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## The Catholic Readings: Writing for the Masses

Stephen B. Whelan, S.D.B.

The *Lettura Cattolica* or the *Catholic Readings* was St. John Bosco's imaginative brainchild in his effort to bring good, decent and inspiring reading into the home. It appealed to a wide spectrum of persons from young to old, from commoners to high-born. It was his most effective counter-measure against the anti-clerical, anti-Catholic and anti-religious forces which were growing in influence during his lifetime.

The sheer volume of the work, the persevering fidelity to seek material, write original pieces, get guest authors, meet deadlines and see to printing, production and distribution staggers the mind. A careful analysis of this apostolate reveals how much St. John Bosco involved others, laity, diocesan clergy, religious and, later, his own Salesians, in the apostolate of the press for the sake of the Gospel and the mission of the Church.

St. John Bosco's brain child was not an original idea. He recognized a good thing when he saw it. His genius was in his organizational skills and persuasiveness which he used to develop the concept of a popular, easy-to-read periodical that was inexpensive and convenient (pocketbook size). He made several abortive attempts at a newspaper and other writings. It was by no means an easy and risk-free enterprise.

When the tolerance of other religious groups, especially the Waldensians.<sup>1</sup> became law, these groups quickly exploited their advantage to proselytize. To

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<sup>1</sup> The Waldensians were founded by Waldo (Valdes or Valdesius) a merchant of Lyons who, in 1173, was inspired by the ideal of evangelical poverty, and renounced his great wealth. He had the Gospels translated into the vernacular and began to preach. He and his followers ran afoul of church authority by preaching without ecclesiastical approval. He later fell into an antisacerdotal heresy and was condemned. His followers came into Piedmont c. 1330. Their contempt for the power of the Church, which was the basis for the heresy, led the Waldensians into a greater radical attitude. The French Waldensians, reduced in numbers, transferred allegiance to the Reformation churches. The Piedmontese Waldensians, however, stood their ground and were involved in the revolution of 1655. In 1848, the act of emancipation granted them equality with Catholics. Cf. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967, Vol. 14, p. 770-771.

counter these groups, Don Bosco filled a need for a popular Catholic press which was practically non-existent at the time. His *Catholic Readings* was a pocket compilation of moral tales, lives of the saints, works of instruction and apologetics. The format followed a long succession of endeavors. It was his adaptation of an idea begun in 1835 in Savoy by the *Bibliothèque des familles chrétiennes*, by similar projects in Lille and other French areas, and, as late as 1849 in Florence and Turin, by a periodic pocket edition of "good books." Don Bosco's genius was not to create a new format but to take over a good idea and to organize its implementation in an effective, enterprising way.<sup>2</sup>

On July 25, 1849, while Archbishop Fransoni of Turin was in exile,<sup>3</sup> the bishops of Piedmont opened a five-day episcopal conference at Villanovetta,<sup>4</sup> in the diocese of Saluzzo, to plan strategies to deal with the social, political and religious crises that were coming. The conference appointed a committee of bishops to compile a uniform catechism which was a project dear to the heart of Don Bosco.<sup>5</sup> The bishops of Mondovì and Ivrea were appointed to study a plan

In the United States they established small communities in Missouri, Texas, and Utah, and most importantly around Valdese, in North Carolina, now a thriving industrial town whose population around 3,000 is still largely Waldensian. Cf. *The Gentleman's Almanac: "Don Bosco's Venture Into Popular Education"* by Fr. Michael Ribotta, S.D.B., *Journal of Salesian Studies*, Berkeley, CA, Vol. II, #2, 1991, p. 55, footnote 2.

<sup>2</sup> Don Bosco's *Catholic Readings* were typographically and literarily inferior but they outlasted the *Collezione di buoni libri* published in Turin. The *Catholic Readings* were more popular in tone and Don Bosco made every personal effort to get them into the parishes of Piedmont. He succeeded in getting them to be regarded as a most useful and almost indispensable resource by bishops, priests, wealthy and generous Catholics, teachers, and the humble populace. The clergy and influential laity helped with money and efforts at wider distribution, so that monthly circulation rose from 3,000 to 10,000 in his lifetime. Success was also due to the fact that the simple prose was adapted to the understanding of all, and that it was addressed to people well disposed to religion and hungry for reading material. (Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco: Life and Work* (2nd ed. Tr. By John Drury, New Rochelle, N.Y.: Don Bosco Publications, 1985), pp. 280-281.)

<sup>3</sup> In 1849 the spirit of independence and unity was about to come to a head with the Italian war against Austria in 1848-1849. The Catholic Church supported the Restoration after the downfall of Napoleon (1815). Its resistance to the "Statuto" of 1848 resulted in the exile of Archbishop Louis Fransoni to Lyons, France. Later the war of 1848 caused Pope Pius IX to flee Rome to Gaeta, between Rome and Naples in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

<sup>4</sup> The dioceses represented were: Saluzzo, Alba, Acqui, Ivrea, Asti, Mondovì, Cuneo, Susa, Pinerolo. The vicar general of Turin, Filippo Ravina was there as well as the capitular vicar of Fossano, Giacinto Ricca. Cf. Stella, Pietro, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)* (Roma: LAS, 1980), p. 347.

<sup>5</sup> During his days at the Convitto and especially afterward, from 1844 to 1851, when he began his special apostolate of the Oratory, Don Bosco catechized hundreds

for printing and distributing good books to counteract the teachings of an irreligious press against Faith, Church authority, and morals. In fact, according to Fr. François Desramaut, Bishop Louis Moreno of Ivrea is to be credited with the idea of a truly popular series, in response to the Waldensian propaganda.<sup>6</sup> When Don Bosco began planning the Catholic Readings he often met with Bishop Moreno either in Ivrea or at the Oratory.<sup>7</sup>

As mentioned above, the battle lines were drawn between traditional Catholicism and militant Protestantism, with the Waldensians<sup>8</sup> leading the attack. Don Bosco, as well as the bishops of Piedmont, saw that the simple and uneducated people were at risk. He faced the situation with the total driving force of his fighting spirit.<sup>9</sup> Fr. Joseph Aubry considered as Don Bosco's outstanding

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of boys using the archdiocesan catechism. At first he used the *Epitome of Christian Doctrine for Use in the Diocese of Turin*. It consisted of five parts, but Don Bosco used only the first two (1. Prayers and devotions and 2. a short catechism for children preparing for confession and first communion). The rest did not fit his needs or the abilities of his boys. In 1846 Archbishop Louis Fransoni published a new catechism called the Abridged Catechism for Children Preparing for [the Reception of the Sacraments of] Confession and Communion and of All Others Who Need to Learn the Rudiments of Christian Doctrine, for Use in the Diocese of Turin. Again Don Bosco used this official catechism and yet it still did not meet his needs. His attempt in 1855 to revise the Abridged Catechism was not successful and was never published.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. François Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888)*. Torino, SEI, 1996, pp. 348-359.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *EBM III*, pp. 379ff.

<sup>8</sup> The Waldensians took advantage of the newly acquired equality of rights and of the liberty of the press. King Charles Albert, in granting them freedom in 1848, seems to have only wished to allow them open religious services. But they did not see it like that. They set out in every possible way to spread their teaching among the Catholic population by tracts and books. A flood of pamphlets, biblical and non-biblical, began to flow into the villages and homes. They strove to extend their influence, especially among the uneducated. These numbered about two-fifths of the total population of Turin in 1848. According to Don Bosco, the Waldensian missionaries operated with all the more success because "Catholics, who had been accustomed to rely on the civil laws which had protected and defended them, published only a few journals, classical or learned, but not a single newspaper or book which could be put into the hands of the people." Don Bosco responded as early as 1850 (and perhaps even as early as 1848) with his *Avvisi ai Cattolici* (Warnings to Catholics). "In two months," he tells us, "more than 200,000 copies were circulated."

<sup>9</sup> Don Bosco's ecclesiology must be understood to explain the Church's and his attitude toward the civil government in general and the Protestants in particular. Due to historical changes in the 11th and 12th centuries, the Church, as an institution, was first considered in the realm of dogmatic theology and the first treatises were written. The first great historical challenge was the confrontation of Boniface VIII and Philip the Fair. An effort was made to clarify the relationship between the spiritual and temporal powers of Church and State. In the Middle Ages many abuses called into question the authority and mediation of the visible Church. For example, the

achievement the launching of the Catholic Readings. As one of the chief editors, he assumed the role of teacher who formed and guided the people's faith by way of wise spiritual direction.

His efforts had three goals: 1) To present the fundamental premises of the Christian faith, correct errors, and counter current criticism; 2) To provide edifying examples for young and old; 3) To offer forms of prayer for worship and devotion. This kind of literature was particularly valid for its impressive exposition. It was clear, lively, and "popular" in the best sense of the word.<sup>10</sup>

According to Fr. J. B. Lemoyne,<sup>11</sup> the idea of the Catholic Readings was entirely Don Bosco's. We know this is an exaggeration. However, he did anticipate the concerns of the Piedmontese bishops and, in a sense, dropped in their laps a project that fulfilled their expectations and the needs of their people. Don Bosco prayed long and hard over this. He consulted various authorities and weighed the pros and cons of undertaking this project.<sup>12</sup> It just may be that he

Franciscan Spirituals, the Waldensians, John Wyclif and John Hus, and the conciliar movement after the tragedy of the Western Schism. All this came to a head in the Reformation and the theology of Martin Luther and other Protestants. The Counter-Reformation stressed the exterior visible aspect of the Church (Juan de Torquemada, O.P.). Formal theses dealt almost exclusively with the visible hierarchical structure of the Church (Cardinal Robert Bellarmine). Later, the Church had to face the threats from Jansenism, Gallicanism, the rationalism of the 18th century. The ecclesiology became primarily apologetical and was described as "hierarchology." This was the ecclesiology Don Bosco learned and believed and defended. It reached its high point at Vatican Council I with the solemn definition of the primacy of jurisdiction and infallibility of the pope.

Don Bosco gave his followers three loves: Love of the Holy Eucharist, Love of Mary under the title of Help of Christians, and Love of the Pope. Any attack against religion, devotion or the Pope inspired him to rise in their defense in a great variety of ways. One of these was his writing and publishing apostolate. His spirit and charism were manifest in seminal form in his early writings.

<sup>10</sup> Aubry, Fr. Joseph (Ed.), *The Spiritual Writings of Saint John Bosco*, Trans. by Fr. Joseph Caselli, S.D.B., Don Bosco Publications, New Rochelle, NY, 1984. p. 159.

<sup>11</sup> *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, an American Edition, translated from the Original Italian, Rev. Diego Bortigello, S.D.B. Editor-in-chief, (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Salesiana Publishers, 1972), IV, p. 364. (EBM)

<sup>12</sup> Fr. Pietro Stella mentions that, as a result of the synod of Piedmont bishops called to deal with the inroads of Protestantism, the *Catholic Readings* arose as a response to the founding of the Waldensian periodical *La buona novella* (*The Good News*) which began in Turin. It was printed by A. Pons Artists and Company in 1851 with the subtitle *Giornale dell'evangelizzazione italiana* (*The Journal of Italian Evangelization*) edited by J.P. Meille. Cf.: Stella, Pietro, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol. II: *Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità* (LAS-ROMA, 1981), p. 83, footnote #83. Other Waldensian publications were *La Luce Evangelica* and *Il Rogantino Piemontese*.

was torn between the needs of the times and his abortive effort with the *L'Amico della Gioventù* (The Friend of Youth).<sup>13</sup>

## 1853

By the beginning of 1853, Don Bosco had assembled an editorial staff of scholarly priests and laymen. He was busy with all that goes into announcing a new undertaking of this nature, viz., formal announcements, meetings, establishment of subscription centers, mailing promotional literature and dealing with printers. With the permission of the bishops of Piedmont Don Bosco drew up a prospectus<sup>14</sup> and mailed out thousands. He included it in every piece of mail he sent out and made it a life-long practice. This was the beginning of an apostolate of the pen that would produce hundreds of works and about a hundred pamphlets from Don Bosco's pen alone. As will be seen, many of these works will have an anti-Protestant slant, esp. against the Waldensians.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In 1849, Don Bosco was still not satisfied with the amount and distribution of good literature to edify the faithful, defend the Faith and Church and expose errors. He decided to start a politico-religious newspaper called *L'Amico della Gioventù* (*The Friend of Youth*). He was shrewd in adding the word "political" to the masthead because the word "religious" would not have been attractive to many. 1849 was a time of tremendous social upheaval. The newspaper was to appear twice a week with Don Bosco as managing editor. A circular letter soliciting subscriptions was sent out to all the priests of the area. There was small response although 800 lire were collected. During the first three months the newspaper had about 137 subscribers, though the readership was greater since Don Bosco distributed it gratis among his boys. After three months the subscriptions dropped to 116 and by the end of 1849 *L'Amico della Gioventù* was merged with *L'Istruttore del Popolo*. Don Bosco stayed on for four or five months to ensure proper editorial policies. Much later this newspaper fell into the hands of the liberals, but by then Don Bosco had long since disassociated himself from it. Don Bosco felt that this experience was Divine Providence telling him that he was not to be a journalist but to continue the writing of edifying books and pamphlets.

<sup>14</sup> The prospectus contained the following information: 1) These booklets will be written in a simple, popular style and their contents will deal exclusively with the Catholic Faith. 2) These booklets, averaging about 100 pages, will be published monthly. Format, stock, and font will be exactly as in this prospectus. 3) The subscription rate (payable in advance) is 90 centesimi per semester, or L. 1.80 per year. The mail delivery rate is L. 1.40 per semester, or L. 2.80 per year. 4) There will be no charge for domestic bulk deliveries of at least fifty copies to distributors who wish to cooperate in this apostolic work. 5) In towns and rural centers subscriptions may be paid to agents appointed by the respective bishops to whom we recommend this new publication. (Addresses of bishops enclosed). Cf. *EBM IV*, p. 541.

<sup>15</sup> These works must be taken within the historical context in which they were written. Without doubt there was a much greater militancy between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Italy (as well as elsewhere) 140 years ago. Cf. also footnote 8 above.

The *Catholic Readings* were destined for success. The records show that in the period of 1853–1860 there were 9,000+ subscriptions. There were 10,000 in 1861 and from 1870 the number remained constant, between 12,000 and 14,000 and the average monthly printing was 15,000+.

Less than a month before the first number of the *Catholic Readings* was to come out Bishop Moreno of Ivrea (one of the forces behind the project) suggested some changes as to size<sup>16</sup> and frequency. He suggested bi-monthly rather than monthly with 24 to 36 pages each. He suggested some less polemical articles as well as lives of the saints and other items. However, he left it up to Don Bosco and the editorial board.<sup>17</sup> Don Bosco tried to follow the above suggestions. The magazine, at first bi-monthly, had about 100 pages.

On March 1, 1853, the first issue of the *Catholic Readings* made its appearance. The inaugural article was entitled: *Il Cattolico Istruito nella sua Religione: Trattenimenti di un Padre di Famiglia co'suoi Figliuoli Secondo i Bisogni del Tempo epilogati dal sac. Bosco Giovanni* (The Well-Instructed Catholic: A Father's Timely Talks to His Children with a summation by Fr. John Bosco).<sup>18</sup> According to Fr. Lemoyne, attorney Louis Gallo of Genoa, a close friend of Don Bosco, assumed the role of the father. The entire work was 452 pages in length. It was divided into two main parts:<sup>19</sup> the First Part consisted in basic catechetical questions from the knowledge of God to His revelation in the Old and New Testaments to the Resurrection of Jesus; the Second Part dealt with the founding of Christianity and the history of the Catholic Church with special attention to the controversies and heresies and a Catholic's answer to them. It concludes with Don Bosco's appeal to Protestant ministers.<sup>20</sup> This substantial work was spread over five of the first year's *Catholic Readings* (March, April, May, July and Sep-

<sup>16</sup> The booklets were truly "pocket" books. The dimensions varied in width between 3.3" (85mm) and 3.5" (90mm) and in length between 5.3" (135mm) and 5.5" (140mm). Only very rarely was it larger (3.67" (95mm) and 5.67" (145mm)).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *EBM IV*, pp. 374f.

<sup>18</sup> *EBM IV*, p. 400.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Opere Edite* (hereinafter referred to as *OE*) *IV*, table of contents (pages unnumbered).

<sup>20</sup> "I appeal to you as a brother who loves you, and loves you more than you believe, as a brother who is willing to sacrifice himself and all he has for your salvation. In fear and trembling for the salvation of your souls and those of your disciples, I raise my eyes and hands to heaven and invite you and all the faithful to pray to our merciful God. May He enlighten you with His heavenly grace so that you may return to the fold of Jesus Christ. By so doing you will cause great joy in heaven and gain peace for your own souls and a well-founded hope of salvation for all." (*EBM IV*, p. 401; *OE IV*, LAS-ROMA, pp. 637–638.)

tember). This work was combined into a single volume in the *Catholic Readings* in 1883 with the title "The Catholic in the World."<sup>21</sup>

According to Don Bosco, his first issues were forced to remain only manuscripts since no bishop, fearing head-on confrontation with Protestants, would back his work. He complained to Archbishop Franzoni in exile and the Archbishop referred Don Bosco's work to Bishop Moreno of Ivrea.<sup>22</sup> Bishop Moreno looked into the matter and realized that he had found the man who would put into execution the plan he himself had been forming.

