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Madonnas for Times of Trouble

Don Bosco's Devotion to Mary the Madonna, and to Mary under the Titles "Immaculate Conception" and "Help of Christians"

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Introduction

The question of the circumstances in which Don Bosco became the champion of the Virgin Mary under the specific titles of Immaculate Conception and Help of Christians is no longer a matter of debate. These titles, in so far as their revival in the second half of the nineteenth century is concerned, are tied to specific and well-known political events. It is the purpose of this paper, after initial general comments on Don Bosco's devotion to the Virgin Mary, to describe the events that provided the new impetus for these forms of devotion to Mary, and to note the impact that these forms had on Salesian life, work, and spirituality.

Literature of Salesian origin on the subject is not lacking, and the present article will make full use of it.[1] An attempt will also be made to submit material that is not accessible to all our readers.

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[1] Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality* II, tr. by J. Drury. (New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1996), 138-169.

Francis Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888)* (Torino: SEI, 1996).

Among the many valuable papers published in the Acts of the *Accademia Mariana Salesiana* the following have been particularly useful:

Pietro Brocardo, "L''Ausiliatrice di Spoleto' e Don Bosco," in *L'Immacolata Ausiliatrice. Accademia Mariana Salesiana* III. (Torino: SEI, 1955), 239-272. "Maria Ausiliatrice: la Madonna di Don Bosco," in *Accademia Mariana Salesiana* XII (Roma: LAS, 1980) 97-130.

Eugenio Valentini, "*Hic Domus Mea,* Storia del santuario di Maria Ausiliatrice in Torino (1868-1968)," in *Aiuto dei Cristiani, Madre della Chiesa. Accademia Mariana Salesiana* VII (Roma: LAS, 1968), 89-118.

In the present article, Don Bosco's writings in honor of Mary are cited from Don Bosco's collected works, Centro Studi Don Bosco, *Giovanni Bosco, Opere Edite.* Ristampa anastatica, 37 volumes (Roma: LAS, 1977).

An important distinction should be made at the outset between Don Bosco's devotion to Mary, in her basic role as the *Madonna* (Our Lady, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother) and his devotion to Mary under *particular titles* [2]

Mary in her basic role was a constant presence to Don Bosco throughout his whole life, and his devotion to her as simply the *Madonna* was constant, fervent and ever on the increase, no matter what title might gain ascendancy in a particular historical context. Moreover, for Don Bosco in his later years devotion to Mary under titles (including Help of Christians) became less important than devotion to her as simply Our Lady (Mary our Mother). In this respect, he is no different from the saints throughout the ages; or if he differs, it is only in the intensity of his devotion or in aspects of his perception of the role of Mary.

On the other hand, Don Bosco's devotion to Mary under particular titles should be correlated to particular social and historical contexts and to his perception of the significance of Mary in those contexts. Thus, for instance, when considering Don Bosco's decision to dedicate to the *"Help of Christians"* the great church he built in the sixties, it seems appropriate to ask how Don Bosco came to choose that title. This question implies that historical forces played a role in such a choice. And this realization in turn raises the question of the development of Don Bosco's Marian devotion and Marian doctrine through particular historical contexts.

I. Don Bosco's Marian Devotion and its Expression[3]

1. Theological Structure of Don Bosco's Marian Devotion

We would expect that Don Bosco would have gone along with what theologians in his day taught about Mary. Perhaps he took it all in stride, but he himself did not cultivate what has been termed the *Mariology of privilege,* though this was the kind of Mariology still current in his day, and still current in our days at least in some circles. It was the system of Marian doctrine which was gradually formed in the 16th-17th centuries by the use (and abuse) of deduction and of the

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[2] In older Italian, as in all regional languages in Italy, *Madonna* meant "My Lady." The etymological sense was then lost in common parlance. In nineteenth-century as in modern Italian, as also in English, *Madonna* designates either the person of Mary (the *Madonna)* or an image of Mary (a *madonna).* A good English equivalent of *La Madonna,* as Don Bosco would have used the term to refer to Mary, is simply "Our Lady."

[3] Devotion may denote the interior commitment of faith and love, or it may mean external acts (presumably) intended to express that commitment. Devotion is distinguished from devotions as prayer is distinguished from prayers. Here devotion is taken to mean internal commitment as well as liturgical and paraliturgical action as expressing, in Mary's case, *a cultus of veneration* (essentially distinguished from *a cultus of adoration).*

principle of theological congruence. By these methods, in the first place whatever virtue or prerogative is predicated of the saints, martyrs, and apostles, is ascribed to Mary in the highest degree on the basis of the principle of excellence. Secondly, every prerogative predicated of Christ, that is, every point of Christological doctrine (except perhaps pre-existence, incarnation, and hypostatic union) is "congruently" ascribed to Mary. Thus, if Christ is Redeemer, Mediator, King, Priest, etc., so is Mary in a parallel, subordinate fashion.

It is the kind of Mariology that Vatican II and the documents that followed it sought critically to correct. In Chapter VIII of the Constitution on the Church, the Council described "the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the mystery of Christ and the Church." With respect to the mystery of Christ, avoiding any deductive theologizing, Vatican II simply restated the traditional doctrine. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception means that Mary was free of sin from the moment of her conception in her mother's womb. Mary's virginity means Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb without human fatherhood. Mary's divine motherhood means that she is Mother of God through the mystery of Christ's hypostatic union, that is, through the mystery by which Jesus' human nature was joined to the divine Person of the Word from the first moment of his conception. Mary's assumption means that at the end of her earthly life she was taken body and soul up to God.[4]

With respect to the mystery of the Church, the Council spoke of Mary as the new Eve, of Mary as pattern of Christian holiness, and of Mary as image of the Church.

Don Bosco generally refrained from the speculations of the *Mariology of privilege.* His Mariology was simple and pastoral in character; and at the risk of seeming anachronistic, we might say that it ran along the lines adopted by Vatican II. It was derived from reflection on Scripture, the Fathers, the early Councils, and the tradition and the history of the Church through the ages. Its lines are simple: God chose Mary, a woman, to cooperate in the Incarnation of the Son. For this purpose God preserved her from all sin, blessed her in a special way, and because she was perfectly redeemed God raised her to glory even in her physical body. Mary, Mother of the Incarnate Word and hence Mother of God, accepted her election with perfect obedience, in holiness of life, in humble service, and in association with the redeeming passion of her Son. Given to us as mother by Christ on the cross, she continues to be mother and helper of the Church and every Christian in all circumstances. Hence, by reason of God's gifts

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[4] Mary's mediation was hotly discussed before and in preparation for Vatican II. In the Council itself a compromise was reached. While affirming in clearest terms the all-sufficiency of Christ's mediation, the Council allowed the title "Mediatrix" for Mary, but carefully associated it with other explanatory titles from the ancient Church: "Advocate," "Auxiliatrix," "Adjutrix" [i.e. Helper]. The title "Coredemptrix," on the other hand, was not allowed.

and of her correspondence, she deserves special, grateful and worshipful reverence.

2 Don Bosco's Marian Devotion

(1) Overview

Don Bosco's perception of Mary simply as *the Madonna* (Our Lady, or Mary our Mother) even from his earliest childhood, was fundamental and prior to all titles. The sources show how importantly Mary, as the *Madonna,* figured in Don Bosco's personal life, not only as a constitutive element of spirituality, but also as a guide and a force for his vocational decisions and his apostolate. The dreams that punctuated Don Bosco's whole life have a Marian orientation in which our Lady appears without titles. The Lady of the first vocation dream, is simply the *Madonna,* Mary the Mother. In the *Dream of 1844* and/or the *Dream of the Holy Martyrs,* the recurring vocation dream, he saw simply our Lady without titles. (Only later would the church seen in the dream, for historic reasons be dedicated to Mary under the title of Help of Christians.)

Yet without a doubt, from earliest childhood on to past maturity, Don Bosco's devotion to Mary, like that of the common people around him, thrived under various titles. These were at first the popular local, common titles. Many examples can be cited. Our Lady of the Castle was her title at Castelnuovo, Our Lady of Graces was the title of the Madonna whose image stood above one of the altars of the "cathedral" at Chieri. Our Lady of Consolation, the *Consolata,* was the favorite of the people of Turin. Don Bosco honored Our Lady of the Rosary, a popular title since time immemorial, by dedicating a chapel in his brother Joseph's house at Becchi. He wrote a devotional pamphlet in honor of Our Lady of Sorrows when he was chaplain in the institutions of the Marchioness Barolo. The *Companion of Youth,* the book of devotion that Don Bosco wrote for young people, encourages devotion to Mary under various titles.[5] We may mention Our Lady of the Rosary, Our Lady of Sorrows, the Sacred Heart of Mary, the Seven Joys of Mary. But the short meditation on devotion to Our Lady in the same prayer book is entitled simply, "Devotion to Mary Most Holy."[6] St. Alphonsus' *Glories of Mary* and other writings are a frequent source of both concepts and literary expression for Don Bosco, as is the case with the maxim figuratively applied to Our Lady, *"Qui elucidant me vitam aeternam habebunt"* (They

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[5] *Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de' suoi doveri, degli esercizi di cristiana pietà, per la recita dell'Ufficio dell Beata Vergine e de' principali vespri dell'anno, coll'aggiunta di una scelta di laudi sacre, ecc.* Torino: Paravia e Co., MDCCCXLVII, 352 pp. (many editions within Don Bosco's life time and thereafter).

[6] *Giovane Provveduto* (editions 1 to 5), 51-54.

who honor me will have eternal life)."[7] In Alphonsus' as in Don Bosco's writings generally, devotion to Mary is inculcated under no particular title.

In actual *practice,* Don Bosco's devotion to Mary was "traditional," like that of the common people. The Comollo biography reveals what must have been Don Bosco's own style of Marian piety.[8] It was expressed in nosegays, fasts, visits to churches, prayers, speaking of Mary, etc. But the deeper structure of his Marian devotional practice is also revealed; it consisted in a life of virtue in imitation of Mary and in living in her presence, under her protection. The *Memoirs of the Oratory* show a Marian awareness throughout, especially in moments of vocational decision or crisis. Furthermore throughout his life Don Bosco's Mariology had a pastoral thrust. Don Bosco saw Mary as acting for a person's salvation through help given in the practical situations of the Christian life, in dangers, illness, temptation, and especially at the hour of death. Thus, in the *Companion of Youth* Don Bosco assures the youngsters that devotion to Mary ensures "blessings in this world and in the next," and is a "sign of predestination."[9] But while associating Mary with a person's salvation and even predestination, Don Bosco refrains from any theological speculation.

(2) In Summary

A few simple comments will suffice. Mary was a living and guiding presence throughout Don Bosco's whole life, and he firmly believed in her presence and guidance. He developed a tender and personal relationship, and he expressed his devotion by continuous prayer and dedication to his work and mission. He favored the cultic expression of devotion to Mary, through the celebration of the traditional liturgical feasts in her honor, making them instruments for growth in the Christian life for himself and his boys. Don Bosco welcomed and encouraged traditional devotions, popular devotions too, provided they were theologically sound and spiritually profitable. His Marian prayer was also rooted in the liturgy and the tradition of the Church. The Hail Mary, the *Angelus* and the *Regina Caeli,* the seasonal anthems *(Salve Regina, Ave Regina Caelorum, Salve Redemptoris Mater),* the Rosary, the Litany, and obviously, short prayers of all kinds, formed the staples. Finally, he could not conceive of devotion to Mary, no matter what its form, apart from an effort to imitate her virtues, especially her faith, love and purity, and to live by the law of Christ. A better Christian life had to be the goal of devotion to Mary. This ethical-pastoral aspect of Marian devotion took absolute precedence.

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[7] Sir 24:31, *Vulgata.*

[8] [Bosco] *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo morto nel Seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù,* scritti da un suo collega (Torino: Speirani e Ferrero), 1844, 84 pp. (further editions: 1854, 1867, 1884).

[9] *Giovane provveduto (1847), 51.*

(3) Devotion to Mary, Untitled and Titled

We stated above that Mary simply as the Madonna was foundational in Don Bosco's Marian devotion. We also noted that, like the common people around him, he also felt at ease with the various local Marian titles. It is also a fact that at certain points in his life Don Bosco espoused devotion to Mary under special, Church-oriented titles, chiefly Immaculate Conception and Help of Christians. With regard to these developments, in his study on Dominic Savio Father Alberto Caviglia writes:

> Under which titles did Don Bosco inculcate devotion to Mary, and which of them was the object of Savio's devotion? All and none would be the answer. In the dream at the age of nine it was not a *Madonna* under a specific title that appeared to Don Bosco, but simply the *Madonna,* Mary, the Mother of Jesus. At the time of which we are speaking [early 1850s], the saintly Master was devoted to Our Lady under the title of *Consolata,* the *Madonna* of the people of Turin. (The first statue of Mary in the Pinardi chapel was of the *Consolata.)* Then, as the religious movement that led to the Church's definition of the Immaculate Conception gained ground, Don Bosco's devotion moved in the same direction and was for a long time centered on this title. With true Catholic spirit and deep understanding of its implications he turned the article of faith [Immaculate Conception] into a program of devotion and spirituality. For a long time the Immaculate Conception remained in certain respects Don Bosco's *Madonna.* This was the devotion that Savio learnt from Don Bosco from the start [...]. But the saintly Master encouraged all Marian devotions. Thus the practice of the Rosary implied a devotion to Mary under that title. (The little chapel at Becchi and Mary's altar in the church of St. Francis de Sales, before which Savio was often seen kneeling in prayer, were dedicated to our Lady of the Rosary.) Again, Don Bosco, and after his example his boys, cultivated a devotion to our Lady of Sorrows. (Mary's little shrine in Savio's dormitory was of her under this title.) [...] After 1860, Mary Help of Christians became an ever-growing presence in Don Bosco's life, and with the dedication of the great church in her honor the Help of Christians became Don Bosco's own Madonna.[10]

It will now be our task to explore these developments. It was in particular historical circumstances in the 1850s and 1860s that Don Bosco espoused Marian devotion under the titles of Immaculate Conception and Help of Christians. But the understanding gained through those historic experiences allowed him subsequently to transpose their significance to Salesian life and work.

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[10] Alberto Caviglia, *Don Bosco. Opere e scritti editi e inediti,* Vol. IV, part II: *Savio Domenico e Don* Bosco (Torino: SEI, 1942), 314-315.

II. Don Bosco's Devotion to Mary the Immaculate Conception in Historical Context

1. Mary Immaculate and Don Bosco: Precedents

Mary as the Immaculate Conception became important in Don Bosco's life for personal as well as for ecclesial reasons. Hence his devotion to Mary under this title merits special attention not only for the importance it acquired in a specific historical context in the fifties but also for the way in which it became associated with Don Bosco's work never to relinquish its privileged place.

The devotion to the Immaculate Conception and its symbols flourished in France after the Protestant Reformation, and from France it spread to Piedmont through the work of the Jesuits and flourished there even after their suppression.[11] Mary was honored under this title at the Chieri seminary, where the chapel was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. Her image stood above the altar, and her statue was honored in a side chapel. The church attached to the Archbishop's palace in Turin where Don Bosco received all his sacred orders was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception.

