

# **Journal of Salesian Studies**

---

*Spring 1995*

---

**Volume VI**

**Number 1**

**Institute of Salesian Studies  
Berkeley, California, USA**

# Don Bosco's Love Affair with "Poor and Abandoned" Young People and the Beginnings of the Oratory

Arthur Lenti

## Introduction

The publication, in recent years, of heretofore unpublished writings and other materials pertaining to Don Bosco's early apostolate has called our attention to certain aspects of his work at its origins which may not have been clearly depicted in the biographical tradition. I am referring in particular to such publications as Father Pietro Braido's, *Don Bosco per i giovani*,<sup>1</sup> Father Francesco Motto's first volume of Don Bosco's letters critically edited,<sup>2</sup> the City of Turin's three-volume *Torino e Don Bosco*, edited by Giuseppe Bracco,<sup>3</sup> and other valuable studies dealing with the world of the young in the 1840s and Don Bosco's response.

Obviously, when speaking of the origin of Don Bosco's work, we cannot overlook his own *Memoirs of the Oratory*.<sup>4</sup> But in view of the special *Tendenz*

---

<sup>1</sup> Pietro Braido, *Don Bosco per i giovani: l' "Oratorio" una "Congregazione degli Oratori"*. *Documenti*. (Piccola Biblioteca dell'Istituto Storico Salesiano, 9) Roma: LAS, 1988. The critically edited archival documents, to be described below, are: the "Introduction" and "Historical Outline" (*Cenno storico*) which served as a foreword to Don Bosco's Draft Regulations for the Oratory (*Piano di regolamento*), dated 1854; the "Historical Outlines" of 1862. [Braido, *DB per i giovani*; *Historical Outline of 1854 and Historical Outlines of 1862*] There follows an extended study, with a critical edition of the text, of the later "Historical Outline" of 1873-74. Other texts are given in an introductory study and in an Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> *Giovanni Bosco, Epistolario*, Introduzione, testi critici e note a cura di Francesco Motto, Vol. I (1835-1863). Rome: LAS, 1991. [Motto, *Ep I*]

<sup>3</sup> Archivio Storico della Città di Torino, *Torino e Don Bosco*, a cura di Giuseppe Bracco [with many contributors], I: Saggi; II: Immagini; III: Documenti. Torino, 1989. [Bracco, *Torino e DB I, II*]

<sup>4</sup> *Giovanni Bosco, Memorie dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*. Introduzione, note e testo critico a cura di Antonio da Silva Ferreira (Istituto Storico Salesiano - Roma, Fonti - Serie prima, 4). Rome: LAS, 1991. [MO-Fe] This replaces the earlier *S. Giovanni Bosco, Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di*

of this work written by Don Bosco in the 1870s, testimonies from him closer to the events may throw appreciable light on the actual circumstances of the origin of the oratory.<sup>5</sup>

The present study aims, not at any new interpretation, but simply at describing some aspects of the actual circumstances of the origins on the basis of fresh documentation now available. In particular, restricting the field of inquiry, I will focus on the young people who were protagonists in Don Bosco's work at its origin. After a brief description of the social world of certain categories of young people at the time, the very situation which elicited Don Bosco's response, I will present material dealing with the beginnings and early development of Don Bosco's two earliest and foremost institutions, the Oratory and the Home attached to the Oratory.<sup>6</sup> To this effect I will present extensive excerpts of the relevant documents in what I believe to be an accurate, as well as readable, translation. I will also provide the text of some documents in appropriate appendices. My concern is to let the documents speak for themselves, my comments being directed more toward underscoring certain points made in them rather than reaching a critical decision on any of those points.

With this understanding, I will proceed as follows: in Part I, I will deal briefly with the social situation of young people at risk in the Turin of the 1840s; in Part II, I will present and comment on the new material on the beginning of the Oratory and of the Home attached to the Oratory, and on the young people connected with those origins; in Part III, I will submit further statements by Don Bosco tending to show his abiding commitment to young people at risk in spite of changing historical circumstances, with some comments by way of conclusion.

---

*Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, [ed. E. Ceria]. Turin: SEI, [1946]. [*MO-Ce*] English translation based on *MO-Ce: Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855: The Autobiography of Saint John Bosco*, tr. by Daniel Lyons, with notes and commentary by Eugenio Ceria, SDB, Lawrence Castelveccchi, SDB, and Michael Mendl, SDB. New Rochelle, N.Y.: Don Bosco Publications, 1989. [*MO-En*]

<sup>5</sup> Pietro Braido, "<Memorie> del futuro," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 11 (1992) pp. 97-127 — A description of the *Tendenz* character of Don Bosco's *Memoirs of the Oratory* and of the author's points of view. [Braido, "Memorie del futuro"]

<sup>6</sup> "The Home attached to the Oratory" (*Casa Annessa all'Oratorio*) is what Don Bosco called the shelter-boarding facility, or "hospice," conceived as an extension of the work of the oratory proper.

## Part I: Turin in the 1840s and the “*Poor and Abandoned*” Young People at Risk

### 1. Demographic Shift, Population Increase and Urban Expansion

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the period of the Restoration, the population of Turin experienced a quick and remarkable increase. In 1814 Turin, including surrounding villages, registered 84,230 inhabitants; in 1830, 122,424; in 1848, 136,849. This remarkable demographic development may be understood as part of the general increase in population following the Napoleonic wars, not only in Piedmont, but all over Italy and throughout Europe. But the immediate cause is to be sought in the great migration movement of impoverished peasants from countryside to city. What were the causes of this migration? One sometimes hears such migratory movement ascribed to the industrial revolution, albeit in its early phase—people flocking to the city looking for jobs in fledgling manufacturing industries and hopefully a better way of life. This may have been the case earlier in cities like Manchester and London, Lyons and Paris; it was not really the case at this time in the Piedmontese capital. At most one might speak of a pre-industrial or proto-industrial awakening. By far the vast majority of manufacturing undertakings were family based, housed in sheds and spare locales within the city, outfitted in a primitive fashion.<sup>7</sup>

It was certainly a period of transition from the stable demographic model of older times to one of shift and development; but the real cause is to be sought in the worsening condition of the peasant population. In the country, family ownership of land was decreasing at an alarming rate, with the formation of large estates on the increase, and a corresponding increase in the number of impoverished day laborers. Their desperate struggle for survival is described in the darkest tones in the literature. In 1848 the *Farmers Gazette* noted:

---

<sup>7</sup> Umberto Levrà, “Il bisogno, il castigo, la pietà. Torino 1814-1848,” in Bracco, *Torino e DB I*, pp. 20-24.

In the forties in Piedmont (and as late as the seventies throughout Italy) the credit system which is the basis of capitalism was still in a primitive state. Hence the possibilities for investments remained very limited. Italian economy remained for a long time agricultural. Much of the available capital came from marketing agricultural products. The largest percentage of savings continued to be reinvested in land; real estate continued to be the collateral for all credit operations to the few individual investors. Some capital began to be invested in manufacturing, in mining, and in the construction of the first railway trunks during the second half of the eighteenth century [*Compact Storia d'Italia* (ed. by V. Ceppellini et al., Novara: DeAgostini, 1991), p. 77].

Going through the country, in areas removed from population centers, one is struck by the looks of farm laborers. Everyone in those areas, men, women and children, are skinny, yellow with scurvy, tired-looking, exhausted from hunger as well as overwork.<sup>8</sup>

An ominous trend in downward social mobility was everywhere in evidence in the countryside. These were the people who flocked to the city in a desperate move for survival and who were largely responsible for urban growth. Those who remained in the city, and they were in the majority, ended up in the slums already in existence, or in the tenements they helped to build and then turn into slums.

The result was that the condition of laborers and people out of work in the city was no better than in the country, sometimes worse. The consequences are summarized by Levra, with abundant reference to contemporary official sources and literature: (1) inadequate nutrition and hunger, stunted growth, and deformities; (2) huge increase in the number of indigents, homeless and beggars; (3) proportionate increase in the number of the chronically weakened and ill in need of care; (4) high risk of sickness and high mortality among babies and children; (5) lower life expectancy (35 years in the city of Turin, a little higher than the mean for the whole kingdom); (6) lack of hygiene and bad sanitary conditions, especially in the slums of the northern districts; (7) frequent epidemics, especially of typhus, cholera, and smallpox; (8) high incidence of diseases such as tuberculosis, bronchial and lung diseases, dysentery, and a variety of unnamed fevers and infections; (9) increase in prostitution and venereal diseases; (10) illiteracy; (11) abandonment of religious practice; (12) drunkenness and other domestic vices; (13) rise in criminal activity, especially theft; (14) rise in suicides; (15) rise in illegitimate births; (16) exposure of infants and infanticide.<sup>9</sup>

Levra, quoting profusely from documents in the Historical Archive of the City of Turin, from official reports, and from the literature, completes this frightening scenario with a gruesome recital of episodes, involving both adults and children, and of the part played in them by agencies, departments of government, authorities of the highest rank, and the police. He deals especially with the widespread practice of beggary in every part of the city, and the invasion of more beggars during the winter season—adults, both men and women, mothers and their children, whole families, and children on their own. He describes the various kinds of delinquency and criminal activity which inevitably arise out of desperate social conditions, and the official action to curb them. He surveys the situation arising from the inability on the part of public hospitals,

---

<sup>8</sup> Levra, *ibid.*, pp. 26-29, citing official documents. (Quote on p. 29.)

<sup>9</sup> Levra, *Ibid.*, pp. 30-43, citing official documents and literature.

shelters for the poor and the sick, public, state and Church agencies and private charity to cope with the need—and more.<sup>10</sup> In conclusion he gives a detailed account of police intervention to protect the public, noting that criminal activity in the city was largely of the type connected with demographic increase, urban expansion, and widespread unemployment and poverty, rather than of the violent kind against persons, or of the older type connected with banditry still surviving in isolated areas of the country. At the same time he describes the rise of public concern resulting in a vast increase in public and private charity and in an effort on the part of King Charles Albert's government to institute reforms and to provide jobs.<sup>11</sup>

The above remarks suffice to focus our attention on a social upheaval the cause of which must largely be sought in a migratory movement of poor people to the city. Most of these immigrants remained in the city, for they had nothing better to go back to. They settled wherever they could, but especially in the existing poorer districts along the rivers Dora and Po to the north and northeast. This is the area which saw the most significant and quickest urban expansion. It was also the area where some small industries were meanwhile being located, because of available water power. Urban development in these areas was in the form of tenement houses built to lodge immigrant families and individuals. Soon these northern districts turned into overcrowded slums.

This is where the first oratories, Father Giovanni Cocchi's and Don Bosco's, were established.

## 2. The Northern Districts

The Moschino district lay along the Po river at the eastern end of the present Corso San Maurizio, in the territory of the parish of the Annunciation, where Father Cocchi was an assistant. It was there that he first established his oratory of the Guardian Angel in 1840. It was in every respect the worst district in the city, and it was completely razed as part of the urban renewal of mid-1860s. As one author describes it,

The Moschino was a cluster of hovels whose cracked walls, blackened by time, threatened to come tumbling down at any moment. It was the redoubt of bad people, hostile to any form of order, greedy of other people's possessions, ever ready to shed blood, driven by some fierce instinct to evil-doing. In it crime, poverty, prostitution shared the neighborhood as confederates. In this deadly sewer of vice, scandalous immorality was common, and horrible crimes and cruel murders were regular occurrences.

---

<sup>10</sup> Levra, *Ibid.*, pp. 43-61.

<sup>11</sup> Levra, *Ibid.*, pp. 76-97.

Here was born, developed and grew to power the gang that struck everyone with terror.[...] No one dared set foot in the Moschino after dark. Not even the police dared breach the barriers and engage that horde of criminals. At night, no one had access who was not recognized by the gang. It was as though a draw-bridge had been raised.[...]<sup>12</sup>

A physician reports that “the horror and revulsion one experiences in walking down those filthy alleys, putrid sewers unfit for humans, point up the injustice which favors some with every good thing, while it denies to so many the very space, air and sunshine needed for survival.”<sup>13</sup> A sanitation official inspecting the houses in this area at the approach of the cholera reports that he found “all dwellings overcrowded with migrants, hostile and fierce-looking people mostly engaged in the smuggling of alcohol and tobacco.” He goes on to describe the horror and stench of houses and courts filled with sewage and human excrement, and deplores the lack of clean water. The cholera epidemic of 1835 started in the Moschino.<sup>14</sup>

In 1841 Father Cocchi transferred the oratory to better premises in the adjoining district of Vanchiglia, a little further north toward the confluence of the Dora river with the Po. Similar conditions prevailed there. In fact, Vanchiglia experienced a simultaneous outbreak of the cholera. It was an area dotted with stagnant ponds and crossed by little canals and ditches carrying dirty water for irrigation. Sanitation was non-existent. The public sewer which drained from the center of the city in two covered channels toward the Dora and the Po, at this point was allowed to run in the open. This sewage, by ancient feudal or seigniorial right accruing to the canons of the cathedral, was used to irrigate fields they owned by the rivers. Moreover, one of the two slaughterhouses of the city was located in this district, and was one of the chief sources of contamination and infection. The chief sanitation officer pointed out that the very royal palace a good distance to the south was exposed to “the evil stench

---

<sup>12</sup> G.A. Giustina, *I misteri di Torino*, quoted by Levra, in Bracco, *Torino e DB I*, pp. 65f. Cf. also Giorgio Chiosso, “L’Oratorio di Don Bosco e il rinnovamento educativo nel Piemonte carloalbertino,” in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa a servizio dell’umanità. Studi e testimonianze* (Ed. by P. Braidò. Roma: LAS, 1987 [pp. 83-116]), p. 95. [Braidò, *DB nella Chiesa*]

Lemoyne uses this text, with considerable editing, to describe the district of Vanchiglia [EBM III, p. 394].

<sup>13</sup> G. Valerio, *Igiene pubblica*, quoted by Levra, in Bracco, *Torino e DB I*, p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> Levra, “Il bisogno,” in Bracco, *Torino e DB I*, pp. 66f., quoting official document in Turin’s Historical Archive.

and contamination stemming from the hapless district of Vanchiglia, so that all windows on the north side were kept tightly shut day and night.”<sup>15</sup>

Inevitably, the second of the two slaughterhouses was located at the entrance to the Borgo Dora district (in the marketplace of Porta Palazzo). This, the most populous of the northern districts lying between Vanchiglia to the east and Valdocco to the west, was at this time experiencing the proto-industrial development which would gradually spill over into adjacent districts. Some manufacturing undertakings, resembling factories, were being established here, all using water power derived from the Dora River: gun and gun powder works, a sugar refinery, a factory for the production of printing machinery, a textile mill, tanning and leather works, a wood processing factory. These businesses were generally fairly small, but some employed as many as one hundred workers. Numerous tenement houses up to several stories high had been built, and stood surrounded by lower older buildings.

Overcrowded living conditions, with their evil effect on families and individuals, especially young people, prevailed. This was true of all the poorer districts. There the number of families living in a tenement building, and the number of individuals per flat or room, was nearly double that of elsewhere in the city. In the late twenties, so Levra writes,

Poor people’s ghettos, which had been forming through a process of spontaneous agglomeration of migrants gravitating toward the city, were systematically expanded. The first of these expansions took place in the Borgo Dora. Its buildings generally speaking were poor in quality and of modest proportions. At the same time the Piazza Emanuele Filiberto [Porta Palazzo] was redesigned, and the first covered market places, low and unsanitary, were constructed in it. [...] Manufacturing businesses were gradually transferred into the area, most of them noisy, noxious, and dangerous. The gun powder works exploded in 1852, leaving many dead or wounded. A network of canals from the river provided water power, but also made the area damp and malodorous. In 1850, out of some 22,000 inhabitants in the area, 14,000 lived by the day’s labor, and of these some 12,000 existed below the poverty level.<sup>16</sup>

The area of Valdocco, immediately west of Borgo Dora, with the Martinetto district further to the west, was also beginning to be developed in the 1830s and 1840s. Up to then it had remained practically vacant. The old city walls and

---

<sup>15</sup> G. Valerio, *Igiene pubblica*, quoted by Levra, in Bracco, *Torino e DB I*, pp. 67f.

<sup>16</sup> Levra, “Il bisogno,” in Bracco, *Torino e DB I*, pp. 64f.; and cf. pp. 68f. for details.



other ancient structures had been demolished and the rubble dumped in this low-lying, partly marshy area sloping toward the River Dora. To encourage settlement and the city's expansion to the north, King Charles Felix (1821-1831) had approved the gratuitous disposal of these public lands to private individuals. Later, in the 1860s, Valdocco would rival the Borgo Dora as a slum. But in the 1840s the settling of Valdocco was still in progress. Looking from the high ground to the north toward the River Dora, one could see a scattering of houses and small factories along the canals. The only "high rise" buildings were the Marchioness of Barolo's *Rifugio* and Fr. Joseph Cottolengo's Little House of Divine Providence.

Don Bosco's Oratory would settle in this area, a short distance to the west from these.

These districts fanned out from a hub which was the great square and market place popularly called *Porta Palazzo* (the royal palace rising not too far to the south, within the city). The whole area was home to a great number of young people and children, who in the literature are described as "poor and abandoned."

### 3. The "Poor and Abandoned": Young People and Children at Risk

#### (1) Kinds of Young People at Risk

Who are these "poor and abandoned" young people, to whom Father Cocchi, Don Bosco and others addressed themselves? It was no longer a question of poor but normal peasant lads (as at Becchi) or of young students (as at Chieri). This was a new experience. To describe this type of youngster Don Bosco writes:

The oratory was mostly attended by stone-cutters, bricklayers, plasterers, cobblestone setters, squarers and others arrived from distant places" [...] "from the Savoy, Switzerland, the Aosta Valley, Biella, Novara, and Lombardy.<sup>17</sup>

Lemoyne adds:

The area adjacent to Porta Palazzo swarmed with hawkers, match vendors, bootblacks, chimney sweeps, stable boys, lads passing out fliers, messenger boys, all of them poor children eking out of such odd jobs a meager livelihood from day to day.[...] Most of them belonged to one of the Borgo

---

<sup>17</sup> *MO-En*, pp. 197 and 233.

Vanchiglia gangs, that is, to one of those groups of hooligans gathered for self-defense under the leadership of older and more daring fellows.<sup>18</sup>

This is confirmed by an early, probably the earliest, non-Salesian testimony on the nature of Father Cocchi’s and Don Bosco’s oratories:

In these two houses, Turin’s true wretches [*cenciosi*] and true scamps [*biricchini*] come together on feast days in great numbers. It is amazing to see how much they love it, how happy they are, and how well they behave while there. We see match vendors, lottery ticket vendors, etc., etc., apprentices, work hands, house boys, youngsters from all kinds of workshops and trades, all happy together. And what precisely do all these young people do in these new houses of shelter? In the first place, they are given some religious instruction by those zealous priests [... then they pray, they have classes, they play, and occasionally they get a snack in the afternoon].<sup>19</sup>

We are dealing therefore either with local young people living in the slums of the northern districts of Turin trying to eke out a living, or with immigrant and seasonal lads seeking employment in the city, especially in the building trade. Many of these lads are apparently either unemployed or have no steady employment, but work at odd jobs; others are employed in various trades as apprentices, but are poorly paid. All of them are at risk. Don Bosco stresses that in fact many of them have been in prison or are in danger of going to prison. He is not speaking of hardened criminals. He is speaking of young people who being unemployed and left to roam the streets, often organized in gangs, have gotten into trouble or are in danger of getting into trouble with the police. These lads, up to 25 years of age,<sup>20</sup> but mostly between the ages of 12 and 20, although presenting different personal problems and reflecting differing family circumstances, all belonged to the category referred to in the literature as “the poor and abandoned.” On any given day as many as a thousand of them swarmed the market place area of Porta Palazzo, either waiting to be hired or just “hanging around.”<sup>21</sup>

To these older youngsters must be added the large number of younger children, many of them working in manufacturing shops, a long-standing

---

<sup>18</sup> *EBM* III, p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> “Scuole e sollazzi domenicali pei poveri,” [Instruction and Entertainment of the Poor on Sundays], *Lecture di Famiglia* 25 (June 20, 1846) 196, quoted by Giorgio Chiosso, “L’oratorio di DB,” in Braido, *DB nella Chiesa*, cit. p. 91.

<sup>20</sup> *MO-En*, pp. 233f.

<sup>21</sup> For details, cf. Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)* (Roma: LAS, 1980), pp. 159-164. [Stella, *DBEcSoc*]

practice, but in an intensified form typical of early industrial development. Factory owners, to cut wages and therefore production costs, began to employ in great numbers, as well as women, children as young as eight years of age. They were exploited and vastly underpaid. In 1844, children ten years old or younger working in factories throughout Piedmont numbered 7,184. A large percentage of these worked in Turin factories, and their working day averaged as much as 16 hours. (In 1886 the working hours for a child were reduced by law to 12-14.) In a speech delivered in Parliament in 1850 Count Camillo Cavour deplored the general lack of concern about this situation: "Perhaps we have tried conveniently to ignore the fact that in our factories the working day of women and children is as much as twice as long as in England."<sup>22</sup>

According to contemporary testimony, besides being exploited, these children were gravely at risk and exposed to all sorts of physical and moral dangers:

These poor creatures grow up in idiocy, poverty and pain, in complete ignorance of any religious and moral truth, defenseless against the many dangers to their moral life that face them in the work place. This is especially the case where many children of both sexes are grouped together, as is often the practice in factories. Drunkenness, moreover, that most damaging vice common among factory workers, is not uncommon even among children [...] The result is immorality, the terrible effects of which are evidenced by the greater incidence of crimes and misdemeanors committed by these children, as compared to their counterparts in rural areas—according to law enforcement statistics.<sup>23</sup>

This same author gives data collected from a number of factories showing that only 1 in 5 working young persons was attending, or had ever attended, school for any length of time. About 40% of young people below 20 were totally illiterate. Further, a great number of children contracted diseases in the work place. This author lists diseases such as tuberculosis, poisonings and various viral infections. The death rate from these diseases hovered around 12%. Those children who survived were often left physically debilitated for life. Children were frequently beaten for the slightest infractions.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Teresio Bosco, *Don Bosco. Storia di un prete* (Leumann-Torino: Editrice Elle Di Ci, 1987) plates 10 and 11, following p. 112.

