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Don Bosco's Definitive Vocational Commitment (1844-1846)

The Year 1846, Terrible and Glorious

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1. Don Bosco's Vocation Decision and Dream of 1844

Don Bosco, after ordination in 1841, enrolled in the Pastoral Institute of St. Francis of Assisi for Priests (*Convitto ecclesiastico*). Here, while engaged in the study of moral-pastoral theology and preaching under the direction of Father Joseph Cafasso, he first became involved in a special ministry to young people at risk.¹ He met them doing time in the city prisons, idling on the streets and squares, and working at odd jobs in various workshops. He began gathering them for religious instruction and recreation on Sundays and holy days under the auspices of the Pastoral Institute of St. Francis of Assisi. Over the three years he spent there the initial small group of youngsters grew in numbers. It became "his Oratory."

Due to leave the Pastoral Institute in the summer of 1844 Don Bosco had to face a new personal vocational crisis. Ten years earlier, toward the end of his secondary course of study in Chieri, John Bosco had entered a period of vocational crisis and discernment that lasted from the spring of 1834 to the summer of 1835. He had seriously considered joining the Franciscans, but after a period of inner struggle and uncertainty, he had followed advice and entered the diocesan seminary instead. In 1844 the vocational crisis and discernment

¹ Father (Saint) Joseph Cafasso (1811-1860), like Don Bosco from Castelnuovo, was ordained in 1833, attended the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*), and was chosen by its founder (Father Luigi Guala) to serve as lecturer in moral theology. Don Bosco attended the Pastoral Institute under Father Cafasso, his spiritual director, mentor and life-long benefactor.

also had to do with the choice of a future priestly ministry. Don Bosco in his *Memoirs* does not speak of this vocational discernment, but Father Lemoyne in the *Biographical Memoirs* gives it considerable space.² Don Bosco was considering joining the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary with the foreign missions in view.³ Father Joseph Cafasso, after the June spiritual retreat, succeeded in dissuading him from such a course of action. Obviously Don Bosco's attempt (if factual) raises again the question of his actual commitment to the young people at risk he had gathered as his Oratory.

A little later, in October 1844, a second crisis (of a different kind) awaited him, and to it Don Bosco gives some attention in his *Memoirs*.⁴ In this instance, his personal commitment to the young people of the Oratory was not in question. The crisis was forced on him by external circumstances that threatened to nullify that commitment and to militate against the continuance of the Oratory. At this point Don Bosco needed to be gainfully employed as a priest. Father Cafasso and Father John Borel introduced Don Bosco to the Marchioness Barolo, who offered him a job and a salary.⁵ He was to serve as chaplain of her

² *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855. The Autobiography of Saint John Bosco*, tr. by Daniel Lyons, SDB, with notes and commentary by Eugenio Ceria, SDB, Lawrence Castelvetti, SDB and Michael Mendl, SDB (New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications, 1989) [MO-En]. This is a translation (with a new introduction and a new set of notes) of *San Giovanni Bosco, Memorie dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, a cura di Eugenio Ceria. (Torino: SEI, 1846). This, in turn, is a careful edition (with introduction and notes) of archival manuscripts.

Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, Angelo Amadei, and Eugenio Ceria, *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, vol. I-XVII, ed. by Diego Borgatello (New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1965-1988). [EBM] This is a translation and adaptation of the first 17 volumes of the Italian *Memorie Biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco*, 19 vols. — Vols. 1-9 (1898-1917) by John Baptist Lemoyne; Vol. 10 (1939, by Angelo Amadei); Vols. 11-19 (1930-1939, by Eugenio Ceria). [IBM] Lemoyne discusses the vocation crisis in EBM II, 159-164.

³ The Oblates of the Virgin Mary were founded in 1815 by Father (Blessed) Pio Brunone Lanteri in association with other priests, but were forced to disband in 1820. In 1825 Father Lanteri re-founded the Congregation, which was approved by Pope Gregory XVI in 1826. The Oblates had a Vicariate Apostolic in Burma (Myanmar).

⁴ MO-En, 203-204, 209-210.

⁵ Julia Falletti, née Colbert de Maulévrier (1785-1864), having survived the French Revolution, married the rich Tancredi Falletti, Marquis of Barolo. Imbued with a genuine spirit of charity, Marquis and Marchioness Barolo together founded many works of charity. The Pious Institute of Our Lady, Refuge of Sinners, popularly known simply as the *Refuge* is among the best known. Under the spiritual direction of Chaplain Father John Borel it gave shelter and training to young women who had served time in prison or were at risk. The Barolos went on to found other charitable works, including the Community of St. Mary Magdalene and the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Anne of

Little Hospital of St. Philomena (still under construction at the time). Meanwhile he was given a room at the *Refuge* and was to earn his keep and salary by teaching at the *Refuge* and helping Father Borel as associate chaplain. Under these circumstances, lack of suitable premises in which to gather the youngsters, as well as commitments to Barolo's institutes, seemed to countermand any further involvement with the Oratory. As Don Bosco agonized over this situation and was seriously considering disbanding the Oratory, the vocation dream recurred—the so-called Dream of 1844. In his *Memoirs* together with a brief account of the problem, he relates the dream that appeared to be “a sequel [appendice] to the one I had at Becchi at the age of nine.”

On the second Sunday in October 1844, I would have to tell my boys that the Oratory was moving to Valdocco.⁶ But the uncertainty of place, means, and personnel had me really worried. The previous evening I had gone to bed with an uneasy heart. That night I had another dream, which seems to be an appendix to the one I had at Becchi when I was nine years old.⁷

Don Bosco admits that he understood little of the dream and put little faith in it, but by and by the true vocational significance of the dream dawned on Don Bosco. So he concludes the narrative with the words: “Later, together with another dream, it served as a blueprint for my decisions.” In the meantime,

Divine Providence, for which the Marchioness obtained the Church's official approval in 1846. In 1844-45 (after the Marquis' death in 1838) the Marchioness established the *Little Hospital of St. Philomena* for severely handicapped girls between the age of 3 and 12. Don Bosco was hired to serve as its chaplain.

Father John Borel (1801-1873) was ordained in 1824, obtained the doctor's degree in theology from the university, and served as royal chaplain from 1831 to 1840. Given leave from the Royal Chapel with a pension of 500 lire, he was appointed by royal decree chaplain of Barolo's Institute of Our Lady, Refuge of Sinners (the *Refuge*), a post he held until his death in 1873. Don Bosco first met Father Borel when the latter preached a spiritual retreat in the seminary of Chieri. During his years at the Pastoral Institute he was associated with Father Borel in prison ministry. In 1844 Father Borel introduced Don Bosco to the Marchioness Barolo and recommended his appointment as chaplain with a like salary. He was ever after Don Bosco's staunchest supporter and co-worker in the Oratory.

The second chaplain of the Barolo institutes was Father Sebastian Pacchiotti. Father Sebastian Pacchiotti (1806-1884), a collegiate canon of Giaveno (Turin), served, like Father Borel, as a chaplain of the Barolo institutes. Like Father Borel, he was a faithful helper of Don Bosco and the Oratory.

⁶The Barolo institutions were located out of the city proper in the northern district of Valdocco, near Cottolengo's Little House of Divine Providence. St. Francis of Assisi church and monastery (where the Pastoral Institute was housed) were located south of the city's center.

⁷*MO-En*, 209-210.

however, Don Bosco found himself in real difficulties. Although his personal resolve was never in question, leaving the shelter of the Pastoral Institute at St. Francis of Assisi for a place that offered no facilities was a source of anxiety for him and put the continuance of the Oratory in doubt.

That Don Bosco lived through some anxious moments finds confirmation in Father Giulio Barberis' report of the dream from Don Bosco's own narration.

It was the year 1844. I was due to leave the Pastoral Institute of St. Francis for Priests and move to the *Refuge* to live with Dr. Borel. I was truly worried about [what I should do with] my youngsters who attended religious instruction [the Oratory] on Sundays and holy days. I did not know whether I should let go of them or continue to care for them. My desire was to continue with [the work of] the oratories but I did not see how I could. On the last Sunday I was to stay at the Pastoral Institute, I had to notify my youngsters that they were no longer to meet there as usual. As a matter of fact, I was debating whether I should tell them that there would no longer be any place to meet, since the Oratory would be terminated—or else I should tell them where the new meeting place would be.⁸

The dream followed, but it provided little comfort or reassurance for Don Bosco, as he was starting on his new and demanding job in a strange environment.

2. The Oratory at the *Refuge* and at St. Philomena Little Hospital in the Valdocco District, and the "Wandering"

Father Borel, with the Marchioness's permission, had Don Bosco tell the lads that they were to meet at the *Refuge* in the Valdocco district, and that's where they converged on the following Sunday. The Oratory met in Don Bosco's and Father Borel's rooms situated above the entrance to the *Refuge* on six successive Sundays—from October 20 to December 1 (1844).⁹

As the numbers increased, the rooms at the *Refuge* proved totally inadequate, not to mention the disturbance the youngsters caused. Then the Marchioness was moved (or persuaded) to allow the Oratory the use of two rooms in the chaplains' quarters of the Little Hospital still under construction. The space was more conducive to oratory activities. Don Bosco and Father

⁸ ASC 110: Cronachette-Barberis, "Sogni Diversi a Lanzo", *FDB* 866 B10-C1 (finalized report of the dream). Don Bosco related the dream to Father Barberis as they were returning to the Oratory from dinner at a benefactor's home on February 2, 1875. Father Barberis produced an original draft of Don Bosco's narration and some time later a "finalized" report. [*ASC* = Archivio Salesiano Centrale (Central Salesian Archive); *FDB* = Fondo Don Bosco (Don Bosco section of the *ASC* on microfiches)].

⁹ *MO-En*, 215-216.

Borel obtained the Archbishop's permission to establish a chapel there and to conduct religious services. Thus Don Bosco's own Oratory under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales became a reality when it first met at the new place on December 8 (1844), the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Don Bosco writes in his Memoirs:

This was the site Divine Providence chose for the first Oratory church. We began to call it after St. Francis de Sales [...]. We had put that aspect of our ministry, which called for great calm and meekness under the protection of this saint in the hope that he might obtain for us from God the grace of being able to imitate him in his extraordinary meekness and in winning souls.¹⁰

Thus was Don Bosco's own "Oratory of St. Francis de Sales" born.

