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# Don Bosco's *History of Italy*: A Morality Play Or an Exercise in History?

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## Don Bosco's Love of History

"If Don Bosco during his student years had one special preference, it was for reading history," noted Father Alberto Caviglia in his exhaustive study of Don Bosco's *Storia d'Italia*.<sup>1</sup> "In fact, one can say he had a predilection for historical studies." In recent years critics now concur that Caviglia's assertion was an understatement. Seminarian Bosco's predilection was in truth an all consuming preoccupation.

From his first days at Chieri young Bosco became an avid reader of historical works. But if he did have a "predilection", it was for Church history. Biographer Lemoyne attests to this attraction:

He was especially drawn to reading works on Church history. He often deplored the fact that many historians ignored the achievements of the popes while dwelling at length on minor historical personalities. ... In this regard it is pertinent to add that as soon as Rohrbacher's *Church History* was published, he studiously consumed all 17 volumes. Later he also read Salzano's volumes, and once remarked that if his books had been printed when he had still been a seminarian, he would have worshipped every page of his writings, so pleased was he with the author's respect for the papacy. ... Well-grounded and enriched by his reading of the historians Bercastel, Henrion, Fleury, Rohrbacher, Salzano, and the Bollandists, he then set about writing his own popular history of the Church for young readers.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alberto Caviglia, *La Storia d'Italia, Capolavoro di Don Bosco* (Torino, 1933), xii.

<sup>2</sup> John Baptist Lemoyne, *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco* (New Rochelle, vol.1, p.331. (Hereafter cited as Lemoyne, *EBM*). Don Bosco's love for the papacy was a recurring hallmark in many of his writings. "Whenever the subject of

As a young author, Don Bosco's first venture in historical writing was his *Storia Ecclesiastica* (*Church History*, 1845).<sup>3</sup> It was meant to be a basic text and an introductory survey of the history of the Church. It was primarily aimed at secondary school students, as well as at young seminarians who were beginning their studies. The book quickly found an eager and welcome market. Its simplicity of style, unencumbered with the jargon of the academic historian soon proved itself. The book's unique presentation—a question and answer format that runs through the text's 388 pages—no doubt added to its appeal. In one month the first printing of 15,000 copies quickly sold out.

Don Bosco's *Church History* brims over with optimism. Every cloud has its silver lining, no wrong is left unpunished, no test of faith goes unrewarded. The persecutors and detractors of the Church receive their due comeuppance while their innocent victims in the end attain their eternal reward.

Don Bosco's is an upbeat treatment of the triumphs and travails of the Church's history. Its purpose is to edify and uplift the young reader. Nothing, therefore, is allowed to besmirch its pages. As Pietro Stella aptly notes: "Don Bosco did not write about clashes between emperors and popes, or between heretics and orthodox Catholics. Instead he added edifying episodes, hagiographical portraits, miracles, acts of virtue that dot the history of the

the Roman Pontiff would come up in conversation," recalled Emilian Manacorda, Bishop of Fossano, "one could see Don Bosco's face light up with pleasure. It pained him to hear the person of the pope disparaged or to listen to someone brush over the achievements of the popes as though they were of little consequence. I heard him say that there was a lamentable ignorance on the part of most people when it came to recognizing the great service the early popes had done for the Church in the early centuries. It seemed that he was determined to set things right; he spent endless hours in private and public libraries reading everything he could lay his hands on about the first popes. The extensive knowledge that he acquired was put to good use. He ran a series of 14 profiles of the early popes in his *Catholic Readings*. Though these brief biographies were written for the general public they caught the eye of that estimable and scholarly churchman, Cardinal Louis Tripepi, who frequently quoted from Don Bosco's collective lives of the early popes. He referred to their author as "that learned and zealous luminary of Turin and the Church". John Baptist Lemoyne, *Vita di San Giovanni Bosco*, ed. Angelo Amadei (Torino, revised edition, 1941), vol. 1, p. 539.

<sup>3</sup> Don Bosco's *Storia Ecclesiastica* (*Church History*) sold out in a few months after it was released in 1845. It went through a second edition two years later. It is when one reads the complete title of the book that the writer's purpose in writing it becomes evident. It was meant as a textbook to be used in the classroom by schoolchildren: *Storia Ecclesiastica ad uso delle scuole, utile per ogni ceto di persone*. The entire text (388 pages) consists of questions ('domande') and answers ('risposte'). Each question, direct and succinct, averages about 15 words in length. Each answer, brief yet pithy, is remarkable for its completeness. The author well understood a schoolboy's brief attention span and used the question/answer method as the more effective technique in holding his attention.

Church. As he himself put it, his aim was to show the 'progress' of the Church, and how it was spread and preserved amid so many conflicts.'<sup>4</sup>

The author dedicated his work to Erve De La Croix, the provincial superior of the Christian Brothers, for whom he professed his "respect and esteem". Besides his admiration for De La Croix, Don Bosco no doubt also had the circulation of his book in mind, for he writes in his dedicatory note to Brother De La Croix: "... please see to it that it will reach those who may benefit from it." The Christian Brothers conducted several schools in the Turin area.

Don Bosco's text on the history of the Church which had sold out in 1845 went through a second edition two years later. But by that year, Piedmont and the rest of the Italian peninsula, was teetering on the edge of political and social unrest that would usher in the first war for Italian independence. By 1847 relations between Church and state were becoming noticeably tense, and signs of overt anticlericalism were seen everywhere. Don Bosco would have to tread cautiously should he decide to describe the current hostilities between Rome and Piedmont of that period. Don Bosco's biographer sensed the author's wary approach in the revised edition of his *Storia Ecclesiastica*. He noted that the new edition contained no significant changes despite the tumultuous events that were taking place. Lemoyne remarked: "Amid the storm of unbridled political and religious passions, he labored over the second edition of the *Storia Ecclesiastica*. He wanted to tell his readers the whole truth about certain contemporary events and point out to them who the present enemies of the Church were. On the other hand he realized that he had to avoid antagonizing or provoking their wrath against his two oratories. Therefore, ... he avoided specific accusations."<sup>5</sup>

Don Bosco's quandary was a real one. To be a creditable historian he felt he had to tell the true story of the mounting persecution which the Church throughout the Italian peninsula was experiencing. However, taking this tack would have meant naming names and exposing their aggressive anticlerical objectives. Such frankness would have placed him and his Oratory work in jeopardy. It was a risk Don Bosco would not take. He decided to let discretion be the better part of valor, and the revised edition of Don Bosco's history of the Church ends with the description of the advances of the Catholic religion in faraway China.

Two years after the appearance of his *Storia Ecclesiastica*, Don Bosco published the second of his historical trilogy, the *Storia Sacra (Bible History, 1847)*. What motivated him to write the history of the Bible is stated in frank terms in the preface. Dissatisfied with the highfalutin language used in the current Bible histories of his time, he decided to publish his own school text of

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<sup>4</sup> Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco: Life and Work* (New Rochelle, 1985), 261

<sup>5</sup> Lemoyne, EBM, vol.3, p.215. Don Bosco's silence regarding the enemies of the Church, however, is not total. He does single out some secret societies which were discrediting and harming the Catholic Church in Italy. Some of the collective "enemies" he points to are: The Carbonari, the Illuminati, Mazzini's "Giovane Italia". See *Storia Ecclesiastica*, p. 386.

the greatest story ever told. And he would write it in a language that any schoolboy could understand.