<sup>23</sup> Carlo Ilarione Petitti di Roreto, *Sul lavoro dei fanciulli nelle manifatture* [On Child Labor in Factories], quoted by Chiosso, "L'Oratorio di DB," in Braido, *DB nella chiesa*, pp. 96f.

<sup>24</sup> Petitti, *Ibid.*, p. 97.

This situation of moral and physical risk explains Don Bosco's practice of visiting his lads at the work place and of demanding written contracts from the employers. It also explains his decision to establish his own in-house workshops.

## (2) Children of the Poor

That those young people were poor is beyond all doubt. Even those that had a permanent job (including those employed in the building trade, the highest paid, but for a shorter season) lived under severe hardship.

Around 1840 a laborer or trade apprentice's daily wage in Turin ranged between 25 and 60 cents (of a lira), or between 80 cents and 1 lira in the building trade. In view of the expenditure of energy involved in a 10-hour working day (minimum, but as long as 18), the basic daily food need of a worker without a family averaged 65 cents, a sum higher than the wage obtainable, and this for food alone. Children would be even worse off, whether they were employed, or were unemployed and roamed the streets.

This being the case, the daily fare of the poor had to be reduced to or below subsistence-level. Meat would be a luxury available only a couple of times a year. Items such as eggs, sugar and cheese, which were a common component of a peasant's daily fare, would seldom be available. The cheaper and less nourishing foods, such as bread, *polenta*, potatoes, dried legumes (such as beans), some vegetables and fruits in season, would be the staples of the poor in the city.

Rents were high even in the tenements of the northern districts. A two or three-room flat in these districts would normally absorb over one-third of a family's total earnings. The rent for a single room would cut deeply also into a single laborer's earnings, even when the same room was shared, as was the practice with seasonal workers.

The inadequacy and minimal buying power of a laborer's wages was painfully evident when it came to clothing and shoes, and even more so when it came to such "non-essentials" as recreation, schooling, transportation. The cost of a pair of common shoes surpassed the average weekly wage of a laborer or of an apprentice. A cup of coffee or chocolate in any city pub cost as much as half the average daily wage. The cheapest newspaper cost 10 centimes (ca.  $\frac{1}{6}$  of the daily wage) a copy.<sup>25</sup>

Thus an absorbing preoccupation and relentless striving for the satisfaction of basic material needs were constants in a laborer's daily existence. And this left little time, possibility or will to pursue other important interests such as education, religious practice, recreation, and the very care of the family. Such

---

<sup>25</sup> Chiosso, "L'Oratorio di DB," in Braido, *DB nella Chiesa*, pp. 92-94.

being the situation, it is understandable that men (and young men as well) should seek the only cheap entertainment available to them: the tavern. Many such cheap establishments had sprung up in the northern districts. Here working people spent their available evening hours drinking cheap wine and gambling. Drunkenness, obscenity and violence were the inevitable results.<sup>26</sup>

### (3) "Abandoned," Homeless, Neglected or Left to Themselves

The two categories of young people mentioned above were the most liable to being neglected or left to themselves. These were the children of laborers living in the northern districts of the city which we have described, and the immigrant or seasonal working lads. As well as from poverty, the first suffered from neglect, material, moral and religious, because of the very socio-economic nature of life in a slum. The latter, who flocked to the city permanently or seasonally, in search of employment, especially in the building trade, were even worse off. Away from their family and without base or support in the city, those fairly simple lads suddenly found themselves in grave danger from bad companions, readily available means of corruption, and frequent temptations to delinquency.

### (4) Juvenile Delinquency<sup>27</sup>

In Turin, before and for some time after the 1840s, true violent crime was and remained an exceptional occurrence. What kept the police on their toes was the smaller criminal activity of a great number of disinherited people. They were the miserable poor who existed at the margin of the law. They were indeed regarded as "dangerous people," but they were dangerous only to public order, not to social order.

This was especially true where juvenile delinquency was concerned. Many young people and younger children were forced to live by their wits, and practiced all kinds of dodges and expedients which were often outside the law.

On one end of the scale, there were those who sold matches and other small articles, and those who begged in a manner that could only be qualified as "aggressive." They were a constant on the streets and squares of Turin. They

---

<sup>26</sup> Quoting a contemporary author, Levra gives a horrifying description of one of these drinking places ["Il bisogno," in Bracco, *Torino e DB I*, pp. 72f.]

<sup>27</sup> The comments that follow are largely based on the first part of Claudio Felloni and Roberto Audisio, "I giovani discoli," in Bracco, *Torino e DB I*, pp. 99-110 [110-119]. The first part, entitled "Juvenile Delinquents (*Giovani discoli*) on the City's Streets and Squares," is by Claudio Felloni. It will be cited as Felloni, "*Giovani discoli*."

certainly were a nuisance to the “honest citizenry,” and they often drew the attention of the police.

At the opposite pole, there are the young men, few in number, who in order to make ends meet, engaged in more seriously reprehensible behavior, such as burglary or prostitution.

The vast majority of juvenile delinquents were petty thieves who stole goods from the stands in the open market places, or pickpockets who lifted the wallet of unsuspecting passers-by. Numerous instances are cited by Felloni from the “arrests section” of the Vicar’s Office in Turin’s Historical Archive. A couple of instances will suffice. A police report reads:

Following complaints for petty thefts committed in this city, the police department has been watching the movements of a group of juveniles who are repeat offenders recently out of the Towers prison. They are habitually on the street, out of their homes and of their parents’ supervision, and spend their time in idleness and gambling. They live by stealing, whenever they get a chance, from stands selling knick-knacks or food. They have been known also to pick the pockets of careless or unsuspecting people.<sup>28</sup>

The reports show that many of these young people had run away from home; some were orphans or illegitimate who had been in a state home for a time, had had occasional jobs, and were living from hand to mouth. Many of them had been in prison several times, usually for petty thefts. One of these youngsters, Pietro P. by name, told his story to the magistrate on being arrested:

Both my parents died when I was pretty young. I had no place to stay, nothing to live on, nobody to help me or guide me. For a time I worked as a shoeshine boy. Then pretty soon I got into trouble and was arrested. Since then I did time in several prisons, the Senate and the Correctional prisons [in Turin], and those in Chivasso. I have never learned or worked at a proper trade, and there is nothing I can call my own in this world.<sup>29</sup>

One is struck by the number of boys who ran away from home. Many reasons for this are given in the literature: bad companions, inclination to a life of dissipation (!), youthful fickleness, the lure of being on one’s own, difficulties at home, abuse by parents, dire poverty of the family, etc. In some cases, it was the father himself who sent the child away. This was the case of Antonio S., arrested for burglary, according to the magistrate’s report:

---

<sup>28</sup> Felloni, “Giovani discoli,” in Bracco, *Torino e DB I*, p. 102.

<sup>29</sup> Felloni, *Ibid.*, p. 104.

He left home about a month ago because of the dire poverty of the family. Since he was not yet able to earn his own livelihood, he was persuaded by his father to try to make a living elsewhere. And this is what he did.<sup>30</sup>

One is also struck by the negligence of the people responsible for the youngsters. The authorities' complaint that all too often parents, teachers, employers did not report runaways was wholly justified. These youngsters thus joined other street children and vagrants, and learned evil ways from this association.<sup>31</sup>

A special chapter in the story of juvenile delinquency is dedicated to the gangs. For at this time (1830s and 1840s) besides the delinquency of single young people at risk or marginalized, originating in poverty, family problems, and uprootedness, we witness a more serious form of it. It is manifested in the practice of violence and intimidation by organized groups. In the forties, at the time when Don Bosco was beginning his ministry, "societies of reckless 'hoodlums'" and "cliques of hooligans" were reported as perpetrating acts of violence with increasing frequency. These gangs, as we would call them, usually composed of young adults (but also mere youths) under the leadership of a seasoned leader, were given a name in the later popular literature of the fifties and sixties, "*cocche*."<sup>32</sup> They were active at various times in the northern districts we have described. The Gang of the Crab (*Cocca del Gambero*) was active in the Borgo Dora in the late thirties; the "Po Gang" (*Cocca del Po*), was based at the edge of the Vanchiglia district near the river, and five of its members were arrested for murder and convicted in 1840; the Ballone Gang (*Cocca del Ballone*), (name given to the area near Porta Palazzo and Borgo Dora) was charged with the murder of one of their members in 1841. The most notorious, with good reason, was the Moschino Gang (*Cocca del Moschino*). It was active in mid-forties, and was feared for its "scandalous, arrogant and violent activities."

After spending the evening drinking in cheap taverns those ruffians emerge in force to harass or rough up any hapless person whom they come upon in the dark. Then, instead of going home, they knock at the door of some prostitute, and even of women who are not prostitutes, batter the door down if they are not promptly let in, and vent their lust on their

---

<sup>30</sup> Felloni, *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>31</sup> Felloni, *Ibid.*, p. 106, citing police reports of 1845.

<sup>32</sup> "*Cocca*" is the name given in Italian (Piedmontese) to a kind of flat, hard hearth cake or skillet bread.

unfortunate victims. Then, after eating everything in the house, smashing furniture, and battering the woman besides, they make their exit.<sup>33</sup>

In 1846 the St. Barbara Gang (*Cocca di Santa Barbara*) acquired notoriety in the area near and to the east of Porta Palazzo. They were "an association of ruffians who time and again perpetrated acts of violence, especially after dark, against honest citizens who promenaded along the boulevard."<sup>34</sup>

The records show that these gangs, composed of young adults from 16 to 34 years of age, were not in the nature of professional criminal confederacies; they were fairly spontaneous groupings of frustrated young adults, lacking guidance and motivation. They were responsible for mischief of every kind, but not generally of serious crimes such as assaults with deadly weapons and murder. But the very fact that the "gang" phenomenon occurred and persisted was symptomatic of a profound malaise which infected society, especially the young.

Public order was only one of the vicar's many responsibilities. In 1841 he could dispose of only four commissioners or constables and a small force of some 40 policemen. The force was increased under Vicar Michele Benso di Cavour in the forties, but it was never quite equal to the task. There just weren't enough policemen on the street. With the help of military personnel, they had fair success in breaking up roving groups of young people at night and in bringing some of the mischief-makers to justice.<sup>35</sup>

### (5) Prisons and Penal Policy

Given the situation it was inevitable that many of these "poor and abandoned" youngsters should get into trouble and should land in gaol.

There were four prison facilities in Turin in the 1840s, the time when Don Bosco began his work on behalf of "poor and abandoned" young people. P. Baricco writes in 1869, "The prison facilities in Turin are four in number, not including the central facility nearing completion which is not yet in use."<sup>36</sup> But he also discusses other facilities.

Of the four prisons in question, sometimes going by different names and all within the city, two were for men and two for women.

---

<sup>33</sup> Felloni, "Giovani discoli, in Bracco, *Torino e DB I*, p. 109, citing document in Turin's Historical Archive.

<sup>34</sup> Felloni, *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>35</sup> Levra, "Il bisogno," in Bracco, *Torino e DB I*, p. 79; Felloni, "I giovani discoli," *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>36</sup> Pietro Baricco, *Torino descritta*. (Torino: Tipografia G.B. Paravia, 1869, 2 vol. Photomechanically reprinted by Edizioni L'Artistica Savigliano, 1988), p. 285. [Baricco, *Torino descritta*]



[i] *Criminal Prison Facility for Men (Carceri criminali)*, in Via San Domenico, 13.— Located in the basement section of the so-called “Palace of the Senate,” later the seat of the Court of Appeal, this facility was popularly referred to as Prisons of the Senate, or of the Magistrate of the Court of Appeal. “This facility is cramped and overcrowded, airless, and noisome. Young people live together with adults, and those merely accused are committed together with those convicted of crimes.”

[ii] *Correctional Prison Facility for Men (Carceri correzionali)*, in Via degli Stampatori, 3.— It was popularly called “Correctionnel,” from the name given to the street during Napoleon’s occupation (*Rue correctionnelle*). This facility was for lesser crimes. “It was not a great deal better [...]. Here also accused and convicted, young people and adults, are all thrown together.”

[iii] *General Prison Facility for Women (Carceri delle Forzate)*, in Via San Domenico, 32.— It was also small and ill-kept. In the sixties it was given over for use as a detention facility for young men waiting to be evaluated and assigned.

[iv] *Towers Prison Facility for Women (Carceri delle Torri)*, at *Porta Palatina*.— Commonly called “the Towers,” it housed women guilty of serious crimes or with a past criminal record. “The women are kept in overcrowded and uncomfortable wards, the place being insufficient and in disrepair.” Earlier, in the 1830s, it had been a place of commitment for juvenile offenders.

The *Central Prison (Carcere centrale)*, in the Corso S. Avventore, outside of the city, was built at great expense and in accordance with more enlightened standards between 1862 and 1869. Gradually the other smaller facilities were phased out.

Baricco also mentions and describes the House of Detention for Women (*Casa di pena*, also called, *Ergastolo*), in Via Nizza, well out of the city. The place had been acquired by the government from the Vincentians for use as a correctional facility for juveniles. In 1838 it was converted into a prison-hospital for women. One section of it, in fact, was used for the isolation and treatment of several hundred women with venereal diseases.<sup>37</sup>

The expensive and “modern” correctional facility for juveniles, located at the place of a large country house called “Generala,” on the Stupinigi road well out of the city, was dedicated in 1845. Such a facility for juveniles alone had been long in the planning and was part of elaborate social reforms sponsored in the reign of Charles Albert (1831-1849). For in spite of ambiguities in both personal philosophy and practical policy, Charles Albert had understood the

---

<sup>37</sup> Data derived from Baricco, *Torino descritta*, p. 286. Cf. also *MO-Fe*, p. 119, notes to lines 746, 748, 750-752, and Natale Cerrato, *Il Linguaggio della prima storia salesiana. Parole e luoghi delle Memorie Biografiche di Don Bosco* (Istituto Storico Salesiano - Studi, 7. Roma: LAS, 1991), pp. 226f.

importance and the necessity of dealing with juvenile problems in a way that took into consideration the physical, psychological and social situation of a young person. His reforms were also made possible by the emergence of a new "ruling class," drawn from a small sector of the middle class and of the aristocracy, non-representative of larger society certainly, yet possessed of great technical ability and driven by authentic moral awareness and concern.<sup>38</sup>

Article 28 of the penal code of 1839 promulgated by King Charles Albert clearly laid down that delinquents of minor age be committed to separate prisons. Other articles provided that a juvenile delinquent, aged 14 or under, acting without malice was not liable to prosecution and incarceration; and that only such minors who were found guilty of crime with malice aforethought were liable.<sup>39</sup> But Petitti di Roreto, commenting in 1867 on Charles Albert's principle that "young people convicted of crime must absolutely be kept separate from adult convicts," laments the delays in implementing this basic program of the reform. Prisons were and continued to be for some time the school of moral corruption for young people committed in them with adults.<sup>40</sup>

This was certainly the situation when Don Bosco began to visit the prison in 1841. He visited the first two of the facilities mentioned above, for those were men's prisons, where also young offenders were incarcerated.

We briefly commented on the criminal activities of adults, and we discussed the offenses in which juveniles were usually involved. To summarize—statistics for 1831-1846 show that theft was by far the most common crime, amounting to 30% of all offenses investigated and brought to justice by the police. The next most common crimes were of violence against persons (10%), and over half of these (5+%) were in the nature of threats and battery resulting from squabbles. Other (non-criminal) offenses such as loitering, vagrancy, beggary accounted for over 50% of the cases referred to the "General."<sup>41</sup> For the first two years of operation of this institution (1845-1847) of 295 commitments only 26.1% were by the court for criminal offenses, and of these, 76% were for crimes against property, not persons. The rest were chiefly "precautionary" commitments by the police or (to a lesser extent) by parents.<sup>42</sup>

As a whole, for what concerns juvenile delinquency, statistics show that in the 1840s Turin was a city of the "poor and abandoned" rather than of criminals.

---

<sup>38</sup> Levra, "Il bisogno," in Bracco, *Torino e DB I*, p. 88.

<sup>39</sup> Roberto Audisio, *La "Generala" di Torino. Esposte, discoli, minori corrigendi (1785-1850)* (Santena: Fondazione Camillo Cavour, 1987), p. 29. [Audisio, *La "Generala"*]

<sup>40</sup> Audisio, *Ibid.*, pp. 30f., quoting Petitti and other authors.

<sup>41</sup> Stella, *DBEcSoc*, p. 168.

<sup>42</sup> Audisio, *La "Generala,"* pp. 193f.

## (6) Addressing the Problem

It is within the situation described above that the emergence of a new generation of young people of the working class that were “poor and abandoned” is to be understood.

We have indicated that a significant effort to reform old structures was being made in the forties by the state. The “Generala” was a case in point.

What about the Church? The traditional parish structures were unable to deal with the problem and respond meaningfully, for they were being called upon to respond to situations for which they had not been intended. The activity of the priests of the *Convitto*, who after all were not the ones who should have taken the initiative, only served to point up the inadequacy of the structures. Hence Don Bosco’s response to those who complained that he took youngsters away from the parishes made perfect sense. He writes in his *Memoirs*:

Most of the boys I collect know nothing of parish or parish priest.[...] Most of these boys [either] are neglected by their parents [and are adrift] in this city or have come into the city [as migrants] looking for employment and have failed to find any.[...] The fact that they find themselves away from home, that they speak a different language, that they have no permanent lodgings, that they are not familiar with the places makes it difficult, if not impossible, for them to attend a parish church. Moreover, many of them are already grown up, at 18, 20, or even 25 years of age, but are ignorant of anything that has to do with religion. Who could persuade them to sit with 8 or 10-year old children who are more knowledgeable than they?<sup>43</sup>

That same situation before which traditional Church structures seemed powerless began to be addressed by a new generation of priests, Father Cocchi, Don Bosco, and others, who were aware of the problem and were willing to respond to it—beyond, and sometimes in opposition to, the inadequate traditional parish structure and the inadequate pastoral practice of the older clergy.<sup>44</sup>

In his “Introduction” to the *Draft Regulation for the Oratory* of 1854, Don Bosco writes:

The young constitute the most fragile yet most valuable component of human society, for we base our hopes for the future on them. They are not of themselves depraved. Were it not for parental neglect, idleness, mixing in bad company, something they experience especially on Sundays and

---

<sup>43</sup> *MO-En*, pp. 233f.; cf. *EBM* II, p. 194.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco. Life and Work* (2nd ed., tr. by John Drury. New Rochelle, N.Y.: Don Bosco Publications, 1985), pp. 101f. [Stella, *DB* I]

holy days, it would be so easy to inculcate in their young hearts moral and religious principles—of order, good behavior, respect, religious practice. For if they are found to have been ruined at that young age, it will have been due more to thoughtlessness than to ingrained malice. These young people have real need of some kind person who will care for them, work with them, guide them in virtue, keep them away from evil. [...] Oratories should be reckoned among the most effective means for instilling the religious spirit into the uncultivated hearts of neglected young people.<sup>45</sup>

This same concern is expressed in the Preamble of the first draft of the early Salesian Constitutions (1858). Don Bosco wrote :

At the present time, however, this need [of helping young people at risk] is felt with far greater urgency. Parental neglect, the abusive power of the press, and the proselytizing efforts of heretics demand that we unite in fighting for the Lord’s cause, under the banner of the faith. Our efforts must aim at safeguarding the faith and the moral life of that category of young people whose eternal salvation is more at risk precisely because of their poverty. This is the specific purpose of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, first established in Turin in 1841.<sup>46</sup>

## Part II: Don Bosco and Young People at Risk: The Beginnings of the Oratory and of the Home Attached to the Oratory

### I. The Beginnings of the Oratory

The foregoing remarks have focused on the kind and on the situation of young people who were at risk at the time when Don Bosco first enrolled in the pastoral institute known as the *Convitto* in 1841. The first exercises in practical ministry in which he engaged under the guidance of Father Joseph Cafasso led to a discovery which was to change his life forever. From the start he felt drawn to these young people out of a natural and Christian instinct. It was not long before he became fully committed to them, and this commitment became his “vocation.”

How does Don Bosco describe the beginnings of the work of the Oratory?

---

<sup>45</sup> Appendix I; and cf. notes 125 and 126 and related text, below.