But it was inevitable that, as the hospital neared completion, the Oratory should have to meet elsewhere. Moreover, the youngsters, steadily increasing in number, were becoming a serious aggravation to the Barolo establishments. So, the Oratory moved out of the Little Hospital on May 18, 1845 and went through a period of "wandering," an odyssey that took it through different "ports o' call" before it found a permanent home on the property of a certain Mr. Francis Pinardi (April 1, 1846).¹¹

After leaving the Little Hospital, the Oratory used the church of St. Peter in Chains at the disused Holy Cross Cemetery on one Sunday, May 25, 1845. Forbidden further use of that church, the Oratory "roamed" without a fixed place from June 1 to July 6, 1845. Next, Father Borel and Don Bosco obtained the city's permission for a restricted use of St. Martin's chapel at the Dora Mills, from July 13 to December 21, 1845.¹² Denied further access because of complaints, Father Borel and Don Bosco rented rooms in the house of a retired priest, Father John Moretta, from January 4 to March 1846. Again evicted for the same reason, Don Bosco and Father Borel obtained use of a grass field belonging to the Filippi brothers for a couple of Sundays in March 1846.¹³ At last, on April 1, 1846 the Oratory settled on Mr. Pinardi's property, the place that was to become its permanent home (to be described below).

¹⁰ *MO-En*, 217.

¹¹ The term "wandering" refers to the many moves of the Oratory between October 1844, when it left the Pastoral Institute, to April 1846, when it settled on Mr. Pinardi's property. The term, however, is more often applied to the Oratory as it sought places at which to meet after it left the Little Hospital (May 18, 1845).

¹² These were the city's gristmills driven by waterpower from the Dora River to the north.

¹³ The Filippi brothers (John, Anthony and Charles) owned a sizable tract of land in the area with houses on it. It is from them that Mr. Francesco Pinardi bought the property that would become the permanent home of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

3. Hostility confronting Don Bosco during the Oratory's Wandering Period

In his *Memoirs*, speaking of the Oratory during its wandering period and before telling the story of its settling on Mr. Pinardi's property, Don Bosco deals with opposition encountered because of his commitment to young people at risk.

First he describes himself as the object of hostility from local parish priests who even attempted to commit him as insane. He argues back that the young people of his oratory didn't belong to any parish. The pastors finally agree that Don Bosco should stay with his Oratory for the duration.¹⁴

Next comes the story of Vicar Michael Cavour's "persecution" of Don Bosco as a potential revolutionary. Don Bosco succeeds in appeasing him "for a while."¹⁵

He then relates how the Filippi brothers gave notice forbidding any further use of their field, and portrays himself as abandoned by his helpers and left to struggle on alone. Even Fathers Borel and Pacchiotti left him with his "visions" of playground, house, church and helpers.¹⁶ Finally comes the clincher, an ultimatum from the Marchioness Barolo that he should either leave his youngsters or her employ.¹⁷

What can one make of all this? Given the special character of the *Memoirs*,¹⁸ Don Bosco might be supposed to have emphasized and dramatized these difficulties, but it is unlikely that he would have created them out of whole cloth. We have in fact earlier, weighty attestation to the same effect. The Historical Outline of 1854 (written 20 years before the *Memoirs*) speaks in much the same terms of the local pastors' protest, of Vicar Cavour's and the civil authorities' opposition, and of Father Borel's doubts about Don Bosco's sanity.¹⁹

There are, however, other documents that seem to call into question certain aspects of the story as given in the *Memoirs*. These call for some comment for, as Pietro Braido points out some of these "stereotypes" need critical evaluation.

Don Bosco Opposed by Local Parish Priests?

Objections on the part of local pastors are recorded with "impatience," as instances of misunderstanding or willful opposition. Certainly Don Bosco met

¹⁴ *MO-En*, 233-234.

¹⁵ *MO-En*, 244-245.

¹⁶ *MO-En*, 246.

¹⁷ *MO-En*, 249-251.

¹⁸ See Pietro Braido, "Memorie del futuro," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 11 (1992) 97-127.

¹⁹ For the Historical Outline of 1854 see Appendix IV, p. 30, below.

with opposition, mostly at the start, but the pastors' objections do not appear totally unreasonable in the context of Don Bosco's desire and strategy for complete autonomy in his oratorian ministry. It should also be noted that Don Bosco was an "outsider" who was now gathering young people at the outskirts of the city and outside the parish structure. He was also from a pastoral program (the Pastoral Institute) that was still trying to find acceptance among Turin's clergy. Time was needed before the parish priests, even the best of them, could come round to seeing Oratory work in its true light.

Don Bosco Persecuted as a "Revolutionary?"

In the *Memoirs* (as well as in the *Historical Sketch* of 1854), the Vicar of Turin, Marquis Michael Cavour is represented as harshly opposed to Don Bosco's work.²⁰ That the Marquis, as "Prefect of Police" would at first view such gatherings of rough-looking young men with suspicion is certainly credible. What appears unusual is such unrelenting intransigence in the context of Vicar Cavour's documented unflinching defense of, and deference to, constituted authority. Now, Don Bosco was catechizing the young people with the permission and support of that authority, the respected Archbishop Fransoni and His Majesty King Charles Albert, to name but the highest-ranking. In addition Don Bosco was working in consort with laymen and priests who were connected with the royal house: Count Joseph Provana di Collegno, Father Joseph Cafasso, Father John Borel, Father Sebastian Pacchiotti, the last two having been Don Bosco's close associates in oratory ministry at least since 1844.²¹ Furthermore, a

²⁰ *MO-En*, 244-245, 276-279, and *Historical Sketch* of 1854 (for which see Appendix IV, p. 30, below). Comparing the *Memoirs* with the *Historical Sketch*, it seems that the *Sketch* (1854) served as source for these passages of the *Memoirs* (1874/75).

Marquis Michael Benso of Cavour (1781-1850) was the father of [Marquis] Gustavo and [Count] Camillo (the future prime minister and political leader of the unification of Italy). The Marquis served as Vicar, governing the city for the king (*vicario e sovrintendente di politica e polizia*), from 1835 to 1847. Before the law of October 17, 1848 (the year of the constitution), the city was governed by a Vicar, appointed by the king, assisted by two "syndics" and by a council of fifty-seven officials (*decurioni*). After 1848 the city was governed by a mayor (*sindaco*), likewise appointed by the king, and a city council.

²¹ Cf. G. Bracco, "Don Bosco and Civil society," in *Don Bosco's Place in History* (Roma: LAS, 1993), [239-244], 241 [Bracco in *DB's Place*]; also id., "Don Bosco e le istituzioni," in *Torino e Don Bosco*, vol. I: *Saggi*. (Torino, 1989), 123-126 (Don Bosco e Don Borel). [Bracco in *Torino e DB I*].

Count Joseph-Marie Louis Hyacinth Provana di Collegno (1785-1854) sometime vicar of Turin and counselor of state, was head of the finance department since 1840. As a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society he was a staunch supporter of Don Bosco and the Oratory. See also *MO-En*, 276-278. Stella [*DBEcSoc*, 80] opines that this

letter addressed by Don Bosco to the Marquis (dated March 13, 1846) recently come to light and bearing the Marquis' brief endorsement on the back, makes the image of a bitterly hostile Cavour even less credible.²² The letter reveals, among other things, that Vicar Cavour had been sympathetic in the past, and that Don Bosco had reason to believe that the Vicar would show his good will now that the Oratory was about to settle at Pinardi's.

The role which Your Excellency plays in everything that concerns the public good, both civic and moral, leads me to hope that you will welcome a report on a catechetical program we have started. Since its purpose is the good of young people, you yourself have on a number of occasions shown favor and support for it. [...]

You are a good-hearted person, and have at heart everything that may contribute to the common good of society. For this reason we seek your protection on these our endeavors. [...]

[Endorsement in Cavour's hand for his secretary] Reply. I have spoken with His Excellency the Most Reverend Archbishop and with Count Colegno [*sic*], and I agree that, without any doubt, much may be gained from a catechism program. I shall be happy to see the Rev. Father Bosco in my office at 2 P.M., March 26. Benso di Cavour.

That the Marquis, as Prefect of Police, would at first be suspicious of such gatherings and would wish to investigate is certainly credible, but his continued, unrelenting hostility much less so.

Don Bosco Abandoned and Alone?

The dramatic representation of Don Bosco abandoned and alone with his youngsters, as on the Filippi field, also appears doubtful. In his *Memoirs* he writes:

We came to the last Sunday on which I was allowed to keep the Oratory in the field [...] Finding myself alone with no one to help me, my energy gone, my health undermined, with no idea where I could gather my boys in the future, I was deeply troubled. I withdrew to one side, and as I walked alone I began to cry, perhaps for the first time. [...]²³

gentleman might be Louis Provana di Collegno, rather than Joseph. Don Bosco, however, writes "Count Joseph Provana di Collegno" [*MO-En*, 276].

²² Cf. G. Bracco in *DB's Place*, 241; and in greater detail, Bracco in *Torino e DB I*, 126-128 (text of the letter), 128-130 (comments). The letter is critically edited in Motto, *Epistolario I*, 66-68. (For the text of the letter in translation see Appendix II, p.25, below.)

²³ *MO-En*, 255.

Certainly Don Bosco experienced difficulties which should not be generalized. The continuous presence, alongside Don Bosco, of trusted collaborators, both priests and laymen, is documented for the first fifteen years of the Oratory. These people helped with the work, and lent moral and financial support. Bracco writes:

One thing appeared obvious from the moment I began to search the city archives for documents concerning Don Bosco: Don Bosco was *never alone*. He worked with a group of priests who all seemed to share the same objective, namely to do something about the under-privileged and about social unrest, using methods that were already well tried.²⁴

In familiar conversations with his Salesians, Don Bosco spoke at various times of that last Sunday on the Filippi field. Giulio Barberis in his autograph chronicle records one such conversation, in which Don Bosco states:

It was the last Sunday on which I had use of the field, and here [Mr. Pinardi] comes up to me again. I was walking along the edge of the field absorbed in thought *while Dr. Borel was delivering his sermon*.²⁵

Don Bosco then was not alone on the Filippi field on that last Sunday. Father Borel was preaching the sermon, and possibly other oratory workers were with the lads. That Don Bosco was not alone, however, also finds confirmation from the above-mentioned letter of March 13, 1846 to Vicar Cavour, written as negotiations with Mr. Pinardi were in progress, while the Oratory has use of the Filippi field. Don Bosco writes: "Finally, earlier this week we [Rev. Dr. Borelli, Father Pacchiotti and myself] entered into negotiations with Mr. Pinardi for a site." Confirmation is also had from the fact that the contract for the 3-year lease of the shed was between Mr. Pinardi and Father Borel.²⁶

The confrontation with the Marchioness Barolo will be discussed below. Immediately we will describe the settling of the Oratory in the place that became its permanent home.

²⁴ Bracco in *DB's Place*, 241.

²⁵ Barberis, *Autograph Chronicle*, Notebook III, 49-50, entry of January 1, 1876; *FDB* 835 D12 - E1.

²⁶ Fedele Giraudi. *L'Oratorio di Don Bosco. Inizio e progressivo sviluppo edilizio della casa madre dei Salesiani in Torino*, 2nd ed. (Turin: SEI, 1935), 60-107 (with photographic reproduction of contracts, etc.) [Giraudi, *L'Oratorio* (1935)].