Twenty years later when penning his autobiography, *Memorie Dell' Oratorio Di S. Francesco Di Sales (Memoirs of the Oratory)*, he both recalled and reiterated the reasons that had motivated him in writing the history of the Bible:

I took a look at the Bible Histories that were then in current use and found that not one suited my needs. The language in which they were written was too literate, and therefore, difficult for children to follow. Moreover, the authors included too many stories that for young readers could have been morally disturbing. Above all, most of these Bible texts failed to focus on those elements that should have served to strengthen the foundation of the truths of the faith. ...

In view of this I decided to fill this void by writing my own history of the Bible. I took pains to write it in easy-to-read language, free of the shortcomings that I had found in the other histories I consulted. It was not, of course, an elegant production, but I accomplished what I had set out to do: produce a history of the Bible that would both help and inspire my juvenile students.<sup>6</sup>

Don Bosco's objection that too many authors were writing textbooks that went far over the heads of their young readers would later impel him to write a history of Italy that could be easily understood. During the mid 1850s children's textbooks were edited by university-trained and classically-educated authors. They crafted their works in the popular rhetorically Italianate style of the time, and they seemed to be totally oblivious of the fact that they were supposed to be writing for schoolchildren.

Don Bosco was determined not to be lured into that trap. To insure that what he was writing would be easily understood, he used to hand out pages of his manuscript of his *Storia Sacra* to the school porter (literate but not learned) for him to read. Later he would query him to ascertain whether he had understood

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<sup>6</sup> *Memorie dell' Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales*, ed. Eugenio Ceria (Torino, 1946), 185. Don Bosco's dissatisfaction with language usage that prevailed in history textbooks of the time is brought to the reader's attention in each volume of his trilogy. His theme is consistent: His style, plain and direct and shorn of all academic baggage, is intended to reach the average reader. Yet his everyday vocabulary that render his concepts easy to grasp can be deceptive, as Pietro Stella perceptively points out: "His readers were astounded and captivated by the mounds of paper behind [his writings]."

For an excellent study of Don Bosco's *Storia Sacra (Bible History)* see Natale Cerrato's *La catechesi di Don Bosco nella sua Storia Sacra (LAS, Roma 1979)* Besides being a scholarly analysis of Don Bosco's *Bible History*, Cerrato's presentation demonstrates how Don Bosco used his text as a practical and efficient instrument in teaching the history of the Bible to children.

what he had read. "If not, Don Bosco would rewrite those pages and make them even simpler and easier to read." <sup>7</sup>

### "Write the History of Italy"

During the early months of 1855 Don Bosco was busily at work preparing two books for publication. One was a sorely-needed handbook especially designed to counsel priests in the hearing of children's confessions; the second, a long-cherished project, was an easy-to-read yet comprehensive history of Italy. The latter was being deliberately crafted to appeal both to a teenage audience as well as to the man in the street. <sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lemoyne, *EBM* vol. 2, p. 307.

<sup>8</sup> In the mid-1850s Don Bosco was a man constantly on the go. Demands on his time were numerous; his days at the Oratory were always chock-full with activities. How and when, one wonders, did he ever find time to write as much as he did? Perhaps his biographer and trusted confidant, John Baptist Lemoyne, has the best explanation. After all, he lived with Don Bosco at the Oratory for a number of years, observed and recorded his subject's many activities, and consulted with eye-witnesses regarding the numerous events and intimate vignettes he chronicled in his *Memoirs*:

Whenever Don Bosco was at home or on some trip, he somehow managed to squeeze every minute out of every hour to his advantage and put it to work. He wrote little during the day because of his numerous commitments and demands on his time. So at the Oratory he reserved his nights for writing. By the light of a flickering candle, and later in the glow of an oil lamp, he would work tirelessly on his manuscripts into the small hours of the morning. The light burning in his room often served notice that he was fighting the clock to meet a printer's deadline. And it was no rare sight to see him late that same morning rushing out of the Oratory to bring his copy to the publisher.

Since he was often on the road, whether traveling by stagecoach or by train, he made the most of his enforced inactivity. He rarely set out on a destination without first stuffing his traveling bag with manuscripts, copybooks, and an ample supply of pencils.

When journeying by stagecoach he would secure a window seat and scribble away until light failed him. As dusk came on, he would put his papers aside, clamber up to the coachman's seat and converse with him for the remainder of the trip.

During stopovers, while fresh horses were being harnessed, he would search out some isolated spot—a window ledge, or outdoor table, or rickety chair—and pursue his writing. When the stagecoach stopped at an inn or pulled up to a relay station for refreshments or to take on new passengers, Don Bosco sought out an inconspicuous corner table. Then completely oblivious to the hustle and bustle around him, he would use the rest-interval on his writing.

Don Bosco had shrewdly determined that the time for a popular history of Italy had arrived. No such work in Italian for young readers was available, and he had decided that his work would fill that void. Moreover, the stirrings for Italian unification among the populace throughout the peninsula had created a strong consciousness of nationalism and a drive for self-determination. The story of Italy was yearning to be told. But Don Bosco found himself in a quandary: which of the two books should he publish first?

Don Bosco's early biographer, John Baptist Lemoyne, noted that he leaned toward completing his confession manual first because of its urgent need. An increasing number of priests were belittling the hearing of children's confessions, *insisting* that it was "a waste of time". Moreover, "... the impatience and annoyance caused by the thoughtlessness and ignorance of most children, as well as the priests' own lack of experience in dealing with the young had brought about the sad result that very few priests understood the value of, or cared to hear, children's confessions. As a result, most children received the Sacrament only at Easter."

Unable to make up his mind, the author sought the advice of his beloved mentor, Father Joseph Cafasso. He brought along two bulky copybooks containing the drafts of his texts. One was entitled *The History of Italy*; the other, *A Manual for the Hearing of Children's Confessions*. Without missing a beat, and perhaps to Don Bosco's surprise, Cafasso's advice was almost a command: "Write about the history of Italy first".<sup>9</sup>

In recreating circumstances surrounding this conversation, Don Bosco's biographer neglects to mention a relevant fact. Unavailable anywhere was the existence of a history of Italy adapted for young readers. Father Albert Caviglia's

Even on his walks his fertile imagination was at work. Going over some work in progress in his mind, he could be seen coming to an abrupt stop, jot down a few notes, and then proceed on his way.

In later years when train travel became more common and convenient, he would select a well-lighted place, spread out his manuscript on the adjoining seat, and in a few moments become totally engrossed in his writing. However, in those days train travel was still in its infancy; long delays for connecting trains were frequent. While impatient travelers cooled their heels in the waiting room, or paced impatiently outdoors, Don Bosco would put those intervals to good use, revising or proofreading his manuscripts.

He also had his little-known hideaways. One was the library of the *Convitto*, with its well-stocked shelves of historical works and learned tomes. Sometimes, to get away from the madding crowd and write undisturbed, he sought refuge in a quiet room in Bersalgiere Brosio's home. See Giovanni Batt. Lemoyne, *Memorie Biografiche Di Don Giovanni Bosco* (Torino, 1904), vol. 4, 539 passim. Pietro Stella, *op.cit.*, 276.

