My companions were deeply devoted to me. You could say that I lived for them and they lived for me. [...] Hence the parting was very painful indeed. I was leaving the place where I had lived for six years, where I had received an education, knowledge, priestly spirit, and all the tokens of kindness and affection one could desire.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, it hadn't been all fun and games, and many and keen had been his disappointments—with superiors, whom he could not approach; with fellow seminarians, who seemed to lack Christian commitment and priestly spirit; with the seminary program of study, which he found abstruse and even threatening; with himself, as he struggled with illness and spiritual crisis. But in spite of drawbacks, he regarded the seminary experience as positive and rewarding.<sup>32</sup>

As Lemoyne relates the episode [cf. *EBM* I, 382], John rated a not-so-satisfactory *fere optime* (A minus) in the examination, for failing to answer a certain question to Dr. Gastaldi's satisfaction.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Michele Molineris, *Don Bosco inedito: Quello che le biografie di San Giovanni Bosco non dicono*. Colle Don Bosco-Castelnuovo Don Bosco (Asti): Istituto Salesiano "Bernardi-Semeria", 1974 [henceforth cited as *Molineris-DBIn*], p. 249f.

The seminary records cited in *Caselle-DBStud*, 207, entitled "For Ordinations on Saturday after Pentecost, 1841," show that "Bosco Giò Melchior of Castelnuovo" was rated *optime* (A) in piety; *fere optime* (A minus) in ability; and *optime* in application. No grade for the examination is recorded in this document. But Lemoyne writes: "On May 15, [John] passed his final examination before ordination and scored a *plus quam optime* (A plus)" [*EBM* I, 382].

<sup>31</sup> *MO-daSilva*, 110; *MO-En*, 166. Cf. also note 11 above, and text relating thereto.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *MO-daSilva*, 91f., 98ff., 104, 116; *MO-En.*, 131f., 144ff., 152, 180. Cf. also *Stella-DB* I, 40-74, and note 23 above, and text relating thereto.

## Part II: Priesthood

## The Spiritual Retreat, the Keepsake and the Nine Resolutions

As mentioned above, in his *Spiritual Testament* Don Bosco dedicates the first few pages of the tiny notebook to a summary recall of the events relating to the beginnings of his priesthood. In brief opening sentences he mentions the preparatory retreat, the ordination itself and his first Mass.<sup>33</sup> This is followed by a 'transcription' of a keepsake given as a conclusion of the retreat, and of the nine resolutions made by him on that occasion. In his earlier work, on the other hand, the autobiographical *Memoirs of the Oratory*, he does not mention the preparatory spiritual retreat, nor does he record the keepsake and the resolutions. However, after a passing reference to his priestly ordination, he dwells at some length on his first Masses.<sup>34</sup>

To quote his *Spiritual Testament* then,

The concluding keepsake of the retreat I made in preparation for my first Mass was worded as follows: "A priest does not go to heaven, nor to hell, alone. If he will have proven worthy of his calling, he will go to heaven with those [souls] who will have been saved through his good example. If, on the other hand, he will have proven unworthy, through a scandalous life for instance, he will go to perdition with those [souls] who will be damned because of the scandal received from him.

[In addition I made the following] resolutions:

1. I will not go out for walks, unless a real necessity, such as visiting the sick, demands it.
2. I will make good and careful use of my time.
3. I will not shrink from suffering, from striving, nor even from humiliations, whenever it is a question of saving souls.
4. May the love and gentleness of St. Francis de Sales be my guidelines in everything [I think, say and do].

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Note 1 above, and text relating thereto.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *MO-daSilva*, 110f.; *MO-En*, 166f.

5. I will always be satisfied with whatever food is served to me, unless it should prove harmful to my health.

6. I will not drink wine unless it is mixed with water; and then only as a 'remedy', that is, when and in the measure that my health may require it.

7. Work is a powerful weapon against the enemies of the soul. Hence I will sleep no more than five hours at night, nor will I take any rest during the day, and certainly not after lunch. Only in case of illness shall I make some exception to this rule.

8. I will set aside some time each day for meditation and for spiritual reading. During the day I will pay a brief visit, or at least raise my heart in prayer, to the Blessed Sacrament. I will spend at least one quarter of an hour in preparation for Holy Mass, and another quarter of an hour in thanksgiving.

9. I will not indulge in conversations with women, except to hear their confession, or whenever their spiritual welfare may make it necessary.

These memoirs were set down in writing in 1841.<sup>35</sup>

The last sentence deserves a comment. By 'memoirs' in this context Don Bosco means the resolutions just 'recalled' or 'transcribed', perhaps also the keepsake; but certainly not the *Spiritual Testament*, or the initial portion of it, even though it bears the title, *Memoirs [...]*. Internal evidence shows beyond any doubt that no portion of the work, even that referring to the beginnings of his priesthood, was set down in writing before 1884.<sup>36</sup> This fact, of itself, would not preclude the possibility that for his resolutions Don Bosco could have availed himself of notes dating from 1841, but now lost. If this be the case, the text of the resolutions would have been 'transcribed', not merely 'recalled.'<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Cf. ASC 132: Quaderni-Taccuini, 6, p. 3-6 (*Micro* 748 D7-10) and *Motto-TS*, 21ff. Cf. also note 1 above, and text relating thereto.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Motto-TS*, 10f., especially note 14, and *Desramaut-Mem I*, 136.

<sup>37</sup> Lemoyne at this point quotes the *Spiritual Testament* without comment [cf. *IBM I*, 519 (*EBM I*, 385: "He wrote all the above in 1841"!)]. It is unlikely that Lemoyne knew of a manuscript dating from 1841. It would be contrary to Lemoyne's custom not to acknowledge the existence of such an important document.

Da Silva writes, "Also the resolutions which the seminarian John Bosco took at the end of his spiritual retreat re-echo the commonplaces favored by the Vincentian preachers and reflecting the practice of the community."<sup>38</sup> Granted—but I believe there is more to these resolutions than the fact that they reflect common themes and practice.

