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Key-Concepts, Concerns and Fears of a Founder—Don Bosco in His Declining Years Part II

Arthur J. Lenti, SDB

Introduction and Description of Archival Source Material

In an article which appeared in an earlier issue of this Journal, I described some of Don Bosco's concerns, as he expressed them in meetings of his council and in sessions of General Chapters held during the last decade of his life.[1] That article, based almost entirely on unpublished minutes held in the Central Salesian Archive,[2] dealt chiefly with one area of concern, namely, the admission of candidates to the Salesian Society and to Holy Orders and problems relating thereto.

In the present essay, drawing on, and quoting liberally from the same sources, I will try to describe, as will be detailed below, other important areas of Don Bosco's concern.

Again, let me repeat that although these official documents remained unpublished, ample use was made of them by the biographers, in particular by Giovanni Battista Lemoyne in *Documenti* and by Eugenio Ceria in the last volumes of the *Biographical Memoirs*.[3] But in spite of such extensive use, Don Bosco's words on important subjects still deserve to be highlighted and to be heard in all their freshness and power, at least in English. For this is the task I

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[1] A. Lenti, "Key-Concepts, Concerns and Fears of a Founder—Don Bosco in His Declining Years," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 6:2 (1995) pp. 1-48.

[2] The Don Bosco files (*Fondo Don Bosco*) of the Central Salesian Archive in Rome (*ASC*) are available on microfiches (*FDBM*). The *ASC* is at present being reorganized and re-catalogued. In this as in the former article, reference to the archive is made according to the older filing system, as it is specified in the *FDBM* manual.

[3] [Giovanni Battista Lemoyne] *Documenti per scrivere la storia di D. Giovanni Bosco, dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales e della Congregazione Salesiana*, 45 privately printed volumes [no publication data], specifically Volumes XIX-XXXIX, in *ASC* 110: Cronachette, *FDBM* 1053-1162.

Eugenio Ceria, *Memorie Biografiche del Beato [di San] Giovanni Bosco*. Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1932-1939, Volumes XIII-XVIII. *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, an American Edition, translated from the Original Italian, Rev. Diego Borgatello, S.D.B. Editor-in-Chief. New Rochelle, New York: Salesiana Publishers, 1983-1988, Volumes XIII-XVI.

set for myself, to focus on Don Bosco's utterances expressing his deeply felt views and concerns as father and founder of a religious family.

The earlier article provided a detailed description and a complete catalogue of the archival documents under consideration, which consist chiefly of minutes of the meetings of the Superior Chapter[4] and the sessions of the Second and Third General Chapters. A reading of Part I of the earlier article is recommended;[5] but for practical purposes a brief review of these documents seems appropriate at this point also.

I. The Minutes of the Superior Chapter from 1875 to 1888[6]

With the exception of a couple of entries by unidentified scribes, the minutes of meetings of the Superior Chapter (from 1875 on) preserved in *ASC* (*FDBM*) are the work of Father Giulio Barberis and of Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne. Of the two sets of minutes, Father Barberis' covers the earlier period.

1. Father Giulio Barberis' Minutes of Meetings of the Superior Chapter

Barberis' minutes, all in his own hand, basically span the years 1875-1879, with lacunae. While chiefly contained in three notebooks, some are found also in other locations.

(1) The three Notebooks.— *Notebook I* covers the period from December 10, 1875 to August 17, 1877.[7] *Notebook II* records meetings held from May 15,

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[4] "Superior Chapter" was the name given to the group of councilors which, under Don Bosco, made up the central government of the Society. In 1966 the group was enlarged and its name changed "Superior Council." Finally, in 1984 the central government was reorganized and the name was changed to "General Council." In Don Bosco's times, the Superior Chapter was composed of the following members: the rector major (Don Bosco), the prefect-vicar (Father Michele Rua), the spiritual director or catechist (Father Giovanni Cagliero, then Father Giovanni Bonetti), the financial administrator (Father Antonio Sala), the prefect of studies (Father Celestino Durando), and two additional councilors. The meetings were also attended by the director of novices and secretary (Father Giulio Barberis), later by the secretary general (Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne), by the director of the house of the Oratory (Father Giuseppe Lazzero), and by others upon invitation. For biographical data on these and other significant *dramatis personae* to follow, cf. Appenix V.

The sources give first names only rarely. I will supply the first name generally only at the first occurrance, but I will retain it whenever the sources themselves record it.

[5] A. Lenti, "Key-Concepts...," *op. cit.*, pp. 3-15.

[6] Almost all minutes of the Superior Chapter are located in *ASC* 0592 Consiglio Superiore: Verbali, *FDBM* 1873 D9 - 1883 E3.

[7] *ASC* 0592 Consiglio Superiore, Verbali, *FDBM* 1875 B10 - 1876 E12.

1878 to February 8, 1879.[8] In this notebook are also included the minutes of the "general conference" held at Alassio on February 6-8, 1879.[9] *Notebook III* covers the shorter span from April 29 to June 9, 1879.[10]

(2) Two earlier meetings.— After Notebook III are placed (on loose sheets) two reports of meetings of the Superior Chapter dated August 14 and November 7, 1875.[11]

(3) In another location of *ASC* (*FDBM*) (following Barberis' minutes of the Second General Chapter of 1880) we find a shorter set of minutes of Superior Chapter meetings held after General Chapter II between September 29, 1880 and January 3, 1881.[12]

(4) There are no minutes of meetings of the Superior Chapter to be found in *ASC* (*FDBM*) between January 3, 1881 and September 14, 1883, a lacuna of nearly three years. Then with the date of September 4, 1883. we have a 14-line report by Barberis.[13] This is followed by two further reports in another hand, dated October 2, 1884 and September 17, 1885.[14] These three reports are located immediately before the book of Lemoyne's minutes, in which the first entry is dated December 14, 1883.

2. Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne's Minutes of the Meetings of the Superior Chapter

The Lemoyne minutes of the meetings of the Superior Chapter in *ASC* (*FDBM*) span the period from December 14, 1883 to February 28, 1888. The reports, organized by the year ([1883-1884, 1885, 1886, 1887, 1888), are written in one large notebook or ledger of 110 numbered sheets (220 pages).[15]

II. Minutes of the Alassio General Conference and of General Chapters II and III

1. Minutes of the Alassio General Conference

From 1865 to 1877, Don Bosco convened general conferences on a yearly basis, normally around the feast of St. Francis de Sales (hence their designation), but occasionally at other times as well. To these conferences, conceived as "instruments of government," Don Bosco summoned, besides his council, the

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[8] *FDBM* 1877 A1 - 1878 D8.
[9] *FDBM* 1878 C7-D8.
[10] *FDBM* 1878 D9 - 1879 C2.
[11] *FDBM* 1879 C3-D11.
[12] *ASC* 04 Capitoli Generali presieduti da Don Bosco, *FDBM* 1856 C7-D1.
[13] *ASC* 0592 Consiglio Superiore: Verbali, *FDBM* 1879 E12.
[14] *FDBM* 1880 A1-12.
[15] *FDBM* 1880 B1 - 1883 E3.

directors of the houses and other confreres.[16] The last such conference, a special one at that, was held at Alassio on September 6-8, 1879.

As noted above, the minutes of the Alassio conference are found at the end of Barberis second notebook, wherein he records its four sessions.[17]

2. Minutes of General Chapter II

The Second General Chapter met at Lanzo on September 3-15, 1880, for 13 days, as may be gathered from the minutes which (such as they are) are extant in *ASC* 04. They were authored separately and concurrently by Father Giulio Barberis and by Father Giovanni Marenco, the two secretaries elected by the chapter. These records appear in *ASC* and in *FDBM* as follows:

(1) One notebook contains a report of the opening session (September 3 PM) in various hands, followed by Father Barberis' incomplete rough draft reporting proceedings from September 4 to September 11 only.[18]

(2) A similar notebook contains Father Marenco's minutes, likewise incomplete, which record sessions from the evening of September 5 to the end of the chapter (September 15).[19]

(3) Two notebooks contain Father Barberis' finished, edited minutes, which record the proceedings of the chapter from its inception on the evening of September 3 to its conclusion on the evening of September 15.[20] *Notebook I* contains 87 pages of text;[21] *Notebook II*, 43 pages.[22]

3. Minutes of General Chapter III

The Third General Chapter met at Valsalice from the evening of September 2 to the evening of September 7, 1883, for a total of 6 days. Minutes of the sessions were taken by Father Marenco and Father Barberis, the two elected secretaries.

(1) Father Marenco's reports fill one fairly large notebook with twenty-one pages of text.[23] They begin with the session of September 3 AM. The notebook is followed by three pages of notes on the opening session, in Marenco's hand."[24] From these notes we learn that the chapter began on Sunday, September 2.

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[16] Minutes of the sessions of these conferences (from 1868 on) are located in *ASC* 04 Conferenze Generali, *FDBM* 1869 E6 -1873 D8. Succinct or extensive reports are given in the *Biographical Memoirs* (*EBM*, Volumes VIII-XIII).

[17] *FDBM* 1878 C7-D8, cf. note 9 above.

[18] *ASC* 04 Capitoli Generali presieduti da Don Bosco, *FDBM* 1856 A11-C6.

[19] *FDBM* 1856 D2 - 1857 A1.

[20] *FDBM* 1857 B7 - 1859 A9.

[21] *FDBM* 1857 B7 - 1858 D6.

[22] *FDBM* 1858 D7 - 1859 A9.

[23] *FDBM* 1863 E7 - 1864 B9.

[24] *FDBM* 1864 B10-12.

(2) Another notebook contains Father Barberis' short notes on the various sessions of General Chapter III, beginning with September 3, but referring to the opening session of the preceding evening.[25] The longest of these reports records Don Bosco's closing words.

The foregoing list of archival documents (here only briefly described) served me as the basis for the earlier article. They will also serve as the source for the present study.

On perusing the material, one is struck first of all by Don Bosco's concerns and fears relating to basic points of the Society's religious life and discipline, such as obedience, charity and gentleness, moral conduct. He voiced these concerns at the General Chapters, and particularly at General Chapter II (1880), and on other occasions as well.

Later in the 1880s, one of Don Bosco's important concerns related to the good running and ordering of the mother house, the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales at Valdocco. These discussions, the views expressed, and the decisions taken in the matter, generally hotly debated, dealt both with the ordering of the Oratory communities generally and with the problems of the Oratory school in particular. The issues debated are of great interest, for they reveal not only real situations crying out to be addressed, but also Don Bosco's views and sometimes frustrated expectations. There also emerge the rationale and principles underlying the decisions, as well as their relevance to the Oratory situation and to life and work of the Congregation at large.

The present paper therefore will deal with two questions: Don Bosco's general concerns for the religious and Salesian spirit of the Congregation (Part I); his concern over the deteriorated life and discipline of the house of the Oratory, of the school in particular, and his proposals for reform (Part II).

Part I. Don Bosco's Concern for the Religious and Salesian Spirit of the Congregation

Obviously religious life and discipline in the Society was at all times one of Don Bosco's deeply felt and abiding concerns. It is interesting, however, that it should be voiced with particular insistence in the decade 1875-1885. Mid-way through this decade, the Second General Chapter (1880) provided the occasion for major statements on the subject. The reason might simply be that General Chapters were a handy forum for such utterances. For it should be recalled that according to the Constitutions and to the Regulations for the General Chapter, these conferences were held every three years, and all directors attended, an ideal opportunity for Don Bosco.[26]

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[25] *FDBM* 1864 C10-D8.

[26] Cf. Don Bosco's note to Art. 3 of Ch. 6 (Religious Government of the Society) in the Constitutions of 1875 (Italian text), in Motto, *Cost. Testi critici*, p. 113;

Again, probably such forces were at work here as are operative in every founder's life and in the process of consolidation of every religious congregation. After the Salesian Society and its constitutions obtained definitive approbation (1874), the founder proceeded to consolidate its structures and to put its life and work in order, even independently of external pressures and prodding: hence, for example, Don Bosco's efforts at putting study and formation, including a regular novitiate, on a sound basis.

At the Alassio Conference of 1879, Don Bosco spoke with urgency on the subject:

> Our job is to perfect (*perfezionare*) [our institutions] as much as we can, and as soon as possible. The principles which we lay down now by common agreement will be the abiding foundations [of the Salesian work of the future]. The young men who are now in formation will readily assimilate these norms. If we let a generation go by, with all the changes which this implies, the difficulty will be greatly increased. We should learn from the experience of some religious orders in the past which required reform or were split by schism.[27]

Furthermore, after 1875, Don Bosco entered a period of reflection in which he produced major statements on the life and spirit of the Society. One may mention for instance, the definitive edition of the general regulations, the Memoirs of the Oratory, the treatise on the "Preventive System," the Letter from Rome, and the Spiritual Testament.[28]

Deliberazioni del secondo Capitolo Generale [...] (Torino: Tipografia Salesiana, 1882, p. 1, in *Opere Edite*, Vol xxxiii, p. 9.)

[27] Alassio General Conference, Session 2, February 7, 1879, Barberis, *Minutes* Notebook II, p. 73, *ASC* 04 Conferenze generali, *FDBM* 1878 B2.

[28] Don Bosco's principal reflective, systematic writings of the period 1875-1885 may be listed as follows:

1. Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, Italian edition, 1875, 1877 (with an extended Introduction). The *Introduction* deals with concepts of vocation and religious life. The earlier draft September 5, 1877 is Don Bosco's own. Between September 5 and October 5, the Introduction underwent considerable development at the hand of Father Giulio Barberis, with Don Bosco's approval. — 2. Regulations for the Salesian Cooperators: (1) *Unione cristiana* (1874); (2) *Associazione di buone opere* (1875); (3) *Unione cristiana nel bene operare* (1876); (4) *Cooperatori Salesiani ossia modo pratico per giovare al buon costume ed alla civile società* (1876, 1877). — 3. Regulations for the Oratory (the Boys' Club): *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per gli esterni* (1877). — 4. Regulations for the Houses of the Society: *Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales* (1877). — 5. Confidential Advice (Keepsakes) for Directors (1863, 1871, 1875, 1876, and Dec. 8, 1886). — 6. Advice (Keepsakes) for the First Missionaries (September-October 1875). — 7. Memoirs of the Oratory (1873-1877): *Memorie dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*. — 8. Little Treatise on the Preventive System (March-April 1877): *Inauguration du Patronage de S.*

But one should also bear in mind that at this time the conflict with Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi reached the critical stage. Perhaps Don Bosco's concern gives us to understand that, as Archbishop Gastaldi had warned, the freedom inherent in the Salesian method and spirit, was now bearing its bitter fruit.

Thus, between 1875 and 1885, Don Bosco took every opportunity to voice his views, to lament abuses, and to inculcate the principles by which he intended the Society to be formed and guided.

In order to deal with the material in an orderly fashion, I will begin with Don Bosco's utterances at General Chapter II, for in several sessions, Session 2 in particular, he spoke at some length on matters of concern. These quotations will serve "to anchor" additional words of Don Bosco on the same subjects, with comments designed to provide some background and context.[29]

1. Don Bosco's Statements on Religious and Salesian Life in the "Keynote Address" of General Chapter II, Session 2.

(1) Religious Obedience

[i] Don Bosco's Words in the "Keynote Address"

At the morning session of September 4 (Session 2), after elections, as the Chapter was getting under way, Don Bosco delivered what might be termed a keynote speech, or a state-of-the-Society address, in which he touched on a variety of subjects. The first was on religious obedience.

> *Among the many concerns of this Chapter, perhaps the most urgent is that of restoring religious obedience. I am not saying that obedience is totally lacking in our houses, but in many respects it is on the decline. This is unfortunately true even, I should say especially, of some superiors. Then one hears such excuses as, "I thought...How should I have known?..." In the meantime things are left undone and go badly for lack of true obedience. Failure in this matter is totally unacceptable. Sometimes a task is assigned or a charge given to a confrere, but, without breathing a word to anyone, he does nothing. The superior rests with an easy mind in the belief that the*

Pierre à Nice Maritime [...] avec appendice sur le système préventif pour l'éducation de la jeunesse; *Inaugurazione del Patronato S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare [...] con un'appendice sul sistema preventivo nell'educazione della gioventù*. — 9. Letter on Punishments (attributed to Don Bosco) (Feast of St. Francis de Sales, 1883: copies to be distributed by Fr. Rua to the directors). — 10. Letter from Rome (May 10, 1884). — 11. Letter on the Control of Books and Readings in Salesian Houses and Schools (November 1, 1884). — 12. Letter on the Spreading of Good Books and the Apostolate of the Press (March 19, 1885). — 13. Spiritual Testament : *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 pel sac. Gio. Bosco a' suoi figliuoli Salesiani*.

[29] Quotations from the speech delivered at General Chapter II will be italicized. Additional related quotes will be set in normal format.

> *job is being done; but then he finds to his chagrin that, far from being completed, the task is not even begun. Or when he thinks that a certain undertaking is well attended to and making good progress, he learns that the individual in charge has let everything go. Such lapses are extremely damaging to the Congregation. All Salesians, especially those in command positions, must be willing to make sacrifices, real sacrifices, to ensure orderly progress. The members of the Superior Chapter ought to be the first to set an example of absolute and self-sacrificing obedience. Their good example will then be an inspiration to directors and prefects, and to all the members of the Congregation.* [30]

[ii] Additional Utterances with Comments

[a] Don Bosco's Concept of Religious Obedience and Its Practice in the Society

Don Bosco reflected and spoke on religious obedience on numerous occasions—before, during and long after General Chapter II. His reflection and his utterances bore, first of all, on the *foundation role* of religious obedience in the Salesian society.

Clearly he regarded obedience as essential to the survival of the Society; he expected all Salesians to accept this principle in its totality. It was out of this perception that in 1858 he accepted the plan traced out by Pius IX, according to which religious vows were to be one of the two foundations of the new congregation. The pope had said,

> Don't be content [...] with simple promises, for in that case the *link* [...] between superiors and subjects would not be adequate. You could never be sure of them, nor could you *count* on them for any length of time.[31]

By these words the vow of obedience is clearly singled out as the basic factor in the bond. This perhaps explains the order which, in writing the constitutions, Don Bosco assigned to the vows: obedience, poverty and chastity. As can easily be shown, in his thinking charity and its zealous exercise was the goal of religious life, and was to be the goal of Salesian religious life in particular; the vows were the means to that end. Charity, although *ultimum executionis* is *primum intentionis*. Chastity and poverty are the means of religious consecration; and obedience, the means whereby an individual becomes available to the superior (community) for the work of charity. Charity is the goal towards which the life

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[30] General Chapter II, Session 2, September 4, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook I, p. 14, *FDBM* 1857 C9. The failure to mention provincials in the last sentence is probably due to the fact that in 1880 the four provinces (Piedmont, Liguria, South American, and Roman) were still at the planning stage.

[31] *EBM* V, p. 561. Italics mine.

of consecration symbolized by the vows is directed. Obedience is the spiritual structure whereby the superior (community) directs the religious, consecrated in poverty and chastity, to the work of charity. And this finally becomes the means of personal holiness.

At the very outset of General Chapter II, Don Bosco laments a lack of obedience in his Salesians. This failure, in Don Bosco's view, jeopardized the very goal of religious life, the exercise of charity.

One year later Don Bosco related the Dream of the Diamonds which he had at San Benigno on the night of September 10-11, 1881, during the confreres' spiritual retreat. As recorded in writing by Don Bosco himself,[32] he dreamt he was with some Salesians in a magnificent hall, when a noble gentleman clad in a splendid cope appeared. The cope was studded with ten diamonds, five on the front and five on the back, each bearing the name of a virtue. The orphrey of the cope bore the legend, in Latin, "The Pious Salesian Society in 1881." On a pendant of cloth were written the words, "As it ought to be." Suddenly, everything went dark and the scene changed. The same gentleman appeared in an attitude of mourning. The cope he wore was tattered, and in place of the diamonds were clothes-moths which devoured the cloth and tore gaping holes in it. The new words in Latin read, "The Pious Salesian Society as it is in danger of becoming by the year 1900." The scene again changed, and a radiant youth appeared. He was dressed in a vestment bordered with flashing diamonds. He sang out a message of hope and a chorus of voices joined in the singing. Then Don Bosco awoke.

Clearly the dream as a whole, but especially in its middle section, reflects Don Bosco's concerns and fears for the spiritual health of the Congregation at this time. As to their order, the virtues (in Italian in the original draft, then changed to Latin in Don Bosco's correction) appear as follows: Faith, hope, charity; work, temperance; obedience, [vow of] poverty, [great] reward, [vow of] chastity. Again obedience precedes [the vow of] poverty and [the vow of] chastity. But what is more remarkable is the place which Don Bosco, in his own editing, assigns to the diamond of obedience on the cope. In his original draft, at the center of the back of the cope, hence the place of honor, Don Bosco had placed the diamond of [the vow of] chastity. Immediately, however, he corrected his own text and wrote instead obedience.

Pietro Stella, in discussing this dream, points out that although Don Bosco had often exalted chastity as the most *beautiful* virtue, "he wrote that obedience was the first and the foundation of all the other virtues, even in religious life."[33]

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[32] Don Bosco's laborious autograph with corrections, all in his own hand, is in *ASC* 132 Autografi-sogni, *FDBM* 1346 C12-E2. This is followed by a transcription by Father Gioachino Berto with additional corrections by Don Bosco, *Ibid.*, E3-10.

[33] Stella, *DB II*, p. 528. For this statement Stella cites *The Companion of Youth* (*Il giovane provveduto*, 1847, p. 13), and the *Biographical Memoirs* (*EBM* IV, p. 554; VI, p. 556; VII, p. 417; IX, p. 419, etc.), where indeed Don Bosco makes this point.

It is therefore understandable that Don Bosco should insist on the practice of obedience. His perception that Salesians, directors, and even closer associates, took a somewhat cavalier attitude toward obedience to their superiors, to him in particular, distressed him greatly and explains his grave concern. He took up the subject with even greater emphasis in Session 3 and again in Session 9 of General Chapter II. The minutes read:

> Don Bosco again takes the opportunity to speak on obedience, especially as it concerns superiors, touching on various points. One can see that he is rather, in fact extremely, dissatisfied (*un po' profondamente malcontento*) with the fact that, in spite of all he has said and done in the matter, the response has been less than adequate. Tasks are performed in ways that are either wrong or unsatisfactory; work is left undone that should absolutely be done. The reason behind all this is that a unified principle (*un solo principio*) of action is lacking, and everyone goes his own way (*varii vogliono varie cose*). All directors then are urged to begin by setting a good example in this regard. Let them carry out every directive and command of the superior (*ogni disposizione e volontà superiore*), or see that they are carried out. Then by exhortations, conferences, and by every possible means, they should urge their confreres (*subalterni*) to do the same.[34]

> Let the practice of obedience be the subject of the [director's fortnightly] conferences. I am speaking of that truly internal submission which is so dear to the Lord. On this point there has been real backsliding. Craftsmasters and workshop directors want to be independent and they accept the orders of their superiors only under protest. At other times the orders are accepted but not carried out. This cannot be tolerated. Now, to eliminate such abusive practices directors should be faithful in receiving the confreres' manifestation; and in their [fortnightly] conferences they should insist on observance of the rule and on obedience. [35]

The holding of fortnightly conferences by the director was a prescription of General Chapter I. The "manifestation," a time-honored practice in religious congregations, was an account which members of the community periodically gave to their superior of their life and work. At first Don Bosco had wanted it to be a true manifestation of conscience, as he wrote it into the Constitutions in drafts from 1858 to 1873:

> Let each one place full trust in his superior, and not keep any secret of his heart from him. Let him moreover manifest his conscience openly to the

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[34] General Chapter II, Session 3, September 4, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed. Minutes*, Notebook I, pp. 29-30 *FDBM* 1857 E1-2.