<sup>9</sup> Lemoyne *EBM*, vol. 5, 322-323.

exhaustive research in the field of children's books for this period reveals the dearth of books on Italian history for a juvenile audience: "When Don Bosco published his work, not a single popular book on Italian history, written expressly for the young, was to be found in Piedmont."<sup>10</sup>

### Defining his goals

In his preface to the first edition of his *History of Italy (1855-1856)*, the author's objectives are clearly defined. Unlike his *Church History (1845)* and his *Bible History (1847)*, he alerted his readers that his was not a textbook, but an easy-to-read history book tailored for the adolescent (and for the general public) designed to edify and instruct. Because it was not a scholarly tome, the reader would not be burdened with the academic baggage of footnotes; and he would be mercifully spared the inevitable obtruse references that accompanied historical works of that period. Further, the author hastens to assure his young reader that his book will make for pleasurable and uplifting reading. For not only will he not get lost in the thickets of political theories and prickly controversies, but History herself will become his moral guide, inspiring while instructing him. In part the preface to the first edition of 1855-1856 reads:

It is a universal maxim that every writer aims to reach the intellectual level of his reader. Just as one should not force rough food on an infant, neither should an author force his reader to pore over pages he cannot digest. This is the principle I have followed in writing the story of my country.

Consequently, throughout my work, the mental grasp of my readers has been uppermost in my mind. In style and format and content, the approach I have used in describing historic events has been to couch them in plain, easy-to-understand language. This principle has always guided me in the past, and it continues to underlie the style of this book.

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<sup>10</sup> Almost twenty years earlier, Luigi Alessandro Parravicini (1800-1880) had published his highly popular *Giannetto*. But this was a children's book written for the pre-adolescent reader. Its purpose was to instruct children of tender years with the salutary moral lessons that could be derived from historical anecdotes and events. Don Bosco's story of the history of his country was written for teenage readers in secondary schools and in junior seminaries. Caviglia notes that there was no popular historical literature for the juvenile audience such as existed in France, England, and the United States. England had the delightful history manuals of Oliver Goldsmith which were widely read; the United States had such historical novels as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (wrongly attributed to Edgar Allan Poe), but popular historical works that appealed to the interest of the young were non-existent in Piedmont. Caviglia, *op.cit.*, xlv.

In view of this, I have limited myself to narrating only those historical events whose sources are verifiable and useful for inculcating a sense of moral consciousness in my reader. Thus he becomes doubly enriched: first he learns to appreciate the noble legacy of his country while profiting from the moral lessons he derives from the recital of its past deeds.

I also thought it appropriate to eliminate those historical happenings which have constantly caused endless debates, and whose real circumstances are shrouded in the unknown. It is my conviction that the young mind often finds it difficult to grapple with involved political controversies which in the long run often confuse rather than instruct him. Therefore, I have omitted them in my text.

It must not be inferred from the above that my work is a superficial treatment of history. In fact, in recreating the story of Italy's past, I have dutifully consulted the works of numerous reputable historians. Endless hours have gone into the reading of recognized scholars who have written on Italian history and related subjects. Nor have I hesitated to profit from the fruits of their labors whenever it suited my purpose.

In writing the history of our country, therefore, my principal goal has been to craft an historical account that would best serve the interests of the young, who are, after all, the hope of our future.

Every page of this book has one overriding purpose: to inculcate in my young audience an appreciation of historical truth with the purpose of planting in the reader a love for righteousness, an abhorrence of evil, and respect for religion and authority.

It is my confident expectation that the warm welcome my other books and writings have received will also be accorded the history of our country. And should the reader benefit in any way from its reading, let him be thankful to the Giver of all good things, to whom this book is dedicated.<sup>11</sup>

The author clearly defines his goal in writing the history of his country and charts the course it will take. He will use the ebb and flow of historical events to inculcate moral values in his readers. This objective is reiterated in his book's "Conclusion". Moreover, reading the chronicles of the past, he warns his readers, can be serious business, for History can be an unrelenting taskmaster.

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<sup>11</sup> Giovanni Bosco, *La Storia D'Italia, raccontata alla gioventu da suoi primi abitatori sino ai nostri giorni* (Torino, 1855), 524-525.

History is a grand but demanding teacher. Grand because of the invaluable lessons she teaches us; demanding because she records the words and actions of man incisively—regardless of his wealth, dignity, or station in life. Whatever a person has said or done is all grist for the mill of History, and she records his achievements as they deserve to be remembered. If then History's memory is so tenacious, should we not always be conscious of what we do or say, knowing that they will be recorded as such for all time? That is reason enough to serve as a warning that the good or evil we do in this life will live on long after we are gone.

As Don Bosco's story of Italy unfolds, it is the teacher rather than the historian who plays the leading role. "His pages are those of an educator talking. There is concern for truthfulness in retelling past events, of course, but his main purpose is to teach, to present the facts and events that would be more beneficial for morality. ...He wants the moral lesson to flow naturally from his presentation of facts, to avoid the 'political debates' that permeate other history manuals and to underline the religious import of history as he had already learned to do in his histories of the Bible and of the Church. He seeks to teach that God governs human events, that good and evil are recompensed even in life, and that Jesus Christ ... will reward the good."<sup>12</sup>

The author's moral imperative continually surfaces in his story. Don Bosco believed education to be primarily moral, and insisted that intellectual training must always have a moral foundation.<sup>13</sup> His moral lessons, generally brief and unobtrusive, are pervasive and insistent throughout; and there is rarely a chapter in which the author does not draw a salutary lesson from an historical event.

What is the nature of the morality that pervades the pages of *The History of Italy*? Actually it is not synonymous with the morality of 19th century Victorianism with its antimacassars and genteel ways. Nor is it the middle-class, conventional, and equalitarian morality for example, that derived from Benjamin Franklin and his careful rules of good conduct, with its stress on industry, thrift, sobriety, punctuality, and other middle-class virtues. Rather it is the morality that traces its roots directly to the truths of Catholic doctrine and practice "wherein only there can salvation be found."

It was his young readers' traditional Catholic faith that Don Bosco sought to strengthen. This becomes obvious by his frequent examples of the heroic acts of

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<sup>12</sup> Pietro Stella, *op.cit.*, 262.

<sup>13</sup> Even Don Bosco's manual, *The Metric System (1849)*, is replete with a utilitarian morality. For the author, arithmetic computations are not just soulless numbers. If a young man, the question asks, smokes a given number of cigarettes a day, how much of his hard-earned money goes up in smoke after one week? after one month? Or, how much does a young worker accumulate from his weekly salary if he wisely saves a given portion of it (after contributing a modest share to the poor, of course) after one month? In Don Bosco's popular manual, morality and thrift go hand in hand.

the saints, of the death of the martyrs who gave their lives for their religion, of the contributions of the popes in the course of history.

Perhaps the most powerful lesson that history can teach us is that the practice of religion is deeply rooted in the nature of man. And where religion is practiced and respected, society in general and the family in particular have always thrived. On the contrary, where religion has been suppressed or where it is non-existent, there chaos and immorality have taken over. This then is a compelling reason to cherish one's religion. Foster it, therefore, and above all shun those who would attempt to subvert it.