The work of the oratory, as Don Bosco emphasizes in his own *Memoirs,* began in 1841 and was resettled in 1844 on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Don Bosco wished to dedicate his second oratory, St. Aloysius founded in 1847, also on the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

In early December 1850, Don Bosco traveled to Milan to preach the Jubilee proclaimed by Pius IX, in the wake of the liberal revolution of 1848, to obtain God's help in those difficult times for the Church. Don Bosco then hastened back to the Oratory for the traditional December 8 conference, in which it was his custom since 1842 to recall the protection of Mary Immaculate on the work of the oratory.[12]

It appears, therefore, that before the Immaculate Conception became an ecclesial symbol and then a permanent Salesian educational symbol, this devotion expressed for Don Bosco a very personal experience connected with his life and work.

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[11] The Society of Jesus, the enemies of Jansenism and Gallicanism in any form, came under pressure from Catholic absolute rulers during the pontificates of Popes Clement XIII (1693-1769, elected in 1758) and Clement XIV (1705-1774, elected in 1769). Clement XIII died before he was forced to make a decision. Clement XIV finally succumbed to pressure and signed the Bull of abolition (submitted by the Spanish ambassador) in June 1773. The Jesuits were restored by Pope Pius VII in 1814.

[12] *EBM* IV, 126-127.

2. Definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception

(1) Devotion at the Oratory

In 1847 the Piedmontese bishops requested prayers for the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in response to Pius IX's encyclical *Ubi primum.* Since that time, prayers were regularly offered at the Oratory to that end.

Shortly before the definition in 1854, while the cholera was still raging in Turin and other parts of Italy, the Pope proclaimed a special Jubilee with the encyclical *Apostolicae nostrae charitatis* to obtain the Immaculate Virgin's protection against "all these evils." While tending the cholera victims, the Oratory people intensified their prayers to Mary Immaculate.

By the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus,* toward the end of 1854 Pius IX defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, while the cholera that had ravaged the population subsided. Dominic Savio, enrolled some five weeks before as a student at the Oratory, experienced veritable transports at the definition. Bishop Cagliero testified:

> I recall his irrepressible joy at the time of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, the year when he entered the Oratory. His emotion and enthusiasm knew no bounds during the celebration of that solemn feast. The Oratory and the whole city of Turin was lighted with lamps for the occasion. Don Bosco had given us permission to go out [to watch the festivities], and Dominic could no longer restrain his emotion on witnessing the popular jubilation.[13]

The Oratory boys lived through a period of incredible fervor. The church of the *Consolata* was the center of celebrations in thanksgiving to *Mary Immaculate* that lasted well into 1855. A special day was reserved at the church of the *Consolata* for the Oratory community. The feast of the Annunciation (March 25) was marked by citywide celebrations in honor of the Immaculate Conception that had the character of a religious revival.[14]

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[13] Bishop Cagliero's testimony at Dominic Savio's Apostolic Process, *Positio super virtutibus* (Rome, 1926), 135. Cf. G. Bosco, *Vita [...] Savio* (1859), 38-39.

Father John Francesia speaking of the fervor of the celebration adds some interesting detail: "The outward popular celebration was to some extent upset by evil people. The lamps which the good people lit to honor Mary were pelted with stones, so that the devout were obliged to remove them and express their devotion to Mary Most Holy in private. At the Oratory, however, under Don Bosco's leadership, we outdid ourselves. The feast was preceded by a solemn novena." [John Francesia, *La Vergine Immacolata, Don Bosco e i Salesiani* (San Benigno: Scuola Tip. Salesiana, 1904), 17-18.]

[14] Cf. *EBM V,* 138.

It is fair to say that the Company of the Immaculate Conception founded some time later (June 1856) owes its existence to this "outbreak" of devotion to Mary Immaculate. According to Don Bosco's *Life of Dominic Savio* it was founded at Dominic's initiative, though there is some conflicting testimony.[15]

(2) Ecclesial Symbol of the Woman Crushing the Serpent's Head

The preacher on the occasion of the celebration held in the church of the *Consolata* (mentioned above) was the Oblate Father Vincent Berchialla. He spoke on the text, "I will place enmity between you and the woman," predicting that socialism and liberalism and their secret societies would be vanquished just as original sin was vanquished by her who crushed the serpent's head.

This kind of rhetoric expressed a hope, if not an expectation, among conservative devout Catholics. It also revealed the special political slant of the dogma and of the devotion to the Immaculate Conception in that special historical context at mid-19th century. Pius IX's Bull, *Ineffabilis Deus,* speaks of Mary Immaculate as the One who, totally pure, crushed the serpent's head, who destroyed all heresies, who is the sure defense of the Church, who saves the Christian people from the most deadly evils and is their sure refuge and faithful help, etc. In other words, Mary Immaculate is presented as the symbol of the victory of good over evil.

For an understanding of the political charge of the title, and of the rhetoric connected with it, one must bear in mind the special historical situation that it addressed in the Italy of the 1850s, particularly in the Kingdom of Sardinia. The liberal revolution of 1848, which had turned the Kingdom of Sardinia into a parliamentary monarchy, also set the stage for the establishment of the Mazzinian Roman Republic forcing Pope Pius IX into a year-long exile (1848-1849). There followed in the Kingdom of Sardinia (Piedmont) a spate of actions designed to secularize society, wresting it from the power of the Church. In 1848 a lay school system was created by the Boncompagni school reform. In 1850 the Church's ancient privileges were abolished by the Siccardi Bill. In 1854-1855 the Cavour-Rattazzi Bill, providing for the disbanding of religious congregations and for the confiscation of Church property, was debated and passed in parliament.[16]

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[15] Seminarian Joseph Bongiovanni, the leader of the group, in his undated letter to Don Bosco lists Dominic's name in the fourth place among the founding members: "He was one of the founders of the Society of the Immaculate Conception, the fourth [to join], and he accepted the proposal with great joy." [Letter included in the process of beatification, *Positio super virtutibus,* 480.]

[16] It was at the time of the debates and of the impending signing of the Bill that Don Bosco addressed letters to King Victor Emmanuel II, threatening divine chastisements in the form of deaths in the royal family.

This was the serpent's head ("all these evils") that Mary Immaculate was called upon to crush. The idea of Mary's engaging the evil powers in combat and leading the faithful to victory was not new. It was a traditional interpretation of Gen 2:15. In the *Treatise on the True Devotion* by Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716) Mary is presented as an eschatological figure that engages Antichrist (here a suggestion from Rev 12), and her true devotees as the Church's vanguard in the final struggle against the powers of hell. But in the special historical context of the 1850s the powers of evil to be engaged were secularism and heresy. See below how this special understanding was widespread and found expression in devotional books, such as Don Bosco's *Month of May* of 1858.

Needless to say, it is this very understanding of the role of Mary that is expressed even more clearly with the title of Help of Christians in the sixties. Hence the melding of "Immaculate Help of Christians."

3. Mary Immaculate, an Educational Symbol for Don Bosco's Work

In Don Bosco's case, the Immaculate Conception provided also a different kind of symbol. On the feast of the Immaculate Conception Don Bosco had begun his work for poor and abandoned youth. This circumstance, interpreted in the light of his first and subsequent dreams and of the "ascent" of the devotion to the Immaculate Conception in the forties and fifties, provided a devotional and theological framework from which he looked at his apostolate. First, by catechizing and educating youth, thus Christianizing society, he joined the Church's on-going struggle against the powers of evil, although in a less political and militaristic mode. Secondly, the Immaculate Conception provided him with a most appropriate symbol for his educational program, which was also a spirituality patterned after the "Mother Most Pure." "The Immaculate Virgin, the Mother most pure, hates everything that is contrary to holy purity."[17] Thus the symbol that had been offered in St. Aloysius was invested with theological importance through the Immaculate Conception. The Savio, Magone and Besucco biographies are evidence of this development. The feast of Immaculate Conception took on a key role at the Oratory, for this was the time when Our Lady "swept out" the house, that is, made it possible for the educator to single out unsuitable youngsters.[18] This also explains the importance of the Immaculate Conception Sodality in the life of the Oratory.

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[17] Bosco, *Month of May,* 154. [Cf. note 19 below.]

[18] Cf. e. g., *EBM* VI, 460 (Ruffino Chronicle).

III. Don Bosco's *Month of May* (1858)

Don Bosco's *Month of May in Honor of Mary Immaculate* (1858)[19] is a milestone, as well as a watershed, on the course of Don Bosco's developing awareness of Mary's titles. It is Don Bosco's first important Marian work. True, in 1845, while still connected with the Barolo institutions, he had authored a devotional exercise in honor of the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady, though no copy of the work has come down to us. The *Month of May,* on the contrary, was published in the Catholic Readings as a booklet of 192 pages, and went through many editions. It was written to serve as an aid for the most important popular devotional exercise in honor of Mary, intended also to do homage to the Immaculate Conception.

1. History and Contents of the Practice of the Month of May Devotion[20]

The practice of the Month of May in honor of Mary took root in Italy at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In 1726 the Jesuit Annibale Dionisi authored a *Month of Mary, [...] with the practice of flowers of virtue proposed to Her true devotees.*[21] In the month of flowers (in the northern hemisphere at least), the practice of various virtues is inculcated with prayers, songs, and meditations. Boarding schools and religious houses took up the practice which, encouraged by the Jesuits, soon spread throughout Italy. The same happened in France when Father Pierre Doré translated the *Month of May consecrated to the glories of Mary* by the Jesuit Father Francesco Lalomia.[22] Like St. Alphonsus, this author celebrated the "glories of Mary," a formula which had greater success

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[19] *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS^ma^ Immacolata ad uso del popolo,* per cura del sac. Bosco Giovanni (Letture Cattoliche 6: #2. Torino: G. B. Paravia e Co., April 1858*),* 192 pp. [The Month of May Dedicated to Mary Most Holy for the People's Use.]

[20] For this and the following paragraphs on the *Month of May* I rely on Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps,* 508-513.

[21] *Il mese di Maria o sia il Mese di maggio consacrato a Maria coll'esercizio di vari fiori di virtù proposti ai veri divoti di Lei,* dal Padre Annibale Dionisi della Compagnia di Gesù, da praticarsi nelle Case de' Padri di famiglia, ne' Monasteri, nelle Botteghe, etc. (Parma: Eredi di Paolo Monti, 1726). (The Month of Mary, that is, of May, Dedicated to Mary, with the Practice of Nosegays of Virtue for Her True Devotees [...]).

[22] Francesco Lalomia, *Il Mese di Maggio consacrato alle glorie della gran Madre di Dio coll'esercizio di vari fiori di virtù* (Palermo, 1758). [The Month of May Dedicated to the Glories of the Great Mother of God, with the Practice of Various Nosegays of Virtue.]

in France than in Italy. A little later, the Jesuit Alfonso Muzzarelli, took up and adapted Dionisi's formula and authored a *Month of May* that became standard for a long time, and that had many imitators.[23] In this "moral-ascetical" formula, the purpose of the Month of May exercises was not directly to celebrate the glories of Mary, but to sanctify the Christian life through the practice of virtue and through meditation on Christian truths. This approach was criticized by some for the reason that the Month of May took on the character of a second Lent, and a kind of controversy ensued between upholders of the two formulae. Then there were those who adopted hybrid formulae which mixed moral-ascetical material with reflection and examples of a Marian character. An author who preached the Month of May in 1856, 1857 and 1858 confessed that he would have preferred to speak solely of Mary, her graces, her glories, her protection. But experience had taught him that the Muzzarelli formula was more likely to better the moral and religious life of the Christian people.

2. The Christian Life Formula in Don Bosco's *Month of May* Exercise

Faced with this dilemma Don Bosco did not hesitate to choose the Muzzarelli formula, in spite of his great love for the "glories" of Mary. Don Bosco's *Month of May in Honor of Mary Immaculate* is less about Mary than it is about the Christian life. It is a little spiritual treatise that takes the reader on a journey from God the Creator to the promised salvation in heaven. We see therefore that for the May devotions Don Bosco preferred to invite the faithful to consider Christian life and practice, rather than the "glories of Mary." Don Bosco conceived all devotion, whether to Christ, Mary, or the Saints, as an application in real Christian life of the saying of Jesus, "If you love me keep my commandments," with no sentimentality.

He did, however, devote the introductory exercise (set for April 30), the last two days of May, and the concluding exercise (for June 1) specifically to Mary. For the rest of the Month he proposed to his readers for prayer and meditation the same subjects treated in spiritual retreats and parish missions.

The format is simple. After the initial invocation, "God, come to my assistance [...]," there follows the short meditation (spiritual reading) on the subject of the day. This is followed by the "Example," taken from the Bible, from the lives of the saints, from famous people, from simple Christians (some within Don Bosco's own experience, e.g., Dominic Savio, a prostitute on her deathbed). A short invocation and the *Memorare* (the so-called Prayer of St. Bernard, a paraphrase of the Sub *Tuum Praesidium)* conclude the exercise for the day.

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[23] Alfonso Muzzarelli, *Il Mese di Maria, o sia di Maggio* (Ferrara, 1785). [The Month of Mary, that is, of May.] It went through 150 editions and was translated into English, Arabic, Spanish, French, and Portuguese.

3. Teaching of Don Bosco's *Month of May*

(1) A course in Christian Life

The teaching of *The Month of May* is vintage Bosco. It offers in summary Don Bosco's own spiritual-devotional program and his convictions of how a Christian life should be lived. He takes advantage of the month of May to set this program forth in language that common people and the young understood.

Don Bosco's basic proposal is about "salvation." Salvation in the sense of complete victory over sin and death is what the Christian life is all about: "God, soul, eternity." In the meditation for the second day, he addresses the Christian: "O Christian, you have an immortal soul. If you save it, all is saved; if you lose it, all is lost. Think about it. You have only one soul, and one single sin can put it in jeopardy. How would we fare, were we to be called before God's judgment seat this very instant?"

The program of *The Month of May* falls into two sections separated by a consideration of death, judgment, and hell. Thus, at the center stand death and the verities that follow it (Day 15-19); the first section (Day 1-14) explains how one may prepare oneself for that supreme confrontation; the second section (Day 20-31) explains how one may return after having strayed, and so win heaven. *The Month of May* traces a spiritual journey, the road to salvation. In its structure, sequence, contents and language the work discloses also the author's religious understandings. There's a kind of tragic quality in the presentation which projects an image that is not exactly (as the biographical portraits would have us believe) that of a man totally self-assured. [Cf. Appendix I, p. 46.]

(2) Mary in Don Bosco's Month of May

The work then overall is devoted to Christian life topics. When Mary is the subject, she is generally presented as Mother of God, Mother of Christ, our Mother, Heavenly Patroness, etc., rather than under particular titles. In the introductory exercise for April 30, in speaking of the reason why we should be devoted to Mary, Don Bosco writes: "I shall begin by giving the three principal reasons: Mary is the holiest being in all of God's creation; Mary is Mother of God; Mary is our mother."[24]

In the course of the work, however, special titles are occasionally offered for consideration, Mary Immaculate as expected being one of them. As the title states, it is a *Month of May* "in honor of Mary Immaculate." After all, it was written after the definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and after the Lourdes appearances (1858). In speaking of Mary's holiness Don

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[24] Bosco, *Month of May,* 12 (Introductory Meditation, April 30).