The April, 1853, issue of 54 pages contained reprints of the lives of St. Zita and St. Isidore followed by three edifying stories or parables. Don Bosco was the probable author of the introduction. This introduction brings out in sharp relief the uncompromising battle he waged against Protestantism.<sup>23</sup>

One of the many arguments proving the sanctity of the Catholic Church is that all her members are called to sanctity and many of them have actually distinguished themselves by their outstanding virtues and miracles. Other religions, on the contrary, had their origin in sin. Their very beginnings must be traced not to men of virtue and holiness, but to libertines (reprobates) or apostates. The virtues that may be found among their disciples either spring from the sentiments which God instilled into the hearts of men when He endowed them with reason, or they are remnants of their former Catholic Faith.

We challenge Calvinists, Lutherans, Waldensians, Anglicans, and any other Protestant sect to produce evidence of a single person whose virtuous life has achieved the heroic degree demanded by the Church of Rome from her children before elevating them to the honors of the altars... Have they ever been able to point to a miracle that can be attributed to the intercession of their founders or any of their disciples? Never! On the contrary, the Roman Catholic Church has been marked by genuine miracles; the apostolic processes concerning them are open to any examiner. Miracles prove beyond doubt the truth and sanctity of religion. God cannot permit them to bolster any Church other than the one founded by Him to be the sole font of truth and sanctity; otherwise He Himself would lead us into error. The saints and miracles within the Roman Catholic Church indis-

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<sup>21</sup> Fr. Pietro Stella, S.D.B., *Gli scritti a stampa di San Giovanni Bosco*, LAS-Roma, 1977, p. 71.

<sup>22</sup> *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Don Bosco Publications, New Rochelle, New York, 1989, pp. 403-404.

<sup>23</sup> We are again reminded of the historical context when Catholicism and Protestantism were active belligerents, more than a century before the rapprochement and mutual understanding that has arisen since the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965). Also at stake, from Don Bosco's point of view, was, given the new religious freedom granted in Piedmont at this time, the welfare of his boys when the Waldensians took the initiative by building a church near the Oratory of St. Aloysius and tried to recruit the oratory boys.

putably prove that she is the true Church founded by God, the source of all holiness and of all miracles.<sup>24</sup>

The zeal and charism of Don Bosco shines through this uncompromising challenge. He shows great concern for the Faith and the Church of Rome. But more importantly he defends his boys. One can almost see the fire in his eyes as he pens this introduction. His boys, and Catholics in general, are being beset by forces, arguments and enticements beyond their ability. How much they actually understood this introduction, if, in fact they bothered to read it(!), cannot be evaluated. But they knew this came from Don Bosco whom they instinctively recognized as a protector looking out for their welfare. They certainly were edified and inspired by the lives of the saints recounted in this booklet as well as the appended parables. The boys were certainly "youth at risk," the ones to whom Don Bosco dedicated his life.

An interesting sidelight was that these first issues of the *Catholic Readings* carried the declaration "With Ecclesiastical Approval" but no signature. This demonstrates the fearsome fight going on among the denominations to the extent that none of the official diocesan censors wanted to be identified with such inflammatory statements.<sup>25</sup> There was a real threat of physical violence (to which we will refer later) in reaction to the solid arguments offered in the *Catholic Readings*. This also testifies to the courage of Don Bosco who stated more than once that he was willing to lay down his life for the Faith, the Church and his boys.

The April and June issues formed a booklet entitled *A Good Mother: Moral Talks in a Popular Style*. The "good mother" was a housewife who explained the Apostles' Creed and gave some moral exhortations to a group of neighbors she had invited to her home.<sup>26</sup> The May issue, entitled: *A Factual Account of the Miracle of the Blessed Sacrament in Turin on June 6, 1453, with a Brief Description of the Quadricentennial Celebrations*, was the famous booklet that Don Bosco asked Fr. Michael Rua<sup>27</sup> to reprint when the next golden anniversary occurred in 1903. The August issue was titled: *Fatti Contemporanei Esposti in Forma di Dialogo (Contemporary Events Presented in Dialog Form)*. It contained seven dialogues: 1) A Waldensian minister bribes a Catholic to abandon his faith; 2) An apostate reveals the causes of his defection to a close friend; 3) A

<sup>24</sup> EBM IV, pp. 401–402; OE V, pp. 173f.

<sup>25</sup> EBM IV, p. 402f.

<sup>26</sup> EBM IV, p. 403. Again the "anonymous" author (whom Fr. J. B. Lemoyne understands to be Don Bosco) uses language like: *Unprincipled men, perverse false teachings, irreligious publications, subvert morals, seduce and corrupt, etc.*

<sup>27</sup> Michael Rua came to Don Bosco's Oratory in 1845 as a boy of 12. He went on to join Don Bosco's Society of St. Francis de Sales (Salesians) and after Don Bosco's death in 1888, became his successor guiding the Society until his own death in 1910. He was beatified by Pope Paul VI in 1972.

repentant sinner explains how his return to the Catholic Church was due to reading Don Bosco's *Warnings to Catholics*; 4) A dying man, after getting no help from his minister, calls for the priest who was once his confessor; 5) A dying man begs a Waldensian minister to get a priest, who refuses, and the man dies without the Last Sacraments; 6) A mother tells a priest of her sorrow that her son has forsaken the Church; 7) After losing his faith through the reading of impious books and joining an irreligious workers' society, a boy meets a priest, once his boyhood friend, and joyfully returns to the Catholic Church.<sup>28</sup> The September issue of the *Catholic Readings* was entitled: *Examples of Christian Virtue—Selections from Various Authors*. This issue was a respite from the polemic with the Waldensians. The October issue was an anonymous booklet entitled: *Family Discussion on the Precepts of the Church*. It was set in the workshop of a tailor whose son had absorbed impious notions during a stay in the capital (Turin). In it a priest answered the boy's objections and proved that the Church had the right to make laws.

The Waldensians were successful in offering an almanac titled: *The Family Friend*. Almanacs have always been popular, containing information, farming and household tips, astronomical and astrological charts, stories, games, puzzles and jokes. A good example is Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac* which Don Bosco quoted in 1865.<sup>29</sup> Today we are familiar with the *World Almanac* and *The Old Farmers Almanac* and many others. Don Bosco consulted with distributors and authors<sup>30</sup> of the *Catholic Readings* and came up with the title *Il Galantuomo*<sup>31</sup>—*National Almanac for the Year 1854 and Other Useful Information*. With all the other projects Don Bosco had the almanac ready by

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<sup>28</sup> EBM IV, p. 433.

<sup>29</sup> For more on *Il Galantuomo* the excellent article "Don Bosco's Venture into Popular Education—The Gentleman's Almanac," by Fr. Michael Ribotta, S.D.B., *Journal of Salesian Studies*, vol. II, #2, Fall 1991, Berkeley, CA pp. 55–77 is recommended reading.

<sup>30</sup> Of the 432 manuscripts for the *Catholic Readings* some 70 were written personally by Don Bosco. Some of the contributors to the *Catholic Readings* were the prior of Santa Sabina, in Genoa, Fr. Joseph Frassinetti, the Vincentian, Fr. Francis Martinengo, Fr. Charles Philip da Poirino, Canon Lawrence Gastaldi, later Archbishop of Turin, Bishop Louis Gaston de Ségur, Fr. Isidore Mullois, Marianist, Fr. Marc-André Huguet and many others. From the Oratory came Frs. John Baptist Lemoyne, John Bonetti, Julius Barberis, John Baptist Francesia and Stephen Tirone. Cf. *Don Bosco nella Storia: Atti del Primo Congresso Internazionale su Don Bosco*, Midali, Mario (ed.) 1989, LAS-Roma, p. 444.

<sup>31</sup> "Galantuomo" may translate also into a "trustworthy," "honest," "reliable" man. This issue of 117 pages was compiled by Francesco and Alessandro Faà di Bruno. Don Bosco wrote the introduction (Cf. *OE V*, pp. 233–237).

October 1853.<sup>32</sup> This Almanac was a New Year's gift to subscribers of the *Catholic Readings* and became an annual publication. It began with a printing of 16,000 copies which increased year by year.<sup>33</sup> The two issues of the *Catholic Readings* for the second half of October and the first half of November were entitled *Henry Buche: A Christian Workman*.<sup>34</sup> This anonymous biography was dedicated to workmen in general. It described the life of a pious and devout layman (†1696) whose faith led him to found a religious society of shoemakers. It was a loose organization which had no habit, vows or enclosure. Its members were bound solely by charity and love for their work. Perhaps Don Bosco saw a glimmer of an idea for his society in this example.

The November issue was entitled: *Unhappiness of a Recent Apostate*. This anonymous story describes a man who had lost his peace of mind, peace of heart, and also his reputation.

It was at this time that the Catholic newspaper *Civiltà Cattolica* wrote the following:

Many zealous priests spare neither effort nor expense in combating heresy. Among these there is Don Bosco, a humble but highly commendable priest whom we have already had occasion to mention in this periodical. He is the founder and publisher of the *Catholic Readings* a monthly publication in defense of our Faith. Its fifth issue deals with Islamism, the Greek schism, and the Waldensian sect whose true origin and bad faith are exposed. The greatest merit of these booklets is that they are doctrinally sound, written in a popular style, and very timely.

Don Bosco truly deserves our praise. We exhort parents to take a deep interest in the Faith of their children and to avail themselves of the *Catholic Readings* in order to instill into their minds the seeds of an up-to-date religious education.<sup>35</sup>

To repeat an important custom of Don Bosco's: He was motivated only in doing good in all his writings. "My goal in preaching and writing was always and solely that of making myself understood by using a simple style and vocabulary."<sup>36</sup> He strove for simplicity in speaking and writing. He asked people who

<sup>32</sup> It contained a listing of the members of the royal family, the dates of eclipses, a brief direction for watches operating on mean solar time such as used on the railroads. It also listed the national and international fairs, the rates of exchange for foreign currency, cooking recipes, moral and religious reflections, interesting facts and anecdotes designed to enhance the people's appreciation of the priesthood, the confutation of certain Waldensian ideas, and some Italian and Piedmontese poems.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *EBM IV*, pp. 448ff.

<sup>34</sup> *EBM IV*, pp. 450–451.

<sup>35</sup> *EBM IV*, p. 452.

<sup>36</sup> *EBM IV*, p. 452.

were not highly educated, such as his own mother, Mamma Margaret, and the doorkeepers of Barolo's *Rifugio* and the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*, to read his manuscripts and then tell him what they had read.<sup>37</sup> He consciously avoided showing off his erudition in the classics by avoiding any learned turns of phrase. Despite his expertise in many areas he always submitted his manuscripts to persons of learning such as Silvio Pellico, Fr. Amadeus Peyron and Fr. Matthew Picco. At times he would also ask his clerics to go over them.

After the first six months of publishing, Don Bosco had the twelve issues of the *Catholic Readings* bound into six small volumes as a gift to Pope Pius IX and sent them to him. Cardinal James Antonelli, responding for the Pope, encouraged Don Bosco to continue the good work he was doing and granted him and his co-workers an apostolic blessing. Don Bosco continued to push the *Catholic Readings* with everyone he could, whether they be hierarchy or laity.

The December issue of the *Catholic Readings* printed a two-act play that Don Bosco wrote entitled: *A Debate between a Lawyer and a Waldensian Minister*. He wrote that many items mentioned in the play were true and in spite of his fierce attacks on the Protestants they were never personal but doctrinal. He writes in the preface: "Whatever the play says about Protestants must be understood as referring to their doctrinal errors and never as a personal attack."<sup>38</sup>

Don Bosco's writing caused strong reactions from the Waldensians. He was so uncompromising that, although his works were approved by the diocesan censors, they refused putting their names to the approval lest they be sought out for recriminations. This is precisely what happened to Don Bosco. He was threatened, beaten, almost kidnapped, shot at and endured constant verbal abuse from his enemies.<sup>39</sup>

## 1854

1854 was a year of some import. In January the first nucleus of the future Salesian Society got together to form an "association." They were Rocchietti, Artiglia, Michael Rua and John Cagliero. In March the diocesan seminaries were commandeered to quarter the military (Italy would be involved in the Crimean War at the beginning of 1855); in March a cholera epidemic began in Turin. In August Fr. Alasonatti came to Valdocco. Pope Pius IX proclaimed a Holy Year

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *EBM II*, p. 210. Peter Malan, nicknamed "Parin" was the original "founder" of the *Rifugio*. He saw young girls neglected by parents, homeless and exposed to many dangers. He brought them in to his home and had his wife care for them, feeding them and temporarily sheltering them. He even sought employment for them. When the Marchioness Barolo heard of this, she took it over, establishing the *Rifugio* and appointing Parin as the doorkeeper.

<sup>38</sup> *EBM IV*, p. 483; *OE V*, pp. 103–104.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Desramaut, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

on August 1st. In October Dominic Savio entered the Oratory. In November the Rattazzi Laws were presented to the Chamber of Deputies. These led to the suppression of many religious congregations. In October or November the bookbindery shop was opened at the Oratory and in December the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was proclaimed.

The January 1854 issue of the *Catholic Readings* was a reprint of Don Bosco's short biography of Louis Comollo. He reprinted it again in 1867 and then in 1884 printed a new edition. Don Bosco wrote in the introduction:

We are delighted to inform our readers of a cherished letter from His Eminence (James) Cardinal Antonelli written on behalf of His Holiness Pope Pius IX.

The gracious support of the Vicar of Christ has encouraged us to zealously endure the burdens we have assumed in our desire to defend our holy Faith and unmask the seductive wiles of the foes of our religion. Undoubtedly, this support will also greatly encourage our friends and strengthen the hope of those whom we strive to protect against error.<sup>40</sup>

This letter also represents Don Bosco's thinking. His ecclesiology was that of the Jesus' declaration to Peter in the Gospel, "...You are 'Rock,' and on this rock I will build my church, and the jaws of death shall not prevail against it. I will entrust to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you declare bound on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatever you declare loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven."<sup>41</sup> Don Bosco was absolutely convinced that the Church was God's presence in this world and the Pope was the vicar of Jesus Christ. Any attack against the Church or the Pope was an attack against God. Don Bosco was an uncompromising warrior in defense of both and in a particular way the defender of the faith of his boys, thus the strength and force found in his writings.

The second half of January saw another issue of the *Catholic Readings* which was a fifth reprint of a 48 page pamphlet by Fr. Serafino Sordi, S.J. entitled: *A Catholic Handbook on Revolutions*. Don Bosco resisted associating this pamphlet with the *Catholic Readings*. But Bishop Louis Moreno of Ivrea wanted it published. Don Bosco felt this was dangerous since it attacked many persons then in power. The bishop insisted and Don Bosco humbly and courageously acquiesced knowing full well the consequences.<sup>42</sup> When the issue came out he

<sup>40</sup> EBM V, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> *New American Bible*, Matt. 16: 18–19.

<sup>42</sup> It is probable that Don Bosco wrote the brief introduction. "The difficult times in which we live, the calumnies with which the enemies of the light strive to hide the truth, make a catechism in which the Catholic teachings on revolutions are explained an urgent necessity. This is something that will certainly serve as a norm for the Catholic if ever such sad situations should arise and will also serve to help men of judgment to understand that Catholicism must not and has never, nor will ever promote revolutions.

was summoned before the civil authorities, many of whom were named or implicated, and reprimanded.<sup>43</sup> However, the storm soon passed.

Also in January, 1854, Fr. Vincent Devit of the Institute of Charity at Stresa wrote on behalf of Fr. Antonio Rosmini asking Don Bosco to submit a plan for a proposed printshop at the Oratory. Don Bosco was already thinking along these lines to facilitate his many publications. He submitted a plan but it was shelved and it was not until 1861–1862 that he established a printshop at the Oratory.<sup>44</sup>

Don Bosco continued to recruit learned priests and laymen to contribute to the *Catholic Readings*. Some willingly did so while others shied away from it, so that during the first fifteen years a large number of issues were authored by Don Bosco and the rest were carefully checked and edited by him. Fr. Lemoyne leaves the impression that Don Bosco actually wrote most of them. According to Fr. Pietro Stella the reverse seems to be true. Much was reprinted or authored by others with Don Bosco as editor. However, Don Bosco usually contributed something to each issue even if it was only an introduction.