### ***Don Bosco's History of Italy Goes to Press***

The final editing of Don Bosco's manuscript before it was delivered to the printer proved to be an arduous task. The author dictated his entire text to the young seminarian, Michael Rua. That draft was then vigorously revised anew by the author, as the few extant pages of the original manuscript reveal. Finally, this emended version was given to Melchior Voli who carefully recopied it in his own crisp and clear handwriting.<sup>14</sup>

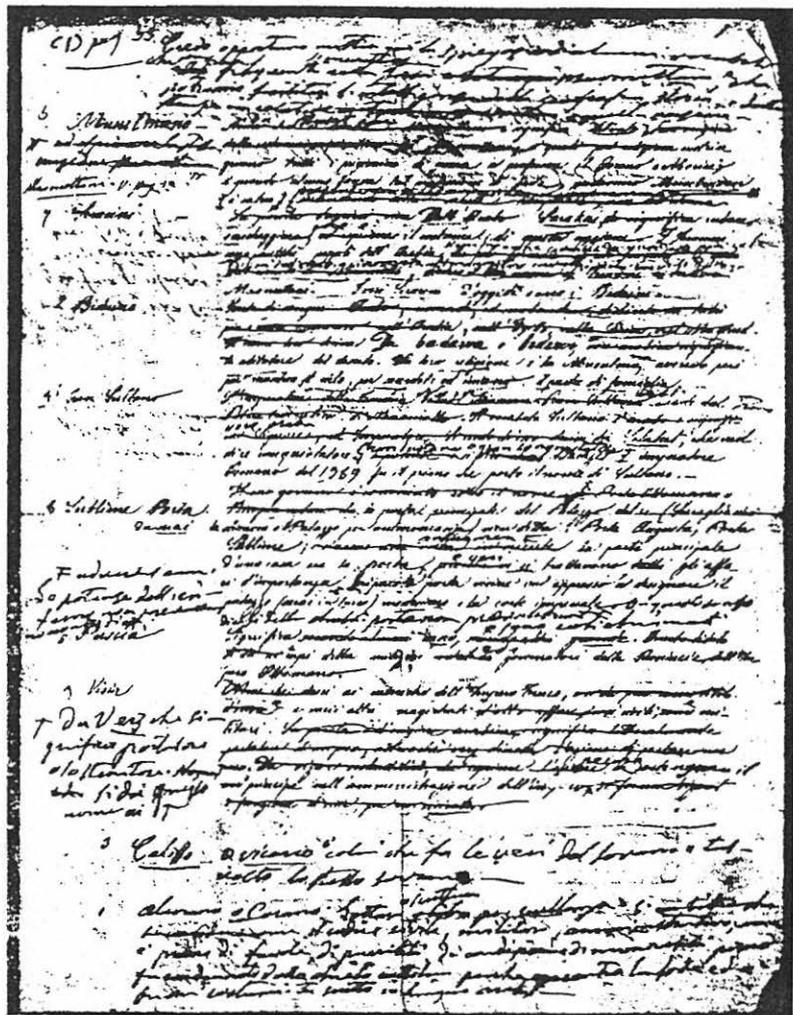
To assure himself that this text was error free, the author left no stone unturned. He rushed the galley proofs to Father Amadeus Peyron, professor of the classics at the University of Turin, for his scrutiny. Don Bosco urged him to give his final draft his expert reading and to make any correction or alteration he deemed suitable.

At first Peyron acceded to his friend's wish and began to blue-pencil Don Bosco's text. But he soon realized that he was only gilding the lily. His "improvements" were impeding, not improving, the flow of the narrative. Furthermore his proposed language changes were only obscuring what was already a limpid and attractive style. Thereupon he promptly deleted all his corrections and limited his editing to discussing the text with its author. This discussion led to the omission of all references to Vittorio Alfieri, an author whom Peyron considered unsuitable for young readers.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Rua and Melchior Voli did yeoman service in preparing Don Bosco's manuscript for the printer. The author's crabbed and squiggly handwriting would have daunted even an Egyptologist. Lemoyne admits that some pages of his manuscript "... became hopelessly marked up with corrections". For the hieroglyphic character of these 'corrections', see page 117. Melchior Voli went on to a distinguished career. After practicing law for several years, he was appointed mayor of Turin, and in his later years served as a senator in the Italian parliament.

<sup>15</sup> The author of the *Storia d'Italia* not only valued the advice and scholarship of Amadeus Peyron, but also acknowledged the Turin-born scholar as perhaps Piedmont's greatest living classicist. In fact, his admiration for the man was so exalted that he is listed among the twelve "Greatest Italians" that are profiled in the second edition of Don Bosco's work. When the author of *The History of Italy* decided



An extant page of Don Bosco's manuscript of his History of Italy. Numerous corrections and annotations made his work a constant challenge both to copyist and printers. (Salesian Archives, Rome)

to include a brief biography of the life and work of the poet-dramatist, Vittorio Alfieri, in his text, he was advised against it by Peyron: "This writer had a reputation for living an immoral life. His pernicious ideas are most damaging. Remove any mention of him from your book. He can do a lot of harm to young and impressionable readers. The sooner he's forgotten, the better." All "mention" of Alfieri was promptly deleted. However, Alfieri's name and fame were not that easily expunged from the annals of Italian literature. In fact, modern Italian literature begins with Alfieri, and the modern Italian theater became his heir. See *EBM* vol. 5, p. 324.

Not one to let well-enough alone, Don Bosco approached Father Peter Banaudi who had taught him Italian literature and the classics during his secondary schooling at Castelnuovo. Although Lemoyne notes that he sought out Banaudi's "evaluation of certain church events", it was really the stylistic improvement of his text that the author was seeking. Banaudi's literary skills and mastery of the Italian language would have detected any rough corners that would have needed smoothening over.<sup>16</sup>

In mid-October of 1856 Don Bosco's *History of Italy*<sup>17</sup> was released by the Paravia Press of Torino. It received a quick and enthusiastic reception. The first printing of 2,500 copies was soon sold out. The then Minister of Public Instruction, Giovanni Lanza, was so impressed by Don Bosco's work that he ordered a cash prize of 1,000 lire to be awarded to the author. School officials quickly took notice of the quality of the work and considered its possible adaptability as a school text. Biographer Lemoyne wrote that they approached Don Bosco and made him an offer they thought he could not refuse. They proposed to "designate his work as the authorized textbook of Italian history for all public schools—if he would agree to eliminate certain paragraphs." Lemoyne does not, however, identify these "certain paragraphs".<sup>18</sup> Alberto Caviglia in his probing study of the origins of Don Bosco's story of Italy suggests that it was not what Don Bosco had written that made his work, in its present form, unsuitable as a public school textbook. It was, rather, what the author had omitted. The provincial scholastic syllabus for approved history textbooks required that Italians who had made significant and outstanding contributions in behalf of their country be accorded such recognition in a biographical sketch in any authorized textbook. Such treatment of important Italians in such form was apparently absent in *The History of Italy*. However, with the appearance of the

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<sup>16</sup> Father Peter Banaudi was young John Bosco's teacher of rhetoric and the "humanities" during the youth's school days at Chieri. Banaudi was both mentor and friend to the young student, and John found in him an amiable and kindly priest. For the close bonding that developed between the two, see Lemoyne, *EBM*, vol. 1, pp 215, 244, 248, 262; vol. 5, p. 395.

