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Aesthetics in Don Bosco's Educational System (1876-1884)

Rik Biesmans, SDB

In the well-known, concise treatise "The Preventive System" St. John Bosco defines the educator as one who is dedicated fully to the well-being of his pupils. Consequently "an educator should be ready to face every difficulty and fatigue in order to reach this goal: the civic, moral and intellectual education of the young." One need not know Don Bosco very well to think it strange that in this enumeration he does not clearly mention the religious component. Nor does he clearly delineate aesthetical education. He touches this aspect slightly when writing in the same treatise: "Gymnastics, music, reciting, acting and outings are a most efficacious means of promoting discipline and improving morality and health."¹ As we however are convinced that this factor was very important in the way that Don Bosco and his collaborators educated young people, we thought it would be worthwhile looking for theoretical and practical signs of this in their daily educational activities. We would limit our search to the period 1876-1884. This is the period in which not only the treatise (1877) but also "the Regulations for the Houses" were published. It is also the period in which three General Chapters took place and in which a vice-director represented Don Bosco in the Oratorio of Valdocco and several newly nominated directors were leading Salesian works outside Turin.

1. Continuity in the care for the appropriate celebration of feast days

At the beginning of the 1876-77 school year Giuseppe Lazzerio succeeded Michele Rua as vice-director of the Salesian work in Valdocco.² Don Lazzerio was in the habit of keeping a record of the events and activities of the Oratory in a notebook which has come to be designated as the "Diario dell'Oratorio di S. Fr. de Sales e di Don Bosco XII 1875 fino XII 1895 Don Lazzerio."³ In his

¹S. Giovanni Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*, Introduzione e testi critici a cura di Pietro Braido (Roma: LAS, 1985), 90/506-509.

²Michele Rua and Giuseppe Lazzerio were both born in 1837, and were both invited by Don Bosco to join the original group that formed the Salesian Society in 1859. Rua was a member of the first "Superior Chapter" (general council), and Lazzerio was added to the council by Don Bosco in 1874. Lazzerio remained a member until forced to resign for health reasons in 1897; Rua became Don Bosco's vicar, and he succeeded the saint as rector major in 1888. Lazzerio died in Mathi on March 7, 1910; Rua died at the Salesian motherhouse, one month later on April 6; Paul VI beatified him in 1973.

³For a study of this notebook/chronicle, and a critical edition of the text, see: José Manuel Prellezo, "L'Oratorio di Valdocco nel 'Diario' di Don Chiala e Don Lazzerio (1875-1888.1895): Introduzione e testi critici," in *Ricerche Storiche*

first year as director of the Oratory, 1876 Don Lazzerò listed the main religious and secular feasts to be celebrated. He included a rather detailed timetable indicating the activities to be organized and suggesting arrangements which would enable the festivities to be conducted in an orderly manner.⁴ These pages form a kind of appendix and seem to be a concise *vade mecum* which shows the care taken with feast days in the course of the pastoral and pedagogical work of the community. They also manifest a deep concern to encourage practices of piety and religious education in all aspects. It is obvious that this part of the educational program remains one of the chief objectives of the efforts of Don Bosco and his closest collaborators. The arrangements show a preventive attitude, organizational talent and realism. This enabled Giuseppe Lazzerò and his staff of course to avoid wasting time on issues which recurred every year and which had already devoured a lot of time and energy in the preceding period 1866-1876 under the leadership of Michael Rua.

On the other hand, such a *vade mecum* also carries with it a danger of routine. Were Don Bosco and his collaborators able to avoid this danger at Valdocco, Borgo San Martino, Lanzo, Varese, Massio, Sampierdarena, Valsalice, Nice (France), Bordighera and Trinità, in the newly founded houses in Argentina and in the institutes which were to be opened during this period (1876-1884)? As far as Valdocco is concerned, the answer seems to be fairly positive. First of all, the prescriptions and advice in the appendix are sometimes very concise and have to be developed in each practical situation. Secondly, a few feasts are omitted in the appendix. Finally, according to the *Diario*, in the meetings of the House Council a great deal of attention is devoted to the practical organization of coming feast days in spite of the draft and regulations at hand. So while the notes and outlines in the appendix contained concrete experiences, they did not exclude new experiences and their consequences.⁵ The *vade mecum* was a guide, not a set of norms cast in stone.

In this respect a remark made by Eugénio Ceria in reference to Don Bosco's name day celebration in 1878 is appropriate. "The program was practically the usual one that we all know. But filial piety which welled up in the

Salesiane 9.2 [17] (July-December 1990): 347-442 [afterwards cited as *RSS* (17)].

⁴José Manuel Prellezo, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento tra reale e ideale, documenti e testimonianze* (Roma: LAS, 1992), 104-122.

⁵Cf. *Ibid.*, 116/400-402, where Don Lazzerò himself weakens the force of the prescriptions by writing: "We cannot lay down fixed regulations, for every year there will be changes". See *ibid.*, 116/404-406; 66-67; 80/1065 and 1073; 82-84; 241/220; 250/464-465; 250/467-481; 250/483-485. In the dispositions of the *vade mecum* the *Exercise for a Happy Death* is mentioned for New-Year's Day (*ibid.*, 104/22), but no more on p. 120/533-538 nor in the additional regulations for 1879 (*ibid.*, 73/871-875). During the first General Chapter Don Bosco explains why it is so difficult to issue regulations, valid everywhere and forever [Marcel Verhulst, "I Verbali del Primo Capitolo Generale Salesiano 1877, Edizione critica," STD diss., Università Pontificia Salesiana, 1980, 121-123].

hearts of everyone gave the impression that it was something completely new each year."⁶

1.1 A large number of feast days

The number of feast days at Valdocco and other houses, which came into existence like clones, was certainly not small. The first was probably the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, the occasion of the autumn outing in October from Valdocco to Becchi-Castelnuovo. Then came All Saints day and the feast of St. Cecilia, the patron saint of singers and musicians. There followed the feast of Mary Immaculate on December 8th and Christmas. In January there were three special days, New Years Day, the Epiphany and St. Francis of Sales. In February Lent began with the usual celebration of Carnival time. March saw the feast of St. Joseph, the special patron of professional or technical students. Holy Week and Easter were undoubtedly the culminating point of the year. From 1868 onwards devotion to Mary reached its peak in the magnificent feast of Mary Help of Christians held in the recently constructed basilica of the same name. Yet its splendor and magnificence did not obscure Pentecost and the Sacred Heart.⁷ In June came St. Aloysius Gonzaga, the patron saint of the young, and St. John the Baptist, Don Bosco's name day. The feast of the Assumption on August 15th, the date on which Don Bosco's birthday was kept,⁸ apparently closed the list of the main feast days which had started at the beginning of the school year.⁹

1.2 The strong religious character of the preparation and celebration of such feast days

Each feast had its own well-determined place within a clearly defined hierarchy. This was determined on the one hand by ecclesiastical tradition, the liturgical calendar (for instance Christmas and Easter), and on the other by local preferences, like St. Francis de Sales, St. Joseph, Mary Help of Christians, St. John the Baptist.

⁶Eugenio Ceria, *Memorie biografiche del beato Giovanni Bosco*, vol. XIII: 1877-78 (Torino: SEI, 1932), 755/3 [afterwards cited as *MB*; the English-language edition is cited as *EBM* 13:579/6].

⁷Cf. *MB* 13:753/6 and 755; *EBM* 13:578/5 and 579/6.

⁸Though he was born on August 16, 1815. E. Ceria writes quite rightly "the presumed birthday of Don Bosco" and "As for Don Bosco's birthday, mistakenly kept on the feast of the Assumption" (*MB* 15:163/1 and 174/4; *EBM* 15:131/1 and 141/4). Cf. *Epistolario di san Giovanni Bosco*, a curadi Eugenio Ceria (Torino: SEI, 1958), 3:380/note 2 to the letter 1813.