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"The fundamental reason that Catholicism will never come to favor revolution is that all Catholics are bound to a sure authority, which is the Church and this Church, supported by Sacred Scripture, says to all the faithful: Obey legitimate authority; he who resists authority, resists God, from whom all authority comes. And since the faithful must accept this teaching, it follows that no good Catholic will support revolutions. It is precisely for this reason that a learned Protestant, reflecting on the unity of doctrine in the Catholic Church said recently: 'The Catholic Church alone is a school of respect.' (Guizot)

"On the contrary, Protestantism allows anyone to interpret the Bible as he wants, so that one no longer has any authority except one's own understanding. The Protestant, if he wants to be consistent with himself, must say: 'Only *my* authority and *my* reason. Therefore, away with every religious dependence, away with every social convention, every order, every law, every authority: *my* reason and no one else's: only force will make me obey.' Even more dangerous if one or more Protestants took it into their heads to form a conspiracy to kill a superior, even the king himself, they could do it, provided it seemed to them the right thing to do.

"Meanwhile, we recommend that Catholics read this catechism attentively, and practice the maxims contained therein; we would likewise want it to serve to open the eyes of so many ill-advised and unfortunate people, who either because of malice or ignorance are active in promoting a sect, Protestantism, which, in offering man the option of believing in what he wants and of doing what he thinks fit, opens a disastrous abyss in society and gives legitimacy to every disorder, every misdeed. There is no escaping God." (*OE V*, pp. 245–246.)

<sup>43</sup> The "revolution" was not the overthrow of the Kingdom of Savoy but the ousting of the Austrians and the annexing of the Papal States to effect the unification of Italy.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *EBM V*, pp. 4–6.

The two February issues were combined and printed as one volume called: *Rules of Proper Behavior for Farmers and Others*. Don Bosco reveals his Salesian spirituality in his advertisement for this issue:

My dear friends, I wish I could make you prize your station in life above all others. I wish I could make you realize that your lot is most honorable, most favored by God, most conducive to holiness... You are the ministers, the instruments of the Creator's power... If you were to abandon your work, life could no longer continue... Your calling deserves the highest respect because God made the first man on earth a tiller of the soil.<sup>45</sup>

This issue also marked the first anniversary of the *Catholic Readings*. Don Bosco recalled the original announcement of a monthly booklet of no less than 96 pages and stated that due to its popularity it became a bi-monthly of 50 to 60 pages and that a total of 1,296 pages were offered without an increase of subscription rates. He goes on to repeat his vision and purpose for the *Catholic Readings*:

The enemies of our Faith and country strive feverishly with all available means to corrupt the minds and hearts of lukewarm, uneducated people. Therefore, it is our duty and the duty of all good citizens to exert every effort and use all lawful means to stem this raging torrent which threatens to sweep away both Church and State in its murky waters.<sup>46</sup>

In reality, more often than not, the two bi-monthly issues were combined into one. The March (1854) issue was a combined issue of 107 pages. It was entitled: *The Conversion of a Waldensian Girl*. This was written entirely by Don Bosco and was a true story with names changed to protect persons' identities. It told the story of a young girl born of non-Catholic parents who yearned for the peace of mind enjoyed by her young Catholic friends. She asked for and secretly obtained instruction in the Catholic Faith from the local pastor. When this became known, she had to face the opposition of her minister and the anger and punishment of her father. Eventually, amid startling circumstances, she managed to run away from home and become a Catholic despite the pitfalls laid for her.<sup>47</sup>

The foreword contained an extract of a notice sent by bishop John Peter Losana of Biella to the faithful of his diocese on March 15, 1854:

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<sup>45</sup> EBM V, p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> EBM V, p 17. Don Bosco also announces that a French translation of all the issues published to date is being prepared for the French-speaking provinces and dioceses.

<sup>47</sup> EBM V, pp. 17–18.

In earlier days the Waldensians used to hand out free copies of an adulterated Bible and other publications attacking Catholic dogmas, worship, and moral teachings. When these tactics proved unsuccessful, they decided to bribe consciences with gold. Now they have gone one step further. Deceit is their latest weapon. Only the infernal enemy could have devised this new strategy. Evil salesmen have now taken to the road. Under the pretext of selling various wares, they enter stores and homes, accost pedestrians, and push low-priced heretical and impious books or give them away free. Their eye-catching titles lure the uneducated who unsuspectingly carry the poison into their own homes—a poison all the more deadly because it is not recognized as such beforehand.

Then Don Bosco added a few lines of his own:

My dear friends, the enemies of Catholicism, and especially the Waldensians, are doing their utmost to undermine our beliefs. We exhort and urge all who cherish the Faith of their fathers to join us in defending this most precious gift of God. Help us to spread *Catholic Readings* so that we may unmask deceit and heresy and safeguard the Catholic Faith of our people. It alone has the whole truth; without it one cannot please God; outside of it no one can be saved.<sup>48</sup>

The two April issues of the *Catholic Readings* were bound into one title: *A Collection of Curious Contemporary Episodes*. This was, for the most part, written by Don Bosco. It contained articles concerning Protestant proselytizing. The chapters were: *A Pastor in the Midst of Assassins*; *A Workman's Common Sense*; *A Fine Similitude*; *Catholic Steadfastness*; *Calamities of the Year*; *The Truth Known*; and *Working on Sundays and Holy Days*. He also added the story of the apparition of the Blessed Virgin to two young shepherds at La Salette and a story about the conversion and death of a Protestant young man. Don Bosco writes in the foreword:

In publishing this collection of contemporary episodes, we think it advisable to inform our readers that Protestants have expressed great indignation over certain publications that have exposed their activities. They have done so orally, by letter, and through their own press. We expected them to question our veracity or to point out errors, but nothing of the sort has occurred.

They had nothing but a tissue of insults and abuse against the *Catholic Readings* and its writers. We shall not reciprocate in the least; when it comes to insults and abuse, we gladly accord them the palm of victory. It has always been our policy never to publish anything offensive to charity; this we owe to every person. We willingly pardon those who abuse us. On our part, we shall continue our policy of avoiding personal attacks, but we shall also continue to be unrelenting in our goal of unmasking error.

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<sup>48</sup> *EBM V*, p. 18.

May God abundantly bless our readers and all those who cooperate with us in upholding the truth and defending the holy Catholic Faith.<sup>49</sup>

The May issue was also a combined booklet. It was entitled: *A Popular Handbook on Protestantism*, written by Fr. John Perrone, S.J. It dealt with the history and doctrine of Protestantism, its insidious wiles, and the unhappy life and miserable death of apostates.<sup>50</sup> The second issue of June and the two of July were also written by Fr. Perrone under the same title. Comprising 200 pages, it contained explanations for the origin and nature of the Catholic Church as well as the marks and prerogatives of the true Church of Jesus Christ—her infallibility, holiness, steadfastness, and immutability. It then described her structure, stated the members' obligation to heed her ministers, and refuted Protestant objections to the Inquisition, the sacrament of Penance, the Mass, purgatory, Benediction, and the veneration of the saints. Finally, it brought out the duty of the faithful to love the Church.<sup>51</sup>

The August issue was again combined. It is an issue that has been lost. It was anonymous but may have been a work of Fr. Charles Philip da Poirino, O.F.M.C.<sup>52</sup> It was entitled: *A Discussion about the Sacrifice of the Mass* and consisted of a series of dialogues between a father and his son that proved the divine institution of the sacrifices of the Old Law and the Mass and refuted the brazen lies of some Protestants by appealing to the various ancient liturgies of the Christian churches—including the schismatic ones—all of which fully confirmed Catholic beliefs. Finally, it brought out the excellence of the Mass, its infinite value, and its benefits to the celebrant and to the faithful, whether living or dead.<sup>53</sup>

In the Fall of 1854 Don Bosco opened a bookbinding shop which, among other tasks, began to assemble the *Catholic Readings*. This enabled him to shave some costs from his printing expenses as well as teach a trade to his boys.

The cholera epidemic raged from March to September, 1854. Although Don Bosco was involved in helping during the epidemic and would eventually take in many boys orphaned by it, it did not prevent him from readying the two September issues (combined in one volume) of the *Catholic Readings*. It was entitled: *Trafficking in Souls and the Protestant Agitation in Europe*. The author is anonymous, although it could be Louis Rendu.<sup>54</sup> An excerpt demonstrates the Catholic-Protestant confrontation:

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *EBM* V, pp. 21–22.

<sup>50</sup> *EBM* V, p. 22.

<sup>51</sup> *EBM* V, p. 43.

<sup>52</sup> Stella, Pietro, *Gli Scritti a stampa di San Giovanni Bosco*, LAS-ROMA, 1977, p. 30.

<sup>53</sup> *EBM* V, pp. 43–44.

<sup>54</sup> Stella, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

With thirty pieces of silver, like Judas, the Waldensians seek to bribe Catholics, especially the poor, to deny Jesus Christ and His Church. Although many are Protestants in good faith, the leaders of the various sects believe neither in the Bible nor in God. While they are in hopeless disagreement in matters of belief, they are united on one point: their venomous hatred of the Catholic Church.

Protestant ministers, catechists, and missionaries do not act in good faith for two reasons. First, their untenable principle of free thinking denies the infallibility of the Pope and the Church while granting it to every illiterate dolt; second, their motive is the handsome remuneration they receive. Their purpose is not to convert sinners but to corrupt innocent, unsuspecting souls and persuade them to rebel against truth. Their model is Satan who deceived our first parents in Eden; they knowingly ape his evil ways.<sup>55</sup>

An anonymous series of five issues of the *Catholic Readings* was prepared for the two issues of October, the first half of November and the two issues of February, 1855. The series was entitled: *Informal Talks on Maintaining Good Health*. They contained ten talks on the physical and moral consequences of excessive drinking and eating, of some immoral habits, and of anger and selfishness. The author offered suggestions to help overcome these faults, and he described the beneficial effects of such self-reform. He also touched upon the private sinful lives of the leaders of Protestantism. The final conversation offered a golden rule for family and social life. The speaker was a friendly guidance counselor who had been able to direct several young men and restore peace and happiness in their homes.<sup>56</sup>

The Holy Year, which opened on August 1, 1854, was solemnly celebrated in the Archdiocese of Turin from October 1st to December 31st. For that occasion, the November issue of the *Catholic Readings* was entitled *The Jubilee and Prayers for the Visits to Churches*. It contained the full text of the encyclical and Don Bosco wrote this foreword:

The main purpose of this booklet is to show the Jewish origin of the Jubilee and its adoption by the Catholic church.

For the sake of authenticity and accuracy I have diligently checked the most ancient and reliable authors. I have also included some practices of piety for the prescribed visits to the three selected churches.

This booklet will also disprove the allegation of Protestants and fallen-away Catholics that the Jubilee and other indulgences are of recent origin.

My dear friends, read these pages attentively. This could possibly be the last Jubilee for both me and you. Happy will we all be if we take advantage of it. Our merciful God welcomes us; heavenly treasures are within our reach. Would to God that we all avail ourselves of them.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> EBM V, p. 78.

<sup>56</sup> EBM V, p. 87.

<sup>57</sup> EBM V, p. 95.

The December issue was written by Fr. Costa of Rome and entitled *Considerations on the Expected Dogmatic Definition of the Immaculate Conception and a Novena*. This issue was in gratitude to the Blessed Mother. Don Bosco had promised his boys that the cholera plague that raged that year would not touch the Oratory, and so it happened, much to the astonishment of skeptics.<sup>58</sup>

## 1855

1855 saw Piedmont enter the Crimean War on January 10th on the side of England and France. The Queen Mother, Maria Teresa, dies. On January 20th the Queen Consort, Maria Adelaide, dies. On February 10 the Duke of Genoa, Ferdinand (the King's brother), dies. On March 2nd the Rattazzi-Cavour Law of suppression is passed in the lower house. On May 17th the King's youngest son, Prince Victor Emmanuel Leopold, dies. Michael Rua takes his first vows on March 25th, the Feast of the Annunciation. On May 29th the Law of Suppression is passed and 35 religious orders, with hundreds of houses and thousands of members are suppressed. Don Bosco starts a residential high school with the third year and cleric John Baptist Francesia is the teacher and moderator. He also publishes his *History of Italy*. October 4th is the vestition of cleric John Baptist Francesia and November 24th is the vestition of John Cagliero.

In March of 1855, the *Catholic Readings* entered its third year. The March issue was again a double issue combined into one volume. It was entitled: *An Easy Method for Learning Bible History for Christian people*. This issue included a map of the Holy Land, a comparative list of geographic names and a chronology of the important personages of the Old Testament. Regarding Jesus' teachings, Don Bosco laid particular stress on what he said about honors, wealth, earthly pleasures, chastity, temperance, envy, anger, and sloth. There was this exhortation at the end:

Let us pray for those outside the Catholic Church and beg God to give them the grace to overcome all human considerations to join her—thus fulfilling Christ's earnest desire that there be but one fold and one shepherd—and to grant to all an eternal heavenly reward.<sup>59</sup>

The April issue was entitled *Stealing Church Property and Its Consequences*. This booklet was attributed to Baron Nilinse, pseudonym of Collin de Plancy. This issue created such a stir in political circles that it was debated in the Chamber of Deputies as a provocation and an insult to the legislature and that the

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *EBM V*, pp. 96 and 50.

<sup>59</sup> *EBM V*, p. 132.

author be identified. There was even talk of its being confiscated. Nothing really happened and this storm also soon passed by.<sup>60</sup>

The two May issues were entitled: *Evangelical Comfort to Christians Living in the World* by "T.K." printed by the Ribotta Press. The two issues were a series of short meditations on the Gospel of St. Matthew. They showed how easy Our Lord's precepts are to obey and how holy and beneficial His counsels have proved to be. Also demonstrated were the perpetuity of His Church, the duties of her members, her God-given power to forgive sins, the importance of prayer—especially communal prayer—and the mercy and justice of God.<sup>61</sup>

The two June issues were authored by Don Bosco and entitled: *Dialogue between a Lawyer and a Rural Pastor on the Sacrament of Penance*. They totaled 127 pages. He explained its purpose in a foreword:

There is not the slightest doubt that our Faith is being bitterly attacked in these tragic times. Since its enemies will fail unless they can first persuade Catholics to give up confession, the forces of evil will direct their major attacks against this wholesome practice... To destroy the very idea of confession, Protestant publications are continually telling Catholics that confession is not of Divine institution and must therefore be rejected.

...I have restricted myself to explaining the Church's doctrine regarding this sacrament. In the process I have refuted the more common errors without mentioning them any more than necessary. I think that I have adequately rebutted all objections.

Meanwhile, deeply grieved by the harm daily perpetrated against the Church, I urge all Catholics to be brave and steadfast in the Faith. Yes, dear fellow Catholics, be brave! Let us cling firmly to the Church founded by Jesus Christ, and to His Vicar, the Pope. Let us hold fast to the Church that has been persecuted through the centuries but has always triumphed...<sup>62</sup>

The two July issues again were made into a single booklet entitled: *The Conversion of a Wealthy Noble English Lady to the Catholic Faith, during the Period When Anti-Catholic Laws Were Still in Force in England*. The author was anonymous. Fr. J. B. Lemoyne gives a summary as follows:

In 1772 Catholic priests were obliged to remain in hiding. Penalties for celebrating Mass or permitting its celebration in one's home were, respectively, death and confiscation of property plus hard labor for life in the colonies—quite an apt

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *EBM V*, p. 132. In December of 1855, the Christian Brothers were dismissed from the municipal schools. Apparently the Brothers distributed copies of this issue of the *Catholic Readings* in their school in Racconigi and because of this "offense" the Minister of Education ordered the Mayor to dismiss the Brothers or close the school. (Cf. *EBM V*, p. 235.)

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *EBM V*, pp. 161–162.

<sup>62</sup> *EBM V*, pp. 162–163.

illustration of the much vaunted Protestant tolerance. Persecution of Catholics went on without interruption for over two hundred years. The booklet also described this lady's trials in entering the Catholic Church, her perseverance in her newly-found Faith while living with her Anglican family, and God's reward for her heroic virtue.

Fr. Lemoyne goes on to write that pamphlets of this kind were devastating to the Waldensians. But if Don Bosco never tired of warning the faithful, he also strove to rescue those who had gone astray, especially the youth of the area.<sup>63</sup>

In July Don Bosco began to prepare *Il Galantuomo (The Man of Honor)* for 1856. This was a national Catholic almanac and was the first issue of the *Catholic Readings* to start off the New Year. New material included highlights of Pius IX's life and the 1856 schedule for the Forty Hours' devotion in Turin's churches. It also contained humorous, scientific and devotional articles and references to the latest discoveries and inventions. There was a charming poem in the Piedmontese dialect entitled *The Vice of Gambling*. This issue created great interest because of several predictions it made.<sup>64</sup>

The August issues were again joined into one booklet entitled: *Marriage Instructions* and were written by Canon Lawrence Gastaldi. The author explained the rights of the Church in the education of Catholic children. He also brought out the obligations of parents to bring up their children according to Christian principles, to entrust them to genuine Christian teachers, and to give them complete freedom of choice in their vocation. Should the government propose marriage legislation contrary to sound doctrine, all Catholics should vigorously petition Parliament to reject it.<sup>65</sup>

At the end of July, Don Bosco wrote to Count Pio Galeani Aglano asking if he could avail himself of his hospitality at his villa in Carraglio. He was preparing the September issue of the *Catholic Readings* and expressed a desire to get away for a few days. The Count picked him up in his carriage and he spent Monday through Saturday on a working vacation.