As indicated above, in his autobiographical *Memoirs of the Oratory*, antecedent to the *Spiritual Testament* by some ten years, Don Bosco does not record these priestly resolutions, though he records those made at the donning of the clerical habit in 1835. These are worth quoting for the purpose of comparison:

I drew up a fixed rule of life; and in order to be sure I would not let it slip from my mind, I wrote up the following resolutions.

1. Never again in the future will I take part in public shows, attend dances or watch stage performances that are seen at fairs or markets. Nor will I, as far as possible, take part in dinners that are common on such occasions.

2. Never again will I entertain people with games of dice, conjuring tricks, acrobatic feats, sleight of hand, and tightrope walking. I shall give up my violin playing and hunting. I now regard these pursuits as contrary to ecclesiastical dignity and spirit.

3. I will love and practice a retired life and temperance in eating and drinking. I will allow myself only those hours of rest that are strictly necessary for health.

4. In the past I have served the world by my pursuit of secular literature. Henceforth I will try to serve God by devoting myself to religious reading.

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It is also worth noting that the original draft of this text in Don Bosco's *Spiritual Testament* was emended by him at various points [cf. ASC 132: Quaderni-Taccuini 6, p. 3-6 in *Micro* 748 D7-10; cf. critical apparatus in *Motto-ST*, 21f.]. This would tend to show that he was 'recalling' rather than 'transcribing.' The question may then be asked, how far Don Bosco's later experiences and concerns, and specifically those that dictated the *Spiritual Testament*, influenced the fashioning of this text.

<sup>38</sup> *MO-daSilva*, 110, note to line 579, quoting L. Chiericotti, C.M., *Il P. Marcantonio Durando (1801-1880)*.

5. I will oppose with all my strength anything contrary to the virtue of chastity—readings, thoughts, conversations, words and actions. Positively, I will practice all those things, even the smallest, which may help preserve this virtue.

6. In addition to the ordinary practices of piety, I will not fail to set aside a short period of time every day for meditation and for spiritual reading.

7. Every day I will tell some story or relate some example that is apt to be of spiritual advantage to others. I will do this with my companions, friends, relatives, or other people. And failing this, I will share it with my mother.<sup>39</sup>

A comparison between these two sets of resolutions may be instructive. Some aspects are carried over from the earlier to the later set: temperance in food, drink and sleep (1835, 3bcd and 1841, 5,6,7bc); prayer, meditation and spiritual reading (1835, 6 and 1841, 8); chastity in a negative and positive mode (1835, 5), corresponding perhaps to avoidance of conversation with women (1841, 9). On the other hand some aspects are not carried over either because they are taken for granted, or because the life situation and the understandings that suggested them have been transcended: shunning of worldly pastimes and of activities understood to be opposed to the ecclesiastical spirit (1835, 1,2); practice of retirement (1835, 3a); readings (1835, 4); telling edifying stories (1835, 7).

But the 1841 resolutions also show significant differences of the kind that are not determined merely by the change in circumstances (as would be, for instance, preparation for and thanksgiving after Mass, 1841, 8c). Nor is this development to be understood merely as referring to 'new concepts,' such as the coupling of work with temperance (1841, 7a). The vaster difference lies in the new spirit, indeed the new spirituality, that infuses the priestly resolutions. Assuming that the two sets of resolutions do reflect actual historical situations

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<sup>39</sup> ASC 132: Autografi-Oratorio, *MO-Berto*, p. 54 (*Micro* 61 A1f.), *MO-daSilva*, 89 (cf. *MO-En*, 122f.).

Again it should be noted that Don Bosco's first draft of this text in *MO-DB*, p. 53f. (*Micro* 57 D6f.; cf. critical apparatus in *MO-daSilva*, 89) has been subjected to extensive re-working in Don Bosco's own hand. This is evidence enough that when recording these resolutions some forty years after the event, he was 'recalling' rather than 'transcribing' them. And again the question, to what extent his later experiences, and the very didactic purpose of the work as a whole, may have influenced the fashioning of this text in mid-1870s appears legitimate.

in Don Bosco's life,<sup>40</sup> one is struck with the development that has taken place over the seminary period. We are forced to conclude that, in spite of struggles and difficulties,<sup>41</sup> Don Bosco had transcended the undesirable strictures of seminary formation and was well on the way to the new understandings that would later power his whole spiritual life and apostolate. Likewise the negative, one might say oppressive, aspects of the *fuga mundi* expressed in the earlier set, presumably under the influence of current understandings of Christian and priestly life and spirituality, are gone. And while the discipline of work and temperance (1841, 5-7), prayer life (1841, 8), and the safeguarding of chastity (1841, 9) are re-emphasized, the breath of a fresh spirituality oriented toward the apostolate is now in evidence (1841, 1-4). By resolutions 1 and 2, Don Bosco renounces even legitimate recreation in order to devote as much time as possible to the apostolate. His complete commitment to the apostolate is expressed in resolution 3: "I will not shrink from suffering, from striving, nor even from humiliations, whenever it is a question of saving souls." And as for the 'style of the apostolate,' St. Francis de Sales is taken as the model (resolution 4).

The significance of Don Bosco's recourse to St. Francis de Sales as model and guide for the apostolate at the beginning of his priestly life has often been noted and commented upon.<sup>42</sup> One cannot doubt that it reflects basically the actual historical situation and not a later reflection. St. Francis de Sales was an established model for the clergy, and therefore, also for seminarians. The Chieri seminarians would certainly have been exposed to the biographical facts and the teachings of St. Francis de Sales.<sup>43</sup> But perhaps the spiritual retreats,

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Notes 37 and 39 above, and text relating thereto.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Notes 23 and 32 above, and text relating thereto.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. E.g. Arnaldo Pedrini, *St. Francis de Sales, Don Bosco's Patron. St. Francis de Sales in the Times, Life and Thought of St. John Bosco*, translated by Wallace Cornell; adapted, compiled and edited by Francis Klauder. New Rochelle, N.Y.: Don Bosco Publications, 1988, p. 23ff.