4. Settling of the Oratory on Mr. Pinardi's Property

*Story of the leasing of the shed in Don Bosco's Memoirs*²⁷

In a familiar conversation in 1875 recorded by Barberis in his chronicle, Don Bosco, reminisced about the first settling of the Oratory, and related to his Salesians how he was told of the availability of a place suitable for a "laboratory."²⁸ He told the story, set on Palm Sunday 1846, in much the same terms as in his *Memoirs*, which he was compiling at that time. The bearer of these good tidings was a man named Pancrazio Soave and he was referring to a building owned by a gentleman named Francesco Pinardi.

Francesco Pinardi was an immigrant from Arcisate (Varese, Lombardy). On July 14, 1845, he had purchased a two-story house and surrounding land from the Filippi brothers for 14,000 lire. On November 10, 1845, Mr. Pinardi had leased house and property to another immigrant, Mr. Pancrazio Soave from Verolengo (near Turin). Mr. Soave started a small starch business, which he installed on the ground floor of the house and sub-leased the second-story rooms to tenants. Now, a "shed" (*tettoia*) that was being built at the time (November 1845) against the north wall of the house was not part of the deal. It is explicitly excluded in the Pinardi-Soave contract: "excluding the shed that is being built behind the aforementioned house and the land adjoining it." The shed may have been intended for use as a laundry, but when offered to Don Bosco it merely served as a magazine for some washerwomen who plied their trade in a laundry shed built along a small irrigation canal to the north.²⁹

Additional Information from Archival Documents

Don Bosco's above-mentioned letter to Vicar Cavour, dated (Friday) March 13, 1846 gives us points of reference for a reconstruction of the transaction. Don Bosco writes:

Earlier this week we entered into negotiations with Mr. [Francesco] Pinardi for a site. We agreed on the sum of two hundred and eighty francs for a large room suitable for use as an oratory,³⁰ along with two other rooms and an adjacent

²⁷ *MO-En*, 255-257, 265-266.

²⁸ Barberis, Autograph Chronicle, Notebook I, 27, entry of May 26, 1875, *FDB* 833 D1.

²⁹ Giraudi, *L'Oratorio* (1935), 66. The activity of washerwomen in the area using water from the Dora River to the north may explain the intended use of Mr. Pinardi's shed and Mr. Soave's starch business in the house.

³⁰ "Oratory," meaning chapel.

piece of ground. We think this place will suit our purpose, first because of its proximity to the *Refuge*,³¹ then because of its location far from any church, though near enough to several houses.³² The one thing we need to know is whether it is acceptable to you from the standpoint of the neighborhood and of society at large.

According to the above statement, Mr. Pinardi was contacted between Sunday March 8 and Friday March 13 (letter's date). Having received the information about the shed (presumably from Mr. Soave), the Barolo chaplains (Fathers Bosco, Borel and Pacchiotti), who were running the Oratory, acted immediately. They contacted the owner (Mr. Pinardi) and negotiated the terms. Then Don Bosco was delegated to notify Vicar Cavour by letter and to ask for his permission and support. On the basis of the letter, we may conclude that Soave (on Pinardi's behalf) brought the news of the availability of the shed no later than Sunday, March 8, for the negotiations for the lease were already in progress that very week.

Don Bosco had also dropped a hint to the Vicar: "Should you wish to speak to me or to my colleagues, we are at your service; indeed we would be anxious to oblige." Vicar Cavour's note for his secretary read: "I shall be happy to see the Rev. Father Bosco in my office at 2 P.M., March 26." The secretary replied to Don Bosco on March 28.

[...] I have spoken with their Excellencies Archbishop Frasoni and Count Collegno, and as far as it lies in my power, I am quite willing to support this undertaking. [...] You may call on me at my office, if it is convenient for you, at 2:00, p.m. on Monday, the thirtieth of this month.³³

Don Bosco called at the Vicar's office, and by March 30 he had the desired permit. The contract for the lease was drawn up and signed by Mr. Pinardi and Father Borel on April 1, 1846.³⁴

³¹ Don Bosco, ever since being hired as chaplain of Barolo's Little Hospital of St. Philomena, lived at Barolo's Hospice of Our Lady, Refuge of Sinners ("*Refuge*"), as did the other chaplains Fathers Borel and Pacchiotti.

³² The place was situated in the northern outskirts of the city in the sparsely populated district of Valdocco. The Oratory would thereby not be connected with any parish church, yet not totally isolated.

³³ Vicar Cavour to Don Bosco, March 28, 1846, in ASC 38 Apertura, *FDB* 228 E5; *EBM* II, 316-317. Lemoyne in his reconstruction of the relationship between Vicar Cavour and the Oratory basically follows Don Bosco's *Memoirs* in speaking of the Vicar's unrelenting opposition.

³⁴ Giraudi, *L'Oratorio* (1935), 65-67 (photostat of first page of contract Pinardi-Borel, 69); Motto, *Epistolario* I, 68; *MO-da Silva*, pp. 147, 153; *MO-En*, 260.

According to the *Memoirs*, however (both in the original draft and in Berto's copy), Mr. Soave alerted Don Bosco to the availability of the shed on Palm Sunday, which Don Bosco erroneously dated on March 15, 1846. Father John Bonetti, saw the mistake and took the liberty of emending this date in Father Berto's copy, March 15 into April 5, because in 1846 Easter fell on April 12. These are the dates recorded in Bonetti's *Storia dell'Oratorio* (in the *Bollettino Salesiano*), in his *Cinque Lustri* (*Don Bosco's Early Apostolate*), and in the *Biographical Memoirs*.³⁵

Comments

It should be noted that neither the letter nor the Pinardi-Borel contract describe the place as a "shed" (*tettoia*), the designation used in the *Memoirs*. The letter has "one large room suitable for use as an oratory [chapel] with two other rooms." This is confirmed by the contract, which speaks of "a great, rectangular three-sectioned room with courtyard in front and on the sides."³⁶ Obviously, the "large room" refers materially to this "shed" built against the back wall of Mr. Pinardi's house. The two additional rooms were separate, partitioned back sections of the shed, not rooms in the Pinardi house, which was in Mr. Soave's lease.

The Pinardi house was a two-story building of modest dimensions: about 20 m. (ca. 65 ft.) in length, 6 m. (ca. 19.5 ft.) in width and 7 m. (23 ft.) in height. It comprised 11 rooms, 6 on the ground floor and 5 on the second story. The "camerone" (referred to as a "shed" only because it was not a separate building) spanned the length of the house itself (20 m.) and had the same width (6 m.). But it was no more than 2.5 m. (ca. 8.5 ft.) in height. Of its 3 sections, the main section would serve as a chapel, and the two smaller ones would serve as sacristy and storage room.³⁷

Most probably the shed began to be adapted for chapel use even before the signing of the contract on April 1, and continued to be worked on after its inauguration.

³⁵ Giovanni Bonetti, *Don Bosco's Early Apostolate* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1908); reprinted for the canonization as *St. John Bosco's Early Apostolate* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1934), 50-52. [Bonetti, *DB's Early Ap.*] This is a translation of Giovanni Bonetti, *Cinque Lustri di Storia dell'Oratorio Salesiano fondato dal Sac. Don Giovanni Bosco*, Torino: [Tipografia Salesiana], 1892 (published after Father Bonetti's death). This, in turn, is an adaptation of [Giovanni Bonetti], "Storia dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales," published serially in *Bollettino Salesiano* from 1879 to 1886.

³⁶ "tre membri di un grande camerone oblungo."

³⁷ Giraudi, *L'Oratorio* (1935), 100 with Footnote 1.

Then, according to the *Memoirs*, "the archbishop on April ____ granted the faculty of blessing and dedicating that humble building for divine worship. That was done on Sunday, April ____ 1846."³⁸ The dates are left blank both in Don Bosco's and in Berto's mss of the *Memoirs*. But the chancery document granting the faculty was dated Good Friday, April 10, 1846 and delegates Father Borel to perform the ceremony. On the *verso* of the Archbishop's decree, Father Borel wrote that he "came to bless the Oratory on April 13, the second festal day of Easter." It is unlikely that he was mistaken. Hence we must conclude that the chapel was first used on Easter Sunday, April 12, and blessed by Father Borel the following day.³⁹

Don Bosco in his *Memoirs* admits that the place was nothing "to write home about" and that its immediate neighbors, the Pinardi house (to which the shed was attached) and the Bellezza house next door, were places of ill repute.⁴⁰ But at least now the Oratory had a place to call its own, or nearly so, and Don Bosco could look forward to the day when the whole Pinardi property would be in his possession.

5. Confrontation with the Marchioness Barolo—Don Bosco's Definitive Vocational Choice

Context of the Confrontation

Don Bosco had been hired by the Marchioness Barolo to serve as chaplain of the Little Hospital of St. Philomena, which was to care for handicapped little girls. While it was still under construction, the Marchioness had agreed that the Oratory could use the separate "chaplains' quarters" for its meetings. But it was inevitable that, as the hospital neared completion, Don Bosco and the Barolo chaplains should have to find some other place for the Oratory. In any case, the youngsters, steadily increasing in number, were becoming a serious aggravation.

So, on May 18, 1845 the oratory moved out of the Little Hospital and went through a period of "wandering," as mentioned above, an odyssey that was to

³⁸ *MO-En*, 265.

³⁹ Giraudi, *L'Oratorio* (1935), 61-64, citing A. Amadei, *Don Bosco e il suo apostolato*, 163: "Il sottoscritto addiuvato alla benedizione dell'Oratorio il giorno 13 aprile, correndo la seconda festa di Pasqua." Giraudi notes that the original document could not be traced. He also discusses conflicting opinions regarding who blessed the chapel. See also Michael Mendl's comment in *Mo-En*, 274-275.

⁴⁰ *Mo-En*, 265, 296. In Barberis autograph chronicle Don Bosco, telling the story of the settling to some Salesians, is reported to have said: "I would tell you how the first little house was purchased, but it's a long story. It stood in this very space now occupied by this dining room. The first thing to note is that it was a whorehouse" [Notebook III, 49, entry of January 1, 1876; *FDB* 835 D12].

tax Don Bosco's strength and resolve. At last, on April 1, 1846 it settled on Mr. Pinardi's property, the place that was to become its permanent home.

When the Little Hospital was dedicated on August 10, 1845, Don Bosco began to serve as its chaplain, the job for which the Marchioness had hired him in the first place. As we learn from an exchange of letters between Father Borel and the Marchioness Barolo, Don Bosco had been ill since leaving the Pastoral Institute in 1844, and his illness was getting progressively more serious. Nevertheless on Sundays (with the help of Barolo's chaplains, Fathers Borel, Pacchiotti and others), Don Bosco would spend the whole day with the Oratory. And in addition he would be available to his boys during the week, to help them as needed.

