

ANNALS OF THE SALESIAN SOCIETY
(Vol 1)

Fr Eugene Ceria

ANNALS OF THE SALESIAN SOCIETY I. 1841-1888
FROM THE ORIGINS UNTIL THE DEATH OF ST JOHN BOSCO
(1841-1888)

Note: the following translation is by Fr John Lens, now deceased. It is more a digest than a complete translation of everything to be found in the original, but certainly suffices to give the English reader access to most of the contents of Volume 1 of the Annals.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the fourth successor of St John Bosco, Fr Peter Ricaldone, in the hope that it may be an appropriate contribution to the celebration of the first Salesian centenary.

FOREWORD

The title 'Annals' points to the chronological approach taken in this work. Instead of proceeding according to more or less artificially divided periods, we are following the main direction marked out over the years; we can consider this direction to have its beginning from 1841, as the facts will make obvious but also according to Don Bosco's emphatic statement.¹ It is true, however, that those who love to represent the evolution of complex historical events in successive stages will not have any difficulty finding ways to identify a range of facts that have a similar nature.

The title also refers more generically to the Society of St Francis de Sales without the word 'Pious' added. Why we refer to Society instead of Congregation will become apparent as the story unfolds. With regard to 'Pious', we need to note, first of all, that this never appears in the Rule, not even in the earliest drafts, nor is it generally to be found in official documents. Don Bosco liked to use it when speaking or writing, so that the term 'Society' would not be taken wrongly by ill-intentioned people, but would at the same time clarify the nature of his Institute for good people. Would it have been appropriate to maintain this term forever? The Superior Chapter decided that it should be used only for the Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators, and saw that there was no longer any need to perpetuate its use for the Salesian Society; hence, from 1926 this words was suppressed in its Acts and Year Books.²

Our account will not go beyond the lifetime of our Holy Founder. He left the Society perfectly organised, and it remained to his successor only to develop its potential in every direction not only as marked out but also more or less already in process. In fact, Don Rua did nothing that was not already there at least in embryo in the legacy passed onto him by Don Bosco.

I think it is pointless to offer a bibliography; because, those who have written so far about Don Bosco, drew either from the *Biographical Memoirs*, if they could consult them, or from works based on them. Where I encountered something new, I have not failed to give them due recognition. If any archival material

¹Mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 11

²The Year Books, beginning from 1887, bear the title Society of St Francis de Sales. From 1887 to 1924, inside, the List of Houses and Members bore the heading: General list of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales. In 1925, only the Superior Chapter group is referred to as the Superior Chapter of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales; but this was more a question of oversight. From the following year onwards, the word 'Pious' disappeared completely.

has been published, I have to say that everything has also passed through my hands, since I have easily been able to freely consult the Salesian archives to obtain information, check news and also, if necessary, draw from unpublished material for anything that naturally has a close relationship with the history of the Society.

Hopefully, readers will not have to complain here about a problem people sometimes meet when dealing with topics that refer to Don Bosco. In fact, we can see at times how easily, when we lose sight of the overall direction, we can wander off on unessential biographical excursions, despite the fact that they make the reading more attractive. In our case the temptation was more frequent and stronger than ever. The reason for this is that Don Bosco's life and the history of the Society are intertwined in such a way as to often make it difficult to avoid related elements between them, as everyone could see when reading the *Biographical Memoirs*. But here we will find the material of our history kept apart from the rest and entirely reworked.

There was no need to delay in making a first attempt at the history of our Society. The last of the Saint's contemporaries have gone. They offered us three valuable advantages: they had the good fortune of seeing and hearing this great luminary of the nineteenth century; they were close to those fortunate ones who not only owed their Salesian formation to him, but were also chosen by him to see to the general government of the Society; they were witnesses of how matters concerning us were passed on in times not too far from their origins. To allow those times to move even further away without writing them up and establishing their characteristics with the help of those who had lived with them at more or less close quarters, would have made the task much more difficult for anyone who later wanted or needed to go back to the sources, eager to obey the proverb that those who want clear water go to the source.

It is an ideal for those who write history to bring the people and past matters as close as possible, to those who come after them, according to the advice of a famous historian who says of history that you have to "write so that someone born in a distant age can have it all before him as clearly as those who were present at the time. This is precisely the aim of history."³

I have mentioned the Saint's most immediate collaborators. In the origins of each religious Congregation two facts are observed. The Founder, blessed with many supernatural gifts, sanctifies himself in a way that corresponds to the nature of the foundation he is about to achieve, and meanwhile infuses his spirit among his first disciples, who then have to pass it on to future generations. "The spirit of the disciple," writes St. John of the Cross, "secretly models itself on that of his spiritual father."⁴ Whence we see the importance of knowing these 'satellites' who variously reflect the light of the main star; here, however, they appear almost only on the horizon, but will shine out in the period that follows. We believe it has been the right moment to pass on their features, reproducing the portraits of all those who were members of the Superior Chapter while Don

³GUICCIARDINI, Ricordi poi. e civ., CX1,111.

⁴The Ascent of Mt Carmel, II, 18, 5.

Bosco was alive.

Let me express here my infinite gratitude to the Economer General, Fr Giraudi, who has followed my work with particular interest and gave me plenty of encouragement and advice.

Turin, 31 January 1941.

Chapter 1

The idea of a Society

In 1845, Don Bosco wrote in his 'Church History': "After the fall of Napoleon, the Religious Orders and Congregations (abolished during the French Revolution) could return to their old places and once again take up their Gospel and Mission work. Some of the old Orders did not regain their ancient vigour; therefore God raised up other Congregations that to some extent took their place and at least in part supplied the needs of the day." Without arrogance or exaggeration, with humble certitude, we can say that the Salesian Congregation was the most conspicuous of those Congregations.

Don Bosco was only a boy when he understood what would be his life's mission, the salvation of poor youth. Already as a small boy he gathered the boys of Moncucco and began to catechise them. As a student he continued his apostolate among the youngsters of Chieri; during his years in the Seminary he spent his long holidays educating and evangelising the boys of the surrounding farms. As a young priest he was on the look-out to save the boys of the streets and squares of Turin. At that time he gave a lasting shape to his work: the Festive Oratory – the first cell of a giant complex of works for the benefit of the Church and civil society.

For eight years he worked on a limited scale; meanwhile hundreds and hundreds of poor boys flocked to the capital of Piedmont. Up to a certain point he almost managed alone; occasional helpers gave a hand in keeping discipline and providing instruction for the crowd of youngsters, but the burden of responsibility rested on him alone.

In 1844 he began to feel that he could no longer manage alone; he needed capable and devoted helpers, men on whom he could count. The need of helpers became a constant preoccupation. One Saturday, in October, ruminating on the work of the next day, he went to rest with a heavy heart. A dream kept him busy the whole night.

It looked to him that he was in the midst of a number of animals: wolves, goats, sheep and lambs, dogs, birds... They caused such uproarious bedlam that he took fright and wanted to run away. A Lady, dressed like a Shepherdess, blocked his path. Totally exhausted, he looked around again and he saw, among

other things, that four out of five animals had turned into lambs and that shepherds had appeared to heed them. He was relieved – but not for long: in a short time all those shepherds left the place. Then another change took place: many of the lambs turned into shepherds, and among them they took charge of the immense and increasing flock. Then some of the shepherds detached themselves to go elsewhere, they looked for other animals and took them to other sheepfolds. - Thirty years later he wrote in the ‘Memoirs of the Oratory’: “Then and there I did not understand the meaning, and neither did I give much credence to the dream”, anyhow, it gave him great confidence for the future.

As time went on he began to see clear: experience showed that steady and good collaborators could only be found from among his own boys, those who were formed by him and were attached to his person. Later, in another dream, the same lady gave him a white ribbon inscribed obedience: to avoid desertion he was told to tie it around the forehead of his followers. Here we have a first vague suggestion of a Congregation, but it would take a long time before everything became clear. Dreams continued to encourage him. Between 1849 and 1856, three times a dream was repeated that gave him hope of a happy outcome:

One day, the heavenly Queen appeared to me. She led me into a beautiful garden. There stood there a rustic but wide and charming portico. The portico opened on a lovely walk that soon became, as far as the eye could see, a breathtakingly beautiful pergola, whose sides were lined with enchanting roses in full bloom. The ground too was covered with roses. The Blessed Virgin said to me: “Take off your shoes!”. When I had done so, she added: “Walk under that rose pergola, for this is the path you must take”. I gladly removed my shoes because it would have been a pity to step on such gorgeous roses. I took but a few steps and immediately felt very sharp thorns piercing my feet and making them bleed. I had to stop and turn back.

“I had better wear my shoes,” I told my guide.

“Yes, indeed”, she replied, “sturdy ones”.

So I put my shoes on again and returned to the rose pergola, followed by a number of helpers who had just showed up and asked to go along with me. They followed me under the indescribably beautiful pergola, but as I went along I noted that it was becoming narrow and low. Many of its branches were draped like festoons; others instead just dropped straight down. Some branches here and there, jutted side ways from the rose stalks, while others formed a thicket which partly blocked the path; still others crept along the ground. All the branches, however, were thick with roses. There were roses about me, roses above me, and roses under my feet.

As my feet made me wince with pain, I could not help brushing against the roses at my sides, and even sharper thorns pricked me. But I kept walking. My lacerated legs, though, kept getting

entangled in the lower branches. Whenever I pushed aside a bough barring my way, or skirted the sides of the pergola to avoid it, the thorns dug into me and made me bleed all over. The roses overhead also were thick with thorns which pricked my head. Notwithstanding, I went forward, encouraged by the Blessed Virgin. Now and then, however, some sharper thorns pierced me more than others and caused greater pain.

Meanwhile those who were watching me walk under that bower and they were a crowd – passed comments, such as, “How lucky Don Bosco is! His path is forever strewn with roses. He has not a worry in the world. No troubles at all!” But they couldn’t see the thorns that were piercing my poor legs. I called on many priests, clerics, and laymen to follow me, and they did so joyfully, enthralled by the beauty of the flowers. When, however, they discovered that they had to walk over sharp thorns and that there was no way to avoid them, they loudly began complaining, “We have been fooled !”

I answered: “If you are out for a nice time, you had better go back. If not, follow me”.

Many turned back. After going on for a while, I turned back to look at my followers. You can not imagine how I felt when I saw that some had disappeared and others had already turned back and were walking away. I went after them and called them back, but it was useless: they would not even listen to me. Then I broke into tears and wept unrestrainedly as I asked myself: “Must I walk this painful path all alone?”. But I was soon comforted. I saw a group of priests, clerics and laymen coming toward me. “Here we are,” they said. “We are all yours and ready to follow you”. So I led them forward. Only a few lost heart and quit; most of them followed me through.

After walking the whole length of the rose pergola I found myself in another enchanting garden, and my few followers gathered around me. They were exhausted, ragged and bleeding, but a cool breeze healed them all. Another gust of wind came and, like magic, I found myself surrounded by a vast crowd of boys, young clerics, coadjutor brothers and even priests, who began helping me care for all those boys. Many of these helpers I knew, but many more were strangers. . .

Biogr. Mem.. Vol.III, p.25-27

This dream was easy to explain: through many tribulations he would in the end reach a stage in which he would have numerous and willing helpers. Yes. . . but only after many tribulations! The years 1848 till 1851 were a very critical period. Many of his helpers, mainly young priests, not only left him but started a real war on the Oratory. They were misled by the political fashions of the day and they did not approve of the new method used by our Saint.

Don Bosco became all the more convinced that he should have a free hand, that his work would not be firmly grounded if he was not the Master in his own house. At one point he thought that he could join a religious order: the order would delegate him for youth apostolate and supply confreres to help him – but such an Institute did not seem to exist. There was only one other way: gradually to form his own collaborators.

There were three working boys who frequented his Sunday Oratory, and a fourth boy who studied in his boarding: Joseph Buzzetti, Carlo Gastini, James Bellia and Felix Reviglia. In July 1849 he spoke to them: “You see how many boys are coming to the Oratory, and how many more may come in the future. I am looking for boys who are willing to undergo some training to become my helpers. Would you not like to help me? I will teach you the elementary classes and a little Latin, and God willing you may become priests!” Their reply was an enthusiastic yes! Then Don Bosco took out his handkerchief: “See, he said, I should be able to handle you as freely as I handle my handkerchief – you should be obedient to all my wishes!”

He gave them regular classes and followed them up. In September he took them with him for holidays to his brother’s house in Becchi – and the classes intensified. During these same holidays he discovered another suitable boy, Angelo Savio, whom he took with him to Turin. A priest-friend agreed to give the boys instruction in his own house in town. They came to a stage that Don Bosco could give them the cassock... but Buzzetti smashed the fingers of his right hand in an accident, and Gastini’s health proved unreliable. They remained with Don Bosco, years later the first would become a Salesian Coadjutor, the second also would render many services to Don Bosco, but at that moment they were a disappointment. Don Bosco continued to help Bellia and Reviglia, they became priests but joined the diocese. Savio only became a valid support – he would finish his days as a Salesian missionary in Ecuador.

The first failure did not stop Don Bosco. He was more than ever convinced that he needed helpers who would learn his way of doing and obey him. In 1848, as Director of the three Oratories of Valdocco, Porta Nuova and Vanchiglia, he took part in the meeting of a diocesan Commission. The Commission was to study a proposal of Canon Gastaldi to gather all the Oratories of Turin under the umbrella of a common Federation, the ‘Work of the Oratories’. Don Bosco understood that, if he agreed, he would forever be under the orders of others and be limited to his place in Valdocco. “I do not wish to condemn or be condemned – he said – the Canon has his plan and I have mine. There will always be Oratories to be opened, let each one go his own way. For myself I need two things: a free hand, and individuals who entirely depend on me”. Someone objected: “So, do you intend then to start a Congregation?” - “Well, a Congregation or something else, anything, provided that it allows me to open Oratories, chapels, churches, organise Catechism and other classes, and have personnel that are devoted to my person”. The proposal came to nothing and Don Bosco was accused of stubbornness, but he would not retract, he was sure that he walked the way that God wanted him to follow.