⁹St. Stephen and St. Thomas Aquinas are left out of consideration. As to the former Don Lazzerio mentions that the feast was not celebrated every year with the same solemnity (*Prelezzo, Valdocco nell'Ottocento*, 120/ 527). And St. Thomas was celebrated only among the scholastic confreres (*ibid.*, 108/145-149).

Highlighting the religious aspect

The level of preparation and celebration corresponded with the importance of the feast day in the hierarchical scale. In the area of preparation, some surprising initiatives are found. In November 1877 Don Lazzerio rejoices at the positive results of a triduum in preparation for All Saints day. He had allowed this to coincide with three days of recollection recommended by Don Bosco for the beginning of the school year.¹⁰ In 1878 he even mentions the fact that for the nine days preceding All Saints day, Don Bosco had offered the boys a "little flower", i.e. a stimulating thought for each day.¹¹

If we consider all Don Bosco's experiences and the devotions he had so much at heart, as well as the general atmosphere of the 19th century, it is still easier to understand the novena for the feast of Mary Immaculate.¹² It can also be understood why Don Lazzerio, a fervent promoter of professional education, who held apprentices and those learning trades in great affection, noted in 1878 that the month of St. Joseph began on February 17th.¹³ It must have pleased him a great deal that the whole "house" had taken that month of preparation very seriously.¹⁴ This must also have been the case in 1879.¹⁵

Such short references may not at first sight seem very meaningful, but Don Lazzerio thought they were worth mentioning. This means that in his eyes, and in the eyes of his staff, the spiritual preparation for such feast days had considerable pastoral and pedagogical impact. Religious formation and praxis were essential facets of education and provided its foundation.

Maximum sacramental participation

As regards the celebrating of feast days, it was important for Don Lazzerio that many people, not only boys of the institute but also adults and youngsters from outside, took part in the liturgical ceremonies and received the sacraments. He was very happy when crowds of people, sometimes more than expected, were present and nearly all received Holy Communion.¹⁶ Don Bosco, and also Don Ceria, even years later, were just as happy.¹⁷ A moderate or small

¹⁰Prelezzo, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento*, 60/517-519; 60/512-515. Cf. *MB* 13:66/2; *EBM* 13:47/2.

¹¹Prelezzo, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento*, 71/822.

¹²*Ibid.*, 72/844.

¹³*Ibid.*, 63/613.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 64/635.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 76/968-972.

¹⁶A few examples: *RSS* (17) 373/218-219; 374/270; 375/303; 377/352-353; 382/516-517; 383/552; 384/571; 385/605; 393/822-826; 393-394; 395/ 882-883; 407/1261-1265. The latter concerns Christmas 1883.

¹⁷Don Bosco himself in a letter to Giovanni Cagliero (*Epistolario*, 3:65/4); letter to Don Rua (*Epistolario*, 3:146/4°). Eugenio Ceria in *MB* 13:747-748, where

attendance disappointed him, even if it was caused by unusually cold weather.¹⁸ A smaller number of communicants, when there was apparently no reason for this, left a feeling of pain, discomfort and failure.¹⁹

However pleased they were with the participation of great numbers of their own pupils and of people from outside, they continued to respect the personal liberty of all. During the first General Chapter it was decided that practices of piety should be recommended but not insisted upon.²⁰ Prudence is particularly necessary in the case of boys coming from less pious families or families where religion is never spoken of or practiced, and where they never pray.²¹ As regards the day boys, the final text of the Acts of the General Chapter is still reserved on this point: "Day boys will be invited to receive the sacraments."²² In the short treatise on the Preventive System, also dated 1877, Don Bosco expressed himself very clearly: "Never demand that the youngsters receive the sacraments frequently, nor oblige them to do so. Rather, make it easier for them."²³

This must undoubtedly have been a delicate task. Recommending, inviting, offering opportunities, putting a favorable light on "the beauty, greatness (grandeur) and holiness of faith" may in certain circumstances prove burdensome and displeasing to some boys.²⁴

Liturgical Celebrations

True to the example given by Don Bosco they continued at Valdocco to invite bishops, canons and other religious personalities to officiate at the Eucharist and at Vespers with Benediction. To balance this, a prominent lay person was also invited each time to preside over the whole feast day.²⁵

We are never provided with a direct explanation about the reason why these prominent people were invited. Yet we take for granted that by doing so,

the number of "five thousand Holy Communions" is mentioned, and 750/4; *EBM* 13:574/2 and 576/2.

¹⁸RSS (17) 394/856; 401/ 1063-1064.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 407/1273-1275.

²⁰Verhulst, "Verbali del Primo Capitol Generale," 105-106; 282-283. Thus they accepted Don Bosco's original text with only a few amendments. Cf. Verhulst, *ibid.*, 53/1. , 86.

²¹*Ibid.*, 282-283; 56/5.

²²OE XXIX, 430/2.

²³G. Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo* , 85-86.

²⁴Cf. Verhulst, *I Verballi*, 106/125-132; OE XXIX, 430-431 and G. Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo*, 86/457-458.

²⁵Ecclesiastical superiors: RSS (17) 375/290; 378/374; 379/430; 380/448; 389/718-722; 395/890; 401/1060-1061; 401-402. Prominent lay people: RSS (17) 376/319; 380/452 (recommended by Don Bosco in *Epistolario*, 3:183/PS. to letter 1600); 395/891; 401/1071; 408/1303. Cf. *MB* 15:171/2 and 552/2, where Frenchmen are concerned each time; *EBM* 15:138/3 and 459/4.

Don Bosco and his collaborators wanted to express their gratitude to sympathetic benefactors, both men and women. At the same time they were able to make known the results of their educative work to friendly authorities, and to strengthen already existing ties of friendship and to create new ones. The presence of prominent lay or religious personalities could also yield pedagogically interesting results. Much must have depended on how these prominent people behaved among the boys. Through frankness, easy contact, words of interest, praise and encouragement, these visitors could communicate to the boys an impression of genuine interest in the daily running of the institute and in the well-being of the boys living there, and thus deserve their appreciation and gratitude. The presence and interest of these prominent guests could also develop the feeling of self-confidence among the boys: "What we do and achieve in the field of singing and music, both inside and outside, is worth seeing and listening to. Our work in class, study and workshop is worth while, and we youngsters are appreciated by important people."

For Don Lazzero, and certainly not for him alone, the gift of simple, appropriate and brief words played an important part in this. His displeasure with high-sounding and lengthy sermons is frequently evident in his notes.²⁶ He prefers a short letter from Don Bosco, especially when Don Bosco mentions that Leo XIII advised the boys to be firm in their faith and to live according to it without human respect.²⁷ The liturgical ceremonies were intended primarily for the boys, especially for the professional pupils. They should therefore be conducted so that the boys could remember them as enjoyable, pleasant and attractive, and look forward to the following feast.²⁸

That is why it was important to decorate the basilica for feast days with flowers, flags, hangings and brilliant lighting. Costly vestments were used and the choir sang unaccompanied or with instruments. No wonder that the boys put their money together to buy "two or three tapestries for the church" for Don Bosco's name day in 1877, and that the past pupils offered "a prie-dieu and two dalmatics, a red one and a white one" in 1878.²⁹

For songs and music they were often content to use compositions written by confreres such as Giovanni Cagliari and Giuseppe Dogliani, and by the highly esteemed music teacher Giovanni De Vecchi, to whom Don Bosco had

²⁶RSS (17) 380/463; 388/669-671; 406/1227-1228.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 386/633-634. Cf. *Epistolario*, 3:322/1.

²⁸Cf. *MB* 12:136/2; *EBM* 12:108/5. From the accounts of a discussion during the first General Chapter it appears quite clearly that everything in fact always concerned the boys, in other words that the boys were always in the center. The discussion is about the theater in the Salesian houses ("il teatrino", i.e. theater in the larger sense of the word). Don Bosco's idea is: "Well, instead of providing innocent distraction and amusement, it (the theater) mostly produces a contrary effect. (...) The theater is for our boys and not for those people from outside" (Verhulst, "Verballi del Primo Capitolo Generale," 203/2). The same holds good with regard to liturgical ceremonies.