<sup>43</sup> The episode reported by Fr. Lemoyne [cf. *EBM* I, 302] on the testimony of Don Bosco's seminary companion and life-long friend, Fr. John Francis Giacomelli (1820-1901), would corroborate this. The two Boscos (James and John) are described as Hard-Wood Bosco and Pliant-Willow (*sales*, in Piedmontese) Bosco.

And it may well have been the example and teaching of St. Francis de Sales that enabled John Bosco to overcome the spiritual crisis referred to above [cf. Note 23 above, and text relating thereto].

It is also worthy of note that the church of St. Philip attached to the seminary contained a chapel dedicated to St. Francis de Sales, with a painting of the

preparatory to ordinations, were the more decisive influence. Not only were they held in the house and church of the Visitation, with its pictures and memories of St. Francis de Sales, but the Vincentian retreat masters propounded a spirituality derived from the French Oratory of Pierre de Bérulle and from St. Francis de Sales.<sup>44</sup>

A comment on the retreat keepsake quoted above also seems apropos.<sup>45</sup> It deals with priestly responsibility and accountability. It emphasizes the idea that the priest is answerable for souls saved or lost. This is a commonplace to be found in spiritual and ascetical writings on the subject current at the time. For instance, in his *Dignity and Duties of the Priest*, St. Alphonsus expresses this idea in a variety of ways. At one point he writes:

saint. A sodality of St. Francis de Sales, still active in the nineteenth century, met here for their devotions [cf. *Giraud-B*, 91].

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Giraud-B*, 126 and 123f.

Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629), a contemporary of St. Francis de Sales, distinguished himself as cardinal, diplomat, theologian, contemplative, mystic and spiritual writer. He founded the French Oratory and was a leading figure in the French school of spirituality [cf. *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* 2, 362f.].

Francis de Sales (1567-1622), was a scion of Savoyard nobility, a priest, a theologian, and a missionary through whose preaching and apologetical writings (the *Catholic Controversies*) the Calvinist-dominated region of the Chablais was restored to the Catholic faith. As Bishop of Geneva, with residence at Annecy, he distinguished himself for his pastoral charity and as a spiritual director and master. He was the author of pace-setting spiritual writings, and the founder of a brotherhood of priests under the Oratorian rule and of the Order of the Visitation. A Saint, a Doctor of the Church, and the patron of writers, he stands as a priestly model for his zeal in defense of the faith, for his pastoral charity and for a spirituality permeated with love [cf. *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* 6, 34ff.]. This is how he was known among the clergy in the Kingdom of Savoy-Piedmont-Sardinia, and this is how Don Bosco came to take him as model and guide for his priestly apostolate.

"The monastery of the Visitation founded in Turin in 1638 by Jeanne de Chantal, the massive circulation of the works of St. Francis de Sales published in numerous editions through the eighteenth century, the Life of St. Francis authored by the Piedmontese Fr. Pier Giacinto Gallizia (1662-1737), first published in Venice and reprinted numerous times—these were the vehicles through which the knowledge and spirit of St. Francis spread through the region" [Massimo Marocchi, "Alle radici della spiritualità di Don Bosco," in *Don Bosco nella storia. Atti del 1° Congresso Internazionale di Studi su Don Bosco (Università Pontificia Salesiana, Roma, 16-20 gennaio 1989)*, ed. M. Midali. Roma: LAS, 1990, p. 166.]

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Note 35 above, and text relating thereto.

The souls that were once wild beasts and monsters of hell, but were afterwards converted and became dear to God, shall be so many gems adorning the crown of the priest who has brought them back to the path of virtue. A priest who is damned does not go to hell alone, and the priest that is saved is certainly not saved alone.<sup>46</sup>

St. Joseph Cafasso, Don Bosco's beloved master and mentor, in his conferences on the priesthood, expresses similar concepts:

I do not think that it is possible to imagine any sin or disorder more fatal than scandal in a priest [...]. To find himself on his deathbed, to have to present himself before the tribunal of God to give an account of the souls entrusted to him, of the souls for whom he is responsible, and of the sins committed because of him! [...] What punishment he must expect from God!<sup>47</sup>

Don Bosco frequently spoke on the priesthood, repeating and emphasizing the traditional concepts. For example, some of Don Bosco's words on the subject, reported from a conference held in 1868 and guaranteed by Lemoyne, are recorded in the *Biographical Memoirs*:

The priesthood is the highest dignity to which a person can be raised. For to the priest is given the power to change bread and wine into the substance of the body and blood of Christ; the power to forgive sins—powers not given even to angels. He is the minister of the thrice-holy God [...]. If this be so, then how great should the holiness be of one who is a priest or who aspires to the priesthood! Such a person should be just like an angel, that is, a totally spiritual person [...]. A priest

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<sup>46</sup> St. Alphonsus de Liguori, *Dignity and Duties of the Priest or Selva*, Translated [...] and edited by Rev. Eugene Grimm (The Complete Works of St. Alphonsus de Liguori, Ascetical Works, vol. XII). Brooklyn: Redemptorist Fathers, 1927, p. 175. Cf. also *Ibid.*, p. 230ff. (Part II, Instruction II: "The Good Example that the Priest Should Give").