The September issues again were made into a single booklet entitled: *A Biographical Sketch of Charles Louis Dehaller, Member of the Supreme Council at Berne, and His Return to the Catholic Faith*. Two important points were brought out in this issue: 1) It was the most brilliant and upright Protestants who became Catholics, whereas it is the scoundrels among Catholics who become Prot-

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *EBM V*, 163–164.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *EBM V*, pp. 181–188. There is a translation of the foreword in these pages—a delightful, humorous account of *Galantuomo's* trip to the Crimea and back and predictions for 1856. It shows a humorous, tongue-in-cheek, punning side to Don Bosco. It also has the familiar ring of Don Bosco's later dream accounts that he often related to his boys.

<sup>65</sup> *EBM V*, p. 195.

estants. For the former, conversion is a sacrifice; for the latter, conversion simply means an easier way of life. 2) Whereas Protestants harassed those who became Catholics, they did not in the least bother those who switched to other denominations or even to other religions.<sup>66</sup>

The two October issues were authored by Don Bosco and entitled: *The Life of St. Martin, Bishop of Tours*. Three appendices discussed: 1) the worship of the saints and their powerful intercession with God as proved by Holy Scripture and Tradition and confirmed by many miracles; 2) the story of the glorious martyrdom of the Christian Arab, Jerome, who had been sealed alive in a tower in Algiers for refusing to apostatize; and 3) an outline of the Church's teachings of purgatory and their foundation in Holy Scripture. Right after this Don Bosco began preparing the two November issues which were combined into a single booklet. It was entitled: *The Power of Good Upbringing*. It told the story of a young man, Peter, who by his patience and exemplary conduct succeeded in converting his father.<sup>67</sup>

## 1856

The December and January (1856) issues were entitled: *Talks on the Most Blessed Sacrament* written by Fr. Charles Philip da Poirino, O.F.M.C. They gave some examples of the impiety, disloyalty and ingratitude of Protestants toward Our Lord.<sup>68</sup>

The second issue for January was entitled: *An Easy Method for Learning Bible History*. This was a second edition of the previous year's March publication. It was thus announced by *L'Armonia*:

... The author is well known not only for his indefatigable zeal but also for his practical, intelligent approach to popular instruction, and his name is sufficient guarantee that the book is what it purports to be.<sup>69</sup>

The February issues were combined into a single booklet entitled: *A Commentary on the Lord's Prayer* by St. Cyprian (c. 252 A.D.). It was edited by Count Coriolano Malingri of Bagnolo. Don Bosco wrote a circular which was enclosed with the booklet:

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<sup>66</sup> EBM V, pp. 195–197.

<sup>67</sup> EBM V, pp. 221–222. These issues were prepared by September and Don Bosco then took one of his famous Autumn outings as a treat for his best boys—another working vacation!

<sup>68</sup> Cf. EBM V, p. 233.

<sup>69</sup> EBM V, p. 286.

To Our Subscribers and Distributors:

As we close the third year of the *Catholic Readings*, we feel that we must address a few words to our subscribers and distributors.

First, we wish to extend our sincere and grateful thanks for your support which has strengthened us in our difficulties and enabled us to continue making sacrifices so that God's People would not be deprived of the instruction and comfort which it was our intention to provide...

Anonymous individuals—who for the sake of money are not above inciting passions, corrupting faith and morals, and causing great harm to families and society—are cunningly spreading everywhere with impunity books and periodicals that are expressly intended to corrupt the minds and hearts of uneducated people. It is therefore most necessary—indeed it is our vital duty—to counter such evil effects to the greatest possible extent with books that will instill sound moral principles—books short enough not to be tedious and inexpensive enough to be within reach of all.

This has always been the aim of the *Catholic Readings*. Sponsoring it will be a truly Catholic, civic-minded, and meritorious endeavor. The father of every family should contribute to the civil and religious foundations of society by subscribing to this publication; pastors should endorse and promote it in their parishes; the wealthy could make no wiser investment than to offer free subscriptions to all who cannot afford the price. We feel that we have done our share: at considerable sacrifice, in only three years we have distributed **six hundred thousand copies** (emphasis added) of the *Catholic Readings*. We would have done more if we had some help in spreading it through villages and towns where, unfortunately, it is still practically unknown...<sup>70</sup>

In 1856 Don Bosco reduced the number of issues to twelve without cutting down on the number of pages promised. The March issue was entitled: *The Lord's Day* and dealt with the following topics: 1) The sinfulness of not keeping the Lord's Day; 2) Recreation and family life on Sundays and holy days; 3) Excessive drinking and other afflictions.<sup>71</sup>

The April issue was by an anonymous author entitled: *A Warning about Blaspheming*. Don Bosco interspersed a few edifying stories.<sup>72</sup> As the April issue was going to press Don Bosco was preparing the May issue on the life of St. Pancratius, Martyr.<sup>73</sup> The glorious episodes of the saint's life which he nar-

<sup>70</sup> EBM V, pp. 286–287.

<sup>71</sup> EBM V, p. 288.

<sup>72</sup> EBM V, pp. 288–289. Also included were the Regulations of the Pious Archconfraternity of the Atonement for Blasphemies and Profanation of the Sabbath. It was founded in France by Fr. Peter Marche in 1847.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. EBM V, pp. 289–290. There was a shrine to this saint near Pianezza. Don Bosco occasionally visited it either alone or with his boys. There is a lengthy introduction in this issue which can be found in the above citation. In it Don Bosco himself states that he researched the most reliable collections of legends (emphasis mine) of the saints. He also consulted Laurentius Surius (1522–1578), the Bollandists, *Mémoires pour Servir à l'Histoire Ecclésiastique des six Premiers Siècles* by

rated aimed at refuting Waldensian errors. As in all his writings, Don Bosco took advantage of the encounter between St. Pancratius and Pope St. Caius (283–296 A.D.) to highlight papal supremacy over the whole Church; then, through the astounding miracles of the saint throughout the centuries, he confirmed the dogma of the veneration of relics and the intercessory power of the saints.

The June-July issue was written anonymously and entitled: *Brief Reflections on Conforming to God's Holy Will*. It contained ideas that gave comfort to those who tried to recognize and follow God's will in their lives.

The August issue was entitled: *The Conversion of Herman Cohen, a Jew, Now Father Augustine of the Blessed Sacrament, Discalced Carmelite*. This issue revealed a new miracle proving the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>74</sup> The September issue, printed by Tea Press in Ivrea, was entitled: *Andrew, or Happiness through Piety, as Narrated by Cesaria Fazzene and Edited by Count G. Birago*. It was a story for boys and told of one who disregarded his religious education, gave himself up to a life of vice and crime, until he saw the horror of it all and repented. The story stressed:

- 1) What will make a young man virtuous and honest, a truly upright man, is the fulfillment of his duties to God, himself, and his neighbor.
- 2) The only way to learn such duties is to listen to the Church's teachings embodied in the catechism.

This demonstrates some aspects of Don Bosco's ecclesiology and religious practice that he was teaching his boys. The key words are: "Duty" and "Church Teaching." The Church teaches all one needs to know to save his soul. Through the catechism, the Church shows the way to God and salvation. Duty is an outstanding virtue to acquire and discharge. Duty to God leads to true piety. Duty to self appreciates God working in a person and His gifts and graces. Duty to neighbor is honoring the God who cannot be seen except by seeing Him in one's neighbor.<sup>75</sup>

The October and November issues were combined into one booklet entitled: *Reflections on the Rites and Ceremonies of Holy Mass* by Fr. Charles Filippo da Poirino, Capuchin. Fr. Lemoyne calls it:

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Sébastien Le Nain de Tillemont (1637–1698), Vol. V, a three-volume work by Fr. Juvenal, a Discalced Augustinian, published in 1655. Don Bosco also consulted homilies of St. Gregory the Great and St. Gregory, bishop of Tours. Don Bosco used these sources without a critical eye. These were respected authors and works. Historical criticism was not a research criterion of the time. This also applies to much of the pious and devotional works, as well as biographies that came from the pen or redaction of Don Bosco.

<sup>74</sup> EBM V, p. 337.

<sup>75</sup> EBM V, pp. 337–338.

...a beautiful piece of work that also refuted Protestant errors and calumnies, and proved that temple, sacrifices, rites, and sacred vestments had been divinely instituted. It also showed that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and its principal rites and prayers dated back to the early Christians and that the use of Latin in the liturgy was well advised. As practiced by St. Leonard of Port Maurice, it taught the faithful to praise and adore the infinite majesty of God from the beginning of the Mass to the Gospel; to beg for forgiveness of sin and to make atonement to Divine justice from the Gospel to the Elevation; to thank God for all His benefits from the Elevation until Communion; and to manifest our needs to our Creator, who is the font of all graces, from the Communion to the last Gospel.<sup>76</sup>

An interesting sidelight occurred in November, 1856. The Waldensians continued to spread their literature among the people. Don Bosco gave a talk on St. Paul to the festive oratory boys describing how St. Paul got the Ephesian converts to burn all their books on magic and teachings (Cf. Acts 19:19). Don Bosco asked the cleric Francis Vaschetti why St. Paul had the people do this. The response was that these books were a constant threat for error. Later the boys turned in "unwholesome" books they found at home or had received as gifts which Don Bosco then destroyed!<sup>77</sup>

The December issue of the *Catholic Readings* was entitled: *The Guardian Angel of Young Children; Gleanings from a Book by Canon Claude Arvisenet, Vicar General of Troyes*. It intended to guide a child in his daily activities (duties) and in his spiritual life. It summarized in dialogue form the scriptural proofs that the Catholic Church is the true Church. It also contained several very short prayers for various occasions.<sup>78</sup>

At this time Don Bosco was keeping four printing shops busy with his various books. Fr. Lemoyne quotes Bishop John Baptist Bertagna thus:

The way Don Bosco undertook one task after another was a brilliant show of strength. No sooner did he complete one task than he took up another. Not a moment was lost. His nightly rest, if he took it at all, was very short. He was no less admirable in putting up with frequent interruptions from people who bothered him about trifles. He never betrayed fatigue, even after spending the whole night at work, but went on with whatever tasks were called for with astonishing tranquillity.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Cf. *EBM V*, p. 338. This is quoted at length to give an interesting insight into the popular devotion of how to attend Mass around this time (1856). It shows an effort to focus the faithful's attention and devotion during the Eucharistic celebration. Besides other devotions practiced during the Mass, such as the recitation of the rosary, this was an intriguing way of concentrating a boy's imagination in a pious manner.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. *EBM V*, p. 367.

<sup>78</sup> *EBM V*, p. 367.

<sup>79</sup> *EBM V*, pp. 367-368.

1857

In 1857 Dominic Savio died in Mondonio on March 9th. On June 6th the first priest from the Oratory was ordained—Felix Reviglio. He went on to join the Archdiocese and became a professor of pastoral theology and pastor of several parishes in Turin. The sodality of the Blessed Sacrament was founded. On June 20th the Lanza Laws went into effect putting all secondary education under the administration of the Minister of Public Instruction. A serious effort to rally the “Catholic vote” by conservative churchmen was made to stem the liberal tide in the national elections. This failed and *L'Armonia* proclaimed a voting boycott until further notice.

The January issue of the *Catholic Readings* was printed by Paravia Press and was entitled: *Life of St. Peter, the Prince of Apostles, First Pope after Jesus Christ*. This was written by Don Bosco and contained 180 pages. Each chapter ended with a maxim that intended to arouse love for the Church and the booklet ended with an appeal to Protestants to return to the Church.<sup>80</sup> Don Bosco wrote in the introduction:

Many times I have thought of ways and means to allay the aversion and hatred which people in these unhappy times display toward the popes and their authority. I concluded that if I could but present factually the lives of those whom Our Lord chose as supreme shepherds of His flock and His vicars on earth, fair-minded people could not be hostile to those who did so much for the temporal and spiritual welfare of mankind.

...The present times are disastrous for our holy Faith. Our enemies are spending huge sums of money, undertaking long journeys, and working hard to spread immoral and irreligious publications. Should we not at least match the efforts of those who so eagerly sacrifice themselves to lead souls to perdition?<sup>81</sup>

The February issue of the *Catholic Readings* had a particularly apologetic bent. It was entitled: *Two Debates on Purgatory between Two Protestant Ministers and a Catholic Priest*, authored by Don Bosco. While heated debate and repartee by the written and spoken word went on, Don Bosco was often visited by Waldensian ministers to challenge him in head-on confrontation. In early 1857, a face-to-face debate took place and the topic was “purgatory.”

Another concern at this time was the inroads of a different sect. This sect espoused the immanent arrival of the Second Coming. A major figure in Polish messianism was Andrzej Towianski.<sup>82</sup> He came to Turin in 1840. His teachings

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *EBM V*, p. 385.

<sup>81</sup> *EBM V*, pp. 385–386.

<sup>82</sup> His background included magnetism, occult sciences and rabbinical teachings. He claimed to be a heaven-sent prophet and mesmerized his listeners. He denied the creation of the world, Divine grace, original sin, free will, the merits of good works,

were condemned by the Holy See in 1850 and the ecclesiastical tribunal of the Archdiocese of Turin instituted proceedings against his teachings in 1854. Some priests and laity embraced Towianski's teachings, which also denied the existence of purgatory. And so, we come back to Don Bosco's treatise and debate on the subject. In the preface he writes (after promising anonymity to the participants):

...The arguments advanced here perhaps do not do full justice to the existence of purgatory, but we trust that they will at least clearly present and soundly prove Catholic doctrine on this point.

We realize that some topics may be beyond our readers' comprehension, but we have tried to make up for this by the clarity and simplicity with which, hopefully, we have rebutted our opponents' objections. Everyone should know what the enemies of our Faith say against purgatory and how weak are the objections of even the most learned Protestants.

We beg our readers to inform themselves by reading this booklet...<sup>83</sup>

This issue concluded the *Catholic Readings*' fourth year of publication.

As mentioned above, New Year's was inaugurated with the issuing of *Il Galantuomo*, an almanac which recapped the events of the year past and offered all sorts of information and even predictions for the coming year.

The 1857 edition described the influence of religion on the troops engaged in the Crimean War. Another item of note was an article debunking the many myths and superstitions that people held. It was cozily set on a winter's evening in a stable with a pastor whiling away the time with some of his parishioners.<sup>84</sup>

The March issue was dedicated to a discussion of Lent entitled: *The Christian Easter* and had an anonymous author. It dealt with Lent's origins, practices and exhortations to frequent the sacraments.<sup>85</sup>

Here Fr. Lemoyne gives a clue of how Don Bosco managed the *Catholic Readings* as well as his many works. During Lent 1857 the catechism lessons given to the boys on Sundays and holy days were expanded to daily lessons. Fr. Lemoyne writes:

the divinity of Jesus Christ, the sacraments and the priesthood. He taught metempsychosis or the transmigration of souls. He couched all this in a popular and catchy mysticism that was attractive to the uncritical. This seems vaguely familiar in our present day and age. Cf. *EBM V*, pp. 388–391.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. *EBM V*, p. 390.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. *EBM V*, p. 394.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. *EBM V*, p. 412. A generous accolade was given the *Catholic Readings*. It notes the beginning of the fifth year of publication and mentions the fact that the *Catholic Readings* have reached over 700,000 readers!

Every day after catechism classes, Don Bosco would take a cleric and shut himself up in the library of the Convitto Ecclesiastico to work on the *Catholic Readings*.<sup>86</sup>

The April issue was entitled *Life of St. Paul, the Apostles of the Gentiles* and was authored by Don Bosco. At this time he decided to do a series on the lives of the early popes, again to counter the Protestant contention that the pope is not the successor of St. Peter.

The May issue was dedicated to Mary and entitled *A Thought a Day in Honor of Mary, and the Story of the Conversion of Maria Alphonse Ratisbonne*<sup>87</sup> to the Catholic Faith. The June issue, written by Don Bosco was entitled: *The Lives of Popes St. Linus, St. Cletus and St. Clement*. The July issue was entitled: *Life of Blessed Oringa Toscana, Known as Christiana of the Holy Cross*.<sup>88</sup> The August issue, again authored by Don Bosco, was entitled: *The Lives of Popes St. Anacletus, St. Evaristus, and St. Alexander I*. The September issue was entitled: *Lives of the Popes St. Sixtus, St. Telesphorus, St. Hyginus, and St. Pius I, with an Appendix on St. Justin, Apologist and Martyr* written by Don Bosco. The October issue, written by a canon of Saint Diez was entitled: *The Conversion of a Protestant Family*. The November issue, anonymous, was entitled: *Family Discussions on the Primacy of the Pope and on the Salvation To Be Found Only in the Catholic Church*. This was written in response to a

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<sup>86</sup> EBM V. P. 421

<sup>87</sup> Cf. EBM V, p. 428.