<sup>46</sup> Francesco Motto, *Giovanni Bosco, Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales [1858]-1875*. Testi critici (Roma: LAS, 1982), p. 60. [Motto, *Cost. Testi critici*]

## 1. The Beginnings of the Oratory in Don Bosco's *Memoirs*

Don Bosco's *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales* need no introduction. By this quasi-autobiographical narrative, laboriously styled from the standpoint of his mature reflection in the mid-seventies, Don Bosco wished to hand down to posterity a definitive and privileged interpretation of the meaning of his work. Hence his description of the beginning of the work and of the type of young people involved is of the utmost importance.

### (1) The Beginnings of the Oratory and "the Young People Released From Prison or Liable to Being Sent There" in Don Bosco's *Memoirs*

No sooner enrolled at the *Convitto*, Don Bosco began to visit the prisons, where for the first time, and with a shock, he came face to face with the pitiable state in which the many young people detained there found themselves. He writes in his *Memoirs*:

I saw large numbers of young lads, 12 to 18 years of age, fine youngsters, healthy, strong and alert of mind. But how sad to see them idle there, infested with lice, lacking food for body and soul. I was horrified. [...] What shocked me most was to see that many of them were released full of good resolutions to go straight, and yet in a short time they landed back in prison, within a few days of their release.<sup>47</sup>

He wonders if anything could be done for them. After talking the matter over with Father Cafasso, he begins to form a plan. He continues:

Hardly had I registered at the *Convitto* of St. Francis, when I met at once a crowd of boys who followed me in the streets and the squares and even into the sacristy of the church attached to the institute. But I could not take direct care of them since I had no premises. A humorous incident opened the way to put into action my project [to care] for the boys who roamed the streets of the city, especially those released from prison.<sup>48</sup>

After relating the "humorous incident," namely, the Garelli episode to be discussed below, he continues:

---

<sup>47</sup> *MO-En*, p. 182.

<sup>48</sup> *MO-En*, p. 187.

During the winter, I concentrated my efforts in helping a small number of young adults who needed special catechetical instruction, above all those just out of prison. It was then that I realized at first hand that if young lads, once released from detention, could find someone to befriend them, [...] they began to mend their ways. They became good Christians and honest citizens. *This was the beginning of our Oratory.*<sup>49</sup>

My aim was to bring together only those children who were in greatest danger, those released from prison by preference. Nevertheless, as a foundation on which to build discipline and morality, I invited some other boys of good character who had already received religious instruction.<sup>50</sup>

On Saturdays, my pockets stuffed sometimes with tobacco, sometimes with fruit, sometimes with rolls, I used to go to the prisons. My object was always to give special attention to the youngsters who had the misfortune of being put behind bars, help them, make friends with them, and thus encourage them to come to the Oratory when they had the good fortune of leaving that place of punishment.<sup>51</sup>

[Comment]

These words seem to indicate that young people met in prison were Don Bosco’s first concern and that, once released from prison, they became the first to form the oratory. He writes: “This was the beginning of our Oratory.” But in the same breath Don Bosco connects the beginnings to the “humorous incident” involving Bartholomew Garelli, who may have been a young person at risk, but obviously was neither a juvenile delinquent nor one released from prison.

## (2) Bartholomew Garelli and the Beginnings of the Oratory

In his *Memoirs* Don Bosco relates how on December 8, 1841, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, in the sacristy of the church of St. Francis of Assisi, he met one Bartholomew Garelli. The circumstances of the meeting are well known, as well as the dialogue which ensued:

“My good friend, what’s your name?”

“My name’s Bartholomew Garelli.”

“Where are you from?”

---

<sup>49</sup> *MO-En*, p. 190. Italics mine.

<sup>50</sup> *MO-En*, p. 196.

<sup>51</sup> *MO-En*, p. 198.

“Asti.”  
 “Is your father alive?”  
 “No, my father’s dead.”  
 “And your mother?”  
 “My mother’s dead too.”  
 “How old are you?”  
 “I’m sixteen.”  
 “Can you read and write?”  
 “I don’t know anything.”  
 “Have you made your first communion?”  
 “Not yet.”  
 “Have you ever been to confession?”  
 “Yes, when I was small.”  
 “Are you going to catechism classes now?”  
 “I don’t dare.”  
 [...]

Later Don Bosco gave the lad a catechism lesson, and he ends the story with the words, “To this *first* pupil some others were added.”<sup>52</sup>

[*Comment*]

It should be noted that the sentence, “This was the beginning of our Oratory,” is attached not to the Garelli story directly but to Don Bosco’s experience with youths released from prison, in the paragraph which follows. Garelli was obviously not one of these.

Hence the question is asked whether the orphan Garelli receiving his catechism lesson on the feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1841 might represent the symbolical rather than historical beginnings—whether, that is, this wandering orphan might just be the symbol of all young people at risk in need of help and fatherly care.

Don Bosco wrote this account some time in 1874. But the story, *without* the name and *without* note of the year, appears already in the Ruffino chronicle of 1860. This is what Ruffino wrote after hearing the story presumably from Don Bosco:

Beginnings of the Oratory. In the year.....Don Bosco was at the *Convitto* of St. Francis. On the feast day of the Immaculate Conception, as he was vesting for holy Mass, he noticed a young man of 15 or 16 years of age standing nearby in the sacristy, waiting to hear Mass. The sacristan asked

---

<sup>52</sup> *MO-En*, p. 188. Italics mine.

him if he would serve Mass. When the young man replied that he didn't know how, the sacristan grabbed the [snuffer] pole and gave him a couple of whacks across the head, scolding [and demanding to know] what he was doing there. Don Bosco heard [the scuffle] and asked the sacristan, “Why are you treating him like that?” “Do you know him?” the sacristan replied. “Yes,” said Don Bosco, “I know him; he is a friend of mine.” He knew him only from having seen him a few moments before. The sacristan then said to the boy: “Come, Don Bosco wishes to speak to you.” The young man came over. Don Bosco asked him if he had already been to Mass. “No,” he replied. “Go, hear Mass with devotion,” Don Bosco told him; “then come back, because I have something important to tell you.” When the Mass was over, the young man met Don Bosco in the sacristy. “What's your name,” Don Bosco asked him? “N.N.,” was the reply. “Can you read?” “No.” “Can you write?” “No.” “Can you sing?” “No.” “Can you whistle?” The boy broke into a smile. “Now, tell me, have you been admitted to Communion?” “No.” “All right then, later today, at such and such an hour, come back here, and I will teach you.” That evening the lad was back for his lesson. But first Don Bosco asked the youth to join him in a prayer to Mary Immaculate, that she might help the youngster to learn the basic truths of faith, and that she might inspire many other young people in need to come to him for instruction in these same truths. And so it began. In a short time Don Bosco found himself hemmed in at the *Convitto*. On the feast of the Immaculate Conception he moved to the *Rifugio*.<sup>53</sup>

[Comment]

The two accounts (*Memoirs* and Ruffino) agree that “the Oratory began” with a catechism lesson to one young man on the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

But the scene and the dialogue of the 1860 account is less dramatic. For instance, there is no mention of the boy's being an orphan. On the other hand, it carries some details which do not appear in the *Memoirs*, “Can you sing? Can you whistle?” and the prayer to Mary Immaculate. These details from Ruffino's chronicle became part of the traditional recital of the event.

---

<sup>53</sup> ASC 110: Cronachette, Ruffino, Notebook 1, pp. 28-30 (1860); *FDBM* 1,206 C9-11.

The last two sentences mean that the number grew to the point that the chapel of St. Bonaventure at St. Francis of Assisi proved too small. Eventually, in October 1844, Don Bosco left the *Convitto* for Barolo's *Rifugio*, and the youngsters met there. Then, on December 8, 1844, the Oratory (of St. Francis de Sales) began to meet at Barolo's Little Hospital.



It should also be emphasized that the *name* Bartholomew Garelli appears for the first time in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* (1874); there seems to be no earlier attestation of it in the Salesian tradition.

## 2. The Beginnings of the Oratory in Don Bosco's Early "Official" Statements

### *[Introductory Remarks]*

In documents which may be said to possess an official character, Don Bosco describes the beginnings of the Oratory and the kind of young people who first drew his attention and his commitment. These documents are primarily the *Historical Outline (Cenno Storico)* of 1854, the *Historical Outlines (Cenni Storici)* of 1862. They are used here as critically edited by Pietro Braido.<sup>54</sup>

The value of these documents lies both in their early date and in the fact that they are largely free from the special concerns and points of view of the later *Memoirs of the Oratory*.<sup>55</sup>

### (1) The Beginnings of the Oratory in the Historical Outline (*Cenno Storico*) of 1854

Twenty years before the *Memoirs*, in the *Historical Outline* of 1854 Don Bosco gave a different account of the beginnings of the Oratory.

This Oratory, or gathering of young people on Sundays and holy days, began in the church of St. Francis of Assisi. For many years during the summer time, the Rev. Father Caffasso used to teach catechism every Sunday to bricklayer apprentices in a little room attached to the sacristy of that church. The heavy burden of work on this priest caused him to interrupt this work which he loved so much. I took it up toward the end of 1841, and I began by gathering in the same place two young adults who were seriously in need of religious instruction. These were joined by others, and during 1842 their number increased to twenty, and sometimes twenty-five.<sup>56</sup>

In this, the earliest extant account of the beginnings of the Oratory, Don Bosco speaks of starting with two young adults toward the end of 1841. He does not

---

<sup>54</sup> Pietro Braido, *DB per i giovani*., pp. 30-34, 34-55, 56-70 [cf. note 1, above]. For further data and a translation, cf. Appendices I, II, and III, below.

<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of the character, purposes and *tendenz* of Don Bosco's *Memoirs of the Oratory*, cf. Pietro Braido, "<Memorie> del futuro," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 11 (1992) pp. 97-127.

<sup>56</sup> Braido, *DB per i giovani*, pp. 34f. Cf. Appendix II. Italics mine.

mention names nor does he specify the occasion (feast of the Immaculate Conception).

[*Comment*]

Don Bosco’s own catechetical activity in relation to the catechetical activity of the *Convitto* is poorly documented. Did Don Bosco take over the catechetical instruction, or did he merely help Father Cafasso, or did he work in collaboration with others? One thing seems certain, namely that the *Convitto* priests had been holding catechetical instruction in the church of St. Francis of Assisi before Don Bosco became involved, and continued to do so after Don Bosco left the scene in 1844.

The testimony given in this regard by Giovanni Antonio Bargetto at Father Cafasso’s Process of Beatification is of interest:

On Sundays [Don Bosco] gathered the youngsters he found in nearby squares and streets in the courtyard of the *Convitto*. The Venerable [Cafasso] for his part would wait for them, and at a certain hour would teach them their catechism in the private chapel of St. Bonaventure. [...] I had not been long at the *Convitto* at the time. I was working as a helper in the kitchen, and occasionally I would bring left-over food from the kitchen to those youngsters.<sup>57</sup>

Be that as it may, the *Historical Outline* of 1854 is of particular importance not only because of its early date but also because it was written as a foreword to the Regulation for the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, which fact confers on it an almost official status. Braido attaches particular significance to it also from another standpoint:

The restrained reconstruction of the origins presented in the *Historical Outlines* of 1854 and 1862 appears far less idealized. They are also far less overlaid with the ideology which is evidenced in later interpretations, such as the *Memoirs of the Oratory* as well as the conferences, and the familiar conversations and recollections handed down by Don Bosco’s devoted sons in their chronicles.[...] Generally speaking, the emotional quality of the earlier accounts is muted and pretty much under control. Likewise, in these accounts the information is delivered with greater objectivity. Moreover, eyewitnesses and collaborators were still on hand at the time of writing who would not fail to criticize any lack of objectivity.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> As reported in *MO-Fe*, pp. 12f.

<sup>58</sup> Braido, *DB per i giovani*, p. 22.

## (2) The Beginnings of the Oratory in the Historical Outlines (Cenni Storici) of 1862

In the *Historical Outlines* of 1862, Don Bosco describes the beginnings of the Oratory as a response to the situation of young people on the streets, in factories, and in prison—all at risk for lack of religious instruction.

The idea of the Oratories arose from my frequent visits to the prisons of this city. In these places, where spiritual and material wretchedness held sway, one met many young people in the flower of their youth, with lively minds, good hearts, who could well become the consolation of their families and the pride of their country. Instead they were detained there in a state of degradation and made the reproach of society. [...] Experience also showed that as one helped them gradually to become aware of their human dignity [...] many of them changed their behavior even while still in prison, and on being discharged lived in such a way as never again to have to be sent back to gaol. [...]

To put this perception to the test, we began to give appropriate religious instruction in the prisons of this capital and a little later in the sacristy of the church of St. Francis of Assisi; and *out of this the gatherings on Sundays and holy days began*. These gatherings were open to the young men who were discharged from prison, and to those who during the week gathered [with nothing to do] in the squares and streets, as well as to those who [if they had a job] would be found in the factories. [...] It was the year 1841 [when it all began]. The young people who attended averaged about seventy.<sup>59</sup>

### [Comment]

In this account, written for “outsiders,” Don Bosco indicates that the meeting with young adults at risk occurred in the prisons, and that the Oratory began with the religious instruction of “young men who were discharged from prison” and “who loitered about the squares,” or who were employed “in the factories.” Apart from the fact that Don Bosco seems to be speaking of a “group,”<sup>60</sup> this scenario does not match that of the Garelli story, for he was apparently not that kind of boy.

---

<sup>59</sup> P. Braido, *DB per i giovani*, p. 56; and cf. Appendix III. Italics mine.

<sup>60</sup> For the idea of a “group” beginning, cf. also note 71 and related text, below.

### 3. Comment of the Garelli Tradition

In the *Memoirs* Bartholomew Garelli is given prominence and a symbolic role, which of itself does not speak against the historical reality of the person or of the event.

But it should again be noted that before the writing of the *Memoirs* in mid-1870s, the name and the Garelli story were not in the Salesian tradition. Nor, except for the occurrence in the Ruffino chronicle of 1860 (story without the name), are they to be found in any of the documentation, whether published or unpublished, that has come down to us. Moreover, neither the story nor the name of Garelli were recalled by the old oratory boys at their annual gatherings and celebrations; nor is any reference to either story or name found in the souvenirs left by Joseph and Joshua Buzzetti, the two brothers who faithfully attended the Oratory in earliest times.

However, Ruffino's mention of the story would tend to show that as early as 1860 Don Bosco had spoken of this episode in connection with the feast of the Immaculate Conception, as marking the beginnings of the Oratory, without apparently naming the lad or specifying the year.

#### (1) The Garelli Tradition

It was the *Memoirs of the Oratory* which established Garelli in Salesian lore as the significant starting point of the Salesian work. The tradition then begins there and might be outlined as follows.

The *Memoirs* themselves were not for publication. But Father Giovanni Bonetti used them for his *History of the Oratory* published in the *Salesian Bulletin* serially over a number of years. The Garelli story appeared *in public* for the first time in the *Salesian Bulletin* in 1879.<sup>61</sup> This marks the beginning of the epic tradition in which the orphan lad from Asti is enshrined as a mythical hero. The dialogue between Don Bosco and Garelli recorded in the *Memoirs* and transcribed in Bonetti's *Storia* achieved the status of a sacred text to be reverently recalled and recited for all Salesian generations to come. The episode also was taken as a further sign of divine approval of the Salesian work. For the Lord had willed that Don Bosco's providential work should begin on the day sacred to the Immaculate Mother of God. Through this connection, the feast of the Immaculate Conception became a symbol and a rallying point in the life of all Salesian institutions.

---

<sup>61</sup> [John Bonetti], "Storia dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales," *Bollettino Salesiano* 3:1 (1879) pp. 6-8.

From the *Salesian Bulletin*, the story passed into d'Espiney's *Don Bosco* (1881).<sup>62</sup> The year 1891 saw the solemn celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the event. The story was subsequently re-told in Bonetti's *Cinque Lustrì* (1891).<sup>63</sup> A commemoration of the event also took place at the First International Congress of Salesian Cooperators in 1895.

Finally the *Biographical Memoirs* (Vol. II, 1901)<sup>64</sup> became the chief vehicle whereby the Garelli epic tradition was handed down. From then on the story remained in the public domain and was given currency in sermons, biographies, leaflets and pictures.

## (2) The Name "Garelli"

With reference to the name, it should be noted that in the original draft of Don Bosco's *Memoirs*, after writing "Bartholomew," Don Bosco had begun to write an "N" not a "G": "*Mi chiamo Bartolomeo N Garelli.*"<sup>65</sup> Had Don Bosco intended to leave the young man in anonymity ("N" for any name), or was that "N" the initial letter of some other name? (For the purpose of the story one name would have done as well as any other.)

Furthermore, a careful search of the records of the city and diocese of Asti has not yielded anyone named Bartholomew Garelli, born around 1824-25.

In view of this, one wonders whether to credit certain reports according to which Bartholomew Garelli is supposed to have put in appearances at the Oratory in 1855 or 1856 and, after a long retirement in his hometown, at meetings of alumni after 1890. It is possible that these "sightings" of Garelli had their origin in the tendency to give concrete *post-factum* support to a tradition that conferred such great importance on an event and on a person.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Charles d'Espiney, *Don Bosco* (Nice: Typographie et lithographie Malvano-Mignon, 1881). English translation (from 1883 ed.): *Don Bosco: A Sketch of His Life and Miracles* (by Dr. Charles d'Espiney, Tr. from the French by Miss Mary McMahon. New York, Benziger Brothers, 1884), pp. 13f.

<sup>63</sup> Giovanni Bonetti, *Cinque Lustrì di storia dell'Oratorio Salesiano di Valdocco* (Torino: Tipografia Salesiana, 1891), pp. 19-23. English translation: *Don Bosco's Early Apostolate* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1908), pp. 8-10.

<sup>64</sup> *EBM* II, pp. 56-59, with considerable editing.

<sup>65</sup> Don Bosco's original draft is in *ASC* 132: Autografi-Oratorio: "Memoria dell'Oratorio," p. 87, line 14; *FDBM* 58 C4.

<sup>66</sup> For the remarks in the foregoing sections, cf. Pietro Stella, *Piccola guida critica alle Memorie Biografiche. Apologia della storia*. Typescript: Professor's notes for 1989-1990, pp. 21-27.

### (3) Possible Typical and Symbolic Role of the Garelli Story

Don Bosco came to see the origin of his work and the events that brought it about as God's doing through the mediation of Mary Immaculate. Hence, in telling the story "in the family" and in writing his *Memoirs* he may have wished to express that very idea in one single inclusive episode set on the feast of the Immaculate Conception and featuring a typical youngster. Don Bosco clearly presents the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1841, as a root experience, a decisive starting point—in the sense that the succession of subsequent events and experiences that shaped his thinking and directed his apostolate were seen as starting from that point and as being in continuity with that point.

Note should be taken of the fact that the vocation dream did not recur in this connection, and that in fact no reference is made to it at this point. Hence, it is unlikely that the experience acquired significance in the light of that dream. (The dream instead recurred in 1844, as Don Bosco agonized over where he could gather his boys after he left the *Convitto*.) Nor could the experience be significant materially as the beginning of a catechetical activity on behalf of poor youngsters, for in fact Don Bosco was already involved in such activity as part of the *Convitto* program.

One is probably right in thinking that there was a root experience and a decisive starting point, which turned out to be for Don Bosco a revelation and a personal introduction to the world of the "poor and abandoned"—a world no doubt previously heard about, seen, and even contacted, but perhaps not yet experienced as addressing him personally. Whether the discovery occurred in the streets of the city, in the prisons, or in the sacristy of the church of St. Francis of Assisi; and whether the initial test was with the two young adults, or with youths released from prison, or with young Garelli—was perhaps less significant for him than the charismatic nature of the discovery and of his personal involvement.

### 4. Further Statements by Don Bosco on the Origin of His Work

In a number of memorandums and summaries Don Bosco refers back to 1841 for the origin of the work of the oratories, in fact for the beginning of the Society and of the very constitutions. For Don Bosco the Society, as the vehicle of the work of the oratory, is thought of as originating with the work itself, and likewise the constitutions, as embodying the practice and the spirit of the work. Although none of these documents mention any specific young people as first

contacts, they nonetheless illuminate the beginnings. Some examples will suffice.

In the *Historical Summary* which preceded the chapter on "Purpose" in the earliest Salesian Constitutions (Italian, 1858), Don Bosco writes:

As far back as the year 1841, Fr. John Bosco, working in association with other priests, began to gather together in suitable premises, the most abandoned young people from the city of Turin, in order to entertain them with games and at the same time break for them the bread of the divine word.<sup>67</sup>

The year 1841 is the point of reference also in a *Brief Notice on the Society* (1864): "The work of the oratories began with a simple catechetical instruction on Sundays and holy days as far back as the year 1841."<sup>68</sup>

To the same general effect is the statement made to the newly appointed Archbishop Alessandro Riccardi di Netro in 1867: "Beginning of this Society. This Society began with gathering poor youngsters on Sundays and holydays in the year 1841. It was limited to a few priests at the time."<sup>69</sup>

The memorandum addressed by Don Bosco to Bishop Pietro Maria Ferrè of Casale to obtain diocesan approbation in 1868 begins in the same vein:

This Society had its origin in simple catechetical instructions begun by Father John Bosco with the consent and advice of Fathers Luigi Guala and Giuseppe Cafasso, both of happy memory. The meetings took place in a hall reserved for that purpose and attached to the Church of St. Francis of Assisi. Our aim was to gather the poorest and most neglected youngsters [*i giovanetti più poveri ed abbandonati*] on Sundays and holy days so that [besides receiving catechetical instruction] they could attend church services. Then they were kept occupied with the singing of hymns and with wholesome recreation. Our special concern was directed towards those young

---

<sup>67</sup> "Beginning of this Society," in Motto, *Cost. Testi critici*, p. 62. Cf. *EBM* V, p. 636. The text reproduced in *BM* is not that of the "first constitutions," as Lemoyne claims; it is an early text, however.