[35] General Chapter II, Session 9, September 9, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook I, pp. 73-74, *FDBM* 1858 C9-10.

> superior whenever he may be requested or he himself may feel a need to do so. [36]

The Church authorities, however, did not approve of the practice as Don Bosco conceived it; so he was forced to scale it down to "an account of one's external life." It should be noted that Don Bosco called for a manifestation of *conscience* not principally with "spiritual direction" in view, and certainly not out of a desire to pry. Calling for such total trust was coherent with his concept of religious obedience. (He placed this article under "Vow of Obedience.") For if, in his view, the vow of obedience was the spiritual structure whereby a religious, consecrated in poverty and chastity, becomes totally available to the superior for the work of charity, then it would be coherent for the superior to know in strictest confidence what this person is really like, so that the religious can be properly deployed. Obviously this may be coherent at an ideal level, but perhaps not workable in practice. Hence, the Church saw fit to scale down the practice in her concern for the person.

While respecting the Church's ordinance regarding "conscience," Don Bosco nevertheless continued to call for "full trust" in the confreres' relationship to their director. In the same Session 9 of General Chapter II, as Barberis reports, "no schemata were read nor any commission reports discussed, because Don Bosco had things to say." His comments dealt with unity of direction at all levels in the Society, and more extensively with the relationship between confreres and their director in a local community, again stressing the importance of the manifestation.

> All confreres should regard their director as a loving father, as an elder brother, appointed to the office for the sole purpose of helping them to do their work well. Let them not hide anything from him, whether good or bad, rather let them show themselves to him such as they are. Everyone must be convinced of this, that a school or a house will run smoothly only when the confreres in their various capacities live and work united as one heart and one soul. This obviously is not possible in practice if the confreres do not make their director the center of the whole operation and do not fully open their hearts to him.
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> In the early years of the Oratory, Don Bosco was practically the only superior around. His helpers were untrained, the work was enormous, there was practically no one who was really knowledgeable in anything. Yet, things were going well, and we remember those times with pleasure. And what was the reason for this? I believe it was because Don Bosco was in the middle of everything and available to everybody. Everyone had an opportunity to make his needs known to him. Everyone referred everything to him, opened his heart to him, and no one hid anything from him. Thus, even if of little ability, a person would carry out diligently and with a will

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[36] Vow of Obedience, art. 7[6], Motto, *Cost. Testi critici*, pp. 96-97.

whatever Don Bosco told him to do. The fact that such a person was united with the superior as one heart and one soul resulted in everything going well, in spite of little or no expertise and of total lack of resources. Yes indeed: what made the early Oratory such a great experience was, on the one hand, the gentle way of commanding and, on the other, willing obedience [marginal addition:] *and open-hearted attitude toward the superior.* This was when Don Bosco was alone, and when there was but one house. Now things have grown beyond all expectation, and Don Bosco cannot be everywhere. How then should this unity continue to be maintained?

Here is the secret. I believe that a close bond of unity may be perfectly maintained through the monthly manifestation, on which I have often insisted. Keep this well in mind: the monthly manifestation made and received as it should be is the best means of maintaining the Salesian Congregation as it was conceived. [...] To instill the spirit of St. Francis de Sales in the confreres should be a director's principal concern; and this should be done under all circumstances, not only through the manifestation, but also by word and example. [...] The only delicate point relates to the disclosure of matters of conscience. This should be avoided. Matters of conscience are private and should remain such, unless one chooses to disclose them. In the manifestation those matters should be disclosed which can be used for the good of individual confreres and for the good of the Congregation at large. [37]

[b] Don Bosco's Concept of Religious Authority

In the second place, Don Bosco voices a deep concern for the preservation and strengthening of the chain of command in the Salesian Society. As quoted above, he stressed the necessity of "a unified principle." He had, in fact, a centralized and unified concept of authority, especially as it referred to himself as rector major. In his view, the scale of religious authority and command was pryamidal in structure, with the rector major at the vertex. He had already embodied this idea in the constitutions when describing the government of the Society.[38]

At General Chapter I (1877) in speaking of the plan to divide the congregation into provinces ("inspectorates") and of the committee appointed to study the matter, he clearly laid down the principle:

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[37] General Chapter II, Session 9, September 9, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook I, pp. 70-72, *FDBM* 1858 C6-8.

[38] Motto, *Cost. Testi critici*, p. 151. On the articles on the vow of obedience, and on the form and style of Salesian authority and obedience, cf. the insightful study by F. Motto, "La figura del superiore salesiano nelle Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales." *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane*, 2 (1983:1) 3-53.

> In this work they must ever keep in mind that the chain by which juridical authority is communicated cannot be tampered with, namely, from the Pope to the rector major, to the provincials, and finally to the directors of each local house. [39]

In this respect, one should bear in mind that in creating provinces Don Bosco did not intend to decentralize, but only to facilitate, government and administration.[40] He maintained a rigorously unified, centralized, pyramidal concept of the Salesian Society, as to government and administration, and in other respects as well. In the Introduction to his 1879 Report to the Holy See, he writes:

> The confreres assigned to the various houses of the Congregation take orders (*dipendono*) from the director of their respective community. The directors are subject (*soggetti*) to an inspector who presides over a stated number of houses constituting his inspectorate or province. The inspectors take orders (*dipendono*) from the rector major. The rector major, with the Superior Chapter, governs the entire Congregation under the direct and absolute control (*dipendenza*) of the Holy See. [41]

He emphasized the concept at the opening session of General Chapter II and again in Session 9. We read in the minutes:

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[39] General Chaper I, Session 16, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, p. 254, in *ASC* 04 Capitoli generali, *FDBM* 1851 E8. The sixth committee appointed to study and report on "Provinces and Duties of Provincials," was made up of Father Giovanni Cagliero, Michele Rua and Paolo Albera. [*EBM* XIII, p. 186.

[40] The early constitutions of the Salesian Society (the approved text of 1874 included), make no specific provision for the establishment of "provinces", that is, of regional-local divisions of the Society under a major superior. However, for the establishment of "inspectorates" Don Bosco appealed to an article of the constitutions "On Other Superiors" (*De caeteris superioribus*), a chapter first introduced in 1873 and approved in 1874. When the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars objected to the setting up of "inspectorates," as outlined in Don Bosco's 1879 Report to the Holy See, he replied: "The Pious Society was divided into inspectorates in compliance with Chapter 9, Article 17 of our constitutions, which reads: 'If need arises, the Rector Major, with the consent of the Superior Chapter, shall appoint Visitators, and shall delegate [*demandabit*] to them a certain amount of responsibility (*curam quandam*) over a stated number of houses, whenever their distance and number may require it. Such Visitators or Inspectors shall act in place (*vices gerent)* of the Rector Major in those houses and in those matters for which they are authorized'." [Constitutions as approved in 1874, in Motto, *Cost. Testi critici*, p. 155. Cf. *EBM* XIV, 161.] As may be seen, this constitution on the "Visitator" does not exactly speak of, or define, the office of provincial as we know it today. Don Bosco seems to have thought of the "Inspector" as a visitator or representative in the field acting for the Rector Major.

[41] *Brevi notizie sulla Congregazione di San Francesco di Sales dall'anno 1841 al 1879*, in *Opere Edite*, Vol. XXXI, p. 241; cf. *EBM* XIV, p. 157.

> The Rev. Don Bosco strongly emphasized this point: directors, and provincials too, should carefully hold the principle that command, as well as jurisdiction, is vested in one person alone. Hence every one should strive to uphold this authority and to keep everything under the Rector Major's unified direction (*tener legata bene ogni cosa al Sup[eriore] Maggiore*).[42]

> For the smooth running of the Congregation, it is important that [in each house] everything and everyone be centered on the director; that every director have an understanding with his provincial in everything; and likewise each provincial with the rector major. If we succeed in operating by this principle, we may rest assured of having put the running of our Congregation on a solid basis. [43]

Toward the end of General Chapter II, on the subject of the Rector Major's authority, Don Bosco asked that a committee be appointed to study the following proposal: "How the Rector Major's authority may be extended directly to the individual members of the Superior Chapter, and then to all members of the Congregation through provincials and directors." The committee comprised all the members of the Superior Chapter.[44]

(2) Charity and Gentleness toward the Pupils, Soul of the Salesian Educational Method

[i] Concern Voiced in the "Keynote Address"

The Salesian educational method demanded uncommon dedication as well as skill in the educator. Don Bosco had to lament a diminution of the gentle spirit of St. Francis de Sales in Salesian houses, a breakdown of the educator-pupil relationship, so good and effective in former times. He said:

> *We must also make a joint effort and find ways of cultivating St. Francis de Sales' spirit of charity and gentleness* (carità e dolcezza). *This spirit is weakening among us and, as I have had occasion to observe on my visits to the houses, the loss of it is especially noticeable in the classroom. Some times pupils are treated carelessly because they are disliked by their instructor. At other times they are neglected and left isolated in the classroom; the instructor will not interrogate them for long periods of time and*

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[42] General Chapter II, Session 1, September 3, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook I, p. 8, *FDBM* 1857 C3.

[43] General Chapter II, Session 9, September 9, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook I, p. 74, *FDBM* 1858 C5.

[44] General Chapter II, Session 13, September 11, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook II, p. 14, *FDBM* 1858 E8.

> *will not correct their homework. Or again, youngsters are put out of the classroom. And if they are sent back by the superior, the instructor readmits them with bad grace and treats them badly, and will even hold a grudge against the superior for having rebuffed him. Then the superior, to avoid a feud with that instructor which might then make it necessary to take action against him, is sometimes forced to dismiss or treat a pupil unfairly, who might perhaps by a gentler treatment be drawn to a more religious and godly conduct. I urge you all, therefore, to strengthen this Salesian spirit of gentleness and charity in yourselves, and back in your houses to foster it in your confreres, particularly if they be teachers.* [45]

[ii] Don Bosco's Further Utterances with Comments

In accepting schools and in working out conventions with local authorities, one of Don Bosco's demands was that the Salesian educational program and method not be interfered with in any way. This was non-negotiable. The premises might be under the control of others; the financial administration of the school might be negotiated; but the education of the young people must be Salesian—solely under Salesian control and according to the Salesian method. Such a position emerges from Don Bosco's correspondence with the contracting parties as well as from the discussion of foundations in the meetings of the Superior Chapter. In his exchange with Prince Gabrielli in 1879, when the boarding school of San Michele a Ripa in Rome was being offered to the Salesians, Don Bosco stated his demand in clearest terms. He writes:

> The [present] administration will have control over finances and office personnel, real estate transactions, building, repairs, etc. The Reverend Don Bosco, on the other hand, will supply a director, an administrator, supervisors, a porter, craftsmasters, and teachers for the school, in numbers sufficient to ensure discipline, morality, and the successful education of the pupils. [...] This would enable the Salesian Society to put into operation those means that are indispensable to its goals. For in our houses a unique disciplinary method is in use which we call "Preventive System." The method rules out all punishments and threats. It calls instead for an approach characterized by gentle manners, reason, loving kindness (i modi benevoli, la ragione, l'amorevolezza), and a very special kind of supervision. These are the means we use in order to ensure discipline and morality among the pupils. [46]

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[45] General Chapter II, Session 2, September 4, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed. Minutes*, Notebook I, pp. 14-15, *FDBM* 1857 C9-10.

[46] Letter Bosco to Gabrielli, [June, 1879], in Ceria, *Epistolario* III, pp. 481-482. It may be noted that the term "*amorevolezza*" (employed here, as as a component of the trinomial "reason, religion, loving kindness") does not otherwise occur in the documents under consideration.

> [...] Our basic demand is that we be allowed to set up and practice our educational method without any interference. [47]

Again, to pastor Clément Guiol in Marseilles, who demanded the right to assign Salesian personnel to ministries which had not been agreed upon, Don Bosco writes:

> I have tried to meet the terms of our agreement fully and in good faith, but your recent letter makes demands which run contrary to our educational method. Since according to our method repressive measures are eliminated, in order to ensure discipline and morality we require total control over the pupils and total autonomy in the educational program. [48]

Don Bosco's concern over the practice of the Salesian educational method is therefore understandable. Apparently in the 1880s this concern of his turned to apprehension. The well-known "Letter on Punishments" of January 29, 1883 is an important and telling expression of such fears.[49] So is the even better known

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[47] Letter of Don Bosco to Gabrielli, July 23, 1879, in Ceria, *Epistolario* III, p. 499. Roman red tape and other complications eventually brought to naught all negotiations over this school.

[48] Letter of Don Bosco to Guiol, [September 1879], in Ceria, *Epistolario*, p. 520.

[49] This circular letter attributed to Don Bosco as to contents, though not as to literary editorship, is dated on the "Feast of St. Francis de Sales, 1883," and was to be distributed by Fr. Rua to all directors. First published by E. Ceria in *IBM* XVI (1935), pp. 439-447, and in *Epistolario* IV (1959), pp. 201-209, it has now been critically edited and studied by José Manuel Prellezo, "Dei castighi da infliggersi nelle case salesiane. Una lettera circolare attribuita a Don Bosco," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 5 (1986) 263-308. By the same author we also have the earlier study, "Fonti letterarie della circolare 'Dei castighi da infliggersi nelle case salesiane'," *Orientamenti Pedagogici* 27 (1980) 625-642. In English we now have a translation by Michael Mendl based on Prellezo's critical text in *EBM* XVI, pp. 368-376, and a readable paraphrase in Michael Ribotta, "Tough Love is Not the Answer—Don Bosco's Views on Punishment," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 6 (1995:1) pp. 96-108. On pp. 93-95, Ribotta summarizes the critical questions concerning the authorship of the letter.

José Manuel Prellezo ["Valdocco (1866-1888). Problemi organizzativi e tensioni ideali nelle 'conferenze' dei primi salesiani," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 8 (1989:2) 289-328, especially pp. 294-297, 308-311.] describes the "real situation" (*realtà viva*) with respect to discipline and punishments prevailing in earlier days at the Oratory, and the gradual shaping over the years of a truly "Bosconian" disciplinary policy, the Salesian method as described in the little treatise on the Salesian Method and later in the Letter on Punishments. He cites the use of certain "extreme" forms of punishment in official use at the Oratory with Don Bosco's consent. Prellezo also refers to a letter written by Don Bosco to the chief of police of the city of Turin (*pretore urbano*) in which he defends a Salesian supervisor accused by a boy

Letter from Rome of May 10, 1884, which (though styled by Fr. Lemoyne) stands as Don Bosco's last extended statement on his educational philosophy. This document describes the educator-pupil relationship from a variety of standpoints, but it emphasizes above all presence, love, family spirit, trust, and makes a plea for a return to the method of loving kindness in Salesian education.[50]

At the Third General Chapter, in his closing address to the Chapter members, most of them directors of Salesian communities, Don Bosco spoke on the subject, as Marenco briefly reports:

> With regard to the administration of punishment, urge [your confreres] in and out of season to practice the Salesian method of education (*sistema preventivo*). Some Salesians slap the youngsters or [at meals] confine them to the punishment table for a whole week. Make it clear that an instructor may scold or call a boy to order, but he may not inflict corporal punishment on anyone. He should rather refer [difficult cases] to the director, who is to act in accordance with the Salesian method. Experience has shown that youngsters are often less blameworthy than they at first appear to be. [...][51] The director should admonish those confreres who resort to corporal punishment, obviously in private, never in the boys' presence. Admonished in a private, kindly manner they can easily be persuaded to listen to the director and use the Salesian method.
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> Good results [may be expected from the practice of the Salesian method]: (1) We shall win the boys' trust. (2) Vocations will be fostered in greater numbers. (3) The boys will leave the school as friends, not as enemies. (4) They may not exactly get better and begin to give good example, but at least they will not get worse and give really bad example.[52]

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of rough handling. Don Bosco writes: "in order to control certain youngsters [...] we were allowed to use whatever means seemed appropriate, and in extreme cases to seek the help of the police, as we were forced to do on a number of occasions." The holograph of this letter (undated, but datable to the late 1860s) is in *ASC* 131.01 Letter autografe, *FDBM* 4 B2-4.

[50] For a critical edition and study of the letter in its historical context, see Pietro Braido, "La Lettera di Don Bosco da Roma del 10 maggio 1884," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 3 (1884) 296-374; also in *La Lettera di Don Bosco da Roma del 10 maggio 1884* (Piccola Biblioteca dell'Istituto Storico Salesiano, 3; Roma: LAS, 1884), and again "Due Lettere da Roma," in *Scritti Pedagogici e Spirituali* (Roma: LAS, 1987) pp. 269-303. Cf. also Michael Ribotta, "The Roman Letter of 1884 and Its Aftermath," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 5 (1994:2) pp. 1-21, for a short critical introduction (pp. 1-7, based on the above) and for a précis of the text in English (pp. 7-13).

[51] Marenco notes at this point: "Here Don Bosco relates an episode by way of confirmation." The episode is not recorded.

[52] General Chapter III, Closing Session 11, September 7, 1883, Marenco, *Minutes*, p. 20, *FDBM* 1864 B2.

(3) Fostering Vocations Through Charity, Good Morals, and Other Means

[i] Don Bosco's Words in the "Keynote Address"

[a. Bond of Charity in the Community of Educators] Not only did Don Bosco call for the charity and gentleness of St. Francis de Sales in all educator-pupil relationships; he also wanted this spirit to reign in the community of educators. If the young people saw that unity and love reigned among their educators, they would be attracted to follow the same vocation. He spoke at some length on this point.

> *Vocations have been declining at a frightening rate, throughout the Church at large, and unfortunately also among us. There was a time when, if a young man showed the least sign of a vocation on coming to us, we were able in most instances to bring him along, mold him according to our spirit, and make him a priest. This is no longer the case. There is evidence, stronger by the day, that our schools little by little are going the way of all other schools. Our pupils today are no longer driven by that impulse toward good, toward religious practice, and toward imitating their religious educators, which was so much in evidence in olden times. How are we, then, to reverse this trend, so that vocations can be fostered as before? Our efforts must be all the more intense in the face of increasing dangers and of the relentless onslaught of evil.*
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> *First of all, we must begin by treating each other, and all confreres, with mutual charity and gentleness. Young people would be strongly attracted to our way of life if they see that charity and gentleness reign among us. Secondly, we must extend to our pupils the same love with which we treat our confreres. When this happens, the youngsters will be captivated, and once we have gained their affection we will be able to influence their vocation. This has been my experience. A boy decides to leave the school. I do not interfere, but when he is about to leave I approach him in a friendly manner and say to him: "You are leaving for home, and that's fine; but you will be doing me a great favor if you tell me frankly what has prompted your decision to leave." Often the answer is: "I would have liked to become a Salesian, but I see that the Salesians don't get along and speak ill of each other. I no longer want to be one of them." I point out that those few that are at fault do not reflect the spirit of the Congregation, that the majority of Salesians are good religious. Again the usual reply is: "That's true; I realize that there are many virtuous Salesians; but what I have seen has made such a bad impression on me that I have lost the desire. Under the circumstances, I am afraid I would not do any good." Others leave because of some defect they have noticed in their superiors. The superior in question may well be a saintly man, but he may have a tendency to*

deal with the boys in a rough or impatient manner. All his virtues are overlooked; that defect of his becomes the deciding factor.

Let me repeat: gentleness and charity among ourselves and toward the boys are the means most conducive to good education and to fostering vocations. This is how boys reason: "If the Salesians so love one another, they will also love me should I be one of them." True, one should not join the Congregation in order to find love. But this is how boys reason. So they come in, they begin to do well, and gradually they become real assets for the Congregation and do much good. Under different circumstances they would never have entered, and they would in most cases have gone completely astray and come to a bad end. Gentleness and charity, on the other hand, would spell salvation for them. [53]

[b. Good Morals in the Boy Essential to a Vocation] Recruiting vocations to the priesthood and to the Salesian Society was one of Don Bosco's important concerns. As will be seen, the great expansion of his educational effort, begun in the 1860s in the form of the boarding school, was to serve that very purpose. This required a shift of focus from the "poor and abandoned" to morally sound youngsters in whom the ideal of a vocation could be developed. Don Bosco decries the corruption of society in his day and the damage done to the young by rampant sexual license, and deplores the fact that the Salesian school could not be immune to the virus. Obviously, the Salesian boarding school could not accommodate young people that could become agents of moral corruption. The number of boys who left or were dismissed for this reason was probably much greater than that of those who left because of having experienced unkind treatment. Don Bosco continued.

A good moral life is the foundation of a vocation. One can only grieve at the rampant and increasingly pervasive immorality of present-day society. In spite of our best efforts, we are often forced to dismiss youngsters from our schools for this reason. They come to us already tainted by vice. They refrain for a time, then they fall back into their bad habit. There is nothing for it but to be as watchful as possible. We ought to begin by setting a good example and by never allowing the least moral fault to show in us. Then we must use every means at our disposal to foster good morals and the spirit of piety among our boys: the frequent, worthy reception of the Sacraments [is important]. And we must keep away from our young people anything that may be harmful in this respect.

We have much to fight against in this day and age when sexual license is the rule. We see boys start a chain of immoral habits when only 4 or 5 years of age; and this happens even in kindergartens. I would never have believed that kindergartens where boys and girls are kept together (con

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[53] General Chapter II, Session 2, September 4, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook I, pp. 15-17, *FDBM* 1857 C10-12.

promiscuità di sesso) *could do so much harm.*[54] *Precocious eight or ten-year old boys today have already acquired the malice of an eighteen or twenty-year old of former times. This moral decay is responsible for sapping the energy and undermining the good health of young people. This being the case, the education of a youngster to a virile and hardy life style, capable of undertaking and persevering in strenuous tasks without damage to health, is seldom possible. In order to keep their schools open and maintain adequate enrollment religious congregations are forced to adapt to the times, and yield in such matters as students' rest, fare, and amount of work demanded. Young people's health and stamina are not what they used to be. This is due to moral decay. What's more, where immorality has taken hold, the seed of religious vocation is stifled and is replaced by an aversion to anything sacred.* [55]

[c. Practical Means for Fostering Vocations] In Barberis' original notes the name "Rua" appears at the beginning of the following paragraph.[56] It probably indicates that at this point Father Rua asked the question about "practical means," to which Don Bosco responded.

As to how we may promote vocations, I would suggest the following practical means: (1) Always speak well of priests. (2) Remove bad companions systematically. (3) Keep bad books out of the way, as also books that may not be bad in themselves, but are apt to excite the imagination or stimulate the passions. (4) Instructors, supervisors, directors, and preachers from the pulpit should speak often on the subject of vocation. They should make the point that one's whole life depends on choosing the right vocation, and therefore one should give it much thought, pray over it, and seek counsel. Avoid telling a lad that he should or should not become a priest. What's important is that boys think about vocation and choose the one that is right for them. So, if there is the seed of a vocation [to the priesthood or religious life] it will not be stifled, but it will be allowed to germinate. (5) Encourage the reading of our publications, such as the Life of Dominic Savio, of [Michael] Magone, etc. This is how a young person will reason: a house, a school, a congregation which can turn out such saintly youths is

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[54] The clause in normal type is an interlinear addition. Kindergartens were pioneered in Italy and Turin by Father Ferrante Aporti (1791-1858). He advocated new methods in the education of young children, incurring thereby the censure of Church authorities. Don Bosco was wary and critical of this educator. [Cf. e.g. *EBM* II, pp. 148f., 165-172.]