Bosco mentions her Immaculate Conception, (without, however, making any reference to Lourdes). Don Bosco writes:

> The Catholic Church expresses Mary's holiness by defining that she was always free of any sin. The Church invites us to invoke her with the following precious prayer: "Queen conceived without original sin, pray for us."[25]

Later, speaking of the sin of impurity, Don Bosco urges the reader to pray to Mary Immaculate and kiss her medal, so as to avoid this sin.[26]

In the meditation for May 24, Don Bosco speaks of Holy Communion, in which we receive "Jesus Christ himself as he was born of the Immaculate Virgin Mary."[27] He makes no reference to Mary Help of Christians, in spite of it being May 24.[28]

Help of Christians is another Marian title singled out for consideration. The Meditation on the Christian's Dignity concludes with the words:

> Mary most holy, the mother of our Savior, is the most beautiful ornament of the Christian religion. So I turn to you, O most merciful Virgin Mary, in the certainty that I will obtain grace from God and the reward of heaven. My Christian dignity will be restored to me if you will intercede for me, *Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis.*[29]

The example attached to the same meditation speaks of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, and focuses on the title, Help of Christians.

> In the Litany we come upon the title, Mary Help of Christians, *Auxilium Christianorum.* After a victory won by Christian forces against the Turks through Mary's intercession in the year 1771 [sic],[30] St. Pius V added this title to the Litany. In 1815 Pius VII instituted the feast of Mary Help of Christians. This he did to express his gratitude to Mary, the great Queen of Heaven, for his restoration to his Roman See and for the restoration of peace to the Church, which he attributed to Mary's intercession. This feast is kept on May 24. Let us therefore invoke Mary's help.[31]

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[25] Bosco, *Month of* May, 13.

[26] Bosco, *Month of May,* 148 (Meditation for May 25, The Sin of Impurity).

[27] Bosco, *Month of May,* 140 (Meditation for May 24, On Holy Communion).

[28] The feast of Mary Help of Christians instituted in 1815 was not "celebrated."

[29] Bosco, *Month of May,* 63-64 (Meditation for May 19, The Dignity of the Christian).

[30] Read 1571.

[31] Bosco, *Month of May,* 64-65 (Example for May 19, The Dignity of the Christian).

The last two May meditations (Day 30 and 31) are devoted to Mary's protection in life and in death. Don Bosco insistently pleads with his readers to put their trust in Mary, Mother of God, Mother of Christ, and our Mother. In this context we also find mention of, or at least allusions to some of Mary's titles. Don Bosco refers the reader to the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation *(Consolata,* in Turin) to see the signs of Mary's protection.[32] The meditation ends with the words, "It is you, O Great Virgin, who alone did crush all threatening heresies: *Cunctas haereses sola interemisti in universo mundo."*[33] This text in Marian tradition and liturgy is often associated with the titles, Immaculate Conception and Help of Christians. The same may be said of the other words expressing Mary's power to defend us against the enemy: "Fearsome as an army in battle array *[Terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata]."*[34] And a little later Don Bosco refers expressly to the title, Help of Christians:

> Mary is ready to help her devotees at the hour of death [...]. This is what the Church believes when calling Mary, *Auxilium Christianorum,* Help of Christians. Her help has to be all the more necessary at the hour of our death.[35]

We see, therefore, that *The Month of May* of 1858 speaks (though only incidentally) of Mary Immaculate and Help of Christians, and that it uses the invocation, *Auxilium Christianorum ora pro nobis* and texts connected with these titles. It may be regarded as a bridge linking the two titles.

We have described the historical circumstances of Don Bosco's adoption of the title, Immaculate Conception. Under what circumstances, we may now ask, did Don Bosco become the champion and apostle of the title, Help of Christians? How did this title come significantly into his awareness to power his Marian doctrine and devotion.

IV. Don Bosco and the [Immaculate] Help of Christians

In a book on the Help of Christians, Father Giulio Barberis voices his conviction that Don Bosco was devoted to Mary under that title from his very childhood. He writes:

> In spite of our lack of positive proof, we have come to believe on the strength of converging circumstantial evidence that from his childhood, and more especially from his seminary days, Don Bosco became devoted to Mary under the ti-

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[32] Bosco, *Month of May* , 169-170 (May 30, Mary's Protection in life).
[33] Bosco, *Month of May,* 171.
[34] Bosco, *Month of May,* 175 (May 31, Mary's Protection in Death).
[35] Bosco, *Month of May,* 177.

tle of Help of Christians. He entrusted himself entirely into her keeping in the certainty that she would always be there to help.[36]

As mentioned above, about Don Bosco's devotion and trusting commitment of self to Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, from his earliest childhood there is no argument. But Don Bosco's writings lend no support to the assumption that the title "Help of Christians" figured *significantly* in his *devotion* before the 1860s.

For example, neither in the *History of the Church* (1st ed. 1845) nor in the *History of Italy* (1st ed. 1855/6) is there any mention of Mary Help of Christians before the editions of 1867. The inscription on the frieze inside the great church that Don Bosco saw in his dream in 1844 read not *"Auxilium* Christianorum" (Help of Christians), but simply *"Hic domus mea, inde gloria mea"* (Here is my house, hence forth goes my glory).[37] The title is not mentioned in the early editions of the *Companion of* Youth (1st ed. 1847; 2nd ed. 1851; 3rd ed. 1854; 4th ed. 1860). At the Oratory the prescribed short invocation, *"Sedes Sapientiae, ora pro nobis"* gave way to *"Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis,"* only in 1867. The statue placed on top of the house after lightning struck in 1861 was one of Mary Immaculate, as was the one later placed on the top of the lantern of the church of Mary Help of Christians.

1. Forerunner Indications Prior to 1862

There are forerunner indications from before 1860, apart from the *Month of May*, of the gradual "ascent" of the Help of Christians in Don Bosco's devotion.

Don Bosco knew that the people of Turin had a devotion to the Help of Christians. He writes in fact that they were among the first to honor Mary under this title, as shown by the chapel, altar and statue dedicated to Mary Help of Christians in the church of St. Francis of Paola.[38] This was the church to which Don Bosco was assigned by Father Joseph Cafasso during his *Convitto* years.[39] The statue honored there may have later served as the model for Don Bosco's own conception of what Mary Help of Christians might "look like," though there was also a traditional iconography to draw on.

In 1848 or 1849 (after the Piedmontese Constitution), according to a testimony by Father John Giacomelli, a fellow seminarian, Don Bosco put up some

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[36] Giulio Barberis, *Il culto di Maria Ausiliatrice* (Torino: SEI, 1920), 56.

[37] "My House," "My Glory" may refer to God rather than to Mary. In the Dream of 1844, cf. notes 61 and 62 and related text below.

[38] G. Bosco, *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice,* raccolte dal Sacerdote Giovanni Bosco. (Torino, 1868; *Catholic Readings,* May 1868), 104. [Marvels of the Mother of God Invoked under the Title of Mary Help of Christians.] See picture on p. 36.

[39] Cf. *MO-En*, 202.

holy pictures in his room with invocations to Mary Help of Christians. The prayer on one of these in particular reads: "O Immaculate Virgin, you alone vanquished all heresies; come now to our aid, as we have recourse to you: *Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis."* Don Bosco added in his own hand: *"inde expectamus consolationem"* (from her we await our consolation).[40] Here the titles, "Immaculate," "Help of Christians" and "*Consolata"* are combined.

The Month of May of 1858 is a turning point in this respect. As indicated above, besides liturgical texts that refer to Mary's help *(Terribilis ut castrorum acies, Cunctas haereses sola interemisti),* and the use throughout of the *Memorare (Sub Tuum Praesidium),* we find a reference to the victory over the Moslem Turks and the introduction of the title into the Litany. But such historic events receive extended treatment only in 1868.[41] And yet Don Bosco was certainly familiar with those events, and in the aftermath of the liberal revolution he probably had drawn a parallel between Pius VII and Pius IX. Likewise he certainly saw the importance of Mary's role as helper of the Church and of the Pope, even though before the 1860s this role was assigned simply to Mary, or to Mary under the title of "Immaculate Conception."

In the almanac of the *Catholic Readings* for 1860 (the *Galantuomo,* the Honest Citizen) under May 24 Don Bosco noted for the first time, "[the feast of] the Blessed Virgin Help of Christians." This is expanded in the issue of 1861 to, "The most holy Virgin under the well deserved title of Help of Christians, *Auxilium Christianorum."*

These precedents notwithstanding, it seems that the title and role of Mary as "Help of Christians," was not definitely championed by Don Bosco before 1862.

2. The Spoleto Events of 1862 in Historical Context

Setting 1862 as the year in which the title Help of Christians began to be significant in Don Bosco's life and apostolate immediately draws our attention to a specific religious event, and to a specific political context.

For the political context, a brief summary will suffice. The Second War of Italian Independence (1859) was followed by the annexation of Lombardy, of most of the Papal States, and of the duchies of Parma, Modena, and Tuscany. In 1860 Garibaldi invaded Sicily and Naples to unseat the Bourbon monarch, while King Victor Emmanuel II invaded the Marches and Umbria in the Papal States. Italy was thus "united," and the Kingdom of Italy proclaimed in 1861, with Victor Emmanuel II as its first king. There was no stopping the unification movement, and Rome itself would eventually have to be surrendered. In 1860 Pius IX

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[40] *EBM* III, 414.

[41] Bosco, *Marvels,* passim. [Cf. Appendix V, p. 60.]

had condemned the assailants of the Church's temporal power; and in 1864 he condemned liberalism in *Quanta Cura,* with the *Syllabus of Errors.*

The liberal revolutions of 1848 provided the context that made the title Immaculate Conception the object of special devotion. It invested that title with its peculiar political-religious slant. In parallel fashion, the relentless progress of the revolution culminating in the takeover of the Papal States and the Unification of Italy (1861) gave currency to the title "Help of Christians" and conferred on it an even greater political charge. It was the apparition and miracle at Spoleto in 1862 that precipitated this development.[42]

(1) The Spoleto Events

Spoleto is an ancient and historic city located at the geographical center of Umbria and of Italy itself. Pius IX had been Bishop of Spoleto (1827-1832). Because of its central location Spoleto was mentioned as the possible capital of a united Italy. At the beginning of 1860, the calamitous year of the annexation, Archbishop Giovanni Battista Arnaldi of Spoleto addressed a pastoral letter to the faithful in the name of the bishops of the whole region. In it he voiced the hope that "the Mother of Mercy," "the undefeated and invincible warrior," "the Virgin responsible for all the victories of the Church," would once more come to the rescue. He called on the faithful to pray to God for help "through the intercession of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mother of God, *Help of Christians,* the powerful One who crushes the rebellious head of the ancient serpent under her feet."[43] Then came the annexation and the turmoil connected with it.

Early in 1862 the Virgin in a painting on the wall of a ruined church at La Fratta near Spoleto spoke to a five-year-old child, named Righetto (Enrico) Cionchi. The archbishop told the story in his first report.

> On a hillock located in a sequestered spot [outside of the city of Spoleto] an ancient image of the Virgin Mary has survived in a niche of a crumbling wall, all that remains of an old church which had existed on the site. The fresco, which for being exposed to the elements is still in good condition, depicts the Virgin Mary holding the Christ child in her arms. The place has long been abandoned and forgotten. But in recent weeks people have been praying at the ancient shrine, because the Blessed Virgin has several times appeared and spoken to a child named Enrico, not yet five years of age. However, only after March 19, 1862, and a miraculous cure, have people been flocking to the place in large

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[42] For the Spoleto connection and events, cf. Brocardo, "L'Ausiliatrice di Spoleto." in *Accademia Mariana Salesiana* III, 239-272; and Stella, *DB* II, 155-169, footnotes.

[43] Joint pastoral letter cited by Brocardo, "L'Ausiliatrice di Spoleto," 252. Giovanni Battista Arnaldi (1806-1867), ordained priest in 1828 and bishop in 1852, served as archbishop of Spoleto from 1853 until his death.

numbers. A 30-year-old peasant had recourse to that image and was instantly cured of chronic illnesses that had plagued him for a long time.[44]

The report spread far and wide, many cures were reported, and pilgrimages began almost immediately. People began to refer to this unnamed image of the Virgin by a variety of names: Madonna Unsheltered *(Madonna scoperta),* Our Lady of the Star *(Madonna della Stella),* or simply Madonna of Spoleto. Archbishop Arnaldi officially bestowed the title, *Auxilium Christianorum* (Help of Christians) on this Madonna. He sent out periodic reports that were carried by the Catholic press and gave currency to the Spoleto events. The first and most important report of May 17 (quoted above) appeared in the Catholic newspaper *L'Armonia* of Turin on May 27.

(2) The Spoleto Events and Don Bosco

The Catholic newspaper *L'Armonia* was read at Valdocco, and its reports from Spoleto must have fired up the hearts and minds of the Oratory population. Biographer Lemoyne tells us that in a Good Night of May 24, 1862, Don Bosco spoke of the Spoleto events. He told the story of the apparition and the miracle with great joy, and ended with the "good news" that since the Spoleto image did not have a title the Archbishop wished that it be honored under that of "Help of Christians." Doubts exist concerning Lemoyne's report on the May 24 Good Night.[45]

On the contrary, the Spoleto connection seems certain in the case of Don Bosco's allegory or apologue which goes by the name of "Dream of the Two Columns." Don Bosco narrated it in the Good Night of May 30 (1862), and of it we have contemporary reports by John Boggero, Caesar Chiala, and Dominic

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[44]Archbishop Arnaldi's report, published in *L'Armonia* of Turin, is cited by Don Bosco in *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio,* 95.

[45] Cf. *EBM* VII, 105. *IBM* VII, 164-167 follows up with a description of the Spoleto events (omitted in *EBM).* Lemoyne quotes Bonetti's chronicle as his source. But apart from the fact that the first report in *L'Armonia* bore the date of May 27, neither the Bonetti chronicle nor Lemoyne's own *Documenti* say anything about Spoleto. Don Bosco must have at some time spoken of those events, but Lemoyne's May 24 Good Night should probably be discounted. Stella [*DB* II, 159, note 86] and Desramaut [*Don Bosco en son temps,* 699-700, note 561] consider this Good Night apocryphal, and add that May 24 was not yet *significant* for Don Bosco in 1862. Later, after the consecration of the church of Mary Help of Christians in 1868, Don Bosco published a detailed description of the Spoleto events in his book *Marvels of the Mother of God.* There he transcribed Archbishop Arnaldi's first report, cited above.

Ruffino.[46] Don Bosco spoke of two pillars rising in the midst of the sea, one holding the sacred Host, the other the statue of Mary Immaculate beneath which a placard bore the inscription "Help of Christians." He then described a flotilla of enemy ships attacking the Pope's galley and trying to sink it. The Pope is wounded and falls, but he rises and steers his ship in between the two columns and anchors it safely there.

We also have another document, which because of the political situation was published anonymously and which is usually overlooked. This is the *Marian Calendar* of the *Catholic Readings* for June and July 1862.[47] In this calendar, May 24 passes without notice. But April 26 carries an important note on the feast of Mary Help of Christians and its meaning, relating it to the ancient prayer, the *Sub tuum praesidium.* The passage reads in part:

> Feast of Mary Help of Christians—As we are surrounded by enemies [and attacked] without respite, [...] we are very much in need of extraordinary help against their ambushes and dangerous attacks. [...] But where shall this help come from? From Mary, the Mother of God. The Church calls her the *Help of Christians.* Let us, therefore, have recourse to her and beg this most merciful mother to come to the help of Christ's bride, the holy Church in distress, and of Christ's most august vicar, the Church's visible head.—To this end we will recite five times the *Sub tuum praesidium* (We fly to your protection) for the needs of holy mother Church.[48]

(3) The Spoleto Ideology of the Help of Christians

This is precisely the significance that Archbishop Amaldi attached to the Spoleto events. In his reports, he expressed the idea that the Virgin would soon act to deliver the Pope from his enemies, and voiced the hope that Pius IX would crown the Help of Christians of Spoleto just as Pius VII had crowned the Virgin of Savona on his return from exile.