Marie Alphonse Ratisbonne (1814–1884) was the ninth child of the most important Jewish family in Alsace. His older brother, Marie Théodore Ratisbonne (1802–1884) converted to Catholicism in 1827 and was ostracized from the family. On a trip to the Near East, Alphonse stopped in Rome and was himself suddenly converted to Catholicism after a vision of the blessed Virgin Mary in the church of St. Andrea Della Fratte in 1842. He joined the Jesuits but later got permission to leave to found, with his brother, congregations of priests, brothers and sisters dedicated to fostering understanding between Christians and Jews and of converting Jews and Moslems to Christ. The Congregations of Notre Dame de Sion and the Fathers of Sion are still extant, though small in numbers, and continue their founders' mission. (Cf. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, (1964) Vol. 12, p. 93).

<sup>88</sup> Blessed Oringa Toscana, aka Bl. Christiana of Lucca or, simply, Bl. Oringa, (1240–1310) came from a poor family and early on dedicated herself to virginity. She went into service for a noble family and, after taking them on pilgrimage to Monte Gargano and Assisi, founded a convent in 1279 under the Augustinian rule. She was noted for her devotion to the Eucharist and the Blessed Virgin and was popularly acclaimed a saint. Her cult was acknowledged by several popes and given official recognition in 1776. Many legends surround her life. (Cf. *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1964), Vol. 3, pp. 652f and *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, Kenedy & Sons, NY, 1956, vol. I, p. 32.

booklet by the Turinese Waldensian minister, Amadeus Bert,<sup>89</sup> entitled *The Waldensians, or Christian-Catholics in the Light of the Primitive Church*. Two issues came in December, *Il Galantuomo*, the almanac for 1858 and the regular *Catholic Readings* entitled: *The Life of St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna and Martyr, and of His Disciple, St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons and Martyr*. Don Bosco was the author but it was published without a by-line. According to Fr. Lemoyne, this issue described the unchanging teaching of the Catholic Church from the first and second centuries to the present (1857). Don Bosco explains the veneration of relics and the profanation of the relics of St. Hilary in Lyons by both Calvinists and Waldensians and their “ferocious massacres” of Catholics.<sup>90</sup>

## 1858

In this year Don Bosco went to Rome to meet with Pope Pius IX for the first time. It was in these audiences that he first proposed the founding of the Salesian Society. The Marian apparitions took place at Lourdes, France. Politically, Camillo Cavour made a secret accord with France at Plombières which enabled Italy to plan its “second war of independence” from Austria with French backing. In December, the Salesian Society officially began as a private association.

The January issue of the *Catholic Readings* was entitled: *Reflections on the Epistles and Gospels of Sundays and Feasts of Our Lord*. The section on epistles was written by “a devout and scholarly priest” (Lemoyne) and the section on the Gospels came from the Appendix of the *Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ* by Fr. Charles Massini. Don Bosco prepared the next two months’ *Catholic Readings* so he could be free to make his first trip to Rome. The February issue was entitled: *The Lenten Season* by an anonymous author. The March issue was entitled: *The Lives of the Popes St. Anicetus, St. Soter, St. Eleutherius, St. Victor I, and St. Zephyrinus*. This was also anonymous but almost certainly authored by Don Bosco. This issue marked the sixth year of publication.

On February 9, 1858, Don Bosco obtained a two-month leave of absence from the archdiocese of Turin so he could have an audience with Pope Pius IX and broach the subject of founding a religious congregation (Salesians) and ask his advice on other matters. Don Bosco, after brushing off the Pope’s idea of making him a monsignor, went on to ask his permission to circulate the *Catholic Readings* in the Papal States with postal exemption. This the Pope graciously granted. When Don Bosco went to the Cardinal vicar, Constantine Patrizi, he went on to successfully ask to distribute the *Catholic Readings* in

<sup>89</sup> Amadeus Bert (1809–1883), Waldensian minister. Don Bosco had many contacts with him in conversation, debate and written word.

<sup>90</sup> EBM V, p. 510.

Rome as well! He also obtained a papal blessing for all the distributors of the *Catholic Readings*.

The April issue was entitled: *The Month of May Consecrated to Mary Immaculate for Popular Use* and authored by Don Bosco. It announced the papal blessing and dealt also with indulgences—which probably gave the idea for the following issue. The May issue was entitled: *Indulgences, a Treasure for the Faithful*. This issue explained the doctrine on indulgences, what a treasure they are in Catholic devotion and refutes Protestant attacks against them. The June issue was entitled: *Joseph and Isidore, or the Danger of Bad Companions* written by P. Marcello. The July issue was entitled: *The Christian's Vademeum or Important Counsels on the duties of the Christian so that Each One Can Attain His Own Salvation in His Vocation*. The Foreword was under Don Bosco's by-line. The August issue was entitled: *Anthony, Little Orphan of Florence*. The September issue was called *The Youth's Guide to Salvation* by Claude Arvisenet. This work was translated from the French and was originally published in Brussels. The October issue was entitled: *The Lamp at the Shrine* by Cardinal Wiseman and was a simple, sentimental story translated from English. The November issue was *The Life of St. Callistus I, Pope and Martyr* written by Don Bosco. The December issue was entitled: *A Christmas Novena* by Blessed Sebastian Valfrè.<sup>91</sup> *Il Galantuomo (The Honest Man)* accompanied the December issue.

## 1859

During this year the Second War of Independence against Austria began and was brought to a successful conclusion. Michael Magone, one of Don Bosco's students, died in the "odor of sanctity." The Casati Laws which were to organize and streamline the educational system and would have profound effect on Italian education and, consequently, on Don Bosco's Oratory school were promulgated.<sup>92</sup>

The January issue was entitled: *Life of Dominic Savio, Pupil of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales* by Don Bosco. The February issue was also authored by Don Bosco and was entitled: *Life of Pope St. Urban I*. The March issue, which began the seventh year of publication, was entitled: *The Cross by the Wayside*.

<sup>91</sup> Blessed Sebastian Valfrè (1629–1710) was an Oratorian priest noted for his pastoral concern, effective preaching and teaching with humor and simplicity. He was tutor to the future King Vittorio Amadeo II. He ministered to Waldensian prisoners following Louis XIV's expedition against them. When the French besieged Turin he encouraged the inhabitants to hold out until the siege was lifted. He was beatified in 1834.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. "The Day They Shut down the Oratory School" by Fr. Michael Ribotta, S.D.B., *Journal of Salesian Studies*, v. II, #1, Spring 1991, pp. 10–44, Berkeley, CA.

This anonymous piece was a wanderlust tale of a young Tyrolean boy who leaves his sorrowing parents and, after various adventures, good and bad, acquires substantial wealth. He regrets leaving his parents, now on in years, and returns to care for them. Don Bosco comments about the foreign missions and the difference between those of Catholics and Protestants.

Publishing of the *Catholic Readings* continued even though the war for independence from Austria was being waged at this time. The April issue was entitled: *Edifying Stories*. These dealt with an alpine sculptor, a beggar, the giving of alms is not dependent on one's wealth, etc. May's title was *The Life of Rose Cordone* written by Fr. Joseph Frassinetti. June's title was *The Shrine of Bassa*.<sup>93</sup> July's issue, also anonymous, was entitled: *Anthony and Ferdinand: The Triumph of Innocence*. It dealt with Divine Providence being able to draw good from the sorrows and injustices in one's life. August's issue, written by Don Bosco, was entitled: *The Lives of the Holy Pontiffs Sts. Pontian, Anterus, and Fabian*. September's issue was called: *The Valley of Almeria*. It was an anonymous, adventurous tale of a family which went through numerous trials and separations before being marvelously reunited through God's goodness.<sup>94</sup> October's issue was entitled: *Frequent Communion, Key to Heaven*. This was a condensation of a French work by Fr. Antoine Favre written by the Capuchin, Fr. Charles Philip da Poirino. The November issue of the *Catholic Readings* was an anonymous story entitled: *Augustine, or the Triumph of Religion*. This described the conversion of a rich nobleman who, in expiation for his sins, spent all his wealth on good works. He reduces himself to voluntary poverty and worked in obscurity until he surrendered his life in defense of the Blessed Sacrament at the hands of heretical thieves. Don Bosco wrote December's issue entitled: *The Persecution of Decius and the Pontificate of St. Cornelius I, Pope*.

## 1860

1860 saw Piedmont annex the Toscana, and the major part of the Papal States—the Marche and Umbria. Garibaldi wages a successful campaign with his "Thousand" and wins over the Kingdom of Naples which is annexed to Piedmont. There is a marked rise in anticlericalism on the Italian Peninsula. The "Roman Question" becomes a real thorn. The extension of Piedmontese law into the annexed regions caused great difficulty for the Church. Many dioceses were without bishops.

Despite the pessimistic aspects of politics and society Don Bosco continued to counter the weakening of religion among the common people and youths with

<sup>93</sup> This shrine is located in the hills of Rubiana in Piedmont. It is in honor of the Blessed Virgin in gratitude for granting the requests of her suppliants. (*EBM VI*, pp. 120–121)

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *EBM VI*, p. 142.

his *Catholic Readings*. In fact, his own contributions to this literary endeavor for the commonweal only increased. The January issue was entitled: *The Hour of Grace* or *The Last Hours of a Man Condemned to Death*. The issue was anonymous. However, in the appendix Don Bosco wrote:

Calamities have long afflicted us, and we have reason to fear even worse to come. We all sigh and groan, and many wax angry and complain bitterly. Yet, only a few know the true cause of our troubles and strive to remove it. Let it be very clear that sin causes all evils, all unhappiness. When man dares to offend and outrage God, God punishes him. Reason and faith tell us this. Only a fool could doubt it.

Do we really want to rid ourselves of present ills and ward off threatening ones? Let us remove their cause—sin. Let us make our peace with God, appease His anger, and satisfy His justice... Let us not be like wretched sinners who, rather than make their peace with God, keep offending and provoking Him so that He is forced to inflict greater punishments which eventually will climax in endless, frightful punishments of hell!

As Christians, can we be indifferent to the loss of so many brothers? Can we allow God's anger to be further provoked and His punishments—including temporal ones—to fall heavier upon them and us? Let us rather seek His mercy, ease His anger, and expiate our sins. Let us revive our faith.<sup>95</sup>

Despite the woeful commentary, Don Bosco does end on the upbeat. "Let us revive our faith," which can still be a rallying cry today. Don Bosco stresses the positive by urging greater love for Jesus Christ and promoting attendance at Holy Mass.

The February issue of the *Catholic Readings* was written by Fr. Joseph Frassinetti and was entitled: *Spiritual Resources as Needed by Our Times*. Don Bosco appended to this booklet a small treatise by Bishop Louis Gaston de Séjur entitled: *The Pope: Timely Questions*. This explained the Papacy and its temporal power which at this time (1860) was being stripped away. Don Bosco added in the preface:

Let the reader mind well that this treatise deals with religion, not politics. It appeals to good common sense and good faith, and so we hope it will be well received. The Pope's temporal power is discussed only from the viewpoint of religion and conscience, but to restrict conscience to the realm of immaterial things only would be foolish. An unbiased reading of these pages will show that truth speaks louder than sophism.

He also added in the appendix:

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<sup>95</sup> EBM VI, pp. 269–270.

Dear readers, be steadfast in your union with the Pope and the Church. Fear not the enemy's furious threats and let not his honeyed words deceive you. Mostly, do not be taken in by those seemingly moderate ways and expressions which the wicked use to worm their way into the minds of the upright. Stand up bravely for your faith and convictions. Do not be afraid. God is with the Church all days to the end of time. It is for the wicked to tremble before the godly, not the godly before the wicked.<sup>96</sup>

The March issue was entitled: *Elizabeth or the Reward of Poverty* by Bishop D'Esovile. This issue marked the start of the eighth year of publication. April's issue, written by Don Bosco, was entitled: *The Life and Martyrdom of St. Lucius I and St. Stephen I, Popes*. May's issue was called: *Angelina or a Good Girl Taught True Devotion to the Virgin Mary*. It seemed to be compilation of items from previously published issues: *The Month of May* and *Il Giovane Provveduto*. June's issue was entitled: *Alexis, a Young Painter with Some Added Edifying Facts* which extolled the virtue of honoring one's parents. July's issue was called: *The Precepts of the Church and Their Observance With Each Precept Demonstrated*. Don Bosco prepared the next three month's issues together. August's issue, written by himself, was entitled: *The Pontificate of St. Sixtus II and the Glories of St. Lawrence, Martyr*. The September issue was written by Fr. Frassinetti and entitled: *The Model of a poor girl, Rosina Pedemonte*<sup>97</sup> (died on January 30, 1860 at 20 years of age in Genoa). October's issue was entitled: *Confession: the Gate to Heaven*. It was written by Fr. Charles Philip da Poirino. Don Bosco authored the November and December issues. These issues made up a two-part biography of Fr. Joseph Cafasso, a great mentor of his who had died on June 23, 1860.

## 1861

Victor Emmanuel II was proclaimed the king of the new Kingdom of Italy. Prime Minister Camillo Cavour died suddenly and Baron Bettino Ricasoli (1809–1880) succeeds him. The Catholic protest to the annexation of the Papal States and anticlerical legislation results in Catholics withdrawing from political life—"neither vote nor run for office." Don Bosco opens a print shop at his Oratory school. The first lay Salesians (coadjutors) are enrolled in the Society.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>96</sup> *EBM VI*, p. 275.

<sup>97</sup> She was a member of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate founded in Mornese. From this group Don Bosco, with St. Mary Mazzarello, formed the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (the Salesian Sisters). Cf. *IMB VI*, p. 658.

<sup>98</sup> When the first lay Salesian (coadjutor) was admitted to the society is not at all clear. In the foundation minutes of Fr. Michael Rua of 1858, he mentions two "laymen." They are not identified. In 1859 there were no laymen unless Joseph Gaia was present. Louis Chiapale, who is mentioned is called a layman only because he had not yet donned the clerical habit. Joseph Rossi is the first lay Salesian admitted to the "practice of the rule" (novitiate) in 1861 and made his profession in 1864. The

During this year the *Catholic Readings* were distributed in Sardinia for the first time.

January's issue of the *Catholic Readings* was entitled: *Virtuous Sons* authored by Louis Friedel and stressed family values. February's issue was entitled: *A Hidden Treasure: or Appreciation and Excellence of the Holy Mass with a Practical and Devout Way of Attending It with Beneficial Results* and was a reprint of St. Leonard of Port Maurice. March's issue was entitled: *The Life of St. Cyprian, Martyr* written by Fr. Re.

April's issue was entitled: *Edifying Examples for Youths* and was a collection of 100 stories directed to students about student life. Authorship for this issue has not been determined. May's issue was entitled: *The Church* written by Bishop Louis Gaston de Ségur.

The 1860 *Il Galantuomo* marked May 24th for the first time as the Feast of Mary Help of Christians. The 1861 issue stated: "Feast of the Most Blessed Virgin Under the Well-Merited Title 'Help of Christians, Auxilium Christianorum!'"<sup>99</sup> The *Catholic Readings* became the first popular almanac to mark each recurrence of this solemn observance.

The June issue was entitled: *Victorina and Eugenie or Courtesy and Charity* demonstrated that courtesy toward all was a sign of true charity toward neighbor. July's issue was entitled: *Abstinence from Work on Festive Days (Sundays and Holydays)* by a former member of France's legislative assembly, D. Olivier. August's issue was called: *A Family of Martyrs: or the Lives of the Holy Martyrs Marius, Martha, Audifax and Abachum and their Martyrdom, with an Appendix about the Shrine Dedicated to Them near Caselette*. September's issue was entitled: *A Biographical Sketch of Michael Magone, Pupil of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*. October's issue was entitled: *The Pontificate of St. Dionysius with an Appendix on St. Gregory Thaumaturgus*. The August, September and October issues had been authored by Don Bosco. The November issue was entitled: *Paradise on Earth in the Chaste Christian* by Fr. Joseph Frassinetti. The December issue was entitled: *Information about Blessed Panasia, a Valesiana Shepherdess from Quarona* written by Silvio Pellico.

## 1862

Urbano Rattazzi (1810–1873) became Prime Minister in March and by December Luigi Carlo Farini (1812–1866) succeeded him. Archbishop Louis Franzoni died in exile in Lyons, France. The Blessed Virgin Mary formally became the Patroness of the Salesian Society and its works under the title of Help of Christians.

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first official (temporary) professions of lay Salesians took place in 1862. They were Joseph Gaia and Frederick Oreglia di Santo Stefano. (Lenti, Arthur, class notes.)

<sup>99</sup> EBM VI, p. 572.

Don Bosco started up the carpentry shop at the Oratory school. He also wanted to have the *Catholic Readings* printed at the Oratory printshop. This gave rise to a heated controversy which we will describe below.