[55] General Chapter II, Session 2, September 4, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook I, pp. 17-18, *FDBM* 1857 C12-D1. I will make no comment on the ideas expressed in this last paragraph of the text; I will only say that it is an exact translation of Don Bosco's words, as reported.

[56] General Chapter II, Session 2, September 4, 1880, Barberis, *Original Minutes*, p. 8, *FDBM* 1856 B7.

> *worthy of my love and admiration; and if I wanted to become a priest, that's where I would want to be. In fact, I might try it. (6) Let us work very hard. There are lots of friars* (frati) *and priests who are engaged in preaching, in hearing confessions, and the like; but they are otherwise not much in evidence, and people know it. Salesians, on the contrary, are seen teaching in the classroom, giving religious instruction, preaching from the pulpit; they are a bit everywhere, and do a bit of everything. This [tireless activity] is what attracts people to us. Someone said to me a while back: "You have sent one Salesian to Rome, and he has half the city on the move. What if you had sent fifteen or sixteen Salesians?"* [57]

[ii] Additional Utterances with Comments

The recruiting and care of vocations was one of Don Bosco's constant concerns. The problem seems to have been very much on Don Bosco's mind in the period preceding the Second General Chapter, for he discussed the subject in similar terms in the Alassio General Conference emphasizing also the role of the sacramental life and of the confessor in the matter. He said:

> Basic to the development of a vocation is a good sacramental life. We must create an environment in which such life can flourish. But it is not enough, for it is only the foundation on which one must build. The directors should speak on vocation on various occasions during the year. There is no need ever to tell a youngster, "You ought or ought not to be a priest." The boys, however, should know that there are two ways which lead to salvation; some are called to enter the one, and some the other. We must pray, and persevere in prayer, that the Lord may show us which of the ways lies open to us, the one on which he will pour out his saving graces on us. To this end, the confessor's advice must be sought. Most effective means apt to sow the seed of a vocation to the priesthood and to our Congregation, and make it grow, are: (1) the love which we show in all our dealings with the boys; (2) the mutual charity which they see at work in the community of their educators. For if they see that their educators treat each other badly or run each other down, they will never want to join them as Salesians. [58]

In a further comment, Don Bosco expatiated on the role of the confessor.

> It is very important that our boys take direction from [Salesian] confessors who are imbued with the Salesian spirit. Not infrequently priests who stay

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[57] General Chapter II, Session 2, September 4, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes,* Notebook I, pp. 19-20, *FDBM* 1857 D2-3. Father Francesco Dalmazzo was the first Salesian stationed in Rome, cf. Appendix V.

[58] Alassio Conference, Session 2, February 7, 1879, Barberis, *Minutes*, with Minutes of the Superior Chapter, Notebook II, p. 72, *FDBM* 1878 B1.

> with us for an extended period of time are asked to hear confessions. They may be good and saintly priests but, not being Salesians, they are not trained in the spirit of our Congregation. The advice they give in confession may run contrary to that which a Salesian priest would give. As a consequence the boy loses his confidence in his [Salesian] confessor, or in his director. I cannot think of anything more damaging to a vocation. During a spiritual retreat at Lanzo a young man sought Don Bosco's advice regarding some difficulty in his vocation. He then went to confession to a visiting priest, not a Salesian, and received contrary advice. That was the beginning of his slide toward total spiritual ruin. [59]

Don Bosco returned to the subject of vocation in a later session of General Chapter II, emphasizing again the importance of a good moral life for the preservation of a vocation.

> The Lord plants the seed of vocation in the heart of many of our young people, so that as long as they remain good they love the priestly vocation and experience a desire for it. But one literally sees the Lord withdrawing from a young man who begins to sin and who loses the precious gift of chastity. Then the priestly vocation loses all its attraction for that boy, and more often than not it becomes the object of jokes and ridicule. If we succeed in preserving a boy's virtue, we will see the seed of vocation grow and blossom in him. [60]

A little later in the same session, Don Bosco is again quoted on the subject of vocation, this time (in accordance with contemporary theology) stressing the obligation of following a vocation.

> A good moral conduct is basic in the development of a vocation. But even when this prerequisite is present we must not tell the young man, "You should, or should not, become a priest; you should or should not join the Congregation." Young people need to be instructed on the subject of vocation. Above all they should be made to understand the obligation which one has of following one's vocation. Beyond that, the decision is theirs. We should also tell them not to go to many different priests for advice; and, should they be considering religious life, not to seek the advice of secular priests. [61]

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[59] Alassio Conference, Session 2, February 7, 1879, Barberis, *Minutes*, with Minutes of the Superior Chapter, Notebook II, p. 74, *FDBM* 1878 B3.

[60] General Chapter II, Session 6, September 6, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook I, p. 50, *FDBM* 1858 A10.

[61] General Chapter II, Session 6, September 6, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook I, p. 51, *FDBM* 1858 A11.

We shall have occasion to hear more on vocation from Don Bosco when speaking of his concern over the Oratory school.

(4) Working Tirelessly for Young People in Need, Both a Way of Spirituality and a Means of Survival for the Congregation

[i] Don Bosco's Words in the "Keynote Address"

[a. Active Religious Life a Prime Need] The exercise of pastoral charity is the Salesian way of the spiritual life: spirituality in action. It is also what will secure the sympathy and good will of people of every persuasion, especially when this ministry is expended on behalf of poor and homeless children.

> *Let us therefore work hard. Let us in every way and everywhere try to salvage whatever is good in people, [particularly] in young people, to increase the good that is present, defective though it be, and to supply what is lacking. Then we shall, even humanly speaking, have gained the support of people, both good and bad. I shall never forget what the great Pius IX, of happy memory, once said to me: "We live in a materialistic age. Saying prayers, performing acts of devotion, receiving the Sacraments—these things mean nothing to materialists. External works are also needed. We need to match their philanthropic activity with works of charity [of our own], such as taking in [needy] youngsters, visiting inmates in the prisons, and the like." While these works render us dear to God, they also secure for us the good will [even] of bad people. Then not only will they allow us freedom of action; they will even support our charitable activity.*
>
> *I have frequent occasion to be or deal with real anticlerical people, liberals of the first water. Most of the time they do not know who I am, but when the conversation happens to be about us and our work, invariably they will admit: "Yes, Don Bosco and the Salesians, they work! They have given a home to so many poor street boys; they are well-deserving of society; they do a lot of good. Priests of this kind—may they be with us forever for the good of the people."*
>
> *Neither prayers (*paternostri*) nor miracles will avail to counter this evil world. Works are needed. We need to give a home to as many young people as we can.* [62]

[b. The Marseilles Episode, an Example]

> *What is it that so impressed the people of Marseilles and drove them to near folly in their good will toward us [Salesians]?*[63] *It all began with a*

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[62] General Chapter II, Session 2, September 4, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes,* Notebook I, pp. 20-21, *FDBM* 1857 D3-4.

> *small incident. It was a very cold evening, and it was snowing. As I was returning to our orphanage, I spot a lad standing at a street corner nearby, crying and numb with cold. I go over and try to talk to him, but I get no answer. I try again, and he finally replies, "I'm hungry." I take him with me into the house, where he is given something to eat. Then they tell him, "Now go on home to your parents." He replies, "I have no parents." "We're so sorry, but do go home and stay out of the cold." "I have no home to go to." "Then where do you spend the nights?" "In entry-ways or wherever." The hospice was full at the time, and there wasn't a single bed available. No matter, he is made comfortable for the night; the next day he is enrolled as a pupil, and he is still with us. Some people happened to witness the incident, and then learnt that the boy had been accepted. They spread the news, and soon the whole city is talking about the incident. [Rich people in] carriages come to visit from all parts [of the city]. The Salesians have the good will of all, both the good and the bad. In a word, let us work hard, and the Congregation will be blessed.*[64]

[ii] Additional Utterances with Comments.

The priority of pastoral charity in Salesian spirituality was one of Don Bosco's most rooted convictions. The research connected with the writing of his *Church History* (first published in 1845) had shown him that too many orders and congregations had sought and still were seeking holiness in ascetical and religious exercises. In consequence of this perception, the religious orders and congregations singled out for special commendation in his *Church History*, from the Dominicans to the Salesians, are those that have sought to exemplify Christ's pastoral charity toward the poor, especially poor young people. Hence, when Don Bosco gathered the first group of young helpers in 1854, in order to bind them to himself he invited them, as Father Rua reports,

> to make, with the help of God and of St. Francis de Sales an experiment in the practical exercise of charity toward neighbor, in order eventually to make a promise, and later if possible and appropriate, a vow of it to the Lord.[65]

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[63] St. Leo's orphanage (*patronage*) and oratory were established in Marseilles in the latter part of 1878 through a convention with a local pastor, Canon Clément Guiol, and the Beaujour Society. At first the work met with opposition from local anticlerical groups, but it soon became the most important Salesian foundation in Southern France. [Cf. *EBM* XIII, pp. 556-564, where, however, there is no mention of the "episode".]

[64] General Chapter II, Session 2, September 4, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook I, p. 21, *FDBM* 1857 D4.

[65] *EBM* V, pp. 7-8.

As a way of holiness or spirituality, Don Bosco proposed to his Salesians the imitation of Christ's pastoral charity: Christ the good shepherd. This he made clear in the Preamble to the early constitutions and in Article 1 of the Chapter on the Purpose of the Society. In the earliest drafts, this article of the Constitutions stressed the relatedness of the imitation of Christ's pastoral charity and religious perfection or holiness. Holiness is achieved *through* the exercise of pastoral charity. Even though, by force of circumstances,[66] in the 1864 draft of the Constitutions the article appears drastically re-written, so that the concept of perfection to be achieved *through* the imitation of Christ's pastoral charity is replaced by the mere *coordination* of various purposes,[67] we may take this as certain: Don Bosco never swerved from his conviction that holiness is achieved through the imitation of Christ's pastoral charity. For instance, this is the doctrine propounded through the five editions of the Savio biography (1859-1878):

> The first piece of advice he was given for achieving holiness was that he should endeavor to win souls to God; because there is no holier work in this world than that of contributing to the salvation of souls, for whose redemption Jesus Christ shed the very last drop of his precious blood.[68]

The way of spiritual life which Don Bosco proposes to the Salesians, in spite of the re-writing of the above-mentioned article, is no different. Thus in the Comments (*Cose da notarsi*) which Don Bosco submitted with the constitutional text of 1864 (in which the re-written article appears), Don Bosco clearly states:

> The purpose of this Society, in so far as it concerns its members, is to offer them an opportunity to unite in spirit in order to work for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. We find inspiration in the words of St. Augustine: *Divinorum divinissimum est in lucrum animarum operari* [Of all divine works the most divine is to be engaged in winning souls over to God]. Considered in its historical existence, [this Society] has for its purpose to continue what has been in effect for the past 20 years in the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. [...][69]

Again, in the Historical Summary (*Cenno istorico*) presented in Rome with the constitutional text in 1873/74, explaining his idea of the Society in question-and-answer form, Don Bosco writes:

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[66] For a discussion of the circumstances that determined the re-writing of this article, cf. Francis Desramaut, "Lo scopo della società nella costituzioni salesiane," in *La Missione dei Salesiani nella Chiesa* (Colloqui 2). Torino: LDC, 1970, pp. 65-85.

[67] F. Motto, *Cost. Testi critici*, p. 72.

[68] G. Bosco, *[...] Savio [...]* (1859), p. 53, in *Opere Edite*, Vol. XI, p. 203.

[69] G. Bosco, *Cose da notarsi [...]*, in Motto, *Cost. Testi critici*, p. 229.

> Q: In this Society is your aim the good of neighbor or that of its members? A: The purpose of this Society is the spiritual advancement of its members *through* the exercise of charity toward neighbor, especially toward poor young people.[70]

This is also the spiritual doctrine taught in the *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators*:

> This Association might be regarded as a traditional Third Order but with a difference. Whereas in a Third Order perfection was made to consist in the exercise of piety [devotions], the main purpose of this Association is the active life and the exercise of charity toward neighbor, especially toward young people at risk.[71]

He steadfastly maintained that the exercise of Christlike pastoral charity is the Salesian's way to holiness and religious perfection. But working for the poor is also a way of winning the good will and the support of people. This was one of Don Bosco's favorite themes, an understandable concern in the context of the liberal revolution. In the Alassio Conference (1879), speaking of the orphanage of St.-Cyr (France), which was being offered to the Salesians at the time, Don Bosco noted:

> In France religious congregations have practically disappeared. The few that remain either are no longer active by force of circumstances or are engaged in the education of the upper classes. None of them is involved in the education of the poor. By contrast, people are in love with our spirit, and they are well disposed toward us precisely because of the type of young people we serve. This is the reason why we are the object of so much good will; and this is the reason why (we may hope) we shall never be harassed.[72]

One of Don Bosco's interpositions at General Chapter II is noteworthy in this regard. As negotiations for a school to be opened in the city of Cremona (Lombardy) were being reviewed, he restated the Salesian option for the poor in clearest terms.

> [Don Bosco] repeated what he has stated so often in the past, namely, that our mainstay, and hence the chief concern of our pastoral activity, is to receive poor working boys (*artigianelli*) in homes *and to conduct oratories on*

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[70] P. Braido, *Don Bosco per i giovani [...]*, p. 125.

[71] G. Bosco, *Cooperatori salesiani, ossia [...]*, 1876, p. 6, in *Opere Edite* , Vol. XXVIII, p. 260.

[72] Alassio General Conference, Session 3, February 8, 1879, Barberis, *Minutes*, with Transcribed Minutes of General Chapter II, Notebook II, p. 81, *FDBM* 1878 B10.

Sundays and holy days.[73] As for schools, [we should accept] ~~only~~[74] those that serve the common people (*pel popolo*) and poor, neglected youngsters (*poveri giovani abbandonati*). "These pastoral works better correspond to our purpose, do a tremendous amount of good, and attract the good will of all people, good and bad alike. At the same time they require less personnel and, what's more important in our days, personnel that need not be academically qualified. We are painfully short of people with certification, diplomas, or degrees. In these homes for working boys we can then gradually also set up a regular school. This strategy will diminish the danger of inquiries by the school authorities, wanting to check on the program of studies and on the certification of teachers."[75]

The above are the topics which Don Bosco is reported to have touched upon in the "Keynote Address" delivered at the beginning (second session) of General Chapter II. But a little later in the same session the Chapter, apparently at Don Bosco's suggestion, took up the subject of the Salesians' secular readings (particularly those of young Salesian seminarians). Don Bosco had occasion to voice his views on the subject, deploring the fact that such literature (often stories of chivalrous love) was very harmful. His words could be regarded as a continuation of the "Address."

2. Don Bosco's Words on Unsuitable and "Forbidden" Books at General Chapter II, Session 2

(1) The Problem of Unsuitable and "Forbidden" Books for Salesians

[i] Don Bosco's words continuing the "Address"

[a. Unsuitable Light Reading Matter] Barberis writes:

After disposing of less important topics, the subject of bad books and readings came up. Don Bosco voiced his concern about the books which some of our seminarians read for pleasure: *Such reading can be very harmful to our young people, for that is what our seminarians really are. True, books are often read quickly and merely for the novelty of the plot, and at the time of reading they do no harm. Later, however, one recalls and dwells on them, and ideas are suggested that are at variance with the doctrinal and moral teaching of the Christian religion.* The directors were strongly urged

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[73] "And to conduct oratories on Sundays and holy days" appears as a marginal addition.

[74] "Only" is struck through.

[75] General Chapter II, Session 8, September 7, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook I, pp. 62-63, *FDBM* 1858 B10-11.

> to keep such literature out of the hands of their youngsters and of their confreres. The works by Ariosto, Metastasio, d'Azeglio, and Giusti were especially singled out among those that should be banned. Nor should we stop there. We should also discourage the reading of novels, which are not bad and are in fact written with a good end in view, but which are apt to fill one's head with frivolous thoughts and fantasies of love. Example of such novels are [Manzoni's] I Promessi Sposi, and even the books by Bresciani, Franco, and the like.[76]

[b. Reading Forbidden Books][77] Don Bosco warned against reading, or even only speaking favorably of literature which was "forbidden" for demeaning or contradicting Catholic doctrine in points of faith and morals.

> Don Bosco added: *There is a mania with younger as well as older priests who teach in schools to read forbidden books, and to ask for my permission to do so. This is a very serious matter. For a true appreciation of the Catholic faith* [cattolicesimo] *in all its beauty, one must acquire a deep knowledge of it in its entirety. If one's mind is filled with prejudices even on one point, as a result one will not appreciate it as a whole. I think therefore that one should never read bad books, even if one is sure of not suffering any moral harm [from such reading]. There are so many good books available on all sorts of subjects. Let's have recourse to these*

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[76] General Chapter II, Session 2, September 4, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook I, p. 22, *FDBM* 1857 D5. Ludovico Ariosto's (1474-1533) many poetic works include the chivalric epic poem *Orlando Furioso*, considered the best poetic expression of Italian Renaissance. Pietro Metastasio (1698-1792) authored, among other works, over 2 dozen melodramas (*Didone abbandonata, La clemenza di Tito*, etc.). Massimo Taparelli, Marquis d'Azeglio (1798-1866), Piedmontese author and politician active in the *Risorgimento*, authored political novels (*Ettore Fieramosca*, etc.) and the memoirs *I miei ricordi*. Giuseppe Giusti (1809-1850), a poet and prose writer, is known for his political and social satires (*Lo stivale*, etc.). Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873), Italian novelist and poet active in the time of the *Risorgimento*, is known especially for his work, *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*), an historical novel of 17th-century Italy with political overtones. (I have no information on Bresciani and Franco.)

[77] The Holy Office forbade some books explicitly by name, and they were then listed in the *Index librorum prohibitorum*. But many other books were forbidden by the law itself (*ipso jure*), and the Common Law in force at the time listed a dozen broad categories of such forbidden books. Basically all books, whether by Catholics of non-Catholics, which contradicted the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church in the fields of Scripture, theological doctrine, philosophy, and moral doctrine and practice, were forbidden by law. Likewise forbidden by law were books that ridiculed religion, upheld practices alien to the Christian ethos (e.g., suicide), were irreligious (e. g., propounded superstition, magic, etc.), or were lascivious or obscene. In our case, it seems that we are dealing chiefly with literature which did not measure up to Catholic standards in point of doctrine, philosophy, religion, or morality.

sources where "excellence" abounds, and not waste time in sifting through the mire for the little good [it may yield]. All the more so, since it seldom happens that even that little bit of good is completely free of filth; or that such reading does not have the effect of diminishing one's devotion or of increasing one's prejudice against religion. [78]

[ii] Additional Comment

Don Bosco's concern over the confreres' readings appears to have been motivated in the first place by what he expected to be an uncompromising commitment to Catholic faith and moral life in his Salesians. It was no doubt motivated also by his perception of the spiritual danger involved in such reading. For if, on the one hand, Don Bosco wanted his followers to be with "the world" and to work fearlessly in "the world," on the other, he sought to surround them with a carapace of precautionary measures designed to protect them (so he believed) from its evil influences. But, beyond protective concerns, such separation from, or renunciation of the world (*fuga mundi*), was also an important component of Salesian asceticism.

(2) The Problem of Books Harmful and Unsuitable for the Young

Protective concerns, on the other hand, seem to have been uppermost in Don Bosco's urgent call for control and strict supervision of all reading material of young people in Salesian schools. His conviction that serious spiritual harm can come to young people from reading even seemingly harmless books is evidenced in his final exhortation.

[i] Don Bosco's Words Continuing the "Address"

I also urge directors and instructors to avoid praising those books whose content may be good in part, but which are objectionable from other points of view. For example an author like [Niccolò] Machiavelli is extolled for his style and for his historical writing, and deservedly so. But the young man who hears this author's praises sung will want to get his books and read them. Just to issue a warning that, in spite of good points there is much to blame in these writings, will not help: Nitimur in vetitum *(We fall for the lure of what's forbidden).*

It was pointed out that a number of the books described as unsuitable, such as Manzoni's, were for sale in our book store, some of them even at discount prices. Someone suggested that such books be sold only to out-

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[78] General Chapter II, Session 2, September 4, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook I, pp. 22-23, *FDBM* 1857 D5-6.

> side customers, not to our students. Don Bosco spoke against such a half measure. He said: *What is harmful to our young people is bound to do harm to others as well. We ought not to offer such books for sale. We must not criticize those who sell or print them, but we should not favor their circulation. The least we can do is take a position of non-participation.* [79]

[ii] Additional Utterances and Comments

[a. Latin and Italian Classics Series]

Keeping unsuitable literature out of young people's hands was no belated concern on Don Bosco's part. Indeed it lay behind many and demanding publishing ventures, which he conceived as part of a God-given vocation to the "apostolate of the press." Just as with the *Catholic Readings*, begun in 1853, Don Bosco sought to counteract anti-Catholic propaganda, so with the *Library of Selected Latin Classics* (from ca. 1865) and the *Library of Italian Literature for the Young* (from 1869) he tried to neutralize the irresponsible use made of Latin and Italian classics in the classroom by teachers of the liberal persuasion. He did so by placing selected and "expurgated" classics, beautifully edited and inexpensive, in the hands of young students. The stated editorial policy read in part: "Those classics that deal with subject matter offensive to religion or morality will be presented in expurgated form or entirely set aside, no matter how good their credentials."[80]

Don Bosco also intended to put into the hands of young people books which they could read for pleasure without spiritual harm. In the same second session of General Chapter II he made the suggestion and expressed a hope.

> I hope that shortly we will be able to turn our attention to a library of entertaining readings. The series of the classics, after so many volumes, is running out of steam. When this series is phased out, we must immediately turn our attention to the new project. The stories by Father Lemoyne

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[79] General Chapter II, Session 2, September 4, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook I, pp. 23-24, *FDBM* 1857 D6-7. Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), Italian political philosopher active in Florence, authored *Il principe* (the Prince), his most famous book. He also wrote essays in history and literature.

[80] Don Bosco set forth the editorial criteria for the *Italian Literature* in a circular letter. [Cf. *IBM* IX, 429 (omitted in *EBM* IX 196f.)] The series, *Selecta ex Latinis Scriptoribus* (Selections from the Latin Classics) was begun around mid-1860 and continued even after Don Bosco's death (1888) in expanded form to include also Greek classics. The *Biblioteca della Gioventù Italiana* (Library of Italian Literature for the Young), began publication in January 1869 and ceased in 1885 with the publication of the 204th volume. [Cf. F. Desramaut, "Études V," in *Cahiers Salésiens* 24-25 (1991), pp. 75-78.]