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[46] John Boggero to Chevalier Frederick Oreglia di Santo Stefano *ASC* 275: Boggero; Caesar Chiala to Chevalier Frederick Oreglia di Santo Stefano, in *ASC* 110: Cronachette-Chiala, *FDB* 929 C10-131. Dominic Ruffino's Chronicle: 1862-1863 *Memorie,* 74-76 in *ASC* 110: Cronachette-Ruffino, *FDB* 1216 B11-C1; Cf. *EBM* VII, 107-109; *IBM* VII, 169-172.

[47] *Diario mariano, ovvero eccitamenti alla divozione della Vergine Maria SS^ma^ proposti in ciascun giorno dell'anno,* per cura d'un suo divoto, in *Letture Cattoliche* 10, Nos. 4 & 5, June & July (Torino: tip. G.B. Paravia, 1862), 280 pp. [Marian Calendar, or Encouragements to Devotion to the Most Holy Virgin Mary for Each Day of the Year]. The introduction to this anonymous compilation was certainly written by Don Bosco, who may also be the author of the whole work. [Desmaraut, *Don Bosco en son temps,* 666-667 and 699, note 53.]

[48] *Diario mariano,* 96.

Images of the Help of Christians of Spoleto were circulated. One of these carried the following prayer:

> O Mary, powerful Help of Christians, we entrust ourselves to your patronage. We promise that to our dying day we will remain steadfast in the true faith, as obedient children of the Holy Roman Catholic Church and of the supreme Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth, even at the cost of total material loss.

A holy card published by the printer Marietti in Turin bore a prayer (composed by Pius IX himself) which entreated God, through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, to grant steadfastness "in the midst of all these assaults."

A kind of euphoria and the belief that the "hour of Mary" had come took hold among clergy and Catholic laity. Mary had appeared at the very center of Italy to rescue it from anticlerical forces and revolutionaries. This is what the *Buona settimana* of Turin wrote in November.

> The Virgin Mary has manifested her presence through this very lovely miraculous image in a place that is the center not only of the archdiocese of Spoleto, not only of Umbria, but more significantly of Italy itself. This then must be the manifest will of God and of the Blessed Virgin. In appearing in such a miraculous manner at the very heart of the country in these calamitous times, Our Lady has put everyone on notice that she has taken her place there in order to defend it, protect it, and provide help in all its temporal and spiritual needs.[49]

Archbishop Arnaldi believed that Mary, the Help of Christians, at Spoleto was giving a pledge of the coming triumph of the Church and of the Pope.[50] Through her intercession, Catholics will have the strength of dying, if needs be, for their faith, for holy Mother Church and its supreme shepherd, the vicar of Christ on earth. "This is our resolve and this we promise. This will be a reality with your help, O Immaculate Virgin, most loving Mother Mary, most faithful and most powerful help of all Christendom."[51]

The Archbishop of Spoleto then launched the idea of building a shrine dedicated to Mary, Help of Christians on the site of the miracle, as a citadel from which Mary would defend the Church. The shrine was built in 1864-1865. Archbishop Arnaldi wrote at the time: "This is Mary's answer to the revolutionaries: 'From this shrine, from this place made holy by my presence, your attacks will

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[49] *Buona settimana* 7 (November 23-29, 1962), 383, in Stella, *DB* II, 157, note 77. Almost identical to *Osservatore Romano,* May 31, 1862, in Brocardo, "Maria Ausiliatrice, la Madonna di Don Bosco," 105.

[50] Arnaldi's report of March 24, 1863, in *L'Armonia,* March 28, 1863.

[51] L. Maini, *Manifestazione [...] di Maria Santissima nelle vicinanze di Spoleto [...]* (Turin: Marietti, 1862), 55-57, in Stella, *DB* II, 158-159, note 84.

be stymied just as surging waves break up against the rocks: *hinc infringes tumentes fluctus tuos."*[52]

(4) Don Bosco's Response to Spoleto and its Ideology

Don Bosco's preface to his *Marvels of the Mother of God* written after the consecration of the church of Mary Help of Christians (1868), stated that there was "a very special reason why the Church in recent times wished to invoke Mary as Help of Christians." He explains the statement by quoting a passage from a current booklet:

> Invariably when the human race faced times of grave crisis it found help through the recognition of some new prerogative in Mary Most Holy, the exalted human being who in this world is the most magnificent reflection of the perfection of its Creator.

By way of comment he continues:

> The need of turning to Mary is universally felt in our days. It is not just an individual need but a general need of society. It is not merely a matter of bringing the lukewarm back to fervent faith and sinners back to God. [...] In our day, it is the Catholic Church itself that is under attack—in its ministry, in its sacred institutions, in its Head, in its doctrine and in its discipline. And it is attacked precisely as Catholic Church, as center of truth, as teacher of all the faithful. Hence, in order to deserve God's special protection, we have recourse to Mary who is our Mother and the special Helper of Kings, of Catholic peoples and of individual Catholics throughout the world.[53]

Don Bosco's comment on the quote, which originally referred to the Immaculate Conception but which he applied (with equally good reason) to Mary Help of Christians, is of great interest. The motivation is *historical* rather than theological. Mary is called the helper *of kings,* as well as of Christians. The historical crisis required that Mary be invoked as Help of Christians. Furthermore, a sense of urgency rings in those lines, an expectation that Mary's hour is about to strike.

It seems fair to conclude that the Spoleto events in the year 1862 marked the ascent of Mary under the title "Help of Christians" in Don Bosco's ecclesial awareness. True, Don Bosco was familiar with the title, and was personally devoted to Mary as Help of Christians, since this devotion had already gained a foothold in Turin and elsewhere. However, without the Spoleto events, Don

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[52] Arnaldi's Seventh Report, in *Unità Cattolica,* August 6, 1864; cited in Brocardo, "Maria Ausiliatrice, la Madonna di Don Bosco," 105.

[53] Bosco, *Marvels,* 5-6.

Bosco might not have become *the apostle* of Mary Help of Christians. He might have retained the title of Mary Immaculate for the Mornese group that he met in 1864 and that became the "Daughters of Mary Help of Christians" (Salesian Sisters) in 1872. He might not have dedicated his great new church to Mary under the title of Help of Christians.

V. A Church Dedicated to Mary (Immaculate) Help of Christians and its Significance

1. Decision to Build a Large Church under a Politically Sensitive Title in the Capital of the Liberal State

Mary had acted at Spoleto, and plans to build a church there dedicated to the Help of Christians were being discussed. But Don Bosco did not wait passively for Mary to act in Turin. In December 1862 Don Bosco began to speak of his own plan to build a great church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians.[54] In December 1862, probably during the course of an interminable session in the confessional on the eve of the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Don Bosco decided to build a new and larger church. A mere ten years had elapsed since the erection of the church of St. Francis de Sales in 1852. The vast increase in the Oratory population would justify the building of a second larger church before the civil authorities. They would not be disposed to approve the building of the new church when its politically sensitive title became known.

Don Bosco first confided his plan to Seminarian Paul Albera and to Father John Cagliero. He is reported to have said to Cagliero: "The Madonna wishes us to honor her under the title of Help of Christians. The times are so bad that we sorely need her help for the preservation and defense of the Christian faith." He immediately set out to solicit help toward the project.[55]

Since the title "Help of Christians" to which the Spoleto events gave currency was closely related to the current political situation, it had to be controversial. Hence, when Don Bosco began to solicit funds for the new church he was fairly reticent about the title. The insufficiency of the church of St. Francis de Sales was the reason he gave the authorities. The circular of February 1, 1863, addressed to the Grand Master of the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus, merely spoke of a large church designed to accommodate the increased number of boarders as well as to serve the local population. But the same circular addressed to benefactors stated that it would be dedicated to Mary Immaculate under the title

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[54] The *Biographical Memoirs* describe the planning and the building of the church of Mary Help of Christians in detail. See *EBM* VII, 223-228, 276-280; VIII, 2f., 57-64, 422; IX, 108-114, 118-140.

[55] *EBM* VII, 196-198. At this time the Oratory was the object of an official investigation, and had gone through several house searches.

of Help of Christians. He also made the point that, though large, it would be plain and unpretentious, a point about which he changed his mind when giving instructions to the architect.[56]

Father Barberis, in his chronicle, records Don Bosco's account of how the building permit was obtained and the title, Help of Christians, "approved." Don Bosco said:

> When I submitted the plans of the church for the city's approval, the superintendent rejected the plans because of the title, Help of Christians. "It's too Jesuitical," he complained. "But, sir," I explained, "perhaps in your line of work you have not had occasion of looking into the historic origin of this title. It commemorates the victories won by a coalition of Italian, Spanish, and other forces against the Turks. It also commemorates the liberation of Vienna, etc." He wouldn't hear of it, and the plans were rejected because of the title. A little later I again submitted the plans and requested approval, but in the petition I refrained from any reference to a title. I simply presented the church as a building to be devoted to divine worship. The approval was given without further ado. After all the papers had been signed and filed, I went to the building office to thank the superintendent for giving his approval. He said to me: "I knew that Don Bosco would not be so stubborn as to insist on a title that so smacked of Jesuitical reaction." "Sir," I replied, "in view of your objections, I refrained from specifying any title. But now that the approval has been given, I am at liberty to choose any title I wish, am I not?" "But this is arrant deception," he exclaimed. "Deception has nothing to do with it," I replied. "You objected to the title and approved a church without a title. But as I must now give the church a title I will choose any title I please. We should be satisfied that we have each won our point." He smiled, but he was only putting a good face on a bad deal.[57]

Ruse and wit notwithstanding, the permit could have been revoked. If the permit was allowed to stand, the title also was in a way given "approval." In those times of confrontation, and in view of the intransigent rhetoric stemming from the Spoleto events, this may be seen as a conciliatory gesture on the part of the authorities, not so much toward Don Bosco as toward the Church.[58]

2. Site of the Church: the "Field of Dreams"

When asked where the church would be built Don Bosco would point to the field to the south, across the Giardiniera Street, the street running obliquely and front-

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[56] Circular in Motto, *Epistolario* I, 550-551.

[57] Barberis, *Autograph Chronicle,* June 26, 1875, Notebook II, 23-24, *FDB* C 1-2.

[58] Likewise, the fact that Prince Amadeus of Savoy (son of Victor Emmanuel II) attended the laying of the cornerstone on April 27, 1865, may be regarded as an even more conciliatory gesture.

ing the Oratory property.[59] On June 20, 1850, Don Bosco had bought that tract of land from the archdiocesan seminary. But in a moment of grave need, on April 10, 1854, he had sold it to Father Antonio Rosmini. Father Rosmini intended eventually to build a house there and establish his congregation, the Institute of Charity, in Turin. He meant also to provide priests to help Don Bosco. But with Rosmini's death in 1855, the plan was set aside. Eventually the land was put up for sale. At the beginning of 1863 Don Bosco directed his financial administrator, Father Angelo Savio, to inquire about buying the land. The Rosminians had stipulated that it would not be sold back to Don Bosco. Father Savio then proposed the alternate site on the property of the Filippi Brothers, east of the Oratory enclosure. This sale, however, fell through. Don Bosco circumvented the Rosminians by getting a third party to act for him, and so he got the field back much to their discomfiture.[60]

This field came to be known later as the "field of dreams," because Don Bosco identified it with the field he saw in the dream of 1844. In this dream our Lady showed him the place of the holy martyrs' death, on which rose a large church, later identified with the church of Mary Help of Christians. Thus it is that the church of Mary Help of Christians claimed what might be called a "supernatural prehistory."

In his *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Don Bosco relates the dream he had the second Sunday of October, 1844, as he was about to leave the *Convitto*. He dreamt that the Shepherdess led him through various phases of the wandering (while wild animals were being transformed into lambs), until they arrived at a field under cultivation. There he saw a great church rising before him and, inside the church, the legend, *Hic domus mea, inde gloria mea* ("Here is my house, from here goes forth my glory.") The words were probably meant to apply to God, and were only later in retrospect applied to Mary.[61]

Father Giulio Barberis reports the same dream on the basis of the narration heard from Don Bosco as the two were returning from visiting some benefactors. In the Barberis version of the dream the Lady showed Don Bosco successive churches; and in a field under cultivation she pointed out to him the place of the

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[59] This street was actually in the way, for the plans called for a larger building than the field could accommodate. In January 1865, after an elaborate agreement negotiated by Don Bosco with the widow Mrs. Bellezza (Teresa Caterina Novo) for new access to her house, the Giardiniera street was closed and became Oratory property. He also had Cottolengo street redesigned by the city in February 1866, so as to allow more space in front of the church on the south side.

[60] The source for Don Bosco's dealings with the Rosminians about the field is Father Giulio Barberis, reporting Don Bosco's narration of the Dream of 1844. [For text see Appendix II, p. 48. Cf. *EBM* VII, 223-228, noting that *EBM* mentions the proposed alternate site on the Filippi property to the east only briefly, for which see *IBM* VII, 371-374].

[61] *MO-En,* 210, Dream of 1844.

martyrdom of SS. [Solutor,] Adventor and Octavius, marking it with her foot. At this spot he saw the church rising before him.[62]

However, the church that was eventually built on this holy ground was to be dedicated (for the historic reasons noted above), not to the holy martyrs, but to Mary Help of Christians. The church of the dream was identified as "that of Mary Help of Christians" only in retrospect. But the church retained its symbolic and numinous character nonetheless. This derived less from the fact that it rose (supposedly) on a place of martyrdom, than from the fact that the Lady of the dream, (now invoked as Help of Christians) had a "miraculous image" and dispensed "graces" from her church. The church became a place of pilgrimage. The Church of Mary Help of Christians was thus believed to have had supernatural origins and to have an abiding numinous character.