In December of 1861 Don Bosco prepared the 1862 almanac, *Il Galantuomo*, Lombard-Piedmontese Almanac for the Year 1862. The January issue of the Catholic Readings was entitled: *The Devotion of the Seven Sundays in Honor of the Joys and Sorrows of St. Joseph with a Plenary Indulgence each Sunday* by Fr. Ughet and translated by Josephine Pellico. February's issue was entitled: *A Siberian Maiden or Filial Piety* by Xavier De Maistre. It was a story of a girl who traveled on foot from Siberia to St. Petersburg to obtain a pardon for her father who had been exiled in perpetuity. March's issue was entitled: *The Jewish Orphans, Translated from the French with some Little Songs for the Feast of the Holy Infancy*. This was the story of two Jewish orphans, brother and sister, who in spite of the hindrances of their co-religionists, received the grace of Baptism. April's issue was entitled: *The Orphan of Fénelon or the Effects of a Christian Education*. This story shows how the Our Father is a good tool to teach Christian fundamentals. May's issue was entitled: *A Marian Diary or an Encouragement to Marian Devotion Every Day of the Year by one of her Devotees*.

As mentioned at the beginning, the *Catholic Readings* were Don Bosco's brainchild. After having written many other books and pamphlets, Don Bosco conceived the *Catholic Readings*. However, he could not get this ambitious project off the ground by himself. He needed a partner. When the Piedmont bishops met to decide how to counter the Protestant and anti-clerical surge, he proposed his project to Bishop Louis Moreno of Ivrea. The bishop underwrote the project and supported it wholeheartedly. The bishop considered himself co-founder and co-owner with Don Bosco, and rightly so. When Don Bosco's printshop came on line in 1862 and was geared up to handle large volume (the *Catholic Readings* averaged 9,000 copies per issue) he wanted his Oratory press to do the work. As is so often the case in these matters, money was the bottom line. Canon Francis Valinotti handled the business administration, subscriptions, contracts, book-keeping, etc. Canon Valinotti became so involved that he considered himself a third co-founder and co-owner. His office was a de facto focal point of management. Both the bishop and Don Bosco forwarded all financial matters to Canon Valinotti. However, Don Bosco, who bore the entire editorial burden, occasionally asked how the financial situation was and was invariably told that expenses far exceeded income. The bishop kept out of this affair, but Don Bosco wondered. He did not press the point at this time since he disliked confrontations on such a material point. Still he wondered. When Don Bosco's presses were ready he asked the bishop's permission to shift the printing from the Paravia Press to the Oratory Press. The bishop was amenable. However, in May 1862, Canon Angelo Pinoli, Moreno's provicar, indicated that Don Bosco had no right to make these changes since he was not the exclusive owner of the *Catholic Read-*

ings. Someone had gotten to the bishop. Was it Canon Valinotti or the Paravia Press, which would lose a substantial contract and would demand payment of outstanding debts?<sup>100</sup> Canon Valinotti forwarded the provicar's letter to Don Bosco who responded thus:

Turin, May 10, 1962

You cannot imagine how hurt I was by the letter you sent me, both in its contents and in its source. Yesterday I made several attempts to answer but was too upset...

It never entered my mind that the *Catholic Readings* was somebody else's property. I planned the publication, I saw to its printing, and I always took care of it. I wrote or edited every issue and always assumed responsibility for its contents. To increase its circulation, I made long trips, wrote circulars, and asked others to do the same. Public opinion, as well as the Holy Father himself in three letters of his considers me as the founder of the *Catholic Readings*.

While retaining my full authority, which was not always fully respected, I always delegated material chores of mailing and accounting to others. Of late, in view of constant printing delays, I gave the job to Ferrando Press; then, seeing I had no guaranteed production schedule, I decided to set up my own printshop and match Paravia's specifications for the *Catholic Readings* pamphlets. Since all the copy is ready and printing operations have already started for this year's issues, I intend to continue the printing here at the Oratory, in order to provide work for our needy boys. (...)

I do not believe that Bishop Moreno authorized Canon Pinoli's letter... (Bishop Moreno) told me... "We must not look for any profit from the *Catholic Readings*. Should there be any, it will come in handy for the Oratory which certainly can use it." Now, what kind of profit would there be in this publication if, after ten years' hard toil without compensation, I should even be deprived of the authority to provide work for my boys? To this day no one ever disputed my ownership of a project which I began myself and kept up despite so much work and expense.

You may say there are debts to pay. Let's pay them. After all, I have worked ten years without one cent of salary. And I don't want any now. Money has never entered my mind in projects connected with God's glory...<sup>101</sup>

This issue would not be settled until 1867 (in Don Bosco's favor) and would cost Don Bosco much grief and the friendship of Bishop Moreno.

And so the Oratory boys began to typeset and print the *Catholic Readings*. The July issue was entitled: *Theophilus or the Young Hermit, a Lovely Story* by Canon Christopher Schmid. It was a kind of Christian *Robinson Crusoe*. August's issue was entitled: *The Pontificate of St. Felix I and St. Eutichianus, Popes and Martyrs* written by Don Bosco. September's issue was entitled: *The Power of Darkness or Dogmatic-Moral Comments on Evil Spirits and Men*,

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<sup>100</sup> EBM VII, pp. 95ff.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. EBM VII, pp. 97-98.

*followed by an Account of a Diabolical Infestation which Occurred in 1858 in the Val della Torre.* This dealt with obsessions, poltergeists, etc. The author was the Capuchin, Fr. Charles Philip da Poirino. October's issue was entitled: *Two Orphan Girls or The Consolation of the Catholic Religion.* The November issue was entitled *Germaine, a Cabinetmaker.* The story dealt with the happiness of the Christian family. The December issue was entitled: *Work.* This was written by Fr. Felice, S.J. This was a talk to outstanding students on the occasion of the solemn presentation of academic awards. Don Bosco constantly explained to his boys that work, whether intellectual or manual, was necessary for all and how it was a means of "working" out one's salvation. It was also a means of avoiding evil and being a productive citizen. In the same issue, Don Bosco added a little anecdote called: *A Pleasant Story of One of Napoleon I's Veterans, related by Fr. John Bosco.* It was one of many that he was wont to tell his boys during recreation.

## 1863

In February, Don Bosco announced the planned building of the Church of Mary Help of Christians at the Valdocco Oratory. Construction actually started in May. The first Salesian work outside of Turin began at Mirabello. The first five Salesians obtained their teaching credentials from the University of Turin.

Don Bosco combined January and February into one issue entitled: *Blessed Catherine De Matei of Racconigi of the Order of Penitents of St. Dominic.* Also at this time the annual almanac *Il Galantuomo* was offered to his reading public. The March issue was entitled: *Four Popular Dialogues on Current Religious Errors.* Don Bosco continued to publish past titles to stimulate sales. He also sent a promotional circular to ten cardinals, eighty-five bishops, and sixty diocesan officials throughout Italy. He provided complimentary subscriptions to distinguished benefactors, bishops and cardinals.<sup>102</sup> Many responded to his appeal. The April issue was entitled: *The Pontificate of St. Caius, Pope and Martyr.* The May-June issue was entitled: *Biographical Highlights of Father John Vianney, "Curé d'Ars."*<sup>103</sup> This was authored by Canon Lawrence Gastaldi<sup>104</sup> who much

<sup>102</sup> EBM VII, p. 222.

<sup>103</sup> Fr. John Vianney (1786–1859) was canonized by Pope Pius XI in 1925. He was renowned for his pastoral care of the poor and his spiritual direction of persons of all social classes.

<sup>104</sup> Canon Lawrence Gastaldi (1815–1883) was to become, with Don Bosco's suggestion to Pope Pius IX, Archbishop of Turin. A most severe controversy was to arise between him and Don Bosco over the development of the Salesian Society which would last ten years and would only end with Gastaldi's death. Cf. "The Bosco-Gastaldi Conflict (1872–1882) Part I," Fr. Arthur Lenti, S.D.B., *Journal of Salesian Studies*, Berkeley, CA, Fall 1993, vol. IV, #2, pp. 1–83; "The Bosco-Gastaldi Con-

favored Don Bosco and his work. The July issue was entitled: *The Life and Institute of St. Angela Merici* by Fr. Joseph Frassinetti. This issue also mentions the Institute of Daughters of Mary Immaculate founded in Mornese (near Genoa) in 1855. From this Institute would come St. Mary Mazzarello and the first Salesian Sisters. The August issue was entitled: *Anthony, the Good Father of a Family* authored by Fr. Peter Bazetti. It dealt with a simple and devout man who, in spite of poverty and misfortune, relied on his faith and Divine Providence to raise his family. The September issue was entitled: *The Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament* by Fr. Huguet et al. The October issue was entitled: *A Biographical Sketch of the Saintly Cleric Ezio Gherardi of Lucca*. He died while a subdeacon in 1861. He dedicated himself to teaching catechism to youths, worked in the parish on weekends and in a night school. The November issue was entitled: *Short Dialogues on the Commandments of the Church* by Fr. Joseph Frassinetti. The December issue was entitled: *Man Proposes and God Disposes* by Fr. Peter Bazetti. Don Bosco added two accounts of miraculous cures received through the intercession of Dominic Savio. This issue was also accompanied by the 1864 almanac, *Il Galantuomo*.

## 1864

During this year the government of the Kingdom of Italy was transferred from Turin to Florence. This ushered in a period of economic and demographic depression in Turin which would last for five years. Turin's population at this time was 218,000 inhabitants. Pope Pius IX issued the encyclical *Quanta Cura* which established the *Syllabus of Errors* which listed books condemned as inimical to the Catholic Faith and its institutions. Don Bosco's Salesian Society received the *Decretum Laudis* which allowed the Society to continue on its destined path with the Church's initial approval. The foundation stone of the Church of Mary Help of Christians was laid at the Oratory. The book shop was established at the Oratory. The municipal Salesian boarding school was opened at Lanzo. Don Bosco also had his first meeting with Mary Mazzarello at Mornese.

The January-February issue of the Catholic Readings was entitled: *Papal Authority*, a catechetical instruction written by Canon Lawrence Gastaldi.

At this time (early 1864) the question of the ownership and control of the *Catholic Readings* came up again (cf. supra). The ownership was still disputed by Bishop Louis Moreno and, his agent, Canon Valinotti who had rejected Don Bosco's claims and contested his rights. When Don Bosco began publishing the *Catholic Readings* at the Oratory Press he smoothed ruffled feathers by retaining Valinotti and giving other manuscripts to the Paravia Press.

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flict (1872-1882) Part II", Fr. Arthur Lenti, S.D.B., *Journal of Salesian Studies*, Berkeley, CA, Spring 1994, vol. V, #1, pp. 35-131.

From 1862 to 1864 the Oratory Press did the printing at Don Bosco's expense and when he forwarded bills to Canon Valinotti he was told that no money was available due to large debts to the former printer, loan repayment and other incidental expenses. Don Bosco asked Joseph Buzzetti<sup>105</sup> to go over the books. He found them in such a shambles (due to negligence and ineptitude rather than dishonesty) that he could not figure the income and discovered that a large sum was owed to De Agostini Press for two full years of printing the *Catholic Readings*.

Don Bosco then asked to have the books audited. The bishop of Ivrea took exception to this affront to his representative. Don Bosco was not making accusations. He only wanted to be paid. He repeated his request and added that if his right of ownership was not acknowledged he would refuse collaboration and use of this printshop. The others threatened a lawsuit and Don Bosco accepted the challenge for the sake of his boys. When he did so the others calmed down. However, matters remained at a stalemate. Don Bosco needed the work and so resolution of the dispute was delayed to a future date (1867) and allowed the bishop's manager to close up unfinished business without an audit. However, he did notify the bishop that he planned a new start for the *Catholic Readings* beginning with the March issue on the cover of which was the following announcement:

Distributors and subscribers are hereby notified that:

1. Effective immediately, all subscriptions, payments, inquiries, and correspondence concerning the *Catholic Readings* are to be addressed exclusively to: *Catholic Readings*, Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, Turin (Valdocco).(...)

The March issue, which began the twelfth year of publication, was entitled: *Louise and Pauline, a Conversation between Catholic and Protestant Girls*. The April issue was entitled: *The Pontificates of St. Marcellinus and St. Marcellus, Martyrs* by Don Bosco. The above announcement was repeated in this issue and Don Bosco finally gained full control of the *Catholic Readings*. Although he was the de facto owner, the de jure dispute went on for three more years until the previous administration's accounts were finally liquidated.<sup>106</sup> The May issue was entitled: *Delightful Contemporary Experiences from Public Records* by Don Bosco. It contained stories about a Protestant conversion, some sketches from the life of St. Joseph Cottolengo, facts about Pope Pius IX and miracles and graces of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The June issue was entitled: *The Fortune*

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<sup>105</sup> Joseph Buzzetti (1832–1891) with his brother, Charles, had been among the first boys to attend the Valdocco Oratory. He was encouraged to become a priest by Don Bosco but an accident (loss of a finger) disqualified him from the priesthood. He then remained with Don Bosco working in the shops, especially the Print Shop. He took vows as a Salesian coadjutor in 1877. He died at Lanzo.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. *EBM VII*, pp. 378–381.

*Seeker* (in the gold mines of California). It also contained a chronological table of sacred and church history and graces obtained through the intercession of Dominic Savio. Don Bosco's hand can be seen in some of the items. The July and August issues were on the life of Francis Besucco called: *The Little Shepherd of the Alps*. This biography, as well as the biographies of Louis Comollo, Dominic Savio and Michael Magone, was a great success. The price for the Besucco biography was the same as for the other Catholic Readings but Don Bosco complained to the director of the Oratory printshop that it should be less expensive so as to be more available to more people, especially youth. The September and October issues were entitled: *St. Athanasius the Great, Bishop of Alexandria and Doctor of the Church, a Popular Account* by Fr. Joseph Re. It dealt with the persecutors of the Church, heretical and pagan. The November issue was entitled: *Adventure of Two Orphans, Urbano and Paola*. It was a story of a brother and a sister from a noble family who miraculously survived all kinds of brutality and remained faithful and preserved their innocence. The December issue was entitled: *Two Hidden Joys on frequent and even daily Communion and perfect chastity*. The 1865 *Il Galantuomo* was also readied at this time.

## 1865

1865 was unusual for the paucity of special events for Don Bosco and Italy in general. However, in April the cornerstone was blessed and laid for the church of Mary Help of Christians. Don Bosco founded the *Library of Latin Classics* and the first perpetual profession in the Salesian Society was made by Fr. John Baptist Lemoyne.

The January issue of the *Catholic Readings* was entitled: *The Fortune House* a dramatic presentation by Don Bosco with an appendix called: *The Good Son* by Abbot Mullois. The February issue was entitled: *The Jubilee Year, How It Came About and Suggested Devotions When Visiting the Churches* by Don Bosco. In honor of the tenth anniversary of the definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, Pope Pius IX proclaimed a Jubilee or Holy Year. This was to be celebrated in 1865 and the faithful could gain a plenary indulgence after performing certain prescribed devotions and pilgrimages to designated churches. The March and April issues were authored by Canon Lawrence Gastaldi and were entitled: *Memories of Fr. John Ignatius Vola*,<sup>107</sup> a Priest of the Archdiocese of Turin. The May issue was entitled: *A History of the Inquisition and Some Errors Falsely Attributed to It* by Fr. Peter Boccalandro, pastor of St. Mark's in Genoa. In this work the author describes some terrible and bloody persecutions of Protestants against Catholics. The June issue was entitled: *Peace for the Church, the Pontificates of Sts. Eusebius and Melchiades, the Last Mar-*

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<sup>107</sup> Fr. John Ignatius Vola (1797–1858) was an exemplary secular priest and a great friend of Don Bosco and of the Oratory. (Cf. *EBM VIII*, p. 42).

*tys after Ten Persecutions.* This was the last pamphlet in the series on the lives of the popes. The July issue was entitled: *On Animal Magnetism and Spiritism, by a Medical Doctor and Surgeon.* This dealt with pseudo-magic and magnetism. Its purpose was to disabuse the gullible of the value of magic and magnetism in obtaining cures and healing by explaining the true science of magnetism. The August issue was entitled: *The Life of Blessed (now Saint) Margaret Mary Alacoque with an Appendix of devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.* The September issue was entitled: *Albert and Nina, an Uplifting Story.* The October issue was entitled: *A Catechetical Instruction on the Sacrament of Confirmation* by a priest of the Archdiocese of Turin. This booklet was to be followed up with another with prayers and meditations to prepare properly for the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation as well as the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist. The November-December issue was entitled: *The Life of the Turinese Carmelite, Blessed Mary of the Angels.* It was written by Don Bosco and recounted her devout and edifying life. It also contained a novena of prayers in her honor. The 1866 almanac, *Il Galantuomo*, was also sent out at this time.

## 1866

This year saw the onset of the Third War of Italian Independence and the Austro-Prussian War. Also the last brick for the church of Mary Help of Christians was set in place in the cupola.

The January issue of the *Catholic Readings* was entitled: *The Cult of the Holy Martyrs, Sts. Salutor, Adventor and Octavius, Patrons of the City of Turin* by Canon Lawrence Gastaldi. This issue was particularly timely due to the general depression in and around Turin and the war of independence.