<sup>47</sup> St. Joseph Cafasso, *The Priest, the Man of God: His Dignity and Duties*, Translated by Patrick O'Connell. Rockford, IL: TAN Books and Publishers, 1971, p. 166.

should possess all the virtues [...], especially outstanding charity, humility and chastity [...], a most lively faith, a most ardent charity [...]. And, yes—good example is essential! Let us remember that a priest never goes to hell or to heaven alone, but always well accompanied.<sup>48</sup>

Lemoyne cites an archival document in Don Bosco's hand and transcribes titles of sermons delivered during the August retreat of 1867. Among them are the following: "A priest does not go to hell or to heaven alone, but always accompanied by those who have been lost or saved on his account. Dignity and Duties of the Priesthood."<sup>49</sup>

Such a concept of priestly accountability went hand in hand with current teachings about the holiness required of a priest, the almost impossible demands made of one who embraced the priestly vocation, the dangers with which priestly life and existence were beset, the strict judgment priests would receive at God's tribunal. Such emphases were common in the current ascetical literature, as well as in seminary teaching.<sup>50</sup> They continued to be staples of priestly spirituality for a long time.

Don Bosco's priestly resolutions may then be seen as an appropriate response to the demands of priestly life and existence, as understood in that context. But, as indicated, their pastoral orientation and the open spirituality which they reveal, would tend to show that the dangerous, introverted anxiety of earlier seminary days has been left behind.

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<sup>48</sup> *IBM IX*, 343f (omitted in *EBM IX* [161]).

<sup>49</sup> *IBM VIII*, 909; cf. *EBM VIII*, 392, 438.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Stella-DB I*, 52ff. This author discusses the subject in connection with seminary formation, and points out the anxieties, even phobias, to which such emphases could give rise. He writes in conclusion:

The seminarian who seriously pondered such things would perforce be led to think of the priesthood as something grand and terrible indeed. It could earn him a greater reward, but it would also subject him to a stricter judgment. As a consequence the priestly vocation aggravated rather than solved the problem of personal salvation.

### Don Bosco's First Masses

As Don Bosco states, and the seminary records concur, he was ordained a priest on the summer Ember Saturday (the Saturday after Pentecost Sunday, the vigil of Trinity Sunday), June 5, 1841. Archbishop Louis Fransoni was the ordaining prelate, and the ordination ceremony was held in the Church of the Immaculate Conception at the archbishop's residence. In both the *Spiritual Testament* and the *Memoirs of the Oratory* the priestly ordination receives only the briefest mention. Likewise, in the *Spiritual Testament*, the first Mass, which was said the following day in the church of St. Francis of Assisi attached to the *Convitto*, is allotted a couple of lines. These momentous events are recalled simply, almost impersonally:

Priestly ordination was conferred by our archbishop, His Grace Louis Fransoni, at the Bishop's House on June 5 that same year. First Mass was said at St. Francis of Assisi on June 6, Trinity Sunday, with the assistance of my signal benefactor and director, Fr. Joseph Cafasso from Castelnuovo d'Asti.<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, in the latter work, Don Bosco speaks of his first Masses at some length. The first, second, third and fifth Mass are recorded in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*. In the *Biographical Memoirs* Lemoyne fills out Don Bosco's text with additional material, including details of the fourth Mass :

1. *First Mass: Turin, Church of St. Francis of Assisi, June 6, 1841, Trinity Sunday.*

In the *Memoirs of the Oratory* Don Bosco writes:

The vigil of the feast of the Holy Trinity was the day of my ordination. I said my first Mass in the church of St. Francis of Assisi, [adjacent to the *Convitto*] where Fr. Cafasso held the chair of moral theology. The townsfolk of Castelnuovo were anxiously waiting for me to say it there, for there had not been [a priest ordained and] a first Mass said in my home town for many a year. But I preferred to say it without fuss in Turin.

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. *Motto-TS*, 20 and note 1 above, and text relating thereto.

That day was the most wonderful day of my life. At the *Memento* in that unforgettable Mass I made devout remembrance of all my teachers, of my benefactors both spiritual and temporal, and especially of the ever-lamented Fr. Calosso, whom I have always remembered as a great and signal benefactor.<sup>52</sup>

In the *Biographical Memoirs* Lemoine fills out this quote with considerable detail from other sources, but (as he often does) he ascribes everything to Don Bosco's *Memoirs*:

Again in his much quoted manuscript Don Bosco writes:

The vigil of the feast of the Holy Trinity, *June 5*, was my ordination day. *The ordination ceremony was held by His Grace Archbishop Louis Fransoni at the bishop's house.*

I said my first Mass in the church of St. Francis of Assisi [adjacent to the *Convitto*], where Fr. *Joseph Cafasso, my signal benefactor and director*, held the chair of moral theology. The townsfolk of Castelnuovo were anxiously waiting for me to say it there, for there had not been [a priest ordained and] a first Mass said in my home town for many a year. But I

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<sup>52</sup> *MO-daSilva*, 110; *MO-En*, 166f. The church and the monastery of St. Francis of Assisi were built early in the thirteenth century (by St. Francis himself, as tradition has it). They quickly acquired great religious and civic importance. Both church and monastery were restored in the early seventeenth century; but the church again underwent considerable rebuilding in the 1760s, and through this it acquired the definitive architectural and artistic character that was familiar to Don Bosco in the early 1840s. The Franciscans were expelled by Napoleon and never returned, for the monastery premises had been largely disposed of. The church was taken over by the Archdiocese, and Fr. Dr. Louis Guala (1775-1848) was appointed rector in 1808. Working in association with Fr. Pius Bruno Lanteri (1759-1830), founder of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, Fr. Guala began the famous conferences which, once housed in restored premises obtained from what remained of the old Franciscan monastery, became known as the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*. It offered a two-year program in moral theology and pastoral practice for newly ordained priests who lived there in community. Don Bosco entered the *Convitto* after his ordination with the sponsorship of Fr. Joseph Cafasso (1811-1860) who had been engaged by Fr. Guala as associate [cf. *Giraud-B*, 130-133].