3. Designing and Building the Church

Don Bosco had engaged a number of architects to submit plans, specifying only that the church (contrary to his earlier advertisement) should be large and magnificent. Architect Antonio Spezia's design was chosen: a Latin cross 48 by 35 m. (157.5 by 115 ft.), the central nave being 11.5 m. (37.5 ft.) wide. It featured a beautiful composite (chiefly renaissance-style) facade, and a dome. These dimensions are fairly modest, though some people at the time thought them extravagant. Don Bosco would have wanted a much larger church, but the ground could not accommodate anything larger. It would be a tight fit. It would abut on Giardiniera Street on the north (soon to be eliminated). It would infringe on city property, namely, the Via Cottolengo on the south (soon to be straightened by concession from the City). On the west side, the wall of the left arm of the cross

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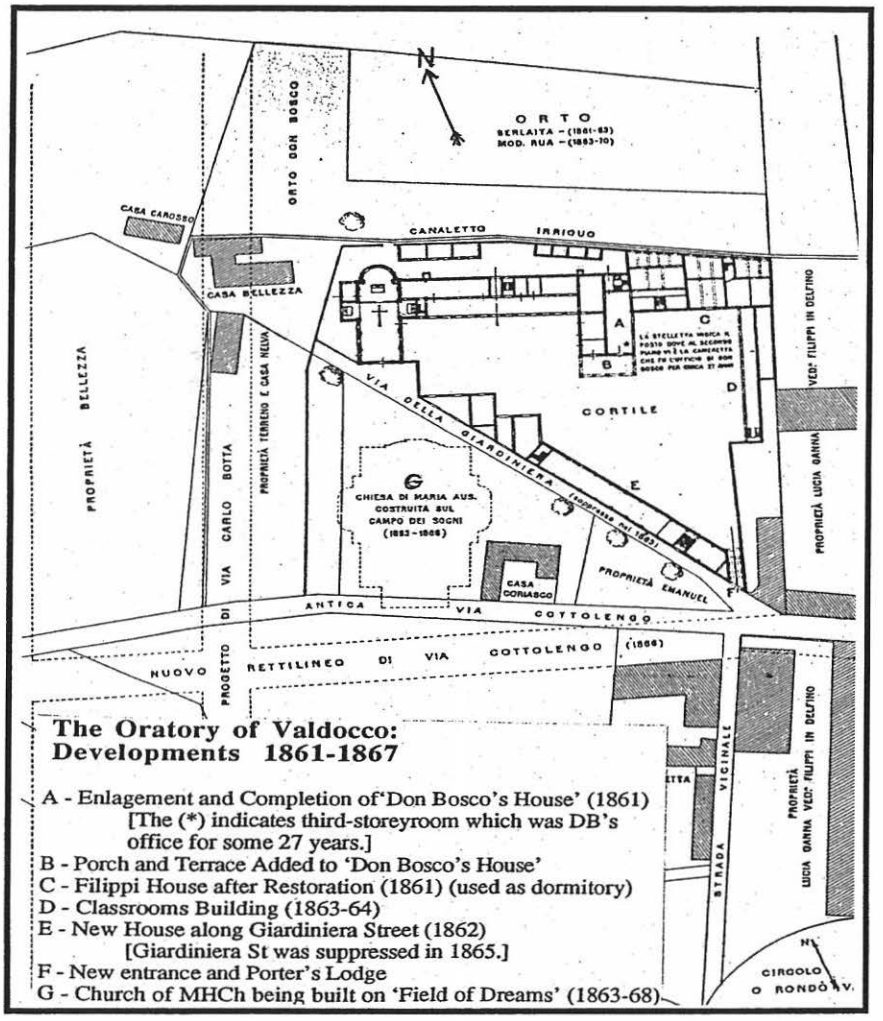
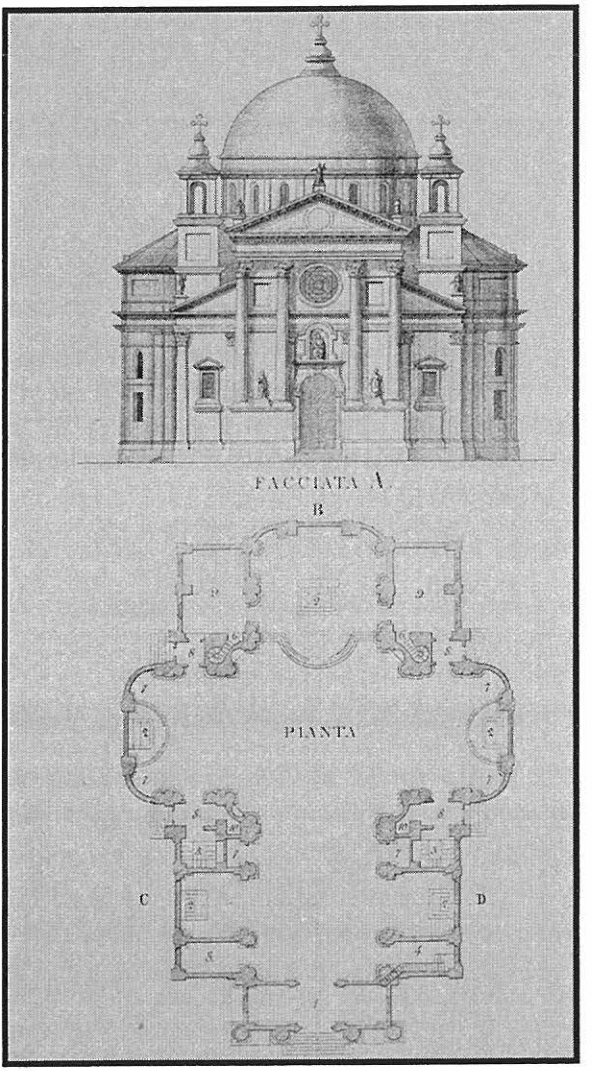
[62] Cf. *EBM* II, 232-234, Dream of the Holy Martyrs, to which Lemoyne gives a new context differing from that of his source (Barberis), and from his own transcription of it in *Documenti.*

Note on the Holy Martyrs. These are the legendary martyrs of the Thebean Legion (of Turin), Solutor, Adventor and Octavius. Don Bosco's library, assembled much later, contained several volumes on these holy martyrs. At the time of the dream, however, his knowledge of the history (or legend) of these martyrs was vague. In his *History of the Church* (1845), he speaks imprecisely about them. Later in the *Pontificate of St. Marcellinus and St. Marcellus (Catholic Readings* 13: #2, Apr. 1864), he gives a better account. Still later, Canon Lawrence Gastaldi, at Don Bosco's request, "researched" and published a larger "history" of the martyrs *(Catholic Readings* 14, # 1, Jan. 1866). He believed it possible that these Christian soldiers of the Thebean Legion suffered martyrdom in the vicinity or within the enclosure of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales (!). There is no historical evidence corroborating even the existence of these martyrs, and certainly none pinpointing the place of martyrdom. Don Bosco, however, believed in the sacredness and numinous quality of the place. And it is certain that, as he was trying to find a base for his youth apostolate in 1844, he had dreamt of a church to be built on that spot *as part of his mission.*

would infringe on seminary property (the needed strip of which was later acquired by Don Bosco, in August 1864). Finally the easternmost wall rose closer than the law allowed to the Coriasco house (acquired and demolished only in 1874).



The Oratory of Valdocco in the 1860s with the site on which the Church of Mary Help of Christians was built (1863-1868)



Architect Spezia's sketches showing frontal elevation and floor plan of the Church of Mary Help of Christians

Having obtained a building permit from the city, Don Bosco engaged contractor Charles Buzzetti for the building.[63] Architect Spezia supervised the work throughout without compensation. Excavations began in the autumn of 1863 and were completed in March 1864. The excavations turned out to be insufficient, the ground being swampy and unstable. More earth had to be removed and pylons sunk around the perimeter. In April 1864, Don Bosco went down into the excavated pit to lay the first stone and start the building. It was on this occasion that he emptied the contents of his wallet (40 centimes) into Buzzetti's hands.

Once the foundations of the church were completed, on April 27, 1865, the Turin diocese being still vacant, Bishop John Anthony Odone of Susa blessed and placed the comer stone. The Bishop was attended by young Prince Amadaeus of Savoy, Duke of Aosta (son of King Victor Emmanuel II), by the Prefect, by the Mayor and by other city dignitaries of the liberal establishment. Again attendance by such authorities, especially by the prince, may be seen as a conciliatory gesture toward the Church.

The work now proceeded at a steady pace, and by the end of 1865 the whole main building (but not the cupola) had been completed and roofed over. As the building progressed, Don Bosco gave evidence of a confidence in Divine Providence that seemed foolhardiness. But he also intensified his efforts in soliciting private and public charity. It should be noted that in his appeals Don Bosco only cited reasons of public utility and devotion for building the church, muting the matter of the title (Help of Christians), never once referring to the Society's mission or to his personal vision.

Besides the cupola much other work remained to be done, but funds ran out. Having already tapped all possible sources, Don Bosco began to beg for materials instead of money. At this point he found himself in such financial straits that he decided to replace the projected cupola with a simple domed vault. Financial administrator Father Angelo Savio and Contractor Buzzetti, however, without arguing merely stalled the work for a month, hoping that some last minute charity might enable the work to proceed according to plan. The break came when Mr. Antonio Cotta, a local banker and benefactor, was cured of a serious illness through Don Bosco's prayers. He provided immediate funds to resume work, and promised further funds to bring the work, including the cupola, to completion. But even Mr. Cotta's money proved insufficient to finance the building as called for in the plans. This explains why a "simple" and not a re-enforced ("double") cupola was built, with no proper lantern at the top. This

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[63] Charles Buzzetti was one of three Buzzettis who came to Turin from Lombardy as youngsters in search of employment. They attended the oratory in its earliest years. Charles and Joshua were successful in the building trade; Joseph became a Salesian.

in turn explains why the frescoes on the cupola ceiling inside suffered deterioration with time.[64]

The work on the "simple" cupola was completed in the summer of 1866. On September 23, young Marquis Emmanuel Fassati climbed the scaffolding with Don Bosco to set the last brick in place in the crown. The cupola rose 40 m. (ca. 131 ft.) above the floor.

In May 1867 the copper statue of Our Lady (Immaculate Conception in appearance), was placed on the pinnacle, a wooden structure topping the cupola in place of the originally planned lantern. The statue was cast and gilded through the munificence of benefactors. The newly appointed archbishop of Turin, Alessandro Riccardi di Netro blessed it on November 17, 1867.

On May 21, 1868 five bells were blessed and lifted in place on the bell tower to the right or east as one faces the front of the church looking north. (Three more were added in 1870.)

The statues of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, of cast and gilded bronze, were placed on the twin towers in 1869, replacing temporary simple crosses. The angel on the left or west tower (Michael) holds a copper banner with the word " Lepanto" drilled through it in large letters; the one on the right or east tower (Gabriel) offers a laurel crown to Our Lady standing high up on the dome.

[64] A restoration was made necessary in 1890-91, under Don Bosco's first successor, Father Michael Rua. At that time the painter Rollini was engaged to paint the great fresco on the ceiling of the cupola, and Architect Louis Caselli submitted a design for a re-enforced cupola and the lantern. But again lack of funds prevented its execution.

Church of Mary Help of Christians, frontal view, with the statues of Mary Immaculate (on pinnacle), of Archangel Michael (on left-west tower) and of Archangel Gabriel (on right-east tower).

Church of Mary Help of Christians.
Statue of Mary Immaculate on the pinnacle

Church of Mary Help of Christians.
Statues of Archangels Michael and Gabriel on twin towers

4. A "Prophetic Date" Intended for Gabriel's Banner?

Lemoyne claims that this east tower angel (Gabriel) was also intended to hold a similar banner (instead of the wreath) with a "prophetic date" cut into it. He writes:

> In a previous design, *which we saw,* the second angel, too, held a banner on which the number "19.." followed by two dots, to be drilled through the metal. It stood for another date, "nineteen hundred ..." without the final two digits that would have indicated the specific year. Though ultimately, as we have said, a laurel wreath was put into the angel's hand, we have never forgotten the mysterious date which, in our opinion, pointed to a new triumph of the Madonna. May this come soon and bring all nations under Mary's mantle. The Broggi brothers of Milan ably cast the two statues.[65]

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[65] *EBM* IX, 276. *EBM,* inexplicably, omits, without explanation, the words, "which we saw," at the beginning of the paragraph.

This design, which Lemoyne claims to have seen, has not come down to us and was in any case never executed. This is *all that can be said* regarding the much talked-about "mysterious date."

It should be borne in mind that the surge of devotion to Mary Help of Christians in the 1860s was accompanied by the expectation that Mary would intervene to defeat the enemies of the Church, and to overthrow the liberal, secular state. Prophecies (in almanacs and by "seers") circulated to that effect. (Such expectation was noted in connection with the Spoleto events described above.)

5. Features of the Church upon Completion

By May 1868 the interior of the church was completed.[66] Although the interior was simply finished with stucco and paint, a few interesting artistic and decorative features deserve to be noted.

The altarpiece, a great picture of Mary Help of Christians above the high altar, completely dominated (as it does even at present) the whole of the interior. It was the work of the painter Thomas Lorenzone after a detailed program submitted by Don Bosco. The image of the Virgin holding the Christ child appears surrounded by apostles and saints high above the city of Turin and the Oratory.

It is claimed that, in devising the image of Mary for the great altarpiece, Don Bosco took as a model the statue of Mary Help of Christians venerated in the church of St. Francis of Paola in Turin, which was familiar to him. This is possible; but Don Bosco was also acquainted with the iconographic tradition of the *Hodegetria* (Help of Christians) from the Eastern Church. In this icon, virgin and child are seen in frontal aspect (facing the beholder). The Virgin holds the child usually with her left hand, and points to him with the right. The child holds the scroll of Gospel teaching in his left, and symbolizes the Trinity with his right hand. In this icon compositional elements such as posture and attitude, the words *MP ΘY (Meter Theou* = Mother of God), *IC XC (Iesous Christos* = Jesus Christ), color of garments and other symbols, show us the Virgin Mother of God *(Theotokos)* offering and pointing to Jesus Christ who is our salvation. This icon is called *Hodegetria,* distinct from other icons such as *Eleousa* (Merciful Virgin) or *Glykophilousa* (Sweet Loving Mother).[67]

The image of Mary Help of Christians, the Virgin and Child of Don Bosco's altarpiece, is essentially of the *Hodegetria* type, even though Byzantine theological symbolism is no longer in evidence, and later devotional elements are added.

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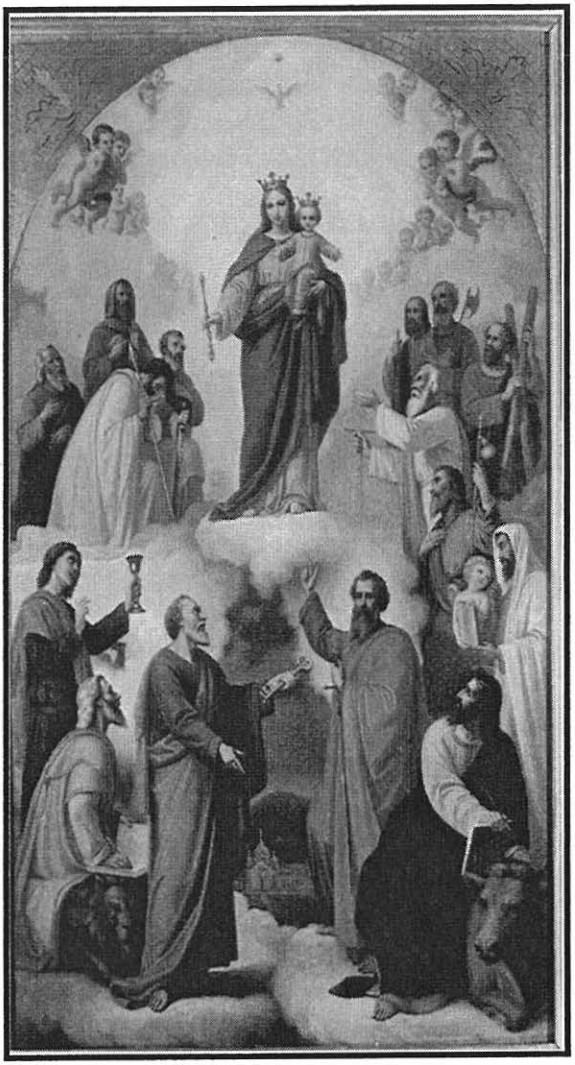
[66] Details in *EBM* IX, 108-114.