The Marchioness had formed designs on her young chaplain, whom she admired and valued highly and was willing to do everything in her power to get him back to good health and keep him for her institutes. Don Bosco, however, by this time had made a firm, in fact irrevocable, commitment to the Oratory. It seemed inevitable therefore that he would have to resign from the chaplaincy. The Marchioness, however, looked at things from a different point of view. She fully expected that Don Bosco should give up "his vagabonds" and work full time as chaplain of her institutes. This is the context of the Marchioness' confrontation with Don Bosco and of her "ultimatum" as reported in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* and edited with additional material in the *Biographical Memoirs*.⁴¹

Don Bosco's Poor Health and Events leading up to the Confrontation

Toward the end of September 1845, the Marchioness Barolo had gone to Rome to seek the approval of the constitutions of her congregations, the Sisters of St. Anne and the Sisters of St. Mary Magdalene. Several months of difficult negotiations were necessary before she won the approval and could return to Turin. While she was so occupied in Rome, Father Borel by letter of January 3, 1846 reported to her on Don Bosco's deteriorating health and on what was being done to help him. They had rearranged the Masses at the *Refuge* and at the Little Hospital to allow Don Bosco some extra sleep in the morning. They also had gotten him to promise that after Epiphany (January 6) he would take a long period of rest away from the Oratory and the chaplaincy. Father Guala and Father Cafasso insisted on it.⁴²

⁴¹ For a description of the "confrontation" and "ultimatum" see *MO-En*, 249-252, noting that in the *Memoirs* Don Bosco places the event before the settling of the Oratory at Pinardi's. For Lemoyne's account see *EBM* II, 356-363.

⁴² Father Borel to Marchioness Barolo, January 3, 1846, in *ASC* 123 Persone, Borel, *FDB* 552 D9, edited in *EBM* II, 276-277 (correct the date to January 3, 1846).

Don Bosco, however, did not keep his promise and elected instead to stay with the Oratory, which on January 4 (1846) had begun to meet at Father Moretta's house.

After several arduous months in Rome and the successful accomplishment of her goal, the Marchioness on May 6, 1846 returned to Turin to a joyful welcome from her religious communities and her chaplains. The Sisters of St. Anne and of St. Mary Magdalene and their constitutions had been definitively approved. The Oratory had only recently settled at the Pinardi shed (April 1), which had been inaugurated as a chapel on Easter Sunday (April 12), and had been blessed by Father Borel the following day.

In a long letter she wrote to Father Borel with the date of May 18, 1846, (written to "avoid" meeting with him face to face) the Marchioness recalls how she met and hired Don Bosco, and clearly states her position with respect to her young chaplain. From this letter it also emerges that she and Father Borel did not see eye to eye with regard to Don Bosco and his oratory work. Its salient passages are worth quoting.

[Dear Father Borel]

A conversation with Father Cafasso has led me to see the necessity of our reaching an understanding [about Don Bosco] [...].

When St. Philomena Hospital became the latest addition [to my institutions], we agreed on the necessity of appointing a chaplain for it. [...] You selected the excellent Don Bosco and introduced him to me. I liked him from the very start, since I noticed that spirit of recollection and simplicity about him that is the mark of holiness. [...] The hospital was not expected to be ready for occupancy, and in fact was not, until August 1845. But in my anxiety to secure the services of such a worthy priest, I agreed to engage him then and there at a regular salary. However, a few weeks after he had taken up residence with you, both the Mother Superior of the *Rifugio* and myself realized that his health could stand no work. [...]

Don Bosco's health continued to get worse, up to the time of my trip to Rome, but, although he was already coughing with bloody sputum, he kept working. Then I received a letter from you, informing me that Don Bosco was in no condition to carry on the work he had been hired for. I replied immediately that I was prepared to continue his full salary, on the sole condition that he take a total rest, and I am ready to fulfill that promise now. [...]

You have accused me of being against the religious instruction which these boys receive every Sunday, and against the care that Don Bosco takes of them during the week. That's not true. [...] I approve and praise the instruction being given to the boys, but because of our type of inmates, I object to the boys' habit of gathering around the doorways of my institutions. And I firmly

believe that Don Bosco needs a complete rest. [...] This is all the more important to me as my respect for him has grown apace.

Dear Father, I know that we differ on this point. Were it not for my conscience, I would be ready, as always, to submit to your judgment [...].⁴³

The confrontation

The Marchioness' letter clearly reveals the high esteem she entertained for Don Bosco as a person and for his oratory work. That she wanted him for her institutions, and wanted him healthy, is also evident. All along she had been worried about his deteriorating health and sincerely ("in conscience") wanted this problem resolved. It seems therefore that the inevitable confrontation was not in the nature of a bald "ultimatum." In any case, the Marchioness' proposal came too late. Don Bosco had already entered into a covenant with his Oratory, and his resolve could no longer be shaken—in sickness or in health.

To the Marchioness' advice that he should give up his oratory work and become a permanent chaplain in her institutions, Don Bosco replied:

You have money and will have no trouble in finding as many priests as you want for your institutes. It's not the same with my poor youngsters. If I turn my back on them now, all I've been doing for them will go up in smoke. Therefore, while I will continue to do what I can for the *Refuge*, I will resign from any regular responsibility and devote myself seriously to the care of abandoned youngsters.

The Marchioness pointed out that, ill as he was and with nothing to live on, he would not survive. Then she laid out her proposal and offered some "motherly advice:"

I'll continue to pay your salary, and I'll increase it if you wish. Go away and rest somewhere for a year, three years, five years. When you're back in good health, come back to the *Refuge* and you'll be most welcome. Otherwise you put me in the unpleasant position of having to dismiss you from my institutes. Think it over seriously.

Don Bosco replied without hesitation:

I've thought it over already. My life is consecrated to the good of young people. I thank you for the offers you're making me, but I can't turn back from the path that Divine Providence has traced out for me.

⁴³ Marchioness Barolo to Father Borel, May 18, 1846, in ASC 123 Persone, FDB 541 B5-8, edited in EBM II, 360-361. See also the full text in Appendix III, p. 28, below.

In that case, the Marchioness concluded, "you are dismissed from this moment."⁴⁴ To prevent malicious gossip, the Marchioness agreed to allow Don Bosco to keep his room at the *Refuge* for another three months. But, having been dismissed (or having resigned) from the chaplaincy, Don Bosco was now without a salary and would also have to find new lodgings.

That is why with Father Borel he acted immediately to sub-lease three rooms in the Pinardi house, in spite of its being a "house of ill repute." The notary public recorded the transaction as follows:

In the year of our Lord 1846, on June 5, Pancrazio Soave, Father Giovanni Borel and Father Giovanni Bosco, here present, have arranged to sub-lease three adjoining rooms at the eastern end of the second floor of the house owned by Francesco Pinardi. The house at present is in the lease of the above-mentioned Pancrazio Soave. The present contract will be in force from July 1 [1846] to January 1, 1849. [...]

Turin, June 5, 1846.

[signed:]

Soave Pancrazio

Father Giovanni Borel

Chiodo Giorgio, Not. Pub.

Apparently, Don Bosco's plan was to rent rooms as soon as they became available until the whole second story of the house was under his control, and its unsavory tenants were dislodged. Words spoken by Don Bosco and reported in Barberis' original chronicle describe the strategy.

Some time later, I discovered that the house attached (*attigua*) was actually a whorehouse. You may well imagine my embarrassment! I started by renting a couple of rooms, paying as much as double their worth, but made no use of them. As I continued to rent more rooms, the landlord would urge me to move in. "I don't really need them now," I would reply. "We'll be moving in as soon as I have got them all rented."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ MO-En, 251. Don Bosco's text is the source both for the story in Bonetti's *Storia dell'Oratorio* [Bonetti, DB's Early Apostolate, 41-43] and for the Biographical Memoirs [EBM II, 358-359]. In the Salesian tradition the Marchioness' position appears that of an intransigent and hard-hearted lady. However, her letter makes a different impression, and surely Don Bosco must have realized that he would have to resign, if he hadn't done so already.

⁴⁵ Barberis' *Autograph Chronicle*, Notebook I, 27-28, entry of May 26, 1875. FDB 833 D1-2.

6. Don Bosco's Illness of 1844-1846

From the foregoing paragraphs we may gain some understanding of the situation in which Don Bosco found himself at that crucial time in his life. The years 1844-1846, the difficult period of his definitive ministerial commitment to "poor and abandoned" young people, were marked by serious, in fact life-threatening, illness. This calls for an additional comment.

On-going and Worsening Illness

The Marchioness Barolo, in her letter to Father Borel, quoted above, outlined the progress of Don Bosco's quite serious illness. He had been ill since leaving the Pastoral Institute and moving in with Father Borel at the *Refuge* (October 1844). He was coughing up bloody sputum, and his health had been getting progressively worse.⁴⁶

Various factors combined to aggravate Don Bosco's condition. There was a genetic predisposition for respiratory ailments in the family. He himself admits to serious problems during and since his high school days in Chieri. But there were more recent aggravating circumstances. When the Oratory moved out of its space at the Little Hospital in May (1845) and began its "wandering" out of doors through the summer, fall and winter of 1845-46, Don Bosco spent Sunday and holy days with the youngsters, come rain or sunshine. When the Little Hospital opened its doors in August 1845, Don Bosco began fulfilling his duties as chaplain, the job for which he had been hired in the first place, while attending to the Oratory. At the same time he would be working late into the night writing, a practice that aggravated his condition still further. This is the period of his earliest writings. Besides the *Life of Louis Comollo* written while still at the Pastoral Institute and published in October 1844, Don Bosco was able to send to his publishers a number of works compiled during these years, the fruits of his nocturnal labors. We may mention the *Devotee of the Guardian Angel* (1845), the *History of the Church* (1845), the *Six Sundays in Honor of St. Aloysius* (1846), *Practice of Devotion to the Mercy of God* (n. d.), the

⁴⁶ Don Bosco was not the indomitable athlete imaged in popular biographies. He was plagued with illness since his teen-age years. While in secondary school at Chieri, so he tells us in his *Memoirs*, he was in the habit of reading late into the night. He adds, "This practice so ruined my health that for some years I seemed to have one foot in the grave." [*MO-En*, 108] When leaving the Pastoral Institute in 1844, Don Bosco was thinking of joining the Oblates of the Virgin Mary and going to the missions. Father Cafasso told him: "The foreign missions are not for you. [...] You can't even stand a minute in a closed carriage [...] without getting sick to your stomach [...] and you want to cross the ocean? You'd die during the voyage" [*EBM II*, 161].

Companion of Youth (1847), and the *Bible History* (1847).⁴⁷ The accumulated strain and stress were responsible for the serious condition described by Marchioness Barolo in her letter to Father Borel.

At the beginning of October 1845, sheer physical exhaustion forced Don Bosco to take a short vacation. He left Turin for Becchi on foot with a group of Oratory boys, but at Chieri he collapsed. The following day he rallied and could reach his destination. He spent the next four days in bed. We learn this from a letter addressed by Don Bosco to Father Borel, a letter however that he could not finish for lack of strength.⁴⁸ From a second letter we learn that in the next few days (it was vintage time) his ailment got worse. Gradually he got some of his strength back, but he continued to be plagued by sickness.⁴⁹

Back in Turin and to his hospital and oratory work later in October, he felt only slightly better. But, as the Marchioness writes, "although he was already coughing with bloody sputum, he kept on working."