Don Bosco had certainly large vistas. Already in 1847, in his Regulations for

the Festive Oratory, three items pointed to future development, even a Society. First, the designation he gave to the leaders of the Oratory, were the same as later would become customary in his Society: there was a Rector, a Prefect (the Rector's right hand), and a Catechist (Spiritual Director). Secondly, the Oratory was not confined to the city of Turin, the Rules presupposed that the Oratory would spread to other places. Thirdly, he envisaged the permanency of his Institution: the Rector could nominate his successor. Added to these, the Superiors were to be elected democratically, in a kind of Chapter. Finally, the spirit itself of the Rule, the family spirit, would also be the prevailing spirit of his future Congregation.

Chapter 2

Preparing the ground

Archbishop Fransoni of Turin always looked with a kind eye to the ‘Work of the Oratories’. In a letter from his exile in France, dated 31 March 1852, he appointed Don Bosco ‘the effective Head and Spiritual Director of the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales, and of those of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga and of the Holy Guardian Angels, united with and depending on the former, granting him all the faculties necessary and opportune to reach his holy purpose’.

The Archbishop was preoccupied about the future of the work. He earnestly insisted that Don Bosco would find ways and means to assure its continued existence. Don Bosco, he suggested, should acquaint others with his experience, familiarise them with his spirit, and prepare them to take up his heredity when his time had come to leave the world; in other words, the Archbishop wanted Don Bosco to start a religious Congregation.

Surely, the Archbishop did not envisage a world-wide Congregation - but he clearly desired that Don Bosco would explore the possibilities of founding a diocesan religious Congregation that would carry on his work. Don Bosco understood, but the undertaking was difficult for several reasons. It would not do to gather just a few willing adults; he had realised that he had to educate youngsters to work in his spirit, and it would take years before they would be able to take up adult responsibility.

At the time, the Government was closing religious houses, the air was poisoned with prejudices against religious orders and religious persons. Even the diocesan clergy and good Catholic families had a jaundiced view of religious life; the word ‘friar’ had become synonymous with ‘lazy bum’. All the first Salesians, Cardinal Cagliero included, told us that a mention of monks or monasteries would make the boys burst out in uproarious laughter.

Don Bosco however tried his best, and in the end he succeeded. When he noticed a suitable boy, he would first of all offer him his friendship, provide for his needs, give him a good religious education and place him among like-minded friends. Often, in a group of boys or clerics, he would start playing with his handkerchief and say: “O, if only I had a dozen boys who would be as obedient as my handkerchief! You know what I would do? I would spread the name of Jesus

not only in Europe but far away, to the four corners of the world!" In his talks he hinted at the beauty of life in community, he would narrate the example of Saints who had done a lot of good on earth and received a big reward in heaven. With a boy alone, he would ask him: "Do you love Don Bosco? Would you not like to stay with him? What do you think of being a cleric here in the Oratory? Would you not like to help Don Bosco in his work for boys? See, even if I had a hundred priests and a hundred clerics, I would have work for all of them."

In his prudence he did not ask more from them than being good Christians, nothing that had the appearance of religious practices: no long prayers, no meditation, no severe penances. All this would have ruined his work, it would have upset the parents, it would rouse the suspicion of priests and even Bishops. He made himself loved, and the Madonna helped him: dreams, prediction of deaths, revelation of consciences... all these caused the boys to esteem him and attached them to his person. The best boys attended his conferences, and among themselves they appointed monitors to warn against any imperfection in their conduct. The atmosphere in the Oratory was exceptional, all liked to stay there even though many comforts were missing.

When he judged that the moment was propitious, he took a step forward. Rua, though he was still staying at home, left us a simple relation of a conference which he attended on 5 June 1852. After mentioning the names of the participants (Don Bosco, a deacon, Rua and twelve other boys) he wrote: "It was decided that all would recite on every Sunday the 'Seven Joys of Mary'. We will then find out who will persevere in this practice till next year the first Saturday of May". He concluded: "O Jesus and Mary, make holy all those whose names are written on this paper!" Later Don Bosco revealed his mind: those prayers were intended to come to know, through Mary, at what time he could start his Society.

Michael Rua had met Don Bosco for the first time in 1845. From the beginning he was very attached to the Saint, but it was only after he finished his schooling with the Brothers of the Christian Schools that he came to stay with Don Bosco in September 1852. He would become Don Bosco's right hand in founding and governing the Congregation.

But at that time the Congregation existed only in the mind of Don Bosco. In January 1854 Don Bosco convened another meeting and this time there were only four youngsters present, among them Rua and Cagliero. The same Rua wrote the minutes: "Don Bosco proposed that with the help of God and of Saint Francis of Sales, we would make an exercise of practical charity towards our neighbour – to arrive at a promise, and afterwards, if possible and convenient, to turn it into a vow to the Lord. From this evening on, those who accepted this proposal were called Salesians." – The participants had been well chosen and prepared and Don Bosco's words made a deep impression on them.

The name 'Salesians' caused no surprise. They knew Don Bosco's attachment to the Saint, the Oratory was called after Saint Francis of Sales, and Don Bosco's two-year old church was dedicated to him. But Don Bosco had his own reasons which he revealed later in his Memoirs: "This Oratory is placed under the protection of Saint Francis of Sales to make clear that the fundamental

virtue of the Congregation, for those who command as for those who obey as well, is the virtue of charity, meekness, the characteristic virtues of the Saint.”

The number of trusted clerics increased and in his conferences Don Bosco began to mention the three vows that religious make – just by way of information, as if it was not meant for them.

The first proposal to pronounce vows was made to Rua. It was March 1855, and Rua had no objection, He saw in the vows a more efficacious means to help Don Bosco in the work of the Oratories. On the feast of the Annunciation, in the room of Don Bosco, Rua knelt before a crucifix and made the three vows for one year. Don Bosco was the only witness.

A few months later, equally without the least solemnity, someone else pronounced vows. It was a holy priest whom all Salesians will ever admire, Father Victor Alasonatti. He was a teacher in the local school of Avigliana, not far away from Turin. He had accepted the proposal of his old friend Don Bosco to come and share with him the burden of the Oratory. As he realised from the onset, this was no easy job, but his virtue overcame all obstacles. Don Bosco received him as a gift from Providence; at that time, 1854, besides the boys of the Sunday Oratory, there were 80 boarders among artisans and students. Father Alasonatti undertook to look after discipline, as Prefect of the house. It was totally different kind of life for him, but his spirit of sacrifice, his dedication to work, his obedience to Don Bosco made him a model for all.

The next year it was the turn of John Baptist Francesia to pronounce vows. He was hardly 17 years old when Don Bosco made him the first teacher of his newly started High School.

In Piedmont, the Government continued to harass, suppress and disperse religious Congregations. In a corner of the capital, in ill-famed Valdocco, a young priest laid the foundation of a religious Institute that would spread over the five continents of the globe.

Chapter 3

The first attempts to frame a Rule

Just as Don Bosco used prudence in the choice of his collaborators, so he was prudent in framing the Rules for the Society he had in mind. From Church History, Don Bosco knew the working of various Orders and Institutions; he managed – with difficulty – to get copies of the Rules of various approved Religious Congregations; he asked advice from knowledgeable persons, but all this did not help him very much. He strongly felt that he could not just copy the past, he had to rely as much on his own experience and wisdom.

The first documents he composed have gone lost. The text presented to Pius IX in 1858 and published in the 5th volume of his *Biographical Memoirs*, is the first text that we have in hand, it was not the first that ever existed. Many Salesians heard Don Bosco narrate how the devil spoiled his first copy. He was working at night and had finished writing the final words under the last line (‘Ad maiorem Dei gloriam’ – To the greater glory of God!) when the table began jumping, the inkpot overturned and ink spilt all over his manuscript; then his papers flew through the air and finally fell in total disorder to the floor. They were dirty and illegible, he had to begin his work over again.

He did not come out with his Rules until he had a nucleus of truly reliable followers. In 1857, when he had 8 clerics and students, he began to take them into confidence. He found them well disposed and began now and then reading out some extracts. It helped to make them look upon their union as a true Society with a unified structure and spirit.

Unavoidably, the thing somehow leaked out, and some prominent priests became alarmed. They advised him prudence. The laws against religious orders were applied without mercy; also the Oratory could suffer bad consequences. Don Bosco agreed that prudence was mandatory, but, he said “We must also act. To do something for poor youth is undeniably the need of the hour, and God will not fail to help those who work for this noble purpose. I count on your prayers that things may turn out well!”

Providence arranged that help would come from where he least suspected it, from Ratazzi himself, the originator of the ‘Ratazzi Law’, the Minister responsible for banning 35 religious orders and suppressing 334 religious houses. Don Bosco had met Ratazzi earlier. On 7 July 1857 Ratazzi wrote regarding a boy he had recommended for admission to the Oratory and he concluded his letter: “Please meet me as soon as possible.” Don Bosco readily seized the opportunity, and both of them had a very interesting conversation. The Minister, who appreciated the social work of Don Bosco, told him that he had to reflect on doing something to assure the permanence of the Oratory after his death. He suggested that Don Bosco gather some lay persons and clerics and form them into a Society, they would help him now and continue the work afterwards. Don Bosco observed that such a Society would be stable only if it had a religious foundation. To Don Bosco’s surprise, the Minister agreed. “Well yes, he said, provided every member keeps his civil rights, remain subject to the laws, pays taxes and so on. In front of the Government it would be a grouping of free citizens assembled in Society for a work of social uplift. No Government could object to such a form of Society.” Don Bosco affirmed that these words were for him ‘a flash of light’¹

He put the question to Father Cafasso and to several Bishops: Can a Society, remaining a civil Society in front of the Government, nevertheless be recognised as a Religious Institute in front of the Church? He was especially keen on hearing the opinion of his own Archbishop who was by that time in his 7th year in exile in Lyons, France. To make the journey to Lyons would have roused suspicions, so Don Bosco consulted him by letter. As always, Archbishop Frasoni was most encouraging, but – was the matter too new? – he advised him to see the Pope. When later he came to know that Don Bosco planned to follow his advice and go to Rome, he sent him a letter of recommendation.

Don Bosco, with the cleric Rua as his companion and secretary, arrived in Rome on the 2nd February 1858. Two weeks later he had a first audience with the Pope.

The Pope listened with attention when Don Bosco explained what he was doing for the poor boys of Turin. “You have started quite an enterprise, he said, but what will happen when you die?” That was the moment to come out with the recommendation of Archbishop Frasoni and to explain the nature of the Congregation he had in mind. The Pope was most understanding, only, he said, “Your members should be bound by vows; promises alone will not do if you want to be sure of stable co-operation. Adapt your rule in this sense, and when you have finished the work, we shall have it examined. It is certainly not an easy undertaking. . . Anyhow, if it is the will of God, He will show you the way. Go, pray, and come back after a few days.”

¹On 1 January 1876, Don Bosco was talking with Fr. Lemoyne, Fr. Barberis and other confreres. He said: ‘From time to time Ratazzi would drop in at the Oratory. . . he personally advised me on how I could avoid harassment from the civil authorities’ (M.B. XII, p.2) – and: ‘Ratazzi was anxious to work with me in drafting several articles of our Constitutions. . . It is quite accurate to say that certain safeguards which protect us from Government harassment were entirely his own contribution’ (M.B.V, pp.461-462).

Don Bosco was encouraged by the kindness of the Pope. Back at his lodging, he took the draft of the Rule he had brought from Turin and introduced the changes that the Pope had suggested.

The next audience was fixed at 9 PM., an unusual hour, because the Pope wanted to discuss the matter at leisure. He came right to the point (and his ideas were exactly as Don Bosco had planned): “I have been reflecting over your project and I am convinced that it will do a lot of good for youth: you have to go through with it!... Your Society must be based on the following criteria: let there be vows, without vows you cannot maintain unity of spirit and of action; but let them be simple vows, vows that can easily be dispensed so that the ill will of one may not trouble the peace and unity of others. Let your Rule be simple and of easy observance. Your dress or your practices of piety should not attract attention. It may be better to call it a Society rather than a Congregation. Make sure that your members be religious recognised as such by the Church, and free citizens in front of the Government.”

The Pope was slightly surprised when Don Bosco came out with his Rule, ready made and carefully written out in the neat handwriting of Rua. He paged through the document, placed it on his desk and began to ask, in detail, about the history of the Oratory. Some of Don Bosco’s answers seemed to suggest some inspiration from on high. The Pope wanted to know everything and Don Bosco had to tell him about his dreams and how they had come true. “Let Don Bosco, said the Pope, write down everything, because this is going to be very useful to his future Congregation.”

Writing down was not easy with all the work he had. When 16 year later Don Bosco had another audience, the Pope asked him how far he was with his writing. Don Bosco had to hang his head in shame and admit that he had not even started to write, he had not found the time. Pius IX did not relent, he turned his wish into a formal order, and that is how now we have the ‘Memoirs of the Oratory’ – Don Bosco’s autobiography from his childhood up to 1855. In a third audience, on 6 April, the Pope returned the manuscript. Don Bosco noted that he had made a few corrections in his own hand. “Take it to Cardinal Gaudi,” he said. For another full week Don Bosco spent his time revising the Rule from beginning to end; Rua made a fair copy and Don Bosco took it to Cardinal Gaudi.

The Cardinal received Don Bosco most cordially. He was Piedmontese and had once visited the Oratory in Turin. He read the matter carefully and had a few more sessions with Don Bosco who listened to his good advice and gave him the required explanations. The Cardinal’s conclusion was: “Practice your Rule for some time, then send me back a final copy and I will present it to the Holy Father for his final approval.” - On 14 April Don Bosco left Rome, a happy man.