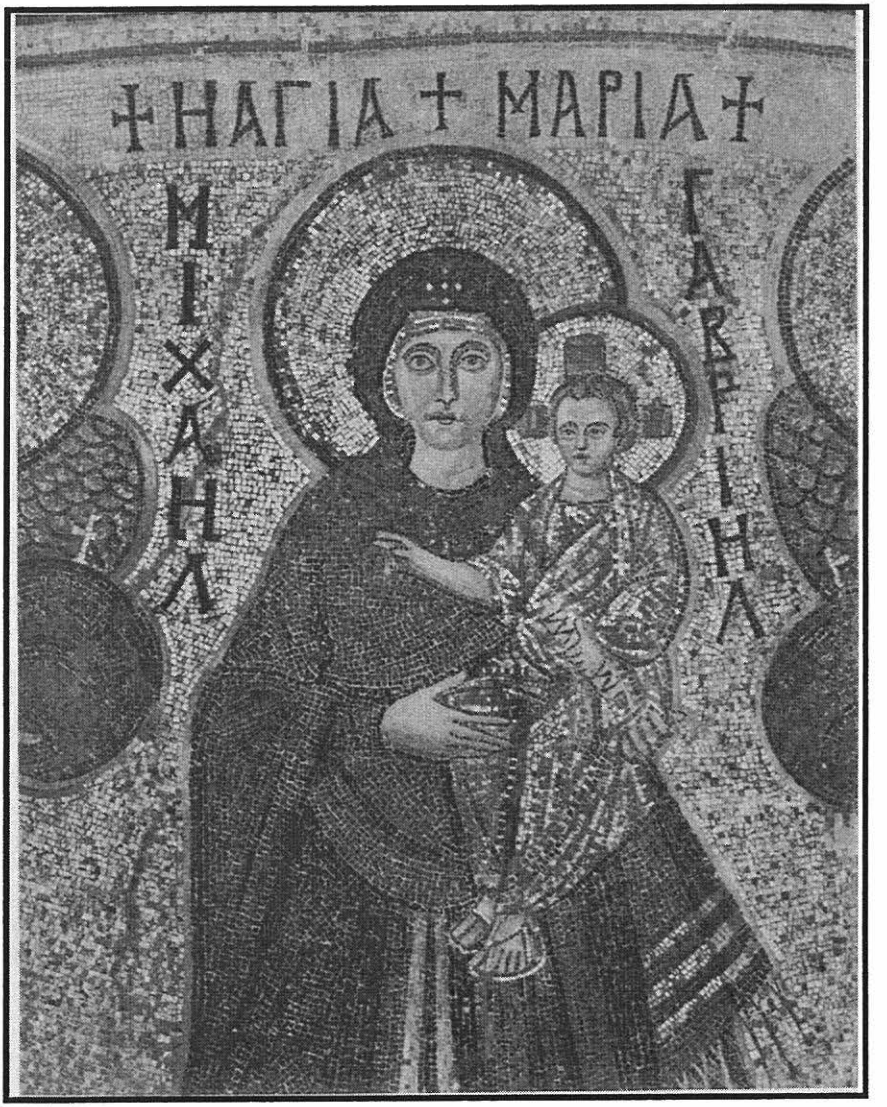
[67] *Hodegetria* is a Greek feminine noun (masc. *hodegeter, hodegos)* derived from *hodos* (way). It means "leader, escort, help on the way."



Church of Mary Help of Christians.
The great altarpiece

Church of Mary Help of Christians.
The image of Mary.
Deatil of the altarpiece

Church of St. Francis of Paola.
Statue of Mary Help of Christians. (17th Century)



Hodegetria **between Archangels Michael and Gabriel (Cyprus, Church of the Mother of God)**

Apart from the high altar, richly fashioned and decorated, four other marble altars stood in side chapels with marble railings and mosaic floors. They were dedicated to St. Joseph, St. Peter, to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (later re-dedicated to St. Francis de Sales) and to St. Anne (in spite of the fact that this chapel stood over the spot pointed out as the place of martyrdom).

The sculpted door and doorway, and the pulpit were the creation of Architect Antonio Spezia.

The choir loft over the doorway, in two graded tiers capable of accommodating a choir of some 300 singers and supported by sculpted columns, was the work and gift of a local master woodworker.

The monumental organ in the choir loft was the creation of the prestigious firm, Lingiardi of Pavia.

6. Consecration

The consecration of the church of Mary Help of Christians by Archbishop Riccardi di Netro took place on June 9, 1868.[68] The students from the Salesian schools of Mirabello and Lanzo were brought in for the occasion. Several choirs performed music by Father John Cagliero, and other composers. The altar boys added splendor to the services under the guidance of Father Joseph Bongiovanni. Don Bosco published an account of the festivities in *Rimembranza di una solennità in onore di Maria Ausiliatrice* (Souvenir of a Solemn Celebration in Honor of Mary Help of Christians).[69]

Pius IX, in a personal letter to Don Bosco wrote that it was by divine disposition that "while renewed, fierce warfare was being waged by evil people against the Catholic Church, our heavenly Patroness was being honored anew under the title of *Mary Help of Christians.*"[70]

7. Salesian Significance of the Church of Mary Help of Christians

The Spoleto ideology that Don Bosco's church with its proud title seemed to embody was quickly transcended. Don Bosco and the Salesians believed that the church had a supernatural origin of its own, and so had the devotion and spirituality connected with it. After all, was it not built in a holy place at our Lady's behest?

More importantly, the church of Mary Help of Christians had a special significance for the Salesian Society as such. It should be noted that it came into

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[68] Details in *EBM* IX, 125-140.

[69] *Letture Cattoliche* 16: #11 & 12, Nov.-Dec. 1868. *Opere Edite* XXI, 1-174.

[70] Pius IX to Don Bosco, September 23, 1868, in *IBM* IX, 358 (omitted in *EBM.)*

existence at mid-point in the great decade 1863-1874, with its consecration on June 9, 1868. The importance and significance of this event in the early history of the Salesian Society cannot be overstated. At the time the Society had not yet won canonical status and internally still lacked cohesiveness both as to membership and organization. Externally it was fighting for its very survival against superior forces, political and ecclesiastical. The church of Mary Help of Christians stood as an act of faith and courage on Don Bosco's part. Really and symbolically it stood as the center of a work and a movement that could no longer be stopped. From this church Don Bosco's apostolate would radiate to all parts of the world.

VI. Don Bosco the Apostle of Mary (Immaculate) Help of Christians: Expressions of His Devotion

1. As Founder

Don Bosco became the apostle of Mary Help of Christians through the founding, in response to need, of institutions specifically created with this title.

The Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (Salesian Sisters) is the prime example. It was founded in 1872 by Don Bosco in association with Mary Dominica Mazzarello. The religious congregation developed from a group of young women, the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, who already lived as religious in the world and engaged in works of charity. Father Dominic Pestarino, a priest active in the little town of Mornese, had banded the group together in 1854 under the leadership of the local school teacher, Angela Maccagno, and under the direction of Father Joseph Frassinetti, pastor of the church of St. Sabina in Genoa. Don Bosco first became acquainted with the Mornese group in 1864, two years after the Spoleto events, when the "decade of Mary Help of Christians" was well underway, and the church of Mary Help of Christians was already under construction. The founding was accomplished between 1869 and 1872, after the consecration of the church of Mary Help of Christians.

Other examples are the Work of Mary Help of Christians for Adult Vocations (Sons of Mary), founded in 1875, and the Archconfraternity of the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians, based at the church itself, established in 1869.

2. As a Man of Prayer

Devotion and its style are best attested in the language of prayer. In his efforts to spread and explain his own devotion to Mary (Immaculate) Help of Christians in its ecclesial and personal aspects, Don Bosco used a variety of prayer forms, some of them of his own devising, all very dear to him. The following may be mentioned,

(1) Sub Tuum Praesidium (and Memorare)

The *Sub Tuum Praesidium,* a prayer from Christian antiquity, was truly "adopted" by Don Bosco. He made frequent use of this prayer and urged others to do the same. He included it as a basic prayer in devotional works on Mary.[71] For Don Bosco, Mary Help of Christians is the *Theotokos* (Mother of God) of the *Sub Tuum Praesidium,* to whom we can flee for refuge in time of need.

(2) Mary Help of Christians, Pray for Us

The short invocation, "Mary Help of Christians, pray for us," became common practice at the Oratory in 1867, when it replaced " Seat of Wisdom, pray for us." It has ever since maintained its privileged position as the short invocation that punctuates the daily actions of individual Salesians and of Salesian communities. For this short prayer, taken from the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Don Bosco obtained indulgences in connection with the approval of the Salesian Society in 1869.[72]

(3) Blessing of Mary Help of Christians.[73]

The blessing was composed by Don Bosco and was approved with indulgences in 1878. By this time the church of Mary Help of Christians had achieved the status of a place of pilgrimage. Our Lady dispensed "graces" to the person who invoked her and received the blessing. Don Bosco published the Latin text of the Blessing of Mary Help of Christians in the Catholic newspaper *L'Unita Cattolica,* December 31, 1878, with the following words of introduction.

> The devotion to Mary Help of Christians is ever on the increase throughout the Catholic world. It was fitting therefore that this great Helper of humankind should be honored with a special rite. She is daily invoked as Help of Christians in the Litany of Loreto by the faithful. On the 24th of May the Church celebrates a special feast in her honor. Altars, churches, religious associations in all parts of the world honor her as Help of Christians.

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[71] The *Sub Tuum Praesidium* in the form of the *Memorare,* is part of each daily exercise of the *Month of May* of 1858. The Marian Calendar of 1862 for the feast of Mary Help of Christians (entry of April 26) recommends saying the *Sub Tuum Praesidium* five times [See Notes 47 and 48 and related text above]. The rite of Blessing of Mary Help of Christians begins with the *Sub Tuum Praesidium* [see Appendix IV, p. 58], etc.

[72] *EBM* IX, 266.

[73] *OE* XXXVIII, 240-242. *EBM* XIII, 380-381 gives no text. For the Latin text cf. *IBM* XIII, 956-957 (Appendix 36, omitted in *EBM).*

In the church built in her honor in Turin increasingly larger numbers of people have recourse to her daily and find help and comfort in time of trouble and pain.

A blessing rite has been in use for some time in this church. But Father [John] Bosco has now sought the approval of the Holy See, so that everything might be done in accordance with liturgical tradition. The Sacred Congregation of Rites has carefully examined the text of the blessing in the name of His Holiness Leo XIII and has given its approval. [For the text of the Blessing, see Appendix IV, p. 58.]

(4) O Mary, Mighty Virgin

In 1885 Don Bosco composed a beautiful prayer in Latin, a compilation from liturgical texts.[74] It is the prayer of the aging saint, replete with unshakable faith and hope.

Latin Text in *IBM* XVII, 309-310	**Translation**
O Maria, virgo potens, tu magnum et praeclarum in Ecclesia praesidium; tu singulare Auxilium Christianorum; tu terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata; tu cunctas haereses sola interemisti in universo mundo; tu in angustiis, tu in bello, tu in necessitatibus nos ab hoste protege, atque in aeterna gaudia in mortis hora suscipe.	O Mary, mighty Virgin, you are the strong and glorious defense established in the Church; you are the marvelous Help of Christians; you are as awesome as an army in battle array; you are the one who alone has vanquished all heresies throughout the world. In difficulties, in struggles, in straits do you defend us from the enemy, and at the hour of our death do you receive us into everlasting joy.

[74] Don Bosco sent this prayer to Bishop Cagliero in Argentina, suggesting that he might set it to music. The bishop never got around to doing that himself, but in 1918, on the 50th anniversary of the consecration of the church of Mary Help of Christians, Cardinal Cagliero had the great Salesian composer, Father John Pagella, set the text to music.

3. As Author of Devotional Pamphlets

Don Bosco authored a number of booklets by which he sought to spread devotion to Mary, especially under the title of Mary (Immaculate) Help of Christians. The list that follows gives the titles of his Marian writings. In some cases also the contents are given in appendices.

(1) The Month of May Dedicated to Mary Most Holy for the People's Use (1858) [75]

This important work was discussed above.[76] As may be seen from the titles (Cf. Appendix I, p. 46), the program of *The Month of May* falls into two sections separated by a consideration of death, judgment, and hell. Thus, at the center stand death and the verities that follow it (Day 15-19); the first section (Day 1-14) explains how one may prepare oneself for that supreme confrontation; the second section (Day 20-31) explains how one may return after having strayed, and so win heaven.

(2) Marvels of the Mother of God Invoked under the Title of Mary Help of Christians (1868).[77]

The work, true to its title, takes the reader on a historical journey through which the marvelous deeds performed by Mary Help of Christians on the Church's behalf are recounted. The booklet, composed on the occasion of the consecration of the church of Mary Help of Christians, ranks as one of Don Bosco's most important Marian writings. Its 19 chapters recall the traditional images and doctrine of Mary in the Bible and Mary's glorious feats throughout the Church's history, down to the building of the church of Mary Help of Christians. [Cf. Appendix V, p. 60.]

(3) Souvenir of a Solemnity in Honor of Mary Help of Christians (1868)[78]

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[75] *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS^ma^ Inmmacolata ad uso del popolo,* per cura del sac. Bosco Giovanni. Letture Cattoliche 6: #2 (Torino: G. B. Paravia e Co., April 1858) 192 pp., in *OE* X, 295-486. Re-edited: 1864, 1869, 1873, 1874, 1879 and 1885.

[76] Cf. note 19 above and paragraphs that follow in the text.

[77] *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice,* raccolte dal Sacerdote Giovanni Bosco. (Torino, 1868) 184 pp. [text, 5-138; hymns and appendices, 140-184], in *OE* XX, 192-376.]

[78] *Rimembranza di una solennitá onore di Maria Ausiliatrice,* pel Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni. (Torino, 1868), in *OE* XXI, 1-174.

Written immediately after the ceremonies and festivities attending the dedication of the church of Mary Help of Christians, the booklet gives a detailed account of the events on that memorable occasion.

(4) Association of the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians Canonically Established in the Church Dedicated to Her in Turin, with a Historical Notice on This Title (1869)[79]

The pamphlet describes the nature of the Association and gives an account of the origin and meaning of the title, Help of Christians.

(5) Nine Days Dedicated to the Glorious Mother of Our Savior, under the Title of Mary Help of Christians (1870)[80]

The format of each exercise of this novena is similar to the one found in the *Month of May*. The prayer, "God, come to my assistance [...]," and the short invocation, "Mary Help of Christians, pray for us," make up the introduction. The centerpiece is the meditation (a substantial spiritual reading). The exercise concludes with a Resolution and an Example. Again, as in the Month of May, Don Bosco proposes Christian life topics for consideration, rather than "glories of Mary." [Cf. Appendix VI, p. 61.]

(6) The Blessed Virgin's Appearance on the Mountain of La Salette with an Account of Other Extraordinary Events Taken from Public Documents (1871).[81]

Don Bosco tells the story of Mary's appearance in 1846 to two young shepherd children (15 and 11 years of age) on the mountain above La Salette, a village in the diocese of Grenoble (southeastern France). The Lady called for repentance from religious apathy, and entrusted each child with a "secret" (later disclosed to Pius IX). A church was built at the site in 1852-1864.

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[79] *Associazione de' Divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice canonicamente eretta nella Chiesa a Lei dedicata in Torino con ragguaglio storico si questo titolo,* pel sacerdote Giovanni Bosco. (Torino, 1869), in *OE* XXI, 339-434. Re-edited in 1878, 1881, 1887.