<sup>17</sup> Throughout this essay, Don Bosco's *Storia d'Italia* will be cited by its English translation, *The History of Italy*, unless when quoted in context, or when the title of the book demands the Italian.

<sup>18</sup> Lemoyne devotes an entire chapter to the origin of *The History of Italy*, and to the circumstances surrounding its publication. It should be noted that although the title page indicates 1855 as the year of its publication, Don Bosco's book was not released to the public until 1856. Lemoyne's statement that "... the manuscript was given to the Paravia Press in 1855", can be misleading. Don Bosco was still constantly revising and correcting his manuscript well into the early months of 1856 (which must have taxed the patience of his printer). Don Bosco's work must have been released to the public in August, since a letter from Cardinal Antonelli, dated September 18, acknowledges a courtesy copy sent to Pius IX from Turin on September 7. The Catholic newspaper, *L'Armonia*, reviewed Don Bosco's book on October 21, 1856. See Lemoyne, *EBM*, vol. 5, 322-321.

second edition in 1859 this obstacle was resolved. Twelve brief biographical sketches, averaging approximately 1000-2000 words each are included in the book's final chapters. Obviously to secure wider circulation of his work, and willing to accept its adoption as a textbook for use in the public schools Don Bosco had gone along with introducing those "certain changes". By 1859, *The History of Italy* was enjoying widespread use in many schools of northern Italy.

### Press Reviews

The Catholic press rushed to hail the success of Don Bosco's work. *L'Armonia*, Turin's most popular and influential Catholic newspaper, was lavish in its praise. Its October 21 issue applauded Don Bosco's work as filling a long-felt need; it accurately predicted its future success. In part, the reviewer who apparently had rushed through its contents, wrote:

... Father John Bosco, that well-known indefatigable and zealous educator, has just published a 600-page *Storia d'Italia*, complete with map and geographical glossary. We will not here speak of its literary merit, since one cannot digest a book of this size at one sitting. ... So rather than keep this book from the hands of teachers and parents, we will simply say that the author's name, already known for his other educational writings, is ample guarantee for the excellence of its material and for its attractive presentation.

We feel certain that both teachers and parents, and all who are sincerely concerned with the education of the young will be grateful to the author for having taken on the burdensome and almost thankless task of writing a history of our country which children can read with great benefit to themselves. ... Don Bosco's *Storia d'Italia* will no doubt be adopted as a textbook in many schools and even in minor seminaries. We do not doubt that it will soon become the favorite history textbook in all our schools.

But Don Bosco's efforts were not all entirely on the side of the angels. The anticlerical *Gazzetta del Popolo*, which had long carried on a vendetta against Don Bosco and his work, hastened to expose his book as a blatant pro-Austrian piece of propaganda, "full of inaccuracies of every kind."<sup>19</sup>

Don Bosco's *Storia d'Italia* is nothing more than a drawn-out paean of praise for everything that has been hateful in our memory of Austria's continuing domination of Italy. A perfect example of the mishmash he

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<sup>19</sup> For this and other attacks on Don Bosco by the secular press, see Michael Ribotta, "Hero or Villain as Seen in the Press of His Time", *Journal of Salesian Studies*, Volume 3, No.1 (Spring, 1992): 79-108.

makes of historical events is his recounting of the recent conflict in the Crimea.

We want to inform our readers that we have just learned that efforts are underway for the possible introduction of this book as a history textbook for the schoolchildren of Turin. In view of this possible outrage, we have immediately warned the Minister of Public Instruction that this grotesque publication does not merit a place in the curriculum and should be kept out of the classroom.

Should it happen that this so-called history of our country should ever meet the approval of the school authorities, we shall denounce it as an affront to our nation, expose it as a blatant distortion of the truth, and report it as a work filled with gross errors of every kind.

In a word, Bosco's book does nothing more than echo throughout the perverted views of that Jesuit scoundrel, J. N. Loriquet. [A sympathetic church historian and author of children's elementary historical manuals.]

In the meantime Don Bosco had forwarded a deluxe-bound copy of his *History of Italy* to Pius IX, and included with it a separate copy for Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli. The latter acknowledged the gift with a brief but warm note:

Very Reverend and dear Don Bosco:

As you requested in your letter, I have promptly presented your copy of the *Storia d'Italia* to the Holy Father. I hasten to inform you that he was very pleased to receive this homage addressed to his holy and august person, and he has asked me to convey to you his apostolic benediction. I, too, am grateful for the copy which you so kindly sent me. I thank you most heartily and beg to remain,

Your true servant,  
Giacomo Cardinal Antonelli

In Rome the following year, the Jesuit review, *Civiltà Cattolica*, ran a laudatory editorial, praising Don Bosco's history for its intelligent chronicling of the recent complex historical events that were taking place in Italy. No other book of its kind, it commented, could compare with it.

With the appearance of the second edition in 1859, the Jesuit review, *Civiltà Cattolica* was again high in its praise for Don Bosco's work. The following paragraphs are but a sampler of the kudos bestowed on the 1859 edition:<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> For the complete reviews of Don Bosco's *History of Italy* in the *Civiltà Cattolica* (quoted only in part here), see Caviglia, *op.cit.*, pp. 6-7.

In these modern times when distorted versions of history find their way into the textbooks of our children and poison their minds, it is with a great deal of pleasure that we bring to the attention of our readers the recent new edition of *The History of Italy* by that estimable and well known educator, Don Bosco. ... His telling of the story of our country, though only a compendium, succeeds in presenting a thorough, accurate, and truthful unfolding of our history from the earliest times.

His narration of historical events is not twisted to air his own personal political ideology; nor does he use his book as a forum to mouth hypocritical claims in the name of freedom of expression, something which our modern historians are doing with alarming frequency. ...

Don Bosco's presentation of historical facts is truthful beyond reproach. The clarity of his style is attractive and suited for young readers; the logical and systematic treatment of complicated issues is most admirable. ...

We urge parents, teachers, and school authorities who sincerely want to see the history of our country treated in a truthful and appealing manner to give this book every serious consideration. ...

Above all, Bosco's text will serve as an effective antidote against the poisonous literature that portrays the Church and its clergy in villainous fashion. Moreover, the history of the papacy and the true and often heroic roles of numerous popes are faithfully and respectfully portrayed. ...

## J. D. Morell and his pirated English edition

In the fifth volume of his *Memorie Biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco (1906)*, Lemoyne informs his readers that Don Bosco's *History of Italy* had somehow managed to find its way across the English Channel. Don Bosco's work, he wrote, almost with a touch of pride, "unknown to him and in his lifetime became known in England. Some of our Salesians found a handsome copy of his *History of Italy* in a used-books stall." He notes further that the translated version of the work had also found its way into English classrooms. Entitled *A Compendium of Italian History* by Giovanni Bosco, the *Storia d'Italia* had indeed been translated from the Italian by John Daniel Morell, a former school inspector.<sup>21</sup> The volume had been published in 1881 by Longman Green of London.