Chapter 4

The birth of a Society

Don Bosco's kind personality attracted more and more candidates to his proposed Congregation. The Archdiocesan Curia had allowed him to give the cassock to promising boys, because the 'Work of the Oratories' was considered to be a diocesan activity. When, in 1849, the military occupied the Seminary, Don Bosco offered hospitality to many seminarians and those clerics mingled with those of Don Bosco in the same house. Together they went for classes to the Seminary where the army had vacated a few rooms for that purpose.

In 1859, Don Bosco had already a number of clerics of his own; all of them would become famous names in his Congregation. There was Cagliari, a talented musician, from Don Bosco's own place Castelnuovo. He was a most vivacious character who would not tolerate any fetters – it was Don Bosco's goodness and the family atmosphere of the Oratory that saved him. There was Durando, who had never seen a friendly priest till he met Don Bosco; he became a friend of Dominic Savio and was always first in class. There was Cerutti, another friend of Dominic Savio, another topper in studies. There were Bonetti, Ghivarello, Lazzero, the last two were already 20 years when they arrived in Valdocco. Some of them were allowed to make vows for one year, others made a simple promise to help Don Bosco in the Oratory. Don Bosco continued to invite promising youngsters to his conferences. At times he explained how to go about with boys or how to give them a Catechism class; at times he stressed the merits of a religious vocation or he explained the rules of the Oratory. Weekly he called all the clerics for a class on the New Testament. There was also a class of Ceremonies and of Good Manners – but these classes Don Bosco soon delegated to others. All this in an uncomplicated spirit of family, uniting the clerics among themselves and attaching them more and more to his person. . . All were eager to hear about the plan he had at heart, his project of a Society.

In 1859, on 8 December, the Oratory had solemnly celebrated the feast of Mary Immaculate. That evening, after the goodnight, with all clerics and boys present, Don Bosco announced a conference for the next day. They all understood: there was going to be some important development.

The conference, after nightprayers on 9 December, opened with the usual

prayers. Don Bosco then summarised what he had said on other occasions about consecration to God in a religious Congregation. He continued: "For a long time it was my desire to start such a Congregation. I spoke about it with Pius IX and he encouraged me. In truth, I am not contemplating a completely new idea: you are already observing its Rules, but you were not bound in conscience. We can say that in spirit you already belong to the new Congregation, but now we want to go one step further. The time has come to give your names and accept the Rules. Know therefore that from now on, only those who are willing to dedicate themselves by vows will be considered 'ascritti'.¹ All of you who attended our conferences have been approved by me, I judge all of you fit to become members of the Society that will bear – that will continue to bear – the name of Saint Francis of Sales. Let it therefore be understood: those who do not wish to take part in this Congregation need not come to our conferences. I will take it for granted that those who are absent next time do not wish to become members. I give you a week to reflect and to pray that the Lord may illumine you."

They recited the final prayers. Then the gathering broke up in profound silence.

The rest of the story shows how right Don Bosco had been when he prepared his plan with so much caution. Some left his room grumbling: "Don Bosco wants to make us monks!" Cagliero walked with large strides up and down the porticoes, till at last he shouted to a friend: "Monk or no monk, I stay with Don Bosco!" Not only that, he also wrote a little letter to Don Bosco, declaring himself resolved to follow his advice and decisions. When afterwards Don Bosco met him: "Welcome, he smiled, your life is here!"

The next conference, the 'Founding Conference' so to say, took place on the 18th. The proceedings were related in a document that is preserved in our Archives:

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. In the year of the Lord one thousand eighteen hundred and fifty nine, on the eighteenth of December, in this Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, the following met in Don Bosco's room at nine o'clock in the evening: Don Bosco, Father Victor Alasonatti; Deacon Angelo Savio; Subdeacon Michael Rua; the clerics: John Cagliero, John Baptist Francesia, Francis Provera, Charles Ghivarello, Joseph Lazzero, John Bonetti, John{Baptist}Anfossi, Louis Marcellino, Francis Cerruti, Celestine Durando, Secundus Pettiva, Anthony Rovetto, and Joseph Bongiovanni; and the lay member Louis Chiapale -- all unanimously determined to promote and maintain the true charity that is needed in the work of the festive oratories for abandoned youth, nowadays exposed to so many dangers and in many ways led astray and plunged into iniquity and ungodliness, to the great detriment of Society.

¹'Ascritti' means: entered into the list of prospective members. They were 'admitted to the practice of the vows'.

The above-mentioned participants decided therefore to band themselves into a Society or a Congregation which, while aiming at the sanctification of each member by mutual assistance, would strive to promote God's glory and salvation of souls, especially of those in greater need of instruction and formation. After unanimous endorsement of these goals and after a short prayer and invocation of the Holy Spirit, the participants proceeded to the election of the officers of the said Society or other future ones {connected with it}, if it will so please God.

Accordingly they unanimously begged the founder and the promoter (of this Society) to accept the office of Rector Major as entirely becoming him. He accepted with the proviso of the right to choose the Prefect, to which all agreed. Thereupon he declared that the writer of these minutes should continue to hold the office of Prefect, which he has filled in the house up to the present.

The manner of electing the other officers was now considered. It was agreed that voting by secret ballot would be the speediest way to form a Chapter consisting of a Spiritual Director, an Economer, and three Consultors, besides the Rector Major and the Prefect.

The writer of these minutes, officially appointed as secretary, solemnly declares that he has faithfully discharged the duty entrusted to him by the assembly to record the votes as cast and that the results are as follows:

The subdeacon Michael Rua was unanimously elected to the office of Spiritual Director, and he formally accepted. The deacon Angelo Savio was likewise elected to the office of Economer and he too accepted. The meeting then proceeded to choose three Consultors. The first one elected was the cleric John Cagliero; the second, the cleric John Bonetti. The third balloting ended in a tie between the clerics Charles Ghivarello and Francis Provera, and an additional balloting resulted in the choice of Charles Ghivarello. Thus the body of officers of our Society was definitely established.

The proceedings, as here described, were read to the assembly and approved as written. It was then resolved that this original record should be signed and preserved.

As proof of the authenticity of this document, the Rector Major and the writer, as Secretary of this meeting, append their signatures hereto.

Fr. John Bosco, Rector Major

Fr. Victor Alasonatti, Prefect Biogr.

Mem. Vol. VI, pp. 181ff.

Not all those that were present persevered, e.g. Anfossi. Don Bosco helped him to get his University degree, but later he changed over to the diocese, always remaining a good friend of Don Bosco and the Salesians.

Hardly was the Chapter (now we call it the Council) elected, when it had to gather in meeting to consider the request for admission of Joseph Rossi, the first laybrother of the new Society. Rossi loved Don Bosco, he would have given his life for him; he was made ‘Provider’ of the Society and handled many delicate material transactions. From then on the Chapter had to meet again and again to consider more admissions. Among the four admitted on 1 May 1860 was Paul Albera, who would become Don Bosco’s second successor; three more were admitted just two days later.

The new members were ‘admitted to the practice of the vows’. Not all were admitted with full votes because some of them were still school boys. For instance, Albera looked thin and frail, but Don Bosco knew what he was doing. Almost all came from lower middle-class families, but they loved Don Bosco and profited from his example and instructions.

Already then everybody was convinced that Don Bosco was an extraordinary person who would go down into history. Two of the very first Salesians began to write down chronicles, facts and sayings of which they had been witnesses. Bonetti wrote between 1858 and ’63, and Ruffino between 1859 and ’64 – i.e. till both of them were called to be Rectors of new foundations.

On 8 June 1860, Don Bosco considered that the time had come to communicate the written Rule. He read it out in a Plenary Assembly. He planned to send the Rule for approval to the Archbishop in exile, and all the members set their signature to a letter, asking the Archbishop to ‘change, remove add, correct’ as the Lord would inspire him. That was not all. They were aware that the times were bad, that the whole of Italy was in ferment, that the relations between Church and State were fragile; just in those days, on 26 May and 10 June the Oratory itself had been searched by the police. Ruffino’s Chronicle reads as follows:

“On June 11 we set our signature to the Rules of the Society of Saint Francis of Sales for the purpose of submitting them to Archbishop Fransoni. We solemnly promised that, should the present troublesome times prevent us from making our vows, each of us would strive to promote the Society’s growth and, as far as possible, always keep its rules, even if all its members should be dispersed or if only two, or even one, should remain.”

The Archbishop read the Rule and answered: “I am consulting someone who better than me is acquainted with matters regarding community life”. This caused a long delay. Don Bosco told his confreres: “If our Congregation is not to promote the glory of God, I would be happy if the Lord caused difficulties as to prevent its approval.”

Unfortunately, the Archbishop had sent the Rule to a wrong person, to a certain Fr. Durando who only knew ancient traditional orders and therefore gave a negative opinion on all points. The Archbishop did not agree with his assessment, in fact, he wrote to his Vicar General in a very positive way. But the points raised needed an answer, and that took time. Meanwhile Cardinal Gaudi, who had asked for and received another copy of the Rule, expired before he could open it. According to the prevailing Canon Law, the approval of the Archbishop would have been enough to recognise the Society ... but also the

Archbishop died, 25 March 1862, before he could reach a conclusion. Meanwhile, in front of Church Law, Don Bosco's Society remained a purely private affair and the elections and rules had value only in so far as the members agreed among themselves. Besides, the Curia of the Archdiocese began to have its own doubts: how could clerics that were teaching and assisting find time for a serious study of Philosophy and Theology? The answer came from the examinations of 1860: the clerics that were regular teachers got the best results. Out of thirty-three of Don Bosco's clerics, two received 'excellent', sixteen 'very good', three 'almost very good', and one 'good'.

Another reason for critique was that Don Bosco sent several of his clerics for degrees to the Royal University of Turin. He knew: for the anticlerical Government any pretext was good enough to close Catholic Schools. The law already existed, every teacher was to have his diploma; but many still hoped that, with all the opposition there was to the law, things would return to the days of old. Don Bosco did not share this illusion, he wanted to be ready. He prudently took previous permission from the Vicar General of the Archdiocese, but this did not prevent many priests and even Bishops to accuse him of bending to the dictates of an anticlerical Government. Besides, they said, the atmosphere in the University was pestilential. Don Bosco was aware of it, but there were also some very good Professors, and he took care to forewarn and protect his young students. As events show, even his opponents afterwards had to follow his example. Whoever writes the history of private schooling in Italy, must not ignore the beneficial influence of our Saint.

Chapter 5

The first expansion: Giaveno and Mirabello

Don Bosco would not wait to reach out to other places till his Society was perfectly organised and established. As soon as he had some members on whom he could rely he widened his field of action. Already Valdocco had been enlarged: in 1862 he could admit 500 students/artisans and he was constantly on the lookout to buy neighbouring property; the 600 square meters rented from Pinardi would grow to 35,000 square meters in the year of his death. While all around the Oratory houses came up and Valdocco became part of the city, Don Bosco kept pace and developed accordingly. There is no doubt that already then he had in mind a ‘Mother House’ for his Congregation.

The fame of the Oratory and its Director spread to all the dioceses of Piedmont and many municipalities that desired to start or improve a school had recourse to Don Bosco and asked him to send qualified teachers. We still have the applications of the municipalities of Cavour, Dogliani and Giaveno, but there must have been many more.

In Giaveno there had once been a flourishing Seminary. At this time the big building was dilapidated and there were just a handful of students left; the Government had an eye on the building, the municipality wanted to use it as a school, and the diocesan authorities wondered how the Seminary could be revived. Someone mentioned the name of Don Bosco; he alone could succeed.

Don Bosco pondered over the proposal, and because it was a question of raising vocations he was inclined to accept. He made one condition: he wanted a free hand in the administration – no meddling of outsiders!

The matter was urgent. Those in charge had threatened not to continue beyond the present school year 1859-60. Don Bosco looked out for personnel. The only priest he had was Father Alasonatti who was indispensable in Valdocco. He approached a friend, Father Grassino, who had spent six months in the Oratory, to be the Rector. His clerics were all ready to go to the new place, they saw the horizon widen under their eyes. Don Bosco picked out the cleric

Vaschetti to be Prefect and two others to be assistants. Three of the teachers agreed to stay on and teach the lower classes.

But – how to get students? Don Bosco had sent a circular letter to all the Parish Priests of the diocese but there was not the least reaction. Then he thought of something else. The applications for admission to Valdocco came in abundantly. Don Bosco prevailed upon the parents who could pay fees to send their sons to Giaveno – they readily agreed when they were told that Don Bosco was in charge. So, new students arrived in Giaveno in batches of fifteen to twenty at a time, at the beginning of the school year they were one hundred and ten and gradually the number went up to one hundred and fifty, the maximum the house could support.

Don Bosco took great interest in the new school. To make sure that his system would be followed he had also sent a few exemplary students from Valdocco to act as yeast in the lump. The cleric Cagliari was sent, almost as an Inspector, and Don Bosco was consoled at the news he brought when he returned. The goings up and down from Valdocco to Giaveno and back (for reasons of ministry, exams, excursions...) were so frequent that everybody understood: Giaveno and Valdocco are one and the same thing. Twice Don Bosco preached the ‘Monthly Exercise of a Happy Death’, he heard confessions, gave the good night, everything as in Valdocco.

Then the devil put spokes in the wheel. The Rector began to feel jealous of Don Bosco’s influence and ‘to protect the interests of the diocese’ he went for instructions to the Curia. Finding out that he had ready listeners, he began to criticise Don Bosco’s system of education, he called it Jesuitism, too many practices of piety. He began to suggest to the clerics how much better off they would be if they leave Don Bosco and join the diocese – and when they did not relish that idea, he suggested to the Curia to withdraw all the diocesan seminarians from the Oratory. All the whispering was secret, but the clerics kept Don Bosco informed.

Don Bosco wrote to the Archbishop in exile, but he declared helplessness, he had given a free hand to those who took his place in Turin. But the Rector in Giaveno got a piece of Don Bosco’s mind: “You know what Giaveno was and what it is now. If the Seminary is filled with boys, it is because they saw no difference between Giaveno and Valdocco. But do not imagine that I want to interfere, I have work enough in Valdocco...”