²⁹RSS (18)153-154; RSS (17) 389-390.

entrusted the band in 1864.³⁰ In Don Lazzero's eyes the care of all this was a matter of faithfulness to the tradition of Valdocco and a declaration of clear pastoral and pedagogical objectives. It also sprang from a developed aesthetic sense that sometimes led him to make critical comments.³¹ He was himself an excellent, much admired and confident singer.³² He appreciated good public speaking, was enthusiastic about décor and liked crowds. He describes with pleasure, sometimes at length, sometimes briefly, what he sees, hears, feels and admires in the institute and outside on the occasion of feast day celebrations.³³ The enthusiasm and talent of Don Lazzero and his collaborators could not but influence the creativity and generosity of boys and staff alike.

During this period the *Diario* makes little mention of altar servers and says absolutely nothing about the sodalities.³⁴ However, we may reasonably assume that at Valdocco these associations were active and that they continued to make every effort to carry out the decision of the General Chapter which asserts: "The divine services... greatly contribute to fostering piety and good moral behavior among the pupils. Among the pious organizations we find... the Altar Servers' Guilds, the Sodalities of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, the Blessed Sacrament, St. Joseph and others."³⁵ Through Don Bonetti, Don Bosco orders Don Lazzero in April 1877 to pay attention to these and if possible also to the Sodality of the Immaculate Conception.³⁶ A year later G. Lazzero must have notified Don Bosco, who was in Rome, of the satisfactory celebration of the

³⁰See Giovanni De Vecchi in Prelezo, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento*, 50/note to line 217; 57/435; 80/1079-1076; 211/333. Giovanni Cagliero in *RSS* (17) 377/363-368; 378/380; 383/541; 383/552-553; 384/580; 388/680-682; 389/721-722. Giuseppe Dogliani (lay Salesian) in *RSS* (17) 373/223; 380/435-436. Cf. Prelezo, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento*, 99/note to line 1661. Also see *Epistolario*, 3:440/3, in which Fr. Joseph Ronchail writes about a performance by the boys of La Navarre in France. See further Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica II* (Zürich: PAS, 1969), 332-333.

³¹*RSS* (17) 383/535-537.

³²*Ibid.* 373/244; 374/261; 385/600-601.

³³*Ibid.*, 368/111-112; 372/204-211; 373/231-244; 374-375; 377/364-365 (a sample of eloquence); 382/502-503; 383/552-553; 386/627 (a brilliant funeral oration by Fr. Cerruti; 388/683-689 (Eugenio Ceria even changes Giuseppe Lazzero's "imponente" on the occasion of the feast of Mary Help of Christians on May 24th 1878 into "imponentissimo" in *MB* 13:751/2; *EBM* 13:576/3); 390/734; 399/1004. 32 *RSS* (17) 380/458 (where the altar servers are perhaps included in the "etc., etc."); 390/745; 393/835.

³⁴*RSS* (17) 380/458 (where the altar servers are perhaps included in the "etc., etc."); 390/745; 393/835.

³⁵*OE XXIX*, 429-430. Cf. Regulations for the Oratory in *OE XXIX*, 75-76. Also see Don Rua's account of the Conference of St. Francis de Sales in February 1877.

³⁶*Epistolario*, 3:164-165. Cf. *Epistolario*, 3:7/6 and 135/8. Also see *OE XXIX*, 467.

feast of St. Joseph by the professional students and of the part which the professional students played in it.³⁷

For these organizations the principle of "recommending, inviting, no force, free entry" holds good.³⁸ During this period, as previously, they must have been invited to take part in processions.³⁹

Taking all this into account, we see that a strong accent was placed on the religious aspects of feast day celebrations, but the matter did not stop there. The joy and happiness which we know from his letters Don Bosco wishes his boys to experience on feast days, stem from other sources as well.

Secular aspects of feast days

Feast day meals

Don Bosco often expresses his concern for the health of his boys and Salesians. It is no secret that he was not always able to give them the food they should have had, but on feast days he made a special effort and wanted those with this responsibility in his houses to make similar efforts. Sometimes he suggests this tactfully. He does so in a letter to the rector, teachers and pupils at Lanzo, as follows: "On this occasion (i.e. of his visit) I want us to rejoice in body and in spirit, and to show the world how we can be happy in body and soul without offending God."⁴⁰ A careful listener needs no further explanations. Sometimes he is very clear, as in a letter from Rome to Don Rua, probably with his own name day in mind. He writes: "Tell them all that it is my wish that we should make a happy feast of it, in the Lord and also in the kitchen."⁴¹ If the date of a feast has to be shifted a little, he does not want the boys to suffer as far as food is concerned: "What is postponed should not be omitted altogether."⁴² On the eve of his name day at the end of June 1877 he assures the boys that the next day they will have a real treat from the kitchen, indeed they have the best cook in Turin. Care should be taken that the choir-boys should be able to sing in the evening about a "tremendous feast" rather than a "little feast."⁴³

In this area Don Lazzerio is less explicit. On the occasion of Don Bosco's name day he writes that "at noon, they had a separate meal for Don Bosco, the

³⁷*Epistolario*, 3, see: *Lettera* 1748. Cf. *RSS* (17) 386/635-638.

³⁸See notes 20 and 22.

³⁹Cf. *RSS* (17) 369/136-137; 379/404-405; 380/450.

⁴⁰*Epistolario*, 3:5/4

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 193/1.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 193/6: "quod differtur non aufertur". When Don Bosco wishes a fine carnival, he must have thought of the body and the soul (*Epistolario*, 3:309/4). Cf. *Epistolario*, 3:440/1: "I want to make them very happy with a solemn feast that must in a particular way extend itself as far as the kitchen and the refectory."

⁴³*MB* 13:149/2. In Italian the pun is on the words "festina" and "festona", both of which happen to be feminine. This pun is lost in the English translation.

boys and a few guests."⁴⁴ We may suppose that there was something special for all of them. That is why it must have given him great pain when he learned that for the long outing a distinction was made between the academic and professional students. He describes the distinction in detail. The professional students got only a half day and consequently only a snack at four. The others got a whole day which included a lunch and snack. He gives details of what each group received.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, he had words of praise for Don Leveratto, the bursar, who "knew how to provide for everything."⁴⁶

On Christmas day 1881 he is indignant, actually quite furious. As that feast is drawing near Don Bosco communicates the "strict order", which for Don Lazzero was incomprehensible and unacceptable, "to cease giving salami, biscuits or sweets at table on feast days. Even for singers, musicians, and actors, drinks and biscuits are forbidden." Don Bosco had taken this decision at the instigation of "a narrow minded individual he completely trusted." What disgusted Don Lazzero most was that in this way a twenty-five year old tradition was wiped out by one stroke of the pen. This tradition was, in fact, included in part in the famous *vade mecum*.⁴⁷ It is understandable that obedience was extremely difficult that Christmas. It is hard to imagine that he could have been content to "put up with it for God's sake."⁴⁸

This is all the more unthinkable because it concerned a tradition much appreciated by the boys which could make a big contribution to the success of the feast. After all, a feast in Don Bosco's educational system was intended to be for "body and soul". Moreover it would have been difficult to communicate such bad news to the boys. Whether Don Bosco ever changed his decision cannot be deduced from Giuseppe Lazzero's notes. For almost a year he did not write a single note in the *Diario*. Even in the minutes of the House Council, nothing was noted until mid-June 1882.⁴⁹ His disappointment and resentment must have been considerable.

⁴⁴RSS (17) 390/735-736.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 405/1189-1211.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 405/1212-1214.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 440/521. He also mentions them for other feasts, among others for carnival (RSS (17) 426-427 and 441-442).

⁴⁸For the whole paragraph see RSS (17) 406/1243-1253. To keep this in context, it should be mentioned that already in September 1877 the General Chapter had decided that no little extras were to be given to those involved in theater (*OE* XXIX, 434-435). Cf. Verhulst, "Verballi del Primo Capitolo Generale," 231-232. But just these explicit words "(...)" and consequently to be avoided" (or "to be dropped") are lacking in the Regulations for the Houses that were published in November 1877. And the title of that little chapter "What is to be excluded" does not unequivocally neutralize this omission.