Identical descriptions (in Latin) are given in *Notitia brevis Societatis Sancti Francisci Salesii et nonnulla decreta ad eandem spectantia* (Torino: Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Francesco di Sales, 1868), in *OE* XVIII, pp. 571-586 (Ms. Bosco in ASC 132 Autogr. Soc. Sal., *FDBM* 1,925 E1-10), and in *De Societate S. Francisci Salesii brevis notitia et nonnulla decreta ad eandem spectantia* (Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales, 1873) in *OE* XXV, pp. 103-121.

<sup>68</sup> *Breve Notizia della Società di S. Francesco di Sales* (1864), in *IBM* VII, p. 890 [omitted in *EBM*].

<sup>69</sup> *Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, in ASC 132 Autogr. Soc. Sal., *FDBM* 1,925 A12-B3. Cf. *IBM* VIII, pp. 809-811 [omitted in *EBM*].

men who were released from prison and found themselves more gravely at risk.<sup>70</sup>

Again, describing the origin of the Society in a memorandum dated in 1870 and addressed to the Holy See, Don Bosco writes: “1841. The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales is its principal house, and it began as follows: we started by giving catechetical instruction to a group [*schiera*] of poor and neglected youngsters on the day of Mary’s Immaculate Conception.”<sup>71</sup>

In a presentation to Roman authorities written in 1874, Don Bosco states: “This society has been in existence for 33 years. It began and achieved its stability in stormy times and places [...]”<sup>72</sup>

In a memorandum to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars dated March 18, 1874, Don Bosco likewise wrote that the Constitutions of the Salesian Society had been “in experimental use for thirty-three years.”<sup>73</sup>

On the other hand, in a statement attached to the constitutions submitted for approbation in Rome on February 12, 1864 (addressed to Pius IX) Don Bosco wrote:

Considered in its historical existence, [this Society] has for its purpose to continue what has been in effect for the past 20 years in the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. One may truthfully say that these constitutions embody in an orderly fashion, and in accordance with the counsel of the Supreme Head of the Church, the discipline developed up to the present in the oratories for boys established in this city, the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales being the center.<sup>74</sup>

Don Bosco did not speak with consistency of the point in time marking the beginning of the Society and its constitutions; but 1841 is the most frequent point of reference.

---

<sup>70</sup> *Cenno storico intorno alla Società di San Francesco di Sales* [1868], in ASC 132 Autogr. Soc. Sal., FDBM 1,924 D11-E2 (Ms. Bosco), E3-6 (good copy), Cf. EBM IX, pp. 35-37.

<sup>71</sup> *Stato religioso-materiale della Società di S. Francesco di Sales sul principio dell'anno 1870*, in ASC 132 Autogr. Soc. Sal., FDBM 1,925 C3-11 (Ms. Bosco).

<sup>72</sup> *Riassunto della Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel 23 Febbraio 1874*, in OE XXV, pp. 377-384; transcribed with commentary in Braido, *DB per i giovani*, pp. 147-155.

<sup>73</sup> *Alcuni pensieri che muovono il sac. Gio. Bosco a supplicare umilmente per la definitiva approvazione delle Costituzioni della Società Salesiana*, in Ceria, *Ep II*, pp. 371f.

<sup>74</sup> *Cose da notarsi intorno alle Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, in Motto, *Cost. Testi critici*, p. 229. Cf. IBM VII pp. 622f. [omitted in EBM]



## II. Beginnings of the Home Attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales

### 1. Settling at Pinardi's: Don Bosco's Letter of March 13, 1846 to Marquis Michele Cavour, Vicar of Turin

In a recently published letter addressed to the vicar of Turin, Don Bosco speaks about the origins and nature of his work of the oratory, and then requests the vicar's permission to settle the oratory at Pinardi's, and also asks for his support.<sup>75</sup>

The letter describes the origins only in very general terms. But it makes a number of noteworthy statements which call for comment. The fact that this document is contemporary to the events and is addressed to a person "in the know," confers considerable authority on it.

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.<sup>76</sup> Since its purpose is the good of young people, you yourself have on a number of occasions shown favor and support for it.

This catechetical program was begun three years ago in the Church of St. Francis of Assisi, and because it was the Lord's work the Lord blessed it, and the young people attended in greater number than the place could

<sup>75</sup> Motto, *Ep I*, pp. 66-68 from unpublished document in Turin's Historical Archive. For a photostatic copy of the original, cf. Bracco, *Torino e DB*, II: Immagini, pp. 22-25.

Marquis Michele Benso di Cavour (1781-1850) was the father of Gustavo and Camillo (the future prime minister). He served as *vicar*, governing the city for the king (*vicario e sovrintendente di politica e polizia*), from 1835 to 1847. Up to 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 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.

<sup>76</sup> 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 had top priority in Don Bosco's oratory.

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. [Giovanni] Borelli, Father [Sebastiano] Pacchiotti and myself jointly, presented a petition to His Grace the Archbishop for permission to convert one of our rooms into an oratory, 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 mills, and their reply was favorable. There many boys attended and often exceeded two hundred and fifty.

As it turned out, we were put on 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.<sup>77</sup> 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.<sup>78</sup> Finally, 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, along with two other rooms and an adjacent piece of ground. 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 wider society.

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) an appreciation

---

<sup>77</sup> 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, *Ep* I, p. 68].

<sup>78</sup> These would be the rooms rented in Fr. Moretta's house [Cf. note 133 and related text, below.]

of work; (2) the regular reception of the sacraments; (3) respect for all superior authority; (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; 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 from ten to sixteen years of age, lack any kind of education, religious or academic. Most of them in fact have already fallen a prey 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 and 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

Cavour's notation for his secretary on back of the letter reads:

Reply: that I have spoken with His Excellency the Most Reverend Archbishop and with Count Colegno [*sic*]; that there is no doubt in my mind, that is, I fully agree, that much may be gained from a catechetical program; and that I shall be happy to see the Rev. Father Bosco in my office at 2 P.M., March 28. Benso di Cavour.

[*Comment*]

Don Bosco gives no details as to the number and type of young people with whom the oratory was started. He states generally that the aim is to gather youngsters who are "left to themselves" and would not attend parish instruction. He further characterizes the lads as "between the ages of ten and sixteen, lacking any kind of education, having fallen a prey to evil, and being in danger of

becoming public nuisances or of being put in places of correction." These (in spite of the lower age given) appear to be the young people at risk already discussed. He broadly outlines the educational aim of the oratory and its basic principles, and describes the good results obtained: good citizens and good Christians, with the added bonus of "vocations."

But the letter is also important as a document which throws considerable light on the tradition of the origins and the settling. To begin with, here Don Bosco, writing in March 1846, dates the beginning of the oratory to three years earlier ("this catechetical program was begun three years ago"), hence in early 1843. A little further down he describes the happy results obtained "in the space of these three years." By contrast, as indicated, other statements by Don Bosco, and indeed the Salesian tradition, date the beginning of the oratory in 1841.

Secondly, also to be noted is the statement that negotiations with Pinardi had been in progress during the week preceding Friday, March 13 (date of the letter), hence between Sunday, March 8, and Thursday, March 12. Cavour's secretary replied on March 28.<sup>79</sup> Don Bosco called at the vicar's office, and by March 30 he had the desired permit; the contract with Pinardi was signed (by Father Borel) on April 1.<sup>80</sup> The inference from this evidence is that the negotiations started early in March. Perhaps the "large room" began to be adapted for chapel use even before the signing of the contract on April 1. On Easter Sunday, April 12, the chapel was inaugurated. But adaptation work must have continued after that date.

In his *Memoirs*, however, Don Bosco gives a different date and a different picture. Both in the original manuscript and in Berto's copy of the *Memoirs* Don Bosco gives us to understand that on Palm Sunday 1846 (which he wrongly dates March 15, 1846) he was still at a loss as to where to gather his oratory on the following Sunday. This date (March 15) in the Berto manuscript of the *Memoirs* is corrected by Father Giovanni Bonetti to April 5, 1846, because that year Easter fell on April 12.

Don Bosco in his *Memoirs* also gives a different scenario, when he describes his last stand on the Filippi field, before Mr. Soave appeared to make his offer: "With no one to help me, my energy gone, my health undermined, with no idea where I could gather my boys in the future."<sup>81</sup>

As Bracco points out, from the present letter and from other documents "it appears uncontestably that Don Bosco was never alone." Fathers Borel and Pacchiotti (both chaplains at the Barolo institutions), and others as well, remained his associates in oratory work. Father Borel in particular acted as a

---

<sup>79</sup> ASC 38 Apertura, *FDBM* 228 E5; cf. *EBM* II, pp. 316f.

<sup>80</sup> Giraudi, *L'Oratorio* (1935), pp. 65-67 (photostat of first page of contract Pinardi-Borel, p. 69); Motto, *Ep* I, 68; *MO-Fe*, 147 and 153.

<sup>81</sup> *MO-En*, pp. 255-259.

partner during the gathering of the oratory, the settling, and for some time thereafter. As a matter of fact, he acted as principal in corresponding with the authorities, as well as in contracts.<sup>82</sup>

This raises again the question of the special character of Don Bosco's *Memoirs*, the very question which Braido addresses in the article already referred to.

Thirdly, it should further be noted that there is no mention of a "shed" (the famous Pinardi shed-turned-into-chapel mentioned in Don Bosco's *Memoirs*) either in the letter to Cavour or in the Pinardi-Borel contract of April 1, 1846. Both documents agree on "one large room, with two other rooms and an adjacent piece of ground." This requires some explanation. Francesco Pinardi was an immigrant from Arcisate (Varese, Lombardy). On July 14, 1845, he had purchased a house and surrounding land from the Filippi brothers for 14,000 lire. On November 10, 1845, he leased house and property to another immigrant, one Pancrazio Soave from Verolengo (Turin). Mr. Soave was starting a starch business. Now, a "shed" (*tettoia*) which was being built at the time (for use as a laundry) as a lean-to on the north side of the house was not part of the deal. It is explicitly excluded in the Pinardi-Soave contract: "excluding the shed which is being built behind the aforementioned house and the land adjoining it." It may be assumed that the "large room suitable for use as an oratory [chapel]" refers materially to this "shed" built at the back of Mr. Pinardi's house. The two additional rooms were probably sections of the "shed," and not rooms in the Pinardi house (which was in Mr. Soave's lease).

Taking this explanation one step further, we may simply list the additional actions leading to the complete acquisition of the Pinardi house and property. As indicated, the original Pinardi-Borel contract for the acquisition of the "one large room suitable for use as an oratory, along with two other rooms and an adjacent piece of ground" (the "shed") is dated April 1, 1846. By contract with Mr. Soave dated June 5, 1846, three rooms on the upper story of the Pinardi house itself were sub-leased (by Mr. Soave) to Fr. Borel for three years. On December 1, 1846, after returning with his mother from his convalescence at Becchi (November 3), Don Bosco sub-leased from Mr. Soave the entire Pinardi house and adjacent lot for 710 lire a year (with a 59 lire bonus) for a period ending on December 31, 1848. Mr. Soave was to retain the use of the ground floor for his starch business until March 1, 1847. Don Bosco signed as the contracting party for the first time. When Mr. Soave's lease with Mr. Pinardi expired, Father

---

<sup>82</sup> Giuseppe Bracco, "Don Bosco e le istituzioni," in Bracco, *Torino e DB I*, pp. 123-130. Bracco cites unpublished letters from Turin's Historical Archive. Cf. Also Bracco, "Don Bosco and Civil Society," in *Don Bosco's Place in History* (ed. by Patrick Egan and Mario Midali. Roma: LAS, 1993), p. 241; and Braido, "Memorie del futuro," p. 109.

Borel (again acting as principal) merely took his place, and signed a lease for the house and property with Mr. Pinardi for 150 lire a year. This contract covered the period April 1, 1849 to March 31, 1852. The Pinardi house and property was finally acquired by Don Bosco (in partnership with Fathers Borel, Cafasso and Roberto Murialdo) on February 19, 1851, for 28,500 lire. By this final action the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was definitively settled.<sup>83</sup>

## 2. The Beginnings of the Home or Shelter attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales (*Casa Annessa*)

Once established at Pinardi's in Valdocco, Don Bosco, again responding to pressing need, opened in the Pinardi house a home for needy and homeless youngsters. It is often referred to in Salesian parlance as "hospice," a literal translation of the Italian *ospizio* (shelter or boarding establishment). In this undertaking Don Bosco was following the example of a number of saints in earlier times: St. Philip Neri (1515-1595), St. Joseph Calasanz (1556-1648), St. Vincent de Paul (1581-1660), St. John B. de la Salle (1651-1719), etc. Some of Don Bosco's own contemporaries were also responding to the same need in much the same way.<sup>84</sup>

The establishment of the home was a step of major significance in the development of Don Bosco's work. Obviously, its original inspiration was that it should be a haven for boys who were really the poorest of the poor. This fact alone places it, if not on a par with, certainly as a close second to the work of the oratory itself. It is in fact the logical extension of the work of the oratory. So much so that when first putting this work on a constitutional basis (1858) Don Bosco wrote by way of explanation:

Some [youngsters] are found who are neglected (*abbandonati*) to the extent that unless they are given shelter every care would be expended upon them in vain; hence, as far as possible houses of shelter shall be opened in which, with the means which divine Providence will provide, lodging, food and clothing shall be supplied to them. While they are instructed in the truths of faith, they shall also be started on some trade or line-of-work, as is presently done in the home attached [*Casa Annessa*] to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in this city.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Stella, *DBEcSoc*, pp. 75f. 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*, pp. 145-150.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Stella, *DB I*, p. 114.

<sup>85</sup> *Constitutions of the Salesian Society* (1858), "Purpose of this Society," art. 4, in Motto, *Cost. Testi critici*, p. 74. A similar intent is expressed in art. 2 of the *Constitutions of the Charitable Society to Benefit Orphaned and Abandoned Young*

But its importance also lies in the fact that almost from the start it became the laboratory in which the founder broadened his experiment in the education of the young, both working apprentices and students, including even those also who would eventually become the continuators of his work.

It was in and through this diversified experiment that “what was done at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales” became the pattern for Salesian work everywhere. It was thus that the “Oratory experience” became normative.

### (1) The Beginnings of the Home in the Pinardi House and its First Boarders.

[i] According to the *Memoirs of the Oratory*

In his *Memoirs* Don Bosco recalls how the Home had its beginning. On a rainy evening in May 1847, he and Mamma Margaret took in a 15-year old, homeless orphan from the Valsesia, and Margaret lectured him before putting him to bed. No name is given. Don Bosco adds: “Very soon we had a companion for him.”<sup>86</sup> According to Lemoyne, Don Bosco found this second boy, also a homeless orphan, crying and leaning against a tree in the *Corso San Massimo*.<sup>87</sup>

[ii] According to the *Historical Outline* of 1854

In the *Historical Outline* of 1854, after noting the renting of additional rooms in the Pinardi house, Don Bosco goes on to describe very briefly the beginning of the Home: “Two young men were given shelter. They were poor, orphaned, without a trade, ignorant of their religion. This is how the Home began; it never stopped growing.”<sup>88</sup>

It is possible that the two young men spoken of here as the first boarders at the Home are the same as the two mentioned in the *Memoirs*, their social condition being identical. The sequence in the narrative in the two documents also corresponds: in the *Memoirs*, in three successive chapters, the establishment of the St. Aloysius sodality (April 12) and concomitantly the celebration of the feast (June 21), the beginning of the Home (dated in May), and the opening of the Oratory of St. Aloysius (December 8, 1847); in the *Historical Outline*, likewise, sodality and feast of St. Aloysius, beginning of the Home (no time

---

*People in Turin* founded in 1849 by Fr. Cocchi in association with others. This is the group that built the Collegio degli Artigianelli [Stella, *DB I*, pp. 114f, n. 37].

<sup>86</sup> *MO-En*, pp. 313f.

<sup>87</sup> *EBM III*, pp. 143f.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Appendix II (final paragraph).

specified) and the opening of the Oratory of St. Aloysius (date given, December 8).

It should be noted, however, that in the *Memoirs* the *real* beginning is made in May with *one* boy (the unnamed orphan from the Valsesia), whereas in the *Historical Outline* of 1854, the undated beginning is made with *two* lads.

[iii] According to Extant Records in Salesian Archives

Records were kept by certain departments of the administration at the Oratory, and some of these books contain information regarding boarders in those early times.

The first to be considered is entitled “Family Register” (*Anagrafe*) or “Census Register from 1847 to 1869.”<sup>89</sup> This book records the names of boarders accepted at Valdocco during each solar year: 2 in 1847, 1 in 1848, 2 in 1849, and on to 375 in 1869.

With the caution that “the Family Register” is a late compilation, made in 1870 or even later,” Stella writes:

For 1847 two young men are recorded as having come to live at the Oratory as boarders, both born in Turin: Felice Reviglio and Giacinto Arnaud. Reviglio, born in 1831, became a boarder as a student on October 10, left in September 1858. He was then ordained a priest and served as pastor of the church of St. Augustine in Turin. Arnaud, born in 1826, became a boarder as a working lad on October 25, and left on February 5, 1856. Neither of the two corresponds to the young man from the Valsesia described by Don Bosco.<sup>90</sup>

Nor, we may add, do these two young adults correspond to the two described by Don Bosco in the *Historical Outline*, cited above, except in number.

Stella then calls our attention to “an older record, all in Don Bosco’s hand, entitled, ‘House List’ (*Repertorio domestico*), which contains information on people who were residents at Valdocco between 1847 and 1853.”<sup>91</sup> It is a rough copy in which Don Bosco jotted down names, dates, fees paid, expenditures incurred for particular individuals, etc., but apparently not exhaustively nor in strict order.

---

<sup>89</sup> Stella, *DBEcSoc*, p. 175 describes it (in 1980) as, “the first ledger of the group to come into ASC from the secretary’s office of the Salesian house at Valdocco, not catalogued.”

<sup>90</sup> Stella, *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>91</sup> Stella, *Ibid.*, p. 176. This “House List” is in ASC 132: *Taccuini-Repertorio domestico: Orat. dal 16-10-1847 al 14-8-1853*, pp. 1-40; *FDBMicro* 753 C6-E12. Transcribed in Stella, *DBEcSoc*, pp. 559-571.



The information which Don Bosco gives regarding certain individuals who took up residence in the year 1847 may be summarized as follows: October 16: Alessandro Pescarmona, monthly fee, 55.50 lire; October 23: Father Carlo Palazzolo, monthly fee, 35 lire; October 29: Father Pietro Ponte, to February 29, 1848, monthly fee, 50 lire; November 2: Seminarian [Giovanni Battista] Bertagna, monthly fee, 50 lire; November 9: "The boy Luigi Parone came with Don Bosco" [no fee noted]. (Notations for later years follow.)

[Comment]

What this "House List" represents in terms of the beginning of the Home of the Oratory is uncertain. Certain facts are immediately evident, however. First, people other than young boarders resided at the Oratory (in 1847, two priests and a seminarian). These usually paid for their room and board, as did at least some of the youngsters. Secondly, the record begins with October, not with May (the time when the orphan from the Valsesia was given shelter according to the *Memoirs*). Thirdly, it is unlikely that this is a complete record of the boys taken in as boarders, for to the two mentioned here (Pescarmona and Parone) the two mentioned in the "Family Register" (Reviglio and Arnaud) should be added. Further, it is known that by the end of 1847 the young men "given shelter" at the Home numbered 6 or 7, including a couple of students.

Fourthly and more importantly, Alessandro Pescarmona does not qualify as the orphan from the Valsesia, for he was the son of Giovanni B. Pescarmona, a well-to-do farmer and formerly a mayor of Castelnuovo. Fees and other terms were agreed upon by a private convention between Mr. Pescarmona and Don Bosco.<sup>92</sup> The boy Luigi Parone who "came with Don Bosco" (no fee noted) might qualify, except that he was accepted in November, not in May.

[iv] According to the *Historical Outlines* of 1862

The description of the beginnings of the Home in the *Historical Outlines*, though not specific, still is detailed enough to offer an alternative to the traditional picture, and is worth quoting in full.

*House Attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.*— Among the young people who attended these oratories some would be found who were so poor and neglected (*abbandonati*) that every care expended on their behalf would have been of little use, unless they were given a home in some place and provided with food and clothing. We sought to supply for this need with the Home Attached (*Casa Annessa*), also [simply] called Oratory of St. Francis

---

<sup>92</sup> Signed document in Don Bosco's hand in ASC 132 *autografi-contratti*, Pescarmona, *FDBM* 109 C8.

de Sales. There we began by renting a small house in 1847,<sup>93</sup> and providing a home *to a few* among the poorest. At that time they used to go out to work at various places in the city, returning to the home of the Oratory to eat and sleep. But the grave need that was experienced in various localities of the [Turin] province was responsible for our decision to extend admission also to those who did not attend the Turin oratories. One thing led to another. Neglected young people appeared out of nowhere in swarms. It was then that a policy was established according to which only those youngsters were admitted who were between the ages of eighteen and twelve, orphaned by both parents, and in a state of dire poverty with no one to care for them (*totalmente poveri ed abbandonati*).<sup>94</sup>

One may note that the motivation for the home here is given much in the same language as in the draft of the Salesian Constitutions of the same period (cited above). The description of the establishment of the Home in 1847 (the “renting of a small house” as a home “for a few among the poorest”) is sufficiently general as to allow further specification. But nothing in the passage suggests a beginning in May with one orphan lad from Valsesia.