At the approach of the new school year, as if nothing had happened, Don Bosco opened a new section and the number of students went up to two hundred and forty; the house was bursting at its seams. Two more clerics were sent to help with assistance and the teaching staff was re-distributed. Unhappily, the whispering continued and the death of the Archbishop deprived him of his greatest protector.

He had patience till the end of the year; then he informed the authorities that he was withdrawing from the direction of Giaveno; it was exactly what they wanted. Meanwhile he lost a cleric, Vaschetti. Vaschetti was a capable and most industrious cleric, he had not been able to resist the pressure and returned to the diocese. He remained however a great admirer of Don Bosco

and later, in the time of Archbishop Gastaldi, when things in Giaveno again became as bad as they had been, Vaschetti had the courage openly to defend Don Bosco's method.

**_*_

During the two years in Giaveno, Don Bosco had been planning another foundation, in Mirabello, situated outside the Archdiocese of Turin, in the diocese of Casale Monferrato. The Parish Priest of the place wanted a boarding. The local Bishop Mgr. Calabiana approved when Don Bosco proposed that the new school would be called a diocesan Minor Seminary; the father of the cleric Provera who was a native of Mirabello donated a ground and a house, and Countess Callori was the main benefactor of the new building.

The new project was for Don Bosco a most important venture. In August 1863 he made a pilgrimage to the Marian shrine of Oropa for the precise intention of making a good start. While he was in Oropa, he adapted the rules of the Oratory to the new situation in Mirabello; these guidelines would become the fundamental Regulations for all other Salesian schools.

Back in Turin he called his Council together and they fixed the personnel for the new foundation. Don Rua would be Rector; he received 5 clerics, the best ones, to help him, plus 3 aspirants who received the cassock before leaving. Then he called the new community together for some fatherly advice. Among other things, he suggested that they keep a copybook called 'Experience', to note in it all inconveniences, mistakes, displeasures, disorders, to serve as guidance for the future. Rua went on a few days ahead of the others; it was a difficult leave-taking, so dear had Valdocco become to them. Francesia later wrote: Mirabello then was like America now!

Don Bosco promised to the new Rector that he would send him some special recommendations. He kept his word. He sent him 'Norms' that later on were amplified and given to every new Salesian Rector:

Norms for new Salesian Rectors,
the final draft

I. WITH YOUR OWN SELF

1. Let nothing upset you.
2. Avoid mortification in eating. Let your mortification consist in doing your duty diligently and bearing with the defects of others. Take at least seven hours' rest each night, with a margin of one hour this way or the other, for you and for the others, if there is a good reason for it. This is necessary for your own health and that of your dependants.
3. Celebrate Holy Mass and say the Divine Office pie, devote, attentive (fervently, devoutly, attentively). Do so yourself and inculcate it in your dependants.

4. Never omit meditation every morning and a visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the course of the day. For the rest, do as prescribed by the rules of our Society.

5. Strive to make people love you if you want that they fear you. Charity and patience in commanding, in correcting; always make those concerned understand that you are prompted by a desire to do good to souls. Put up with anything if it is a question of avoiding sin. Direct every effort to the spiritual welfare and to what is good for the health and scientific progress of those entrusted to you by Divine Providence.

6. In matters of greater importance, always raise your heart to God before taking a decision. When you hear reports of anyone, clarify matters well and listen to both sides before you pass judgement. Often things that appear to be beams are merely specks.

II. WITH TEACHERS

1. See that your teachers do not lack needed food and rest. Be mindful of what their work involves. If they fall sick or simply feel indisposed, get a substitute to cover their classes.

2. Talk to them often, either individually or collectively. Find out if they are overworked, if they need books or clothes, if they are troubled physically or morally, or if some of their pupils need admonition or special care regarding discipline or regarding their class-work. Once you know their needs, do your best to meet them.

3. When conferring with them, urge them to interrogate all their pupils without any exception, let them check in turn everybody's homework and steer clear of intimate friendship or partiality, and let them not allow boys or others to enter their rooms.

4. A room or hall shall be assigned for the purpose of giving duties or remarks to the students.

5. Let them make brief announcements to their classes of any coming celebration, novena, or feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary or of any Mystery of our religion, in the school or in the region - this must never be omitted.

6. Teachers should never send students out of the classroom; where this seems absolutely necessary appoint someone to accompany them to the Superior. For no reason beat negligent or delinquent students; rather be satisfied with advice and at the most use corrections that are allowed and suggested by well-understood charity.

III. WITH THE ASSISTANTS OR DORMITORY MONITORS

1. What has already been said as regards teachers can mostly apply to the assistants or dormitory monitors.

2. Distribute their occupations in such a way that they, as well as the Teachers, have the time and facility to attend to their studies.

3. Make an effort to confer with them and to hear their opinion on the conduct of the boys in their charge. Their most important duty is to be punctually present where the boys are gathered for their rest, for their studies, for work, recreation, etc...

4. If you see that one of them is becoming too attached to a boy or is even in slight moral danger, prudently move him around or give him another duty. If the danger persists, immediately inform the Superior.

5. Periodically call a meeting of teachers, assistants, and monitors and urge them all to do their best to prevent unseemly conversation and to eliminate any book, paper, or picture - pictures especially - and anything else which may endanger the queenly virtue of purity. Let them give good advice and be kind to the boys.

6. Let all be concerned to discover pupils that are morally dangerous. Let them report them to you so that morality is safeguarded with the co-operation of all.

IV. WITH COADJUTORS¹ AND DOMESTICS

1. They should not be familiar with the boys. See that they attend Mass daily and approach the Sacraments according to the Rules of the Congregation . Exhort persons in our service to go to confession once or twice a month.

2. Be kind in giving orders. Make it clear in all circumstances that you are interested in their spiritual welfare and see that they do not contract familiarity with boys or externs.

3. Do not allow women to enter the boys' dormitories or the kitchen; likewise they should not deal with anyone in the house except for reasons of charity or necessity. This is a matter of the greatest importance.

4. Watch if any disagreements should arise between domestics, assistants and pupils or other residents. Listen kindly to all concerned, but as a rule give your opinion separately so that the others may not know what is said.

5. Appoint a dependable, upright coadjutor to supervise the domestic staff. He should especially watch over the diligence and morality of his workers and zealously try to prevent pilfering and foul talk or accepting errands or sending messages to parents or outsiders.

V. WITH STUDENTS

¹The terminology of the beginning was unprecise. the Coadjutors mentioned here were good people who did some service, paid or unpaid, in the house. Laybrothers-coadjutors who made vows came under Title VI: 'With members of the Society' (editor's note).

1. Never, but never, accept pupils expelled from other boarding schools or boys known to be of loose morals. If, despite all precautions, such a boy should be admitted, assign a reliable companion immediately who is never to leave him alone. Should he offend against morality, he should be warned. On the occasion of a second offence he should immediately be expelled.

2. Do all you can to make yourself known and spend all your free time with the boys. Whenever opportune, whisper a kind word - you know what I mean - to whoever needs it. This is the great secret of winning hearts.

3. You may say: What shall I tell them? The same things that in the past were told to you. E.g.: How are you doing? - Alright. - And your soul? - So and so. - You should help me in a great enterprise, will you? - Yes, but what is it that you want of me? - Help me to make you good... or: See that you save your soul... or: Try to become the best of our boys! (With distracted boys): When will you make a start? - With what? - To be my consolation... or: To become as good as Saint Aloysius. (With those who are not regular to the Sacraments): When will you make a good confession? - When you want. - Do it as soon as possible. (Another time): Shall we do some good washing up? ... or: Will you help me to break the horns of the devil? - Do you want me to be the friend of your soul? These or similar words.

4. In our houses the Rector is the ordinary confessor, be available therefore, but give everyone full freedom to go to others if they wish. Make it known that you don't take part in the remarks for conduct. Do your utmost to banish even the shadow of a suspicion that you remember what you heard in confession. Let there be no suggestion at all of partiality towards any boy who prefers one confessor to another.

5. Recommend and promote the Altar Boys' Association, the Sodality of St. Aloysius and of the Immaculate Conception Sodality. Promote, but do not act as Director. It must appear as the pupils' initiative; its direction is entrusted to the Catechist/Spiritual Director.

6. As much as possible, entrust odious or disciplinary measures to others. When you discover an important shortcoming, call the guilty or suspect person and in a most charitable way lead him to declare his fault and his sorrow for having committed it, then invite him to make up with his conscience. Using this way of doing, and further arranging for suitable assistance, you will obtain marvellous effects and obtain amendments that seemed impossible.

VI. WITH OUTSIDERS

1. Whenever charity and the duties of your own state of life allow, willingly help out with the religious services, preaching, saying mass

for the people and hearing confessions, especially in the parishes where our houses are located. But don't take up obligations that entail a long absence from the house or that comes in the way of the duties entrusted to you.

2. Courtesy demands that at times you invite extern priests for preaching or for other services at the occasion of a solemnity, or for some musical entertainment. Similarly invite the civil authorities and any person who has done us or can do us some favours.

3. Let kindness and courtesy be your outstanding traits in dealing with boarders and day students alike.

4. In misunderstandings of a financial nature, conciliate as far as you can, even at the cost of sacrifice, in order to avoid litigation and to safeguard charity.

5. In spiritual or moral matters, differences of opinion should be settled in a way conducive to God's greater glory. Obligations, a point of order, revengeful feelings, self-love, logic, unfair demands, and honour itself must all be sacrificed to avoid sin.

6. Should the matter be very serious, it is wise to seek time for prayer and the counsel of some devout, prudent person.

VII. WITH MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY

1. The exact observance of the Rule, especially in matters of obedience, is the foundation of everything. But if you want that others obey you, begin by being yourself obedient to the Superiors. Nobody is fit to command, if he is not ready to obey.

2. Distribute the work in a way that nobody feels overburdened, but see that everybody faithfully fulfils the duties entrusted to him.

3. Nobody in the Congregation should make contracts, receive money or give loans to relations, friends or others. Nobody should keep money or keep the administration of temporal goods without an explicit authorisation of the Superior. The observance of this article will keep far away the most deadly plague of religious Congregations.

4. Abhor as poison every modification of the Rule. Exact observance is better than any change: the better is the enemy of the good.

5. Study and experience made me realise that gluttony, prestige and vainglory were the ruin of flourishing Congregations and respectable religious Orders. With the years you will understand the truth of what at the moment may look incredible.

6. Take great interest in promoting the common life in words and in deeds.

VIII. WHEN GIVING ORDERS

1. Don't command things which you judge to be beyond the strength of you subordinates, or when you expect that you will not be obeyed. Avoid giving repugnant orders – rather, if possible, gratify

each one's inclinations, giving by preference those offices that are more to their liking.

2. Don't command things that may endanger health, or prevent the necessary rest, or are in contradiction with other duties or with the orders of another Superior.

3. When giving orders, always use ways and words that are charitable and kind. Threats, anger or violence be far from your words and actions.

4. If you have to command difficult or repugnant things, then say, e.g.: Would you do this or that? Or: I have something important on hand that I would not like to ask you – it is a difficult matter – but really, there is nobody who would do it like you. Would you have the time, the health to do it, and do other occupations not stand in the way? - Experience teaches that a similar approach in the end reveals itself very satisfactorily.

5. Save as much as you can, but in such a way that the sick lack nothing. Draw the attention of the confreres to the fact that all of us have made a vow of poverty, that therefore we should not look for, not even desire, a comfortable life. We must love poverty and the inconveniences that poverty entails. Avoid therefore all expenses that are not absolutely necessary regarding clothing, books, furniture, journeys, etc.

This is my Testament that I bequeath to the Rectors of our houses. If you put these counsels into practice then I can die peacefully because I know that our Society will be forever flourishing in front of man and blessed by the Lord; it will obtain its purpose: the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.

We read in the chronicle of Ruffino: “Don Rua in Mirabello conducts himself exactly like Don Bosco in Turin. He is always surrounded by boys, they are touched by his friendliness and also because he has always some new story to narrate. In the beginning of the school year he recommended the teachers not to be over-exacting, not to shout at the boys when they were thoughtless or light-hearted but to bear patiently with a lot of inconveniences. After lunch he always has recreation with the boys, he plays with them or sings hymns. The teachers and assistants have their place at a common table in the study hall. For every feast he preaches twice... , in the goodnight talks he is always entertaining and cheerful.”

Things were going well when a nasty difficulty cropped up. Don Bosco wanted to call the school a Minor Seminary, it was certain to provide many vocations. Another reason for calling it a Seminary was that he hoped to avoid the need of legal titles for his teachers. The Government officers did not understand it that way and Father Rua was asked for an explanation. Don Rua, after consulting Don Bosco, replied: Minor Seminaries till now had not been disturbed, which showed that the law did not apply to them. Also the local

Bishop stoutly defended his Seminary. But the controversy dragged on for a long time till, in the end, the Government let things go. The question of legal teaching titles was also a problem in Valdocco; it would be a problem in every Salesian school opened in Italy.

Chapter 6

The Decree of Praise

Father Ruffino's Chronicle, early in April 1861, read; "Don Bosco cut the head of Costamagna and four others." "Cutting the head" meant: They abandoned their will into the hands of Don Bosco, they became members of the Society. Already before 1864 Don Bosco had cut the heads of sixty-one, nine of them priests.

With so many willing members, the need of an approved rule and a recognised authority became ever more imperative. The death of Cardinal Gaudi had interrupted the negotiations in Rome; the death of Archbishop Fransoni came in the way of a diocesan approval. Acting Vicar General Zappati dragged his feet.

Don Bosco waited for some time, then he sent another copy of the rules to Rome. The reply was that proceedings for approval could not be set in motion until 1) some Bishops send letters of recommendation, and 2) the diocesan authority sends its own agreement. So Don Bosco set out to get as many recommendations as possible from the Bishops of Piedmont: he wrote letters, made visits, distributed copies of his Rules, explained and defended them in discussions, made the boys pray – and hoped.