> would be good for a start. Then books, like those of *Tommaso Moro*, provided they contain no love plots (*amoreggiamenti*), could be included. [81]

The Italian Literature series was finally phased out in 1885, and the new series, *Readings for Pleasure* (*Letture amene*), took off the following year.[82]

[b] Two Circular Letters on Curbing Unsuitable Books and on Spreading Good Books

Two circular letters, attributed to Don Bosco as to contents, though not as to literary editorship, stand as important attestations to this enduring concern. The first is the letter on controlling the pupils' books and reading materials in Salesian schools (1884); the second is the letter on the dissemination of good books (1885). These two document are given (in translation) as appendices. Here a few excerpts will suffice.

[Curbing Unsuitable Books]

We have attestation that in 1884 Don Bosco was gravely concerned over discipline and good morals at the Oratory, as well as in other houses of the Society. As already indicated above in connection with the Letter of 1884 from Rome, and as will be seen at some length below, he was pondering ways of improving the situation. The letter on controlling "bad books" apparently grew out of this same concern. At a meeting of the Superior Chapter in late 1884, he had this to say:

> We should make every effort to put all forbidden books beyond the reach of our pupils, even if this means getting rid of prescribed school textbooks. Much less should such books be available at the bookstore. [...] We ought never to adopt, quote, or even mention authors whose writings are forbidden or who propound anti-Catholic principles. An exception may be made in the case of those who have to take public examinations; but even then expurgated editions should be used. But forbidden books, even in expurgated editions, ought never to be placed in the hands of pupils in lower grades. This would only excite their curiosity to go and check the edited passages, with fatal results. Nor should we even mention [such authors] except with great caution. Directors and instructors should place under lock

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[81] General Chapter II, Session 2, September 4, 1880, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook I, p. 24, *FDBM* 1857 D7. Don Bosco's mention of "*Tommaso Moro*" as a likely contributor to a series of entertaining readings for young people is puzzling. He may be referring to Saint Thomas More (1478-1535) or to Thomas Moore (1779-1852), the Irish poet who also authored various prose works.

[82] Eighteen volumes of *Letture amene* were published on a bimonthly basis from 1886 to 1889.

> and key any [forbidden book] they may have in their possession. I would never have believed that a time would come when the craving for reading forbidden books would reach such a fever pitch. The same may be said of the mad craving for reading novels, which, besides being a great waste of time, may spell the ruin of one's soul. [...] The biographies of our pupils, all the books of the Catholic Readings, and those in the Young People's Library should be read by preference, or recommended for reading.[83]

E. Ceria writes: "It was with such worries on his mind that Don Bosco gave Father Lemoyne instructions for writing the letter [on the control of books]. It was reviewed by him, before it was sent out to the schools over his signature on November 1, 1884.[84]

Don Bosco begins with voicing the "grave concern" (*gravissima cagione*) which has prompted the writing of this letter, and calls on all Salesians to a greater sense of responsibility as educators, a responsibility which "must be shared jointly and indivisibly by both myself and you." The question to be urgently addressed, he states, is about the "books used by our youngsters; which books should be kept out of their reach, and which should be allowed for their personal, as well as for common, reading." The letter refers to the modern craving for reading and speaks of the way in which books are used to shape young people's minds.

> The enemies of souls know the power of this weapon, and experience has taught you how cleverly they can use it for the criminal destruction of innocence. Fanciful titles, beautiful paper, clearest print, fine illustrations, modest price, attractive popular style, variety in plot, lively descriptions—all these features are used for the purpose [of corruption] with consummate skill and diabolical cunning. Consequently, it is our bounden duty to counter bad books with good books. And woe to us if we go to sleep while the enemy is ever sleeplessly at work sowing the bad seed.

The letter then goes on to inculcate vigilance to prevent bad books from being brought into the school at the beginning of term and throughout the school year,

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[83] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, September 12, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, pp. 33a-b, FDBM 1881 B5-6.

[84] *IBM* XVII, p. 197. The entire text follows on pp. 197-200. A printed copy of the letter bearing Don Bosco's (authentic?) signature is in *ASC* 131.03 Lettere circolari, Una gravissima cagione, *FDBM* 1368 C9-11. An archivist's note quotes Father Ceria as saying: "The signature could be Don Bosco's own; at least it cannot be ruled out." However, a simple comparison with Don Bosco's handwriting during this period shows that this signature is far too firm and calligraphic to be authentic. Don Bosco was losing control of his hands and had just survived a near fatal illness. The authenticity of the letter as such, however, is not in question. The ideas and concerns voiced in the letter are certainly coherent with Don Bosco's attested position in the matter. For the letter in English translation, cf. *Appendix I*.

suggesting such methods as inspection of lockers, trunks and packages. It continues:

> A bad book invariably becomes a noisome source of contagious infection for many a youngster. [...] When a bad book is discovered which has been forbidden by the Church, or which is immoral, it should be burnt immediately. It has happened that such books taken from the youngsters and not destroyed have turned out to be the ruin of our priests and seminarians.
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> [...] Not only should we purge out bad books; we should also be on our guard against those other books which, even though good or indifferent in themselves, are dangerous because they are unsuitable, considering the age, place, studies, tendencies, burgeoning passions, or the very vocation of the persons in question. These books also should be removed.

But the letter, while unyielding with regard to vigilance and methods of control, also urges that all, especially directors, be guided by the Salesian spirit in the matter.

> Unfortunately youngsters find it difficult to be obedient in this matter, and practice all sorts of subterfuge to hide a bad book. The director is up against the boy's secretiveness, curiosity, fear of punishment, human respect, unbridled passions, all combined. Consequently, winning over the hearts of the youngsters through persuasion and gentleness is of paramount importance. Periodically, during the school year, the subject of bad books and of the harm they do should be raised from the pulpit, as well as in the Good Nights and in the classrooms. Youngsters should be made to realize that what is demanded is intended solely for the good of their souls—which are, after God, the supreme object of our love. Severity should be avoided except when a youngster is the cause of spiritual ruin to others. If a bad book is handed in late in the year, the disobedience should be overlooked, and the book accepted as a present. In such cases, it may have been the confessor who enjoined this course, and it would be imprudent to pursue the matter further. Moreover, such leniency on the part of the superiors would motivate others who may have been hiding bad books to come forward.

In the latter half, recognizing that the boys' craving for reading can no longer be contained, the letter addresses also the subject of good books to be encouraged and makes various suggestions for both private and public reading. The subject is taken up at greater length in the second letter.

[Spreading Good Books]

The circular letter on the apostolate of the press for the diffusion of good books, written in 1885, is a uniquely beautiful piece of writing, at some point almost

poetic in style and inspiration. One immediately thinks of Father Giovanni Bonetti, or more appropriately of Father Giovanni Francesia, as literary editor.[85]

Don Bosco's all-out commitment to the apostolate of the press took shape in response to the call of the Church at the very onset of the liberal revolution. The bishops of Piedmont in their conference of July 29, 1848 (held at Villanovetta, Cuneo) passed a resolution to counter "irreligion and immorality with good books, so that the people need not have recourse to bad books to satisfy their desire to read." Father Leonardo Murialdo reports on "a committee set up to examine books and newspapers, and to proscribe and forbid those that were loose and licentious [...];" and on "an association established to publish and distribute good and wholesome books." Bishop Luigi Moreno of Ivrea and Bishop Tommaso Ghilardi of Mondovì were to coordinate this effort, to which Don Bosco's *Catholic Readings* would make a major contribution. The committee was charged with preparing

> a list of errors and propositions being circulated in the press against faith and morals as well as against the Church, the Pope and the clergy. They were to be refuted in [Catholic] newspapers, and through books and pamphlets, written in a simple, easy style, to be distributed free of charge among the people.[86]

In the letter, after citing the role of the books of Scripture in disseminating the saving word of God, and after a poetic description of the power of the book, Don Bosco speaks of the dissemination of good books, the "apostolate of the press," as a special apostolate entrusted by God to him and to the Salesian Society.

> This is one of the most important apostolates entrusted to me by Divine Providence, and you know that I worked at it untiringly, even when engaged in a thousand other tasks. The vicious hatred displayed by the enemies of good, and the persecutions unleashed against me, are clear proof both that Error regarded those books as a formidable foe and that the work had the blessing of God.
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> [...] The spreading of good books is one of the principal apostolates of our Congregation. Our Constitutions, at chapter 1, article 7, lay down

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[85] A printed copy of this letter bearing Don Bosco's (authentic ?) signature is in *ASC* 131.03 Lettere circolari ai Salesiani, *FDBM* 1368 C12-D3. The text is given in *Lettere circolari di Don Bosco e di Don Rua* (Torino: Tipografia dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales, 1896), pp. 24-29; and in Ceria, *Epistolario* IV, pp. 318-321. It is not reported in the *Biographical Memoirs*. As for the authenticity of the signature, cf. note 84, above. An English translation is given in *Appendix II*.

[86] P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)*, (Roma: LAS, 1980), p. 348. [Saint] Leonardo Murialdo (1828-1900), Don Bosco's younger contemporary, similarly engaged in oratory work and other ministries, founded the Society of Saint Joseph.

> that the Salesians "shall apply themselves to *spreading good books* among the people, employing all the means that Christian charity inspires."
>
> [...] Over the years I have spared no effort, whether by the spoken or by the printed word, to help one category of society in particular, namely, the young. By the *Catholic Readings* I tried to reach people at large and enter into their homes. But at the same time I tried to make known the spirit of our schools and to entice young people to virtue through such writings as the biographies of Savio, Besucco, and the like. Through the *Companion of Youth*, I tried to draw young people to the Church, instill into them the spirit of piety, and win them over to the frequent reception of the sacraments. Through the *Italian Literature* and *Latin Classics* series in expurgated editions, through the *History of Italy*, and through other books of a historical and literary character, I tried to be present to them in the classroom, in order to guard them against so many errors and against the passions that would surely be fatal to them in this world and the next. I have also always wanted to continue to be their companion in their leisure time, as in the old days at recreation. To this end I am planning the publication of a series of entertaining books, which, it is hoped, will soon see the light of day. Finally, through the *Salesian Bulletin* I aimed, among other things, at keeping alive in our young people, once they have graduated from our schools and returned to their families, a love for the spirit of St. Francis de Sales and for his teaching, in the hope that they would in turn be apostles to other young people. I am not claiming to have accomplished successfully what I set out to do. I only wish to emphasize that it is now up to you to continue the project and coordinate all efforts so as to bring it to completion in all its phases.

Thus we have multiple attestation of Don Bosco's eager response to the Church's call and of his commitment to the apostolate of the press.

In the foregoing pages (Part I) I have described some of Don Bosco's concerns over religious observance in the Salesian Society at large. Taking statements made by him in the second session of General Chapter II as a starting point, I went on to cite additional utterances and to make what seemed appropriate comments by way of reinforcement and explanation.

We will now turn to Don Bosco's particular concerns over the disciplinary and moral situation of the Oratory communities. This will be the subject of Part II.

Part II. Problems with the Life and Discipline of the Communities of the Oratory

Don Bosco's concern over the deteriorated life and discipline of the house of the Oratory, of the school in particular, is voiced in a number of meetings of the Superior Chapter taking place between May 19, 1884 and September 16, 1885. The debates, as reported by Lemoyne, attest to the gravity of the situation.

The question of the condition prevailing among the communities of the Oratory in 1884 has been addressed recently in the pages of this *Journal* by Michael Ribotta in connection with Don Bosco's Letter from Rome of May 10, 1884. Greater attention has been given to the subject by José Manuel Prellezo in a number of articles published in *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* and gathered in a handy collection, in which the author provides introductions and comments to accompany the critical edition of the texts.[87] Prellezo's studies are directly concerned with house chapter minutes and other house records rather than with the minutes of the Superior Chapter and of General Chapters. Obviously he has occasion to make explicit reference to, and quote from these documents. His quotations from them, however, are not *extensive*.[88] I will, on the contrary, quote liberally from them. Of special value to me has been Prellezo's other study, *Valdocco (1866-1888)*, already cited but not included in the collection.[89] This article surveys the period and gives an insightful interpretation of developments at the Oratory. I will be guided by his insights; but again my purpose is to present extensive excerpts (in English) from the archival records of the meetings in order to draw attention to the dynamics of the social processes in question and, in particular, in order to highlight Don Bosco's very words and ideas.

Don Bosco was very unhappy and worried over the situation at the Oratory. His distress, his chagrin in fact, was caused by the deteriorated moral and spiritual condition of the Oratory school—specifically of the upper section of the

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[87] José Manuel Prellezo, "L'Oratorio di Valdocco nel 'Diario' di don Chiala e don Lazzero (1875-1888.1895. Introduzione e testi critici," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 9 (1990) 347-442; "L'Oratorio di Valdocco nelle 'Conferenze capitolari' (1866-1877). Introduzione e testo critico," *Ibid.* 10 (1991) 61-154; "L'Oratorio di Valdocco nelle 'Adunanze del capitolo della casa' e nelle 'Conferenze mensili' (1884). Introduzione e testi critici," *Ibid.* 10 (1991) 245-294; "Valdocco 1884. Problemi disciplinari e proposte di riforma. Introduzione e testi critici," *Ibid.* 11 (1992) 35-71. These studies are collected and edited in José Manuel Prellezo, *Valdocco nell'ottocento tra reale e ideale (1866-1889). Documenti e testimonianze* (Roma: LAS, 1992).

Michael Ribotta, "The Roman Letter of 1884 And Its Aftermath," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 5 (1994:2) pp. 1-21. Pages 14-20, dealing with the topic, are based on Prellezo's last mentioned article ("Valdocco 1884").

[88] Prellezo, *Valdocco nell'ottocento*, pp. 274-276.

[89] José Manuel Prellezo, "Valdocco (1866-1888)," [cf. note 49, above], especially pp. 294-300, 312-320.

school, the fourth and fifth year of the *ginnasio*[90]—and by its failure to produce vocations. This is the immediate concern, evident from even only a cursory reading of the documents. He saw the alienation of the boys in the upper *ginnasio* as due to two related causes. First, in passing into the upper section the boys adopted a worldly attitude which led to their abandoning the spiritual life and to a deterioration in their moral conduct. Secondly, this worldly attitude, fed by the prospect of taking the comprehensive public examinations at the end of the fifth year and going on to further study or to the professions, defeated his purpose, to develop vocations. The fifth year, then, constituted a temptation which lured the boys away from a priestly or religious vocation, namely, as will be explained below, away from the purpose for which the school (essentially a charity school) had been established. Consequently, Don Bosco proposed to deal with the problem by curtailing the academic program, for example, by abolishing the fifth year.

The debates in the meetings, however, reveal the existence of even more fundamental problems: a breakdown in discipline and supervision, a lack of leadership, unity and coordination. It seemed that the director could no longer fill the traditional role of sole authoritative leader. As a matter of fact, the committee appointed to look into the matter identified this failure in leadership as the root cause of the problem. The Oratory had become so complex that the director could no longer cope. Don Bosco adopted the drastic, later regretted, solution of placing the two main communities (students and working boys) under two different directors.[91]

All these related questions recur in counterpoint and in fugal sequences at most of the meetings in which the question is debated. But for the sake of clarity and order, I will deal first with the general condition of the house of the Oratory and the question of the director; next I will retrace my steps and deal with the question of the Oratory school and its failure to produce vocations.

1. Order, Discipline and Moral Conduct in the House of the Oratory, and the Problem of the Director

(1) The House of the Oratory and Its Problems

The problem was not a new one. Back in 1879 the Superior Chapter gave its attention to the situation, identifying the source of disorder in a lack of unity in direction and administration.

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[90] In the Casati school reform (1859) the five-year course of secondary studies was called *ginnasio*. It was divided into a lower section of three years and an upper section of two years, ending with a comprehensive examination and diploma (*licenza*). Allowing for the children's younger age, and for differences in the curriculum, the *ginnasio* corresponded roughly to the American high school. Throughout this paper I will use the Italian term *ginnasio*.

[91] The term "working boys" used throughout this article is the translation of the Italian "*artigiani*," which designates boys learning a trade in one of the workshops.

> We are faced with a real problem at the Oratory. We lack a true center of command and administration. Since house personnel is insufficient and overworked, some people have recourse to various members of the Superior Chapter whenever problems arise. But too many cooks spoil the soup. Actually, there has never been true and clear unity of administration in this house. Unfortunately, the situation being so complex and involved, we stumble along "catch as catch can" (*alla buona*), and this simply means that we are doing a bad job of it. Father Leveratto, who is prefect and hence the one most involved and in close touch with the real situation, has taken the matter up with various members of the Superior Chapter and with Don Bosco himself. [...] Don Bosco has requested a detailed written report. [...] Father Leveratto's report was read and discussed at this meeting. It appears that the principal cause of all disorders is the lack of a center of command and administration from which the various departments can take direction. In the early days, Don Bosco took care of everything himself. This he can no longer do, nor can Father Rua, weighed down as they both are with the most demanding job of governing the Congregation. Someone else must take over. But even this is not enough. A way must be found to unify and organize all departments under the one center of command and direction. [...] Consequently, a committee composed of Fathers Rua, Lazzero, Sala and Leveratto was appointed to study the matter, formulate a proposal, and report at the next meeting, five days hence.[92]

The next meeting, May 16, 1879, was devoted to a discussion of the proposal. The principal decision was to define and separate the competencies (including residence and offices) of the Superior Chapter from those of house. Father Lazzero was appointed director of the house of the Oratory, responsible for the whole operation, communities and departments. Father Leveratto was confirmed prefect under him. An effort was made also to define other offices and their particular responsibilities.[93]

Obviously, at the beginning when the Salesian Society consisted chiefly of the Oratory of Valdocco, Don Bosco and his other close associates, subsequently his council, were directly involved in the running of the house of the Oratory and its communities and groups. A time would come, however, when the fields of competence, that of the Superior Chapter and its government of the Society, on the one hand, and that of the staff of the house of the Oratory, on the other, would have to be clearly defined and separated. This separation, however, was never completely accomplished during Don Bosco's life time. In the 1880s members of the Superior Chapter still maintained official or unofficial connec-

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[92] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, May 8, 1879, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook III, pp. 16-18, *FDBM* 1879 A1-3.

[93] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, May 16, 1879, Barberis, *Transcribed Minutes*, Notebook III, pp. 19-23, *FDBM* 1879 A4-8.

tions with the house. As the record shows, this inability to disengage was part of the problem.

But this was not the only problem, by any means. Six years later, the records seem to reflect a situation which if it wasn't out of hand, it had deteriorated considerably. It was a set of problems inherently associated with the complex nature of the Oratory itself, as it developed over the years. The "house of the Oratory" (*casa dell'Oratorio*) comprised the complex of communities and programs which developed from the original boarding home established back in 1847.

The establishment of the home was a step of major significance in the development of Don Bosco's work. Conceived as a *home* for boys who were really the poorest of the poor, it ranked, if not on a par with, certainly as a close second, to the work of the oratory itself. It was in fact the logical extension of the work of the oratory, as Don Bosco states in his early Constitutions.[94] But its importance also lies in the fact that almost from the start the home became the laboratory in which the founder broadened his experiment in the education of the young, both working apprentices and students, including those also who would eventually continue the work and constitute the Salesian Society.

Although the home had originally been established with poor, orphaned working lads in view, students at the secondary level were admitted to it from the start. Both sections increased steadily in number with the expansion of the premises at various stages. At first, the working boys were apprenticed to workshops, and the students attended private schools, in the city. Soon, however, as a protective measure to keep the working boys from the physical and moral dangers met with in the city, and the better to supervise their education, Don Bosco established workshops at the home: shoemakers and tailors (1853), bookbinders (1854), carpenters (1856), printers (1861-1862), and iron workers or blacksmiths (1862). In these workshops, under the guidance of hired craftsmasters at first, and later of Salesian brothers, the boys learned their trade, while they also attended evening and Sunday school for literacy and basic education. In a similar manner and for the same reasons, in 1855 Don Bosco opened a secondary school program at the home. By the year 1859-1860 he succeeded in establishing the complete five-year program of secondary studies (*ginnasio*). From then on, the student community acquired ever greater importance not only because of the greater number of students, by comparison with that of workers (steadily about 2 to 1), but also because through a regular course of studies at secondary level, Don Bosco aimed at cultivating vocations to the priesthood and to the Salesian Society among those (poor) boys who gave evidence of good conduct, good will, and intelligence.

But the Oratory was home to other groups and individuals in addition to the students and working boys. According to Don Bosco's report submitted to the

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[94] *Constitutions of the Salesian Society* (1858), [Ch. 3]: Purpose of this Society, art. 4, in Motto, *Cost. Testi critici*, p. 74. Significantly Don Bosco referred to this hostel as the "Home Attached to the Oratory."

Holy See in 1879 on the state of the Society, the mother house, among its many activities, comprised also the oratory on Sundays and holy days, day and evening school, the house of studies for Salesian seminarians, and the novitiate.[95] Even after a house of novitiate was officially opened at San Benigno (near Turin) in 1880, a number of novices still lived at the Oratory. There were also Sons of Mary, in residence at the Oratory, as well as in Sampierdarena, since their founding in 1875. Some of them remained based at the Oratory even after their relocation to Mathi (near Turin) and to St. John the Evangelist's (in Turin) in 1883-1884. There were also diocesan seminarians, hired teachers and craftsmasters, as well as a number of adults who worked with the boys in the shops.[96]

The number of boarders both in the student and in the working section, in spite of fluctuations, was always considerable. Angelo Amadei quotes statistics for 1870-71 from the Oratory books, according to which the students enrolled in the school numbered 425, while the apprentices in the workshops numbered 228.[97] By 1884, as we learn from Lemoyne's minutes, "60 or 70 Salesians" are required to staff the educational program;"[98] "the fourth and fifth year have a combined enrollment of over 100;"[99] "there are too many people at the Oratory;" the place has become "a vast, intractable ocean"; "any one workshop may be regarded as a school by itself."[100]

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[95] *Opere Edite*, Vol. XXXI, pp. 237-254.

[96] After the diocesan seminary was shut down by Archbishop Luigi Fransoni in 1848, the Oratory functioned as seminary for the diocese. This practice was continued even after the legitimate seminary was re-opened in 1863. Throughout the tenure of Archbishop Alessandro Riccardi di Netro (1867-1870) and of Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi (1871-1882) Don Bosco continued to "host" diocesans at various stages of formation. At General Chapter II (1880) "the question is raised as to how Salesian seminarians might be separated from lay brothers. Don Bosco rejoins that it is much more urgent to separate those who are members of the Congregation from those who don't belong to us." [General Chapter II, Session 9, September 18, 1880, Marenco, *Minutes*, p. 16, *FDBM* 1856 E6.]

[97] *IBM* X, p. vi (omitted in *EBM*): "From the book recording the results of the examinations, we learn that in 1870-71 the students numbered 425, broken down as follows: 36 in philosophy, 30 in the fifth year of *ginnasio*, 45 in the fourth year, 94 in the third year, 94 in the second year, and 126 in the first year, subsequently divided into two, higher and lower, sections. On the other hand, in the "book of conduct" apprentices are listed by name as follows: "36 printers, 73 bookbinders, 33 tailors, 39 shoemakers, 22 carpenters, 14 iron workers, 6 smelters, 5 hatters—a total of 228, not counting the bookstore." Prellezo gives somewhat lower figures derived from the registry (*anagrafe*). [Prellezo, "Valdocco (1866-1888)," *op. cit.*, pp. 299 and 318.]

[98] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, July 7, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 18a, *FDBM* 1880 D11.

[99] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, June 5, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 13a, *FDBM* 1880 D1.