⁴⁹Cf. RSS (17) 407 and RSS (19) 274. At any rate the situation seems to be more tense than at the beginning of 1877. At that time, it was about a theatrical performance, for which Giuseppe Lazzero was criticized (RSS (17) 376/312-313 and especially *Epistolario*, 3:136/Lettera 1543). A year later, in the beginning of

Sports, games and outings

Don Lazzero does not write anything about recreational games on feast days. The "Guide" must have been sufficient, as for instance on Shrove Tuesday.⁵⁰ Even the fireworks which Don Rua liked to write about in the years 1866-76 are mentioned only once, and in passing.⁵¹ Yet in 1881 questions must have been raised about the customary way of celebrating Carnival. A meeting of educators indicates this and decides that the traditional "pot breaking" will take place after lunch.⁵² It isn't mentioned whether walks took place on such feast days or what other activities were held.

Theatrical performances

Don Lazzero provides more extensive notes about which theatrical performances take place and what is sung, both in church and outside. This is certainly a matter of personal preference. But it must also have to do with the fact that the theater has not only a recreational function but also an educational one, especially for professional students. Theatrical performances had already been criticized prior to Don Lazzero's arrival. According to Eugenio Ceria, in 1876 Don Bosco had summoned two lay Salesians and given vent to his feelings. The theater no longer breathes the spirit which he desires. He wants them to perform simple plays, morally beyond reproach, and these need to be inspected beforehand.⁵³ It comes as no surprise that Don Bosco drafts extensive regulations on this matter. The question was settled in the course of the first General Chapter in September 1877.⁵⁴

Don Bosco does not object to performances that provoke laughter, at any rate not at Carnival time.⁵⁵ On this Don Lazzero is in perfect agreement. Even after the General Chapter he thought that amusement and exuberant laughter might not be out of place from time to time.⁵⁶ In general, however, serious plays predominated. Often they dealt with the lives of saints such as St. Louis of France, St. Pancras, St. Mammes, and St. Cecilianus as an image of St.

March, Don Bosco inquires of Don Rua "how is Don Lazzero's mood now?" Had anything unpleasant happened again in January or February 1878?

⁵⁰Cf. *RSS* (17) 405/1189-1214.

⁵¹*RSS* (17) 389/727.

⁵²Prellezo, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento*, 246/366-367. In this game pots are placed on a plank. Participants are blindfolded and try to smash the pots to pieces with a stick. Our throwing-booths look like a variant of it.

⁵³*MB* 13:30-31; *EBM* 13:15-16.

⁵⁴*OE* XXIX, 432-437 and 146-151. Cf. Verhulst, "Verbali del Primo Capitolo Generale," 231-232.

⁵⁵*Epistolario*, 3:138/2°.

⁵⁶*RSS* (17) 384/587. Short farces too on Twelfth Night (Epiphany) 1877 (*RSS* (17) 376/311) and a melodrama or farce in 1880 (*RSS* (17) 401/1075-1076).

Cecilia.⁵⁷ Such performances of course taught some lesson or emphasized some aspect of good behavior. Some plays were written by the institute's own staff, among others the lay Salesians Peter Barale and M. De Vecchi. This enhanced their prestige and authority among the boys when the performances went well and raised the general morale.

Both comedies or farces and tragedies were popular at Valdocco, and also probably in other Salesian institutes. The size of the audience in Turin was so great that some means had to be found to limit the numbers or cope with them in a safer and more orderly fashion.⁵⁸

When the professional students performed well Don Lazzero felt particularly happy.⁵⁹ This was also true when they put on an entertainment in honor of St. Joseph or Pope Pius IX, who had died recently.⁶⁰

Don Bosco himself looked forward eagerly to theatrical performances and recitals, and was pleased when these were successful. According to Lazzero, Don Bosco recognized the enthusiasm to practice Christian virtues which found expression in the noble ideas included in speeches made on the occasion of his birthday in 1878.⁶¹ Don Bosco was certainly not naïve in his words of thanks that evening. "I must admit" he said, according to the *Memorie Biografiche*, "that just now a flush of pride surged through me, not so much because of titles and praises you lavished on me—what you said and wrote is pure rhetoric, you know, better called hyperbole, your way of telling me what you would like me to be—but for another reason.... What good boys I have! They will stay that way. Indeed it is impossible that someone who is grateful should be lacking in other virtues and that one who knows virtues should neglect practicing them. This thought gave rise to my sense of pride.... But there was another reason that I am very happy, namely that this year our boys are generally much better... I also want to thank all who took part in this celebration with singing, band selections, speeches, recited poems or participated in any other way."⁶² The rest of his closing speech contained encouraging news from the missions and an appeal to be missionary Christians. Words such as these in the context of a successful celebration must have had a positive influence on the educational climate.⁶³

⁵⁷RSS (17) 376/322; 384/579-580; 395/874; 395/892; 410/1361.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, (17) 397-398. Don Lazzero mentions rather laconically that the archbishop of Turin attended a theatrical performance in February 1879. It is understandable when one considers the circumstances under which this happened. Cf. *MB* 14:232-234, *EBM* 14. Amused or vexed himself, he notes that the numerous babies present were an essential part of the distraction. Also RSS (17) 401/1075-1081. Cf. RSS (19) 269/342-343.

⁵⁹RSS (17) 373/224-227.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 377/344; 386/636; 385/612.

⁶¹The anticipation of it in *Epistolario*, 3:380/5. The performance itself: RSS (17) 390/755-759.

⁶²*MB* 13:756/3; *EBM* 13:580-581.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 757; *ibid.*, 581.

Music and singing

The boys' choir was allowed to perform during the solemn services in the basilica and during theatrical performances and recitals in the evening. It sometimes contained seventy or more members.⁶⁴ From time to time the *Diario* records exactly what the choir has sung during Benediction in the evening.⁶⁵ The magnificent performance of a Mass for six voices was a high point not only for Don Lazzero but for all the others as well, educators, boys, friends and benefactors present. Such successes contributed to the good name and morale of the institute. Don Lazzero mentions the fact that they are allowed to perform with famous singers and that they are invited time and again by bishops and noblemen to give of their best elsewhere as well. Whenever possible he himself wholeheartedly took part.⁶⁶

Unfortunately, all the singers could not participate every time. Usually only twenty or thirty were able to do so. This must have caused some disappointment among those who had to stay home. On the other hand it provided an additional encouragement to the boys to accept the sometimes long hours spent rehearsing. A success like that at Strambino where they sang on the occasion of the consecration of two altars must have left an unforgettable impression. The parishioners of the village accompanied them to the station with the local brass band and the noise of firecrackers.⁶⁷

The choir was also appreciated for its participation in theatrical performances, academies, prize days, the reception of prominent people or of Don Bosco himself when he came home after a long absence.⁶⁸

Such occasions were ideal for allowing the band to show its ability. This was particularly significant, given the objections of the Archbishop of Turin over the use of instrumental music in church during the celebrations for Mary Help of Christians in 1875, Don Bosco directed that the band play only at outdoor events and entertainments.⁶⁹ The band usually alternated with the choir, or sometimes played alone. The young musicians welcomed guests in a festive manner, contributed to the creation of the right atmosphere during outings and brightened up the celebration of feast days in the institute. They too were al-

⁶⁴RSS (17) 372-373; 388/681-682.

⁶⁵RSS (17) 378/378-380; 383/539-541; 382/525; 383/551-552; 388/680-686; 395/894-895 (cf. MB 13:751/2; EBM 13:576/3). Also see 373/244; 374/261; 385/600-601.