preferred to say it without fuss in Turin. [*I said it*] at the altar of the Guardian Angel, which in this church is situated on the Gospel side. On that day the Universal Church was keeping the feast of the Most Blessed Trinity; the Archdiocese of Turin, the feast of the Miracle of the Blessed Sacrament; the church of St. Francis of Assisi, the feast of Our Lady of Graces, honored in this church from time immemorial. That day was the most wonderful day of my life. At the Memento in that unforgettable Mass I made devout remembrance of all my teachers, of my benefactors both spiritual and temporal, and especially of the ever-lamented Fr. Calosso, whom I have always remembered as a great and signal benefactor. *It is a pious belief that the Lord infallibly grants the grace requested of Him by a new priest at his first Mass. I prayed most ardently for efficacy of speech, that I might thereby do good to souls. It seems that the Lord truly heard my humble prayer.*<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *EBM* I, 385f. Under the one reference to Don Bosco's autobiographical *Memoirs*, Lemoyne introduces considerable material derived from elsewhere (*italicized* portions). For such a procedure, and for Lemoyne's editorial method generally, cf. Francis Desramaut, "Come hanno lavorato gli autori delle Memorie Biografiche," in *Don Bosco nella storia* (note 44 above), p. 37-65. Cf. also Arthur Lenti, "Don Bosco's 'Boswell': John Baptist Lemoyne—the Man and His Work," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 1 (1990: 2) 39ff.

Joseph Cafasso (1811-1860) from Castelnuovo (a compatriot of Don Bosco) studied for the priesthood at first as a non-resident seminarian and then as a resident student of theology in the Chieri seminary. He was ordained in 1833. A student of moral and pastoral theology at the *Convitto*, then associate lecturer under Fr. Guala, and finally chief lecturer and rector, he became the spiritual director and supporter of priests and lay people engaged in ministry, and of Don Bosco in particular. A relationship that grew stronger with the years was established between seminarian Cafasso and young John Bosco perhaps [?] in 1827, when the two met at the door of the church of Morialdo (on the patronal feast, SS. Joachim and Ann, July 26?). [Cf. *MO-daSilva*, 51f.; *MO-En*, 47f., bearing in mind that Don Bosco's dates at this point are not to be relied on]. But Fr. Cafasso became more and more deeply interested in John, to the point of seeing him through to ordination by moral, spiritual and financial support [cf. *MO-daSilva*, 105, 109; *MO-En*, 156 165]. Subsequently Fr. Cafasso brought Don Bosco into the *Convitto* and became his inspiration and guide in the apostolate, as well as his spiritual director.

John Melchior Calosso (1760-1830), the chaplain of Morialdo (1829-1830), was John's first great benefactor and father-figure. Don Bosco gives him what seems at first a disproportionate amount of space in his *Memoirs* [cf. *MO-daSilva*,

As the *italicized* citations show, we are dealing with three additions. The first (a fairly small one) records the place as well as the date of ordination and the ordaining prelate. It is clearly derived from the *Spiritual Testament*.<sup>54</sup>

The second (the sizable middle addition) contains details obtained by Lemoyne upon inquiry of the parish priest of St. Francis of Assisi. The information was conveyed to Lemoyne in a letter which he included in Volume XLIII of his *Documenti*.<sup>55</sup>

44-50; *MO-En*, 33-36. 41ff.], until we read his touching tribute to, and his lament over the death of the good priest. Then we understand:

Fr. Calosso had become my idol. I loved him more than a father, I prayed for him and served him willingly in every way I could. My greatest happiness was to do things for him; and, believe me, I would gladly have given my very life to make him happy.[...] On his part, that holy man loved me so much, that he would frequently reassure me: "Do not worry about your future. As long as I am alive I shall see to it that you lack nothing; and I shall provide for you after I am gone."

Fr. Calosso's death was a disastrous loss for me. I wept inconsolably over my dead benefactor. I thought of him in my waking hours and dreamt of him when asleep. It affected me to the point that my mother became alarmed over my health and sent me off to my grandfather at Capriglio [*MO-daSilva*, 50. 52; *MO-En*, 42. 48].

Thus we understand why Fr. Calosso's remembrance figures so prominently in Don Bosco's first Mass.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Note 51 above, and text relating thereto.

<sup>55</sup> [Giovanni Battista Lemoyne,] *Documenti per scrivere la storia di D. Giovanni Bosco, dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales e di Sales e della Congregazione Salesiana* [privately printed; no place, no date given] [henceforth cited as *Documenti*], vol. XLIII, p. 9 in ASC 110: Cronachette-Lemoyne-Doc, Micro 1183 C3.

The following letter was written by a Fr. Lawrence Romano in the name of the Rector of the church of St. Francis of Assisi, a Fr. Louis Dadesso, O.M.V. in response to Lemoyne's request:

Turin, December 11, 1891.

Most esteemed and reverend Fr. Lemoyne:

Just today I had a note from the Rev. Fr. Louis Dadesso, O.M.V, Rector of the church of St. Francis of Assisi, in these terms: "I checked out the older ledgers of this church, as you

The third addition, at the end of the paragraph, deals with 'efficacy of the word' Except for the clause, "that I might thereby do good to souls" the passage already appears in its entirety in Lemoyne's *Documenti*, and must have been taken from some written source available to Lemoyne.<sup>56</sup> The additional clause included in the text of the *Biographical Memoirs* may have been derived from the testimony given by Fr. Ascanio Savio at the Process of Beatification (1895) otherwise not utilized.<sup>57</sup>

requested, and have ascertained that the Very Rev. Fr. John Bosco did indeed say his first Mass on June 6, 1841, and he said it at the altar of the Guardian Angel, which in this church is situated on the Gospel side."

On that day the Universal Church was keeping the feast of the Most Blessed Trinity; the Archdiocese of Turin, the feast of the Miracle of the Blessed Sacrament; the church of St. Francis of Assisi, the feast of Our Lady of Graces, honored in this church from time immemorial.

Lawrence Romano .

The style and shape of the letter indicates that the information concerning Don Bosco's first Mass in the upper part originates with Fr. Dadesso and is based on his research. On the other hand, the liturgical information concerning the feasts kept on that day seems to have been volunteered by Romano, writer of the letter.