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<sup>21</sup> John Daniel Morell (1816-1891), philosopher and inspector of schools, was born in Essex, England. His father, Stephen Morell, was a Congregationalist minister. Born in a family where the ministerial calling was widely followed, young Morell chose it as his own destination "even as a child".

Obviously Lemoyne was unfamiliar with the true nature of Morell's so-called translation. He must have assumed that it was a faithful rendering of Don Bosco's work. Had he given the *Compendium* a closer examination he would have been dismayed to learn that the translator had adroitly manipulated Don Bosco's text to suit his own purpose.

By the time Don Bosco's book had fallen into Morell's hands, it had gone through several editions, probably accounting for its popularity and easy availability. The former inspector of schools admitted as much when he wrote in his preface: "It has already gone through five editions and has gained extensive use as an approved textbook on the subject." As a school official and on the prowl to find a suitable history of Italy for the classroom, he came upon Don

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He began his theological training at the age of seventeen; but by the time his divinity studies were over, young Morell's health was so impaired that he resolved to qualify himself for the classroom rather than the pulpit, lest pastoral work should prove beyond his health. Accordingly he attended Glasgow University where he distinguished himself and gained first prize for Logic and Moral Philosophy. He graduated with a B.A. with honors in 1840 and then proceeded to his M.A. in 1841. That summer he traveled to Bonn where he studied theology and philosophy under Fichte, whose influence stayed with him all his life. Returning to England, Morell began his ministry as an Independent and in October of 1842 he was "fully ordained".

Four years later Morell published his *Historical and Critical View of Speculative Philosophy of Europe in the Nineteenth Century*. It was highly praised. In fact, Edmund Chalmers, the dean of the School of Philosophy at Edinburgh University tried to secure for Morell the chair of Moral Philosophy at that institution. Also impressed by Morell's work was Laurence Oliphant, Minister of Education, who offered the author the post of inspector of schools. After some hesitation, Morell accepted the office and held it for almost thirty years.

In his lifetime Morell was a voluminous writer of twenty-five books on a variety of subjects ranging from philosophy to theology to studies of the English language. His lectures and his work took him to many parts of England and Scotland. His religious affiliation was as eclectic as his writings. He worshipped for some years with Protestant Nonconformists, then with Anglican churchmen, and finally with Unitarians.

Interestingly enough, the first book published by this entrenched advocate of Protestant causes was his *The Catholic Church*. It is amazing that such a learned man who plunged so deep into the fountain of religious learning could emerge so dry. His last work was his *Compendium of Italian History, Translated from the Italian of Giovanni Bosco (1881)*.

Besides his eclectic writings on philosophy, theology, and religious issues, John Daniel Morell was an acknowledged authority on English language studies. He authored several books on English grammar which became widely used in schools throughout England. He even found time to publish a short, if bland, collection of nature poems.

As a translator, Morell's mastery of the English language is evident on every page of his *Compendium of the History of Italy*. His style is forceful, incisive, and precise. He does indeed give Don Bosco's work a polished quality of language which even modern-day English translations of Italian Salesian works rarely attain.

Bosco's work which he found eminently suitable for his purpose. With one exception. "I must explain that, as the author is a very zealous priest of the Catholic Church, many sentiments and opinions scattered throughout his pages are not at all in accordance with our English and especially our Protestant ideas. Thus, for example, the chapter on the necessity of the temporal power of the pope has been left out as being now virtually an anachronism." It is hardly likely that Don Bosco, for all his amiable tolerance, would have looked upon his chapter relating to the pope's temporal power as an "anachronism". Nor is this the only appendage that translator Morell snips from Don Bosco's text. Gone are all references to the noble lives of the saints and the courageous example of the early martyrs. Most are mentioned by name only, while their accomplishments, which Don Bosco took pains to narrate, are ignored. But the cruelest cut of all is the excision of the entire first part (the first 100 pages) of the text, "From the Earliest Inhabitants to the Beginning of the Christian Era". This section is dismissed as expendable because "... it merely goes over the ground occupied by the English manuals which are already used in our schools and colleges."

Morell's translated version begins with Part II of Don Bosco's text which is entitled "L'Italia Cristiana" (The Christian Era). In Morell's *Compendium* that heading is revised to read: "The History of Italy During the Middle Ages". Gone too are the fascinating biographical sketches of the dozen prominent Italians whom Don Bosco had enshrined in his personal pantheon as meriting recognition and even veneration. These several chapters are peremptorily dismissed by Morell because they include individuals "whose names are little known or heard of in this country." To exclude the father of the Italian novel, Alessandro Manzoni, or Antonio Canova, Europe's greatest 19th century neo-classical sculptor, as irrelevant is to cast doubt on Morell's own professional credentials.

One looks in vain for the crucial account of the transference of the Papal See to Avignon because, inexplicably, its omission is "more in accordance with the generally accepted historical ideas on the subject."

If there is one positive element in Morell's translation, it is found in his updating of Don Bosco's historical narrative. Accordingly, the *Compendium* relates the account of Garibaldi's expedition to Sicily and Naples which ended in the final extinction of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Also found in the concluding chapters of Morell's translation are the events which led to the annexation of Central Italy, to the transfer of the capital of Turin to Florence, of the cession of Venice through the intermediate agency of Louis Napoleon, and lastly to the fall of the temporal power of the pope and the creation of Rome as the nation's new capital.

Certainly had Morell not lopped off the first part of Don Bosco's text his *Compendium* would have been a full, if one-sided, recital of the history of Italy.

It should be noted that Don Bosco's *History of Italy* a few decades later also crossed the Atlantic. In searching for a reliable history of Italy, Morell's translation of Don Bosco's work caught the eye of Professor J. Higginson Cabot of Wellesley College. The compilation of Collier's History of Nations was then

in progress. As editor of the volume on Italy, Professor Cabot, found just what he was looking for in Morell's translation. And in his introduction to *Italy*, the fourth volume in the series of the History of Nations, Cabot acknowledges the superior quality of Don Bosco's work:

For Italian history since 476 AD, Bosco's *History of Italy* has been the foundation (Of volume 4, *Italy*). It is one of the most satisfactory digests of the very complicated history of the peninsula during the centuries of disunion down to the present time. It has passed through several editions, being considered in Italy a standard authority.

The *History of Italy* went through ten editions during the lifetime of the author; the tenth and last was published in 1874. By the turn of the century (1904) it had registered 31 printings. It is remarkable that as a history text it enjoyed such longevity since, when it was originally published in 1856, most of the more dramatic scenes of the Risorgimento had yet to be acted out. Bosco's chronicling of the 19th century ends with the Crimean War and the Peace of Paris which followed.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, such historic events as the clandestine formation of the French Alliance between Cavour and Louis Napoleon; the bloody battle of Solferino which marked the birth of a nation;<sup>23</sup> the madcap but successful

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<sup>22</sup> With understandable pride the bravery and courage demonstrated by Italy's troops are described in the concluding chapter of *The History of Italy*. What is not mentioned, however, is that the Piedmontese forces had little opportunity to prove their valor in the Crimean War. They fought in only one action, the battle of Chernaya on August 16. Fourteen Piedmontese soldiers were killed and 140 wounded. More deadly than the Russian guns was the cholera epidemic that decimated the Italian army. Two thousand troops perished of cholera. Nor is the end result of the Crimean War brought to the attention of the reader. By his adroit maneuvering of Piedmont into the conflict, Cavour earned the right to sit down with the great powers at the Peace Congress in Paris.