⁶⁶RSS (17) 372/204 and 208-210; 373/219-221; 383/538-539; 375/292-299; 378/399-400; 379/402 and 406-410; 381/473 and 492-495 (Don Lazzero being present); 385/614-615; 386/617 and 619-628; 393/819.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 381/492-495. ⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 376/311; 379-380; 384/580; 390/739 and 748; 395/893.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 376/311; 379-380; 384/580; 390/739 and 748; 395/893.

⁶⁹*Epistolario*, 3:82-83.

lowed to perform elsewhere for the band was successful and was often invited to accompany processions with music.⁷⁰

These opportunities for students to engage actively and creatively in singing and reciting, theater and music helped them to appreciate and develop their sense of beauty. This was true both in the religious and secular spheres. Actors, singers and musicians contributed to making feast days high points of religious experience and also occasions of great joy. All this responded fully to the pastoral and educational objectives of Don Bosco and his closest collaborators. It contributed to the quality of life at Valdocco and later also to church and social life when the choristers and musicians joined parish and local associations.

2. The aesthetic element in education: the meaning of aesthetic formation in the mind of Don Bosco

However splendidly and enjoyably feastdays were celebrated in Valdocco and the other houses⁷¹, Don Bosco nevertheless felt the necessity of pointing out to Giuseppe Lazzeri the fact that on such days things may not always go according to plan, and much may happen that will mar the pleasure of the occasion.⁷² After all, there can be no rose without thorns. Don Bosco had accumulated enough experience to be aware of this even with regard to the theater. When he used the expression "that accursed theater" in a letter to Don Rua, the phrase did not come out of the blue.⁷³ According to the chronicles dating from the period before 1870, something always went amiss, either before or after or even during the performances. Thus, for instance, boys allowed to act, might "become conceited" and transgress the rules. That's why they should never be given exaggerated praise for a good performance. They should be given no special privileges nor are they to be left unassisted. To prevent undesirable, harmful effects, the cutting out of certain unsuitable scenes was strongly advocated.⁷⁴ Indeed, it would appear that the theater more than once came under fire for a variety of reasons. There was, too, the danger of the young actors developing a liking for the stage, and perhaps wanting to visit and perform in public theaters.⁷⁵

⁷⁰For the whole of it: *RSS* (17) 370/155; 376/317-318; 377/368; 379/402-405; 379/426; 381/473; 382/502; 387/657-658; 389/730-731; 390/739; 392/809-810; 399/1003; 405/1205. Also *MB* 13:761; *EBM* 13:584.

⁷¹For the Oratory in Milan e.g. *MB* 13:145-148, *EBM* 13:109-111. In Sampierdarena in *MB* 14:790-793; *EBM* 14: These pages (document 50) were omitted in the English version.

⁷²*EIII*, 324/Lettera 1748.

⁷³See the preceding section.

⁷⁴*MB* 14:839-840 and 847; not translated into English.

⁷⁵*OE XXIX*, 434/2 and 147/4. Verhulst, "Verbali del Primo Capitolo Generale," 348/302-303. Don Bosco had already been confronted with that danger years before. Still he urged on his past pupils in Turin to start with a brass band. But in

No wonder then, we might conclude, that the 'teatrino,' (i.e. theatrical performances, and musical recitals, etc.) was given serious consideration during the first General Chapter. And no wonder that, later on, a special appendix was devoted to it in the Regulations for the Houses, some of which have been quoted above. If it is surprising that the theatrical performances were brought up for discussion, it is even more surprising that so much time and energy were spent on the subject. Given the problems that they regularly engendered, would it not have been easier to simply abandon the idea altogether?

According to Don Bosco and many of his collaborators this would have meant "throwing away the baby with the bathwater." In the opinion of the supporters of the 'teatrino', foremost among them Don Bosco, occasional disorders or disadvantages could not outweigh the positive aspects that really existed. Eugenio Ceria illustrates this by means of a pithy anecdote. He doesn't date the occurrence precisely. Neither does he communicate the name and surname of the person involved, but he hits at the heart of the matter. About 1881 a French religious who had founded an oratory, came to meet Don Bosco in Marseille. He attached great educational importance to music in his dealings with young people and enumerated its many advantages to Don Bosco. Don Bosco listened with evident approval. This, however, did not fully satisfy his visitor, for he also had some misgivings about his use of music. He could envisage some "serious drawbacks: dissipation, and the danger that the boys might perform in theaters, restaurants, dance halls or during demonstrations." Don Bosco continued to listen and finally asked: "Which is the better, to be or not to be? A Sunday oratory without music is a body without a soul."⁷⁶

This does not mean the positive aspects are always mentioned or explained clearly and decisively. The Acts of the first General Chapter imposed guidelines that heavily restricted conditions for giving theatrical performances, but continues to give a positive assessment: "If the 'teatrino' is conducted in accordance with the rules of Christian morality, it can greatly benefit the young."⁷⁷ Unfortunately this statement does not clarify matters for us; there is no explanation of the phrase "greatly benefit." The text does not identify the benefits or how they will be recognized. This statement sounds nearly as frustrating as the sentence in the report of another session of that Chapter: "For a few years now the 'teatrino' has no longer achieved the objectives and the aims we had in mind when we introduced it into our houses."⁷⁸ The members of the Chapter must have been familiar with the original aims and objectives, which

the rules he wrote for them, he clearly stipulated that "they were never to perform in public theaters" (*MB* 11:229/2; *EBM* 11: 210/3).

⁷⁶*MB* 15:57/3; *EBM* 15:41/2. Rightly Eugenio Ceria wrote that "he (Don Bosco) realized that in this world one can abuse everything, even science. Some people do not use it to construct but to destroy". Literally: "non *ad aedificationem*, ma *ad destructionem*." See: Eugenio Ceria, *Annali della società salesiana, dalle origini alla morte di S. Giovanni Bosco 1841-1888* (Torino: SEI, 1941), 701.

⁷⁷Verhulst, "Verbali del Primo Capitolo Generale," 347, 268-269.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 231/93-94. See there 203/200-201.

is why undoubtedly they saw no need to enumerate them. A few months later, when the decisions of the Chapter are published, they would be more explicit: "The 'teatrino' can be beneficial to the youngsters only if its target is their 'amusement, education and instruction,' and only if this is done in a way as morally justifiable as possible".⁷⁹ This returns us to Don Bosco's original intentions as he had announced them in an earlier address in 1871. "As I see it," he said, "the basis of theatrical performances ('teatrini') should be entertainment and education."⁸⁰ In other words they should amuse and instruct.

2.1 The 'teatrino' should offer young people entertainment and amusement

Directives, such as those used before and during the first General Chapter, unavoidably lead to the conclusion that in Don Bosco's institutes music had to play both a pastoral and moralizing role. Yet for Don Bosco entertainment and amusement come foremost. This is apparent from one of Don Bosco's letters and from Don Lazzerio's diary, from which we quoted earlier.⁸¹ Moreover in the exchange of ideas during the first General Chapter outspoken criticism was leveled at the 'teatrino': plays and recitals because they no longer provided the entertainment and satisfaction (i.e. the pleasure) they gave in former days.⁸² That is why the articles of the Chapter reiterate yet again the directives to be followed. Pleasing the boys, cheering them up, amusing them: these objectives are unequivocally stated in the document.⁸³

These same objectives continue to be emphasized in various other articles of the document. Thus a director should not forget that the 'teatrino' should be "a means of providing recreation and education for the boys," and the person in charge of the theater must take care that the plays, recitals and self-written texts "are acceptable and of a kind to provide diversion and amusement".⁸⁴ Particular

⁷⁹OE XXIX, 432. Cf. the wording of the compromise in OE XXIX, 146/1. Here a less literal translation has been preferred.

⁸⁰See MB 6:106; EBM 6:646: regulations for dramatics 1.; MB 10:1057/2 and 1059; EBM 10:461-462 and 463/5. Cf. Pietro Braidò, *L'Esperienza pedagogica di Don Bosco* (Roma: LAS, 1988), 149.

⁸¹Cf. foot-notes 55 and 56 in the preceding section.

⁸²Verhulst, *I Verbali* . . ., 203/203-204 and 231/93-94; 231/100-101.