[v] Comments

Above we raised the question of the symbolical (rather than historical) role of the Garelli story as a description of the beginnings in the *Memoirs*. The same question might be raised with respect to the possible symbolical role of the story of the orphan boy from the Valsesia as marking the beginning of the second great institution. For the importance of the *Casa annessa* as the extension of the Oratory and as the setting for the tremendous developments which followed, cannot be overestimated. The story of the beginning of the “Home attached to the Oratory” with one (unnamed) orphan from the Valsesia may then be said to form a diptych, as to contents and rhetoric, with the story of the beginning of the Oratory itself with one orphan (Garelli?) from Asti. That both stories might be symbolical, rather than historical, representations cannot be ruled out. For, as will be seen, the type of the “homeless, destitute, orphaned young person at risk” not only motivates the beginnings, but also defines the character of the work throughout its development. This remains true in Don Bosco’s thinking and statements even when, for example, his school at the Oratory, and later his schools elsewhere, were attended by young people who were neither homeless, not destitute, nor orphaned, nor (strictly) at risk.

---

<sup>93</sup> This is the Pinaridi House. Cf. Note 83 and related text, above.

<sup>94</sup> Appendix III. “*To a Few*”: Italics mine.

## (2) The Home in "Don Bosco's House"

The number of working and student boarders increased steadily. As indicated above, students as well as working lads, lived at the Home from the start. Pescarmona and Reviglio have already been mentioned. These were students at secondary level (high school) and they constituted the nucleus of the Oratory school, as will be mentioned below. Other easily recognizable names appear in the registers. Among these, we note Angelo Savio, future financial administrator of the Society (1850) and Giovanni Cagliero (1851), both, like Pescarmona, from Castelnuovo; Michele Rua and Giovanni Francesia (1852), who had attended the oratory, both from Turin. At this time (1852) the boarders at the Home numbered about 30, some 20 working lads and some 10 students. The Pinardi house was overcrowded.

The Church of St. Francis de Sales, dedicated on June 20, 1852, was Don Bosco's first major building project, at a time when his "charity base" was still small and insecure. For this project Don Bosco launched his first large-scale fund raising campaign through a benefit raffle, the first of nine that were to follow.<sup>95</sup>

A few days after the inauguration of the church of St. Francis de Sales, Don Bosco began to develop plans for a large building to replace the small Pinardi house as the "Home attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales." It was to be situated between the church to the west and the Filippi house (not yet purchased) to the east, hence taking up also the space occupied by the Pinardi house. But since he could ill afford meanwhile to raze the Pinardi house, he decided to put up only the eastern part of the projected building. The work was well along when, on November 20, 1852, part of the second story to the east came tumbling down. Three workers were seriously injured. Don Bosco ordered the damage repaired without delay. The work went forward, but as the structure reached the roofing stage, at midnight of December 2, 1852, the whole edifice collapsed, damaging also the corner of the adjacent Pinardi house where Don Bosco's room was located. Next morning, while the municipal building inspectors were at work, the last standing wall collapsed. Since it was winter, the work was stopped. To enable the programs to go forward at the Home, Don Bosco turned the old Pinardi chapel into a dormitory and located the day and evening classes in the church of St. Francis de Sales. In the spring of 1853, work on the building resumed. In March the city commission stopped the work and demanded that a certified architect and contractor be called in. The original contractor was fined for negligence. The building was completed in October 1853 and immediately occupied. The old Pinardi chapel was now turned into a class

---

<sup>95</sup> For the significance of this first great lottery and of others that followed, as instances of Don Bosco's dealings with city authorities, cf. Bracco, "Don Bosco e le istituzioni," in Bracco, *Torino e DB I*, pp. 130-138. City Hall's response to Don Bosco's requests for permits was constantly reasonable and favorable.

room and study hall. Don Bosco moved into a room on the third level of the east wing of the new house, henceforth to be known as "Don Bosco's house." In successive frontal additions to this wing, this room became the waiting room of a "suite." In 1853, out of a boarding population of 100 boys, some 65% were working apprentices, while some 35% were students.

A further expansion was made possible by the construction of the second section of Don Bosco's house in 1856. This replaced the Pinardi house, which was demolished together with the old shed-chapel. Again during construction an accident occurred as the scaffolding and the supporting beams were being removed. One of these plunged through the ceiling of the top story, and this collapsed taking down with it part of the floor below. The damage was repaired, and the building could be occupied by October 1856. By 1857-58 the proportion in the boarding population was reversed: out of 200 boys some 65% were students and 35% workers.<sup>96</sup>

### (3) Development of the School and of Student Community at the Home

From October 1847 (when Don Bosco admitted the first student) to 1850-51 Don Bosco himself, with Fr. Pietro Merla's help, had taught the students. But by the year 1851-52, Don Bosco began to send them out to private schools in the city:<sup>97</sup> The private teachers, Carlo Giuseppe Bonzanino and Father Matteo Picco generously admitted Don Bosco's "poor youngsters" free of charge. Don Bosco's boys were set up as examples of devotion to duty and good conduct before the other students, who were mostly from well-to-do families.

In 1855-56 Don Bosco began to establish a secondary school program at the Home, with 17-year old seminarian Giovanni Francesia as teacher. By the year 1859-1860 he succeeded in establishing a complete resident program of secondary studies, with five years of *ginnasio* (high school).

From then on, the student community acquired ever greater importance for a number of reasons: (1) because of the greater number of students, by comparison with that of workers (steadily about 2 to 1); (2) because, in line with the new realities (the education of the masses by the secular State), Don Bosco saw himself as increasingly committed to education through schools for the poor, with the aim of turning out good Christians as well as good citizens; (3) through the school, Don Bosco aimed at cultivating vocations to the priesthood (the Salesian priesthood, too) among those (poor) boys who gave evidence of good conduct, good will, and intelligence.

---

<sup>96</sup> For data, cf. Stella, *DBEcSoc*, pp. 86-100, 175-181, esp. 180f.; and Giraudi, *L'Oratorio* (1935), pp. 111-131. Cf. also *EBM* IV, pp. 327f., 351-361.

<sup>97</sup> By private school is meant a school run by a licensed teacher privately in his own home. There were several such schools in the city.

In this last respect the Oratory school, while trying to comply with the law in academic matters, was otherwise run as it would have been run in the times of the Restoration, that is, as a junior seminary.

Even before the secondary studies program was completely established at the Oratory, Don Bosco began to advertise the Home and Oratory school, stressing its charitable character and purpose. It was for “orphans” who were “destitute and homeless.” The November 7, 1857, issue of the Catholic daily *L'Armonia*, published Don Bosco's admission requirements, which ideally also constitute a manifesto of his commitment to the poor:

1. The boy must be at least twelve and not over eighteen.
2. He must be an orphan with both parents dead and have no relatives able to care for him.
3. He must be completely destitute and homeless. If a boy fulfills the first two conditions but has some property of his own, he must bring it with him to help defray expenses; since it would not be right for a person who has property to live off the charity of others.
4. A boy must be in good health, and not be physically deformed or ill with some loathsome or communicable disease.
5. Priority will be given to totally destitute and homeless boys who already attend the oratories of St. Aloysius, of the Guardian Angel and of St. Francis de Sales, because this Home has been opened especially for them.<sup>98</sup>

As Lemoyne has noted, this policy statement seems intended to emphasize “for the public” that priority option for the “poor and abandoned,” which had inspired the creation of the Home in the first place. But this statement, while perhaps generally reflecting the situation in the working community, did not reflect the *real* situation in the student community. A number of these boys, though generally poor, were neither orphans nor destitute, and at least some of them paid room and board and tuition fees, at least in part. This may be learned from Oratory books such as Don Bosco's own “House List” mentioned above.<sup>99</sup>

Don Bosco's statement, however, is not just for publicity purposes, but reflects a real commitment to the needy. P. Baricco, writing in 1868, in the sections devoted to scholastic and to charitable institutions, notes that Don Bosco's Oratory belonged to the latter category. He writes:

The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, under Father John Bosco's direction, should be classed as a charitable institution rather than as an academic one. The fees charged for room and board are modest in the extreme, and most of its pupils are maintained free of charge. Perhaps less than one hundred of

---

<sup>98</sup> *EBM* V, p. 496.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Stella, *DBEcSoc*, pp. 202-204. Lemoyne also notes that even before 1851 some of the boarders paid regular fees [*EBM* III, p. 410].

them pay the full amount of 24 lire per month. Of the 504 students in residence at the institute, 445 are enrolled in the high school (*corso ginnasiale*), while 59 attend theology and philosophy classes at the archdiocesan seminary.

In the studies program are enrolled young men of good conduct who have completed their elementary course of studies. They are either received free of charge (and these are in the majority) or they pay only a modest fee ranging from 5 to 24 lire per month. On the other hand, working apprentices are all admitted free of charge. They must be at least 12 years old, and orphans with both parents dead and no one to care for them (*abbandonati*).<sup>100</sup>

### Part III: Don Bosco’s Abiding Commitment to the “Poor and Abandoned”

The foregoing remarks on the development and character of Home attached to the Oratory, and specifically of the student community at the Home, are intended to emphasize Don Bosco’s fidelity to his original commitment to “poor and abandoned” young people, albeit in realistic historical circumstances. That fidelity and that commitment never flagged.

In a number of early letters and appeals to solicit charitable help in straitened circumstances, some of them published for the first time by F. Motto in the first volume of the *Epistolario*, Don Bosco again and again restates this commitment, and with it the purpose and character of his work. A few of the most interesting and typical examples are given here in chronological order.

#### 1. Don Bosco’s Letter to King Victor Emmanuel II, before November 14, 1849<sup>101</sup>

Your Majesty:

Fr. John Bosco, a priest living and working in this capital, takes the liberty of bringing to Your Majesty’s attention a work in which he has been involved with the aim of caring for the most neglected (*più abbandonati*) youngsters of this city in their need. He began the work by gathering these young people on Sundays and holy days at various places, having first obtained the permission of the civic and Church authorities. With the Lord’s

---

<sup>100</sup> Baricco, *Torino descritta* II, pp. 708 and 813.

<sup>101</sup> Motto, *Ep* I, pp. 90f., from an unpublished original (not in Don Bosco’s hand) in Turin’s Historical Archive.

Victor Emmanuel II succeeded Charles Albert when the latter abdicated after his defeat by the Austrians in the battle of Novara, March 23, 1849 (First War of Independence).

blessing, an oratory under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales was established in the Valdocco district between Porta Palazzo and Porta Susina. Attendance often surpassed five hundred, and most of the young people either had already spent time in gaol or were in danger of being sent to gaol.

Young people came in such numbers that the place at Valdocco quickly became inadequate. Hence, in 1847 another oratory, under the patronage of St. Aloysius, was opened at Porta Nuova, between the Viale dei Platani and the Royal Valentino.

In our days there is an even greater need to care for neglected young people (*gioventù abbandonata*), to instruct them in their religion and to give them some education. To meet this need the oratory in the Vanchiglia district, which has been closed for the past year, was reactivated. This oratory had been established, under the patronage of the Guardian Angels, by the Reverend Father [Giovanni] Cocchi, assistant at the church of the Annunciation.

In these oratories the youngsters are educated to a love of work, respect for authority, and obedience to the law, in accordance with the tenets of our holy Catholic faith. This is done through sermons, the teaching of catechism, and classroom instruction. On Sundays we also offer classes in the metric system for those youngsters who can attend. We have also opened a Home to provide shelter and basic needs (*urgenti bisogni*) for some twenty-five such youngsters. The total number of boys attending the three oratories on any given Sunday is about one thousand.

Up to the present, the work has gone forward through the charity of some generous people and with the help of quite a few zealous priests and committed lay persons.

[... In straitened circumstances Don Bosco appeals for help, adding that the king's father, Charles Albert, had generously helped the work.]

Following upon this letter, a report on Don Bosco's work by a government official, quoted by Motto from Turin's State Archive, reads in part:

[By his work Don Bosco] renders a great service not only to the city of Turin, which has the misfortune of having to put up with [these young people's] conduct, but also to parents and society throughout Piedmont. The work being done in the capital easily provides a model for similar work in the provinces, where delinquency among young people at risk is not unknown, and is in fact on the increase, much to the discomfiture and scandal of the good people. The Reverend Don Bosco is doing his best; but he is just a poor priest, lacking the means to meet even the most basic needs [of these children]. He must therefore rely on charity, public as well as private. For the government has a large vested interest in controlling and ensuring order among this class of people whose numbers have increased and are increasing alarmingly. These are the young people who live on the

street, without schooling, without discipline, open to being seduced for the smallest price, and I don’t know what else.<sup>102</sup>

## 2. Letter to the Administrators of the *MendicITÀ Istruita*, February 20, 1850<sup>103</sup>

Honorable Gentlemen:

In an effort to promote the social, religious and moral advancement of the most neglected (*più abbandonati*) young people [of this city], in 1841 Father John Bosco began by gathering several such young people in a place attached to the church of St. Francis of Assisi. By force of circumstance, their number was limited to seventy or eighty.

[...The move to the Rifugio and the wandering are alluded to.]

In the year 1846 he succeeded in renting a place in Valdocco, and the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was established there. The number of young people, between the ages of 12 and 20, reached as high as six or seven hundred. Many of these youngsters had just been released from prison or were liable to being sent there.

[...The opening of the Oratory of St. Aloysius in 1847 is mentioned.]

In response to the ever more pressing need to educate and help neglected (*abbandonati*) young people, in October 1849 the Oratory of the Guardian Angel was re-opened. Father Cocchi, curate at the church of the Annunciation and a most zealous priest, had been forced to shut it down the previous year. The number of young people attending the three oratories jointly often reaches one thousand.

[... Oratory activities are described.]

We also have a home (*ospizio*) capable of housing from twenty to thirty youngsters of the kind, as it all too often happens, who find themselves in dire need (*estremo bisogno*).

<sup>102</sup> Motto, *Ep I*, p. 91, note to line 31.

The author of the report (so Motto remarks) added that when interviewed Don Bosco had stated that the charity of benefactors had declined sharply, and that he feared he would be forced to shut down the work, just as Father Cocchi had, for lack of financial means. The king approved a subsidy of 400 lire.

Motto [*Ibid.*, note to line 34] further states that none of Don Bosco’s letters to King Charles Albert could be traced.

<sup>103</sup> Motto, *Ep I*, pp. 96f. from the archive of the *MendicITÀ Istruita*; Ceria, *Ep I*, pp. 29f.; *IBM XVII*, pp. 853f.

The *Regia Opera della MendicITÀ Istruita* (Royal Institute for the Instruction of the Destitute) was an association legally established toward the end of the eighteenth century for the purpose of providing help and instruction to the poor. Later it also undertook to open day and evening classes for poor children, entrusting the boys’ schools to the de la Salle Christian Brothers and the girls’ schools to the Sisters of St. Joseph [Motto, *Ibid.*, note to line 2].



Up to now the work has gone forward with the help of a number of charitable persons, both priests and lay people. The priests that are committed to this work in a special way are: Father Dr. [Giovanni] Borrelli, Father Dr. [Giacinto] Carpano, Father Dr. [Giovanni Ignazio] Vola, Father [Pietro] Ponte, Father [Giovanni] Grassino, Father Dr. [Roberto] Murialdo, Father [Giovanni Francesco] Giacomelli, Father Dr. Prof. [Francesco] Marengo.

[... Financial needs are outlined and a request for help is made on grounds that the purpose of the oratories coincides with that of the *MendicITÀ Istruita* ...]

In response to this petition, the administrators of the association voted a subsidy. But they did not always respond favorably to Don Bosco's appeals.

### 3. Letter to Father Antonio Rosmini, March 11, 1850<sup>104</sup>

By this letter Don Bosco invites Father Rosmini to collaborate in a new Oratory building, which could also serve as a base in Turin for Rosmini's Institute of Charity. The letter is important not only because it is Don Bosco's first direct contact with the great man (he had been in touch with other Rosminians), but also because in it Don Bosco refers, in a veiled manner, to his gaining control of the three oratories, two years before he was officially recognized as "director-in-chief" by Archbishop Fransoni.

Most Reverend Sir:

[...]

The plan is to put up a new building for an Oratory the purpose of which would be the civic, moral, and religious education of such young people as are most at risk (*gioventù più abbandonata*). Several oratories of this kind have already been opened in Turin. Of them, *as things turned out*, I find myself in charge (*comunque siasi mi trovo alla testa*). The harvest is a thorny one indeed, but it is huge, and much fruit may be hoped from it. The crying need now is for more priests, but priests truly imbued with pastoral charity.

[...Don Bosco then outlines his proposal.]

The proposal was spelled out in a subsequent letter, dated April 15, 1850.<sup>105</sup> Negotiations with Don Bosco were undertaken by Father Francesco Puecher in Father Rosmini's name. In reporting to his superior, Father Puecher gave the following appraisal of Don Bosco and his work.

---

<sup>104</sup> Motto, *Ep* I, pp. 99f. from the archive of the Institute of Charity; Ceria, *Ep* I, p. 31; *EBM* IV, pp. 27f.

<sup>105</sup> Motto, *Ep* I, pp. 101-103; *EBM* IV, pp. 28-30.

I believe [Don Bosco] to be a priest imbued with great faith (*pietà*), simplicity, and charity, and endowed with a gentle and kindly disposition. He is a man of average intelligence and education (*d'ingegno e cognizioni discrete*), nothing more. His views [in political matters?] are somewhat limited and narrow (*ristrette e anguste*), but his prudence and more than ordinary discretion allow him to get by. [...] For the present, the charitable activity undertaken by his institute is twofold. The first is the oratory for the local children held on Sundays and holy days and run in much the same manner as Father Giulio's oratory.<sup>106</sup> Oratories are much needed in Turin, and [Don Bosco] assures me that he is the only one who has been involved in this kind of work. He has, therefore, obtained the archbishop's approval, and likewise the approval of city authorities and of the government itself, which has seen fit to poke its nose into this matter. For this work, [Don Bosco] has been able to enlist the help of a few priests and seminarians. The second charitable activity has been to gather from the streets and squares of the city a few lads who, though showing good dispositions, nonetheless run the risk of being corrupted and drawn into all kinds of evil because they have no parents or no guardians to care for them. He has given shelter to about thirty of these lads, whom he also provides with food and clothing as one does with the indigent. They board at the house under his supervision, and under the care of a few willing seminarians who act as prefects. Some lay people also help in such capacities as cook, porter, etc. The lads, as is the case with the *Somaschi*,<sup>107</sup> are apprenticed in various workshops in the city to employers chosen by [Don Bosco] himself, so that they may learn some honest trade, as far as possible without spiritual harm.

Now, some comments on the material aspects of the matter. The small house he is renting at present is poor indeed, more poorly furnished than a Capuchin monastery. It is filled with beds, chairs, tables, and odd pieces of all kinds and sizes. The costs of running the establishment are defrayed partly from his small personal resources and partly through the charity of kind benefactors. Recently he has also obtained a subsidy from the city. He certainly needs to build a more suitable house if the twin charitable purposes just described are to be properly served. [...] His idea, so he told me, is to build a house which would in no way resemble a monastery, a house of modest proportions which would not draw attention to itself and would therefore give no cause for speculation. I expressed my appreciation for the idea and for the reasons behind it, but I also made the following observations, on purely theoretical grounds: (1) the house could not be too small, for it had to serve three distinct institutions, each susceptible of further development, namely, the oratory, the orphanage, and our

---

<sup>106</sup> Presumably the reference here is to an oratory run by Father Giulio, known to the Rosminians, in their area (Stresa, Novara, in northeastern Piedmont).

<sup>107</sup> The Congregation of Clerks Regular of Somasca founded by St. Jerome Emiliani (1481-1537).

[Rosminian] community; (2) consequently, plans should be drawn up for a large building, even though for now only a wing of it might be built to serve the present purposes; (3) granted that the building should not resemble a monastery, we should nevertheless not sacrifice our true requirements because of what people might say. [...] I do not think that Don Bosco has a clearly thought-out idea of the direction he wishes his institute to take. Perhaps it would help if we submitted a plan of our own.[...]<sup>108</sup>

#### 4. Don Bosco's First Raffle Appeal, December 20, 1851<sup>109</sup>

Announcing his first raffle to raise funds for the building of the church of St. Francis de Sales, Don Bosco gives a brief history of the Oratory for the public, before inviting participation.