[100] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, September 4, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 25b, *FDBM* 1881 A2.

The workshops took a leap forward as the 1880s got under way. A gradual shift from medieval-style apprenticeship to vocational school, determined by social and economic developments, took place. A concern for the "instruction" of the working boys is evident already in General Chapter II (1880). But a comprehensive program of study, training and formation of the "working component" was drafted for the first time at General Chapter III (1883) and was made final at General Chapter IV (1886). This development aimed both at establishing a base for lay Salesian vocations and at inserting good Christian workers into society at large.[101] The school also made good progress in academic quality, as will be noted below, as well as in numbers.

The students and the working boys for all practical purposes formed two communities, but the two operated under one director and one administration, separate from the Superior Chapter. Unity of direction in any particular house was one of Don Bosco's postulates, demanded by his conception of authority and the chain of command. In mid-1880s, however, it seemed that at the Oratory one director could no longer cope with such numbers and such diversity of programs and interests. The problem and its solution were the subject of lively debates in several meetings of the Superior Chapter.

(2) The Meeting of June 5, 1884: The Bonetti Committee and Report

In Lemoyne's minutes, the Superior Chapter's concern over the order and discipline at the Oratory is first mentioned at the close of a meeting held on May 19, 1884. We read: "Father Bonetti moves that a future meeting be devoted to discussing means of improving the running of the house. The motion is carried."[102]

This meeting took place on June 5. Don Bosco took the floor: "The task which lies before us," he said, "is to study and work out ways of ensuring good morals among our youngsters and of promoting religious vocations." These words show that Don Bosco's immediate concern was for moral conduct and over the failure of the school to produce vocations as it once did. He went on to propose a drastic solution: curtailing the school's academic program (as we shall see

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[101] The document "Indirizzo da darsi alla Classe Operaia" is in *ASC* 04 Capitoli Generali, IV Cap., *FDBM* 1866 B3-C6. Cf. [G. Bosco] *Deliberazioni del terzo e del quarto Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuti in Valsalice nel settembre 1883-86*. S. Benigno Canavese: Tip. Salesiana, 1887, in *Opere Edite*, Vol. XXXVI, pp. [253-280] 268-274.

For details on the development of the Oratory and its programs, cf. Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale*, pp. 231-251; Luciano Pazzaglia, "Apprendistato e istruzione degli artigiani a Valdocco (1846-1886)," in *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare*, ed. by Francesco Traniello (Torino: SEI, 1987), pp. 13-80; Prellezo, "Valdocco (1866-1888)," as in note 89 and related text, above.

[102] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, May 19, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 12a, *FDBM* 1880 C11.

in greater detail below). But since the unsatisfactory condition of the Oratory communities and its effects on their life and discipline were the root cause of this failure, a lively debate ensued. Father Bertello, a former prefect of studies in the Oratory school, objected to such curtailment: "We should rather begin by straightening the discipline, by expelling the corrupt with severity, by greater vigilance and more careful supervision everywhere." He also proposed the reorganization of the house in three sections: student community, working community, community of people not belonging to the Congregation. Father Cagliero added that greater care should also be exercised in admissions, which should be the responsibility of one person. Father Bonetti emphasized the necessity of proceeding not with palliatives but radically and systematically. He then called on Father Lazzero, who as director would know what was needed, to speak up. Father Lazzero made the following points: (1) the regulations for Salesian houses should be enforced at the Oratory as they are in all other houses; (2) there should be unity of direction with no interference. He also complained that members of the Superior Chapter were in the habit of giving letters of commendation to boys who were dismissed for bad conduct, a practice which undermined good order and discipline. He went on to point out other causes of disorder.

Don Bosco emphasized the urgent necessity of safeguarding good morals in the house. To this end, "no effort and no expense should be spared," he said. Some practical measures should immediately be put into effect: (1) the house should be purged of all undesirables; (2) admissions should be unified and regulated; (3) offices and all boys' activities should be reorganized. Finally,

> Don Bosco decides to set up a committee to study ways of safeguarding and promoting good morals in the Oratory. The following are elected to this committee: Fathers Rua, Bonetti, Lazzero, Durando, Cagliero. They are to give the matter personally some thought and attention, and then meet on Monday afternoon and exchange ideas. Father Bonetti is asked [to chair the committee and] to explore the views of each house chapter member and of each instructor, and then report to the committee at their meeting on Monday.[103]

According to documents preserved in the archives and critically edited by Prellezo, Father Bonetti asked six confreres in responsible positions in the house to give their views in writing on what was wrong and on how to remedy it. They were the prefect (Father Secondo Marchisio), the vice-prefect (Father Serafino Fumagalli), the spiritual director or catechist (Father Domenico Canepa), the prefect of studies (Father Stefano Febraro), a house council member (Father Giacomo Ruffino), and a Salesian seminarian who served as supervisor (Tommaso Pentore). The "instructors" were apparently polled only orally. Father Bonetti collated the various observations in an organic manner in a document

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[103] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, June 5, 1884, Lemoyne. *Minutes*, pp. 13a-14a, *FDBM* 1880 D1-3.

dated June 9, 1884. There is also a rather lengthy memorandum by Father Lemoyne, the secretary of the Superior Chapter, which appears to have been produced in response to Father Bonetti's inquiry.[104]

The most frequently voiced concern centers on the director, his position of leadership in the house, and the harm which results from a failure to maintain that position and to exercise its authority. Father Bonetti's main recommendations follow.

> (1) The director of the house should be allowed, and should have the courage, to act as director. He should exercise his authority in ways that will show the boys that he is in charge, and that all others, whether involved in teaching or supervision, are but his representatives, the long arms of his authority. (2) Consequently, he should often be seen at recreation with the boys; pay frequent visits to the classrooms and other places where his associates are at work. Such presence will help to establish his authority with the boys, will foster mutual trust, will set a good example to other Salesians. As a result the method which Don Bosco and the first Salesians followed in the old days will again flourish, and with it the family spirit. (3) Since the director must regularly act through the prefect, the prefect of studies, the spiritual director, and the instructors, he should also regularly meet with them in conference to exchange information and views regarding the boys' conduct and discipline in the school. Such exchanges will bring about mutual understanding and foster unity of direction [...]. (4) It is the director's job to educate the boys in virtue and in the Christian life, as well as to correct where correction is due. This will show that he is truly concerned about their spiritual welfare. He should therefore be the one who addresses the boys in the Good Night, and he should plan his talks around topics dealing with moral conduct and Christian life. The good will be encouraged and made to feel at home, while the bad will understand that they are not wanted, unless of course they reform and prove worthy. [...] (5) An able and experienced spiritual director is needed, a person who can instruct and guide the boys with skill and prudence; a person who can win their esteem and trust. (6) For various reasons, there has been a failure to dismiss boys who are the cause of moral harm to others. Such youngsters should not be allowed to return next term.[...][105]

As may be seen, lack of direction or leadership is the basic problem; and clearly the director in office (Father Lazzero) is under fire. But Father Bonetti's temperate and civilized report, while recording in summary the principal observations made, does not really reflect the despondent mood, or the bitter, even angry, tone

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[104] All these documents are in *ASC* 38 Fondazioni, *FDBM* 240 B8 - 241 A3. For a critical edition, cf. Prellezo, *Valdocco nell'ottocento*, pp. 286-303.

[105] *ASC* 38 Fondazioni, Relazione Bonetti, *FDBM* 240 D11-E2; Prellezo, *Valdocco nell'ottocento*, pp. 301-303.

of some of the original remarks. And there are other points of consensus: the corrupting influence of some of the older boys in the school, serious failures in supervision, etc. Some examples will suffice.

> We need a director who has total authority (*direttore assoluto*) and is sole judge and interpreter of what needs to be done; then most other things will fall into place. *Item*: The superiors should consider appointing a director (and a prefect) solely for the school.[106]
>
> Supervision is practically non-existent, and no one cares how the boys of the school behave. [...] The director doesn't care. *Item*: Fifth year students spend their time, especially afternoons, in the dormitory, lying on their beds, "reviewing." The director and the others know it, but nothing is done about it.[107]
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> Last year we discussed the reason why the boys in the upper section of the school become alienated. The reason I gave then is confirmed now by Don Bosco's recent letter from Rome. They are alienated because they are corrupt, and the chief agents of corruption are bad talk and bad books. *Item*: A Salesian assigned to the Oratory is doomed to isolation; with so many superiors around, there is no one in charge.[108]
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> Boys who do harm to others by their immoral conduct should be immediately dismissed. Instead they are often kept on because they have been recommended by some influential person, or because they enjoy some one's protection. We have only ourselves to blame for the spiritual ruin of so many boys.[109]

(3) Debates on the Oratory Situation

We have no direct record in the minutes of when the Bonetti report was presented and discussed, and what response it elicited. We see, however, that the debates reecho the themes of the report, repeatedly and insistently, and that the measures instituted correspond to the suggestions of the report.

In the June 30 meeting, Father Bonetti and Father Lazzero have an exchange with regard to the breakdown in supervision and the fact that dormitories remain open throughout the day. Then we read:

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[106] Stefano Febraro, in *ASC* 38 Fondazioni, *FDBM* 240 C2; Prellezo, *Valdocco nell'ottocento*, p. 289.

[107] Tommaso Pentore in *ASC* 38 Fondazioni, *FDBM* 240 B8-9; Prellezo, *Valdocco nell'ottocento*, p. 287.

[108] Domenico Canepa, in *ASC* 38 Fondazioni, *FDBM* 240 C9, D2; Prellezo, *Valdocco nell'ottocento*, pp. 292, 294.

[109] Serafino Fumagalli in ASC 38 Fondazioni, *FDBM* 240 D10; Prellezo, *Valdocco nell'ottocento*, p. 299.

> Don Bosco wants to know: "Who is responsible for discipline in the house? To whom are teachers and supervisors to turn for support? Is it to the spiritual director? [...] I have said and I repeat that no expense should be spared in anything that is required to ensure good order. The director's job is not to do things himself, but to see that things are done by the proper person." He then asks that next Friday's meeting be devoted to a discussion of these matters.[110]

The Superior Chapter met again on Friday, July 4.

> Don Bosco pursues the subject of the reforms to be instituted in the house of the Oratory. He has gone over the regulations established in earlier days, and he feels that they are still valid for our times and still meet all our needs. "The director's job is to command. He should therefore be familiar with the regulations that pertain to his office and no less with those that pertain to others in their various jobs. There must be one sole center of command. There has been a gradual breakdown in this unity of direction. [...] Let this unity be restored as of old: one man at the helm. Let the director not get involved in any job. His job is to see to it that others do their job." [...] Father Lazzero says that the reason why there is no unity is that the confreres take direction from various other superiors. Don Bosco replies that if the director were truly involved he would see how things stand and would in no time bring everything and everybody under his control. "Let one person, the director, be in charge. [...] The members of the Superior Chapter should no more be involved in the affairs of the house of the Oratory than they are in those of any other house of the Congregation. The director of the house of the Oratory should be allowed the same freedom that other directors enjoy in their own house. [...] The personnel assigned to the house is assigned as staff to the director of the house, not to others. [...] Let everyone support the person in command. I ask Father Rua to hold a conference of all personnel and explain. But first we must agree among ourselves and be of one mind."[111]

On July 7, Don Bosco repeated with renewed emphasis the point made in the preceding meeting about one center of command and the role of the director. To objections by Father Cagliero, Father Lazzero, and Father Barberis that the director and the members of the house council had too much to do, he replied:

> Let each one attend to his job and to nothing else. For example, let the spiritual director take care of religious instruction and of chapel matters,

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[110] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, June 30, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, pp. 14b-15a, *FDBM* 1880 D6-7.

[111] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, July 4, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, pp. 17a-b, *FDBM* 1880 D9-10.

> and see that the regulations are observed; let him keep in mind that the good running of the house depends on his doing his job. The director should leave off preaching and even hearing confessions, if necessary. His one job as director is to oversee everything and everybody. [...] [112]

(4) Debate on the Appointment of a New Director at the Oratory

I indicated above that the criticism which deplored the lack of strong direction at the Oratory was two-pronged. On the one hand, it recognized as a contributing cause the complex and confused situation that had gradually developed, and also blamed the interference from superiors not connected with the house itself; but on the other it also fingered (so it seems) the director, Father Lazzero, for a less than satisfactory performance. However, for the next five meetings, that is, through the latter part of July and through August, the matter rested. We may suppose that meanwhile a solution was being worked out behind the scenes because in the meeting of September 4 (Father Lazzero not being in attendance) a well articulated proposal was brought to the floor. Under the chairmanship of Don Bosco,

> Father Rua opens the meeting posing the question of a new director for the Oratory. He moves that Father Lazzero, at present director of the Oratory, be appointed councilor for vocational schools,[113] the post created by General Chapter III this past year, and that Father [Giovanni Battista] Francesia, at present director of the Valsalice school, be made director of the Oratory.

Father Rua explains that in the new post of councilor for vocational schools, Father Lazzero would be in charge of all the workshops of the Congregation, just as the prefect of studies general has the run of all the schools. Father Sala sees the new office as clashing with that of financial administrator. But meanwhile a counter-proposal is presented:

> Father Cagliero moves that two separate and totally independent directors be appointed for the Oratory, one to head the students' community and the other solely responsible for the working boys' community. He believes

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[112] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, July 7, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, pp. 18a-b, *FDBM* 1880 D11-12.

[113] This new councilor on the Superior Chapter would be in charge of the "working component" of the Society, namely of the workshops and of the communities of apprentices and personnel (brothers) connected with the shops. The Italian designation for this office in the sources is "*consigliere artistico*" or "*consigliere professionale.*" As the workshops gradually develop into the vocational school (after General Chapter III, 1883), the designation "councilor for vocational schools" would be appropriate.

> that there are too many people and too many different departments at the Oratory for one person to handle.[114]

The idea of two directors was already contained in the Febraro memorandum, though not in Bonetti's final report.[115] Now Father Cagliero's proposal met with the strongest objections on the part of Father Durando and Father Rua. Apart from the fact that unity of direction in any house was a time-tested Salesian tradition, nothing but trouble and conflicts could be anticipated from installing two roosters in the same coop. A lengthy debate, not free of asperity, followed on the merits of these proposals, while apparently Don Bosco just sat and took it all in. Then Father Rua summarized the three motions on the floor outlining pros and cons, noting also the objection raised against Father Francesia's appointment, namely, that he was too much of a gentleman for such a brutal job.[116] Don Bosco finally had his say:

> It is unlikely that agreement can be reached on any one candidate. One will think him too lenient, another too harsh; one, too lax, another, too strict. We must accept the fact that we are human. But let's make a start toward putting things on a viable basis. It seems to me that Father Francesia's only drawback is that he is too good a person. But as to education and spirituality not many can match him. Furthermore, he has an intimate knowledge of the Oratory, having lived and worked here for many years. He is thoroughly familiar with our regulations and will not fail to act on them as the situation demands.

After some discussion about reassigning personnel, Don Bosco brings the discussion to a close: "Father Francesia will come to the Oratory as director, and Father Giuseppe [read: Cesare] Cagliero will replace him at Valsalice. The move will take place during the summer holidays."[117]

(5) The Oratory Under Two Directors

Again we have no record of what went on behind the scenes through the week that followed, but by the September 12 meeting, Don Bosco had gone over to Father Cagliero's position of two directors for the Oratory. He spoke at some length.

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[114] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, September 4, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 25b, *FDBM* 1881 A2.

[115] Cf. note 106 and 105 and related text, above.

[116] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, September 4, 1884, Lemoyne *Minutes*, pp. 25b-26a, *FDBM* 1881 A2-3.

[117] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, September 4, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 26b, *FDBM* 1881 A4. [Don Bosco (or Lemoyne) meant to say Cesare Cagliero not Giuseppe Cagliero (1847-1874).]

> I want Father Francesia transferred to the Oratory; I want both him and Father Lazzero to take direction of this house. One director can no longer cope with so many people. Father Lazzero has more than once petitioned me in writing to be given relief. I propose to divide the tasks of direction between them, entrusting the students' community and all that goes with it to Father Francesia, and that of the working boys to Father Lazzero, thus relieving him from the care of the students. I mean to put Father Lazzero in charge of the working boys of the Oratory and of all other houses of the Congregation. With respect to the Congregation at large, he will assume the title of councilor for vocational schools; with respect to the Oratory, he will be director of the working boys' community. A satisfactory and stable modus operandi, to govern their mutual relationship, will have to be worked out, an arrangement that will work for us now as well as for those who will follow us in future years. Keeping the whole operation of the Oratory under one person would call for an entirely new set of regulations, and I have no intention of changing the system that has served us so well in the past. Furthermore, if the two communities, each under its own director, are to be truly autonomous, a suitable division and reassignment of personnel will have to be made, or there will be trouble. [118]

Apparently everybody, except perhaps Father Cagliero, was caught short by Don Bosco's proposal. Father Cagliero merely objected that the same person could not be both director of the working boys at the Oratory and councilor for vocational schools for the whole Congregation. The other members, however, raised a barrage of questions and objections, even though they had to do chiefly with the practical division of competencies and responsibilities of the two directors, rather than with the principle of unity of direction. Father Barberis attempted to mediate by proposing that the provincial of the Piedmontese province be made director of the whole Oratory with two vice-directors under him. Don Bosco flatly rejected the idea, and appointed a committee comprised of Fathers Rua, Francesia and Cagliero to look at his proposal "calmly and from every aspect," and come up with recommendations. They should "keep their sights on the main part of the proposal:" two separate operations; the practical problems could be addressed with good will on all fronts as they arose.

At the end of the meeting Don Bosco made a terse comment on an earlier remark by Father Lazzero about the many non-Salesians living in the house without any clear connection with its work. [Rather than assign them to one of the two communities or create a special one for them.]

> We must get rid of those people living in the house who do not belong to the Congregation. At least they should not take their meals with us, nor at-

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[118] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, September 12, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 33b, *FDBM* 1881 B6.

> tend functions with us. They poke their noses into everything, they see and hear everything; then they laugh at us, and spread gossip abroad about us.[119]

At this point Don Bosco fell ill again. He had been seriously ill in February, but he had recovered sufficiently to undertake a long and tiring journey to France, and from there to Rome. He had returned to Turin in May much the worse for wear. He was nonetheless able to chair the meetings we have been speaking about. September 14 (1884) marked the onset of another serious crisis which forced him to leave the spiritual retreat and the meetings at Valsalice, return to the Oratory and take to his bed.[120]

The meetings which followed on September 18, 19, 20 and 29 were chaired by Father Rua. Although other matters engaged the attention of the Superior Chapter, the Oratory problem still remained the bugbear of the agenda and fueled the debates. Father Rua introduced the topic and the state of the question concerning the two directors in the meeting of September 18; after which the minutes read:

> Father Francesia strongly opposes (*combatte*) the appointment of two directors in the same house. In his view, the split resulting from such a measure would be fatal. Father Durando calls such an arrangement a makeshift solution which will aggravate, rather than solve, the problems of the Oratory. Operation under two distinct directors would also demand a total separation of the premises in order to work, including even separate entrances to the house and porter's posts. Father Rua declares his readiness to abide by Don Bosco's decision, whatever it be; but he anticipates nothing but difficulties and conflicts. He suspects that Don Bosco was cornered by third parties into such a position, since he has always upheld the principle of unity of direction and command.[121]

Father Rua then revives Father Barberis' proposal of two vice-directors for separate operations under one director for the whole house, and offers himself to serve in this capacity. Again Father Durando objects. In the meeting which followed immediately on September 19,

> Father Francesia again speaks to the subject of two directors. He would not refuse to go along with Don Bosco's proposal; but he is afraid that "someone might call for a vote of confidence" (*fare questione di gabinetto*).

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[119] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, September 12, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 33b-34a, *FDBM* 1881 B6-7.

[120] For some details on these bouts with illness, cf. A. Lenti, "Don Bosco's Last Years [...]," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 5 (1994:2) pp. 44-48.

[121] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, September 18, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 34b, *FDBM* 1881 B8.

> Father Rua then returns to the idea of two vice-directors, adding that it seems the only recourse apt on the one hand to safeguard unity of command, and on the other to allow separate operations. Then the question arises, How would Father Lazzero fit into this scheme, if he is to be in charge of all the workshops of the Congregation as councilor for vocational schools?[122]

Here the logic seems to break down, because Father Rua proposes to name Father Lazzero director at Lanzo. (Perhaps, Father Rua assumed that Father Lazzero would not wish to remain at Valdocco merely as a vice-director.) The Chapter readily agreed, though Father Cagliero remained non-committal. Father Lazzero appeared to go along with the proposal, adding testily that perhaps he would at last enjoy some peace of mind.

When the Chapter met again the following day, the discussion continued more heated than ever and none too gentle, but it came no nearer to a solution.

> Father Rua asks Father Lazzero whether he would be happy with an appointment to Lanzo as director. Father Lazzero replies that the consensus of yesterday's Chapter has precluded any remonstrance on his part; but that he cannot help feeling that this appointment is a badly disguised maneuver to oust him from his position at the Oratory. Father Rua assures him that the idea stems from the solution he has proposed. Father Cerruti emphasizes the need of a full-time councilor for vocational schools, and Father Lazzero is the person specifically requested for the post by lay brothers and working boys alike. But Father Lazzero is adamant: "I have served as director of the Oratory for many years, and I cannot allow my good name to suffer from my being demoted. Besides, I have Don Bosco's support, and I fully intend to stay on at the Oratory as director of the working boys."[123]

Four meetings later, still under Father Rua's chairmanship and a renewed debate, the Superior Chapter capitulates: Don Bosco's will prevails. Secretary Lemoyne notes tersely: "The question of two directors at the Oratory is again on the floor. A protracted and lively debate ensues ending with the final disposition, that Don Bosco must be obeyed."[124]

It appears that Father Francesia and Father Lazzero were installed as directors shortly thereafter, the latter also holding the post of councilor for vocational schools. (The attributions of this office remained unclear for some time.) Don

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[122] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, September 19, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 35b, *FDBM* 1881 B10. Father Francesia, far from being facetious, probably meant that some one might challenge Don Bosco's decision under the constitutions.

[123] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, September 20, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 36b, *FDBM* 1881 B12.

[124] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, September 29, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 38b, *FDBM* 1881 C4.

Bosco returned to chair the meetings on October 3, but "the two directors" are not again on the agenda until the meeting of January 9, 1885. And then, and thereafter till October 1885 (according to the records), the issue is merely that of assigning competencies and responsibilities.[125]

In spite of the best intentions, however, the experiment of the two directors must not have turned out to Don Bosco's satisfaction, for by 1887, less than three years later, we find the Oratory again operating under one director, Father Domenico Belmonte.[126]

2. The Bad Spirit in the Upper Grades of the Oratory School and the Problem of Vocations

In the foregoing pages I have described Don Bosco's fears and concern over the moral and religious condition of the house of the Oratory in mid-1880s. The Bonetti inquiry and report served as a starting point, and from there we followed the painful struggle to identify the causes and to find solutions. Now we turn to the particular problem of the Oratory school.