The miracle of the Blessed Sacrament referred to here took place in 1453 during the plunder of the city of Turin. A soldier was carrying off in a sack slung over the back of a mule a monstrance containing the consecrated Host. When he reached the spot where the present church of *Corpus Christi* was later built, the mule refused to budge in spite of being severely whipped. The animal reared, and the monstrance fell to the ground while the Host remained suspended in midair for all to see [cf. *EBM I*, 16, note 4].

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Documenti* II, 6, in ASC 110: Cronachette-Lemoyne-Doc., *Micro* 969 D10. Lemoyne began printing this work in 1885.

<sup>57</sup> *Processus ordinarius Curiae Taurinensis*, Ascanio Savio, Juxta Interrog. decimum tertium in ASC 161: *Deposizione dei Testi*, *Micro* 2198 D6: "I can only testify that (as he once told me) at his ordination [Don Bosco], among other graces, had asked for the gift of the word, that he might thereby do good to souls. It is my conviction that he obtained what he asked for, because whenever he spoke in the exercise of his ministry he never failed to win over the minds and hearts of people."

Fr. Ascanio Savio (1831-1902), Rector of the diocesan seminary of Bra and Turin, testified in November 1895. His testimony was available to Lemoyne for *Biographical Memoirs I* (1898), but not for *Documenti II* (1885). Therefore, the 'efficacy of the word' passage in *Documenti* was drafted from another source.

All things considered, perhaps Lemoyne may be forgiven for 'defacing' Don Bosco's simpler account, and thanked for preserving the additional information regarding the beginnings of Don Bosco's priesthood.

The *Celebret*, or faculty to celebrate Mass, released to Don Bosco by the Archbishop is also worthy of note:

Louis Marquis Fransoni [...] to our beloved in Christ, the Very Rev. John Melchior Bosco [...], newly ordained to the priesthood, Greetings in the Lord.

You have passed your examination in sacred Rites and have demonstrated sufficient knowledge. Therefore we grant you the faculty to celebrate a First Mass and Masses thereafter, but under the following conditions:

You must have an experienced priest present to assist you in the celebration of the first Mass and the next seven. You are not to have a gentleman or a lady as sponsors for the Mass (*patrinum aut matrinam*), as they say. And you should see to it that elaborate banquets and everything that smacks of worldliness are eschewed. You must also have the permission of the most Rev. Rector of the church where you plan to offer your first Mass; and it is our wish that you inform him of the above.

You should ponder again and again what the exalted nature of this Sacrifice and the majesty of our good and great God, to whom you have access as a priest, require of you. You should, in other words, cultivate the necessary inner dispositions; always manifest the gravity of speech appropriate to your estate; attentively observe all prescriptions pertaining to the rites of the sacred liturgy, in the conviction that none of them may be performed, even in the least degree, carelessly or hurriedly. Therefore, every year you should set aside some time (at least twenty minutes) to review the liturgical rites with the care that their divine character requires [...]<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Celebret* in ASC 112: Documenti personali-ecclesiastici, *Micro* 73 E2.

Perhaps it is in line with such priestly ethic that Don Bosco chose to say his first Mass “without fuss” in Turin rather than in his hometown, and at St. Francis of Assisi with Fr. Cafasso as assistant priest.

2. *Second Mass: Turin, Church of Our Lady of Consolation, Monday, June 7, 1841*

On Monday I went to say Mass in the church of Our Lady of Consolation to thank the great Virgin Mary for the innumerable graces she had obtained for me from her divine Son, Jesus.<sup>59</sup>

This Mass acquired the character of a pilgrimage to thank Our Lady at her renowned and beloved shrine, for it was Don Bosco’s firm conviction that he owed everything to her. Even if not a resident of Turin, Don Bosco was familiar with this popular center of Marian devotion, and the choice was a logical one. Later, while at the nearby *Convitto* at St. Francis of Assisi (1841-1844), Don Bosco was considering joining the Oblates and going to the missions. He must have been a frequent visitor to their house and church of the *Consolata*, and it may have been at the Virgin’s shrine that his vocational crisis was resolved. Lemoyne writes: “He continued to pray fervently that the Blessed Virgin might show him how and where best to exercise his sacred ministry on behalf of souls.”<sup>60</sup>

3. *Third Mass: Chieri, Church of St. Dominic, Tuesday, June 8, 1841*

On Tuesday I traveled to Chieri and offered Mass in the church of St. Dominic, where my old professor, Fr. Giusiana, [sic]

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<sup>59</sup> *MO-daSilva*, 110f.; *MO-En*, 166. Built on a very early shrine in 1679 and dedicated to Our Lady, Consoler of the Afflicted (popularly known as the *Consolata*), it soon became the people’s favorite church, and its miraculous image of the Virgin a center of popular devotion. After the Cistercian monks, it was officiated by the Oblates of the Virgin Mary (1834-1855) [cf. note 52 above]. Subsequently it was entrusted to the Franciscans, and in 1869 to the priests of the *Convitto* under Bl. Joseph Allamano (1851-1926), Fr. Cafasso’s nephew and founder of the Missionary Society of the *Consolata* [cf. *MO-daSilva*, 111, note to line 588]. .

<sup>60</sup> *EBM* II, 162 [160-164].

was still living and where he was waiting for me with fatherly affection. He was so moved that he cried throughout that Mass. I spent the whole day with him, one I can call a day in paradise.<sup>61</sup>

This recollection harks back to Don Bosco's pre-seminary days at Chieri and the friendship which had sprung up between John and his old revered professor, the Dominican Fr. Hyacinth Giussiana, of the monastery attached to the church of St. Dominic. He had been John's professor of 'grammar' in the latter's second year of secondary studies at the 'Royal College'. He had also saved John from the penalties of cribbing, as Don Bosco himself relates in his *Memoirs*.<sup>62</sup> A little earlier Don Bosco had spoken of his good fortune in finding a good confessor in Fr. John Maloria, a canon at the *duomo* (cathedral). But it seems that in Fr. Giussiana he had found a 'father', just as he had in Fr. Calosso. There is then an interesting parallel between the first and the third Mass in their recollection of father-figures from Don Bosco's youth.