The February issue was entitled: *The Hidden Pearl* by Nicholas Cardinal Wiseman, Archbishop of Westminster, England. The March issue was the promised second part on Confirmation entitled: *Meditations and Prayers for a Worthy Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation.* The April issue was entitled: *About Fiscal Duty* by Fr. Joseph Frassinetti. It dealt on the need of donations of good people to further the Church's efforts. It mentions the parsimonious attitude of Catholics in allowing good works to wither while evil works thrived. It brought out the idea that donations to Church efforts was not only a duty but also a power. The May issue was entitled: *Stories and Parables of Fr. Bonaventure.* This was a collection of talks for children and the common people. The June issue was entitled: *Theodulus, a Blessed Son, a Model for Youth* by Fr. Michelangelo Marini about a virtuous Belgian student living at home.

The question of the ownership of the *Catholic Readings* came up again and this time the question was submitted to arbitration at the hands of Count Charles

Cays of Giletta.<sup>108</sup> Canon Francis Valinotti's accounts, as Bishop Louis Moreno's agent, were in almost total disarray. Although Bishop Moreno contributed 425 lire and Marquis Birago loaned almost 9, 500 lire, the yearly income through subscriptions should have covered these debts as well as those owed to Paravia Press. Under Don Bosco's management the *Catholic Readings* was breaking even, if not making money. Count Cays came up with a solution acceptable to all parties and only Bishop Moreno's signature was needed to give Don Bosco total ownership and control. Unfortunately, this did not occur until October 19, 1867.<sup>109</sup>

The July issue was entitled: *A Friendly Word to Servicemen* by Fr. Victor Marchiale. It taught the idea that soldiers must not be swayed by what others think or do; obedience is the virtue needed to keep guard, to perform military exercises and to risk one's life on the battlefield; to conquer egoism and pride, to be generous in pardoning and avoiding duels. The appendix contained the story of John Sobieski and the Liberation of Vienna—a Grace of Mary Help of Christians and military songs.

Chevalier Frederick Oreglia, head of the Oratory printshop, returned from a business trip to Rome to continue overseeing the printing of the *Catholic Readings*. The August issue was entitled: *Charles, a Biographical Sketch of One Condemned to Life at Hard Labor*. This was a story of a prisoner on Devil's Island in French Guiana who was converted and lived a saintly life. The September issue was entitled: *Daniel and His Three Companions in Babylon* by Fr. Giulio Metti, a priest of the Oratory of St. Philip. This was a two-act play in verse with a comic skit in the appendix called *The Chimney Sweep*, if not written by Don Bosco, certainly inspired by him. The October issue was entitled: *The Life of Blessed [now Saint] Joseph Labre*. The November issue was entitled: *The Life of St. Bernard of Menthon* who built two hospices called *Great St. Bernard* and *Small St. Bernard*. Through this biography the readers were encouraged to practice Christian hospitality. The December issue was entitled: *Valentino, or a Thwarted Vocation*. It described the consequences of opposition to following a vocation and the terrible punishment meted out to the father for such opposition. The 1867 almanac, *Il Galantuomo* came out at this time.

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<sup>108</sup> Count Charles Cays (1813–1882) was a staunch Catholic and deputy in the Piedmontese Parliament from 1857 to 1860. He became a Salesian in 1877 and was ordained a priest. He later managed the *Catholic Readings*. (Cf. *EBM VIII*, p. 177, footnote 2.)

<sup>109</sup> Cf. *IBM VIII*, pp. 374–393 for a detailed account of this episode.

## 1867

Alessandro dei Conti Riccardi di Netro became the Archbishop of Turin. During this year an “economic reconversion” was undertaken to bring Turin up to pace with the Industrial Revolution. The statue of Mary Immaculate was unveiled on top of the cupola of the church of Mary Help of Christians.

The January-February issue of the fifteenth year of the *Catholic Readings* was entitled: *St. Peter's Centenary, the Life of the Prince of the Apostles, with a Triduum of Prayers to Prepare for the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul* by Don Bosco.

This booklet was to cause Don Bosco grief and test his humility and obedience. Due to animosities, antagonisms and jealousies by certain powers in Rome, this booklet was scrutinized for errors. And some were found! A petition was made to the Congregation of the Index which asked Canon Pio Delicati, a professor of church history at the Apollinare to investigate. The main sticking point was the statement:

“I deem it opportune, by the way, to point out to writers and lecturers on this subject (the establishment of the chair [see] of St. Peter in Rome)—Catholic or Protestant—not to regard it as a point of dogma and religion.”

(Canon Delicati goes on to write)

To maintain that the coming of St. Peter to Rome is not a dogmatic and religious point—meaning that it has no bearing on dogma or religion—is a grave theological misconception, and it cannot but go against the ecclesial sense.<sup>110</sup>

Canon Delicati recommended that the booklet *proscribendum donec corrigatur* (be banned until revised). Fr. Lemoyne writes:

After studying this report, the Sacred Congregation of the Index rejected the consultor's conclusion and limited itself to informing Don Bosco of it through the archbishop of Turin and mandating correction in case of a reprint. It had been Pius IX's order. “This will not do!” he had exclaimed on hearing the suggestion that the book be banned. “Poor Don Bosco! If corrections are in order, let them be made in a reprint.”<sup>111</sup>

Don Bosco suspended all printing of the issue: *St. Peter's Centenary* until he could make corrections, which he did quickly.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. *EBM VIII*, p. 328.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. *EBM VIII*, p. 329.

Another problem was that the *Catholic Readings* in general came under fire. In a letter to the Archbishop of Turin, Angelo V. Modena, O.P., secretary of the Congregation of the Index wrote:

I...avail myself of this opportunity to alert Your Excellency that other denunciations have come to us these days concerning a periodical published in Turin, entitled *Catholic Readings*, wherein are found, if not manifest errors, at least such phrases and stories as to arouse laughter and derision rather than public edification, at a time when religion—especially when presented in ascetic and mystic publications—is so much discredited...<sup>112</sup>

It seems that some of Don Bosco's opponents lacked a sense of humor. Still, these were not comfortable times for the Church in Italy. After much suffering, Don Bosco was able to resolve the matter by May or June.

The March issue was entitled: *Life of St. Joseph, Spouse of Mary, Foster Father of Jesus* culled from many reliable authors and with a novena to prepare for the feast. The April issue was entitled: *A Collection of Stories* by various Italian authors (Silvio Pellico, Cesare Cantù and Giuseppe Manzoni). There were also eight stories by the French writer, Alphonsus Baleydier, about Pope Pius IX and his charity. The May issue was entitled: *St. Peter in Rome, a Drama in Three Acts* written in verse by Fr. Julius Metti of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri in Florence.

For June and July there does not seem to be editions of the *Catholic Readings* per se. However, another booklet (not called the *Catholic Readings*) was issued during these months, again honoring the solemn celebrations of the Centenary of St. Peter entitled: *An Ancient Pilgrimage to Rome to the Tombs of the Apostles on the Occasion of the Eighteenth Centenary of the Martyrdom of the Apostles Peter and Paul* by Fr. Emilio Ruggieri. It contained information on this tradition and explained the origin of the Peter's Pence and the Church's temporal power.

The August-September issue was entitled: *The Venerable Mary Christine of Savoy, Queen of the Two Sicilies*. The October issue was entitled: *Father Benedict, an Exemplary Ecclesiastic during the French Revolution* by Canon Bernardine Checucci. The November issue was entitled: *A Visit to the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Most Holy for Every Day of the Month* by St. Alphonsus Liguori. It also contained a "heroic act of love" and prayers in honor of the seven sorrows and seven joys of Joseph the Patriarch. December's issue was entitled: *The Family of Simon the Exemplary Husband and Resignation in the Face of Adversity*. The 1868 Almanac, *Il Galantuomo* was also mailed at this time.

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. *EBM VIII*, p. 335.

In January the Salesian Society was approved by the bishop of Casale, Peter Maria Ferré, as a diocesan society. In June the church of Mary Help of Christians, begun in 1863, was consecrated by Archbishop Alessandro Riccardi di Netro.

The January issue of the *Catholic Readings* was entitled: *Historical Incidents about the Popes, from St. Peter to Pius IX*. The author is unknown but possibly Don Bosco himself, judging from past topics. Don Bosco constantly harped on the Papacy to defend it from the attacks from all areas: political, social and military. There was a diminution of the religious and civil morals during this time and the *Catholic Readings* described the Papacy as a defender of society throughout history. The February issue was entitled: *Severino, the Adventures of an Alpine Boy* related by the boy himself and written up by Don Bosco. This true story was about an Oratory boy who left the Oratory, joined the Waldensians and later returned to the Church. The March issue was entitled: *Angel's Flight* by Umberto Le Bon and translated into Italian by Fr. Peter Bazetti. It contained prayers and stories of every sort to encourage prayer and devotion to our Lord for the triumph of the Church. The April issue was entitled: *Reflections and Maxims on Current Events and the Exemplary Family of James Bonomo*. This issue dealt with the misrepresentation of religious questions to the general public through ignorance or malice of current journalism. The appendix demonstrated the happiness to be found in a Christian family and how to preserve domestic joy. The May issue was entitled: *Miracles of the Mother of God Invoked under the Title of Mary Help of Christians* by Don Bosco. This demonstrated the power and goodness of Mary toward her devotees. This was in preparation for the consecration of the great church of Mary Help of Christians at the Oratory. The June issue was entitled: *The Life of Saint John the Baptist* in honor of Don Bosco.<sup>113</sup> The July issue was entitled: *The Story of Some Famous Conversions*. The August issue was entitled: *The Great Treasure, Woe to Him Who Loses It* by Fr. Peter Boccalandro, former pastor of St. Mark's in Genoa. It dealt with the gift of Faith, its benefits and preservation and the sorrow at losing it. The September issue was entitled: *The Life of Young Ernest Saccardi of Florence* by Fr. John Bonetti, director of the Seminary at Mirabello. Don Bosco edited the manuscript and wrote Fr. Bonetti that he eliminated several exaggerations and some incidents that might be misunderstood. The October issue was entitled: *Novena of Prayers for the Holy Souls in Purgatory* by a dogma professor. The November-December issue was entitled: *Remembrance [Souvenir] of a Solemn Feast in*

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<sup>113</sup> Don Bosco, whose first name was John, was named in honor of St. John the Evangelist. However, the Oratory boys, believing that he was named for the Baptist, began celebrating his name's day on June 24th. And so it continued.

*Honor of Mary Help of Christians* by Don Bosco. The booklet was dedicated to Pope Pius IX and recounted the history of the title, the consecration ceremonies, sermons and tendered thanks to all the donors who helped build the church and a word of advice to those who received favors from Mary Help of Christians. The 1869 almanac, *Il Galantuomo*, came out at the end of 1868 and the preface contained an idea of Don Bosco's untiring fight against Protestantism:

To those who are trying to protestantize Italy I would like to quote a man who, stricken by God's justice, departed this life in a frightful manner. He once wrote something that may be aptly applied to them. I report it here in its entirety for our comfort and the distress of the evil-intentioned. "From the point of view of history and politics, it is sheer stupidity and childish fancy to try to destroy Catholicism in Italy. Italy, I repeat, is Catholic, and there is no other Catholicism than the Roman version."

Thus wrote Minister Carlo Luigi Farini before he suffered his most tragic loss, that of his mind...

I think that the hoped-for triumph of the Church has already begun, and soon we shall see it accomplished. Let us pray and hope.<sup>114</sup>

## 1869

Don Bosco began the *Library of Italian Classics for Youth*. He made his third trip to Rome after the Salesian Society got official approval from Rome. He also visited Mornese to look into the project of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, some of whom under Mary Domenica Mazzarello would become the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (Salesian Sisters). In December the First Vatican Council began.

The January issue of the *Catholic Readings* was entitled: *The Pope's Temporal Domain, A Conversation Between a Student and a Teacher* by Fr. Peter Boccalandro. This booklet refuted those who would despoil the Pope of his temporal holdings and presumed that he had the responsibility of renouncing them. The February issue was entitled: *The Catholic Church and Her Hierarchy* by Don Bosco. He again brought up the issue of the temporal power and gave an overview of the schisms and heresies that had cropped up in the past centuries. The March issue was entitled: *Valentina, a Worthy Daughter of Mary* by Fr. Peter Bazetti. It narrated how Divine Providence helped a poor girl, the crosses she suffered and the reward and consolation of a life lived in the love of God and neighbor. The April issue was entitled: *The Valley of Almeria*. The May issue was entitled: *The Association of the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians Canonically Erected in the Church Dedicated to Her with a History of this Title* by Don Bosco. The June-July issue was entitled: *Entrance into the World with*

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<sup>114</sup> EBM IX, p. 197.

*Counsels to Youth When They Leave School to Take Up a Career.* These counsels dealt with studying well and choosing well a career, whether ecclesiastical, religious or secular. They gave advice on how to get ahead and avoid pitfalls. This booklet was given to all the students who finished the courses in Salesian trade schools. The August issue was entitled: *Ecumenical Councils and the Catholic Church* by Don Bosco. In this issue Don Bosco expressed the hope that the doctrine of papal infallibility might be defined at the coming Vatican Council. The September-October issue was entitled: *Sanctifying the Month of November, Devotion to the Holy Souls in Purgatory, How to Hear Mass for the Benefit of the Holy Souls.* The November issue was entitled: *Angelina, Little Orphan of the Apennines* by Don Bosco. The December issue was entitled: *The Vatican Council's Jubilee Year* by Fr. Secondo Franco. As in the February 1865 issue described above, the purpose (success of the Vatican Council) and benefits of a jubilee year were explained and devotional practices were encouraged. As usual, the 1870 almanac, *Il Galantuomo*, was sent at the same time.

## 1870

In January Don Bosco made his fourth trip to Rome and during the Vatican Council was active in promoting the definition of Papal Infallibility. In June the Oratory's Past Pupil Association is founded. In October the first Salesian foundation outside Piedmont was set up in Alassio (Savona). The Mirabello school is transferred to Borgo San Martino. In September the Italian forces occupied Rome forcing the suspension of the Vatican Council. Catholic reaction to this was mixed. The *Correnti Memorandum* made religion optional in the state school giving rise to a parallel Catholic school system.

The January issue of the *Catholic Readings* was entitled: *Nicolò Olivieri and the Ransom of Arab Schoolgirls.* Fr. Nicolas Olivieri died in 1864 after redeeming over 810 Moorish girls and young women. This issue intended to further the cause of the missions. The February issue was entitled: *The Holy Cross, Historical, Dogmatic and Moral Aspects about the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ* by Fr. Charles Philip da Poirino, Capuchin. It was also a polemic against Protestant blasphemies against the Cross, its relics, its cult and its appearance in public places as well as in and on churches. The booklet also described miracles as a result of its use and miraculous appearances seen by great numbers.

It was on February 8, 1870 that Don Bosco was granted an audience with Pope Pius IX (one of two when even many bishops at the Council had not yet seen the Pope). During this audience Don Bosco presented him with a full set of deluxe-bound *Catholic Readings* and the few copies of *Italian Classics for the Young* which were then in print. It is reported that Pius IX took great delight in

them and throughout the rest of the day showed them to those who came to see him.<sup>115</sup>

The March-April issue was entitled: *Emil Defaix, a Model Worker. His Real Story, Following Advice of a Friend* by Abbot Richaudeau, translated by Fr. Peter Bazetti. It was directed toward young workers and related the life of a fellow worker who lived an exemplary life, did much good and, resigned to a long illness, died in the odor of sanctity at the age of 23. The May issue was entitled: *Novena to Mary Help of Christians* by Don Bosco. The June issue was entitled: *History of the Devotion to St. Joseph, Spouse of the Virgin Mary* by the Barnabite, Fr. Innocent Gobio. A petition had been submitted to the Council to declare St. Joseph patron of the Universal Church and this booklet was an effort to further the cause. The July issue was entitled: *Biography of the youth: Joseph Mazzarello* by Fr. John Baptist Lemoyne. It was the life a young man who, overcoming difficult circumstances, donned the clerical habit and died a saintly death. The August-September issue was entitled: *Virginia Anselmi, Model of Christian Widows* by the Barnabite, Fr. Alphonse M. Pagnone. This holy woman was presented to girls, wives and mothers of families as an example to imitate. The October issue was entitled: *The Acts of the Ecumenical Vatican Council up to the Fourth Session*. The November-December issue was entitled: *Church History for the Young and Useful for All People* by Don Bosco. This combined issue was 464 pages long which was an emended reprint of a previous volume of the same name. This, as stated in the preface, was an authentic reprint by the author to counter recent pirated editions which contained errors.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Cf. *EBM IX*, p. 391.

<sup>116</sup> In this period of history there were no international copyright laws to protect the works of authors or their names. Several of Don Bosco's works were thus pirated wholesale or in large part. An example of this was an English edition of his *History of Italy* by J. D. Morell (inspector of schools) called *A Compendium of Italian History* and published in 1881 by Longman Green of London. Cf. *Journal of Salesian Studies*, Vol. I, No. 1, "Don Bosco's Battle Against Illiteracy," by Fr. Michael Ribotta, S.D.B., p. 6 (note).