⁸³OE XXIX 432/4 and 146/1.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 435/3 ("sollievo" means relief in the daily strain of work); 436/4 (literally "ricreare e divertire"). Cf. *ibid.* 148/4 and 149/6. Only once does the objective "instruction" precede the notion "diversion" in an article of those texts in *ibid.*, 433/1 and 146/2. In the rules for teaching music in 1877 "utile sollievo" (useful relief) or meaningful change is mentioned. Especially for boys learning a trade (Josip Gregur, "Ringens um die Kirchenmusik, die cäcilianische Reform in Italien und ihre Rezeption bei den salesianern Don Boscos," Ph.D. diss., University of Graz (Austria), 1995, 185/footnote 123). As to these rules, see also Prellezo, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento*, 208/251-252.

care should be taken in "the choice of extracts: they should be selected from good authors, poetry, fables, history and comedy, ensuring that Christian moral values are instilled".⁸⁵ The same criteria apply to music and the choice of songs, which must be selected so that "they entertain and amuse".⁸⁶ "Entertainment and pleasure" are even called "the cardinal point,"⁸⁷ i.e. the heart of the matter.

2.2 The 'teatrino' should also educate

Too much emphasis, however, should not be placed on the theater as a means of keeping the pupils amused and occupied: nor should the creating of a joyful atmosphere be the sole purpose. An accompanying clause states a further objective: "Theater should provide entertainment, certainly, but at the same time promote education and instill moral values".⁸⁸

2.2.1 The contents should be adapted to the boys' age and understanding and must also be both morally correct and constructive.

How visitors are to be "convinced that this type of entertainment (drama, music and singing) is advantageous for the boys" is not fully explained.⁸⁹ At least, not in a direct and positive way. To make them a worthwhile exercise demands one undeniable condition: the contents of plays and recitals should not be beyond the boys' intellectual grasp. "What is performed must have meaning for the boys." Moreover, nothing untoward or shocking should happen or be said. No "cruel, revengeful or immoral characters," even if they undergo a change of heart as the play develops. "No dueling, no shooting, no violent threatening." There was to be no use of language that in ordinary life sounded "ill-bred and

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 433-434.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 434/1.

⁸⁷Verhulst, "Verbali del Primo Capitolo Generale," 203-205.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 434/1 and 147/2. For "at the same time" the Italian has in the final text *ad un tempo*. Cf. Verhulst, "Verbali del Primo Capitolo Generale," 348/294-295. In his own way Eugenio Ceria expressed this in 1941 as follows: "The main reason (why Don Bosco esteemed music so highly) has to be sought in the impact on the hearts and the imagination of the boys he ascribed to it. He intended to refine them (*ingentilirli*), to educate them and to make them better" (Ceria E., *Annali*, 691/1). But Ceria also drew attention to the fact that Don Bosco's ideas on the role of music are to be considered in "their connection with the meaning he attributed to the joy", (the joyful atmosphere) in his institutes or houses (*Ibid.*, 692/3). As to singing and music does suit the testimony of Alberto Caviglia: "Don Bosco was very fond of music. To him music meant merriness, prayer and education" (Caviglia, A., *Don Bosco e la musica*, 1929 according to Gregur, "Ringens um die Kirchenmusik," 180/footnote 91).

⁸⁹*OE XXIX*, 433/1 and 146/2.

vulgar." The impressionability of young minds is stressed, as is the danger that they could be adversely influenced by certain unsuitable scenes.⁹⁰

In order to ensure that these safeguards are carried out, Don Bosco and the members of the General Chapter lay a great responsibility on the shoulders of the rectors and later also of the provincials. "Directors and other superiors are requested to send the texts of the plays... to their provincial. The latter will draw up a general list of all the plays known and performed, censor those newly sent in and add them to the list, if they are considered suitable...."⁹¹ Suitable in this case does not only mean correct and blameless in connection with the virtue of chastity but also possessing a morally constructive influence in general.

Don Bosco must have been very pleased with the initiative of Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, who, in 1877, wanted to write a play about Patagonia under the title "Una Speranza" (A hope) or "The Past and Future of Patagonia."⁹²

Aesthetic and general formation

Aesthetic qualities are unquestionably present.

Yet a morally and pedagogically justified theme, despite being instructive and edifying in its purpose, is not sufficient for Don Bosco. He first of all gives Don Lemoyne enthusiastic encouragement. He calls the text sent to him "his masterpiece" (as far as it went) and something new that will certainly be successful. But at the same time he gives him a few hints that might have been taken from a guide for playwrights. They concern the drama as a form of art. Don Lemoyne should make the action easier (less complicated), simplify the scenery and decrease the number of actors. He should also heighten the dramatic tension, which seems to slacken somewhat in the third and fourth acts. He further advises him to combine the fourth and fifth acts, so as to retain the suspense and prevent an anticlimax. Don Bosco apparently prefers a short, exciting play to a classical but long-winded drama of five acts. When Don Lemoyne has revised his play, Don Bosco will be pleased to reread and reassess it.⁹³ There is no doubt that Don Bosco wanted the pace of the play and the un-

⁹⁰For the whole paragraph see *ibid.*, 433 and 146-147. Verhulst, "Verbali del Primo Capitolo Generale," 231/97 and 347/279-284.

⁹¹*OE* XXIX, 435/4 and 148-149. Verhulst, "Verbali del Primo Capitolo Generale," 204/209-212.

⁹²Cf. *Epistolario*, 3:152. Giovanni Battista Lemoyne (1839-1916) joined the Salesian Society in 1864 and served as director of Lanzo, and director of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians before coming to Valdocco as secretary of the Superior Chapter in 1883. He was Don Bosco's first official biographer.

⁹³*Ibid.*

raveling of the plot to captivate the boys. He wanted them to find the play "beautiful," i.e. exciting and enjoyable.

It should be understood that his deep concern with the moral and the pedagogical did not preclude other interests. He was not averse to using the 'teatrino' for propaganda purposes, as is revealed in another letter to Don Lemoyne a few weeks later, where he hints: "It would be great if the play about Patagonia could be performed on the occasion of the Argentineans' visit to Turin".⁹⁴ Whether the performance really took place cannot be gathered with certainty from Giuseppe Lazzeri's annotations, nor from Eugenio Ceria's ample narration either.⁹⁵

The above-mentioned letter to Don Lemoyne reveals something of Don Bosco's aesthetic experience and of his basic insights. For him, a writer of plays, poems and short stories, literary and dramatic excellence has apparently less to do with observing poetical rules, using grandiloquent, measured phrases and dazzling scenery than with pace and tension and simple but expressive language. The same preference for realism and simplicity is to be found in the advice given to the person responsible for the 'teatrino'. In the training of young actors, he should take care they don't speak in an affected way, but they should articulate well and act confidently with natural gestures.⁹⁶ Easy and natural acting are essential in Don Bosco's view if the audience is to enjoy the performance.

Well-conducted rehearsals have of course great aesthetic and pedagogical value for those taking part. They inculcate a consciousness of voice projection and modulation, of sound-rhythms and body-movements, or help to develop them. They reinforce self-confidence, mastery of the language, team spirit which, combined with talent and good-will, produce the actor. Well-acted plays on their side are aesthetically pleasing and better able to get their message across to the audience, who are both spectators and critics.

An aesthetical education for the many, not for the élite

As a rule, Don Bosco and his staff did not aim primarily at perfect productions, or excellent individual performances. They stressed the importance of offering every young person the chance to shine, and thus advocate frequent changes of actors, so that no one individual, however good he might be, would always be given the star part. True, the quality of the production might suffer a little, but sharing opportunities would engender greater enthusiasm, and the young people would enjoy it all the more. Admittedly, the task of the person responsible will be harder, but if several teachers are co-opted into discovering and encouraging new talent among the young people, this would eventually prove to be

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 183/Lettera 160/6°.

⁹⁵RSS (17) 379-380; MB 13:147-148; EBM 13:111/2-3. Maybe excerpts from the play were recited.