This third Mass, like the second, seems also to have had a Marian slant, for it was said in the chapel and at the altar of Our Lady of the Rosary, the most beautiful chapel of a very beautiful church.<sup>63</sup>

*4. Fourth Mass: Chieri, the Church of St. Mary of the Stairs (Duomo), Wednesday, June 9, 1841*

Don Bosco makes no mention of his fourth Mass either in his *Spiritual Testament* or in his *Memoirs*. But Lemoyne, quoting Don Bosco as though he

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<sup>61</sup> *MO-daSilva*, 111; *MO-En*, 166.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *MO-daSilva*, 66; *MO-En*, 76.

Fr. Hyacinth [Count] Giussiana (1774-1844) was professor of 'grammar' in the secondary school of Chieri for 26 years. As rector of the church of St. Dominic, he was instrumental in restoring the Dominican community that had been disbanded by Napoleon [cf. *Caselle-DBStud*, 70].

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *MO-daSilva*, 111, note to line 590; *Giraud-B*, 81f. I have been unable to corroborate from the sources that Don Bosco said this Mass at Our Lady's altar. Lemoyne makes no mention of it [cf. *EBM* I, 387].

The three-naved church of St. Dominic, with its imposing gothic-styled façade and bell tower, and the adjoining monastery of that name, date back to the thirteenth century.

did, writes tersely: "On Wednesday, I offered the Holy Sacrifice in the *duomo* of that city."<sup>64</sup>

The Mass was said in the chapel-shrine dedicated to Our Lady [Dispenser] of Graces.<sup>65</sup> Again we see the 'Marian connection'. As a high school student in Chieri, so Lemoine assures us, John Bosco came to this chapel every morning and evening without fail to pray before Our Lady:

At Chieri his favorite church was that of St. Mary of the Stairs. It was generally known as the *duomo* [cathedral], because with its three huge naves and its twenty-two splendid side chapels it surpassed any of the cathedrals in Piedmont in size and grandeur. John would be found there every morning and evening without fail. Advancing under the ancient and lofty gothic vaults, he would go and kneel before the statue of Our Lady [Dispenser] of Graces. He would offer her his filial homage and pray for the graces needed to fulfill the mission she had entrusted to him. He continued this practice throughout his student days at Chieri.<sup>66</sup>

It was also at the feet of the Virgin of Graces that John's vocational crisis was resolved after his attempt to enter the Franciscan monastery and after much soul searching. As he writes in his *Memoirs*:

Since the obstacles were many and lasting, I decided to reveal the whole matter to my friend Comollo. He advised me to make a novena. Meanwhile he would write to his uncle the provost. On the last day of the novena, I went to confession

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<sup>64</sup> *Documenti* II, 7 in ASC 110: Cronachette, Lemoine-Doc, *Micro* 969 D11; *EBM* I, 387. The church of Our Lady of the Stairs, popularly called *duomo* (cathedral) because of its size and grandeur, is an early fifteenth-century structure built to replace an earlier church on the site of an ancient pagan shrine. Outstanding among its twenty-two artistic chapels is the chapel-shrine of Our Lady [Dispenser] of Graces established by vow of the city fathers during the bubonic plague of 1630 and rebuilt in splendid baroque style in 1780. Our Lady under this title was the co-patroness of the city, and her chapel, with the lovely statue sculpted in 1636, was a center of popular devotion [cf. *Caselle-SDStud*, 65f.; *Giraud-B*, 105ff.].

<sup>65</sup> So Giraud and Caselle (*Ibid.*). I cannot confirm this from the sources. But an inscribed plaque in the chapel recalls the event.

<sup>66</sup> *EBM* I, 201.

and communion with this incomparable friend. I attended one Mass and served another at the altar of Our Lady of Graces in the *duomo* [cathedral]. Then we went home and found a letter from Fr. Comollo [...].<sup>67</sup>

Thus, the fourth Mass appears to have been another stage in Don Bosco's Marian pilgrimage.

*5. Fifth and Solemn Mass, Castelnuovo, Corpus Christi Thursday, June 10, 1841.*

On Thursday, the solemnity of Corpus Christi, I gratified the wishes of the people of Castelnuovo and sang Mass in my home town. I also officiated in the traditional procession of the Blessed Sacrament. The parish priest invited to dinner my relatives, the clergy, and the people of standing in the town. It was a happy celebration, and everyone was glad to be part of it, because the townspeople all loved me very much and everyone was happy for anything that might turn out to my advantage.<sup>68</sup>

It was natural, but a great honor nonetheless, that the parish priest of Castelnuovo, Fr. Anthony Cinzano, should defer to the newly-ordained priest on the solemnity of Corpus Christi for both the 'sung' Mass and the solemn procession.<sup>69</sup> It testifies to the esteem which John Bosco enjoyed, as does the dinner reception which Fr. Cinzano gave for relatives and dignitaries in his honor.

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<sup>67</sup> *MO-daSilva*, 85; *MO-En*, 111.

<sup>68</sup> *MO-daSilva*, 111; *MO-En*, 167.

<sup>69</sup> Fr. Dr. Peter Anthony Cinzano (1804-1870) had been administrator of the parish of Castelnuovo since 1834, and its pastor since 1840. He had helped Don Bosco financially [cf. *EBM* I, 228], and from him John had received the clerical habit [cf. *MO-daSilva*, 87; *MO-En*, 121]. A warm father-son relationship had developed between the two [cf. *EBM* I, 247, 274f., 314] which matured into a close life-long friendship [cf. *Sussidi* 2, 249f.].