(1) The Oratory School and Its Character

Don Bosco's concern over the condition of the Oratory, as it emerges from the minutes, was not primarily a technical one, that is, a concern over the loss of a certain educational style, as might be superficially inferred from the Letter from Rome alone (May 10, 1884). His true concern was over the deteriorating moral and spiritual condition of the boys in the school, and particularly over the moral and spiritual alienation of the boys in the upper section of the *ginnasio*. This failure, he felt, frustrated the very purpose for which the school had been established. In other words, the minutes show that what grieved and exasperated Don Bosco so much was the fact that once the boys passed into the upper section (fourth and fifth year) "they are no longer with us:" there were no *vocations*. And this happened after so much material charity and care had been expended on them.

He clearly voiced the theme in his initial statement (already cited above) at the meeting of June 5: "The task which lies before us is to study and work out

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[125] Meetings of the Superior Chapter, January 5, March 20, June 22, October 2, 1885, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, pp. 54a, 56b, 62a, 84b, *FDBM* 1881 E11, 1882 A4, B3, E12. Don Bosco was serious about making the new arrangement work. We have a number of recorded statements of Don Bosco to this effect, for example: "There is much to be gained, if eventually students and working boys could have the use of separate chapels" [*Ibid.*, p. 56b, *FDBM* 1882 A4.] "We urgently need to assign competencies and responsibilities to the superiors of the house." "We have now for some time relied on the good will and prudence of the two directors. It is time we take a look at the house regulations and see where they must be changed or corrected to respond to our present needs" [*Ibid.*, p. 62a, *FDBM* 1882 B3.]

[126] *Società di San Francesco di Sales. Anno 1887* (General Directory), cited by Prellezo, *Valdocco nell'ottocento*, p. 276.

ways of ensuring good morals among our youngsters and of promoting religious vocations." He went on to state his position at some length. After stating that General Chapter II had already addressed the problem and published norms to that effect,[127] he said:

> It's sad to see the change for the worse taking place in so many young men, after promising starts, by the time they reach their fifth year of *ginnasio*. It is a fact that most fourth and fifth-year boys, instead of opting for the priestly vocation, go on to the university or take a white-collar job. True, some do choose the priestly vocation but, because of parental pressure, the wiles of parish priests, or the bishop's advice, they join the diocesan seminary. And yet out of 100 young men in the fourth and fifth year, only a couple or so pay regular fees. The others either are kept free of charge or at the very least are provided with books and clothing by the house. So it is that our benefactors' money subsidizes our future lawyers, physicians, writers. Young men who attend other Salesian schools [and pay for their education] are certainly free to pursue these careers. But this cannot be tolerated in this house of ours where the young people live off public charity. My question then is, What is our obligation and what course should we take? [128]

Refraining from extended comments at this point, I will only observe that these somewhat puzzling words are better understood when one considers Don Bosco's original purpose in setting up a regular course of studies at secondary level at the Oratory.

After the Casati school reform of 1859, Don Bosco, always ready and eager to respond to the needs of church and society, committed himself and his fledgling Society to working for the Christian education of the young through the school. It is for this historic reason that the Oratory school too, as was pointed out above in connection with the development of the house of the Oratory, took on an ever increasing importance through the years. Now, one important reason for Don Bosco's commitment to schools, beyond the need for Christian education, lay in the fact that in times when secularism was making devastating inroads the failure of priestly vocations had reached critical proportions, and he saw the Salesian school as a means of filling such a void. Moreover, he intended the Oratory school, which was largely sustained by the charity of benefactors, to be a preparatory seminary for the Salesian novitiate.

But inevitably, in spite of the fact that Don Bosco preferred to describe the school as a charitable institution rather than an academic one, the school laws of

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[127] *Deliberazioni del Secondo Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel Settembre 1880* (Torino: Tipografia Salesiana, 1882), Section III, Chapter III and IV, pp. 53-59, in *Opere Edite*, Vol. XXXIII, pp. 61-67.

[128] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, June 4, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 13a, FDBM 1880 D1.

the liberal state forced it into the academic mold. Indeed after the confrontation with the school authority in 1879,[129] the academic quality of the Oratory school improved to the point of becoming "competitive," the fifth year students being generally successful in the public comprehensive examinations for the diploma. These achievements, along with cheap rates, charitable deductions, and outright exemptions from fees, acted as an attraction, and as a temptation.

(2) Proposals of Reform

In the meeting of June 4 in which, as quoted above, he lamented the school's failure to measure up to expectations as to good spirit and priestly vocations, Don Bosco put forward a tentative proposal for reform.

> "In my view, we should act to reorganize our studies programs. We should perhaps scale the academics down to the level of the Apostolic Schools in France. It won't be easy, but try we must until we succeed. Once that is done, we can address the question of how to conduct such a program and of what steps to take for the moral care of the pupils. We will no longer have such large enrollments; but that's fine. We can live with smaller numbers: 100, 50, 40, whatever, if only we succeed in extirpating the moral corruption (*cancrena morale*)." [...] Don Bosco then calls for a committee to be formed to study the feasibility of his proposal. He cannot do it himself; his head is not up to it. But the matter must be regarded as urgent and important, as crying out for action.[130]

Immediately alternate proposals are presented. (1) Father Lazzero thinks that the reform should begin with the abolition of the fifth year of *ginnasio*. The fifth year, and the public examinations for the diploma which followed, acted as the lure, since they afforded access to higher studies and the professions. Father Rua, however, observes that it is the instructor in charge who sets the tone. When you have someone like Father Bosio at Lanzo as the fifth year instructor, then you always have students opting for the novitiate. (2) Father Giuseppe Scappini

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[129] Cf. Michael Ribotta, "The Day They Shut Down the Oratory School," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 2 (1991:1) pp. 19-44.

[130] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, June 5, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 13b, FDBM 1880 D2.

"Apostolic Schools" is a designation for various forms of "junior seminaries" devised to prepare very young candidates for the novitiate or for the seminary. A venture undertaken for historical reasons in the second half of the nineteenth century by the Franciscans ("seraphic seminaries"), such schools gradually won the favor of many religious congregations and of bishops. The studies program of such preparatory seminaries was usually based on current secular formats, but it was modified and reduced to serve the strictly religious and ecclesiastical purpose of the school. [P. Péano, "Seminari Serafici," in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, Vol. VIII (Roma: Edizioni Paoline), cols. 1264-1268.]

would rather remove Greek and mathematics from the curriculum, or just provide a beginner's course in these subjects. Thus after the third year, students who have no intention of going on to the novitiate will want to transfer, while later our own seminarians can make up those subjects before taking their examinations for the diploma. (3) Father Bonetti calls for more radical reforms: cure the disease, don't just treat the symptoms; but he makes no specific proposal.

In a further comment, Don Bosco notes that Salesian novices from the Oratory have been scarce also because parish priests have been recommending boys of inferior caliber (*socló*, clodhoppers), and having once accepted them we don't have the courage to get rid of them. We need to set better admission standards and "show the door to the riffraff" (*mettere le ossa rotte alla porta*). "But our first concern now must be to look into the possibility of setting up an Apostolic School." Father Bertello [the prefect of studies] is asked by Don Bosco what he thinks of the idea. He thinks it's a bad idea. "We would have a battle royal on our hands: with parish priests, bishops, parents, and the school authorities." For the same reasons he also opposes the abolition of the fifth year.[131]

The various options are now on the table. The idea is in various degrees to modify and scale down the curriculum, so as to foil those students who enroll (on charitable terms) just to "graduate" and go. Setting up an "apostolic school" would turn the Oratory school outright into a low-grade preparatory seminary. There is no record of what the proposed committee did and what it recommended, but a month later the discussion resumed (though "apostolic schools" are not specifically mentioned.) We read:

> Don Bosco inquires about the measures which might be taken with regard to the fourth and fifth year of *ginnasio* for the coming year, in order to ensure a good moral climate in the house (*per assicurare la moralità*). He has already decided (1) that only those young men will be admitted to the two upper grades who intend to pursue the priestly vocation, and (2) that the Oratory will not guarantee access to public examinations for the diploma. Father Durando [prefect general of studies] objects that such a course of action will deter the more intelligent boys from applying, so that only those of inferior ability will be left to us. Besides, some of those whom we would want excluded will slip through anyway. Furthermore, study, and the personalized help we give the boys for their progress in studies, have proved to be the strongest incentives to good moral conduct. Don Bosco rejoins that he will brook no opposition to this plan of his, and that he expects everyone to cooperate in a project which he regards as the most conducive to his own purposes. Father Durando withdraws his objections.[132]

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[131] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, June 4, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 13a, FDBM 1880 D1.

[132] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, July 4, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 17b, *FDBM* 1880 D10. Prellezo ["Valdocco (1866-1888)," *op. cit.*, pp. 315-318] dis-

Don Bosco ended the session by calling a meeting for the following Monday, July 7. At this meeting Don Bosco laid down certain guidelines relating to admissions and moral conduct.

> (1) Only those boys must be admitted as students who intend (*hanno volontà*) to follow the priestly vocation, with preference given to those who show signs of a Salesian vocation. (2) Those boys who in word, attitude, or action are guilty of immoral conduct (*dicessero, insinuassero o facessero cose biasimevoli contro alla moralità*) must be mercilessly dismissed. No action should be thought too severe in such cases. (3) Boys who neglect the Sacraments (*Santa Comunione*) and their religious exercises should be assigned to a workshop; they should never be kept on as students. [...] [133]

In the following meeting (July 19) Don Bosco spoke even more obsessively and at greater length on the same subject.

> "When judging a boy's moral conduct, we should not be guided by his marks on the monthly conduct sheet, which are usually good. And once we have found a boy to be corrupt (*malvagio*), let us not be fooled into thinking that there might be a change of heart. [...]" He believes that inevitably sooner or later our school will have to be put on the same basis as the so-called Apostolic Schools. As far as possible only those who wish to become Salesians, more especially if they desire to go to the missions, should be admitted. [...] "Whether such young men can or cannot pay their fees is of no importance; let the house take care of that. [...] The Lord will provide all that is necessary and more, if we do our utmost to foster vocations; let us spare no expense in this work. If, however, young men who are admitted under such conditions change their mind, let them pay their full fees. Let this be the rule in all our other schools as well."[134]

In the July 7 meeting, Father Cagliero had suggested a practical way of eliminating undesirables. Once the third and fourth year boys left for their vacation at the end of term, they should be notified by letter to submit a new application and wait to hear whether they have been re-admitted or not. The Chapter concurred. Then, "Don Bosco orders that a letter be carefully prepared in these terms: Unless

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cusses this passage, with a brief comment on Father Durando's misgivings, apparently admitting that they were not groundless. "But Don Bosco saw fit to cut him short."

[133] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, July 7, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 18a, *FDBM* 1880 D11.

[134] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, July 19, 1884, Lemoyne, Minutes, p. 19a, FDBM 1880 E1.

you receive notice of re-admission within a stated date, find another school for yourself." He adds, again in strongest language:

> We must get rid of those who may turn out to be a deadly bane to others and to themselves. In any case, no one presently in the fourth year is to be re-admitted (*Di quei di 4 più nessuno*[135]). Certain individuals (*certi esseri*) who clearly have no vocation and whose conduct is doubtful must be removed from the school program and dismissed. And let us not make the mistake of merely assigning them to a trade. Students with no vocation would play havoc (*far strage*) right and left among the working boys; they are the most dangerous individuals imaginable (*i peggiori esseri che vi siano*). [136]

The discussion at the last few meetings related to admissions and dismissals. The original proposals still remained on the floor awaiting disposition, but more than a year went by before a decision was reached regarding the character of the Oratory school and its studies program. Throughout this period the minutes are silent on the subject. Then in late August 1885 Don Bosco takes up the question.

> Don Bosco declares his intention of suppressing the fifth year of *ginnasio* at the Oratory. There may be those who disagree (*oppositori*), but he will not retreat from his position. Young men who want to do the fifth year should go to some other school and pay regular fees. It's not right that such individuals should live off our hard-earned money (*il pane dei nostri sudori*) to pave their way toward a career which is not the one we intend for our youngsters.[137]

The minutes record only Don Bosco's lone sally on the subject at this meeting. But much thought must have been given to the matter all along and over the next three weeks, to judge from the showdown which followed on September 16, fifteen meetings later.

> Father Rua presents Don Bosco's plan for the suppression of the fifth year of *ginnasio* at the Oratory. Don Bosco specifies that such a measure is intended to affect all our charitable institutions (*tutte le case di beneficenza*)

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[135] The elliptical Italian sentence, if I understood it correctly (and as Prellezo also understands it), implies that Don Bosco at this point had made a decision to eliminate the fifth year. However, as will be seen, the debate over the fate of the fifth year will be resumed.

[136] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, July 7, 1884, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 18b, *FDBM* 1880 D12.

[137] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, August 24, 1885, Lemoyne, *Minutes*, p. 66a, *FDBM* 1882 B11.

and these alone. Father Bonetti requests a full exposition of reasons pro and con before the Superior Chapter can pass on a matter of such importance. Father Rua then presents in summary fashion the state of the question, and makes the following point: "I have consulted the school records for the past eight years to ascertain how the fifth year students fared in their examinations for the diploma, and to note how many went on to the novitiate and how many decided on a secular career instead. The records show that every year when there was a good instructor (*buon professore*) in the fifth year, the students earned high scores in their examinations, and a good number of them went on to the novitiate. On the contrary, in those years in which the instructor did a poor job, vocations were few and the examination went badly. Vocations then depend on the instructor and on the motivation he provides. If worldly success is all the students hear about, then the Congregation is the loser. The chief reason adduced by those who would want the fifth year out of the way is that our young men are interested only in their subjects and in passing their examination, and attach no importance to the spiritual life or to a vocation. [...]"

At this point Don Bosco interjects : "For several years now I have been worried sick over this mania which has overtaken our young people of taking examinations for the diploma. We ought to look at this business with one all important consideration in view. These young men are kept at the Oratory either totally or partly free of charge. Now what cause does all this charity serve? Certainly not the cause of vocations or of the advancement of religion, which is what our benefactors intend by their charity. Therefore we ought not to risk incurring their censure. Besides, it's unconscionable to spend a lot of charity money to further the career of individuals who will perhaps become editors of filthy tabloids (*giornalacci*) or worse. Then people will want to know, 'Where did these gentlemen get their education?' The answer will be, 'They are graduates of Don Bosco's school.' What a disgrace that would be. Furthermore, we have other reasons for doing away with the fifth year, and they have to do with morals. A kind of perversion takes place in our young men when passing from the fourth to the fifth year; it is caused by burgeoning hopes, the prospect of freedom, rising ambitions. We have an obligation to forestall this rite of passage. If they want to go into the fifth year, let them apply to one of our special schools, such as Alassio or Lanzo. 'But what if they can't afford it?' That's their business; we have no obligation. Obviously, an exception may be made in the case of a particularly deserving lad. [...] To end the matter, we go four years, and that's it. We've had only one novice from the Oratory school this year!"

Rua. We pick the best boys out of the third and fourth years and send them to the novitiate; that's why we don't have very good material in the fifth.

Francesia. If the fifth year is dropped, the competition from [the junior seminaries of] Giaveno and Bra, and Cottolengo's institute would be fa-

tal to us. They all have a fifth year, and even Cottolengo's institute prepares their students for their examination and diploma. That would siphon students out of our school. We may not feel the pinch for a year or two, but then parish priests and parents (even if the latter lack education) will realize that we don't offer a full course of studies. Our enrollment will dwindle, and so will our vocations.

Rua. This loss of public trust could be obviated, if our students complete their course of studies in one of our other schools.

Francesia. If we sent our students to other schools for their fifth year, we'd be in for a very unpleasant surprise. This is also true the other way around, I admit: transfers to the Oratory from other schools, even if highly recommended, do very poorly. What we really need is a program of studies tailored to our special needs. Therefore I propose that we keep the fifth year; but that, dropping such accessories as history, natural science, etc., though not mathematics, we concentrate on Italian, Latin and Greek language and literature. The fifth year is a requirement for examinations to take the clerical habit in all seminaries. The boys who left us after the fourth year and applied to the seminary had to get a certificate from their parish priests that they had completed the fifth year under private supervision. Let us insist and make sure that our instructors do a thorough job in those main subjects, and the academic quality of our school, which is below par, will improve sensibly.

Bosco. I still think we should go the way I indicated. If we don't get rid of the fifth year and the troubles that are connected with it, we will be forced into setting up an Apostolic School.

Bonetti. I support Father Francesia's position.

Durando. If we abolish the fifth year, we will eventually lose our best young people.

Bonetti. Why not give Father Francesia's proposal a one-year trial. Don Bosco's purposes would also thereby be served, since the course of studies as outlined would suit only those boys who have a priestly vocation in mind.

Rua. Once supplementary courses are removed from the curriculum, instructors will also have no reason to bring up the subject of examinations for the diploma or to harp forever on success in worldly careers.

Durando. Our Salesian seminarians must take and pass their examinations for the diploma. We need this badly.

Bosco. All right; let's adopt Father Francesia's plan on a trial basis for one year. But let this serve only as a transition to putting into effect what I have proposed: the suppression of the fifth year.

A motion is formulated and approved in these terms: the fifth year of *ginnasio* shall be continued, but supplementary subjects, except mathematics, shall be dropped from the curriculum.[138]

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[138] Meeting of the Superior Chapter, September 16, 1885, Lemoyne, *Minutes*,

There is no further record in Lemoyne's minutes regarding the ultimate disposition of this matter. In his essay, Prellezo does not pursue the question beyond the meeting of July 7, 1884. As indicated, at this meeting the Chapter unanimously agreed to notify the fourth and fifth year students, gone for summer holidays, not to return unless re-admitted upon submission of a new application.[139] Prellezo seems to consider this arrangement as final.[140] I have cited further action by the Chapter in the matter. But we may suppose that Don Bosco, after agreeing to a year's trial, finally had his way.

Conclusion

The time has come for a couple of concluding comments, on these sometimes puzzling, sometimes distressing texts.

First of all, a comment on what appear to be excessive concern and excessive severity on Don Bosco's part is in order. With reference to the texts quoted in both the present and the earlier article, what can one make of Don Bosco's apparently deep-seated fears for religious life and discipline in his young Society—with regard to obedience, kindliness in community and educational relationships, commitment to the Salesian apostolate, morality, etc.? I remarked above that perhaps such forces were at work in Don Bosco's case as are operative during the process of consolidation of any religious family. Again, perhaps the breakdown in religious discipline was real, a consequence of the freedom and extroverted activity of earlier times.

But the insistent, increasingly obsessive emphasis with which he spoke on the subject through his last years to his dying day raises questions of a different order. We know that these fears tormented his sleep and surfaced in his nightmarish dreams. In his *Additional Chronicle*, Viglietti relates several such experiences. The nightmares which Don Bosco had on four consecutive nights prior to December 1, 1884, are a case in point. Viglietti writes:

> Last night I was abruptly roused by rending cries coming from Don Bosco's room. I jumped out of bed and stopped to listen. Between choking gasps Don Bosco was crying: "Alas! Alas! Help! Help!." Without a moment's hesitation I walked into his room. "Don Bosco," I asked, "Are you ill?" "My dear Viglietti," he replied, now fully awake. "No, I'm not ill; but, you know, I just could not draw my breath. But don't worry. Return to your room, and go back to sleep."
>
> This morning, after Mass, when I brought him his coffee as usual, Don Bosco confided: "Dear Viglietti, I have no strength left in me; my chest is crushed with pain from last night's yelling. These last four nights

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pp. 74b-75a, *FDBM* 1882 D4-5.

[139] Cf. note 136 and related text, above.

[140] Prellezo, "Valdocco (1866-188)," *op. cit.*, p. 318.

> I had dreams that forced me to cry out, and I am now completely exhausted."

Then he related the dreams in detail. He saw a line of Salesians carrying numbered placards and symbols signifying their death. He saw demons in council plotting the undoing of the Society (through disobedience, intemperance and other vices), and himself attacked by them. He saw Salesians neglectful of the constitutions. He finally saw a pack of ferocious and ugly beasts, disguised as lambs, representing bad Salesians, intent on destroying the Society.[141] Whether grounded or groundless, the fear for the Society's spiritual health was obsessive.

Again, with respect to the situation at the Oratory and to the spiritual life and moral conduct of the boys in the school, Don Bosco's perception as well as his reported utterances and proposals for reform also appear characterized by unusual severity. One may cite Don Bosco's unexpected decision to install two directors at the Oratory, and Father Rua's belief that he had been cornered by third parties, and his decision to lop off the fifth year of the *ginnasio*. One may also cite his harsh put-down of Father Durando in the meeting of July 4, 1884, or his severely worded pronouncements on July 7.[142] There is no doubt that not all was well with the house and the school, and the Bonetti report bears this out. Yet it is also a fact that Don Bosco's closest associates did not view the situation in quite the same light.

In view of the above the question has been asked whether aging, and the states of mind that go with it, clouded his perception. In the special investigations of the Bosco-Gastaldi conflict ordered by Rome during the process of canonization, Bishop Giuseppe Re of Alba, as cited by Pietro Stella, gave the following testimony:

> After Don Bosco's death on January 31, 1888, I learned from the Salesian Father Giulio Barberis that for ten years prior to that date the Pious Salesian Society was actually governed by Father [Michele] Rua. Don Bosco would in fact refer to Father Rua all priests and young men who applied to him for advice. I also learned from Cardinal [Gaetano] Alimonda that, according to a report made to him by Dr. [Giuseppe] Fissore, Don

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141 C.M. Viglietti, *Additional Chronicle 1884-85* p. 65-70, December 1, 1884, in *ASC* 110 Cronachette, *FDBM* 1829 E1-6. Carlo Maria Viglietti was Don Bosco's secretary and constant attendant from 1884 to the latter's death in 1888. He occupied the room next to Don Bosco and was continually on call. For a detailed description of Viglietti's chronicles and their location in *ASC/FDBM*, cf. A. Lenti, "Don Bosco's Last Years, His Last Illness and Saintly Death from Eyewitness Accounts," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 5 (1994:2) [23-97] pp. 30-35.

142 Cf. notes 132 and 133 and related text, above.

> Bosco suffered from progressive paralysis (*paralisi progressiva*) caused by a slow sclerosis (*ossificazione*) of the brain.[143]

After referring to additional symptomatic descriptions of Don Bosco's illness in the sources, Stella remarks that, if such were the case, a variety of incidents and situations reported of Don Bosco in those later years would have a reasonable explanation: certain emotional outbursts, namely, the heated way in which he occasionally made a point; the indecision which paralyzed his action at critical junctures during the Gastaldi controversy; his wanting to undertake journeys (to France, Spain, Austria, and Rome) which were by that time beyond his physical power to endure; tears and other forms of confusion and emotional distress, etc.[144]

I myself am not in a position to make a judgment in the matter. I only wish to note that from the way in which Don Bosco's interjections are reported in the minutes (which I have carefully perused in their entirety) one *does* get the impression of severity in his judgments and decisions, but one *does not* get the impression that he was suffering from a debilitating disease, such as Alzheimer's or a fatal sclerosis!