Dear Sir:

A modest charitable activity, known as the *Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*, was begun ten years ago in this city. Its single aim is to help intellectually and morally those young people who through parental neglect, through association with depraved companions, or through lack of material means, are exposed to the ever present risk of corruption. A number of persons committed to the moral education of working people were painfully struck by the ever-growing number of idle and ill-advised youngsters (*giovani oziosi e malconsigliati*) who roam the streets and squares of the city and make a living through begging and tricks. They are a burden to society, and more often than not they are the perpetrators of all kinds of mischief (*strumento d'ogni misfare*). It has also been a source of grief to the said persons to see that so many of the lads who hold a job in some workshop or factory in the city waste their meager weekly wages on Sundays in gambling and drinking. In their desire to put an end to such an evil situation from which only the worst consequences may be expected, they decided to open a home in which both groups of young people could meet on Sundays and holy days. Here they are given every opportunity to fulfill their religious duties, and at the same time receive basic instruction, as well as counsel and direction for a Christian moral life. Thus it was that the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was established through the charity of generous people who can be relied upon to give lavishly whenever the public good is at stake. Their charity provided whatever was needed for religious services and for a basic program of education in religion and in secular subjects. A variety of games designed to provide physical exercise as

---

<sup>108</sup> Motto, *Ep* I, pp. 102f., note to line 51, quoting an unpublished document from the Archive of the Institute of Charity.

<sup>109</sup> Motto, *Ep*. I, pp. 139-141 from ASC 131.04 Circolari e inviti a non Salesiani, *FDBM* 1370, A10ff.; Ceria, *Ep* I, pp. 49-51; *EBM* IV, pp. 228-230.

well as mental relaxation make attendance at the oratory pleasant and beneficial.

[... Attendance in large numbers necessitated expansion.]

Classes in reading, writing, arithmetic, and Italian grammar began to be held on Sundays at first, and later also through the week on winter evenings. Particular stress was laid on familiarizing the boys with the new, legally enforced, system of measures [the metric system]. This was a real need for lads who are for the most part working at a trade.

For the past ten years, zealous priests and lay people have worked hard and with great concern and dedication to instill in these boys love for their parents, goodwill for each other, respect for authority, gratitude toward their benefactors, and an appreciation of hard work. Above all else, these [educators] have striven to instruct the boys in the religious and moral truths of the Catholic faith, to rescue them from evil ways, to inspire them with a holy fear of God, and to train them from their youth in the practice of their religion.

While there are those who laudably labor to promote the arts and sciences, to advance technology, and to educate the sons of the well-to-do in secondary schools and colleges, the modest Oratory of St. Francis de Sales seeks to impart a thorough religious and civic education to those who may have been less favored by fortune, but who have the will and talent to be of use to themselves, their families, and their country.

[...To ensure the continuance of this work larger premises and a larger church are needed. The raffle is advertised and participation invited.]

E. Ceria remarks that this dark description of the social and moral condition of the youngsters irked some people at the Oratory and was the cause of much grief to Don Bosco.

Some of his helpers who would have wanted the Oratory run in their own way took advantage of this to stir up resentment against him. By such words, they claimed, Don Bosco portrayed all Oratory youngsters as a pack of juvenile delinquents, and insulted everybody. A number of young men among the best who belonged to good, even well-to-do families, suborned by the most hostile of Don Bosco's helpers, took high offense; they defected, each drawing a following. A schism ensued which for a time paralyzed the life of the Oratory."<sup>110</sup>

The hostility of some oratory workers toward Don Bosco arose out of different conceptions of how an oratory should be run, and this had to do also with the political stance of the individuals involved. As far as the social situation and the moral character of young people at risk are concerned, what has been said above

---

<sup>110</sup> Ceria, *Ep I*, p. 51, note 1; cf. Lemoyne's lengthy account in *EBM IV*, pp. 215-221 and 254-466.

would substantiate Don Bosco's language. It remains to be determined, however, if in 1851 the thirty lads of the Home attached to the Oratory (a community of both workers and students) could in reality be so described. Our comments have indicated that, as descriptive of the real situation, that language needs to be qualified. But (apart from its publicity value) it does express Don Bosco's priorities.

### 5. Letter to Mayor Giorgio Bellono, November 8, 1852<sup>111</sup>

Don Bosco submits his request for the city's yearly subsidy.

Your Honor:

Please accept my renewed thanks for last year's generous grant to our oratories for young people at risk (*gioventù pericolante*). I am now happy to report that because of the aid granted I have been able to continue this charitable work, with the result that a considerable number of homeless youngsters (*giovani abbandonati*) are now gainfully employed. It is a source of great satisfaction to know that they have given up a life of idleness and vice (*la strada dell'ozio e del vizio*) and are now motivated to work. [...]

This year the number of our young people is considerably larger. I am moreover under unusual financial obligations due to the erection of a new church at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. These circumstances make it harder than ever for me to carry on this work, unless the City comes to my aid with its customary generosity.

[...Various needs are described and a grant is requested.]

A yearly subsidy was awarded to the Oratory by the city council after hearing a report from the school committee. At the committee's session of November 30, councilor [Father] Pietro Baricco presented Don Bosco's petition. The minutes read in part:

A number of comments are made by various committee members on the purpose of this institution [the Oratory] and on its educational method [*metodo d'insegnamento*]. Then Councilor [Pietro] Baricco presents a detailed report and answers questions concerning this institution. He states that the Rev. Don Bosco has already helped many neglected young people by giving them shelter [at the Home]. The fatherly care expended on them has effectively brought them back from their evil course. Councilor Baricco then moves that a subsidy of 150 lire be assigned, and the committee's vote is favorable.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> Motto, *Ep I*, p. 171f. from unpublished Ms. in Turin's Historical Archive. The new church mentioned in the letter is that of St. Francis de Sales, dedicated in June 1852 [cf. note 95 and related text, above].

<sup>112</sup> Motto, *Ep I*, p. 179, note to lines 3-4.

6. Letter to the City Council, August 3, 1853<sup>113</sup>

Before submitting his request for the yearly subsidy, Don Bosco gives a description of oratory activities which is of interest.

Honorable Gentlemen:

[...]

I would in the first place like to give you some idea of these three oratories and their activities. This past year the oratory program has been more successful than ever, due in part to greatly increased attendance by young people. Sometimes their number exceeded two thousand in the Valdocco oratory alone. On Sundays the opportunity to fulfill all religious duties is provided to the youngsters. They also receive moral and secular education through classroom instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic, the metric system, drawing, vocal music, and some instrumental music as well. A recreation program is also provided with elementary gymnastics and with games such as trestles, swings, bowling balls, shuffleboard (*piastrelle*), racing, and jumping. These games serve the purpose of attracting those boys that would not otherwise attend. The evening school program has not been as successful as I had hoped this past year. This was due to lack of means, for these children are all so poor that they often lack what they need for the class; this discourages them from attending. We have had nonetheless as many as three hundred in the program.

[... Expenses incurred are briefly mentioned.]

In addition we are burdened with the costs of the new church built in the Valdocco oratory, and with the expense involved in the construction, or more accurately "reconstruction," of a building which is to house new classrooms and to shelter truly destitute and homeless youngsters (*assolutamente poveri ed abbandonati*).

[... Don Bosco makes his request, noting that his regular benefactors are already overtaxed.]

Father Pietro Baricco (1819-1887) professor on the theological faculty of the university, served for many years on the city council and was deputy mayor. He was active in education and worked for the betterment of the school system. He authored various works, including the capital *Torino descritta* [cf. note 36, above]. He was a friend of the Oratory and a Salesian cooperator. For further details, cf. Ernesto Bellone, "La presenza dei sacerdoti nel Consiglio comunale di Torino 1848-1887," in Bracco, *Torino e DB*, pp. 172-178; and Motto, *Ep I*, p. 138.

<sup>113</sup> Motto, *Ep I*, pp. 201f., from unpublished manuscript in Turin's Historical Archive.

The church referred to here is that of St. Francis de Sales [cf. notes 95 and 111 and related text, above]; the "reconstruction" refers to the first section of the building intended to replace the old Pinardi house. This structure collapsed before completion and had to be rebuilt [cf. note 96 and related text, above].

### 7. Letter to Count Clemente Solaro della Margarita, January 5, 1854<sup>114</sup>

Your Excellency:

[...Don Bosco has never before asked the count for help, but grave need forces him to do so now.]

Soaring prices in every category of food stuffs, increasing numbers of destitute and homeless (*cenciosi ed abbandonati*) young people [attending the oratories], dwindling contributions from charitable private individuals who are no longer able to help, have left me in straitened circumstances. I see no way out of this predicament. [...] Nevertheless we must eat. Were I to deny a crust of bread to these young men, in danger and *dangerous* (*pericolanti e pericolosi*) as they are, I would place them at grave spiritual and bodily risk.

[... The need and the count's charity are stressed.]

It's not just a question of helping an individual in need, but of providing food to many youngsters whose faith and morals would be put at gravest risk by hunger.

[...]

This is a rare instance in which Don Bosco qualifies the young people as "dangerous" (underscored). They are routinely so qualified in the literature.<sup>115</sup> This description may have gratified the count, who was a conservative reactionary gentleman of the old stamp, but it does not truly represent Don Bosco's evaluation of young people at risk. Nor does it express the real motivation of his charitable endeavors, as though they were simply aimed at safeguarding public order.

### 8. Letter to Mayor Giovanni Battista Notta, January 25, 1855<sup>116</sup>

In the context of the great cholera epidemic of 1854, Don Bosco asks for help to feed additional cholera orphans, in spite of having agreed with the City not to submit a request this year because of that emergency.

---

<sup>114</sup> Motto, *Ep I*, pp. 212f.; Ceria, *Ep I*, pp. 83f.; *EBM V*, pp. 2f.

Count Clemente Solaro della Margherita (1792-1869) a scion of ancient Piedmontese nobility served first as a foreign diplomat, from 1835 to 1847 as minister for foreign affairs under King Charles Albert, and thereafter as an elected member of parliament. A charitable and most conservative Catholic gentleman, he was on friendly terms with Fathers Giuseppe Cottolengo and Giuseppe Cafasso [Motto, *Ibid.*].

<sup>115</sup> For a common perception of young people at risk, cf. note 101 and related text, above.

<sup>116</sup> Motto, *Ep I*, pp. 243f.; Ceria, *Ep I*, p. 101.

Your Honor:

The heavy financial disbursements forced on the city by the emergency of the cholera epidemic discourage me from submitting a request for help this year. But unfortunately my present need is so grave that I am forced to do so nonetheless. The considerable expenses incurred in bringing our house up to hygienic standards, as demanded by the situation, is one reason.<sup>117</sup> In addition I have now some ninety-five boys to feed, clothe, and keep warm in bed at night. I would have liked to cut the number of admissions, but the number of children orphaned by the epidemic suggested otherwise. A number of such children were sent to me by the commission set up to aid the cholera victims; others I have myself collected and taken in from the streets of the city. I have therefore given shelter to an additional forty such unfortunate lads. The grant I am asking will not go toward defraying expenses for rents, classrooms, and various needed repairs. It will be earmarked in its entirety to feed these poor children of mine through the winter.

[...]

#### 9. To Defense Minister Giacomo Durando, probably November 1855<sup>118</sup>

Your Honor:

I respectfully bring to your attention that I have in the past submitted requests to the Ministry of Defense for articles of clothing no longer serviceable to the royal troops, being defective or worn out. My requests were always favorably received, and help was given. Such petitions were prompted by the need of providing for over one hundred youngsters living at the Home attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, as well as for over one thousand five hundred young people attending the Boys' Oratories of Valdocco, Porta Nuova, and Vanchiglia.

It has been a year of hardship, and at present my financial situation is much worse than in past years. This is why I am forced to turn to Your Honor again. I beg you to consider the unhappy lot of these poor and neglected (*poveri ed abbandonati*) youngsters. They are in need of even the most basic clothing in order to ward off the cold during the coming winter. This will enable them to keep working and earn their livelihood in some honest trade.

---

<sup>117</sup> Stringent hygienic measures were enforced by the city in anticipation of the cholera, and Don Bosco had to spend quite a bit of money to improve conditions at the Oratory.

<sup>118</sup> Motto, *Ep* I, pp. 268f. from *ASC* 131.01 Lett. orig. Vittorio Em. II (A 174); Ceria, *Ep* I, pp. 114f.; *IBM* VI, pp. 310f., where the name of the minister is given as General Alfonso La Marmora (omitted in *EBM*).



I wish to emphasize the absolute poverty (*l'assoluta povertà*) of these youngsters. This is why we will be most grateful for any kind of clothing that might be available: shoes, coats, jackets, shirts, underwear, sheets, blankets, trousers, in whatever condition. Here even worn out clothing, blankets in rags, etc., are mended or patched and made to serve our needs.  
[...]

Don Bosco would send lads to school in the city in groups and prescribe the route they had to follow. They would be easily recognized as "Don Bosco's boys" by the odd clothes they wore. The anticlerical newspaper *La Gazzetta del Popolo* (The People's Gazette), in a satirical piece against Don Bosco and Archbishop Lawrence Gastaldi, remarked: "Don Bosco's seminarians and tonsured boys troop up and down Turin's streets looking like Lenten ghosts and smelling like rotten truffles. Educated people are amused [...]."<sup>119</sup>

Don Bosco's first raffle appeal has been cited above. From later raffle appeals, all very instructive, I have selected two which seem of special interest.

#### 10. Invitation to a Raffle, February [21], 1857<sup>120</sup>

We believe it is common knowledge that Father John Bosco, in an effort to contribute to the moral advancement of neglected (*abbandonati*) young people, has established three oratories for boys at the three most sensitive points in this city. Here on Sundays and holy days young people at risk (*pericolanti*) gather in the greatest possible number. Some of these boys live in the city, while others have come to this capital from provincial towns. Each oratory maintains a chapel for religious services and a few rooms for classes, and also a recreation garden (*giardino per ricreazione*).

The youngsters are enticed with prizes, and, after they have been to church, they are entertained with gymnastics or some other form of wholesome recreation. The number of those who attend sometimes exceeds three thousand.

Seasonal weather permitting, instruction is offered in these oratories in reading, writing, and vocal and instrumental music. Many dedicated Christian gentlemen help with religious instruction. They also try to help youngsters that are out of work by finding them jobs with fair-minded employers, and by following their progress with fatherly care.

[... Further activities and purposes of the oratories and of the Home are described.]

---

<sup>119</sup> *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, November 2, 1872, n. 306, p. 2, cited by Giuseppe Tuninetti, "L'immagine di don Bosco nella stampa torinese (e italiana) del suo tempo," in *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare* (ed. Francesco Traniello. Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1987, [209-251]), p. 219.

<sup>120</sup> Motto, *Ep I*, pp. 317-320 from ASC 131.04 Circolari, *FDBM* 1,370 B11-13; Braido, *DB per i giovani*, pp. 24f.; Ceria *Ep I*, pp. 143f.; *EBM V*, pp. 406-408.

This circular letter is matched by a later and similar one, first published by F. Motto. It offers more detailed information on the oratories and on the Home, and ends with an awesome list of the twenty-three members of the organizing committee, headed by the Mayor of Turin.

### 11. Invitation to a Raffle, [January 30 1862]<sup>121</sup>

[...]

In the past several years three oratories were opened at the three most sensitive points in the city. Here [on feast days] we gather as many as possible of the young people at risk (*pericolanti*). After they have been to church, the youngsters are entertained with wholesome and engaging recreation and with some gymnastics drills. Classroom instruction is also provided. A fairly large number of dedicated Christian laymen are active in teaching catechism [at the oratories], in seeing to it that the youngsters do their work well in the factories where they are employed, and in placing with fair-minded employers those young people who are out of work.

The Oratories of St. Aloysius and of St. Francis de Sales offer also classes on weekdays for those youngsters who, because they have nothing but rags to wear or because they are unruly, would not be admitted to the public schools. The curriculum includes, besides religious instruction, reading, writing, and basic arithmetic, as well as fundamentals in the metric system and in the Italian language, and the like.

But some of these young men are so poor and neglected (*poveri ed abbandonati*) that they could not even begin to learn a trade unless they are provided with lodging, food and clothing. These needs are supplied by the Home attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

In this house, besides workshops and basic schooling, the working boys' curriculum includes also plain chant, and vocal and instrumental music. Both resident and non-resident young men attend these classes.

Furthermore, since many youngsters were gifted by God with above-average intelligence, a section of this house has been set aside for them, in order to make it possible for them to pursue further study. Many of them lack sufficient material means for this purpose; but if they prove themselves worthy by their intelligence and good conduct, they are given a chance even when they can pay only a part, or no part at all, of their room and board. Some of these youngsters become school teachers, others go into business, while those that show signs of a vocation are steered toward the priesthood.

From the foregoing summary description, the destination of the proceeds from this raffle becomes obvious.

[... This is explained in some detail.]

---

<sup>121</sup> Motto, *Ep* I, pp. 478-480 from ASC 131.04 Circolari, *Micro* 1,370 E10-12; Braido, *DB per i giovani*, pp. 24f.

The young people that attend the oratories are very numerous. Their number at times exceeds several thousands in one oratory alone. Hence, the premises, especially the classrooms and the chapel, are overcrowded and totally inadequate.

As to their provenance, some of these young people are from the city; but the majority come from provincial cities and towns. They flock to the capital looking for a job or in order to pursue their studies. To give an example, the young people residing in the Home attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales at Valdocco number some 570, of whom only 50 are from Turin. The others come from cities and towns of this and other provinces.

[...]

We note that besides describing the oratory and its activities and the establishing of the Home, Don Bosco also gives a separate account of the condition of the lads in the working and the student sections of the Home.

### Comments and Conclusion

Don Bosco at various times and in various statements gives figures for attendance at the oratories: 70 or 80 for 1841-44, 600 or 700 for 1846, 1,000 for 1849, 3,000 for 1857, "several thousands in one oratory alone" for 1862, etc. Obviously, the figures may have been inflated somewhat for publicity purposes. Don Bosco is known to have used "propaganda rhetoric" for good ends. The same may be said of figures quoted by him for the number of boarders at the Home, or of students attending evening classes. But it isn't all rhetoric. With fluctuations, the numbers were astounding, and his premises were always overcrowded. Faced with the staggering needs of youth at risk, Don Bosco felt duty-bound to make the best possible use of resources to benefit the greatest possible number of youngsters.

Similarly, some descriptions of the oratory and its activities seem dictated by consideration of the readership or of the times. For example, to describe the recreation facility of the oratories Don Bosco uses the Romantic term "recreation garden," which is hardly applicable to an oratory playground with its rowdy activities. Perhaps Don Bosco is just being "careful." Again, in times of patriotic fervor and of cries for Italian independence, young people were very much attracted by "drills." Don Bosco says cautiously, "*some* gymnastics drills," possibly to avoid sending the wrong signal to the authorities, or to make an oblique reference to Father Cocchi's original oratory, which came under criticism for being too drill-oriented and not "religious" enough.<sup>122</sup> However, in the 1862

---

<sup>122</sup> Cf. *EBM* III, pp. 319, 392, 395.

*Historical Outlines* he speaks of "gymnastics and military drills" without any qualification.

The date and place of the beginning of the evening classes are variously presented in the documents. Since this activity was designed to provide some kind of religious instruction and basic literacy for very poor and illiterate youngsters, it is likely that he began it as soon as he had a room available, perhaps as early as 1844 at the *Rifugio*, or in early 1845 at the Little Hospital, or (as he states in the *Memoirs*) at Father Antonio Moretta's house in which he had rented three rooms in late 1845. Once settled at Pinardi's, such classes (which for Don Bosco were an educational priority) were immediately established and expanded with great success. The instruction imparted in all these classes always remained "basic," even with the expanded curriculum described in the 1862 documents. But it is noteworthy that vocal and instrumental music appear in all descriptions of the curriculum. As classroom instruction for *groups* of children, this appears to have been "a first," and an innovative idea, in fact a stroke of genius on Don Bosco's part.<sup>123</sup>

At a more important level, from the texts submitted above one may gain significant insights into Don Bosco's own thinking about his work.

In the first place, the social milieu and condition of the oratory lads is described. Whether the historical beginnings of his work are to be sought in an encounter with one, or two, or several young men, is less important than the factors that caused his discovery and elicited his commitment. Young people released from prison seem to have been the first object of his priestly concern; then in ever increasing numbers those who were uprooted from their families and home places, as well as those who during the week roamed the squares and streets or were to be found in factories. In his perception, and in reality, all these

---

<sup>123</sup> For Don Bosco's statements on evening and similar classes, cf. notes 109, 121 and related text, above, and notes 134, 142, 143, and 154 and related text in appendices, below.

In his *Memoirs* Don Bosco states that evening classes began in 1845 in the Moretta house [*MO-En*, p. 233]. In the same *Memoirs* a little later he writes: "At the Refuge and later at the Moretta house, we started a regular Sunday school, and when we came to Valdocco [to Pinardi's, in 1846] we also started a regular night school" [*MO-En*, p. 281]. The latter statement is corroborated by the Historical outlines of 1862 [cf. note 154 and related text in Appendix III, below]. Perhaps the magnitude and success of the operation of 1846-47 caused him to discount earlier smaller attempts.

The Christian Brothers (de la Salle) claim to have been the first in Turin to establish evening classes for the Institute for the Education of the Poor (*Opera della MendicITÀ istruita*). This society announced the establishment of "evening classes for adults" on December 3, 1845, entrusting them to the Christian Brothers [cf. note 103, above]. While the royal permit and appropriate premises were being prepared, the classes were started in the Christian Brothers' house in early January 1846 [Braido, *DB per i giovani*, p. 47, note to lines 287-288].

young people were alike in that they were all “poor and abandoned,” and at risk. He was especially touched by the “orphan” character of many of the lads, so much so that this trait acquired the role of an inclusive description. Are we to see in this a personal reference?