[80] *Nove giorni consacrati all'Augusta Madre del Salvatore sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice,* pel Sac. Giovanni Bosco (Torino, 1870), in *OE* XXII, 253-356. Re-edited in 1880, 1885.

[81] *Apparizione della Beata Vergine sulla montagna di La Salette con altri fatti prodigiosi raccolti dai pubblici documenti,* pel sacerdote Giovanni Bosco (Torino, 1871) in ***OE*** XXI, 401-492. Re-Edited in 1877.

(7) Mary Help of Christians with an Account of Some Graces Obtained during the Seven Years since the Consecration of the Church Dedicated to Her in Turin (1875).[82]

(8) The Little Cloud of Mt. Carmel or the Devotion to Mary Help of Christians with an Account of New Graces (1877).[83]

The last two pamphlets (published in *1875* and *1877* respectively) were a collection of reports of "graces" (chiefly cures) obtained by devotees from Mary Help of Christians. The two pamphlets evoked strong disapproval from Archbishop Lawrence Gastaldi, who claimed authority over such publications.

(9). The Seven Sorrows of Mary. A Set of Meditations [84]

Don Bosco compiled this devotional exercise some time during his service as chaplain in the institutions of the Marchioness Barolo (1844-1846). Don Bosco listed it in his last will and testament of 1856 as one of the pamphlets he authored, but no copy is known to have survived.

Conclusion: Transcending Historical Particularity

The Spoleto euphoria hardly outlasted the decade of the sixties nor did it survive the taking of Rome in 1870. And it was not long before Don Bosco, on his part, left behind the Marian eschatology that was strictly tied to the political-religious circumstances of the times.

After 1870 Don Bosco speaks of the Help of Christians in wider historical terms. In reference to the past, he views the Help of Christians as the power behind the triumphs of the Church throughout its history. In reference to the future, he sees in Mary's help the promise and guarantee of the ultimate success of the Church's mission and of *that of the Salesian Society in particular.*

More importantly, Don Bosco retained and incorporated into his brand of Salesian spirituality what was of enduring value in the message of the Immaculate Help of Christians. In Don Bosco's understanding and devotional practice the Immaculate Conception and the Help of Christians are joined to form a double star shining in the firmament of Salesian spirituality. The two titles appear in-

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[82] *Maria Ausiliatrice col racconto di alcune grazie ottenute nel primo settennio dalla consacrazione della Chiesa a Lei dedicata in Torino,* per cura del sacerdote Giovanni Bosco. (Torino: Tip. dell'Orat. di SFdS, 1875) in *OE* XXVI, 304-624. Re-edited in 1877.

[83] *La nuvoletta del Carmelo, assia la Divozione a Maria Ausiliatrice premiata di nuove grazie,* per cura del sacerdote Bosco Giovanni. (S. Pier d'Arena: Tip. Salesiana, 1877), in *OE* XXVIII, 449-565.

[84] *I sette dolori di Maria considerati in forma di meditazione* [1845?].

separable though symbolically distinct. They remain forever linked with his person and with the Salesian Society and its work. Mary Immaculate became the presence powering Salesian education and the spirituality connected with it. Mary Help of Christians became the presence powering the Salesian apostolate and the spirituality connected with it. Mary Immaculate is the symbol of victory over personal evil, the symbol of holiness and consecration for both educator and pupil. Mary Help of Christians is the symbol of victory over evil in society through the Salesian apostolate. The same holds true for the Salesian Sisters, who were Daughters of Mary Immaculate before being Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

The transcendence thus acquired gave these titles a worldwide scope. Through them Don Bosco became the apostle of the Immaculate Help of Christians, and the great church that he built became the radiating center of this worldwide significance.

Appendix I

Don Bosco's *Month of May*

Introduction: Devotion to Mary. How to perform the daily exercise. List of nosegays for each day.

(April 30) Why honor Mary?

[I]

(May, Day 1) *[God our Creator]* Created by God, we are called to obey God's holy law.

2. *[The soul]* Our immortal soul is endowed with freedom and can unfortunately disobey God's law.

3. *[Christ our Redeemer]* Adam and Eve disobeyed God's law, but the merciful God promised a Redeemer to the sinful human race. We may therefore be saved.

4. *[The Church of Jesus Christ]* The Redeemer established a Church within which we can work out our salvation.

5. *[The Head of the Church]* The Church has a visible head who is Christ's vicar; if we separate ourselves from him by leaving the Church, we break our vital link with Christ the Redeemer.

6. *[The Shepherds of the Church]* The head of the Church has helpers under him, who are our pastors, so that "Our parish priests unite us to our bishop, our bishop to the Pope, and the Pope to Christ."

7. *[Faith]* Our faith is what establishes our unity in the Church and with God.

8. *[The holy Sacraments]* Within the Church, in order to sustain us on our way to God, Christ instituted the seven Sacraments, "visible signs of grace necessary for salvation," "channels by which graces flow from God to us."

9. *[The dignity of the Christian]* Hence, as Christians we have God for a father, Jesus Christ for a brother, the Church for a mother, and the Word of God to guide us.

10. *[The Value of Time]* Unfortunately we compromise our salvation when we fail to live up to this dignity; yet "the years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes between our birth and our death are the time of opportunity allotted to us."

11. *[The Presence of God]* We are continuously under God's scrutiny, who is always present.

12. *[The End of Man]* We were created to know, love, and serve God.

13. *[The Salvation of One's Soul]* What counts at the end is our soul's salvation, for there is no way to remedy its loss.

14. *[Sin]* Sin, "disobedience to God's law and offense against the divine majesty," puts our salvation at risk and requires God's forgiveness.

[Death, Judgment and Hell]

15. [Death] Death is the dread moment which separates the time of God's mercy from that of God's justice.

16. *[The Individual Judgment]* The particular judgment and

17. *[The Universal Judgment]* the universal judgment are clear proof of God's justice.

18. *[The Pains of Hell]* Hell and

19. *[The Eternity of Hell]* its eternal sufferings are the lot of unrepentant sinners.

[II]

Two-thirds of the month have gone by, and the reader is still on pilgrimage. Even if we have fallen, God still places means of salvation at our disposal.

20. *[The Mercy of God]* God is merciful and calls us to trust in this mercy.

21. *[Confession]* "In the Sacrament of Confession we have the greatest proof of God's mercy."

22. *[The Confessor]* The confessor as minister of Christ "forgives our sins in God's name."

23. [*Holy Mass]* Holy Mass is the greatest sacrifice that can be offered for the glory of God and the good of souls.

24. *[Holy Communion]* Especially when one shares in the Mass through holy Communion.

25. *[The Sin of Impurity (the "dishonest" sin)]* The sin of impurity is the most abominable sin that can ensnare us along our way to salvation. It damages the body and stupefies the soul.

26. *[The Virtue of Purity]* Contrariwise, the virtue of purity makes the soul beautiful and fills it with peace and joy.

27. *[Human Respect]* Yielding to the social pressure of human respect "prevents us from doing what is right and drives us toward what is evil."

28. *[Heaven]* Heaven, the promised reward, is for us a source of strength and hope.

29. *[A Sure Way to Heaven]* Charity (literally, "almsgiving") is the way.

30. *[Mary, Our Protector in Life]* Mary's protection in life and

31. *Mary, Our Protector at the Hour of Death]* in death is available to her devotees. Hence we should increase our devotion and trust in her.

(June 1) Conclusion.

Appendix II

The Dream of 1844

According to Don Bosco's narration in his *Memoirs of the Oratory* (1875) and according to Don Bosco's narration to Father Giulio Barberis (1875)

Introduction

Below are two different reports of the same dream, that of October 9, 1844. It occurred as Don Bosco was about to leave the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*) to take a job as chaplain in the institutions of the Marchioness Barolo. His perplexity arose from the fact that he couldn't see how under the circumstances he could continue his work with the youngsters (the oratory). He was in fact contemplating dismissing the young people and dissolving the oratory. Then the reassuring dream occurred, a variant of the recurring vocation dream.

One report is from Don Bosco's own pen in his *Memoirs of the Oratory.* This portion of the *Memoirs* may have been set down in late 1874 or early 1875. The second report is from Father Giulio Barberis who heard it from Don Bosco as the two were returning to the Oratory the evening of February 2, 1875.

The two reports are considerably different, but, as the introduction of the two narratives makes clear, they are variants of the same dream experience. The Barberis report is more extensive in that it features the additional scene of the Lady pointing out the place of the holy martyrs' death, and of the great church rising on that spot. The Barberis report then goes on to quote Don Bosco's further comments relating to the acquiring of the field and to the building of church.

The Barberis report mentions a spacious square in front of the great church, and a "monument" in the middle of it. Clearly, it could not be a monument in honor of Don Bosco. He is in fact quoted as saying, "I shall have to wait and see if this is feasible." However, the Past Pupils who dedicated the magnificent monument to Don Bosco in the middle of the square in 1920 may well have thought they were fulfilling Don Bosco's "prophetic" dream.

Text of the *Dream* of 1844 as in the Berto Ms. of Don Bosco's *Memoirs of the Oratory.* [MO 2nd Dec., 15°, "Un *nuovo sogno": MO-Betor,* 86ff., *FDB* 61 D2-4.; Cf. *MO-DB,* 94-945. *FDB 58* C 11-12. Cf. *MO-En,* 209-210.]	**Text of the Dream of 1844** (of the Holy Martyrs) as Reported by Fr. Julius Barberis from Don Bosco's Narration. [ASC 110: Cronachette, Barberis, "Sogni Diversi a Lanzo": *FDB* 866 B10-C1 ("original" copy)]. For derived (calligraphic) copies, cf. *ASC* 111: Sogni-Barberis, "Il nastro bianco, Rivelazione della Congregazione," in *FDB* 1279 C6-11 and 1282 E8 -1283 A1; also *ASC* 111: Sogni, Lemoyne: *FDB* 1314 B 10-C5.1
	[Barbaris'Introduction.] On February 2, 1875, I was walking with Don Bosco back to the Oratory from Borgo San Salvario. We were alone. Among many other things, he related to me the following vision. He said that it was the first he had had regarding the congregation, and it was the longest, since it lasted the whole night. He added that he had never opened his heart to anyone about the matter. I was the first person to hear about it.
On the second Sunday in October that year (1844) I had to notify my youngsters that the Oratory would be moving to Valdocco. But the uncertainty of place, means and personnel gave me real cause for concern. The previous evening I had gone to bed with an uneasy heart. That night I had another dream which seems to be an appendix to the one I had at Becchi at the age of nine. I think it advisable to relate it in detail.	**[Don Bosco's Narration of the Dream.]** It was the year 1844. I was due to leave the Pastoral Institute of St. Francis [*Convitto Ecclesiastico*] and move to the *Rifugio* to live with Dr. Borel. I was truly worried about [what I should do with] my youngsters who attended religious instruction [the oratory] on Sundays and holy days. I did not know whether I should let them go or continue to care for them. My desire was to continue with [the work of] the oratories; but I did not see how I could. On the last Sunday I was to stay at the *Convitto* I had to

[letteralmente].

I dreamt that I was standing in the middle of a multitude of wolves, goats and kids, lambs, ewes, rams, dogs and birds. All together they raised a din, a racket, or better, a bedlam to frighten the stoutest heart. I wanted to run away, when a Lady, very nicely dressed in the style of a young shepherdess, motioned to me to follow and accompany that strange flock, while she walked at the head of it. We kept wandering from place to place, making three stations or stops. Each time we stopped, many of those animals were turned into lambs in ever increasing numbers. After much walking, I found myself in a grassy field where all those animals gamboled and grazed together without the least attempt on the part of some to harm the others.

Worn out with fatigue, I wanted to sit down by the side of a nearby road; but the young shepherdess invited me to walk on a little farther. After another short journey, I found myself in a large courtyard. It was ringed round with porticoes, and at one end stood a church. At that point I realized that four-fifths of those animals had turned into lambs, and their notify my youngsters that they should no longer meet there, as they did usually. In fact I was debating whether I should tell them that they need not meet anywhere, since the oratory would be terminated; or else I should tell them of a new place where they could meet.

On the night between Saturday and Sunday, I dreamt that I was in a vast plain crowded with an enormous number of youngsters. Some were fighting or swearing; others were stealing or engaged in nasty behavior. The air was thick with flying rocks, from the little war that was being waged by those youngsters—all of them abandoned and gone bad. I was about to leave the scene, when I saw a Lady beside me. "Go among those youngsters," [she told me]. "But what can I do with these street urchins?" [I replied]. "Go in and work," [she countered]. I went in among them; but what could I do? No place was available to shelter even one of them. I wanted to do some good to them; but no one [of the people around] paid any attention to me or lent a helping hand. I then turned to the Lady, and she said, "Here is the place," and pointed to a grassy field. "There is nothing here but a field," I objected. She replied: "My Son and His Apostles had no place where to rest their heads." I began to work in that field; but I saw that my efforts were largely unavailing. I had to find some place where I could provide shelter for some [of the lads] that were wholly abandoned. Then the Lady led me a little farther out and said: "Take a good look." I looked and saw a little church, a small courtyard, with youngsters, etc.

number grew very large. Just then several young shepherds came along to care for them; but they stayed only a short time, and were soon gone.

Then something wonderful happened. Many of the lambs were changed into young shepherds, and as they grew up they cared for the others. As the number of young shepherds grew very large, they split up and went to other places to gather other strange animals and guide them into other folds.

I wanted to be off, because it seemed time [for me] to go and celebrate Mass; but the shepherdess invited me to look to the south. I looked and saw a field sown with maize, potatoes, cabbages, beets, [various kinds of] lettuce and many other vegetables. "Look again," she said to me. So I looked again and saw a magnificent, great church. An orchestra and music, both instrumental and vocal, were inviting me to sing Mass. Inside the church a white band was displayed on which was written in large block letters, *Hic domus mea, inde gloria mea* [Here is my dwelling place, from hence my glory.]

But since the church soon proved inadequate, I again appealed to her, and she pointed out another church and a much larger building. Then the Lady took me a little farther to the side, and said: "This is the place where the glorious martyrs of Turin, Adventor and Octavius, suffered martyrdom.[85] It is my wish that here God be honored in a very special manner." So saying, she put her foot out and laid it on the place where the martyrdom had taken place, thus indicating the exact spot. I wanted to leave some kind of marker there so as to remember it; but I could not find anything about for this purpose. Nevertheless, I kept the place clearly in mind. In the meantime, I saw myself surrounded by a very vast number of youngsters; but, as I looked to Our Lady, the means and the premises also kept growing apace. I then saw a very large church rising on the very spot which she had pointed out to me as the place where the martyrdom had taken place. There were buildings all around [the church] and a beautiful square in front with a monument at the center of it.

While all this was going on, I had the help of priests and clerical students; but they helped me only for a short while, and then ran off. I would make the greatest efforts to win them over, but after a while they would leave, and I would be left all alone. So, I appealed

[85] The legend of the holy martyrs of the Thebean legion mentions three names, Solutor, Adventor and Octavius (or Octavian). It also mentions the fact that only Adventor and Octavius were martyred in Turin. At the outbreak of the persecution, Solutor took to the hills. He was pursued by the Roman soldiers, captured and martyred at Ivrea, about 50 km. north of Turin.