## Margaret Bosco's Presence

Nowhere in the sources do we find any indication that Mamma Margaret was present at any of her son's first priestly functions—whether ordination or first Masses in Turin, Chieri or Castelnuovo. Lemoyne is silent on the subject in both *Documenti* and *Biographical Memoirs*; but in his biography of Margaret Bosco he does mention her presence at the festivities in Castelnuovo on Corpus Christi Thursday.<sup>70</sup>

A bronze bas-relief with a dedicatory inscription was set up in the church of St. Francis of Assisi to commemorate Don Bosco's first Mass. Among the figures represented in the panel one notices also Mamma Margaret.<sup>71</sup> If she was present at the first Mass, she might have been also present at the ordination service and at the Masses that followed. She may or may not have been present. But it should be pointed out that in those days it was the first solemn mass that stole the limelight. The ordination ceremony was where the candidate simply 'took Mass'. It seems more likely, therefore, that Margaret stayed back to await and to prepare for her son's return as a priest for the solemn celebration. One can only imagine the emotion, the crowding of memories, and the pride she must have experienced when she finally beheld her son at the altar, in her home town, among all the folks she knew and loved so well.

Don Bosco in his Memoirs brings the narrative of those memorable events to a close with simple and touching words:

I went home that evening to be with my family. As I drew near the house and saw the place of the dream I had when I was about nine, I could not hold back the tears. I said: "How wonderful are the ways of Divine Providence! God has truly

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<sup>70</sup> G. B. Lemoyne, *Scene morali di famiglia esposte nella vita di Margherita Bosco. Racconto edificante ed ameno*. Torino: Scuola Tip. Salesiana, 1886, p. 101: "The parish priest invited to dinner Margaret, the immediate family, the clergy and people of standing in the town."

Lemoyne collected the biographical episodes on Margaret between 1883 and 1885 chiefly through conversations with Don Bosco. The material was first organized in *Documenti* (1885). It was then edited for publication in the *Catholic Readings*, and offered to Don Bosco on his 'name day' (1886). It was published in its final form in the *Biographical Memoirs* (1898...).

<sup>71</sup> This bas-relief was dedicated by the Salesian Past Pupils on June 6, 1930. Cf. *Molineris-DBIn*, 257f.

raised a poor child from the earth to place him among the princes of his people."<sup>72</sup>

Home for Don Bosco, as for Margaret, at Becchi now was the house that Joseph had built for his growing family after his stint as share cropper at the Sussambrino farm—no longer the 'little house'.<sup>73</sup> We may be sure that she and Joseph's wife, Mary, had prepared a goodly feast and a reception worthy of the occasion. Nothing of this is recorded in the sources. But the profound and prophetic words that Margaret spoke to her son once she had him for herself that day are recorded by Lemoyne, probably as Don Bosco had recalled them in one of their evening tête-à-têtes:

You are now a priest and say Mass. From now on, therefore, you will be in closer contact with Christ. But remember that to begin to say Mass is to begin to suffer. You will not realize this immediately, but after a while you will find that your mother was right. I am sure that you will pray for me every day, whether I be living or dead; that's enough for me. From now on give your whole attention to saving souls, and don't worry about me.<sup>74</sup>

## Conclusion

In the foregoing pages we have examined the records of the beginnings of Don Bosco's priesthood, with particular attention to what he himself has left written in recalling those experiences. Now a concluding comment is in order. As we observe Don Bosco's life in action through his forty-seven and a half years of priesthood, we can only stand in awe at the intensity with which those early experiences were lived, deepened and perfected. The unambiguous fidelity,

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<sup>72</sup> *MO-daSilva*, 11; *MO-En*, 167. The allusion is to Ps. 113, 7-8.

<sup>73</sup> Joseph had returned to Becchi in 1839 after working the Matta farm at Sussambrino with a partner since 1830, and had built his house across the way from the 'little house', which was beginning to fall into disrepair. Margaret had been living with Joseph. Anthony had likewise built himself a tiny one-room house in the immediate vicinity; but he was still using a bedroom in the 'little house'.

<sup>74</sup> *Documenti* II, 7 in ASC 110: Cronachette, Lemoyne-Doc; *Micro* 969 D11. Cf. also *Lemoyne-Margherita*, 101f.; *EBM* I, 388.

the dedication, and above all the burning love for souls which motivated his priestly life are nothing if not absolutely amazing.

It is related that in December 1866, in a context of bitter confrontation between the Holy See and the Italian Government over the matter of the appointment of bishops to vacant sees, Don Bosco was invited to an interview by Prime Minister Bettino Ricasoli in Florence. This gentleman hoped that Don Bosco might act unofficially as a go-between. Lemoyne writes that as soon as Don Bosco was ushered into the Prime Minister's office,

halting in the middle of the room, [he] firmly declared, "Your Excellency, I want you to know that Don Bosco is a priest at the altar, a priest in the confessional, a priest among his boys. He is a priest in Florence no less than in Turin. He is a priest in a poor person's house, a priest in the king's palace, and a priest in a Minister's office!"<sup>75</sup>

Developing the ideas expressed in this familiar text, Fr. Eugene Ceria in an address to a congress of Salesian Cooperators, draws a striking portrait of Don Bosco the priest: a priest at the altar, a priest in the confessional, a priest among young people, a priest everywhere, in Florence no less than in Turin, a priest among the poor, a priest with the rich and powerful, a priest in everything, even in the way he wrote, a priest with his Salesian confreres, a priest with the Pope, bishops and other brother priests, a priest through and through.<sup>76</sup>

Upon reflection we might conclude that this entire extraordinary life of priestly love and service grew out of that original mighty pledge: 'I will not shrink from suffering, from striving, nor even from humiliations, whenever it is a question of saving souls.'<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *IBM VIII*, 533; cf. *EBM VIII*, 239.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. E. Ceria, *Don Bosco Prete (Appunti per un convegno di Direttori dei Cooperatori Salesiani laziali a Roma)*. Roma: Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, 1928, 20 pages.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Note 35 above, and text relating thereto.