Salesian foundations numbered five with 77 Salesians. Minister Lanza called Don Bosco to Florence for "official business" which concerned the filling of many vacant episcopal sees and Pius IX asked him to submit a list of potential bishops. A private Salesian boarding school was opened for young workers (trade school) at Marassi which would be transferred to Sampierdarena (Genoa) in 1872. In June and September Don Bosco made his fifth and sixth trips to Rome. The municipal school at Varazze was opened (absorbing the Cherasco school). In July, Rome became the capital of the Kingdom of Italy. The Italian State unilaterally enacted the Laws of Guarantees granting autonomy to the Holy See. This was rejected by the Pope because of the unilateral acquisition of the Papal States and the environs of Rome. Bishop Lawrence Gastaldi was named Archbishop of Turin and took over the see in November. Turin's population was 212,000, a slight decline over the past seven years which is understandable due to emigration and wars during those years. The first electric tram operated in Turin. Don Bosco became seriously ill on December 6th at Varazze and was bedridden until January 30, 1872.

The following are the titles of the *Catholic Readings* for 1871: *St. Joseph's Vicissitudes*, a sacred drama by Fr. Lucian Secco (January); *Colomba and Giacomina, A Cross Made More Bearable*, a story by Fr. Cajetan Blandini (February); *Anthony, A Soldier's Homecoming* by Fr. Celestine Faggiani (March); *Papal Infallibility Explained to the Faithful* by Fr. Secondo Franco, S.J. (April); *The Blessed Virgin's Apparition at La Salette* with other wondrous events compiled from other publications by Fr. John Bosco (May); *Livia Ortalli, Lover of the Sacred Heart*, recollections by Fr. A. M. Pagnone, Barnabite (June); *The Life of St. Jerome* by Fr. Peter Bazetti (July); *The Crown of Virginity. Why the Diodati Translation of the Bible is Forbidden* by Fr. Louis Bruno (August); *The Young Christian Girl, Reflections and readings for Catholic Girls* (September); *A Great Friend. Devotion to the Guardian Angel*, reflections and anecdotes by Fr. Vincent G. Berchialla (October); *Interesting Incidents in the Life of Pius IX*, (November-December).

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<sup>117</sup> Up to this year (1871), *The Biographical Memoirs*, volumes I through IX, from which most of this paper's information is abstracted, were authored by Fr. John Baptist Lemoyne. In 1908 Fr. Angelo Amadei (1868-1945) became editor of the *Salesian Bulletin* and assisted Fr. Lemoyne in the research and compilation for *The Biographical Memoirs*. In 1916 Fr. Lemoyne died and Fr. Amadei dropped other projects and supervised the publication of Volume IX. He then went on to edit volume X. This will explain why there is a change (less description) in recording the contents of the *Catholic Readings*. For the most part only the titles are available to this writer.

## 1872

During this year Don Bosco, at Archbishop Gastaldi's request, took over the diocesan school of Valsalice which served boys from affluent families. With Mary Domenica Mazzarello as Co-Foundress, Don Bosco founded the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

The 1872 *Catholic Readings* were entitled: *Answers to the Objections of the Evangelical Joseph Imerito Against the Catholic Religion* by Fr. Mark Mal-larini, pastor and vicar of the diocese of Canalli, member of the diocesan Congregation of the Mission (January); *Historical Memoirs of Fr. Victor Frigiolini of the Congregation of the Schools of Charity founded in Venice by the Venerable Fr. Conti de' Cavanis* previously written in 1853 by a member of the same congregation (February); *A Summary of the Life of the Venerable Servant of God, John Ancina, Oratorian of St. Philip Neri and Later Bishop of Saluzzo* written by a Turinese priest (March); *The Sign of the Cross* by Fr. Charles Philip da Poirino, Capuchin (April); *The Railway or a Blind Man's Daughter*, an interesting and edifying story (May); *The Month of June Consecrated to the Sacred Heart* culled from the manual of Fr. Secondo Franco, S.J. (June); *Holy Communion* by Monsignor Louis de Sécur (July); *The Fifteenth Centenary of St. Eusebius (of Vercelli) and the Churches of Western Italy* (August-September); *The Conversion of Daniel Martin a former Calvinist minister in Berne which occurred in the 17th Century: His Own Story* (October); *General Drouot, a Model of a Christian Soldier* by Fr. Vincent Minella (November-December).

## 1873

In 1873 and continuing into 1874, Piedmont banks went through a serious financial crisis. The Italian government dropped the Faculty of Theology from the State University. The anti-church legislation was extended to the province of Rome. Archbishop Gastaldi's opposition to the Salesian Society, begun in 1872, increased. In February Don Bosco made his seventh journey to Rome. In September one of Don Bosco's first collaborators, Fr. John Borel, died. Don Bosco also began the first notebooks which became the *Memoirs of the Oratory*. On December 30th he began a four-month stay in Rome the purpose of which was to further delineate political negotiations between the Holy See and the State as well as to achieve the definitive approval of the Salesian Society.

The *Catholic Readings* for 1873 were entitled: *The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus* by Fr. John Baptist Lemoyne (January-March); *The Martyr Paul Emil Reynaud and John Pinna, Apostolic Missionaries* (April); *Highlights of the Life of St. Gregory VII* (May); *Serapia, An Episode of the Second Century of Lower France for Popular Use* by L. Matteucci (June-July); *The*

*Catholic in the Nineteenth Century, Advice Offered by a Member of the Turin Catholic Circulating Library* (August); *Jesus Christ and the Church, Samples of Revelations Related by a Sister of the Nativity* (September); *The Ferocious Beast Revealed to Youth* (October-November); *The Wonders of Our Lady of Lourdes* (December). The 1874 almanac, *Il Galantuomo* also came out in December.

## 1874

Don Bosco took his eighth trip to Rome during which he was active for bishops' nominations and temporalities, and the Salesian Constitutions. On April 3rd, the decree granting the definitive approval of the Salesian Constitutions was issued. Don Bosco drafted the third notebook of the *Memoirs of the Oratory*. In May, Fr. Dominic Pestarino died. He had been the spiritual director of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate in Mornese. It was from this group and with his cooperation, Don Bosco founded the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello was elected as first superior. Because of the definitive approval of the Salesian Society, Don Bosco became a national figure and his activities were often reported in the newspapers. Not all the reports were favorable due to his uncompromising defense of the Pope and the Church. The Holy See issued the decree *Non Expedit* which forbade Catholics from participating in political elections. The banking crisis in Piedmont continued during the year.

The *Catholic Readings* for 1874 were entitled: *Maximinus, a Young Boy's Meeting with a Protestant Minister at the Site of the Ancient Roman Capitol* (January). In a clear style adapted to all ages, Don Bosco explained and defended the Holy See in Rome against the enemies of the Catholic Church; *St. Joseph, Protector of the Catholic Church* by Fr. Joseph Frassinetti (February); *A Brief Life of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Sixth Centenary of His Death* by Fr. John Bonetti, S.D.B. (March). March began the 22nd year of publication of the *Catholic Readings*; *The Life of St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan and Doctor of the Church* by Fr. Thomas Chiuso, Archbishop Gastaldi's secretary and a member of the Subalpine Ecclesiastical Academy (April).

An important digression is necessary at this point in relation to the April issue on St. Ambrose. Archbishop Lawrence Gastaldi went to Milan to celebrate the fifteenth centenary of the episcopal consecration of St. Ambrose. While he was at dinner with many bishops and distinguished guests he was asked about Don Bosco and his Salesians, knowing the difficulties the archbishop was having with them. The following response is cited in the *Biographical Memoirs*:

The Salesians are doing fine work but they could do a lot more if they yielded to their archbishop. Doubtless, within a short time, Don Bosco will astonish the whole world by the vigor of his Congregation. It is still a fledgling organiza-

tion, but it will soon become a giant, thriving on the spirit of many other religious congregations. While these are crushed by the persecution of the world and the devil, Don Bosco's Congregation will expand all over the world, will be sought by all nations, and will spread its branches from pole to pole. No human power will ever stop its growth... I am convinced that the Salesians are destined to replace outdated religious orders and inherit what was once theirs.<sup>118</sup>

Continuing the 1874 *Catholic Readings: Heartless William, the Prisoner of Poissy* translated from the French (May); *The Tail of the Great Beast* (June); The July to December issues, which added up to 696 pages, were titled *The Evangelist of Wittenberg and the Protestant Reformation in Germany* by Fr. John Baptist Lemoyne, S.D.B.

## 1875

Don Bosco took his ninth trip to Rome. The Salesians opened the first house outside of Italy (Nice, France). The first Salesian missionary expedition left in November for South America (Argentina).<sup>119</sup>

The 1875 issues of the *Catholic Readings* were entitled: *Godfrey, a Moral Story for People*, about a young peasant boy who converts his father and two brothers by an anonymous author (January[?]);<sup>120</sup> *Some Examples of How to Keep Holy Days* by Canon Gaetano Costamagna, professor of theology at the Saluzzo seminary (February-March); it contained 173 anecdotes, mostly of punishments visited on those who profane the holy days. Don Bosco added the *Rules of the Association for Holy Days. The 1875 Jubilee. Its Proclamation and Devotions for Visits to Churches* was written by Don Bosco (April); this was basically a reprint of the 1854 and 1865 editions of the *Catholic Readings* dealing with jubilees. Added to it was the latest papal encyclical. *Mary Help of Christians and*

<sup>118</sup> EBM X, p. 579.

<sup>119</sup> As referred to in footnote #114, the English *Biographical Memoirs* gives authorship of volume X to Fr. Amadei although, for the most part, he edited Fr. Lemoyne's prepared galley proofs, so the English version gives authorship to Fr. Eugene Ceria for volumes XI through XIX. However, the Italian version continues to credit Fr. Lemoyne as author of volumes XI and XII because of the advanced degree of the work. Fr. Ceria becomes author in his own right in volumes XIII through XIX. Fr. Eugene Ceria (1870–1957) was a distinguished scholar, author and editor who personally knew Don Bosco during his (Ceria's) formative years. His masterpiece is considered to be *Don Bosco con Dio* (*Don Bosco with God*) published in 1930. He compiled the *Annals of the Salesian Society* in four large volumes (1941–1951) and collected and edited the *Letters of St. John Bosco* in four volumes, two of which were published posthumously.

<sup>120</sup> Volume XI of the *EBM* (pp. 417–419) does not give the month of publication for the *Catholic Readings* except in a few cases. The [?] represents my reconstruction.

*Accounts of Some Favors Obtained during the First Seven Years after the Consecration of the Church Dedicated to Her in Turin* (May); it was in two parts: the first, a short history of the devotion and the construction of the church; the second, reports of 130 favors granted by Mary. *The Heart of Jesus on the Second Centenary of Its Revelation* by Fr. John Bonetti (June); *Holy Water* (July-August [?]) by Fr. Charles Philip da Poirino and was a sequel to the April, 1872 pamphlet *The Sign of the Cross*. Two pamphlets were combined and called: *The Truth of the Christian Faith* by Baron Manuel di San Giovanni and *A Layman's Thoughts on Christianity* by Fr. Sebastian Vallebona (September-October [?]). Both pamphlets confuted Protestant errors. *Fernando Cortez* by Fr. John Baptist Lemoyne (November-December [?]).

It may be of interest to quote *The Biographical Memoirs* at this point considering the modern attitude toward the European conquest of the New World and the effect of Catholic missionary efforts.

(This issue described) the discovery of Mexico. Mixed with many adventures of that daring warrior were descriptions of customs, monuments, Mexican religious rites, and endeavors of Catholic missionaries to restrain the impetuous temperament of the conqueror and to mitigate the woes of the vanquished people.<sup>121</sup>

Also in December the 1876 almanac *Il Galantuomo* was issued.

## 1876

Don Bosco received pontifical approval for the Salesian Cooperators. Their role was described thus: "To help the Church, bishops and pastors in promoting good according to the spirit of the Salesian Society." He took his tenth trip to Rome. The second missionary expedition set out for a new destination—Patagonia in southern Argentina. He accompanied them to Rome for the papal blessing. An agricultural failure throughout Europe had repercussions in Turin.

As seen above, the *Biographical Memoirs*, starting from volume XI, becomes less detailed about the *Catholic Readings*. From here on mention will be made only of those issues that come to light in the *Memoirs*.

In January of 1876 Don Bosco held his annual Conferences of St. Francis de Sales. These conferences were attended by all the directors of the Salesian foundations and served as an organizing and governing convention for the coming year. During these conferences Don Bosco wanted all the confreres to receive copies of the *Catholic Readings*. He went on to say that all the boys should receive this

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<sup>121</sup> Cf. *EBM XI*, pp. 418-419.

publication as well. There was some inconsistency among the various schools.<sup>122</sup>

The May issue was a reprint from the previous year on devotion to Mary Help of Christians and an account of numerous favors granted to the faithful through her intercession. This raised a storm in the Turin chancery and the antagonism and opposition of the Archbishop which came to a head in 1877. We will mention this subsequently. Suffice it to say at this time that Archbishop Gastaldi appointed two censors for the *Catholic Readings* and another series of books called the *Italian Classics for the Young*.

The October and November issues were a report of the Salesian Missions in South America written by Fr. Caesar Chiala (1837–1876) and were published posthumously.

## 1877

Don Bosco visited Rome three times during this year. The first was an audience with an ill Pius IX. The second, when he accompanied the archbishop of Buenos Aires. The third, to promote his missions and dispel a misunderstanding that Pius IX had when his letters to Don Bosco were not answered. He did answer, but they were not delivered. The first General Chapter of the Salesian Society was held and would be every three years thereafter. These chapters took the place of the annual Conferences of St. Francis de Sales held at the end of January. Don Bosco wrote his educational philosophy in the little treatise on the *Sistema Preventivo*. In August, the *Salesian Bulletin* (*Bollettino Salesiano*) was established. The first missionary expedition of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) set out for Uruguay. The *Coppino Laws* established free and obligatory elementary education with religion taught only if the parents requested it.

In May Don Bosco issued a second edition of the *Catholic Readings* entitled: *The Little Cloud of Carmel*. It had been printed at the Salesian Press at Sampierdarena with the approval of the Genoa Chancery. When Archbishop Gastaldi became aware of it he looked up the 1875 edition and complained to Don Bosco that events were described as “supernatural” without the proper diocesan investigation as mandated by the Council of Trent. Don Bosco responded that he had submitted the booklet to archdiocesan authorities who approved it. He also described the events as “favors,” avoiding calling them miracles or supernatural. Another confusion was the interpretation of the decrees of the Council of Trent which refer to those unusual events attributed to Servants of God not yet beatified or canonized. This certainly did not apply to the Blessed Virgin Mary! In 1878 and 1879 these matters were referred to the Sacred Congregation of Rites and Don Bosco had to defend himself to this Congregation. This matter was not

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. *EBM XII*, pp. 72ff.

resolved until 1880. The Archbishop of Turin had a disclaimer published stating that the issue called *The Little Cloud of Carmel* had the words "With Permission of the Ecclesiastical Authority" but this was not the "Ecclesiastical Authority" of the archdiocesan chancery of Turin.

## 1878—1888

It is at this point that references to the *Catholic Readings* fade away both in the Italian Biographical Memoirs (*Memorie Biografiche*) and the English *Biographical Memoirs*. Only references to issues which Don Bosco wrote wholly or in part are available to this writer. They are: **1878:** (September-October) *The Most Beautiful Flower, the Election of Pope Leo XIII* with a brief biography of his electors by Don Bosco. **1879:** (May) *The Ark of the Covenant, the Power of Mary Help of Christians Toward Her Devotees* by Fr. John Baptist Lemoyne with some revisions by Don Bosco. **1883:** (January-March) *The Catholic in the World* by Don Bosco. It contained simple stories of a father speaking to his children about religion. **1884:** (March) *Some Episodes in the Life of Louis Comollo Who Died in the Seminary at Chieri Admired for His Rare Virtue* by Don Bosco. **1886:** (June) *Upright Family Scenes Revealed in the Life of Margaret Bosco* by Fr. John Baptist Lemoyne derived from the *Memoirs of the Oratory* and probably revised by Don Bosco.

Thus ends the list of recoverable titles of the *Catholic Readings*. From 1884 until Don Bosco's death in January, 1888, his health and eyesight were deteriorating. Don Bosco had delegated the editorship of the *Catholic Readings* and the *Salesian Bulletin* to Frs. John Bonetti and John Baptist Lemoyne.

## Conclusion

Don Bosco was a voluminous writer and indefatigable editor. His topics for the *Catholic Readings* were truly "catholic" in the widest sense of the word. He sought items and stories from countless sources. His motivation was always the greater glory of God and the defense of the Catholic Faith against the anticlerical and Protestant incursions during the *Risorgimento* and the Industrial Revolution as well as the edification and education of the "ordinary" Catholic, especially the young. He was a man of singular dedication and tenacity which helped stabilize the Church in Italy during the most difficult times of the nineteenth century. As we look forward to the new millennium and realize how difficult it is to proclaim the Word of God, especially through the media, we stand in awe before Don Bosco's accomplishments. His challenges and difficulties were comparable to ours today. Yet when it came to the glory of God and the salvation of youth he went ahead and did what he needed to do. What an inspired and courageous Saint!