My second comment refers to Don Bosco's decision to eliminate the fifth year of *ginnasio* in order to restore the Oratory school to the purpose he had originally intended for it. As already indicated above, Don Bosco expected the boys who were enrolled at the Oratory school, generally speaking on terms of total or partial charity, to opt for the Salesian novitiate, or at least for the seminary. This was totally consonant with his decision to work for priestly and religious vocations through the school. This decision is reflected in the addition of an article Don Bosco made to the chapter on the Purpose of the Society in the constitutions. The earliest extant text of the constitutions, the Rua draft of 1858, has no "seminary school clause." But on a separate sheet Don Bosco penned the article that was to be included in the text of 1860. It reads:

> Moreover, in view of the grave danger that young people *desirous of embracing the priestly vocation* have to face, this congregation shall apply itself with care to cultivating the piety and vocation of those who show a

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[143] *Positio super dubio [...], Summarium ex officio*, p. 135, cited in P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol. III: *La Canonizzazione (1888-1934)* (Roma: LAS, 1988). p. 179. Dr. Giuseppe Fissore was one of the physicians who attended Don Bosco during his last illness. [Cf. Lenti, "Don Bosco's Last Years," *cit.*, pp. 41-43]. Cardinal Gaetano Alimonda succeeded Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi as archbishop of Turin in 1883.

Quoting a medical dictionary, Stella explains progressive paralysis as "a disease characterized by progressive weakening of muscular reactions with attending difficulty and alteration in speech, especially noticeable in cases of insanity. The condition is due to a disorder affecting the central nervous system, and it always always fatal." [Stella, *Ibid.*]

[144] Stella, *Ibid.*, p. 180.

> special aptitude for study and an outstanding disposition toward piety. In admitting youngsters to the Home for their studies, preference shall be given to those who are poorer and who would otherwise lack the means whereby to pursue their [seminary] studies elsewhere.

Lest anyone should misconstrue his meaning, in subsequent drafts (from 1864 to 1874) he added the clause: "*provided they give well grounded hope of success in [their vocation to] the priesthood.*"[145]

The expansion of the work of the Society outside of Turin from early 1860s on was predominantly in the form of schools: in Piedmont, Italy, France, Spain, and some countries of South America. In line with the new social and political reality and the impetus given to education of the masses by the secular state, Don Bosco saw himself as increasingly committed to Christian education through the school. And although he never wavered in his option for the poor, by force of circumstances his schools would be attended by middle class youngsters, many of whom paid regular fees and had no intention of following a priestly vocation. In spite of this, Don Bosco never wrote a constitution on the school as such. The only provision made for the school apostolate in his constitutions is the "seminary school clause" quoted above. Under its terms, poor boys were admitted free of charge if they appeared to be likely prospects for the priestly vocation; and the expectation was that those so admitted would actually follow the priestly vocation, preferably in the Salesian Society.

This expectation applied to all Salesian charitable institutions, and to all schools with respect to those boys who were admitted on terms of charity. But Don Bosco apparently regarded the Oratory school in particular as a seminary school for the Salesian Society. He expected most, if not all, of the boys who had been accepted free of charge, or at greatly reduced fees, to opt for the Salesian novitiate. He seems to have regarded their being admitted with the conditions of the "seminary school clause" as implying some kind of contractual obligation.

Don Bosco's tireless quest for priestly vocations, in pursuit of which he displayed a kind of holy ferocity, is to be understood in the context of the need both of the Church and of the Salesian Society. As Stella points out, between 1855 (the time of the punitive Rattazzi laws against the Church) and the early 1870s (the time of the Law of Guarantees) priestly vocations in Italy experienced

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[145] *Constitutions of the Salesian Society* (1860), [Ch. 3]: Purpose of the Society, art. 5, Motto, *Cost. Testi critici*, pp. 76-77. Italics mine.

In the drafts of 1864 to 1867, Don Bosco even specified the number of young men who were engaged in "classical studies" "*with this end in view*" (namely, the pursuit of a priestly vocation): in the house of Valdocco, about 555 (1864) and about 800 (1867); in the school at Mirabello, over 100 (1864) and 150 (1867); in the school at Lanzo, about 200 (1867). In subsequent drafts he dropped all such statistical data.

a frightening decline.[146] At the same time, the explosive growth of the Society beyond Italy after 1875 made it imperative to step up the recruiting of Salesian priestly vocations and to speed up priestly training. In my earlier article I submitted a number of texts from the Barberis minutes in which Don Bosco, with a sense of utmost urgency, speaks of the need of ordaining as many priests as possible, even before the completion of their course of studies, provided the candidates' moral conduct was above reproach. Against the advice of practically all his councilors, he pressed for early ordination in order to increase the number of priests in the field. This he did through the regular channels as well as through the abbreviated course of studies ("school of fire, *scuola di fuoco*") established at the Oratory together with the Work of the Sons of Mary. In his chronicle for the year 1876, Father Barberis speaks of the "great new project completely aimed at increasing quickly the number of Salesians, especially Salesians seminarians." He then records how Don Bosco announced this new program:

> I have already discussed the matter with Father Durando, from whom I expected stiffer opposition. But he is in agreement and has no objections. This is what I have in mind. Some time around the middle of March, once the mid-term exams are over, [I plan] to establish a new course of studies (*aprire una nuova scuola*). I would bring together into this program all those young men who are somewhat advanced in age and who desire to don the clerical habit without much delay, even though they may be only in the third year [of *ginnasio*]. I would also bring in as many as possible of the Sons of Mary Help of Christians. An instructor would be appointed especially for them. He would give them a crash course in Latin and Italian only, so that by the Feast of All Saints [November 1] they can don the clerical habit. The younger boys may continue to the end of their studies [including the fifth year], though we should pressure them to remain with us [and enter the novitiate]. And if it can't be helped (*pazienza*), let them also take the examination for the diploma.[147]

As Prellezo suggests, Don Bosco's decision to reorganize the Oratory school on the basis of the Apostolic Schools, with a scaled-down program of studies should be seen in this light.[148]

Finally, as I had occasion to remark at the conclusion of my earlier article, the debates in the meetings of the Superior Chapter reveal both the freedom as well as the deference of the members with respect to the founder. But they also, and above all, evince the willingness of all concerned to face up to unpleasant

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[146] Pietro Stella, "Le ricerche su don Bosco nel venticinquesimo 1960-1985: bilancio, problemi, prospettive," in *Don Bosco nella chiesa a servizio dell'umanità. Studi e testimonianze* (Ed. Pietro Braido. Roma: LAS, 1987), p. 395.

[147] Barberis, *Cronichetta*, January 31, 1876, Directors' Meeting, *ASC* 110 Cronachette, Barberis, *FDBM* 837 C4.

[148] Prellezo, "Valdocco (1866-1888)," *op. cit.*, pp. 316-318.

situations and the determination to do something about them. What Father Barberis writes in his chronicle (with reference to meetings of the house chapter) is relevant here as well:

> In these meetings the true condition of the Oratory is brought out. First, the things that are wrong (*i disordini*) are identified, and secondly, every effort is made to find ways to correct them. The meetings also reveal how watchful, how concerned, how tireless the superiors are in this effort. There is no falling asleep on the job, believe me (*oh non si dorme no*). Bad situations are never glossed over; on the contrary, they are shown in all their gravity, and even exaggerated, so that suitable remedies may be found.[149]

In this context and in this respect, Don Bosco's words contitute a precious testimony to his founder's desire and determination to shape his Congregation into the best possible instrument for the "greater glory of God and the salvation of souls."

Appendix I

Don Bosco's Letter of 1884 on Controlling Books in Salesian Schools

ASC 131.03 Lettere circolari, "Una gravissima cagione," printed with Don Bosco's authentic [?] signature, *FDBM* 1368 C9-11; cf. *IBM* XVII, pp. 197-200.

On the Feast of All Saints [November 1, 1884]

My dearest children in Jesus Christ,

[Concern and Responsibility with Regard to Pupils' Reading Matter]

A very grave concern impels me to write this letter to you at the beginning of a new school year. You know of the love I bear to those souls whom our Blessed Lord Jesus in his goodness has entrusted to my care. And you are aware, I am sure, of the grave responsibility which educators of young people must bear, and of the account they will have to render to the divine Judge of how they have accomplished their mission. This responsibility must be shared jointly and indivisibly by both myself and you, my dearest children. And my hope is that [the

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[149] Barberis, *Cronichetta*, January 23, 1876, *ASC* 110 Cronachette, Barberis, *FDBM* 837 B7.

way we live up to] it will be for both you and me the origin, source and cause of glory and eternal life.

With this in mind, I decided to call your attention to a very important matter, on which may well depend the [eternal] welfare of our students. I am referring to the question of books used by our youngsters—which books should be kept out of their reach; which books should be allowed for their personal, as well as for common, reading.

[Bad Books and Their Evil Influence on Young Minds]

The first impression which the virgin minds and the tender hearts of young people receive will stay with them their whole life long; nowadays books are one of the principal sources of these impressions. Reading holds the greatest attraction for the young, titillating as it does their unrestrained curiosity. This experience often determines their first choosing good or evil. The enemies of souls know the power of this weapon, and experience has taught you how cleverly they can use it for the criminal destruction of innocence. Fanciful titles, beautiful paper, clearest print, fine illustrations, modest price, attractive popular style, variety in plot, lively descriptions—all these features are used for the purpose [of corruption] with consummate skill and diabolical cunning. Consequently, it is our bounded duty to counter bad books with good books. And woe to us if we go to sleep while the enemy is ever watchful [and at work] sowing the bad seed.

[Controlling Books the Pupils Read]

In the face of such a situation, at the beginning of each school year, all that the regulations prescribe in the matter should be carefully observed without delay. Someone should carefully check the books that the youngsters bring to school with them. If necessary, someone should be appointed to inspect their trunks and parcels. In addition, the director of each house should have the youngsters submit to him a complete list of all their books. This added measure will not be useless, both because it may produce some book that may have escaped inspection, and because these lists may later serve as guidelines for proceeding against any boy who may have maliciously withheld a bad book.

The same vigilance should be exercised throughout the year. Students should be made to turn in any new book which they may acquire during a course, or which they may receive from family or friends outside [the school]. We should watch lest parcels are received that, through carelessness or malice, have been wrapped with objectionable newspapers. Someone should [periodically] search the students' desks in the study hall and the classroms, and lockers in the dormitory.

Watchfulness in this matter can never be too great. Instructors, study hall prefects and supervisors should also carefully watch what the boys read in chapel, at recreation, in the classroom, in the study hall. Unexpurgated dictionaries should be outlawed, for they are the cause of corruption for so many youngsters

and provide material for evil insinuation from bad companions. A bad book invariably becomes a noisome source of contagious infection for many a youngster. The director should count it a great good fortune that a bad book has been taken away from a boy.

[Frequent Exhortations and Spirit of Gentleness]

Unfortunately youngsters find it difficult to be obedient in this matter, and practice all sorts of subterfuge to hide a bad book. The director is up against the boy's secretiveness, curiosity, fear of punishment, human respect, uncontrolled passions, all combined. Consequently winning over the hearts of the youngsters through persuasion and gentleness is of paramount importance. Periodically, during the school year, the subject of bad books and of the harm they do should be raised from the pulpit, as well as in the Good Nights and in the classrooms. Youngsters should be made to realize that what is demanded is intended solely for the good of their souls—which are, after God, the supreme object of our love. Severity should be avoided except when a youngster is the cause of spiritual ruin to others. If a bad book is handed in late in the year, the disobedience should be overlooked, and the book accepted as a present. In such cases, it may have been the confessor who enjoined this course of action, and it would be imprudent to pursue the matter further. Furthermore, such leniency on the part of the superiors would motivate others who may have been hiding bad books to come forward.

[Additional Pointers]

When a bad book is discovered which has been forbidden by the Church, or which is immoral, it should be burnt immediately. It has happened that such books taken from the youngsters and not destroyed have turned out to be the ruin of our priests and clerics.

If these suggestions are observed, bad books (so it is hoped) either will be kept out of our schools; or, if they find their way in, they will be found and destroyed.

Not only should we purge out bad books; we should also be on our guard against those other books which, even though good or indifferent in themselves, are dangerous because they are unsuitable to the age, place, studies, or the vocation of the persons in question, and may awaken evil tendencies or burgeoning passions. These books also should be removed.

As for books that are wholesome and entertaining—let them also be curtailed; this will be as great help the students in their studies. Instructors might try to control their students' free time by appropriate doses of homework. Admittedly, nowadays young peoples' reading mania can hardly be suppressed. On the other hand, even good books in many instances can add fuel to the passions and

stir the imagination. I have, therefore, given much thought to publishing a series of entertaining books for young people, if the Lord grant me time.[150]

[Books for Common Reading]

The foregoing observations were concerned with private reading. As regards the common reading in dining rooms, dormitories, and study halls, my first suggestion is that no book should be read that has not been approved by the director, and that all novels that have not been published by our printing house should be excluded.

[...][151]

As regards the dormitory in particular, I mean to forbid absolutely any kind of distracting or [merely] entertaining book. Only such books should be read that are apt to leave good impressions on the mind of the youngsters who are about to go to sleep, books that will help them be better persons.

[...][152]

[Boosting Salesian Publications]

In order to derive the greatest possible advantage from all this, and to use our own books as an effective antidote against bad books, let all of us (I beg you) have a great appreciation for the writings of our confreres. Banish all feelings of jealousy and avoid all criticism. Where you have noticed defects, try to bring about the necessary revisions by your advice, or even by your own efforts. You may notify the author himself, or send your suggestions to the superiors who edit our publications.

If youngsters hear their instructor or supervisor speaking well of a book, they will also accept it, sing its praises, and read it. [...]

[Conclusion]

My dearest children, take these suggestions to heart; remember them and put them into practice. I feel that the sunset of my years is near. Also for you, time flies. Let us therefore work zealously, so that the harvest of souls we will present to God our Father may be abundant. May the Lord bless you and our young

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[150] Don Bosco kept his word, even though his were only the idea and the inspiration. The *Letture Drammatiche* (Dramatic Readings, that is, plays) was begun in 1885 and the *Letture Amene* (Readings for Pleasure), in 1886. Both were published on a bimonthly basis. Cf. notes 81 and 82 and related text, above.

[151] Here Don Bosco recommends such reading as the *Salesian Bulletin*, the *Catholic Readings*, etc.

[152] Here Don Bosco recommends such books as the Savio biography, select books from the *Catholic Readings*, etc.

people. Give them my regards, and recommend to their prayers this poor old man who loves them so much in Jesus Christ.

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,
Father John Bosco

Appendix II

Don Bosco's Letter on the Apostolate Of The Press ("Spreading Good Books") (March 19, 1885)

A printed copy of this letter bearing Don Bosco's authentic [?] signature is held in *ASC*. The text is given in Ceria, *Epistolario IV*, 318-321, and in *Lettere circolari di Don Bosco e di Don Rua.* Torino: Tipografia dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales, 1896, pp. 24-29. It is not found in the *Biographical Memoirs.*

Turin, March 19, Feast of St. Joseph, 1885

Dearest Children in Jesus Christ,

[Introduction: Don Bosco's Longing to Be with His Sons]

The Lord is witness of how keenly I desire to see you, to be with you, to talk over our affairs with you, and to find comfort in confidential, heart-to-heart exchanges. Regrettably, my dearest children, my failing strength, the lingering effects of past illnesses, and the urgent business requiring my presence in France at this time, prevent me, at least for the present, to follow this impulse of my love for you. And so, since I cannot pay you a visit in person, I do so by this letter. I feel certain that you will be happy to know that I am thinking of you—you who are my glory and my support, as well as my hope. And, in accordance with my desire to see you grow every day more in zeal and merits before God, I will not neglect from time to time to suggest to you such means as will help make your ministry ever more fruitful.

[Theological Rationale for the Apostolate of the Press]

One such means, the one I wish to commend most warmly to your zeal is the spreading of good books. I do not hesitate to describe this work as divine, because God himself made use of it for the regeneration of mankind. The Books which he inspired were the means through which the true teaching was brought to the world. He wished that these Books be available in every town and village of Palestine, and that they be read every Sabbath in religious assemblies. At first these books were the exclusive possession of the Hebrew people. But after the

tribes were exiled to Assyria and Chaldea, the Sacred Scriptures were translated into the Syro-Chaldean language, so that the whole of Central Asia had access to them in its own tongue. With the rise of Greek power the Jews established colonies all over the world, and the Holy Books were copied and given wide circulation. The Septuagint translation of the Scriptures found its way also into the libraries of gentile peoples. Thus, orators, poets and philosophers in those times drew on the truth of the Bible in not a few instances. Through his inspired writings God was preparing the world for the coming of the Savior.

Therefore it is incumbent on us to imitate the work of our heavenly Father. The spreading of good books among the people is one of the means whereby the Savior's reign can be effectively established and maintained in so many souls. The ideas, the principles and the moral teaching of a Catholic book are derived from the divine books and from apostolic tradition. Catholic books are all the more necessary today, when irreligion and immorality make use of the press as a weapon to plunder the flock of Jesus Christ, and to drag down to perdition the unwary and the disobedient. We must, therefore, counter such attacks with like weapons.

[Power of the Book]

It is noteworthy, moreover, that books, even though lacking the force of the living word, carry the better advantage in certain situations. A good book can find its way into homes where the priest is not welcome. It will be kept as a souvenir or accepted as a present even by a bad person. A good book enters a home without blushing. If rebuffed, it is not discouraged. If taken up and read, it teaches the truth calmly. If set aside it does not complain, but patiently awaits the time when conscience may rekindle the desire to know the truth. It may perhaps be left to collect dust on a table or on a library shelf, and given no attention for a long time. But then comes the hour of solitude, of sadness, of sorrow, of boredom, of need for relaxation, of anxiety about the future—and this faithful friend shakes off its dust, opens its pages, and, as was the case with St. Augustine, Blessed Columbinus and St. Ignatius, it may bring about a conversion. A good book is gentle with those that are hampered by human respect and addresses them without arousing suspicion in anyone. It is on familiar terms with good people, and is always ready to make meaningful conversation and to travel along with them at any time anywhere. How many souls have been saved, preserved from error, encouraged in the practice of virtue through good books. The person who gives a good book as a gift acquires great merit with God, even though he may only barely succeed in awakening the thought of God thereby. In most instances, however, the good that is done is much greater. Once brought into a family, if it is not read by the person to whom it was given, the book will be read by a son or a daughter, by a friend or a neighbor. In a small town that book may touch the lives of one hundred people. Only God knows how much good a book can do in a city, in a public library, in a workers' association, in a hospital, where the friendly gift of a book is much appreciated. The fear that

someone may refuse the gift of a good book should not deter us—on the contrary. A confrere of ours in Marseilles was wont to visit the docks regularly and take along a supply of good books to give away to stevedores, repairmen and sailors. Such gifts were invariably gladly and thankfully accepted; and sometimes those men would immediately page through the book and then peruse it with curiosity.

[Don Bosco's and the Salesians' Commitment to the Apostolate of the Press]

Let these simple preliminary reflections suffice. I would now like to draw your attention to some of the reasons why we, as Christians and especially as Salesians, should make every effort and use every possible means to spread good books.

1. This is one of the most important apostolates entrusted to me by Divine Providence, and you know that I worked at it untiringly, even when engaged in a thousand other tasks. The vicious hatred displayed by the enemies of good, and the persecutions unleashed against me, are clear proof both that Error regarded those books as a formidable foe, and that the work had the blessing of God.

2. In point of fact, it is only with God's special assistance the we were able to spread good books to such an extent. The number of copies of pamphlets and books made available to the people through us over a period of less than thirty years surpasses the twenty million. While some books surely went unread, some may have had upwards of one hundred readers. Thus the number of people reached by our books greatly surpasses the number of copies distributed.

3. The spreading of good books is one of the principal apostolates of our Congregation. Our Constitutions, at chapter 1, article 7, lay down that the Salesians "shall apply themselves to *spreading good books* among the people, employing all the means that Christian charity inspires. Finally, they shall endeavor both by the spoken and the written word to raise a barrier against irreligion and heresy, which strive in so many ways to work their way among the uneducated and the ignorant. Toward this end should also be directed occasional sermons preached to the people, triduums and novenas, and the *spreading of good books*." [*Salesian Constitutions* (1975)]

4. Accordingly, those books should be chosen for distribution which are generally held to be good, moral and religious. Moreover, those should be given preference that are published by our printing establishments, for the following reasons: first, the profits derived therefrom can be channeled toward helping so many youngsters that are in need; and secondly, our publications tend to cover the field systematically and on a wide scale, and thus to address every segment of society.

[Don Bosco's Efforts in Publishing Books for the Young]

There is no need to belabor the point. But with deep satisfaction I should like to comment on the fact that over the years I have spared no effort, whether by the spoken or by the printed word, to help one category of society in particular, the young. By the *Catholic Readings* I tried to reach people at large and enter into their homes. But at the same time I tried to make known the spirit of our [boarding] schools and to entice young people to virtue through such writings as the biographies of Savio, Besucco and the like. Through the *Companion of Youth* I tried to draw young people to the Church, instill into them the spirit of piety, and win them over to the frequent reception of the sacraments. Through the *Italian* and *Latin* classics series, in expurgated editions, through the *History of Italy,* and through other books of a historical and literary character, I tried to be present to them in the class room, in order to guard them against so many errors and against the passions that would surely be fatal to them for this world and the next. I have also always wanted to continue to be their companion in their leisure time, and in the old days at recreation. To this end I am planning the publication of a series of entertaining books, which, it is hoped, will soon see the light of day. Finally, through the *Salesian Bulletin* I aimed, among other things, at keeping alive in the young people that have graduated from our schools and returned to their families a love for the spirit of St. Francis de Sales and for his teaching, in the hope that they would in turn be apostles to other young people. I am not claiming to have accomplished successfully what I set out to do. I only wish to emphasize that it is now up to you to continue the project and coordinate all efforts so as to bring it to completion in all its phases.

[Recruitment of Young People through and for this Apostolate]

I beg and beseech you therefore—do not neglect this important sector of our mission. Begin by working with the young people that Providence has entrusted to you; and then by word and example inspire them to be, in their turn, apostles for the spreading of good books.

At the beginning of each academic year our students, especially those newly enrolled, are eager to join the student book guilds established in our schools, all the more so as the fees are quite modest. Make sure, however, that they join these guilds of their own free will and not by force. Try to persuade them to do so by reasoning with them and showing them how much good they personally can derive from these books, and how much good they can do to others by sending them out, as they are published, to their homes, to father, mother, brother, sister, or benefactor. Family members, even if not practicing Catholics, appreciate such a gesture on the part of a son, a brother, etc., and will thus be drawn into reading these books, if only out of curiosity. Let the boys, however, see to it that the sending of these books does not take on even the appearance of preachment or lecture to the family. Let this action clearly appear for

what it should really be, a loving gift or souvenir. Finally, when the students go home [on holidays], let them continue their good work and try to extend their outreach by giving books to friends and relatives, by showing appreciation for favor received through the gift of a book, by placing books with the pastor, requesting him to distribute them and to recruit new members [subscribers].

Rest assured, my dear children, that these efforts will draw on you and on your youngsters the Lord's choicest blessings.

[Concluding Exhortation]

Here I rest my case. After reading this letter draw your own conclusions. See to it that our young people learn their moral and Christian principles especially from our publications, yet without depreciating those of others. But let me tell you of my disappointment on learning that in some of our houses books published by us specifically for young people were either unknown or held in no esteem. You should not love, nor teach others to love that knowledge which, in the word of the Apostle, *inflat* [puffs up]. Recall how St. Augustine, renowned as he was as a master of letters and as an orator, once appointed bishop, preferred common language and inelegance of style to risking not being understood by his people.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always. Pray for me.