We may note that, as already indicated, the description of the social condition and moral character of the youngsters, whether oratorians or boarders, is at times given in dark, almost negative, tones. Their destitution and moral “degradation” are emphasized. Again, no doubt, propaganda rhetoric, such as that required in order to move people, is at work here. And yet the total impact of the documentation we have submitted forces the conclusion that the “poor and abandoned” at various stages of impoverishment, neglect and risk, were for Don Bosco not only an *ideal* option, but *quantitatively a real* option, no matter in what social or moral condition he found them. This is true in spite of the fact that, in speaking of the Home attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, Don Bosco at first fails to mention that from the start it also housed students, who were not usually “poor and abandoned,” who quickly surpassed the workers in number, and some of whom paid at least for a part of their room and board. Even in their case his option for the poor and abandoned was quantitatively real.

With reference to the social and moral condition of the lads, we note that the inspiration underlying many charitable efforts at the time is evidenced also in some of Don Bosco’s statements. Charity toward the poor, especially delinquent young people, proceeded from the perception that these were a threat to society, namely to the public order, and at times to the very social order which the “good people” took to be the norm. This was the prevailing (though already changing) attitude at the time. The Barolo institutions may be cited as a case in point. Perhaps in those early years Don Bosco shared that perception. We note the expressions, “a burden to society,” “the perpetrators of all sorts of mischief,” “in danger and *dangerous*,” “the public good is at stake”. Don Bosco may have emphasized the “*dangerous*” character of youth at risk in writing to Count Solaro della Margarita because of the latter’s conservative views. But overall in the early documents the perception that society was the cause of the problem is not immediately evident. But the documents also show that, whatever Don Bosco’s perception in this matter may have been at the start, he quickly came to view young people at risk in a different light—as a value in themselves and then potentially as the hope for a new Christian society. In spite of a certain dark portraiture of the moral and social character of the lads, and of a certain initial understanding of the purpose of the oratory as charity and social work, we can confidently affirm that Don Bosco’s view of young people appears positive from the start. They are God’s and society’s most sensitive and precious portion. They may be ill-advised, misguided, and heedless, but not of themselves perverted. They remain open to being educated. Such a positive evaluation of young people

is immediately evident from the *Introduction and Historical Outline* of 1854, and from the *Historical Outlines* of 1862.

Don Bosco’s hope for, and trust in young people were not due to sympathy alone. Rather they appear founded on a Christian anthropology, or view of human nature, which avoided the simplistic solutions of both Rousseau and Jansen. In this view, five factors are seen to be working in tension in a young person’s spiritual world: *natural disposition* with its ingrained good and evil tendencies; *will* or *affective availability*, even though contested by contrary suggestions or temptations; *environment*, including especially the influence of bad companions; *educational situation*, which may include good or bad education in varying degrees; and finally, the overriding action of *grace*, which includes an “obvious divine predilection” for young people.<sup>124</sup>

Young people, no matter what evil experiences may have caused their being marginalized, remain open to being educated. This Don Bosco firmly believed. The aim of the oratory is “educational” from the start. The simplest and most expressive formula used to signify the Christian formation of young people through the oratory is “to make them ‘citizens of both earth and heaven,’” “good Christians and honest citizens.” The oratory is proposed as the means to that end.

Historically and institutionally the oratory appears in continuous evolution to meet young people’s needs, “the needs of the times,” in diverse and rich fashion. Starting as a simple gathering for religious instruction, it takes on an ever more complex character: Sunday school, evening school, day school, “sodality” (St. Aloysius’), mutual aid society, home and boarding establishment for workers and students, workshops and school. All this, with a capacity for endless adaptation and development.

As he expresses his hope and trust in young people, in the same breath in these texts Don Bosco proclaims the supreme educational principle of freedom and love: “I allowed my young people every kind of recreation, as long as they did not sin, or do anything against good conduct;” “Long experience has made it clear that good results in the education of the young are achieved especially by knowing how to make oneself loved so that one might then win their respect.”<sup>125</sup>

One final comment. Together with his hope, trust and love, the texts reveal the *force of Don Bosco’s personal witness*, as it takes shape in response to the cry of youth at risk. The perception that “the cry” demanded commitment on his part became Don Bosco’s “vocation.” This called for a Christian understanding relating to life and to persons, inner passion, authentic love, Christian charity,

---

<sup>124</sup> Braido, *DB per i giovani*, p. 27.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. *Introduction, Historical Outline* of 1854 and *Historical Outlines* of 1862, Appendices I, II and III.

and obviously the inspiration of divine grace. It also required exceptional intuitive intelligence and organizing skills, and indomitable staying power. Don Bosco's very "particularity," his Piedmontese stubbornness, his shrewdness (deviousness?), his active-reflective personality, contributed both to his survival and to the continuance of his work. An on-going reflection on the evolving "condition of youth" brought about progressive adjustments in Don Bosco's thinking and tactics, always for an ever deeper and more perfect vocational commitment.

## Appendices

In the appendices which follow, I give a translation of most of the text of three documents: the *Introduction* and *Historical Outline* of 1854 and *Historical Outlines* of 1862.

The *Introduction* and the *Historical Outline* (*Cenno Storico*) figured as Chapters 1 and 2 of the *Piano di Regolamento dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales* [Draft Regulations for the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales] of 1854. The *Historical Outlines* (*Cenni Storici*) of 1862 was an independent summary of the origin and development of the Oratory. The three documents have been critically edited by Pietro Braidò from manuscripts heretofore unpublished in their entirety.<sup>126</sup>

(1) The *Introduction* (*Introduzione*) states the rationale and principles of the work of the oratory.

(2) The *Historical Outline* of [the Origin and Development of] the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales (*Cenno storico dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*), gives a summary history of the work from 1841 to 1854—forming a foreword, as it were, to the *Draft Regulations*. The regulations for the oratory began to be drafted in the early fifties on the basis of the experience gained up to that time. The *Draft* under consideration is dated from 1854. It underwent successive revisions on the basis of further experience until its official publication in 1877.

Don Bosco's autograph of the *Introduction* and *Historical Outline* of 1854 is in ASC 132: Oratorio 1, *FDBM* 1, 872 B3-C5. A complete copy of the *Draft of Regulations* (not in DB's hand) is in ASC 026 (2): *Regolamento dell'Oratorio*, *FDBMicro* 1,955 D6 - 1,956 B3.

(3) The *Historical Outlines* of [the Origins and Development of] the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales (*Cenni storici intorno all'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*) of 1862 is an independent statement (not attached to regulations or other document) and it presents a more detailed summary history of the work of the oratory from 1841 to 1862. It seems that this historical sketch of the work was intended to provide reliable information in summary fashion about the Salesian work to outsiders: church and civil authorities, friendly or hostile influential people, benefactors, etc. The date 1862 is argued from internal evidence, for the main manuscript corrected by Don Bosco in speaking of the workshop lists the print shop, but not that of the blacksmiths (iron workers). The print shop was approved by the Prefect of Turin on December 31, 1861, and by the Public Safety Authority on January 2, 1862. The blacksmiths' shop was established toward the end of 1862.

Don Bosco's autograph of the *Historical Outlines* of 1862 is in ASC 132: Oratorio 2, *FDBMicro* 1,972 C10-D4. A faithful copy (by an unknown)

---

<sup>126</sup> Braidò, *DB per i giovani* [cf. note 1 above].



corrected by DB is in ASC 132: Oratorio 2,2, *FDBMicro* 1,972 D5-12. A third copy of the original by Salesian Brother Chevalier Frederick Oreglia di Santo Stefano, also corrected by Don Bosco, is in ASC 132: Oratorio 2,4, *FDBMicro* 1,972 E9 - 1,973 A6.<sup>127</sup>

### Appendix I

#### Introduction to the *Draft of Regulations for the Boys' Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin, in the Valdocco District [1854]*

Note: Words and numbers in square brackets are supplied by the translator.

*Ut filios Dei, qui erant dispersi, congregaret in unum* [To gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad, Jn 11:52]. These words of the holy Gospel tell us that our divine Savior came down from heaven to earth to gather together all the children of God scattered all over the world. It seems to me that such words could be applied literally to the young people of our own times. The young constitute the most fragile yet most valuable component of human society, for we base our hopes for the future on them. They are not of themselves depraved. Were it not for parental neglect, idleness, mixing in bad company, something they experience especially on Sundays and holy days, it would be so easy to inculcate in their young hearts moral and religious principles—of order, good behavior, respect, religious practice. For if they are found to have been ruined at that young age, it will have been due more to thoughtlessness than to ingrained malice.

These young people have real need of some kind person who will care for them, work with them, guide them in virtue, keep them away from vice. The problem lies in finding a way of gathering them, so as to be in a position to speak to them and guide them in their moral life.

The Son of God was sent for this, and his holy religion alone can achieve it. This religion is of itself eternal and unchangeable; it has always been and will in every age be the teacher of all people. But the law it contains is so perfect that it can adjust to changing times and events and can respond to people's particular need in any culture.

Oratories should be reckoned among the most effective means for instilling the religious spirit into the uncultivated hearts of neglected young people. These oratories are a kind of gathering in which young people engage in pleasing and wholesome recreation. This they do after they have attended church services. The encouragement which the civic and Church authorities have given me, the zeal shown by many well-deserving people who have supported me by contributions and personal involvement, are a clear sign of the Lord's blessings on the work and of the public's appreciation.

---

<sup>127</sup> For the above and further details, cf. Braido, *DB per i Giovani*, pp. 11-18.

It seems that the time has now come to draft a set of regulations that might help organize this field of the Church's ministry and serve as a guideline to the numerous priests and lay people who work in it with such Christian concern and personal dedication.

I have repeatedly tried to do this, but I gave up each time on account of the innumerable difficulties which stood in the way.<sup>128</sup> Now, however, to ensure unity of spirit and discipline, and to comply with the wish of a number of persons in authority who have counseled me to do so, I have decided to complete this work regardless of how it will turn out.

I wish to make it clear beforehand that it is not my purpose to lay down law or precept for anyone. My sole aim is to set out what is being done at the Boys' Oratory of St. Francis de Sales at Valdocco and describe the way it is done. This may cause some people to think that I am seeking commendation and praise. Let them not think so. Let them rather see in the way I write a true concern to describe things as they actually were in the past and as they are even at present.

When I dedicated myself to this field of the Church's ministry, I meant to direct my every effort to the greater glory of God and the good of souls. I meant to work untiringly [for these young people] in order to make them into good citizens here on earth, so that they might be one day worthy inhabitants of heaven.

May God give me strength to continue in this endeavor till my last breath. Amen.

---

<sup>128</sup> In this and in the following paragraph, Don Bosco is referring to the serious disagreements which arose among oratory co-workers in the years 1851-1852 [cf. *EBM* IV, pp. 215-220, 254-265, where Lemoyne uses a memoir of Don Bosco's lay helper, Giuseppe Brosio, in *ASC* 123: *Persone*, Brosio, *Memoria*, p. 16-19, *FDBM* 555 B1-4]. These disagreements arose from different political stances of oratory co-workers as well as from their differing views regarding principles and strategies in oratory work [cf. also note 110 and related text, above]. By decree of March 31, 1852, Archbishop Luigi Fransoni named Don Bosco "director-in-chief" of the three oratories, and Fathers Roberto Murialdo and Paolo Rossi directors (under Don Bosco) of the oratories of the Guardian Angel and of St. Aloysius, respectively [For the two decrees, cf. *EBM* IV, pp. 527-529].

## Appendix II

**Historical Outline [*Cenno Storico*]**—a Foreword to the *Draft Regulations for the Boys' Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin, in the Valdocco District [1854]*

Note: Words and numbers in square brackets are supplied by the translator.

This oratory, a gathering of young people on Sundays and holy days, began in the church of St. Francis of Assisi. For a number of years during the summertime, the Rev. Father [Giuseppe] Caffasso had been giving catechetical instruction every Sunday to bricklayer apprentices in a little room adjoining the sacristy of that church. Because of his heavy work load this priest was forced to discontinue this work, which he loved so much. I took it up toward the end of 1841, and I began by gathering in that same place two young adults who were in grave need of religious instruction.<sup>129</sup> These were joined by others, and during 1842 their number increased to twenty, and sometimes to twenty-five. From these beginnings I learnt two very important truths: that in general young people are not bad in themselves, but that they usually become such through contact with evil persons; and that even these bad youngsters, if removed from evil company, are susceptible to great moral change.

The catechism classes continued on the same footing in 1843, the number [of young people] reaching as high as fifty, the most which the place assigned to me could accommodate. While so engaged, I also visited the prisons of Turin, where I had an opportunity to get acquainted with the unfortunate young people detained in those places of punishment. Most of them are poor young men from out of town who come into the city hoping to find a needed job, or enticed by some rascal. These young people, left to themselves particularly on Sundays and holy days, waste the little money they earn during the week on games [of chance] or on tidbits. Such conduct is the beginning of many vices; in no time at all young people who were good come to be at risk themselves and to put others at risk [*pericolanti per se e pericolosi per gli altri*]. Nor can the prisons make them better in any way, because while detained there they learn more refined ways of doing evil; when they are released they become worse.

I turned therefore to this class of youngster as the most neglected and at risk [*abbandonati e pericolanti*]. Week by week, with promises or with little gifts, I would endeavor to gain more pupils (*allievi*). By such efforts I succeeded in increasing their number considerably, so that, when in the summer of 1844 larger premises were placed at my disposal, I found myself at times surrounded by as many as eighty youngsters. I experienced the deepest joy at seeing myself surrounded by pupils, all of the kind I was looking for, all started on a job—and whose conduct, both on weekdays and on weekends, I could guarantee, so to

---

<sup>129</sup> Cf. notes 56 and 57 and related text, above.

speak. As I looked them over [seated before me], I could see 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 regimen proper to a community of priests like that of the Pastoral Institute [*Convitto*] of St. Francis of Assisi, as well as 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 well-deserving, late-lamented Dr. Guala encouraged me to persevere, nevertheless I clearly perceived the need for new premises. Religious instruction occupies the young people for a relatively short period of time, after which they need some outlet, such as hikes or games.

Providence arranged that at the end of October 1844 I should be appointed to the Refuge (*Rifugio*) as Spiritual Director.<sup>130</sup> I invited my boys to come and visit me at my new residence, and the following Sunday they were there in numbers bigger than usual. So my room became oratory and playground. What a sight! No chair, table, or other object could escape the onslaught of that friendly invasion force.

Meanwhile, the Rev. Dr. Borrelli,<sup>131</sup> who from then on became the Oratory's staunchest supporter, and myself had selected a room intended for use as dining and common room for the priests working at the Refuge. It looked large enough for our purpose, and we thought of adapting it as a chapel. The Archbishop approved of the idea, and on the day of Mary's Immaculate Conception (December 8, 1844), the chapel we had long hoped for was blessed. We were granted the faculty of celebrating the holy sacrifice of the Mass in it, and that of giving the benediction with the Blessed Sacrament.

The news of a chapel for the exclusive use of young people and of liturgical services prepared especially for them were powerful attractions. So was the availability of a bit of open space for the boys to romp around in. Thus it was that our church, which began to be called Oratory at that time,<sup>132</sup> [quickly]

<sup>130</sup> The Refuge (*Opera Pia sotto la protezione di Maria Vergine Refugium Peccatorum*), founded by the Marchioness Julie Falletti di Barolo and popularly known as *Rifugio*, was a home for wayward women, especially those released from prison, desirous of embracing a new mode of life. Fathers Giovanni Borel and Sebastiano Pacchiotti were already in residence as chaplains of this and other institutions founded by the Marchioness. Don Bosco joined them as chaplain-designate of the Little Hospital of St. Philomena for the care of handicapped little girls, under construction at the time.

At this point in his *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Don Bosco relates the Dream of 1844, "a sequel" (*appendice*, as he calls it) to the original vocation dream.

<sup>131</sup> Don Bosco, perhaps regarding the spelling "Borel" as a dialectal form, usually respells the name as "Borrelli" (sometimes, "Borelli").

<sup>132</sup> It began to be called "Oratory of St. Francis de Sales" at that time [cf. *MO-En*, p. 217]. The "room for the priests working at the Refuge" was located in the priests'

became overcrowded. We made do as best we could. Catechism classes were held everywhere: in rooms, kitchen, corridors, in every corner. It was all oratory.

Things were moving along, when something occurred which fairly threw our Oratory into a panic. (Actually it was Divine Providence acting with hidden purposes.) 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.

[...] <sup>133</sup>

In the meantime, as the winter was drawing near, and the weather no longer favored excursions into the countryside, Dr. [Giovanni] Borrelli and myself rented three rooms in the Moretta House, a building only a short distance away from the present Oratory of Valdocco. During that winter our activities were limited to simple evening catechism lessons on Sundays and holy days. <sup>134</sup>

At this time damaging rumors making the rounds were being given credence. It was rumored *that the oratories were a deliberate way of getting young people away from their own parishes, in order to teach them suspect principles.* The latter allegation was grounded on the fact that I allowed my young people every kind of recreation, as long as it was not sinful or contrary to civilized behavior. With regard to the first allegation, I sought to defend myself by stating that my purpose was to gather together only those young people who did not attend any parish. I further pointed out that most of them, being from out of town, did not even know to which parish they belonged. But the more I tried to explain the truth of the matter, the more sinister was the construction put on it.

quarters attached to the Little Hospital of St. Philomena, under construction at the time.

<sup>133</sup> According to Lemoyne [*EBM* II, pp. 232-234], when leaving the Little Hospital to begin the "wandering" Don Bosco had a dream (the first Dream of the Holy Martyrs). Don Bosco related it to Father Giulio Barberis as the one he had in 1844 on leaving the *Convitto*. Lemoyne places this doublet narrative at this point out of context.

The sequence of the "wandering" given here is that of the *Memoirs of the Oratory*: St. Martin's at the Dora mills; Holy Cross Cemetery (St. Peter in Chains), a period of "homelessness"; Father Antonio Moretta's house, the Filippi field, Pinardi's. The correct sequence (after the 6-week stay at the *Refugio* and the 6-month stay at the Little Hospital) is: Holy Cross Cemetery (St. Peter in Chains), St. Martin's at the Dora mills, a period of "homelessness," Father Moretta's house, the Filippi field, the settling at Pinardi's [cf. Francesco Motto, "L'<oratorio> di Don Bosco presso il cimitero di S. Pietro in Vincoli in Torino. Una documentata ricostruzione del noto episodio," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 5 (1986:2) pp. 199-220].

<sup>134</sup> Don Bosco does not mention here the evening classes at Father Antonio Moretta's house in 1845 of which he speaks in his *Memoirs* at this point [*MO-En*, p. 233]. Obviously these evening catechism classes are not the same as those evening classes. Cf. note 123 and related text, above.

Furthermore, a combination of events forced us to leave the Moretta house. Consequently, in March 1846 I had to rent a small grass field from the Fillippi brothers; it was located where at present stands the pig iron foundry. There I was under the wide and starry sky, in the middle of a field bordered by a sorry-looking hedge which kept out only those who did not want to come in. And with me were 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, Marquis Cavour,<sup>135</sup> who had already been informed of these gatherings on Sundays and holy days, sent for me, and having summarized for me all that was being rumored about the oratory, ended his speech as follows:

"My good Father, let me give you a sound piece of advice. Let those villains go their way; 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 good reasons to think that I will succeed in lessening the number of troublemakers, and at the same time, the number of those who land in gaol."

"You are mistaken, my good Father, you are wasting time and energy. Think: where are the means to come from? For my part, I cannot allow such gatherings."

"The positive results already obtained are proof that I am not wasting my time and energy. As for the means, the Lord will provide, for he often uses the most abject instruments to accomplish his work."

"I repeat, I cannot allow such gatherings."

"Please allow them, Your Honor, not for my sake but for the sake of these boys who if left to themselves may come to a bad end."

"I will have no further argument. This is illegal and I must stop it. Don't you know that no assembly of any kind may be held without official permission?"

"Our gatherings are not political in nature. Their sole purpose is to give religious instruction to poor boys. For this I have the archbishop's permission."

"The archbishop then has knowledge of what you are doing?"

"He has; I have taken no step without first seeking his advice and securing his consent."

"That may be, but I cannot allow these assemblies to continue."

"Your Honor, I do not believe that you will want to prevent me from teaching catechism when I have my archbishop's permission."

"Alright, you may go. I shall hear what the archbishop has to say. Then you will have to accept the decision taken in your regard and not be stubborn

---

<sup>135</sup> For Michele Benso Marquis di Cavour, vicar of Turin, cf. note 75, above.

about it; otherwise I shall be forced to take measures which I would rather not take."<sup>136</sup>

The archbishop was kept abreast of everything, and he urged me to be patient and not to lose heart.

In the meantime in order to be completely available to my boys, I had to submit my resignation at the Refuge;<sup>137</sup> as a result, I was without employment and without means of support. A wrong construction was put on everything I did. Moreover, I was physically exhausted and ill, so much so that the word was put about that I had gone mad.

Failing to make others understand my purposes, I sought to mark time, because there was no doubt in my mind that events would prove me right in what I was doing. Furthermore, my desire to see the oratory established in a suitable site was so great, that in my mind I regarded it as accomplished. This was the reason why even my dearest friends thought that I was out of my mind. Even my co-workers abandoned me completely, when they saw that I did not accede to their suggestions and desist from my undertaking.

Dr. Borrelli understood and agreed with my way of thinking; but 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 [for the duration], while [dismissing the rest and] putting off the execution of our plans to a more propitious time.