⁹⁶OE XXIX, 437/6 and 151/2.

of greater benefit in both the aesthetic and general education of the pupils. And if the reasons for the changes were clearly explained to the youngsters, they would come to realize the advantages to themselves and others, and will more willingly accept them.⁹⁷ This holds good for all the young people, whatever their age or course of studies. Giuseppe Lazzero's practical experience and the annotations already mentioned above are the best proof of this.

These opinions and experiences find a somewhat weakened expression in the Regulations, which state: "When selecting boys for theatrical performances and recitals, in allocating the parts, good behavior should be taken into consideration, the better parts going to those whose behavior is exemplary. But sometimes they should be replaced by others so as to give encouragement to everyone."⁹⁸ There is a real danger that this clause, with its vague use of the word "sometimes," may be interpreted in a narrower rather than a wider sense. Despite this, it is nevertheless a significant directive for all who are searching for the roots of Don Bosco's system of education. It is valuable in that by uncovering these less well-known, and rarely, if ever, quoted sayings and ideas of Don Bosco and his collaborators, we begin to notice how inconsistent and incomplete is the relevant passage in the treatise on the Preventive System.

In that concise treatise Don Bosco writes, also in 1877: "Gymnastics, recitals, plays, walks are very effective means of fostering discipline and of promoting good morals and health. One should make sure that no criticism could be leveled against the play chosen, the pupils' performance or the relative dialogue."⁹⁹ Strictly speaking, music, recitations and theatrical performances are looked upon here simply as 'aids to education.'

Can we be certain in our interpretation? Don Bosco himself recognized that his tract was only a draft document, incomplete at best. This is apparent from the clumsy phraseology and the way in which he switches to dealing only with the theater and music, without further reference to the other topics with which the document deals.

What is important is that in our research we should not lose sight of the broader context of Don Bosco's writings and actions. It all becomes less ambiguous, however, if we look at a short work by Giulio Barberis, written in 1876.¹⁰⁰ Desirous of drawing attention to Don Bosco's ideas regarding the thea-

⁹⁷Verhulst, "Verbali del Primo Capitolo Generale," 231/89-100; 232/123-128; 232/134-139; 289/12-20; 290/42. Also see the reserved affirmation concerning a star (actor) from Don Lazzero in Prellezo, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento*, 251/505: "One may let Gastini perform if one thinks this suitable." You can find more information about Gastini in *MB* 13:146; *EBM* 13:110/1. About theater costumes in Verhulst, "Verbali del Primo Capitolo Generale," 231/96-97.

⁹⁸*OE* XXIX, 436/1 and 149/3.

⁹⁹G. BOSCO, *Il sistema preventivo*, 85/446-459.

¹⁰⁰Giulio Barberis, (1847-1927) knew Don Bosco from the age of 13 and joined the Salesian Society in 1865. At the time in question, he was in his second year as novice director, a position he would hold for 25 years. Later he would succeed Don Paolo Albera as spiritual director general of the congregation when the

ter, Barberis offers a summarized, retrospective view of Don Bosco's concepts. "If the plays are judiciously chosen, the theater is 1° a school of morality, of correct social behavior and sometimes piety. 2° It helps to develop the actors' minds and teaches them to express themselves easily and naturally. 3° It gives pleasure to the boys.... 4° It is also one of the best ways of keeping their minds busy. 5° It attracts many boys to our colleges, for, during the holidays our pupils talk to their parents, friends and acquaintances about what happy places our houses are."¹⁰¹ Barberis' reflections come to us through Don Ceria and, on the whole, they confirm what has been discussed so far. We have no wish to enlarge on this summary, or on various other statements in the *Memorie Biografiche* dealing with the period in question, where the term "instruments of education" is more fully explained, since their origin and context are uncertain. It is possible that Eugenio Ceria was influenced by the *Treatise on the Preventive System*, or perhaps relied too heavily on experiences and practices which came later.¹⁰²

2.3 Theoretical practices (substructure) which support the use of recitation, theater and music in the formation of young educators

Since Don Barberis was in charge of the novices for many years (1874-1899), and therefore responsible for the initial religious and pedagogical formation of young Salesians, it seems logical to start with a study of some of his writings. Originally, there was no set syllabus nor text books for his lessons in 'sacred' or catholic pedagogy. The pupils had to rely on the notes they took during his lessons. Only in 1897 was a first lithographic edition issued. For the course Barberis made ample use of a book by G. A. Raynoni, professor of pedagogy at the royal university of Turin. That book, first published in 1859, was reprinted in 1877, i.e. during the period in question. It would be safe to assume that in those years Barberis' lessons took the form in which they are to be found, later, in the "Annotations."

Barberis' teaching notes are systematic and detailed. He highlighted several elements in education: "physical, intellectual, aesthetic, moral and religious education."¹⁰³ When he spoke about aesthetic education, he adopted the

latter was elected rector major in 1910.

¹⁰¹ *MB* 12:135-136; cf. *EBM* 12:108/4. Here we have preferred a more literal translation. It's interesting to compare E. Ceria's summary with Barberis' original text. With a view to this comparison see Braido, *L' Esperienza pedagogica*, 149.

¹⁰² Thus a testimony about Don Bosco: "He was convinced that music is a mighty means in education" (*MB* 11:436/3; *EBM* 11:441). Further a saying of Don Bosco's in the so-called "story of a young confrere": "Music too is an educational means" (*MB* 13:828/3; *EBM* 13:641/5).

¹⁰³ Giulio Barberis, *Appunti*, 53. Rayneri speaks about "physical, spiritual, intellectual, aesthetical, moral education" (Prellezo, G.A. *Rayneri negli scritti pedagogici salesiani*, "Orientamenti Pedagogici," 40 (1993) 1058). Barberis' de-

generally accepted opinions of his time regarding, for instance, the nature and necessity of aesthetic education. It is interesting to read how he teaches his young audience that aesthetic education had a rightful place among the other essential aspects of a man's education, because without it, education "would be crippled and its good order disturbed".¹⁰⁴ In the whole of his exposition he dedicates only 26 pages to this theme, fewer than he devoted to other essential aspects. They are, however, important and valuable pages.

Concerning theater and recitals

In a chapter on "special aesthetic education" Barberis assumes that the fine arts may be condensed to three: poetry, music and drawing. "His aim is to look at the way in which these can contribute to the boys' education, i.e. in so far they are instruments of education."¹⁰⁵ Here we find that rather equivocal expression (instrument) appearing again. But what is more interesting than his theoretical ideas and classification, is the fact that he, as a convinced Salesian, uses this argument as a means of proving these elements are important in Salesian pedagogy. Immediately after stating his own views on this matter, he continues: "Don Bosco attached great importance to aesthetic education, and made good use of the three fine arts in liturgical festivities, and in literary and other academic sessions. He also encouraged their practice in all sorts of ways by organizing appropriate lessons."¹⁰⁶ For Don Barberis the decisive factor always remains what Don Bosco said, did and showed by example.

"Among so many young people," Don Barberis remarked, "there are a good number who have a rich imagination and an inventive mind, which they can use to good advantage. They should be encouraged to develop these faculties in various ways, and given the time and space to do so, not only when preparing for a feastday but also during academic sessions."¹⁰⁷ From the context, it seems a foregone conclusion both Don Bosco and Don Lazzerio must have approved of Don Barberis' positive outlook on this subject.

Convinced of the advantages to be gained from this "Salesian" practice inculcated by Don Bosco, he exclaims: "Indeed! However splendidly a feastday may be celebrated, without poetry and music, it will never be as pleasant and enjoyable, as when the muses together with harmonious songs and music fill the minds with something that I cannot exactly define but which touches the

pendence on Rayneri's work is so great that in 1929 it was decided not to publish Barberis' "Annotations" in book form. See Prellezo, *ibid.*, 1053-1054.

¹⁰⁴ Barberis, *Appunti*, 178/2.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 189. 192/4 .