By December 1845 Fathers Borel and Pacchiotti saw the necessity of rearranging the schedule of Masses to allow Don Bosco longer hours of rest. As mentioned above, Father Borel on January 3 (1846) reported to the Marchioness (in Rome) that these arrangements were having some good effect. Then he continues:

Thanks to your solicitude, he will be able to take a complete leave of absence from his duties at the *Refuge*. He will go away for a while and he is also under orders also to drop all other activities. Today he gave me a definite reply about his intentions and promised that the day after the Epiphany [January 7, 1846]

⁴⁷ *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo [...]* (Torino: Speirani e Ferrero, 1844); *Il Divoto dell'Angelo Custode* (Torino: Paravia, 1845); *Storia ecclesiastica ad uso delle scuole utile per ogni ceto di persone, [...]* (Torino: Speirani e Ferrero, 1845) 398 pp.; *Le sei domeniche e la novena di san Luigi Gonzaga* (Torino: Speirani e Ferrero, 1846); *Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio* (Torino: Eredi Botta, [no date]); *Il Giovane provveduto per la pratica dei suoi doveri [...]* (Torino: Paravia, 1847) 352 pp.; *Storia sacra per uso delle scuole [...]* (Torino: Speirani e Ferrero, 1847), 212 pp. For the text of these and other writings see Centro Studi Don Bosco, *Giovanni Bosco: Opere edite*, Prima Serie: Libri e Opuscoli, 38 volumes (Roma: LAS, 1977).

⁴⁸ Don Bosco to Father Borel, unsigned and undated (but postmarked October 11, 1845), Motto, *Epistolario* I, 60; *EBM* II, 251-252.

⁴⁹ Don Bosco to Father Borel, October 17, 1845, Motto, *Epistolario* I, 61-62; *EBM* II, 253. The sickness is described as "flusso," which may mean diarrhea, rectal bleeding, hemorrhage and the like.

It was illness, therefore, that forced Don Bosco to take this needed period of rest at Becchi. But by and by the "outing" to Becchi with Oratory lads in October, to coincide with the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary (October 7) and vintage time became a yearly event until 1864. It increased in importance when in 1848 a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary was opened in the house of Don Bosco's brother Joseph.

he will place himself under our orders. He will have to do a lot of explaining to Father Guala and Father Cafasso, if he does not keep his promise.⁵⁰

He did not keep his promise. The Oratory (which was meeting at Father Moretta's house at the time) required his presence. In the dead of winter, his condition deteriorated further. It is at this time that Father Borel suggested a scaling down of the Oratory operation, restricting it to a small group of younger children. In response, Don Bosco (referring to the Dream of 1844) claimed that oratory premises were already in place, just waiting to be found. (Had he lost his mind?)⁵¹

Then, as related above, we see Don Bosco and the Oratory, evicted from Father Moretta's house and meeting on the Filippi field, before the renting of the Pinardi shed in early spring (April 1, 1846).⁵² There followed Don Bosco's confrontation with the Marchioness and his dismissal from her service. Meanwhile, Don Bosco and Father Borel were taking initial steps to secure a foothold in the Pinardi house itself by renting rooms in it.

The Crisis

In early July (1846),⁵³ Don Bosco was again on the verge of collapse. Father Borel sent him to spend some time with the parish priest of Sassi, a salubrious hill town in the eastern outskirts of Turin. It didn't work. Since the place was within walking distance, the youngsters of the Oratory, joined by boys from the Christian Brothers' school and others, left him no peace.⁵⁴

He returned to the *Refuge* gravely ill with what may have been advanced bronchial pneumonia and took to his bed. At one point he was near death, but the youngsters' prayers and vows obtained for him the grace of recovery.⁵⁵

As soon as the doctor allowed him to leave his room at the *Refuge* in early August, Don Bosco, as had been agreed,⁵⁶ vacated the premises and had his belongings transferred to the Pinardi house. The rooms he had rented there may not yet have been ready for occupancy, or he preferred not to move in before he had the second story of the house under his control. In any case, in the second

⁵⁰ Father Borel to Marchioness Barolo, January 3, 1846, as in note 42 above.

⁵¹ *MO-En*, 246.

⁵² When speaking of his own condition on the Filippi field, Don Bosco writes: "With no one to help me, *my energy gone, my health undermined*, with no idea where I could gather my boys in the future, I was deeply troubled." [*MO-En*, 255, italics mine].

⁵³ *MO-En*, 293.

⁵⁴ *MO-En*, 290-291.

⁵⁵ *MO-En*, 290-293.

⁵⁶ *MO-En*, 251-252.

week in August he retreated to Becchi for a long period of convalescence.⁵⁷ Father Borel directed the Oratory himself with the help of Fathers John Baptist Vola, Hyacinth Carpano, Joseph Trivero and Sebastian Pacchiotti.⁵⁸

On this point, Goffredo Casalis in his *Dictionary* writes:

These four priests, together with Father Borel, during a period of four months replaced the founder of the institute and implemented its program in a manner that soon gained them the esteem and affection of all the youngsters. Such esteem and affection had to be gained, as was the case with the founder, at the cost of patient endurance and numberless sacrifices. For at its beginning this institution was much poorer than it is at present, the lads were unruly and completely uneducated, and many of them more often than not had nothing to eat, and nothing to wear but rags.⁵⁹

On November 3, 1846, Don Bosco, not yet fully recovered, returned to Turin with his mother Margaret. As noted above, he (and Father Borel) had rented rooms in the Pinardi house. That is where he and his mother took up residence on coming from Becchi. They had brought with them some basic goods and some money from the sale of some pieces of land and a vineyard. Margaret sent for her wedding trousseau, which eventually provided cloth and linen for the church.⁶⁰

There has been speculation on the reasons that motivated Margaret to give up her quiet life with Joseph at Becchi and at the age of 58/59 move to a strange city.

⁵⁷ A few interesting letters (from Don Bosco to Father Borel) from this period have survived [Motto, *Epistolario* I, 68-74; *EBM* II, 388-399].

⁵⁸ Father Dr. John Baptist Vola (1805-1872) is often mentioned in letters by Don Bosco and by Father Borel between 1846 and 1850 among devoted Oratory helpers and benefactors.

Father Dr. Canon Hyacinth Carpano (1821-1894), from a well-to-do family, helped Don Bosco financially and in oratory work. He went on to found homes for young people released from prison and at risk.

Father Joseph Trivero (1816-1894), custodian of the royal chapel of the Holy Shroud, also helped Don Bosco and the Oratory with money and personal service. In a letter to Father Borel, dated August 31, 1846, Don Bosco from Becchi writes: "Father Trivero helps with the Oratory, and that is good. But be on your guard because he has a tendency to be a bit rough with the youngsters, to the point that some have been upset. See to it that the oil [of kindness] seasons every dish we present in our Oratory" [Motto, *Epistolario* I, 71].

For Father Sebastian Pacchiotti, see footnote 5 above.

⁵⁹ Goffredo Casalis, *Dizionario geografico-storico-statistico-commerciale degli stati di S. M. il re di Sardegna* [...]. vol. XXI (Turin, 1851) 716; *EBM* II, 389.

⁶⁰ *MO-En*, 297.

Apart from the need to safeguard her son's reputation in that "house of ill repute,"⁶¹ she may have wished to be near her son, to care for him in his still uncertain health condition. The fact, however, that she had her wedding trousseau brought up would indicate that a permanent move was intended. Perhaps, the dedicated Christian woman that she was, she wished to share in her son's work for the poor and be a mother to the children. But, even if motivated by such high-minded motives, at a more practical level she may just have wished not to be a burden to Joseph and his large family, especially that winter, when the wheat crop had failed and a famine was setting in.

This famine, one of the most severe in the century, affected several European countries. Margaret's move then could perhaps be seen as one tiny effect of that widespread and grave crisis that led to the Paris revolution of 1848 and to Marx' Communist Manifesto.⁶²

7. Acquisition of the Pinardi House and Property (1851)

By way of conclusion, a word on the acquisition of the Pinardi house and property seems in order, for also this final transaction has vocational significance—indeed not in terms of Bosco's personal commitment, but in terms of the permanence of the work. As a matter of fact, at one point (in 1847) Don Bosco and Father Borel were considering leaving Pinardi's property and looking for a place large enough to accommodate the increasing number of boys attending the Oratory (as many as 800). And yet the Pinardi house was the place Don Bosco had seen in the dream of 1844 that he regarded as a sign from heaven. The decision, however, was to stay at Pinardi's and open a second oratory (the Oratory of St. Aloysius).⁶³

The actions leading to the definitive acquisition of the Pinardi house and property are amply described and illustrated by Father Fedele Giraudi, and more recently by Stella and Bracco.⁶⁴ Here a brief summary must suffice.

As indicated, the original Pinardi-Borel contract for the lease of the shed was signed for three years on April 1, 1846. Three additional rooms on the second story of the house were sub-rented by deed signed by Mr. Soave and

⁶¹ *MO-En*, 296.

⁶² Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)* (Roma: LAS, 1980), 76, Footnote 12 and related text [*Stella, DBEcSoc*].

⁶³ Bonetti, *Don Bosco's Early Apostolate*, 103-104.

⁶⁴ Fedele Giraudi, *L'Oratorio* (1935), 60-107; Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 75-76. For acquisition and sale of properties by Don Bosco from 1848 to 1884, as recorded in the Deeds' Office of the city of Turin, cf. Bracco, "DB e le istituzioni," in Bracco, *Torino e DB*, 145-150.

Father Borel on June 5, 1846. According to Lemoyne, Don Bosco rented a fourth room before leaving for Becchi in August.⁶⁵

Back from Becchi with his mother (on November 3), Don Bosco on December 1, 1846 sub-rented from Mr. Soave the entire Pinardi house and adjacent lot for 710 lire (with an added bonus of 59 lire), for a period ending on December 31, 1848. Mr. Soave was to retain the use of a section of the ground floor for his starch business until March 1, 1847. Don Bosco signed as the contracting party for the first time.⁶⁶

When Mr. Soave's lease (from Mr. Pinardi) expired, Father Borel (again acting as contracting party) merely took his place as lessee and signed the lease for the house and property with Mr. Pinardi for additional 150 lire a year.

This contract was to cover the period April 1, 1849 to March 31, 1852. But, on account of a murder on the premises of the Bellezza house next door, Pinardi offered to sell house and property to Don Bosco (in partnership with Fathers Borel, Cafasso and Roberto Murialdo) for 28,000 lire. The deed was signed on February 19, 1851, and by this final action the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was definitively settled in its permanent home.

⁶⁵ *EBM* II, 388.

⁶⁶ As noted above, Don Bosco brought some money from home from the sale of pieces of land and a vineyard [*MO-En*, 297], but they would not have been worth 769 lire. It is believed that Father Cafasso, Father Borel (and others that backed Don Bosco's oratory work) put up the money.