Most affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Father John Bosco

Appendix III

Father Giulio Barberis' Tribute to Don Bosco Written shortly after the Alassio General Conference of 1879

In Barberis, *Minutes of the Alassio Conference*, with Minutes of the Superior Chapter, Notebook II [following p. 91 in *FDBM*, pages unnumbered], *FDBM* 1878 C7-D8. Barberis prefaces this memoir, written after returning to Turin and while he was transcribing the minutes of the Alassio conference, with the note: "Since I don't have my book of chronicles with me, I turn this notebook upside down and enter this memoir beginning with the last page."

Don Bosco has been to France for an extended visit, during most of which he remained at Marseilles. His reception in that city was enthusiastic beyond belief. He returned by way of Bordighera and arrived at Alassio the evening of the fifth of this month of February. Here we held the meetings which are usually held, but which could not be held, around the feast of St. Francis de Sales.

Don Bosco's life is truly a life of sacrifice, a life worthy of the saintly person that he is; but there is no external show. There is never the least incivility in his dealings with others; on the contrary, he is considerate to a fault and most tolerant of other people's defects. He does all he can to keep in good health; his mortification, which I think is of the most genuine kind, consists in accepting whatever comes in all circumstances. The weather may be hot, and he may be suffering from the heat. "It is as it should be," he says. "It is good for the crops." And so he has something good to say for the heat. When it gets cold, and he feels its effects, "It's that time of year," he quips, "there's nothing for it but to bear it. Bundle up, all of you," he warns, "so you won't get sick." When he is really tired, he acknowledges the fact: "I overdid it this time. But one of these days when I can spare the time, I am going to take it easy and relax." He urges moderation on others. But, of course, he'll never have any time to spare for a vacation. Every minute of his long day is taken up by the most pressing concerns, with no respite. And he draws others by his example; no one has any time to spare for a little rest. He suffers from a painful eye disease; in fact his right eye is practically gone. He has an answer to this: "Why worry? I can see just as well with one eye as with two. I only pray that God will let me keep this one eye, otherwise I would be out of work. But let's not worry because the Lord has things well in hand." And, of course, all these conferences and speeches tax his endurance to the limit. But again, "The show must go on!"

To have to listen to our discussions must be a great sacrifice on his part. He often forms a plan and sees clearly the means which will make it a success. But circumstances may force him to scale it down, putting off its full implementation to some future date. Then the critics and the planners take over. He just accepts everything with patient appreciation, while biding his time and waiting for another opportunity.

The reason why Don Bosco came to Alassio is to meet with the members of the Superior Chapter and the directors from the houses in Liguria. Hence he has hardly any time to spend with the youngsters. Nonetheless, it takes him a good twenty minutes merely to cross the playground after church. Here as everywhere else, the boys are drawn to him and crowd around him. He has little strength left in him, but he welcomes the opportunity of being with the boys so that they may get to know him and speak to him, and he may do them some good. He is never out of witty remarks or timely advice. He is always ready with a pointed question, and never at a loss for a pointed reply. The Alassio school [besides the *ginnasio* also] has a *liceo* (junior college) with an enrollment of some 60 students. And it is quite amazing to see these young adults pressing around him. The school spirit is good, and all the traditions of the Oratory are maintained. But these older lads demand a lot of attention, and the staff is small and overworked. Don Bosco is always ready to help by his presence and timely words, or by keeping in touch with the boys through written messages.

[...][153]

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153 At this point Barberis digresses to give his impressions of the school and

Our group, which included Fathers Rua, Lazzero, Ghivarello, Cays and myself, left Turin and arrived at Alassio by way of Sampierdarena on the 6th [of February]. Don Bosco had arrived from France the evening before. I have no words to describe the way he received us. While boys and confreres were gathered outside to welcome us, Don Bosco waited seated in the dining room. We went in to him as soon as we could get away from the crowd, and as we came through the door he would shout a joyful greeting for each one. He would clap his hands and open his arms to receive us, his face shining with joy and affection. While we kissed his hand, he plied us with questions to learn how things stood back at home. Is any one ill among the confreres, among the boys? Have the boys been behaving themselves, etc. We conveyed greetings from every one, many by name. It was moving to see his reaction. He would say, "I must write this confrere a note;" or, "Please write for me and tell the boys that I am so happy to have good news of them. Tell them that I can't wait to see them again soon. Tell them to pray for the success of these meetings."

[...][154]

For the benefit of those who will come after us, and who may chance upon these hasty notes, I should like to add a word about the way we are made welcome here, and about the spirit reigning among us. It is a spirit of true and unstinted brotherliness and mutual good will, spontaneous and unpretentious. In the house we are free to come and go as we please, and there are no secret compartments. Things are so informal in this community (that is, every one is so busy) that on arriving we had to find our own rooms. As is usually the case with our places, also the Alassio school is overcrowded; there aren't many spare rooms available to visitors. Several confreres surrendered their rooms to us and found beds in the infirmary, which is fortunately not in use at this time. A classroom also had to be cleared for the purpose.

All of us, of course, wanted private interviews with Don Bosco. He made himself totally available, after dinner, after supper, and at every free moment; but there just wasn't enough time. Speaking for myself, I had to put in writing the things which I could not discuss with him privately. I know that Father Lazzero did the same. Father Rua, who had urgent matters to discuss, stayed on at Alassio with Don Bosco when we left.

During these days Don Bosco received several requests for foundations from visitors who came to make offers and proposals. After conferring with Don Bosco, without exception, they would come out overwhelmed by his manner and presence. They are impressed by his matter-of-fact simplicity, on the one hand, and by the depth of his perception and the soundness of his suggestions, on the other. Above all, they are taken by his amiable manner, by his forthcoming, smiling presence. Invariably these visitors leave his room in a state of excited

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its spirit.

[154] Short paragraphs describe summarily the sequence and taxing work of the meetings, and tell of Rome's decree extending the terms in office of the superior chapter until the next General Chapter.

confusion, in a trance, so to speak. One can't find the door, another forgets his hat or his overcoat. Expressions often heard are, "It is beyond belief;" or "Don Bosco can truly win over people's hearts; it must be by a very special grace of God."

[...][155]

During his brief stay at Alassio Don Bosco insisted on holding a conference with the local Salesian cooperators. It was scheduled for 3:00 P.M. This meant more work, but work which is necessary both for the good of the people and for the support of our works.

The parish priest of Alassio is a truly dedicated pastor, imbued with the Lord's spirit and looking solely for the good of souls. He is much attached to the school and its staff, to Father Cerruti, its director, in particular. For Don Bosco he has the greatest respect and veneration. Now that the "General Staff" of the Society is meeting in his bailiwick, he is a daily visitor at the school. He comes up for dinner or for coffee. Chatting with Don Bosco, he mentioned the financial problems of the parish, and the fact its only resource, an olive grove of some 1,000 trees, has had very poor yields. Don Bosco urged him to have recourse to Mary Help of Christians, and to promise an offering to her church in Turin, if the yield increased in next years. The good pastor immediately agreed and promised 10% of the net profits. Don Bosco added, "If that's the case, you will have abundant harvest, do not doubt it."

Bishop [Gaetano] Alimonda, the worthy pastor of the diocese of Albenga, is also much attached to the school. He is devoted to its director [Father Cerruti], whom he retains as a confidant and counselor. He loves and protects the Society and holds Don Bosco in the highest esteem and veneration, regarding him as the man of Divine Providence. Immediately upon learning that Don Bosco was at Alassio he asked for an interview. Don Bosco, on the other hand, was looking for an opportunity to go and pay his respects to the bishop, but the bishop beat him to it. He had a long visit with Don Bosco, after which the whole Superior Chapter saw him off at the railway station.

[...][156]

Obviously, Don Bosco could not spend days at the school without wanting to speak to the youngsters in the evening. His address, aimed at the older boys of the upper *ginnasio and liceo* was a masterpiece of restraint. He told them, first, to have a happy attitude, urging them also to pray for the souls in Purgatory so that they may also have happiness. Secondly, they should take care to have and maintain happiness in their souls. Here he urged them all to receive holy Communion worthily and to spend some time thinking about their vocation, which

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[155] A delegation of citizens from a nearby town comes to request a Salesian school. Don Bosco encourages them to go forward with their plan and submit a proposal.

[156] Barberis speaks of Alimonda's many tokens of affections for Don Bosco and the Salesian Society before and after being made bishop, with the note that as of May 1879 Bishop Alimonda was named cardinal.

would ensure life-long happiness. Thirdly, they should keep the body happy, that is, fit. In this respect, he has asked the director to see to it that something special is served at breakfast and at dinner. "If you keep happy in this manner," he concluded, "you will be ensure your eternal happiness, which I wish and pray for you from the good Lord."

Chatting at table, Don Bosco spoke of the warm reception he had in Marseilles. He related the following episode. At a dinner given in his honor were seated the richest and most Christian people of Marseilles. Inevitably the conversation drifted on to the subject of the orphanage and vocational school which was at the planning stage and which would be entrusted to Don Bosco. The obstacles to be overcome were a very grave concern, particularly as they related to the installation of the workshops and to the huge sum of money needed to set up an endowment. This was a priority since the school was for poor boys who could not pay for their room and board. Every one present agreed that the project was daunting and that much courage was called for. Don Bosco, with a smile, but in all seriousness, agreed: "Yes, we have a great and difficult undertaking on our hands, and only the people of Marseilles can bring it to completion." Abbé Clément Guiol of St. Joseph's parish, later recalled: "Those words had the effect of an electric shock, an effect that Don Bosco had neither intended nor anticipated. True, great obstacles had to be overcome: the sums of money and the care which the project required seemed beyond our power, and you Salesians were foreigners! But the difficulties were overcome, and the work is started with tidy sums at Don Bosco's disposal. How did this come about? If Don Bosco had looked around when he said those words, he would have noticed people blushing and casting furtive glances at their neighbors, as though stung to the quick: 'Yes, it's up to us, the people of Marseilles!'" Don Bosco told us that he had noticed nothing and that he had meant nothing by those words. As is his custom, he had just meant to say something flattering, something people like to hear.

Before leaving Alassio Don Bosco called a conference of all the personnel of the school. In spite of being dead tired, he wished to preside, though he had Father Rua address the confreres. All of us [Superior Chapter and directors] attended as well. I don't think that there ever was held such an unusual conference before. Don Bosco, a man of few words, never misses an occasion... [*unfinished sentence*]

Appendix IV

A Day in the Life of Don Bosco Episodes

[Reported by Barberis with the Minutes of General Chapter II, Notebook II, pp. 1-4, *FDBM* 1858 D7-10.]

Notebook II begins with the date, Lanzo, September 15, 1880, and the note, "Some episodes (*un po' di cronaca*) before proceeding with the

minutes." This means that Barberis was transcribing the minutes at Lanzo immediately after the General Chapter and during the spiritual retreat.

Very early yesterday morning an elderly, well dressed gentleman wished to see Don Bosco. He was told that Don Bosco was hearing confessions and would be busy for some time; perhaps he could spend a couple of hours visiting the town and the school. "I am not really interested in that," was the reply. "I have come a great distance, all the way from Tyrol, in order to see Don Bosco; I will just wait." He had a long wait ahead of him, because Don Bosco was hearing confessions. The gentleman, however, had to catch a train back to Turin a little later that morning, so someone notified Don Bosco, explaining the situation. Don Bosco said he would be out soon; but penitents kept going in for confession, and he did not appear until nearly half past ten. The train would be leaving at 11. As soon as the man caught sight of Don Bosco, he went up to him and, after a word of introduction, said: "I traveled from Tyrol just to see you. Now that I have seen you, I am happy and shall be on my way. I have heard so much about you, that I would be miserable forever if I were to died without seeing you." Don Bosco pressed him to go in (they were standing in the corridor) and stay a while, so they could get acquainted. But the gentleman declined the invitation: "I'm sorry, but I cannot miss my train. I have seen you, and that's enough. Only do give me your blessing." He knelt for the blessing, then got up, left a sizable offering, and left. I will make no comment; I will only say that the gentleman was no lunatic. Everything about him spoke for him as a good, sane and educated person.

Nor was he the only visitor that day. A certain Father Gregory, a Benedictine from Rome, had arrived with the same early train. After conferring with Don Bosco on private matters, he had lunch with us and left at 2 o'clock. Later in the morning, after the gentleman from Tyrol had left, Don Bosco received a 30-year old young adult who was seeking his advice about becoming a religious. Their conversation lasted until some time past twelve. He has decided to become a Salesian and has applied to become an aspirant. Again, in the early afternoon, another priest, a school teacher from Vicenza, came to confer with Don Bosco. He left late that evening.

In addition, Don Bosco presided over the evening session of the General Chapter, which has been meeting here at Lanzo since the third day of this month. Several important matters were on the agenda, and the session lasted from 4 to 6:30 P.M. Immediately thereafter, it being also the last day but one of the retreat, Don Bosco heard confessions until nine. He came out weighed down with fatigue and care. After his light supper, five of us (Fathers Rua, Ronchail, Belmonte, Dalmazzo, and myself) sat with him, and his conversation grew progressively more humorous and light-hearted. He was so droll that he had us roaring with laughter to the point of tears. Then he began to recite doggerel on rules of grammar and comic rigmaroles in verse. That is how we spend many Saturday evenings with him at the Oratory. He does this to take his mind off things, when he is either very tired or is oppressed with care. I have seen him in such moods on and off, especially after a long session in the confessional.

This was a day in the life of Don Bosco, but not an extraordinary one; every day is pretty much the same. Here at Lanzo, for instance, he is busy with the important work of the General Chapter, of which he is heart and soul. He is also involved with a spiritual retreat in progress which is attended by some 250 confreres. He sits in the confessional for long hours, morning and evening, every day. He also makes himself available for interviews with the directors who always have important matters to discuss with him. He does the same with Salesian seminarians who may need his advice regarding their vocation. Then every day he has visitors, many of them distinguished persons, from every part of Italy. For example, on September 13, we had with us the marquis of Teano (whose name I don't recall), who came to see about a Salesian school in that city; the Chevalier Gautié, who is from Rome, I believe; and Attorney Borgonuovo and family, from Genoa. On September 12, Count Vespignani, the well known Roman architect, called on Don Bosco. They had lengthy consuktations, and then he stayed for dinner. He has designed the church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome, which has been entrusted to us, and is supervising its building. There have been other visitors, too numerous to mention.

Appendix V

Biographical Data on Significant *Dramatis Personae*

General Sources for the biographical data which follows are:

Ceria, Eugenio, *Profili dei Capitolari salesiani morti dall'anno 1865 al 1950* (Colle Don Bosco (Asti): Libreria Dottrina Cristiana).

Valentini, Eugenio and Amedeo Rodinò, *Dizionario Biografico dei Salesiani* (Torino: Ufficio Stampa Salesiano, 1969).

Ceria, Eugenio, *Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, Ed. by Diego Borgatello, Vol. XIV (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Salesiana Publishers, 1985), pp. 559-585; Vol. XV (1988). pp. 577-595; Vol. XVI (1995), pp. 353-367.

BARBERIS, Giulio (1847-1927).— Born at Mathi (Turin), He became a Salesian in 1865 and was ordained a priest in 1870. For the rest of his life he served as director of novices and as director of formation for the whole Congregation. After Don Bosco's death in 1888 he served as a member of the Superior Chapter until his death in 1927. Not least among his merits must be reckoned that from mid-1870s on he was active as a chronicler and as secretary of both Superior Chapter and general chapters.

BELMONTE, Domenico (1843-1901).— Having entered the Oratory in 1860, he made his profession in 1864 and was ordained in 1870. Subsequently he served as director of the Salesian schools of Borgo San Martino and Sampier-

darena (Genoa), where he also was an instructor in theology and active as a choir director and composer. In 1886 he was appointed prefect general of the Society.

BERTELLO, Giuseppe (1848-1910).— Having witnessed as a young boy the murder of his father, he entered the Oratory at the age of 15. After his religious profession in 1868 and his ordination in 1871, he earned his degree in theology from the university. Don Bosco appointed him prefect of studies of the Oratory in 1873, in which capacity he served until 1880. After a brief stint as teacher at Alassio, he was appointed director of the school at Borgo San Martino in 1881. He served as provincial of the Sicilian province from 1894 until in 1898 he was elected councilor for vocational schools. In 1909 he was named financial administrator if the Society, but he died shortly thereafter.

BONETTI, Giovanni (1838-1891).— Having entered the Oratory at the age of 17, he was a founding member of the Salesian Society in 1859, on which occasion he was elected councilor of the Superior Chapter. After a year in the diocesan seminary he returned to Don Bosco, made his profession in 1863, and was ordained in 1863, after which he replaced Fr. Rua as director of the school at Mirabello. A gifted and prolific writer, he was appointed editor-in-chief of the Salesian Bulletin, and he authored the first extended history of the Oratory. In 1886 he was elected to replace Bishop Cagliero as spiritual director of the Congregation, a post he held until his sudden death.

CAGLIERO, Giovanni (1838-1926).— Having entered the Oratory in 1851, he was a founding member of the Society in 1859, on which occasion he was elected councilor of the Superior Chapter. He was ordained in 1862. A talented musician and a master of theology from the university, he was appointed spiritual director of the Society in 1869 and director of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in 1874. While continuing in these capacities, he led the Salesian missionaries to South America, and acted as Don Bosco's vicar for all Salesian work there. Returning in 1877, he continued his activities as councilor and as Don Bosco's delegate to Salesian foundations in Italy, Spain and Portugal. After the erection of Salesian missionary territories in Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, he was ordained bishop in 1884 for the vicariate of Northern Patagonia. After serving as Vatican plenipotentiary and Apostolic delegate in Central America, he was made cardinal in 1915.

CAGLIERO, Giuseppe, read ***Cesare*** (1854-1899).— A cousin of Bishop Giovanni Cagliero, he made his profession in 1872 and was ordained in 1877. From 1884 to 1887, he was director of Valsalice (replacing Father Francesia). In 1877 Don Bosco appointed him procurator general and director of the Sacred Heart complex (replacing Father Dalmazzo in Rome), in which capacity he served until his death.

CERRUTI, Francesco (1844-1917).— Having entered the Oratory in 1856, he was a founding member of the Salesian Society in 1859. He earned his degree in literature from the university, and was ordained in 1866. He authored text books and essays in the field of education. In 1870 he became the first director of the Salesian school at Alassio, and in 1879, first provincial of the Ligurian province. In 1885 Don Bosco appointed him prefect general of studies, in which capacity he improved studies programs in the schools of the Salesian Society and of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

DALMAZZO, Francesco (1845-1895).— Having entered the Oratory in 1860, he was ordained in 1868 and made his profession in 1869. After serving as director of the Valsalice school from 1872 to 1880, he was appointed procurator general of the Society, as well as rector of Sacred Heart Church and Hospice then being built in Rome. He served in that capacity until ordered removed by Pope Leo XIII in 1887. Subsequently he was appointed rector of the church of St. John the Evangelist in Turin, and in 1894, director of the diocesan seminary of Catanzaro (Calabria). He was struck down by an assassin and died from the wound a few days later.

DURANDO, Celestino (1840-1907).— He entered the Oratory in 1856 and was a founding member of the Salesian Society in 1859. He was ordained in 1864 and became a member of the Superior Chapter in 1865, on which he served until his death. He held other posts as well: instructor, prefect of studies of the Oratory school from 1869 to 1876, then prefect general of studies of the Congregation, and for a while also substitute prefect general. From 1886 to 1903 he also served as provincial of the "foreign province" and as representative of Don Bosco in charge of new foundations. As prefect general of studies he directed the Library of Italian Classics and authored a number of highly regarded text books.

FRANCESIA, Giovanni Battista (1838-1930).— He became a boarder at the Oratory in 1852, and was one of the founding members of the Salesian Society in 1859. He was ordained in 1862, earned his degree in classics from the university, and in 1865 Don Bosco appointed him spiritual director of the Society. He directed the Library of Latin Classics, and authored numerous books in that and other fields. Having completed his term on the Superior Chapter, he served as director of various Salesian schools and provincial until 1895. In his later years he devoted himself to writing, and was the scholar and oral historian of the Congregation.

LAZZERO, Giuseppe (1837-1910).— Having entered the Oratory in 1857 and having been a founding member of the Society in 1859, he was ordained in 1865. He was appointed councilor on the Superior Chapter in 1869, while serving as vice-director of the Oratory under Father Rua. In 1879 he was named director of the Oratory, and with the division of the communities in 1884, director of working community. At the same time he served as councilor of vocational

schools for the whole Society, a post newly created by General Chapter III (1883). In 1897 a serious illness caused his permanent retirement.

LEMOYNE, Giovanni Battista (1839-1916).— Born in Genoa, after ordination he met Don Bosco and joined him at the Oratory in 1864. He was quickly appointed director of the Salesian school at Lanzo, and in 1877, local director of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Mornese and at Nizza. In 1883 Don Bosco called him back to Turin as editor of the *Salesian Bulletin* and as secretary of the Superior Chapter. Already a prolific writer in many fields, and active as a chronicler for a number of years, he now made it his life's goal to collect the material which had accumulated in Salesian tradition for a history of Don Bosco and the Salesian Congregation. His close relationship with Don Bosco during the latter's last years enabled him to begin to put this project into execution. He started to assemble the *Documenti* in 1885, which eventually ran to 45 volumes and which became the basis for the *Biographical Memoirs*. After Don Bosco's death in 1888, Father Lemoyne was charged officially with the work of the *Biographical Memoirs* and completed the first nine volumes. We also owe him a debt of gratitude for his work as secretary. [Cf. also A Lenti, "Don Bosco's 'Boswell': John Baptist Lemoyne—the Man and His Work," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 1:2 (1990) pp. 1-46.]

LEVERATTO, Giuseppe (1846-1909).— Prefect of the Oratory in the 1870s and 1880s.

MARENCO, Giovanni (1853-1921).— Having joined the Salesians from the diocesan seminary in 1873, he was ordained in 1875. After serving as director and as provincial, in 1892 he was appointed delegate to the Salesian Sisters, and in 1899 procurator general of the Salesian Society, in which capacity he served until, in 1909, he was made bishop of Massa-Carrara by Pope Benedict XV. In 1917 he was sent as internuncio of the Holy See to Central America, where he served with distinction until in 1921 illness forced him into retirement.

RUA, Michele (1837-1910).— Having known Don Bosco as a child, he entered the Oratory in 1852. At the founding of the Society in 1859, he was elected spiritual director of the Society. Ordained in 1860, he was appointed director of the first Salesian School outside of Turin (1863), and shortly thereafter prefect of the Society (1865). From then on we find him continuously at Don Bosco's side as his closest associate and right-hand man. In 1884 Pope Leo XIII appointed him Don Bosco's vicar with right of succession. He served as rector major until his death. During his rectorate the society experienced extraordinary growth.

SALA, Antonio (1836-1895).— Having joined Don Bosco and the Salesians at the age of 27, he was ordained in 1869, and then attended the conferences in moral theology at the pastoral institute known as the *Convitto*. In 1875 Don Bosco appointed him councilor of the Superior chapter and assistant to the finan-

cial administrator of the Society, whom he succeeded in 1880. In these capacities he supervised important building projects. A general physical deterioration claimed his life prematurely.

SCAPPINI, Giuseppe (1848-1918).— He attended General Chapter I (1877), as "spiritual director of the Conceptionists in Rome." He was provincial for 6 years.