As the dream continued, I made it a point of asking the shepherdess where I was, and what was the meaning of the journeying, of the stops, of the house, of the first and of the second church. [She replied:] "You will understand everything when with your bodily eyes you see in reality all that you now perceive only with the eyes of the mind." Thinking that I was awake, I said: "I see clearly, and I see with my bodily eyes. I know where I am going and what I am doing."

At that moment the bell of the Church of St. Francis sounded the *Angelus,* and I woke up.

This [dream] lasted most of the night. A lot of detail went with it. At the time I grasped little of its meaning since I put little faith in it. But I gained an understanding of it gradually as its premonitions came true one after another. And later, in conjunction with another dream, it even served as a guideline for my decisions.

once more to the Lady. "Do you want to know what will prevent them from getting away?" she asked. "Take this little cord or ribbon and bind their foreheads with it." I noticed the little white ribbon and I notice the word *Obedience* written on it. I tried to do as Our Lady suggested and began to bind the heads of some [of my helpers] with the ribbon, with immediate and great good results. And the results were even better as time went on. Those individuals gave up the idea of leaving and stayed on to help me. Thus was our Congregation born.

A lot of other things occurred [in the dream], but I see no point in relating them now. (He may have been referring to great things to come.) Suffice it to say that from that time on I have walked on sure ground both in matters regarding the Congregation and the Oratory, and in matters regarding politics. It was because of having seen church, house, playgrounds, youngsters, clerical students and priests helping me, and how the whole undertaking should be managed, that I began to mention the matter to others and to speak of it as a reality. That is why many people regarded the story as irrational nonsense. They thought I had lost my mind, and wanted to commit me.

	[Don Bosco's Additional Comments.] As for the spot which the Virgin Mary had pointed out to Don Bosco as the place of Sts. Adventor's and Octavius' martyrdom, the Rev. Don Bosco had some further comments. He continued: I made it a point of never telling anybody where that had taken place. I simply gave the task of researching the matter over to Canon Gastaldi (now our Archbishop). The object was to determine as nearly as possible, on the basis of historical data, where the martyrdom had taken place. (In fact I suggested that he publish a book on the life of these saints.) He researched the matter thoroughly and concluded that Valdocco, and indeed approximately the area of our oratory, was the most likely place. Meanwhile the decision was taken to build the church at the very place of the martyrdom. That area had formerly been my property. However, since there had been proposals to build the church elsewhere, that is, where the Defilippi [Filippi] house was located, that plot of ground had been sold to the Rosminians, who meant to establish a house of their own there. Negotiations for the purchase of the Defilippi house were already far advanced. The church was to be built on the courtyard in front of the house, so that it would be visible from as far as Dora Grossa Street. But just as the deal was about to be closed, it fell through. The owners were no longer willing to let the house go. Then we again set our mind on the original location; but, of course, the land had been sold to the Rosminians. At this point we received

	word that Abbé Rosmini had passed away. Under the circumstances the Rosminians were no longer keen on setting up a house in Turin. So they put that land up for sale, but with the condition that [the agents] should not deal with Don Bosco. They refused to sell to him because they had bought the plot from him at a high price, and it was now depreciated by 8/10 [of its former value]. Seeing that they refused to sell to me, I got Bishop Negroni's brother to act for me (Negroni, o Negrotti, o Neirotti, o Neironi, or some like name). Without giving anything away, he handled the matter for me, and I appeared only for the signing of the contract. The procurator of the Rosminians was no little surprised at seeing me. He would have none of it, of course, since he had received clear instructions to the contrary. But the matter was urgent. The notary public had been called in. Several city councilors were also present. There was no time for him to write [for instructions]. Everyone put pressure on him to go along with the terms of the negotiations and sell to me. So that is where the new church was built. Without any reference on my part to any specific place, one of the chapels turned out to be situated at the very spot which the Blessed Virgin had pointed out to me. It is the chapel we know as St. Anne's chapel. The altar in it, however, is consecrated specifically to the holy martyrs of Turin. I will not go into the wondrous events that accompanied the building of the church. I could tell you stories that would astonish you, so extraordinary are they.

	Also, in front of the church that the Blessed Virgin showed me there stretched a beautiful square with a monument in the middle of it. Now I shall wait and see if this will be feasible. All the difficulties that may be lying ahead are forestalled, and I walk in full daylight. I have a clear view of the things that will happen to us, of the difficulties, and of the manner dealing with them.

Appendix III

The *Sub Tuum Praesidium*

The *Sub Tuum Praesidium* is thought to have originated in Egypt (Alexandria) and from there to have passed into all the ancient liturgies (Byzantine, Roman, Ambrosian, Coptic, etc.)

The most ancient form of the text of the *Sub Tuum Presidium* is attested by the Rylands Papyrus 470. This papyrus fragment (18 x 9.4 cm.) was discovered in Egypt, acquired by the Rylands Library (Manchester, UK) in 1917, and published by C.H. Roberts in 1938.[86]

It was variously dated: from the fourth century (Roberts, on the basis of the use of the term *Theotokos,* Mother of God); or from the third century (Lobel, 1948, on paleographic grounds). As for internal evidence, it is noted that, although made a dogma at the Council of Ephesus (431), the doctrine of Mary *theotokos* is attested from the middle of the third century. Moreover, the expressions, "We flee for refuge," "Deliver us from danger in an evil time," seem to suggest persecution, perhaps that of Decius and Valerian (250 C.E.).

The Rylands Papyrus 470 is believed to represent the Alexandrian, perhaps original, form of the text.

As the papyrus is frayed all around and torn on the right side, reconstructions differ slightly. The reconstruction made on the basis of the Byzantine form of the text is the most common.

Form of the Rylands Papyrus 470 Reconstructed after the Byzantine Form

Under thy tender-mercy we-flee-for refuge, Mother-of-God;
our entreaties do not despise in *an-evil-time*;
but from danger *deliver us,* O-alone chaste, (alone) the blessed-one.

Byzantine Form of the Text[87]

Under thy tender-mercy we-flee-for refuge, Mother-of-God;

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[86] C. H. Roberts, *Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri: John Rylands Library. Theological and Literary Texts* III (Manchester, 1938), 46-47, no. 470.

[87] The Byzantine text is closest to that of the Rylands Papyrus. The chief differences are as follows: In the 2nd line Rylands has the singular, "in an-evil-time." whereas the Byzantine (as well as the Roman and Coptic texts) has the plural. It is likely that the prayer was composed for a specific situation (e.g. persecution), and was afterwards generalized through use of the plural form. In the third line, the Byzantine text has the stronger verb, "ransom," for the softer one "deliver" of the Alexandrian form.

our entreaties do not despise *in evil-times*;
but from danger *ransom us,* O-alone chaste, (alone) [the] blessed-one

Roman Form of the Text

Sub tuum praesidium confugimus, (sancta) Dei Genitrix;
Under thy protection we-flee-for refuge, God's (holy) Mother;

nostras deprecationes ne despicias in necessitatibus;
Our entreaties do not despise in times-of-need;

sed a periculis (cunctis) libera nos (semper), (sola) Virgo (gloriosa) (et) benedicta.
but from (all) dangers deliver us (ever), (alone) Virgin (glorious) (and) blessed.

Ambrosian Form of the Text

Sub tuam misericordiam confugimus, Dei Genetrix;
Under thy mercy we-flee-for-refuge, Mother of God;

nostram deprecationem, ne inducas in tentationem;
our entreaty do not lead into temptation;[88]

sed a periculo libera nos, sola casta (et) benedicta.
but from danger deliver us, O-alone chaste (and) blessed.

Coptic Form of the Text (Translation)

Under the protection of thy mercies we-flee-for-refuge, Mother-of-God;
our entreaties do not despise in times of need;
but from perdition save us, [thou who] alone [art] (chaste and) blessed.

Brief Commentary

The prayer is dominated by the Marian title, Mother of God *(Theotokos).* Two other epithets emphasize the dignity of Mary: (1) "Alone chaste (Greek, *mone hagne)*" (Roman form, "virgin"). "Alone" points beyond mere chastity to virginity (in divine motherhood). (2) "The blessed one (*he eulogemene*)," may allude to the blessings bestowed on Mary in Luke's gospel. But it is pointed out that the

[88] This surprising variant, "our entreaty do not lead into temptation," seems to ask Mary to help us pray aright or without failing.

term in Jewish and early Christian texts is most often referred to God (the Blessed One). Furthermore a variant of the Byzantine text has "glorious *(semne)* and blessed" (see also variant in the Roman form). "Glorious *(semne)"* in ancient Greece was an attribute of deities.

In this prayer, therefore, the Virgin *Theotokos,* the merciful and high-exalted Being to whom one can flee for refuge, is *directly asked to perform an act of salvation* ("deliver, ransom"). This form of Marian prayer goes beyond the other two forms of Marian prayer, that is, of intercession and of communion. In the prayer of communion (exemplified in Eucharistic prayers of the Mass) the Christian community remembers Mary's role and prays to God to be found in communion with her. The prayer of intercession is addressed either to God through Mary's intercession (as often in the liturgy), or to Mary to intercede with God. On the contrary, the *Sub Tuum Praesidium* asks Mary *directly* to "save" or "ransom." Needless to say, this last form of Marian prayer, which may be regarded as characteristic of Catholic Marian devotion, is theologically the most difficult. But the *Sub Tuum Praesidium* attests that even this form of Marian prayer dates back to the Church of the Fathers.

The *Memorare,* attributed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153), is regarded as a paraphrase of the *Sub Tuum Praesidium.* It reads:

> Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who *fled to your protection,* implored your help, or sought your intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, we *fly unto you, O Virgin of virgins,* our Mother! To you we come, before you we stand, sinful and sorrowful. *O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not our petitions,* but *in your mercy* hear and answer us. Amen.

In form the *Memorare* has come a fairly long way from the older prayer, but it should be regarded as a developed paraphrase of it. The italicized phrases show its dependence on the older prayer. The main difference lies in the absence of the title *Theotokos* (Mother of God) and in the use instead of the titles, "Our Mother" and "Mother of the Word Incarnate."

Appendix IV

Blessing of Mary Help of Christians

Formula Benedictionis in honorem et cum invocatione Beatae Mariae Virginis sub titulo Auxilium Christianorum.	Ritual Blessing in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary Invoked under the title of Help of Christians
[Sacerdos superpelliceo et stola indutus, dicit.]	*[The priest, vested in surplice and stole, says:]*
V) Adiutorium nostrum in nomine Domini. R) Qui fecit caelum et terram.	R) Our help is in the name of the Lord. V) Who made heaven and earth.
Ave Maria, ecc.	Hail Mary, etc.
Sub tuum praesidium confugimus, Sancta Dei Genetrix, nostras deprecationes ne despicias in necessitatibus nostris; sed a periculis cunctis libera nos semper, Virgo gloriosa et benedicta.	We fly to your patronage, O Holy Mother of God; despise not our petitions in our necessities; but deliver us from all dangers always, O Virgin glorious and blessed.
V) Maria, auxilium christianorum, R) Ora pro nobis	V) Mary, Help of Christians, R) Pray for us.
V) Domine, exaudi orationem meam. R) Et clamor meus ad te veniat.	V) O Lord, hear my prayer. R) And let my cry come up to you.
V) Dominus vobiscum, R) Et cum spiritu tuo.	V) The Lord be with you. R) And with your spirit.

Oremus Omnipotens, sempiterne Deus, qui gloriosae Virginis Matris Mariae corpus et animam, ut dignum Filii tui habitaculum effici mereretur, Spiritu Sancto cooperante, praeparasti; da, ut cuius commemoratione laetamur, eius pia intercessione ab instantibus malis et a morte perpetua liberemur. Per eundem Christum Dominum nostrum. R) Amen *[Et personam benedicendam aspergit aqua benedicta.]*	Let us pray Almighty, ever living God, by the active cooperation of the Holy Spirit you prepared the body and soul of the Virgin Mother Mary, so that she might be a worthy dwelling place for your Son. As we joyfully keep her memorial, we pray that through her merciful intercession we may be freed from the evils that beset us and from eternal death. Through Christ our Lord. R) Amen *[The priest sprinkles the person receiving the blessing with holy water.]*
Taurinen. Sacra Rituum Congregatio, utendo facultatibus sibi specialiter a Sanctissimo Domino Nostro Leone Papa XIII tributis, ad enixas preces rev. Domini Joannis Bosco, rectoris ecclesiae ac sodalitatis Beatae Mariae Virginis sub titulo Auxilium Christianorum in civitate Taurinensi, suprascriptam benedictionis formulam, antea a se rite revisam, approbavit atque in usum praefatae ecclesiae et sodalitatis benigne concessit.—Die 18 maii 1878. Th. M[a] Card. Martinelli, S.R.C. Praef. Plac. Ralli, S.R.C. Secr.	[For the diocese] of Turin This Sacred Congregation of Rites acting by the special powers received from His Holiness Pope Leo XIII accepts the petition of the Rev. Father John Bosco, rector of the church and of the confraternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Help of Christians. Accordingly, after careful examination, it approves the text of ritual blessing as given above for use in the above-mentioned church and by the above-mentioned confraternity.—May 18,1878. Th. M. Card. Martinelli, Prefect of the S.C.R. Placidus Ralli, Secretary of the S.C.R.

Appendix V

Marvels of the Mother of God

The 19 chapters develop the following themes.

1. Symbols of Mary's help to the human race in the Old Testament.
2. Mary shown as the Help of Christians in Gabriel's message that she is to be Mother of God, and in the words of Elizabeth. (A commentary on the Lucan texts, from Church Fathers and theologians.)
3. At the wedding feast of Cana Mary shows her zeal and her power with Jesus.
4. By the will of Jesus dying on the cross, Mary is made Help of Christians when John is made her son.
5. The first Christians' devotion to Mary Most Holy.
6. The Blessed Virgin explains the truths of the Christian faith to St. Gregory the Wonder Worker (3rd c.). Nestorius is condemned at the Council of Ephesus (431) and comes to a bad end for denying Mary's divine motherhood.
7. Mary helps those who work for the true faith, while God punishes heretics who revile the Virgin Mary.
8. Mary protects Christian armies fighting for the true faith.
9. The battle of Lepanto and the introduction of the title Help of Christians into the Litany (1571).
10. The deliverance of Vienna (1683).
11. The Association of Mary Help of Christians in Munich, Bavaria, founded in 1684, after the deliverance of Vienna.
12. Appropriateness of the feast of Mary Help of Christians. (This chapter gives a summary of all the foregoing, to show why Mary Help of Christians should be honored with a special feast.)
13. Institution of the feast of Mary Help of Christians by Pius VII (1815).
14. Rediscovery of the image of Mary Help of Christians at Spoleto (the story of the Spoleto events, as described above).
15. Devotion to Mary Help of Christians in Turin, and planning for a church in her honor.

16-18. Story of the construction, and description, of the church of Mary Help of Christians.

19. Where did the money necessary for the building come from? (Offerings for graces received.)

Appendix VI

Novena in Preparation for the Feast of Mary Help of Christians

The topics for the nine exercises are as follows:

1 . Mary, the Help of Christians in life's needs.

2. Honoring Mary on her feast days.

3. Promoting the observance of Sundays and holy days, the avoidance of blasphemy and of bad talk.

4. Frequent Confession.

5. Frequent Communion.

6. Excuses and pretexts for not receiving Communion frequently.

7. Holy Mass.

8. Honoring Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

9. Joy and assurance experienced by Mary's devotees at the point of death.

[10.] Feast of Mary Help of Christians.

Act of consecration to Mary.