Appendices

The appendices that follow give the full text of some documents quoted or referred to above.

Appendix I

Father Borel's Letter to Marchioness Barolo (January 3, 1846) regarding Don Bosco's Worrisome Health Condition⁶⁷

January 3, 1846

My dear Marchioness:

Your generous suggestion regarding our beloved Don Bosco and the goodwill you show him prove how much you value this devoted priest. He will certainly not fail to profit by it, and, on my part, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.⁶⁸

Since the beginning of December, when it became obvious that Don Bosco needed rest, Father Pacchiotti has been saying Mass at the Hospital, leaving to Don Bosco the second Mass at the *Refuge*. The marked improvement in his condition proved that it was a wise move. Of course, we don't think that he has made a perfect recovery. I have firm hope, however, that he will soon be well again, especially since, thanks to your solicitude, he will be able to take a complete rest from his duties at the *Refuge* and go away for a while. He will also be under orders to drop all other activities.

Today he gave me a definite reply about his intentions and promised that the day after Epiphany [January 6] he will place himself under orders. He will have a lot of explaining to do to Father Guala and Father Cafasso, if he does not keep his promise.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ ASC 123 Persone, Borel, *FDB* 552 D9, edited in *EBM* II, 276-277 (Correct the date to January 3, 1846).

⁶⁸ The Marchioness in her concern over Don Bosco's ill health had offered to release him with pay for as long as would be necessary to get him back to health (See Marchioness Barolo's letter to Father Borel in Appendix III, p. 28, below).

⁶⁹ Father Louis Guala was rector and lecturer in moral theology at the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*). Father Joseph Cafasso was Father Guala's assistant in both capacities. They both had shown great interest in Don Bosco—Father Cafasso in particular, who was Don Bosco's spiritual director and mentor (See footnote 1 above).

Incidentally, the two good Fathers have offered to send us another priest for the second Mass at the *Refuge*. Should all our efforts and diligence prove insufficient to the need, I shall call on the superior of the Oblates for one of the usual confessors.⁷⁰ As soon as, God willing, I come across a priest imbued with the spirit necessary for this work, I will not fail to inform you. Again may I express my gratitude for your offer of an additional priest for our work.

Your obedient servant,

Father John Borel

Appendix II

Don Bosco's Letter to Marquis Michael Cavour, Vicar of Turin (March 13, 1846)⁷¹

Turin, March 13, 1846

Your Excellency:

The role which Your Excellency plays in everything that concerns the public good, both civic and moral, leads me to hope that you will welcome a report on a catechetical program we have started.⁷² Since its purpose is the good of young people, you yourself have on a number of occasions shown favor and support for it.

⁷⁰ The reference is to the Oblates of the Virgin Mary founded by Father Pius Bruno Lanteri (See footnote 4 above).

⁷¹ Motto, *Epistolario* I, 66-68. For Michael Benso Marquis of Cavour see note 20 above.

⁷² Throughout the letter, "catechetical program" translates the Italian "*catechismo*," by which Don Bosco almost certainly means "the oratory" as such. In other words, he speaks of the oratory as a "program of religious instruction." One should not think, that Don Bosco's emphasis on catechetical instruction was just part of a strategy on his part designed to allay the vicar's fears. Nor was it just playing on the vicar's feelings, in the certainty that, as a Catholic and a Catholic king's representative, he could not object to a "program for the instruction of poor children in the Catholic faith." It was a fact that catechetical instruction held top priority in Don Bosco's oratory.

This catechetical program was begun three years ago in the Church of St. Francis of Assisi,⁷³ and because it was the Lord's work the Lord blessed it, and the young people attended in greater number than the place could accommodate. Then, in the year 1844, having taken a job [as chaplain] at the Pious Work of the *Refuge*, I went to live there. But those wonderful youngsters continued to attend at the new place, eager to receive religious instruction. It was at this time that we, the Rev. Dr. [John] Borelli, Father [Sebastian] Pacchiotti and myself jointly, presented a petition to His Grace the Archbishop for permission to convert one of our rooms into an oratory,⁷⁴ and he authorized us to do so. Here catechism was taught, confessions were heard and the Holy Mass was celebrated for the above-mentioned young people.

But, as their number increased to the point that the premises could no longer accommodate them, we petitioned the illustrious City authorities for permission to relocate our catechetical program at the Church of St. Martin, near the city's mills, and their reply was favorable. There many boys attended and often exceeded two hundred and fifty.

As it turned out, we were given notice by the syndics of the city that by the beginning of January our catechism classes should be moved from that church to some other place. No reason was given for such an order.⁷⁵ As a result we faced a serious dilemma, for it would have been a great pity to discontinue the good work we had begun. Only His Excellency Count [Giuseppe-Maria Luigi Giacinto Provana di] Collegno, after having spoken to you, gave us the encouragement to continue.

During that winter, the catechetical program was conducted some times in our own house, at other times in some rented rooms.⁷⁶ Finally, earlier this week we entered into negotiations with Mr. [Francesco] Pinardi for a site.⁷⁷ We agreed on the sum of two hundred and eighty francs for a large room suitable for use as

⁷³ Since this letter was written in 1846, "three years ago" would date the beginnings of the catechetical program (oratory) to 1843. Further on in this letter, Don Bosco again speaks of "three years." This may imply that 1843 was the year when the group gathering at St. Francis of Assisi acquired consistency and became recognizably Don Bosco's group.

⁷⁴ "Oratory," here means "chapel," and the reference is to the chapel dedicated to St. Francis de Sales set up at the Little Hospital on December 8, 1844.

⁷⁵ The administration of the mills had lodged a complaint that "the children under the direction of the Rev. Dr. Borel [...] were] causing trouble and disturbance, dirtying up the place besides" [Motto, *Epistolario* I, 68]. The two syndics were each in charge of an area of government and administration under the Vicar.

⁷⁶ These would be the rooms rented in Father Moretta's house.

⁷⁷ This letter was written on Friday, March 13. Therefore these negotiations for the Pinardi shed took place between Sunday, March 8, and Thursday, March 12. In his *Memoirs*, however, Don Bosco gives a different date and a different picture [*MO-En*, 255-259, incl. note 2].

an oratory, along with two other rooms and an adjacent piece of ground.⁷⁸ We think this place will suit our purpose, first because of its close proximity to the *Refuge*, then because of its location far from any church, though near enough to several houses. The one thing we need to know is whether it is acceptable to you from the standpoint of the neighborhood and of the community at large.

The purpose of this catechetical program is to gather those boys who, left to themselves, would not attend religious instruction in any church on Sundays and holy days. We encourage attendance by approaching them in a friendly manner, welcoming them with kind words, promises, gifts, and the like. The following principles are basic to our teaching: (1) the value of work, (2) the regular reception of the sacraments, (3) respect for all superior authority and (4) avoidance of bad company.

These principles, which we skillfully strive to inculcate in the hearts of the youngsters, have produced marvelous results. In the space of three years, more than twenty entered the religious life; six are studying Latin in view of a priestly vocation; and many others have changed for the better and are now attending their own parishes. This is a great achievement when one considers the caliber of the young people who, though generally ranging in age from ten to sixteen years, lack any kind of education, whether religious or secular. Most of them in fact have already succumbed to evil, and are in danger of becoming public nuisances or of being put in places of correction.

You are a good-hearted person, and have at heart everything that may contribute to the common good of society. For this reason we seek your protection on these our endeavors. As you can well see, profit is not our motive in the least; our sole aim is to gain souls for the Lord.

The costs we must meet to provide all that the place requires are great. Count Collegno, gratefully mentioned above, has offered his generous support. He has moreover given us permission to mention the fact to Your Excellency, after which he himself would explain the matter in detail. Should you wish to speak to me or to my colleagues, we are at your service; indeed we would be anxious to oblige.

I beg you to take in good part the liberty I have taken, and I wish you all the Lord's blessings. With sentiments of highest esteem and greatest respect, I have the supreme honor of being Your Excellency's most humble and obedient servant,

Father John Bosco
Spiritual Director of the *Refuge*

⁷⁸ There is no mention here of the famous "Pinardi shed." Don Bosco here is in agreement with the original lease contract (signed on April 1, 1846) which mentions "one large rectangular room, with two other rooms, and an adjacent piece of ground" [Motto, *Epistolario* I, 68]. The material reference, however, is to the "Pinardi shed."

Cavour's notation for his secretary on back of the letter reads: "Reply. I have spoken with His Excellency the Most Reverend Archbishop and with Count Colegno [*sic*], and I agree that, without any doubt, much may be gained from a catechism program. I shall be happy to see the Rev. Father Bosco in my office at 2 P.M., March 26. Benso di Cavour."

Appendix III

Marchioness Barolo's Letter to Father Borel (May 18, 1846)⁷⁹

May 18, 1846

Dear Father Borel:

A conversation with Father Cafasso has led me to see the necessity, dear Father, of our reaching an understanding [about Don Bosco]. Such an understanding, I believe had best be sought in writing than in speaking. This because whenever I have the honor of speaking with you, you never allow me to express my respect for you, my admiration for your virtue and my gratitude for the zealous care you have always shown for my institutes.

When St. Philomena Hospital became the latest addition [to my institutions], we considered it necessary to appoint a chaplain for it. There was no one better qualified than yourself for advice. You selected the excellent Don Bosco and introduced him to me. I, too, liked him from the very start and noticed a certain spirit of recollection and simplicity about him that is the true mark of holiness.

My acquaintance with him began in the fall of 1844, and the hospital was not expected to be ready for occupancy, and in fact was not, until August 1845. In my anxiety to secure the services of such a worthy priest, I agreed to engage him then and there, and start giving him his regular salary. A few weeks after he had taken up residence with you, both the Mother Superior of the *Refuge* and myself realized that his health could stand no work. You will recall the many times I told you to give him special consideration and let him rest, and so forth. You did not listen to me, and replied that priests have to work, etc.

⁷⁹ Marchioness Barolo to Father Borel, May 18, 1846, in ASC 123 Persone, Barolo, *FDBM* 541 B5-8, edited in *EBM* II, 360-361. The lady had returned from Rome, but she avoided a tête-à-tête with Father Borel preferring to state her position in writing.

Don Bosco's health continued to deteriorate up to the time of my trip to Rome, but, although he was already coughing with bloody sputum, he kept working. Then I received a letter from you, informing me that Don Bosco was in no condition to carry on the work he had been hired for. I replied immediately that I was prepared to continue his full salary, on the sole condition that he take a total rest, and I am ready to fulfill that promise now. Do you really think, Father, that hearing confessions and preaching to hundreds of boys is no work? I believe it is injuring his health. He must go far enough from Turin as not to have to subject his lungs to any strain. When he was at Gassino, these lads kept going to him for confession, and he used to walk them back to Turin.⁸⁰ You are a kind person, Father, and I have doubtlessly deserved the unfavorable opinion you have of me. You have accused me of being against the religious instruction that these boys receive every Sunday, and against the care that Don Bosco takes of them during the week. On the contrary, I do really believe that the work is excellent in itself and worthy of those who have undertaken it. However, in the first place, I am convinced that Don Bosco, because of his poor health, is not up to continuing such work. Secondly, I find it rather improper that these boys, who previously used to wait for Don Bosco at the door of the *Refuge*, now should wait for him at the entrance of the hospital.