The Bishop of Cuneo was the first to send a recommendation and Provicar Vigliotti of Turin said that he liked to see it. Don Bosco made a copy and sent the original to the Curia; he should not have done it, after some time he was told that the Provicar had not received it. He received a second recommendation from the Bishop of Asti and he wrote to the Provicar: "Pius IX himself suggested and traced out the form of our Society; I therefore have good hope that our Rule will receive a warm welcome. I respectfully ask you to bring to my knowledge any objections that Mgr. Vicar General could foresee. I am indeed very keen to have the Rule approved, either by the local Ordinary or by the Holy See."

Between 18 November '63 and 11 February '64, Don Bosco received another twenty-one members into the Society; evidently, the Society was badly in need of recognised structures. More recommendations came in, from the Bishops of Susa, of Mondovi and of Casale, but the most important one, that of his own diocese, remained unwritten. Understandingly, the diocesan Curia hesitated to

make provisions that could embarrass the next ordinary, but Don Bosco also had opponents who heartily disapproved the familiar ways in which he treated his clerics and his boys.

With five recommendations in hand, Don Bosco judged that he could no longer wait. He wrote a last letter to the Provicar: "Next Friday morning I have an exceptional opportunity to make my correspondence reach the hands of the Holy Father. All that is lacking is the recommendation that you promised me. You will do me a double favour if you let me have it without delay, first because of the recommendation itself, and secondly because it enables me to make use of this favourable opportunity. Please pardon my repeated disturbances."

The letter had its effect, the next day the document was in Don Bosco's hands. The recommendations were bundled together with a new copy of the Rule and with a long introductory letter. Prudently he also enclosed a separate explanation of points where he expected objections. A special envoy was sent to Rome, he gave the package into the hands of Cardinal Antonelli with the request to hand it over to the Pope. The Holy Father in turn gave the papers to Cardinal Quaglia, the Prefect of the competent Congregation (of Bishops and Regulars). The Congregation entrusted the matter to a Consultor for his study and opinion.

The Consultor, Father Savini, a Carmelite, was of the opinion that it was somewhat premature to immediately approve a Society of recent origin, but in view of the praise of the Holy Father and the recommendations of the Bishops there was no difficulty to give a 'Decree of praise' – however, he had a list of thirteen observations to be transmitted to the Founder.

It took four months before Don Bosco could lay hands on the decree, but when it arrived it was good reason for rejoicing. It was called '... of Praise' because it recognised the existence of the Society, it praised its spirit, but it postponed the approval of the Rule. The same decree appointed Don Bosco as Superior General for life (his successors would serve terms of twelve years). Don Bosco hastened to thank Cardinal Quaglia and the Holy Father, and Father Manacorda took his letter to Rome. Since Father Manacorda again and again appears in Don Bosco's future dealings with Rome, it is good to know something about him:

In 1854 the cleric Manacorda came to consult Don Bosco about his vocation and, enjoying the atmosphere of the Oratory he was inclined to stay with Don Bosco. A few years later he stayed up to six months in the Oratory. Don Bosco saw more in this vocation and advised him to join the diplomatic service of the Holy See. In later life he became the Bishop of Fossano. While in Rome, acquainted as he was with all the offices of the Papal Curia, he did excellent service, helping and defending Don Bosco and his Salesians.

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The 'Decree of Praise' was a big step forward: the Holy See recognised the Society; the Rules were not approved but a beginning had been made. The

thirteen ‘Observations’ were proposed, not imposed, so Don Bosco began a deep study to see how far he could go along. Without any difficulty he admitted nine of them, but the remaining four posed big problems for the type of Congregation he had in mind, and he presented his reasons:

1. According to the ‘Observations’, dispensing from the vows, was the exclusive prerogative of the Holy See. Don Bosco asked if, at least, he would be allowed to dispense from temporary vows.

2. The Rule took for granted that the Superior could present his subjects for ordination (in Church jargon: that he could grant dimissorial letters). The ‘Observations’ instead wanted the Bishop to decide about the fitness for ordination. Evidently, in this case the Bishop would be the effective Superior of the Congregation. It would take another twenty years before this matter was finally settled to Don Bosco’s satisfaction.

3. The ‘Observations’ denied the Society the right to alienate property or contract debts, to open houses or run seminaries, without previous recourse to the Holy See. Don Bosco remarked that this would immediately attract the attention of the Government: in Piedmont, decrees of the Holy See were to be subjected to the ‘Royal Placet’, i.e. to Government approval.

4. And then there was Chapter XVI of the Rule about Extern Members. Let us quote the whole Chapter:

1) Any person, even living without vows and in his own home and with his own family, can belong to our Society.

2) He does not take vows, but must practice those rules which are compatible with his age, state and condition – teaching or promoting catechetics among poor children, helping to spread good books, promote triduums, novenas, retreats and other works of charity especially directed to the good of youth and the working classes.

3) To share in the spiritual benefits of the Society the member must make at least a promise to the Rector to engage himself in matters that in his judgement will tend to the greater glory of God.

4) This promise however does not oblige under pain of even venial sin.

5) Any Salesian who for a reasonable cause leaves the Society is considered an extern member and can still share in the benefits of the Society provided he practices that part of the Regulations prescribed for the externs.

Surely, the idea of having extern religious was something new, but according to Don Bosco there was no reason to scrap the whole chapter. Don Bosco remarked that also other religious orders had their third orders with ‘tertiaries’ living in the world; he asked permission to keep the chapter, at least as an Appendix to the Rules.

Anyhow, he was happy with what had been achieved. Two other facts came to increase his happiness even more: through Father Manacorda he received from the Pope two objects for the lottery of his proposed new church, and Father Manacorda wrote that the Pope had spoken with great esteem about

the Founder of the new Society. Then, a few days later, he received a papal reply to his letter of thanks: the Pope encouraged him to continue his efforts and sent ample blessings for his own person, for his Society and for his boys.

Chapter 7

The school in Lanzo

Nowadays Lanzo is like any other Salesian School, but in those days it was of exceptional importance for the new Society. The early confreres in Lanzo became big names; e.g. the assistants Fagnano, Costamagna and Lasagna became in time three missionary Bishops in America; the cleric Sala, later Economer General of the Congregation, and among the boys there was the Servant of God Andrew Beltrami. It was in Lanzo that the first two General Chapters of the Congregation took place, that the yearly retreats were held, and Don Bosco spent one and a half months there at the end of his life.

It was the Parish Priest of the place, Father (now Blessed) Frederic Albert, who thought of approaching Don Bosco for opening a much-needed school in his parish. The two, Fathers Albert and Bosco, were friends. Fr. Albert had once preached a retreat in the Pinaridi chapel and Fr. Bosco was a regular visitor to the diocesan retreat house in Lanzo. In 1851 Don Bosco had climbed up to a dilapidated Capuchin Monastery (suppressed by Napoleon), a place that had been transformed into a school but was then abandoned again. When Don Bosco admired the enchanting location and looked down on a stupendous Alpine panorama, he is said to have exclaimed: What a beautiful place for a school! So, when he was approached for re-opening the school in 1864, or better: to begin again from scratch, he did not hesitate; only, there were long negotiations with the Municipality before a deal was clinched. The Government had no objection to open a new school as long as the teachers were qualified.

Fr. Ruffino was appointed Rector of the new 'Saint Philip Neri School'. He was the only priest, but his team of clerics were valid assistants. Mistakenly they imagined that everything had been readied for their arrival. Fr. Sala describes their adventures:

We expected to find most of the buildings in good condition , since we assumed that our main concern was to take in students. All we found instead was an empty building and, what is worse, a few walls more than half ruined. We did not know where to have our meals because we had neither tables nor chairs. Making the best

of a bad situation, we picked up a door which was lying about and set it on two trestles as a table. Having no cook, we volunteered our kitchen helper Givone who fed us rice and meat for the first few days from the only pot we had. The windows had no panes; some lacked frames. The first night we made do with towels and blankets nailed to the jambs to keep out the inclement October weather. We had no beds because through an oversight they had not been shipped. Father Albert, the pastor, took as many of us as he could into his rectory; the others had to sleep on straw for a few nights until beds arrived from Turin. Meanwhile Fr. Ruffino and we clerics were up to our necks trying to put the place in order, sweeping, dusting, setting up desks, and fixing up the kitchen. The cleric Guidazio, who had been a good carpenter before joining our Society, made window frames and fixed doors. Several of us went to work in the vegetable garden, partially clearing it of weeds, thistles, and accacias which made it look like a jungle. In addition, we had to set up the furniture sent from the Oratory. Since several pupils had already arrived, we also had the problem of supervising and teaching. To make matters worse, the village boys, perhaps egged on by others, were openly hostile to us. They pelted us with rocks and disturbed our Sunday services with shouts and blows on the outer church door. We were also concerned about some of our boarders who were rejects from other schools.

Biogr. Mem., Vol. VII, p.476.

For the first school year they had only thirty-seven boarders but local students were plenty, all still in the primary stage. A visit of Don Bosco encouraged the staff, and Don Bosco's goodnights in Valdocco made everybody enthusiastic for the new foundation.

Everything went well till the month of March. Then Fr. Provera, just ordained a priest and Economer of the House, began suffering from the bone of one foot. For some time he could do sitting work only, later the foot was to be amputated. Worse with Fr. Ruffino, the Rector: he suffered violent chest pain combined with extreme exhaustion. They carried him to Turin where he died on 16 July.

Around the same time the Municipality demanded that Don Bosco would limit the number of boarders to make more space for day scholars. Just then there was a long waiting list for new admissions to the boarding. "Rather, said Don Bosco, you should help me repair the part of the building that is still in ruins, or put up a new building". They were not ready to do either, so Don Bosco, probably to sound the real intentions of the Municipality, wrote a letter to inform them that he was withdrawing from his side of the contract and that he left the school into the hands of the Municipality. He really did not mean it, he made a trip to Lanzo, had a talk with the gentlemen of the Municipality and withdrew his letter.

Returning to Turin he took with him Fr. Provera who was in a bad shape, and left the school in the hands of the clerics, while an outside priest agreed to take charge of the religious services. The cleric Sala wrote: "How much we worked in those days! We did not want it to be said that the school went bad because we were only clerics!"

When the new school year started, Don Bosco sent Fr. Lemoyne to be the new Rector. Lemoyne wrote: "I was very pleased with the boys there, and even more with the spirit of unity among superiors and assistants. They speak, they preach, they do in such a way as to make those of Turin jealous!"

In our days Lanzo is an imposing building. It remains one of the most glorious monuments to our Holy Founder Don Bosco.

Chapter 8

Internal consolidation

Three and a half months after Father Ruffino's death, it was the turn of Father Alasonatti to follow him to the grave. He had an ulcer on the throat and an extreme form of arthritis. In September he was taken to Lanzo in the hope that the fresh mountain air may do him good, but on 8 October he died. His last weeks were an heroic martyrdom to the great edification of his confreres. He left behind a big void: the Oratory counted seven hundred boys, the construction of the church of Mary Help of Christians was going on, the Society increased in professed members and in new recruits. Don Bosco could not think of anybody else to take his place than Don Rua – Rua the indefatigable worker, Rua always master of himself, Rua with his unlimited devotion to Don Bosco. When the news arrived that Don Bosco wanted him in Valdocco, Rua was busy preparing for the new school year in Mirabello. He dropped everything, left for Turin and immediately occupied the empty chair at the desk of his predecessor. Don Bonetti, still very young but a Salesian after the heart of Don Bosco, temporarily took the place of Don Rua, till, for the new schoolyear, a young priest, Father Lemoyne, was appointed Rector.

In a reshuffle of the Superior Chapter, Don Rua became the new Prefect, Fr. Francesia became the Spiritual Director and Durando filled the gap of the third Councillor.

Now that the Society was recognised in Rome, Don Bosco began to allow some temporarily professed confreres to make vows for life. In January 1866 there were altogether ninety Salesians, twelve of them priests: nineteen perpetually professed, twenty-nine in temporal vows and forty-two 'ascritti'. It was already the custom that he would give them a conference on the feast of St Francis de Sales. In 1865 he gave this tradition a more solemn form: the two Rectors of Mirabello and Lanzo were invited to give a report of the running of their institution. The next year Don Bosco was absent; for the first time Don Rua officially presided and addressed the confreres in the name of the Rector Major. In that year, an 'extern' Salesian, Fr. Pestarino gave an account of what he was doing in Mornese: the group of girls he was guiding and the school the people were building for the Salesians: nobody then knew that the group of

girls would develop into the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and that the school would be their Motherhouse. These conferences greatly contributed to unite the Salesians among themselves and to make them affectionate toward their Society.

In those days, and long afterwards, Don Bosco had two great preoccupations. The first: to get all his confreres to acquire teaching diplomas. A few of them frequented classes in the University; they easily passed their exams even though study for degrees did not exempt them from ordinary teaching and assistance. The government too had to think of qualifications for teachers in government schools, so they notified extraordinary exams for private students. The University professors were up in arms against these exams; how could they give titles to candidates who had not frequented the University? Any pretext was good enough to discard some and fail others. With great difficulty Durando was allowed to take the exams: he was the only successful candidate in the whole of Italy! Don Rua succeeded in the written exam but for some whimsical reason he was not allowed to make oral exams, he had to repeat them the following year.

Then there was military service. Clerics had been traditionally exempted, but this too had been changed by the government. Don Bosco's hope was in friendly Bishops who had the right to exempt one Cleric for twenty thousand subjects. If they were well disposed towards the new Society and they had place on their lists, they could do the favour of entering one or two clerics of Don Bosco among their own.