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 192/3. In the *Memorie Biografiche* Eugenio Ceria relates Don Bosco's attempts to create a Literary Association in the Oratory. That is why in 1875 he established good relations with Mgr. Ciccolini, the general custodian of the "Arcadia" in Rome (*MB* 12:136-137; *EBM* 12:108-109). Also see *Epistolario*, 3; see: *Lettera* 1492; *Lettera* 1727, 192/4.

hearts!"¹⁰⁸ The exclamation mark comes indeed from G. Barberis himself. In this effusive outpouring, every tendency to teach or edify has disappeared and a real aesthetic experience, that can be difficult to define, breaks through.

He puts dramatic art under the heading poetry. "It's good to introduce the young to the wealth and the delights of dramatic poetry." (And again the directly moral, didactic solicitude is absent.) "But performing drama is better than reading it. First go and watch it and then let the young perform. Don Bosco not only let them, he also (truly) encouraged them."¹⁰⁹ Could the younger confreres be more clearly invited to participate? Could they be more strongly convinced of the value of the experiences they themselves had in the course of their studies in one of Don Bosco's houses?

It is as if Don Barberis wanted to arm younger Salesians against the criticism that would eventually be launched against the practice of putting on plays and musical recitals. Barberis pointed out to his students the regulations that Don Bosco himself (Don Bosco again) had drawn up, clarifying the objectives and enumerating the pitfalls to be avoided. "In educational institutes care should be taken that the object of short theatrical performances is not only entertainment, but above all instruction and education." It cannot but strike us that by shifting from Don Bosco's original "at the same time" to "above all" he too emphasizes instruction and education, almost in defiance of what was proposed in the First General Chapter. Then he continues: "In order to avoid the corruption that... so easily slips in, Don Bosco drew up appropriate regulations. In these he presented rules concerning the contents, the things to be avoided and the responsibilities of the head of the 'teatrino'."¹¹⁰ In this way, Barberis sums up the three sections of the regulations that were debated and approved during the first General Chapter and taken up in the first edition of the Regulations for the houses.¹¹¹ He does not include these regulations in his full treatise. He does, however, include them in his shorter treatise on the preventive system itself. This would seem to indicate that he no longer deemed it necessary or opportune to comment in his lessons on each individual article of the regulations for the 'teatrino.' He seems to presume that everyone would be sufficiently familiar with them.

Singing and instrumental music

After dealing with literary art, Barberis passes on to music and singing. He holds the theory that music, and especially singing, "is intrinsic to man and finds expression in times of joy and of sorrow, when words alone are not suffi-

¹⁰⁸ Barberis, *Appunti*, 192/4 .

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 192-193.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹¹¹ See Verhulst, "Verbali del Primo Capitolo Generale," 347-349 and *OE* XXIX, 432-437; 146-151.

cient to describe the emotions that overwhelm him."¹¹² Convinced of the truth of what he says, and relying on experience gained in the Oratory, he states: "But the greatest power (of the art of singing) is the one found in religious songs, especially when they are executed by a large number of voices".¹¹³ If anyone should approve of this affirmation, it would certainly be Giuseppe Lazzerio, who in all probability worked with Don Bosco on drawing up the particular directive on singing and musical recitals that will be referred to later.

In his letters from South America, the Salesian educator and missionary Francesco Bodrato corroborated Barberis' statement. In April 1878 he informed Don Rua that the church is still struggling due to poor attendance at Mass. However, "relying on the drawing power of the choir and the band which we intend to introduce into our services," he hoped that the church would soon be able to boast that it was "well-frequented." Hardly three months had gone by before, on July 3, 1878, he was able to write to Don Bosco himself: "Thanks to our excellent choir and our talented band we have been invited to lead various liturgical celebrations in Buenos Aires. Our boys have sung Don Cagliero's Mass in honor of Mary Help of Christians in the cathedral... and in other churches... and they have received enormous praise."¹¹⁴

This letter shows how Don Bosco's directives on the teaching and value of music lessons bore fruit. In the regulations we read: "The aim of the music lessons in the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales is: 1° to further God's honor by contributing to the greater splendor of the religious celebrations in the Oratory and outside of it as well."¹¹⁵

Barberis himself points to St. Philip Neri's and Don Bosco's practice: "St. Philip Neri made good use of music to win boys over to piety. Likewise in all Don Bosco's colleges music played a prominent part."¹¹⁶ He concludes his teaching on the musical element of the arts with the following statement: "Instrumental music is better suited to the technical pupils, since as a rule they have greater physical energy and it does no harm to their health. Where it can be introduced, it can be an effective instrument in developing the sensitive side

¹¹²Barberis, *Appunti*, 195/4.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 195/4.

¹¹⁴J. Borrego, *Francesco Bodrato, Epistolario ([1857]-1880)*, ISS, Fonti serie seconda 1, Rom 1988, 288/19-21 and 318/24-28. All that in spite of the fact that in catholic circles of the church in Europe they wrote slightly that such compositions only served the pleasure and amusement of the churchgoers. There they wanted to reinforce the real church music, the Gregorian (Gregur, "Ringem um die Kirchenmusik," 272/5). To this criticism the Salesians in the Oratory were not deaf. On the contrary. In this field too they were successful and were praised loudly. "Musica Sacra," a Milanese magazine, acknowledged the musical radiation of Valdocco: "We wish that the very deserving Salesian Oratory, that for the sacred music disposes of such eminent and abundant means (among others 200 executors) will also in future (...)" (*ibid.*, 272-273).

¹¹⁵See Gregur, "Ringem um die Kirchenmusik," 185/note 123.

¹¹⁶Barberis, *Appunti*, 196/2.

of their nature."¹¹⁷ Lazzero and his collaborators must have concurred with this statement, we suppose. On the other hand, this rather restrictive directive concerning the art of singing "in all his colleges," seems to have been ignored.¹¹⁸ Whatever the reasons, the technical students were allowed to sing in the choir, though the special regulations stated that the band was to be their special privilege. The second objective of the music lessons was defined as: "2° to provide the technical students who excel in good behavior and application, with a useful hobby, one which would stand them in good stead when they leave the Oratory."¹¹⁹

Conclusion

Even though aesthetical education as such does not find its place in Don Bosco's short treatise on the preventive system, its practical role in Valdocco and elsewhere does not suffer from this omission. On the contrary, theatricals, recitations, singing and instrumental music were presented as indispensable factors not only in the development of the finer feelings, and an appreciation of beauty (aesthetic pleasure), but also in the development of the whole person.

In addition, despite certain inconveniences connected with productions, and the possible moral risks, "music, theater and poetry" played a preventive role. This consisted, among other things, in contributing to a positive, joyful atmosphere, which Barberis emphasized in the evaluation we noted above.¹²⁰ According to Don Bosco and his fellow educators, this preventive role also consisted in keeping "his youngsters' minds occupied with a variety of things that would crowd out all unwholesome thoughts." Or, to say it in Barberis' own words: "Well-chosen plays... keep the students happy by giving them something to occupy their minds for days before and after the productions. (They) are a most powerful means to keep them busy. How many unwholesome thoughts and conversations are prevented when the boys' minds are taken up by these stage plays!"¹²¹

In saying this, he undoubtedly endorses the theory that these activities have a sound moral and educational value: but first and foremost he stresses the undefinable joy, the aesthetic pleasure derived from them, which the poet Keats' well-known lines capture so perfectly: "A thing of beauty is a joy, forever its loveliness increases." It is the sort of happiness all can experience and aim at in a more or less explicit way. It is indissolubly part of "the holistic education" that helped youngsters become "honest citizens and good Christians," the final goal of Don Bosco and his collaborators.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 197/4.

¹¹⁸Although "collegi" (colleges) could also be interpreted in a wider sense. Cf. a text in Verhulst, "Verbali del Primo Capitolo Generale," 203/200.

¹¹⁹Gregur, "Ringeln um die Kirchenmusik," 185/note 123.

¹²⁰See footnote 100.

¹²¹*MB* 12:136/2 and 135-136; *EBM* 12:108/5 and 108/4.