I won't dredge up past incidents, but Father Durando feels exactly as I do about the matter.⁸¹ I will mention only what took place yesterday. Mother Superior of the hospital told me that a girl of loose morals, who had been dismissed from the *Refuge*, visited the hospital with the family of one of our patients. With her there was a woman whose little girl was taken from her at the suggestion of the pastor of Annunciation Church, and is now at the *Refuge*. I asked both of them to leave the hospital. Now, a little earlier I had seen a group of boys at the door of the hospital and had asked them what they wanted. They told me they were waiting for Don Bosco. Some of them were not so young. Now both this bad woman and this girl, whom I had asked to leave the hospital and who were angry, passed through the midst of these boys. What if this girl had said something about her shameful profession to these pupils of Don Bosco?

To sum up briefly:

1. I approve and praise the instruction being given to the boys, but because of our type of inmates, I object to the boys' habit of gathering around the doorways of my institutes.

2. I firmly believe that Don Bosco needs a complete rest because of his weak lungs. I shall not continue his salary, which he can surely use, unless he

⁸⁰ Gassino was a town of some 3,000 inhabitants located 15 km. (9.3 mi.) east of Turin. I could not find attestation of a convalescence of Don Bosco here.

⁸¹ Father Marcantonio Durando was the Visitor (Provincial) of the Priests of the Mission (Vincentians). He was highly regarded as a preacher, retreat master and confessor.

agrees to go away from Turin to some place where there will be no cause of harm to his delicate health. This is all the more important to me as my respect for him grows.

Dear Father, I know that we differ on this point. Were it not for my conscience, I would be ready, as always, to submit to your judgment.

With unchanging regard and deep respect, I am honored to be,

Your devoted servant,

Marchioness Barolo, née Colbert

Appendix IV

Introduction and Historical Outline

From the Draft Regulations for the Oratory of St. Francis De Sales (*Piano di Regolamento per l'Oratorio maschile di S. Francesco di Sales in Torino nella regione Valdocco*) (1854).⁸²

1. Introduction

[The **Introduction** (*Introduzione*) to the Draft Regulation of 1854 states the rationale and principles of the work of the Oratory;

Ut filios Dei, qui erant dispersi, congregaret in unum [To gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad, Jn 11:52]. It seems to me that the words of the Holy Gospel which speak to us of the divine Savior come down from heaven to earth to gather together all the children of God scattered all over

⁸² Don Bosco's autograph of the *Introduction* and *Historical Outline* is in ASC 132: Oratorio 1, FDB 1,872 B3-C5. These two introductory chapters of the 1854 Draft Regulations for the Oratory (*Piano di Regolamento dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales in Torino nella regione Valdocco*) have been critically edited, with introductory study and notes, by Pietro Braidò, *Don Bosco per i giovani: L'Oratorio, una 'Congregazione degli Oratori'. Documenti (Piccola Biblioteca dell'Istituto Storico Salesiano, 9)*. (Roma: LAS, 1988), 30-34, 34-55. It bears stressing that these are the Regulations for the original boys' oratory, that is, the gathering of young people on Sundays and holy days for church services, religious instruction and recreation. They are to be distinguished from the Regulations for the *house* of the Oratory of Valdocco (later edited as the Regulations for Salesian Houses). Both sets of regulations were officially published in 1877.

the world, could be applied literally to the young people of our times. They constitute the most vulnerable yet valuable section of human society; we base our hopes for the future on them, for they are not of their nature depraved. [The problem arises from] carelessness on the part of parents, idleness, mixing in bad company, which happens especially on Sundays. Otherwise it would be so easy to inculcate in their young hearts the principles of order, of good behavior, of respect, of religion. If they are ruined at that age, it is due more to carelessness than to ingrained malice.

These young people have a real need of some kind person who will take care of them, work with them, guide them in virtue and keep them away from vice. The problem lies in finding ways of gathering them, of being able to speak to them, of making them good.

The Son of God was sent for this very purpose and his holy religion alone can achieve it. This religion is of itself eternal and unchangeable; it has been, and will always be, the teacher of the people. But the law it contains is so perfect that it can change according to the events of the time and can adapt itself to the character of all peoples.

The oratories are the appropriate means for instilling the spirit of religion in hearts that are uncultivated and abandoned.

These oratories are gatherings of young people who, after they have attended church services, engage in pleasant and wholesome recreation. The support which the civil and Church authorities have given me, the zeal shown by many worthy people who have given me material aid, or have helped directly with the work, are a clear sign of the blessing of the Lord, and of the public's appreciation.

It is now time to set out a regulatory framework that might serve as a guideline for the right direction of this portion of the sacred ministry, as well as a stimulus to the numerous priests and lay people who work in it with such concern and dedication. I have attempted to do this at various times, but was forced to give it up on account of the innumerable difficulties that stood in the way. Now, to ensure the preservation of unity of spirit and uniformity of discipline, as well as to comply with the wish of persons in authority who have counseled me to do so, I have decided to complete this work, no matter what the cost.

But I wish it understood from the start that it is not my purpose to lay down law or precept for anyone. My one aim is to set out what we do in the Boys' Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco, and the way that we do it. Some expressions found herein may lead some people into thinking that I am seeking my own honor and glory. Let them not think so, for such impression may arise from my great concern to write about the oratory as it actually was and as it is even at the present day.

When I dedicated myself to this portion of the sacred ministry, I fully intended to consecrate every effort of mine to the greater glory of God, and to the good of souls. I saw myself as working to make these young people good citizens for this earth, so that they might be one day worthy inhabitants of heaven.

May God help me and enable me to continue in this endeavor to my last breath. So be it.

2. Historical Outline

(Cenno Storico dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales)

This chapter, functioning as a foreword to the Draft Regulation of 1854, gives a summary history of the beginnings and early development of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

This Oratory, a gathering of young people on Sundays and holy days,⁸³ began in the Church of St. Francis of Assisi. For many years during the summertime, the Rev. Father [Giuseppe] Caffasso [*sic*] used to teach catechism every Sunday to bricklayers' lads in a little room attached to the sacristy of the aforementioned church. The heavy workload this priest had taken on caused him to interrupt this work, which he loved so much. I took it up towards the end of 1841, and I began by gathering in that same place two young adults who were in grave need of religious instruction.⁸⁴ These were joined by others, and during 1842 the number went up to twenty, and sometimes twenty-five.

From these beginnings I learnt two very important truths: that in general young people are not bad in themselves, but more often they become such through contact with evil persons; and even these bad youngsters, if removed from evil company, are susceptible to great moral change.

In 1843 the catechism classes continued on the same footing and the number increased to fifty, the most which the place assigned to me could accommodate. All the while, while visiting the prisons of Turin, I was able to verify that the poor unfortunates sent to that place of punishment generally are poor young men who come into the city from far away. They come out of a need to find work or at the urging of some rascally companion. These young people are left to themselves particularly on Sundays and holy days and spend the little money they earn during the week in gambling or on sweetmeats. This is the

⁸³ The "*giorni festivi*," on which the "festive" Oratory met, correspond to "Sundays and holy days."

⁸⁴ "Two young adults": compare this statement of Don Bosco with the Garelli story in Don Bosco's *Memoirs* of ca. 1874 [*MO-En*, 187-190].

beginning of many vices; in no time at all young people who were good are found to be at risk and to put others at risk. Nor can the prisons better them in any way, because while detained there they learn more refined ways of doing wrong, so that when they are released they become worse.

I turned therefore to this class of youngster as the most abandoned and at risk; and in the course of each week, either with promises or with little gifts, I managed to gain pupils (*allievi*). My efforts were rewarded as their number increased greatly, so that, when in the summer of 1844 larger premises were placed at my disposal, I found myself at times with some eighty youths around me.⁸⁵ My soul rejoiced at seeing myself surrounded by pupils (*allievi*), all of whom were responding to my care and had already started on a job. Thus, I could in some way vouch for their conduct, whether on weekdays or weekends. As I looked over them, I could visualize one returned to parents from whom he had fled, another placed with an employer, all of them well on the way to learning their religion.

But the community life characteristic of a place like the Pastoral Institute of St. Francis of Assisi, the silence and good order required by the services conducted in that public and very well attended church, got in the way of my plans. And even though the late-lamented Dr. Guala encouraged me to persevere, nevertheless I clearly perceived the need of new [and larger] premises. For, religious instruction occupies the young people for only a certain period of time, after which they need some outlet: hikes, games, and the like.

Providence arranged that at the end of October 1844 I should be appointed to the *Refuge* as spiritual director.⁸⁶ I invited my boys (*figli*) to come and visit me at my new residence, and the following Sunday they were there in a much bigger number than usual. So my room became oratory and playground. What a sight! No chair, table or anything else could escape the attack of that friendly invasion.

Meanwhile, I and the Rev. Dr. [Giovanni] Borrelli,⁸⁷ who from then on became the Oratory's staunchest supporter, had chosen a room intended as dining room and common room for the priests working at the *Refuge*, which

⁸⁵ This development probably corresponds to that described in the *Memoirs* [MO-En, 197, lines 24-28].

⁸⁶ This was the home for wayward young women founded by Marquis and Marchioness Barolo under the title of Our Lady, Refuge of Sinners, popularly known as the *Refuge*. Unlike the *Memoirs*, this Historical Outline presents the move from the Pastoral Institute to Barolo's *Refuge* as trouble-free and makes no mention of the Dream of 1844 (See above).

⁸⁷ Father John Borel (Teologo = Th. D.), with whom Don Bosco was already acquainted, was the head chaplain (spiritual director) of the Barolo institutes. Don Bosco spells the name Borrelli or Borelli (See footnote 5 above).

seemed big enough for our purposes and adaptable as a chapel.⁸⁸ The Archbishop gave permission, and on the day of Mary's Immaculate Conception (December 8, 1844), the chapel we had long hoped for was blessed, with the faculty of celebrating the holy sacrifice of the Mass, and of giving benediction with the Blessed Sacrament.

The news of a chapel destined exclusively for the young, the liturgical services prepared especially for them, a bit of open space to romp around in, proved to be powerful attractions; so that our church, which began to be called Oratory at that time,⁸⁹ became quickly overcrowded. We made do as best we could. Catechism classes were held in every corner: in rooms, kitchen and corridors. It was all oratory.

Things were moving along when an unfortunate occurrence (or better, Divine Providence acting with hidden purposes) put our oratory in a serious predicament. On August 10, 1845 the Little Hospital of St. Philomena was opened, and the premises we had been using for nine months had to be given over to other uses. Another meeting place had to be found.