Don Bosco was generously admitting to the Oratory also clerics who, because of poverty, could not enter the diocesan clergy but had no intention to become Salesians. Together with the Salesian clerics they frequented the classes in the Seminary, but Don Bosco noticed that too many of them easily abandoned their vocation. They were influenced by the newspapers and magazines that published any rubbish, by the anticlerical atmosphere all around, and there was the fact that the clerics on their way to and from their classes in the Seminary often became the butt of jokes and jeers. To remedy it, Don Bosco asked the Vicar General that at least his own clerics would be allowed to have their philosophy and theology classes at home; he would follow the syllabus of the Seminary and the exams could be together with the others in the Seminary. The answer was a flat no. In his reply Don Bosco remarked: "If at least I had received some observations... but a crude no was very unwelcome" and he repeated his appeal at least for the students of philosophy. This time permission was granted.

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Up to 1866, the Salesians made their retreat together with the boys. There were exceptions: the candidates for ordination had their retreat as demanded by Canon Law, and he always took some confreres with him when he went to preach or make his own retreat in Lanzo. But from then on he took his confreres

in two batches to Trofarello, near Turin, where he had bought a little cottage. Also in this matter he had to show prudence. The time for the retreat was time taken away from well-deserved holidays, and he knew how averse they were to all that smacked of 'monastic practices'. For the first time he was satisfied with three full days (plus introduction, plus closure) and he announced that during the free time they could 'talk, laugh and walk', and the food was much better than usual! The confreres gave a good reception to this novelty and Don Bosco gradually increased the practices of piety and the time of silence, and recreation became more moderate.

Don Bosco often spoke to his confreres about the Holy Father who had repeatedly shown his interest in the Society. The effect of these talks was an ever greater attachment to the Society: it was good to know that the highest authority on earth appreciated the work they were doing!

Chapter 9

The Church of Mary Help of Christians

The Society was still in its very beginning and it still had no approved Rule, when Don Bosco gave it a centre and a monument: the church of Mary Help of Christians.

He had seen his church in dream from 1844 on, he spoke of it and gave it a title in 1862: “The Madonna wants that we honour her under the title of Mary Help of Christians. Indeed, the times are bad, so bad that we need the Most Holy Virgin to protect and defend the Christian faith”. In 1863 the excavations for the foundation started, in 1865 the cornerstone was blessed, in 1866 the dome was capped, in 1868 the solemn consecration took place.

The young Salesians who saw the church coming up could not help thinking that the Oratory was something more than just a boarding school for poor boys. They had the presentiment of being present at the beginning of great undertakings. Cagliero, hearing Don Bosco speak about his plan of raising a magnificent church, conjectured: “Do you consider it to be the Mother-Church of the Congregation and the centre and source of all Salesian activity?” - Don Bosco answered: “You guessed it!”

Don Bosco planned it to be a Mother-Church. It would be the focus of Marian devotion: “From here my glory will go out!” as he had seen written on the dome of the Church in a dream. From here bands and bands of missionaries would go out to the four corners of the world; his church would be a centre of attraction where every Salesian heart could find a home, a place of rest under the eyes of his Mother.

Before the church existed, Don Bosco had said to the cleric Albera: “I don’t have a single coin, and I don’t know where I should look for money – but that is not important: If God wants the church, it will be built”. When the church was being completed, he wrote to Oreglia: “Mary is working wonders for her church, one miracle more clamorous than the other!” On the glorious day of consecration it was on everybody’s lips: “Mary has built herself a home!”

Don Bosco called it a 'miraculous' church. Miraculous, because he saw in it the realisation of a dream. Miraculous because he, the father of poor boys, had the evident help of Providence to erect the building. Miraculous because the stream of graces never dried up. Miraculous also when, 50 years after the death of Don Bosco, the Salesian Superiors decided to enlarge the building and enrich it with a second dome: as soon as the news became known, the gifts came flowing in.

Other shrines of Mary Help of Christians multiplied all over the globe, wherever the Salesians went – everywhere repeating the devotion on Mary's feast and indeed on the 24th of every month. The painting of Lorenzoni over the main altar was reproduced in printing, in statues and in medals. The Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians, started in Turin in 1870, spread worldwide even before the beginning of the century. All this to the praise and glory of the 'Madonna of Don Bosco'.

Chapter 10

Dimissorial letters and Recommendations

If Don Bosco, as religious superior, were able to issue his own dimissorial letters, his subjects could be ordained ‘titulo mensae communis’ – i.e., their maintenance would be provided by the community. If however, as the situation was, the Bishops had to decide over their fitness for ordination, the prevailing law stipulated that for their sustenance they had to dispose over a patrimony, a sum that produced a minimum interest of 240 lire per year. Most of the members of the Society came from families that could not afford such a sum and this meant an extra worry for Don Bosco. He had to approach the ministry of cult or other authorities, or write letters and beg, he even wrote to the King!

Similar proceedings took time; there were also Bishops who refused to ordain the clerics of Don Bosco, and therefore ordination was often delayed. There were clerics, who, in their impatience, left the Congregation which in their opinion could not adequately provide for its subjects. It explains how keen Don Bosco was to obtain without delay the faculty to issue dimissorial letters.

The Church, with the Decree of Praise, had recognised the Society as a legal entity, and Don Bosco thought that this would provide a way out. Surely, the superior of such a Society could act without having to depend on the Bishop. Fr. Manacorda, interpreting the Founder’s mind, on his own wrote a petition to the Roman Congregation to have this point of view recognised. The answer was negative: in the matter of ordinations, the superior depends on the judgement of the local Bishop. Probably it was not the opportune time to ask for privileges at the time that Bishops were looking forward to the Vatican Council to have many of those privileges removed to make Religious more dependent on their Bishops.

In 1866 Don Bosco was invited to Rome to mediate between the Holy See and the Italian government in the question of filling the vacancies of the Episcopal sees. Don Bosco profited from his stay in Rome to bring up the matters of the Congregation. The pope always listened sympathetically, but he also desired

to follow the normal procedure, i.e. through the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

In the Roman Congregation however Don Bosco did not find many willing ears. They pointed out that the Holy See had indeed ‘praised’ the Salesian Congregation but the faculty to issue dimissorial letters was only given to superiors of fully approved societies. Though, they said, because of your special circumstances the Holy Father may make some exception if you can give a recommendation from your local Ordinary.

They also would not approve the rule. They found an insurmountable objection, a contradiction in terms, in the article against poverty: “The members keep the patrimony of their goods and the ability to acquire others, though they cannot freely administer them”. How is it possible, they asked, to possess and not to possess at the same time?

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In 1867 Turin welcomed its new Archbishop Mgr Riccardi di Netro. Archbishop Riccardi had for 25 years been Bishop of Savona, he knew Don Bosco well and came to the Archdiocese planning to make use of the Saint’s services: he would give him the direction of the Minor Seminaries of Bra and Giaveno and the Major Seminary of Chieri. His plans evaporated when Don Bosco told him that his Society was not depending on the diocese but on Rome, and that he had world-wide ambitions. To make him understand the situation Don Bosco sent him a ‘Memo’ in which he exposed the end, the origin and the present condition of the Society.

All these controversies did not disturb his peace. In his heart he knew that his Rules would one day be approved and he prepared his confreres for that event. A circular letter dated 24 May 1867 is totally dedicated to the subject of working for the glory of God – not one word of doubt or discouragement, only a fervent expression of zeal and trust.

In June, Rome celebrated the eighteenth centenary of the martyrdom of St Peter. Don Bosco sent two priests, Fr Angelo Savio and Fr John Cagliero as his representatives to the celebration. They carried a letter to the Holy Father: “If ever at this extraordinary solemnity it would be allowed to ask for a favour that I have very much at heart, I dare to renew with the greatest respect the request that your Holiness deign to approve the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales, with all the corrections, changes, or additions that your Holiness would judge to be for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.” Pius IX answered in a brief on 22 July: “For what concerns the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales, you certainly know that this matter has been entrusted to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, whose service we normally make use of in treating such matters”. Besides, friendly persons in Rome advised Don Bosco not to insist on the faculty to issue dimissorial letters: a solemn refusal at this point would jeopardise the matter forever.

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The new Archbishop of Turin was really preoccupied with the formation of his priests - his priests, and he considered those of Don Bosco his own. He disapproved of three things in the Oratory: 1) the clerics were teaching and assisting – this certainly distracted them from their studies. 2) insufficient Ecclesiastical spirit – how could the Oratory be a breeding ground of vocations? – and 3) insufficiency in studies. So he issued a decree: All seminarians who were authorised to live outside the Seminary had to attend the Seminary at least one year before their ordination, and then they would normally pass on to the Convitto Ecclesiastico. The Archbishop himself brought the news to Don Bosco: “This is going to be a blow for you, but in the end it will be for the good of the Church and of your own community!”

It looked like the beginning of the end. All clerics that did not intend to stay with him, and all the wavering, left him. All those who had already made vows began to doubt about their future. It seems however that the Archbishop agreed to make some special arrangement for the Oratory; Don Bosco wrote to the Rector of the Seminary: “For your information, we have literally followed the instructions of our Archbishop’s circular letter. No clerics of the Archdiocese of Turin are either here, or in Lanzo, or in Mirabello, with the exception of those who intend to be members of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales, for whom His Excellency made an exception in the circular he sent to me.” All the same, his obedience did not prevent delays and denials of ordinations, and strong pressure on all to leave the Congregation. Then there came to him all those clerics that had grown up in the Oratory, they were mostly from poor families: “Could he help them paying the fees of the Seminary?” Don Bosco pleaded for them, and the diocesan authorities allowed them to continue their studies.

rovidential help came from Bishop Ferré, the Bishop of Casale, the diocese where the house of Mirabello was situated. On 19 January 1968 he decreed to incorporate the Society of Saint Francis de Sales as a diocesan Congregation, giving its Superior all opportune faculties and privileges. At least the confreres residing in Mirabello could be ordained without complications!

Two Bishops congratulated Don Bosco for his success. One of them, Bishop Gastaldi of Saluzzo, saw in it “a spark that would start a great fire that would destroy all obstacles!” These two Bishops also pleaded with Archbishop Riccardi in favour of the ordination of clerics of the Oratory. But really, the only way to get out of his predicament was to have the Rule definitely approved.

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Don Bosco had to get his Society approved, and the more ‘Letters of Recommendation’ he could produce, the better an impression it would make on the Roman authorities. We know that he received at least twenty one replies from Bishops, so we can guess how busy he must have been. Every application he

sent to obtain a recommendation contained a long letter with information about the origin and development of the Society, the same for all, and a more personal appendix with statistics about boys of that particular diocese who had studied in the Oratory, and how many of them had entered the Seminary.

A few of those Recommendations are worth reading. We have two from Bishop Gastaldi, one in Latin and one in Italian. His unrestrained praise for Don Bosco and the Society stands in stark contrast with his opposition to Don Bosco later: “The undersigned has witnessed the birth and the growth of this Society, has known and knows each individual member and cannot but praise it and express his desire that it be given permanency”. He further underlines that he has seen in person how the Rules were observed, how he has noted the spirit of obedience, submission, piety, concord, peace and charity. He always found the members of the Society of one heart and mind. He saw how, as by miracle, a big Church came up, a real sign of God’s blessing on the Society.

Other recommendations came from two Cardinals: Antonucci and De Angelis. Antonucci had been Apostolic Nuncio in Turin from 1844 to 1852. He narrated the beginnings of the Oratory when he saw with his own eyes how an indefatigable Don Bosco and his helpers provided religious services for crowds and more crowds of poor boys. Cardinal De Angelis testified how he experienced the courage and charity of Don Bosco when for six months he had been a prisoner of the revolution in Turin. Don Bosco was the only one who regularly came to visit him without fear of the consequences. - Bishop Rota of Guantalla had a similar experience: in 1866 he was exiled from his diocese and enjoyed the hospitality of the Oratory, in spite of the risks involved in this act of charity. “We were with him and with his community for all the six months that the exile lasted. There we enjoyed tranquillity and peace surrounded by all possible care. In this way I could form an exact idea of the persons and of the Society he had founded. What we declare here we do not know from hearsay but it is our personal experience.” – Then he went on describing the life of the Oratory and how Don Bosco had realised an idea which he himself had in mind, the formation of a Religious Congregation relevant to our new times.

Not everything was positive. Don Bosco wrote to Bishop Moreno of Ivrea: “Your Excellency, - I beg you to forget for a moment unpleasant memories caused by financial disagreements.¹ If you should decide to refuse my request, I would appreciate that you would kindly let me know”. Don Bosco received no recommendation and no letter. When after waiting a month he courteously insisted, this letter also remained unanswered.

The Bishop of Pinerolo refused to give a recommendation and explained his reasons to Cardinal Quaglia. He praised the charitable work of the Saint, but, according to him, Don Bosco could not be trusted with the education of the clergy.

More serious were the observations of the Archbishop of Turin. He sent a recommendation but expressed reservations on a few points which he clarified in three letters to Cardinal Quaglia. He approved the Society, he said, in so far as

¹The controversy with Bishop Moreno about the ownership of the Catholic Readings.

it was engaged in gathering poor children, catechising them and guiding them towards a useful occupation. But he could not approve the Rules in their present state, and he suggested that the Holy See make a thorough study of them and revise and correct them where necessary. Let the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, he said, send a wise man, an expert in education, to study for himself the situation at the Oratory; he would certainly discover many inconveniences that escape us now. In a last letter the Archbishop made nine observations on the text of the Constitutions. Father Lemoyne characterised them as follows:

“Ignorance of the true state of affairs, suspicions about Don Bosco’s intentions, prejudices, fears from imaginary dangers, misinterpretations of articles, demands that could not then and there be satisfied, erroneous conclusions. . .” – But Fr Lemoyne concludes: “We wish to stress, however, that Archbishop Riccardi was not prompted by ill-will but was rather misled by inaccurate reports and by the opinions of a few hostile advisers whose views were outdated.”

In March 1868 there was in Turin a meeting of all suffragan Bishops of the Archdiocese to agree on a common stand at the coming Vatican Council. With the permission of the Archbishop Don Bosco presented his case to them, hoping to get a collective recommendation of the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical province of Turin.