<sup>23</sup> The defeat of the Austrians at Solferino by the combined French Piedmontese forces marked the end of Austrian domination in northern Italy. But victory came at an enormous price. The killed and wounded on both sides exceeded 42,000 soldiers and officers. The horrendous human slaughter destroyed Napoleon III's will to continue the war, and he arranged for an immediate unilateral peace with Austria in the small town of Villafranca. The battle scenes also horrified a young Swiss stretcher-bearer named Henry Dunant. It was the lack of proper care for the wounded at Solferino that led Dunant to take the initiative for the foundation of the Red Cross a few years later.

In his "Chronological Summary" of important historical events found in the appendix of the later editions of Don Bosco's history, a scant three lines is given to the Peace of Villafranca which brought the Second War of Italian Independence to an end. Not mentioned anywhere, of course, is the baffling and amazing prediction of this peace pact which Don Bosco made on the day when it was unexpectedly signed, unknown even to the Italian command.

Without the slightest intimation from the communications media (press or telegraph), Don Bosco assured a troubled Countessa Cravioso, who came to him

adventurism of Giuseppe Garibaldi and his conquest of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies; and finally the fall of Rome in 1870 which brought down the curtain on the Italian Risorgimento, are all related as expanded footnotes in the "Chronological Summary of Events" found in the book's appendix in later editions.

Probably the reason that the Paravia Press no longer continued to publish Don Bosco's text after the 2d edition was due to the fact that the book itself had become history, for the author made no serious attempt to update his work. Thereafter, the Oratory Press published all the subsequent eight editions.

For all intents and purposes the second edition of the *History of Italy*, published in 1859 became the definitive text. In it are included the biographical sketches of twelve outstanding Italians, an addition which conformed to the requirements of the school authorities and thereby made the history text adoptable in public schools.<sup>24</sup> The 1859 edition also had several remarkable

fearful for her son's life at the front. "Don't worry," he comforted her, "this very night peace will be made." The next morning on her way to the Consolata, she heard the newspaper vendors in the streets shouting "Peace at Villafranca!" See Lemoyne, *EBM* Vol. 6, 132-133.

<sup>24</sup> Following is the roster of outstanding celebrities (*uomini celebri*) who appear in the second edition of Don Bosco's *History of Italy*. At least half of these distinguished dozen were among Don Bosco's friends. Cf pp. 431-471.

#### "Uomini Celebri "

*Carlo Denina (1731-1813)*. Piedmontese-born churchman and historian. Especially known for his twenty-four volume *Le rivoluzioni d'Italia*. Actually, Denina had originally been requested by Frederick II, King of Prussia, to write on the German Revolutions. When asked by the king how long it would take him to complete such a work, Denina replied, "About five years!" The King dismissed the historian with the words, "I'll be dead by then." He was dead right. Two years later he expired.

*Giuseppe De Maistre (1754-1821)*. Born in 1753 (Don Bosco erred on the year of his birth), Joseph-Marie De Maistre was a French polemical writer and diplomat who emigrated to Switzerland during the French Revolution. He was ambassador of Victor Emmanuel I at St. Petersburg and later served as chief magistrate of Turin and of Sardinia. His work *Du Pape* (The Pope) was much admired by Don Bosco because of De Maistre's favorable position on the question of papal infallibility. Don Bosco as historian frequently cited from his work. The De Maistre family were closely associated with Don Bosco and often assisted his work in Turin.

*Antonio Canova (1757-1822)*. Italian sculptor and leading exponent of the neoclassical school. His influence on the art of his time was enormous. He was called to Paris to execute commissions for Napoleon, but the emperor was soon after exiled. He did go to Paris in 1815, but for another reason. He was sent there by Pius VII to recover the art treasures that had been taken from Rome by Napoleon. Canova (and the rest of Don Bosco's distinguished dozen) was omitted from Morell's translation as being "irrelevant" for English readers. Ironically, Canova's famed 174-year old

neo-classical masterpiece, "The Three Graces" was recently sold (1993) to California's Getty Museum for \$11.4 million, from the estate of the English Duke of Bedford. It's interesting to see how the relevance of Canova's work increased over the years in England.

*Antonio Cesari (1760-1828)*. An eminent lexicographer who championed Renaissance purity in language. A priest and native of Verona, Cesari became a renowned Dantean scholar. According to Don Bosco, he knew the entire *Divine Comedy* by heart. Cesari no doubt struck a sensitive chord in Don Bosco who writes affectionately of his love for the poor and his work among deprived and homeless children.

*Vincenzo Monti (1754-1828)*. A highly acclaimed and popular 19th century poet whose neoclassical verses are found in all the anthologies of Italian literature of the period. Don Bosco reproduces several of his more famous odes. Much of what Don Bosco wrote rewarding the poet Monti was gleaned from conversations he had with Silvio Pellico. No doubt Monti's avowed sympathy for the papacy and his stirring patriotic poems influenced his entry in Don Bosco's selection as an outstanding Italian personality.

*Cardinal Giuseppe Mezzofanti (1774-1849)* An ecclesiastic of extraordinary linguistic talent. Even Napoleon was impressed by Mezzofanti's great capacity for mastering an endless number of languages. "What a pity he's a priest," he is supposed to have said; "he could have made a career for himself in our diplomatic corps." Don Bosco makes a startling assertion when he claims that Mezzofanti was able to write and converse in almost three hundred languages. Recent scholars have since revised that figure, but the number of languages Mezzofanti is reputed to have mastered is still awesome. Don Bosco hastens to assure his readers that such fantastic talent did not go to waste, for the Cardinal used his gift for the good of souls (*per la salute delle anime*).

*Silvio Pellico (1789-1854)*. Italian writer and patriot. He was sentenced in 1822 as a Carbonarist to 15 years of hard labor in an Austrian prison. Upon his release he took up residence in Turin, and there became associated with Don Bosco during the latter's early years in Valdocco. In Turin he was the secretary and librarian to the Marchesa di Barolo. Don Bosco writes fondly of this gentle and religious man. Pellico is celebrated in Italian Risorgimento history for the memoirs of his imprisonment, *Le Mie Prigioni (My Years in Prison)*, a book which some historians claim did as much harm to Italy's Austrian oppressors as any single battle. Pellico was a frequent visitor at the Oratory and gave Don Bosco some valuable hints to improve his writing style. Among them: "Always keep a dictionary handy when you write." Advice which he faithfully followed—and passed on to his fellow Salesians.

*Antonio Rosmini-Serbati (1797-1855)*. Priest, writer, philosopher who founded the Institute of Charity in Turin. On occasion he served as adviser to Pope Pius IX. He devoted much of his life and writings to reconciling Roman Catholicism with modern political and scientific thought. He later fell in the pope's disfavor and retired to Stresa after the condemnation of some of his works by the Congregation of the Index (1849). A generous and close friend of Don Bosco whom he helped, on more than one occasion, to extricate from financial embarrassment. It was Rosmini who first proposed to his friend to begin a print shop at the Oratory, and even offered to advance the necessary funds to get the project under way.