[...]⁹⁰

In the meantime, as the winter was drawing near, and the weather no longer favored excursions into the countryside, Dr. [Giovanni] and myself agreed on renting three rooms in the Moretta House, a building not far distant from the present Oratory in Valdocco. During that winter our activities were limited to simple catechism lessons on the evening of each Sunday and holy day.⁹¹

At this time the gossip that had already for some time been making the rounds, *that the oratories were a deliberate way of getting young people away from their own parishes in order to instruct them in suspect principles*, grew more insistent. This allegation was grounded on the fact that I allowed my

⁸⁸ This "room" was located, not in the *Refuge* proper, but in the adjacent "Little Hospital of St. Philomena" under construction for the care of young handicapped girls, for which Don Bosco had been hired as chaplain.

⁸⁹ It began to be called "Oratory of St. Francis de Sales" at that time: cf. *MO-En*, 217.

⁹⁰ A description of the "wandering" follows, with the same sequence as in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*: St. Martin's at the Dora mills; Holy Cross Cemetery (St. Peter in Chains), a period of "homelessness"; Father Moretta's house. (For the attested correct sequence see above.)

⁹¹ These evening catechism classes do not seem to coincide with the "night classes" which, according to Don Bosco's statement in his *Memoirs* [*MO-En*, 233] began to be given at Father Moretta's house in 1845, or according to his statement in the *Historical Outlines* of 1862 at Pinardi's in 1846.

Father John Baptist Anthony Moretta (1777-1847) was a former Capuchin Franciscan who lived in retirement in his own house, a two-story building of some 20 rooms, most of them rented out.

young people every kind of recreation, as long as they did not sin, or do anything that could be regarded as reprehensible conduct. In response to the allegation [that I was drawing young people away from their parishes], I pointed out that my purpose was to gather together only those young people who did not belong to any parish. As a matter of fact most of the youngsters were from out of town and did not even know to which parish they belonged. But the more I tried to explain how things stood in reality, the more sinister was the interpretation put on the matter.

Furthermore, certain events took place that forced us to leave the Moretta house, so that in March 1846 I had to lease a small grass field from the Fillippi brothers, at the location where at present stands the pig iron foundry. And there I was under the wide and starry sky, in the middle of a field bordered by a sorry-looking hedgerow that kept out only those who did not want to come in. There I was with some three hundred young men who found their heaven on earth in that oratory—an oratory the roof and the walls of which were nothing but sky.

To make matters worse, the Vicar of the City, the Marquis [Michael] Cavour, informed and prejudiced against these weekend gatherings, sent for me. He briefly reported what was being rumored about the oratory, and then said to me: "My good Father, let me give you a sound piece of advice. Get rid of those villains, because these gatherings are dangerous." I replied: "All I am trying to do is to better the lot of these poor boys. If the City would care to provide any kind of premises for me, I have every hope of being able to lessen the number of troublemakers, and at the same time, the numbers of those who go to prison."

[...]⁹²

In the meantime in order to be able to attend more directly to the care of my boys, I was forced to resign from the *Refuge*. As a result, I was without employment and without means of support.⁹³ Every project of mine was taking a wrong turn, and I was mentally and physically exhausted, so much so that the word was put around that I had become insane.

Failing to make others understand my plans, I sought to mark time, because I was deeply convinced that events would prove me right in what I was doing. Furthermore, I wanted so much to have a suitable site that in my mind I considered this to be already achieved. This was the reason why even my dearest friends thought that I was out of my mind. And since I would not give in and desist from my undertaking, my helpers abandoned me completely.

⁹² The dialogue continues much as in the *Memoirs* [MO-En, 244-245].

⁹³ Even though the Oratory had vacated the Little Hospital, Don Bosco was still in the employ of the Marchioness Barolo as chaplain of the hospital, drawing a salary, and living at the *Refuge*. As described above, the Marchioness put pressure on Don Bosco to disband the Oratory and join her priests. This was when Don Bosco resigned (or was dismissed), though he was allowed to maintain his room at the *Refuge* for three months, until August 1846.

Dr. Borrelli went along with my ideas. However, since no other course seemed open to us, he thought we should pick [just] a dozen of the younger children and teach them their catechism privately, [while sending the rest away], and wait of a better opportunity to go forward with our plans. "No," I replied, "This is not the way. This is the Lord's work; he began it, and he will bring it to completion." "But meanwhile," he insisted, "Where will we gather our boys?" "In the Oratory." "But where is this Oratory?" "I see it there in readiness: I see a church, a house, and an enclosed playground. It is there, and I see it." "But where are these things?" "I do not know where they are, but I see them." I insisted because of my lively wish to have these things. I was thoroughly convinced that God would provide them.⁹⁴

Dr. Borrelli felt sorry for me, the way I was, and he too reluctantly expressed doubts about my sanity. Father Caffasso [*sic*] kept telling me not to take any decision for the duration. The Archbishop [Louis Fransoni], however, was inclined to agree that I should stay with the work.

All the while Marquis Cavour firmly held to the position that these gatherings, which he claimed were dangerous, should stop. He refrained, however, from taking a decision that might displease the Archbishop. He therefore, with his office staff arranged for a meeting at the Archbishop's palace. The Archbishop later confided to me that the session resembled the last judgment. The discussion was brief, but the verdict was that such gatherings must absolutely stop.

Fortunately Count Provana di Collegno was at the time serving in the Vicar's office as head of the Audit Department. He had always encouraged me and supported my work financially both from his own private purse and from that of His Majesty King Charles Albert. This sovereign, gratefully remembered, appreciated the work of the oratory and would send financial help in times of special need.⁹⁵ Through Count Collegno he often expressed his satisfaction with our special priestly ministry. He placed our ministry on a par with the work of the foreign missions, and would have liked to see such gatherings of young people at risk held in every city of the realm. When he learned of my predicament, he sent me 300 francs by the same Count with words of encouragement. He also let the Vicar's office know that he wished such Sunday gatherings of young people to continue. The Vicar should take care to prevent any disorder that might arise. The Vicar obeyed and took steps to that effect. He ordered a number of security guards to attend our meetings and report. The

⁹⁴ Again note that Don Bosco does not speak of having had a dream at this point. Lemoyne, however, does report a [second] Dream of the Holy Martyrs.

⁹⁵ By the time these Regulations were written (1854) Charles Albert had died in voluntary exile in Portugal (1849) after the defeat suffered in the First War of Independence against Austria (1848-1849).

guards sat through catechism, sermon, and hymn singing, and stood by during recreation, and then reported everything to the Vicar. By and by his attitude changed for the better, and so did the situation at the oratory.⁹⁶

The Beginning of the Present Oratory of Valdocco and Its Development to the Present Time

It was Sunday evening, March 15, a memorable day for our Oratory. [...] ⁹⁷ And on Easter Sunday, April 1 (*nel giorno di Aprile*) [...] our chapel was inaugurated.⁹⁸

A little later we rented other rooms in Mr. Pinardi's house, and we began Sunday and evening classes.⁹⁹ Chevalier Gonella, our outstanding benefactor, was so impressed that he had similar classes established at St. Pelagia.¹⁰⁰ The City, too, after studying the matter, opened evening classes in several districts, so that any apprentice who so desires can receive basic instruction.

In the year 1846, on a Sunday in April, the present church¹⁰¹ was blessed with the faculty of celebrating Holy Mass, teaching catechism, preaching, and imparting Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament.

The Sunday and evening schools made great progress with classes in reading, writing, singing, Bible History, the elements of arithmetic and the

⁹⁶ The Vicar's opposition is described in the same general terms in Don Bosco's *Memoirs* [*MO-En*, 244-246] dating from about 1874 or 75. However, Don Bosco's letter of 1846 to the Vicar [see Appendix II above] seems to indicate a different attitude on Cavour's part.

⁹⁷ The story of the last day on the Filippi field, the renting of the Pinardi shed and the settling are related, much as in the *Memoirs* [*MO-En*, 255-257].

⁹⁸ In 1846 Easter fell on April 12; therefore, if Mr. Soave brought the news of the shed on Palm Sunday (as Don Bosco writes in his *Memoirs*) it could not have been on March 15. It would have been on April 5, the date Father Bonetti wrote into Father Berto's transcription of the *Memoirs*. For the inauguration of the chapel, Don Bosco here writes "*Domenica di Pasqua nel giorno di Aprile*," which I take to mean "on Easter Sunday, the first day of April."

⁹⁹ On December 1, 1846 Don Bosco sub-rented from Mr. Soave the remaining rooms of the second story of the Pinardi house, thus obtaining control of the whole floor.

¹⁰⁰ Don Bosco here refers specifically to the chevalier Marco Gonella (1822-1886) who was indeed a great benefactor. But it was Marco's father Andrea (1770-1851) who on December 3, 1845 obtained the royal permit to establish evening classes for adults at St. Pelagia, the church of the Work for the Instruction of the Poor (*Mendicizia istruita*). The classes were entrusted to the de la Salle Christian Brother. [Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 64-65] Who first established such classes is a matter of debate.

¹⁰¹ "The present church" refers to the original Pinardi chapel. But note that by 1854 (presumably the time of writing) the original chapel had been replaced by a larger church (St. Francis de Sales) built in 1852. It seems then that this Historical Outline had been in preparation earlier, and that the expression was never changed.

Italian language, in which a public display was given by the pupils of the Oratory. By the month of November, I had taken up residence in the house attached to the Oratory.¹⁰² Many priests, including Dr. [Giovanni Battista] Vola, Dr. [Giacinto] Carpano, and Father [Giuseppe] Trivero, took part in the life of the Oratory.

Year 1847

The Sodality of St. Aloysius was established with the approval of the ecclesiastical authorities: we got a statue of the saint; we celebrated the "Six Sundays" preceding the solemn feast of St. Aloysius, with a large attendance. On the feast day of the saint, the Archbishop [Louis Fransoni] came to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to a large number of boys, and a short play was staged, along with singing and music.

Further rooms were rented, thanks to which some evening classes were expanded. Two poor young men, orphans, unqualified, ignorant of religion, were given a place to stay, and so the shelter began and continued to grow.¹⁰³

[...]¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² On November 3, 1846 Don Bosco after a long convalescence, had returned from Becchi with his mother. At that point in time, the "house attached" was the Pinardi house, in which Don Bosco had rented some rooms.

¹⁰³ For actions leading to the acquisition of the Pinardi house and property see footnotes 64, 65, 66 and related text above.

In his *Memoirs* [MO-En, 313-314] Don Bosco states that the shelter (boarding house or "house attached to the Oratory" [*Casa Annessa*]) began with one abandoned orphan from the Valsesia. On the contrary, according to this 1854 statement of Don Bosco, the shelter began with two young men.

¹⁰⁴ There follow brief summaries of the growth of the work through the years 1847-1854, relating the opening of the oratories of St. Aloysius and of the Guardian Angels, and other notable events.