When Don Bosco’s petition was read to the assembled Bishops, Bishop Ghilardhi and others immediately voiced their support, but one Bishop raised objections and stirred up debate. Finally, the Bishop of Ivrea exclaimed: “The head of our ecclesiastical province is present. Let him decide”. “Let’s just ignore it,” Archbishop Riccardi replied. “we have too many other things to discuss”. Subsequently, Canon Berardo, the assembly’s secretary, sent Don Bosco a courteous but evasive reply. “Patience!” Don Bosco remarked. “Let us accept this too for God’s sake and Our Lady’s. We shall try to mend the matters in Rome.”

The Biogr. Mem., Vol.IX, p.193.

Chapter 11

The approval of the Society

Setbacks did not discourage him. He continued his correspondence with those who could help him, but explanations are better understood when they are given in person than when given in writing, so he decided to go to Rome. Many people tried to dissuade him, Rome was too busy preparing for the Council and his journey would be useless. Don Bosco listened to what they had to say, but trusting in Mary he went all the same. – On the day of his departure, 8 January 1869, Bishop Gastaldi wrote a letter to Cardinal Quaglia, all praise for Don Bosco and his Society!

The Roman Congregation had been badly impressed by the negative opinions that had reached them, and therefore they asked Father Margotti, the Director of the ‘Unità Cattolica’ to conduct an independent investigation. Fr Margotti, knew and admired Don Bosco, they had often co-operated with each other. So, Fr Margotti’s account was full of praise for everything done in the Oratory, including the sore point of the studies of the Salesians...but: it would be a mistake, he thought, to make the Oratory independent from the Bishop. When Don Bosco read the report he sighed : “I realised then that nothing short of a miracle would bring about a change of heart... Our poor Rules were being taken apart and insurmountable difficulties were raised with every word. Those who could have done the most for me were determinedly opposed. But trusting in Our Lady and in the prayers said at the Oratory, I still hoped to overcome the difficulties.”

They surely prayed for him at the Oratory! The boys had arranged that every day of the week a number of them would go to communion for the intention of their Father.

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Heaven helped with miracles. The first one concerned a nephew of Cardinal Berardi, a boy of 11 years who was wasting away with typhoid fever. The Cardinal had called Don Bosco to the bedside of the boy; Don Bosco delayed

and came only after much insistence. When he entered the house he began to explain to the Cardinal, how much he required his help to get his Society approved, as if he did not hear the pressing requests from the members of the family to go and cure the sick child. In the end he obliged, he blessed the boy and recommended a novena to Mary Help of Christians. Mgr Manacorda wrote: "To speak of a novena at the bedside of a dying child is not particularly heartening. But the next day the boy was free from fever and at the end of the novena he was safe and sound". The Cardinal, beyond himself with joy, immediately went to tell everything to the Pope.

The second miracle happened to Cardinal Antonelli. Don Bosco found him in an easy chair, tortured by gout. As secretary of state he had to see the Pope, but his condition was such that the Pope came to see him instead. Don Bosco asked him to recommend his Society to the Pope, but the Cardinal shook his head, he was obstinately against the approval of the Society, there were too many obstacles to be cleared. "Nevertheless, Don Bosco said, if you promise that tomorrow you will go and recommend me to the Pope, you will be alright." Well yes, the Cardinal made an unbelieving promise – and kept it: the next day every trace of gout had disappeared.

The Pope had been impressed by the stories of the two Cardinals. Now he desired to speak with Don Bosco in person, and an audience was fixed for the 23rd January. As always, the Pope was very encouraging. He himself taught Don Bosco the way to go round certain obstacles. He agreed with Don Bosco that there was no point in asking the Bishop's permission to enter the Society or for ordination regarding boys that were from their fourteenth year in a Salesian house: the Bishop would not know them better than the Salesian Superior. Regarding the ordination of others, the Pope suggested to present their case to the Holy See every time a batch of them became ready. "Let us take one step at a time, he said, slow but sure. When things go well, the Holy See always adds to the favours, it never removes them". There was also a set of Rules, to be read out twice a year at table, regarding admission to the Noviciate and to the vows. "Those Rules, said the Pope, are for fully developed Religious Congregations, not for a Society in formation. Observe what you can, and leave out the rest!"

After the audience Don Bosco wrote to Don Rua: "I am satisfied with the way things are moving, but there are still grave difficulties on the way. Anyhow, let us thank the Lord, we have reason to be grateful. Just continue to pray!"

Those 'grave difficulties' came from the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, the guardian of the law concerning Religious. Various Cardinals had told Don Bosco: "Try to get Svegliati on your side!" Svegliati was the secretary of the Congregation, an uncompromising man of duty. Don Bosco decided to visit the secretary at his residence. He found him in a pitiful condition: feverish, coughing, with a severe inflammation of the lungs. Don Bosco came straight to the point: "Please, Monsignor, do your best to smoothen the obstacles and tomorrow go to the Holy Father and speak in my favour. If you have devotion to Mary Help of Christians and you promise to go tomorrow, you will be alright!" Monsignor had heard about the two Cardinals, but he did not know how much of their stories he could believe. Anyhow he promised, and the next day he

was describing his experience to the Pope, ready to follow the intentions of the Pope, what ever others might object.

The first week of Lent was probably the most exasperating week in Don Bosco's life. Several Cardinals had been given the Rule to read and all the objections that had been raised, and Don Bosco had to go and explain the same points again and again to convince them. There were long and trying discussions, delicate negotiations, continuous tension. One day a Cardinal invited him to stay some time with him, but Don Bosco excused himself: he was incapable of further conversation, badly in need of fresh air. Some days he escaped from the city to roam through open spaces and rest in green surroundings: his brain was exhausted!

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On 19th February 1869, the Congregation was to have its final meeting. In preparation Don Bosco wrote to the Oratory asking groups of boys to alternate in Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Many boys did more and spent all the time of their recreation in the Church. No wonder, the outcome of the meeting was positive. The Society was approved and Don Bosco was a happy man. That evening the Pope wanted to see Don Bosco: "Don't delay, he said, immediately start the procedure for the approval of your Rules. I am here to help you, he said, but I am old and may die any moment. Who knows who will be the next Pope? and you know how certain matters can drag on!"

Don Bosco was in Rome for another 10 days and people from Rome wrote to Turin to say how happy he appeared. But surely, he was tired: "My mind and my body are tired, he wrote to Don Rua; I really need (underlined) that you do not arrange any demonstrations at my return. Just do as when I come back from Turin, it would give me not a little relief."

They loved him too much for that! It was unthinkable not to celebrate his return after an absence of two months of fear and trepidation, crowned with such good results. Oreglia wrote to Rome: "The Oratory has gone mad. Some sing, some play instruments, some shout, all are besides themselves with joy. Even the bells are ringing at any moment so that people far away can rejoice with us. Don Bosco is back, and nobody can keep quiet, the big people as well as the boys!"

It was a time for conferences, talks, speeches. His confreres had postponed the celebration of the feast of St Francis de Sales till his return. He spoke at length to his Rectors and Confreres in a memorable conference. The boys, who had prayed so much for success, deserved a long goodnight. He thanked them for their prayers and in a witty way described his visits in Rome, they were thrilled! For the first time he issued a dimissorial letter for one of his Clerics – and he wanted to do in a solemn way; there was need to clarify the doubts of the Clerics who had been hesitating and to encourage the goodwill of others.

Another piece of good news from Rome was this: the Confraternity of the Clients of Mary Help of Christians had received Papal approval and indulgences.

It was the occasion of a solemn function with a lengthy conference in the Church of Mary Help of Christians.

Below read the introduction of his conference to the confreres on 7th March.

“I know that you are all very anxious to know the outcome of my journey to Rome in reference to our Society. I am delighted to tell you that my efforts were far more successful than I had anticipated. Evidently God wanted our work to have a firm, permanent basis.

You are all aware that until now this house, or rather our Society, was leading a precarious existence because it lacked a firm foundation. It had rules, but since they were not canonically approved, they could only bind individuals to a person for a specific purpose. Don Bosco’s death might be also the Society’s death. In 1864, our Society was awarded a decree of praise and Don Bosco was appointed superior, but that was all. Then, in 1867, several Bishops commended it [to the Holy See]. But now a definitive conclusion was imperative: either approval or disbandment. [Until now] our situation was precarious. At any time the Bishops could have recalled the clerics belonging to their dioceses, thus de facto disbanding our Society. It was therefore necessary that its members be exempt from episcopal jurisdiction. That is why I decided to go to Rome. Enormous obstacles stood in my way. Our diocesan council, which had been asked to devise a formula that would safeguard both episcopal authority and the existence of our Society, left the matter unresolved. Bishops and other very pious and friendly persons tried to persuade me that my journey would be useless because I would not succeed in having our rules and our Society approved, especially because of the forthcoming ecumenical council. They adduced a great number of reasons and insurmountable difficulties. People also wrote from Rome telling me that it would be utterly useless and a sheer waste of time to go there because I would never obtain what I wanted, and that it was simply impossible that our rules would be approved.

Then this thought struck me: *Everything is against me, and yet my heart tells me that if I do go to Rome, the Lord who is the master of hearts will help me. I will go to Rome!* I left full of confidence, firmly convinced that Our Lady would help me by turning things in my favour. No one could have shaken this conviction of mine. I respected my friends’ advise, but at the same time I was determined to do whatever the Lord might inspire. I left therefore with sole trust in the Lord and Our Lady.”

Biogr. Mem. Vol IX pp.260-261

Two more facts must be mentioned before we conclude this chapter:

- In April 1869, Pope Pius IX celebrated the golden jubilee of his ordination. Don Bosco sent Brother Oreglia to Rome to present to the Pope an album with the signatures of thirty-two priests, seventy-three clerics and three thousand four

hundred and thirty boys. Pius IX was very pleased and Don Bosco received a Papal Letter with praise and encouragement.

- Another fact was not that pleasant. The Procurator General of the King accused Don Bosco that he had put into execution a papal decree without asking the Government's permission. Don Bosco was prepared for this eventuality: probably he had consulted Ratazzi on the matter. Even so his reasons were not admitted; he was informed that the Exsequatur (permission to put into effect a papal decree) could not be granted, and Don Bosco never got back the original copy of the Pope's Decree. Anyhow, some highly placed person, probably Ratazzi, interfered in his favour, and Don Bosco continued to run his Congregation as if nothing had happened.

Chapter 12

Settling down to a regular life

Pius IX had advised Don Bosco to adjust to the situation with a certain elasticity, with the freedom that was required to adapt to the changing conditions of the times. Don Bosco therefore took advantage of the good disposition of the members to animate them to a much needed spirit of family, to a great confidence between superiors and subjects. He asked the superiors to give two conferences a month, always practical and adapted to the needs of the confreres, and he asked the confreres every month to open their heart to the superiors in the monthly talk, a 'rendiconto'. The rectors were asked to give to the Rector Major a monthly report on the health and life of the confreres and on the material condition of the house.

Among the clerics there were eleven who had entered the Oratory after the age of fourteen: Don Bosco could not give them dimissorial letters. However, he judged that also their Bishops could not know about their persons or their studies, so he asked the Holy See for once to make an exception – and it was granted.

The case of deacon Joseph Cagliero (nephew of our future Cardinal) was different. He had been in the Oratory since many years but he had never asked admission to the Congregation. When he approached the Archbishop with his request for ordination, the Archbishop said he would do it on condition that he pass over to the diocesan clergy. Joseph was an impulsive character, he said something like: never! The Archbishop insisted but Joseph held out; he asked him to give the names of the clerics belonging to the Congregation, but Joseph did not answer a word. "If that is the case, said the Archbishop, you can go!"

Back at the Oratory he related it all to Don Bosco. Don Bosco wrote a nice apology and made Joseph copy and sign it: "I therefore declare that it is my intention and decision to belong to the Congregation of Saint Francis of Sales. I arrived here as a small boy, and without the material and moral help which I received here, I would not have been able to go through my studies. You will understand my great affection for the place and persons from whom I received science and morality. Don Bosco always left me free, and though in body and in spirit I always belonged to the Congregation, I had never pronounced myself

definitely: this is what I intend to do with this present letter.”

In fact, he made his profession and was transferred to Murialdo where Bishop Ferré ordained him to the priesthood. The Archbishop of Turin came to know about it and was not a little displeased; he called it underhand dealings and declared everything irregular! Don Bosco had to defend himself. He quoted an old decree of Benedict XIV, he also mentioned that he had been several times to Archbishop's House without being able to see the Archbishop, but without stressing the juridical point he rather asked forgiveness for the displeasure that the whole affair had caused his Superior: “You know that for thirty years I am doing what I can for this diocese. Many clerics, assistant priests and parish priests were our pupils; I never asked for a stipend or an office...”

The Archbishop received the letter when he was in Rome for the Council. He was not perfectly satisfied with Don Bosco's explanation but he let matters go.

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In 1869 there was the election for the new Superior Chapter:

Since the term of office of all the Superior Chapter members had expired, a meeting was held to re-elect them or elect their successors. After the singing of the Veni Creator [invocation to the Holy Spirit] Father John Bosco, Rector, in accordance with the rules, proceeded to reconfirm Father Michael Rua as Prefect and Father John Cagliero as Spiritual Director. Afterwards, the perpetually professed members cast secret votes for the Economer and three consultors. Father Angelo Savio was elected Economer, and Father Charles Ghivarello, Father Celestine Durando and Father Paul Albera were elected consultors. The first two had previously held that office, the last filled the vacancy of Father Francesia who had been appointed Rector of the new Salesian School at Cherasco.

Biogr. Mem. Vol. IX, p.366

As said above, Fr. Francesia was sent to be the Director of a new house, Cherasco. It was the first time that, to obey the 9th observation to his Rules, Don Bosco had to approach the Roman Congregation for permission to open a new house. Don Bosco noted how, in spite of the prevailing anticlerical mentality, the local municipality and the Church authorities harmoniously worked together to get the Salesians open their new school. Today, he wrote to Rome, we have some forty applications from municipalities – see how the ancient co-operation is returning!