"This is not the way," I told him. "This is the Lord's work; he has begun it, and he must see it to its proper conclusion."

"But meanwhile, where will we gather our boys?"

"At the Oratory."

"Where is this Oratory?"

"I see it built already. I see a church; I see a house; I see an enclosed yard for the boys' recreation. These things exist, and I can see them."

"But where are these things?"

<sup>136</sup> The dialogue runs along the same lines as in the *Memoirs, MO-En*, pp. 244f.

As already indicated, at this time (March 13, 1846) Don Bosco wrote to the vicar describing the oratory's catechetical purpose and requesting permission to settle at Pinardi's place. According to the note of instruction to his secretary, the vicar raised no objection [cf. notes 75, 79 and 80 and related text above]. How then explain the thrust of this reported conversation?

<sup>137</sup> Even though the Oratory had vacated the Little Hospital, Don Bosco was still in the employ of the Marchioness Barolo, drawing a salary, and living at the Refuge. From late 1845 through early 1846, the Marchioness put pressure on Don Bosco to disband the Oratory and join her priests. This was when Don Bosco resigned, though the marchioness allowed him to keep his room at the Refuge. After July 1, 1846 he was able to transfer his personal effects from the Refuge to the rooms which he (over Father Borel's signature) had rented from Pinardi. The move was finally completed by the end of his convalescence after his near-fatal illness (November 1846).

"I do not know where they are, but I see them." I spoke in this way because of a lively wish to have these things, and because I was thoroughly convinced that God would provide them.

Dr. Borrelli was grieved to see me in such condition; and he too was heard to express his fears regarding my sanity. Father Caffasso advised me not to take any decision for the duration. The archbishop, however, was inclined to agree that I should stay with the work.

[...] <sup>138</sup>

*The Beginning of the Present Oratory of Valdocco and its Growth up to the Present Time [1854]*

[...] <sup>139</sup>

On Easter Sunday, the [first?] day of April [*nel giorno di Aprile*],<sup>140</sup> all appurtenances for church and for recreation were moved to the place [Pinardi's], and the new chapel was inaugurated. A short time later additional rooms were rented in the same Pinardi house.<sup>141</sup> Sunday and evening classes were begun in these rooms.<sup>142</sup>

[...] <sup>143</sup>

In the year 1846, on a Sunday in April, the present church (*la chiesa attuale*)<sup>144</sup> was blessed, and permission was obtained to celebrate Holy Mass, to teach catechism, to preach, and to give Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament.

The evening and Sunday classes made great progress. Instruction was given in reading, writing, singing, Bible history, elementary arithmetic and the Italian

<sup>138</sup> Here Don Bosco relates that Vicar Cavour wanted the oratory disbanded, but that others interceded, and King Charles Albert himself intervened in Don Bosco's favor. The vicar sent policemen to the Oratory to forestall trouble; and they filed favorable reports.

<sup>139</sup> Here the story of the last day in the Filippi field, the renting of the Pinardi shed and the settling are related, much as in the *Memoirs [MO-En, pp. 255-257]*.

<sup>140</sup> In 1846 Easter Sunday fell on April 12.

<sup>141</sup> For the gradual renting and acquisition of the Pinardi house and property, cf. note 93 and related text, above.

<sup>142</sup> For various statements on the evening classes, cf. note 123 and related text, above.

<sup>143</sup> A brief paragraph describes how others and the City itself also began to open evening schools. Cf. note 123, above.

<sup>144</sup> "The present church" here refers to the original Pinardi chapel. It was blessed on Easter Sunday, April 12, 1846. But note that by 1854 (presumably the time of writing) the church in use was that of St. Francis de Sales, dedicated on June 20, 1852, the original chapel given over to other uses [cf. note 94 and related text, above]. It seems then that this Historical Outline had been in preparation earlier, and that the expression was never changed.



language. A public display was given in these subjects by the pupils of the Oratory. By the month of November, I had taken up residence in the home attached to the Oratory.<sup>145</sup> 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. A statue of the saint was obtained, the “Six Sundays” preceding the solemn feast of St. Aloysius were celebrated with a large attendance. On the feast day itself, the archbishop [Luigi Fransoni] came to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to a large number of boys, and a short play was staged, along with singing and instrumental music.

Further rooms were rented,<sup>146</sup> thanks to which some evening classes were expanded. Two young men were given shelter. They were poor, orphaned, without a trade, ignorant of their religion. This is how the Home began; it never stopped growing.

[...] <sup>147</sup>

---

<sup>145</sup> At the beginning of November Don Bosco had returned with his mother from Becchi, where he had spent three months convalescing from his near-fatal illness. At this point in time, the “home attached” was the Pinardi house, which Don Bosco had rented [cf. note 93 and related text, above].

<sup>146</sup> Cf. note 93, above.

<sup>147</sup> 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.

## Appendix III

Hisotrical Outlines [*Cenni Storici*] on [the Origins and Development of] the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales [1862]

Note: Words and numbers in square brackets are supplied by the translator.

[Description]

[*Original Inspiration and Beginnings.*—] The idea of the Oratories arose from my frequent visits to the prisons of this city. In these places, where spiritual and material wretchedness held sway, one met many young people in the flower of their youth, with lively minds, good hearts, who could well be the consolation of their families and the pride of their country. Instead they were detained there in a state of degradation and made the reproach of society. A serious consideration of the causes of such a tragic situation suggested that for the most part their misfortune originated rather in a lack of education than in an evil disposition. Experience also showed that as one helped them gradually to become aware of their human dignity—that is, that a human being is endowed with reason and that one must needs earn one's living by honest work and not by thieving—a change took place. In other words, the moment that their minds were drawn to the consideration of religious and moral principles, from that moment they would experience a deep happy feeling which they could not explain but which motivated them to become better people. And as a matter of fact, many of them changed their behavior even while still in prison; while others, on being discharged, lived in such a way as never again to have to be sent back to gaol.

This change was a factual confirmation that these youngsters found themselves in this unfortunate situation for lack of moral and religious instruction. Moral education and religious instruction together then were the means whereby those who were still good could be made to persevere, and those who were troublesome could be brought back to their senses, once released from those places of punishment.

To put this perception to the test, we began to give appropriate religious instruction in the prisons of this capital and a little later in the sacristy of the church of St. Francis of Assisi; and out of this (*e quindi*) the gatherings on Sundays and holy days began. These gatherings were open to the young men who were discharged from prison, to those who during the week gathered [with nothing to do] in the squares and streets, and [if they had a job] in the factories. The expedients we used in order to entertain them on Sundays and holy days were moral and religious stories, the singing of hymns, small gifts, and a few games.

It was the year 1841 [when it all began]. The young people who attended averaged about seventy.<sup>148</sup> The oratory continued to meet at the St. Francis of Assisi site for three years to everyone's great satisfaction, until the extraordinary number of boys forced us to seek larger premises.

[*Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.*—] The move took place in the year 1844, when Father Bosco accepted an ecclesiastical appointment as [spiritual] director of the pious work of the Refuge in the Valdocco district. There a place more suitable to the Oratory's needs was chosen; and on December 8, 1844 the first chapel, exclusively intended for the boys' use, was blessed. This church consisted of two rooms adjoining the building set aside for the priests, the [spiritual] directors of the above-mentioned work of the Refuge. The Oratory met here for one year.<sup>149</sup>

In the autumn of 1845, due to the growing number of boys who often exceeded two hundred, and to the fact that the building which up to then had served as a church was needed for other purposes, we were forced to look for yet another place. For the space of about four months we met at the church of St. Martin near the mills of the city; after which we left in order to make way for other catechism classes intended for girls. The cemetery of St. Peter in Chains, the Moretta house, and an enclosed field attached to the Filippi house served as [meeting places for the] Oratory until the spring of 1846.<sup>150</sup>

This same year [1846], the Pinardi house in the Valdocco area, now the permanent home of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, was rented; it was later purchased [1851]. The number of the boys grew to the point that in the year 1850 they often exceeded two, and even three, thousand.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>148</sup> No mention is made here of the encounter with young Garelli. Don Bosco rather suggests that the beginning of the oratory was brought about after encountering young delinquents in the prisons [cf. notes 59 and 60 and related text, above]. Compare the number given here (ca. 70) with the numbers given at the beginning of the Historical Outline of 1854 (up to 25).

<sup>149</sup> At this point the original manuscript has many corrections, evidence that Don Bosco was trying to get the chronology right—without success. This summary does not distinguish between the 6-week stay of the Oratory at the Refuge itself (October-December) and the longer 6-month stay at the adjacent Little Hospital of St. Philomena under construction, where the chapel was dedicated (December 1844-June 1845).

<sup>150</sup> For the correct sequence in the "wandering," cf. note 133.

<sup>151</sup> Perhaps these "approximate" attendance figures refer to all three oratories. With reference to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, in a letter of July 10, 1850, Don Bosco writes that on the feast of St. Aloysius 150 boys received Confirmation and 500, Communion; and that the evening service was attended by over 1,600 youngsters. [Cf. Motto, *Ep I*, pp. 103f.]. The newspaper *L'Armonia* (July 26, 1850) gives 1,000 as normal attendance.

In order to meet this need, in the year 1851, the present church was built;<sup>152</sup> this was done with the help of raffles of donated objects and of private donations.

*Oratory of St. Aloysius at Porta Nuova.*— As the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales could no longer accommodate the great number of boys, in the year 1847, a second oratory was opened at Porta Nuova, at a site located between the Plane-Trees and the *Valentino* Avenues. At first its direction was entrusted to Dr. Giacinto Carpano, and later to others. At present its zealous director is Dr. Leonardo Murialdo. The average attendance there is about 500 boys.

*Oratory of the Holy Guardian Angel.*— The extraordinary number of boys attending the Oratory at Porta Nuova quickly revealed the urgent need of a new oratory. The site would have to be chosen where the need was greatest. Vanchiglia is a very populous area of Turin, and it is full of young people who roam the streets everywhere on Sundays and holy days. The well-deserving Father [Giovanni] Cocchi had opened an Oratory there which he had to give up because of his other occupations. In that same place and with virtually the same purpose, in the year 1849, the Oratory of the Holy Guardian Angel was opened to the public. Its direction was entrusted to the Rev. Dr. Roberto Murialdo; but because of his failing health, it is at present in the care of the Rev. Father Michael Rua. The average attendance at this Oratory is about four hundred.

### General Comments

[*Oratory Activity and Co-Workers.*—] These oratories might be aptly described as places designed to entertain young people at risk on Sundays and holy days with attractive and wholesome amusement, after they have attended church services. Hence, as well as churches, there are reasonably large enclosed areas for recreation, suitable rooms for classes, and premises to shelter the pupils from the inclement weather during the cold season, or when it rains. Inducements for the boys to attend are: medals, holy pictures, fruit, morning or afternoon snacks, and occasionally, in the case of very poor children, a pair of trousers, shoes, or some other article of clothing. We also try to find jobs for them, and help them in their relationship with parents, or even with employers. The games they play are: pitching balls or *bocce* balls, shuffleboard, stilts, various kinds of swings, giant swing (*passo del gigante*). They also have gymnastics and military drills, singing, and entertainment with vocal and instrumental music. But what attracts the boys more than anything is the cordial welcome they receive. Long experience has taught us that good results in the education of the young are achieved especially by knowing how to make oneself loved so that one might then be respected (*temere*).

---

<sup>152</sup> This is the church of St. Francis de Sales, dedicated in 1852, to substitute the original chapel [cf. note 95 and related text, above]. The church of Mary Help of Christians was built between 1863 and 1868.

The religious services on Sundays and holy days are as follows: in the morning, an opportunity to go to Confession for those who wish, then Mass, followed by the narration of a story from the Bible or from the history of the Church, or by the explanation of the Gospel of the day. There follows a period of recreation. In the afternoon: catechism classes, Vespers, a brief instruction from the pulpit, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, followed by the usual recreation. When the religious services are over, each one is free to remain and play, or to go home. At nightfall, everyone is sent home and the oratory is closed.

Special regulations govern all oratory activities, in church, in recreation and in school. Involved in the work are priests, seminarians and lay people of good class who help out wherever help is needed. During the Lenten season, in all three locations there are daily catechism lessons, including sessions at noon for those who are not free at other times of day.<sup>153</sup> The Month of Mary is also celebrated with a sermon or comparable spiritual reading, the Rosary and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, either early in the morning or at the time of the evening Angelus, according to circumstances.

The people who have been most involved in the work of the oratories from the beginning, in addition to those already mentioned, are: Father [Pietro] Ponte, Father [Giuseppe] Trivero, Father [Sebastiano] Pacchiotti, Dr. Giovanni Vola. But Dr. Giovanni Borrelli is, way and above, the most deserving of special mention. He has been the heart and mainstay [of the Oratory] both by the exercise of his priestly ministry, and by providing moral and material support. Also the Chevalier Dr. [Pietro] Baricco has been involved with the work on numerous occasions.

*Sunday School.*— We found that many young people who were already getting on in years, through want of time or of means, lacked the instruction necessary for being taken on as apprentices, and could not moreover attend any kind of school during the week. In response to this situation of need we established Sunday classes. These classes were first begun in 1845. Obstacles of various kinds had to be surmounted. We lacked appropriate books and had no one to counsel or guide us in the matter. Then, we found that lads who attended classes and received instruction on Sundays, during the week largely forgot all that they had learnt. We overcame this serious difficulty to some extent by having them take only one subject at a time and by assigning only one lesson for the week. By these means we managed to teach them first to read and write; and then gradually in succession, the four operations in arithmetic, the elements of the metric system, Italian grammar and Bible History. This was accomplished without ever passing from one subject to a new one unless the first had been

---

<sup>153</sup> In a letter dated April 4, 1854, Don Bosco speaks of an attendance of about 400 at these classes [Motto, *Ep* I, p. 224f.; Ce, *Ep* I, p. 92; *EBM* V, p. 29].

thoroughly learnt. Public performances were given to the satisfaction even of illustrious public figures, such as Father [Ferrante] Aporti, the Chevalier Mayor [Giorgio] Bellono, and the Rev. Chevalier Dr. [Pietro] Baricco, all of whom were good enough to honor us with their presence.

*Evening School.*— Young people attended [Sunday School] in great numbers; and that very fact showed up another need. For, although the Sunday instruction produced good effects, nevertheless for many it was insufficient. We began therefore to invite them to come during the week, on those days and at those times which the pupils found convenient. One youngster involved another, and it was not long before a fixed time had to be established for all. This was in the evening, more precisely when the young workers had finished their daily work.

Thus it was that in 1846 evening classes were held for the first time.<sup>154</sup> Attendance was so extraordinary that we had to limit the enrollment to a number of pupils compatible with the limited space available. Since then evening schools were opened in many districts of the city by the City Council; hence the need for these schools in the oratories ceased. The evening school program was continued and is at the present time still going forward only in the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales. The subjects taught are: reading, writing, the metric system, the Italian language, plain chant, vocal and instrumental music; and selectively drawing, piano, organ and the French language.

*Daytime Classes During the Week.*— Another class of youngsters at risk roamed the city streets. These were the boys who, either because they were badly dressed or because they could not get used to regular discipline, were not admitted to, or were dismissed from the public schools. Mostly orphans or neglected by their parents, even at a very young age they ran free in the streets and squares, fighting, swearing and thieving. Day schools were opened for them, one in the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales and a second one in that of St. Aloysius. Attendance has been excellent at both places. Through the care of perceptive and kind teachers, the results obtained have been satisfactory in terms both of morality and of discipline. A good number of those youngsters have since been admitted to the public schools; others have been admitted to the evening classes, or placed with an employer.

*House Attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.*— Among the young people who attend these oratories one would find some who were so poor and neglected that every care for them would have been exercised in vain without a place where they could be provided with shelter, food and clothing. We sought to supply for this need with the home attached to the place called Oratory of St.

---

<sup>154</sup> In the first draft, Don Bosco had written 1847. Most likely it was during the winter of 1846-47 [cf. note 123 and related text, above.]

Francis of Sales. There in the beginning we rented a small house in 1847,<sup>155</sup> and in it we provided shelter to a few among the poorest.<sup>156</sup> At that time they used to go to work in the city returning to the home of the Oratory to eat and sleep. But the grave need that was experienced in various localities of the province made us decide to extend admission also to those who did not attend the Turin oratories.

One thing led to another. Neglected young people came in swarms from everywhere. For that reason a criterion was established according to which we accepted only those young people who were between twelve and eighteen years of age, without father or mother, completely poor and neglected.<sup>157</sup> Since working in workshops in the city constituted a moral hazard [for our youngsters], we extended the existing facilities and erected a new building.<sup>158</sup> At present the boarders number seven hundred, and all workshops or laboratories are set up here in the house. The crafts in which [our young workers] are engaged are: tailoring, shoemaking, bookbinding, carpentry, bookbinding [repeated *sic*], printing. A course of studies is available for those who by their good conduct and particular aptitude for study, render themselves worthy of it.<sup>159</sup>

The ardent desire which so many lads showed of following the regular curriculum of [secondary] studies caused us to make some exceptions to the conditions for acceptance [laid down above]. Youngsters were also admitted, with [a regular course of] studies in view, who were not completely neglected and poor—as long as their good conduct and their aptitude for study were such as to

<sup>155</sup> This is the Pinaridi house [cf. note 93 and related text, above].

<sup>156</sup> No reference is here made to the poor orphan from Valsesia who came to the door one stormy night, as related in the *Memoirs* [*MO-En*, pp. 313f.; Cf. notes 86 and 87 and related text, above].

<sup>157</sup> Here Don Bosco probably means to emphasize a “priority” (for publicity purposes perhaps?), rather than to make an exclusive statement [cf. note 97 and related text, above]. As the records show, from the very start both poor apprentices and students were admitted to the Home. The students in principle paid for their room and board and tuition, at least in part, if they could. See the paragraph that follows.

<sup>158</sup> One wing of the new building was erected in 1853 east of the Pinaridi house. In 1856 the Pinaridi house was demolished, and the building was completed in its place [cf. note 95 and 96 and related text, above].

<sup>159</sup> The in-house workshops were: shoemakers (1853); bookbinders (autumn 1854); tailors, carpenters-cabinet makers (1856); printers (1861/2); blacksmiths (1862); bookstore (1864). As mentioned above, here Don Bosco does not mention the blacksmiths, because these *Outlines* were written before the establishment of this workshop later in 1862.

Almost concomitantly with the workshops, Don Bosco established an in-house secondary school [cf. notes 96 and 97 and related text, above].

make an honorable and Christian outcome in some academic career virtually certain.<sup>160</sup>

*Administration.*— [...] <sup>161</sup>

*Results.*— To understand the results obtained through these schools, the oratories, and the Home known as the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales, it is helpful to think of the youngsters as falling into three distinct categories: the troublesome, the thoughtless, and the good. The good remain good; in fact, in some marvelous way they become better. The thoughtless, that is, those who have already become accustomed to roaming the streets, and have only occasionally worked at a job, can be made to respond by being coaxed, supervised, instructed, kept busy; they will gradually show good results. The troublesome ones give us plenty to worry about; but if they can be induced to take an interest in work, they are generally won over. By the use of similar means, also in their case some good results have been obtained. To begin with, they won't get any worse. Then many of them begin to realize their position and decide to earn their livelihood honestly. Finally, even those who appeared unresponsive to our care with time will let the sound principles they were taught take effect and produce their good results.

Thus it is that year after year we have succeeded in placing several hundred young people with good employers from whom they have learnt a trade. Many have returned to their families from which they had run away, and have thereafter shown themselves more amenable and obedient. Moreover, not a few have taken a position as servants with good families.

In this oratory we have a yearly turnover of about three hundred. On leaving, many join the bands of the National Guard or the armed forces. Others continue with the trade they have learnt in our shops. Again others take positions with good families. A fair number also go into teaching. The latter, having passed the required examinations, either remain and work as teachers here in the house or go as schoolmasters to those towns that ask for them. Others instead follow careers in the civil service.

Many of our students choose the priestly vocation. These, once graduated from high school, are in most cases sent back to their respective bishops, who with great love and care help them in the pursuit of their chosen vocation. From this group are chosen those who serve as teachers in this house, who teach

---

<sup>160</sup> It should be noted that in 1860-61 Don Bosco introduced the so-called junior-seminary clause into the early Salesian Constitutions, chapter on Purpose, in similar terms [cf. Motto, *Cost. Testi critici*, p. 76]. Here Don Bosco makes no mention of "a vocation to the ecclesiastical state" perhaps because the *Outlines* were intended for "outsiders." But Don Bosco meant his schools to serve as junior seminaries, and wrote no separate constitution on the school as such.

<sup>161</sup> This short paragraph describes how the house was governed and administered: staff and other personnel, financial resources, etc.



catechism in the oratories, who supervise the various workshops and dormitories. Once ordained, many continue to exercise their sacred ministry on behalf of the young people who live here or who attend the other oratories in the city, while others follow their particular calling and serve in those areas of the ministry for which the ecclesiastical superior judges them fit.

A person to whom the oratories and this whole house owe much is Father Vittorio Alasonatti who for many years now has tirelessly dedicated his energies for this charitable work.<sup>162</sup>

None of the personnel of this house or of any of the oratories, including those employed in house work, receive a wage; each one contributes his services free of charge.

---

<sup>162</sup> Father Vittorio Alasonatti (1812-1865), ordained in 1835, joined Don Bosco in 1855, as served as Prefect-Financial Administrator until his death.