*Carlo Boucheron (1773-1855)*. In singling out Carlo Boucheron, Don Bosco pays tribute to the University of Turin for having produced one of the great minds of the 19th century. Still in his twenties, Boucheron was given the position of professor of Eloquence in the University of Turin, a post he honored for 34 years. His fame as an orator spread throughout Italy, and his proficiency in Latin was so outstanding and ingrained in him that at times he would carry on a conversation in that classical language without realizing that he was not speaking in his native tongue. King Charles Albert honored him with numerous awards and gifts and appointed him as the royal tutor of his two sons.

*Pier Alessandro Paravia (1797-1857)*. A renowned academic and professor of literature at the University of Turin. From time to time Don Bosco would sit in on his lectures "to help him perfect his writing". Paravia's writings cover an amazing range of topics; from a work on *How to Train Hunting Dogs* to *Outstanding Piedmontese Literary Masters*. Don Bosco writes that this great scholar looked after impoverished students, often paying their fees and tuition. Often he supplied books and writing materials to those who were strapped for funds.

*Amadeus Peyron (1785-1870)*. A brilliant classicist and orientalist. Peyron and Don Bosco were closely associated for many years. In fact, the latter had such implicit trust in the judgment of his scholarly friend that he promptly deleted all references to the celebrated Vittorio Alfieri when Peyron informed him that the readers of his history would be adversely influenced when reading of his "immoral" exploits. Peyron was not only generous with his advice, but with his financial assistance as well. His name is listed among the contributors towards the construction of the church of Mary Help of Christians. As an orientalist, Peyron brought fame to the city of Turin when through his efforts, and the patronage of King Carlo Felice, he secured a huge and magnificent collection of Egyptian artifacts for the city's museum. This collection has grown into one of the most important accumulation of Egyptian antiquities in all of Europe.

As a classical scholar he was responsible for discovering long-lost fragments of Cicero's letters. His interests and productivity were enormous. In his late years he edited a dictionary of the Coptic language which became a standard classic. His knowledge of Egyptian and the Coptic languages made him much in demand from European Egyptologists who sought his expertise in deciphering recently discovered papyri. Honors came to him from numerous countries. France, Prussia, and even the United States sought his services. He died in 1870 at the age of 85.

*Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873)*. Italian novelist and poet. Leader of the Italian Romantic school. His *Promessi Sposi (The Betrothed)*, is one of world's great romantic novels of the 19th century, and established its author as the leading Italian Romantic novelist of the 19th century. In his youth Manzoni was deeply influenced by Voltairism, abandoned his religion, and even wrote poems that were bold professions of atheism. He married a Swiss Calvinist who later converted to Catholicism. Shortly after Manzoni himself regained his faith. Don Bosco highlights this event in his biographical sketch of Manzoni. Biographer Lemoyne tells of an encounter between Manzoni and Don Bosco which occurred in 1850 (*EBM* IV:89). During the few hours the priest and poet spent together at dinner, Manzoni showed Don Bosco some of his manuscripts which were "liberally" covered with corrections and emendations. This led the visitor to conclude that a simple style, for which Manzoni was famed, was the result of "persevering effort." Although Don

features not found in Don Bosco's original work. The most impressive is the extensive biographical dictionary which must have facilitated the student's efforts; the second is an abridged but very practical glossary of geographical names.

What was the behind the author's seeming reluctance to update his story of Italy with new material? Why did he not add to his narrative those dramatic events mentioned above which would have given his history of a newborn nation a logical conclusion? If a reason is to be extrapolated from the epilogue of his work, it becomes apparent that Don Bosco, as historian, had no desire to rush to judgment in interpreting and evaluating the historic events that occurred in the post-Cavourian decade. He informed his public that the dust of recent events, which could easily obscure the historian's judgment and perspective, had not yet settled. What he did not say, and what was no doubt uppermost in his mind, was that he had no desire to roil the political waters, and thereby jeopardize his burgeoning oratory work. A growing anticlericalism was for him a constant threat. He again decided to err on the side of discretion. Only through the prism of time could the concluding events of the Risorgimento be validly judged:

In those years some important historical events came to pass in Tuscany, Modena, and the Romagna; and then later in Naples. Because they have occurred so recently and also because of their great importance in the history of our country, it is virtually impossible at this moment to pass a clear and definitive judgment on these events. We are, therefore, deferring our treatment of them to a later date. Only in this way can we arrive at the truth that underlies these crucial events which have played so important a part in the history of our country.

The question posed in the title of this essay is perhaps best answered in part by the highly respected Professor Higginson Cabot of Wellesley College, Massachusetts. As coeditor of the Colliers series, "The History of Nations", he acknowledges that Don Bosco's *History of Italy*<sup>25</sup> was the principal source of the fourth volume in the series. His reason: "... Bosco's history has been the foundation of this volume, not only because it is one of the most satisfactory

Bosco was an admirer of Manzoni as a literary artist, he criticized the portrait of Don Abbondio as a failed priest and pastor in the *Promessi Sposi*. Such a portrayal, Don Bosco wrote, "destroys the image of the reverence due to one's pastor which I have unceasingly taught." He did not recommend Manzoni's classic novel to his young readers, but "tolerated it only when the school authorities made it required reading." Manzoni wrote no other novel and critics have condemned him for abandoning the genre that brought him fame and fortune. The fact is that one does not twice write a Divine Comedy.

<sup>25</sup> *Italy (vol.4) in The History of Nations*, Henry Cabot Lodge, Ph.D., Editor in-Chief. Volume on Italy edited by J. Higginson Cabot, Ph.D. (P. F. Colliers and Son, New York)

digests of the very complicated history of the peninsula, but also because it has withstood the test of time, and therefore, is considered in Italy a standard authority.”

It was Alberto Caviglia, one of our early Salesian historians, who singled out the merit of Don Bosco historical compendium and praised it as his “capolavoro” (masterpiece).<sup>26</sup> It was also Caviglia who effectively disabused his critics of the general notion that Don Bosco’s work was only a children’s book because it was “written down” to the level of a schoolboy’s textbook. He further makes patently clear that even though the author deliberately wrote the story of his country so that any adolescent could understand it without a struggle, the simplicity of language and the author’s storytelling technique merely disguise the huge amount of research that went into the preparation of the text. Caviglia has compiled a bibliography of 57 sources (books, learned reviews, historical treatises, etc.) consulted and examined by the author of *The History of Italy*.<sup>27</sup>

It is our contention, therefore, that Don Bosco’s “masterpiece” is both a well-orchestrated morality play, and a skilled and consummate exercise in history. These characteristics are, in fact, the two sides of the same coin. In Don Bosco’s case, it would have been impossible to have had one without the other.

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<sup>26</sup> “*La Storia d’Italia e, tra gli scritti di Don Bosco, per comune sentenza, il capolavoro,*” (By general consensus Don Bosco’s *History of Italy* is acknowledged as the masterpiece of his writings”). Alberto Caviglia, *op.cit.*, ix .

<sup>27</sup> The “Bibliography” used by Don Bosco in his *History of Italy* has been compiled by Alberto Caviglia. See *op.cit.*, pp. c-cvi.