The time had come to present a first triennial report on the state of the Congregation. Don Bosco took it personally to Cardinal Quaglia. The Cardinal showed surprise: “If your Society continues to go ahead at this rate, you will have 2,000 members within fifty years!” – Note: After fifty years, in 1920, there were 4270 Salesians and 482 novices.

Don Bosco was in Rome for a month, 24 January to 22 February 1870, at the time of the Council. We know how much he put himself out for the cause of papal infallibility. In one of several audiences Don Bosco offered the Pope a set of bound volumes of the Catholic Readings and of the 'Library of Italian Classics'. "Good! said the Pope, I see that you are a Congregation in name and in deed. I know how many adversaries you had last year, but you managed to overcome them! The same who opposed you last year, this year don't listen to the Pope: it shows who is on the right and who is on the wrong side!" – In another audience the Pope told him how in the Council-hall a Bishop, applauded by all, had spoken of the need of a Religious Society whose members were bound in front of the Church and free citizens in civil life. The Bishop of Parma then announced that such a society, a flourishing one, already existed: the Salesians, and the Bishop of Mondovi had been given the charge of providing a detailed and exact report about it. Later Don Bosco affirmed in a conference: "Many Bishops came to me and asked me to open houses in their Dioceses. I promised nothing, not because of the lack of material means, but rather because of the lack of personnel!" Seeing the enthusiasm of the hearers, Don Bosco concluded: "Let us be happy that the Lord keeps his hand over our head, and let us with ever greater zeal observe our Rules and give them the importance they deserve!"

Chapter 13

The Salesian Society spreading and growing: 1870-73

It is interesting to see how Don Bosco safeguards his freedom in the foundation of the first two houses on the Ligurian coast: Alassio and Varazze. The conditions which he laid down for those two municipalities will afterwards be the standard-contract for every next Salesian house till the end of his life. He guarantees that he will follow the government syllabus for public schools, and that he will provide qualified teachers, but he brooks no interference regarding internal discipline and in the teaching of religion. The contract was valid for five years and automatically renewed, unless one of the partners notified its withdrawal before the end of the first year.

Lack of means never came in the way of his undertakings. "When I see that a work is necessary, I take it for granted that God wants it, and I take it up, sure that Providence will not let me down!". He spent whatever he had and if somebody donated immovable property it was sold immediately and the money was made use of; of landed property he kept as much as he needed for his work, but the rest was sold. If he did not have the money he went to look for it, but at the proper moment he always had what he needed.

His first idea was to have in Alassio a boarding for poor and abandoned children, with a vocational school attached. He found a suitable place in what had been the convent of St Mary of the Angels, but while the negotiations were on to acquire the place, Don Bosco changed idea. Alassio was too small a place for a school of arts and trades, he proposed an ordinary school and the municipality was all the more happy with the change. He concluded the contract in May 1870, acquired the house, adapted and furnished it, asked and received the necessary permissions from the Government officers and from the Church authorities, and already in the academic year 1870-71 the school opened for the public. With Fr Cerutti, a Doctor in Literature, as Rector, the Salesian

community was composed of fifteen persons: five of them were 'ascritti' who did their novitiate while helping in the house. Fr Bodratto, afterwards leader of the 2nd missionary expedition to Argentine, was Prefect; Fr Garino, author of an appreciated 'Greek Grammar', was Catechist.

The parents of the boys were not only pleased, they clamoured for more: they wanted a Lyceum (Junior College). It had always been Don Bosco's desire to start a Lyceum somewhere, but he had always held back because of the extra personnel required and the extra expenses involved. He presented to the parents a plan that was ungrudgingly accepted: they would give to the school part of the money they would otherwise spend to send their children as boarders to one of the schools in the city. The Lyceum was already working in 1871-72, and Don Bosco's 'Collegio Municipale' became the pride of Alassio.

Much of the success was due to the hard work of Father Cerutti, a man of study and of discipline, highly spoken of by all, even by the anticlerical school authorities. Don Bosco used to say: "There is only one like Father Cerutti!"

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Don Bosco had not forgotten that the first intention had been to open a house for poor and abandoned boys. The Genovese Conference of St. Vincent de Paul promoted the project and Marquis Cataldi, a Senator, offered an abandoned house in Marassi. Don Bosco immediately accepted, so immediately that when Father Albera, appointed Rector, and his community of two clerics and three ascritti arrived at the station of Marassi, there was nobody to welcome them or show them the way to the empty house. Things improved when it became known that they had arrived. The Confraternity of St. Vincent de Paul provided for their first needs and the boys started coming in. In no time three workshops were functioning: carpenters, tailors and shoemakers. Don Bosco, making the work known in a circular to the Parish Priests, had also told them that they could send promising vocations, so besides the working boys there was a small section of boys that attended an accelerated course of Latin Language. With forty boys the house was packed and Don Bosco had to decide: either enlarge, or move to another place.

Archbishop Magnesio of Genova offered a solution. With the permission of the Holy See Don Bosco bought in Sampierdarena, a suburb of Genova, a monastery and a church that, before Napoleon, had belonged to the Theatine Fathers. The church was a grandiose construction of the 16th century, but now closed to worship and in a pitiful condition. Don Bosco entrusted its renewal to Architect Dufour, who turned it into a jewel. The monastery itself was not very spacious. Don Bosco bought an adjoining ground, and with some more acquisitions later, the Institution grew to fivefold its original size. Then the Rector opened a festive oratory and Sampierdarena became a mini-Valdocco.

Surely, the new Institution filled a need. The originally peaceful place of Sampierdarena had recently become a business and industrial centre and the

original population was submerged in a sea of newcomers: Protestants of different brands, unbelievers and adventurers. The Rector, Father Albera, though only twenty-six years old at that time, was a man of calm observation, liked by everybody. He was soon known and welcomed in all the better families of Genova and he never asked their help in vain. He was able to renew the house and the church, to enlarge the boarding and the Oratory. Especially, supported by his priests-confreres, he gave great importance to the church services; the people had never seen such ceremonies, they had never heard such music and such sermons, and the whole atmosphere of Sampierdarena was transformed.

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Halfway Savona and Genova lies the industrial town of Varazze. The municipality of that place had started the construction of a school – but then they heard of the fame of Don Bosco and the civil and religious authorities combined to invite Don Bosco. Don Bosco and his Economer went to Varazze on 22 February 1871 and a contract was made up and signed without great difficulty.

As soon as the contract was signed, Don Bosco informed the civil authorities of Cherasco that he withdrew from that place for reasons of hygiene. The Salesian community was straightaway transferred to Varazze. Father Francesia took up the direction of the new place and in no time he became the most wanted preacher of the region. Francesia was a born writer, prose or verse, Italian or Latin made no difference for him. Professor Vallauri did his best to win him over to a professorship at the University of Turin, but Francesia preferred to remain at the service of Don Bosco.

All the new Rectors of Don Bosco were hardly 26,27 years old, yet they did extremely well. The secret of their success was certainly in the piety they had imbibed and the education they had received at the Oratory. They had grown up under the eyes of Don Bosco who continued to follow them up with his letters and his visits.

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As time went on, Don Bosco delegated more and more of his activities to Don Rua. In the Salesian ‘Catalogues’ from 1870 to 1873, Don Bosco is mentioned as Rector Major of the Society and as Rector of Valdocco, called the ‘Mother House’. Gradually, as the task of Rector Major became more absorbing, more and more local duties devolved on Don Rua, officially called the Prefect General of the Society and the Prefect of the Oratory. In 1869, Don Rua began to give the Sunday instruction for the community and the class of ‘New Testament’ for the Clerics. At times he took Don Bosco’s place in the confessional and on the goodnight-stand. In 1872 Don Bosco became dangerously sick in Varazze; what would the Oratory have become without the mind, the virtue and the authority

of Don Rua? It was the same on many other occasions when Don Bosco was absent, sometimes months at a stretch.

Don Rua however never imagined himself to be indispensable; he always presented himself as the mouthpiece of Don Bosco, the executor of his orders and desires. Only in certain odious matters he acted in his own name so that Don Bosco could retain his aureole of paternity. It was his special concern to see that Don Bosco's system of education was honoured in the Oratory – though these were difficult years in this regard: many of the working boys had been admitted at the recommendation of the police and the civil authorities and all the teaching personnel had not been trained in the ways of Don Bosco.

In 1872 Fr Provera took his place as Prefect, and Don Bosco increased Don Rua's prestige by giving him the title of 'Vice Rector'. Don Rua was given the delicate task of distributing and changing the personnel in the houses. Don Bosco followed him up and advised him; e.g. he told him that things should go spontaneously and never under compulsion; that he should possibly please the superiors and the teachers; that in major difficulties he should leave matters to him.

Don Bosco made only rare appearances in the Festive Oratory. In 1869 Fr Barberis was put in charge and his moral ascendancy was recognised by his helpers and by his boys. Later on we shall see how in 1870 the grateful past pupils of the Oratory formed the Association of the Past Pupils.

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In Lanzo there were so many demands for admission that the house became really overcrowded. In 1870 Don Bosco requested the Municipality to extend the building, but even when he proposed to do so at his own expenses, he could not come to a conclusion. For some time he had to be satisfied with certain minor adjustments. But Don Bosco by all means wanted to give the school stability. He did not hesitate to buy a neighbouring ground and he constructed a completely new building: three floors, wide porticoes and a spacious playground. The work was finished in 1873 and new admissions kept pouring in.

Also for Mirabello he preferred a radical solution. The house needed major improvements and the location proved to be very unhygienic, so much so that parents started withdrawing their charges and the number of boys went down from 180 to 115. Not far from Mirabello, in Borgo San Martino, Don Bosco had his eyes on a big house with garden and space enough for a large school. The owner was a friend-admirer who willingly agreed to sell his property. The contract was signed in July 1870 and the transfer began almost immediately afterwards. The Bishop of Casale willingly recognised the place as a 'Minor Seminary' which saved Don Bosco some formalities with the school authorities. Don Bosco visited the house in March 1871 and wrote back to Fr. Bonetti, the Rector: "I found everything to my great satisfaction!"

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For a long time the better families of Piedmont felt the need of a convenient education for their children. Those who could afford it sent their children to the schools of religious outside the country rather than entrusting them to government schools where they risked to lose their faith. Seven diocesan priests took up the challenge, they formed a Society and opened a school in Valsalice. They courageously carried on in the midst of difficulties, but the number of boarders steadily went down and debts kept heaping up. At the brink of financial catastrophe they appealed to the new Archbishop Gastaldi who could think only of one name – that of Don Bosco – as the person who could successfully take over the administration and the running of the school and thus save the honour of the clergy.

The Archbishop's request put Don Bosco before a dilemma: either displease the new Archbishop, or go against his own declared principles. The Chronicles of the Oratory relate that once, in 1863, the conversation was about accepting a College for Nobles: "That not – not as long as I live" said Don Bosco. The idea that Salesians were for the poor and abandoned and not for the rich, was so much ingrained that when the Archbishop's proposal was brought before the Superior Council, all without exception voted against it.

The Archbishop was not pleased. He almost commanded the Salesians to accept. Don Bosco did not desire a head-on confrontation with the new Archbishop, he brought the matter a second time before his Council; this time they recognised the predicament and voted in favour. Once the decision was taken, Don Bosco acted with all speed, cutting short deliberations and accepting even considerable pecuniary sacrifice. In July the newspapers published the programme of his school, with a fine recommendation of the Archbishop.

Father Dalmazzo, Doctor in Literature, was appointed the first Rector. (Francis Dalmazzo as a boy had once witnessed the multiplication of buns in the hands of Don Bosco). For two years the number of boys remained at twenty, though there were Elementary, High School and Junior College classes, and every year Don Bosco had to pay 7,000 lire as rent for the building. Evil tongues kept discouraging the parents: "The Salesians, they said, are no good for the education of the upper classes". But Don Bosco trusted the Rector, and gradually the number rose to a hundred, the maximum that could be expected.

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In those years, 1870-73, Don Bosco was building two churches in Turin. The population around the station was growing and the people wanted a church of their own, to be dedicated to St. Secundus, one of the martyrs of Turin. They got the design ready, obtained building permission, the municipality donated the ground and promised help, but there was nobody to take charge of the construction. Nobody, except Don Bosco. Vicar Capitular Zappatti turned it almost into a case of conscience: imagine how many people would have no opportunity of fulfilling their Sunday duties, how many souls would be lost if Don Bosco refused to accept the charge!

Don Bosco set to work but changed the plans: by shifting the church to one side, he made place for an Oratory and a school. The municipality objected that it was more esthetical to keep the church in the centre and they suspended the work. Then came Archbishop Gastaldi: he offered to build the church himself, according to the plans of the municipality. He hoped to finish the work in 1875, instead, it came finally ready in 1882.

The other church was in the place where since 1847 Don Bosco had been running the Oratory of St. Aloysius. The Waldensians had turned that place into their headquarters. They had built an imposing Temple, while Catholics had to walk three kilometres to the nearest church. Don Bosco saw the need and started the construction; the church would be dedicated to St. John the Evangelist in honour of Pius IX whose baptismal name was John. From 1870 he began gathering funds and buying up pieces of land. One small but essential stretch of land belonged to a Protestant who would not sell it at any price. In the end Don Bosco had to invoke the law and had the land expropriated for reasons of public utility – but the proceedings took a long, long time.

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Back to Valdocco. In January 1873, after the members of the Superior Council had been re-elected, he announced a big change. Up to now the Superior Council of the Society had also been the House Council of Valdocco. From the next scholastic year, Valdocco would have a House Council of its own, just like every other house.

In September, always 1873, there was a second meeting of Salesian Rectors and Prefects. The Rectors and Prefects separately studied their duties and together they discussed a few more points. Don Bosco gave their conclusions to the press and everybody received his copy. All this helped much to strengthen unity among the confreres and regularity in religious life, two points that were most important now that Rome was going to consider the final approval of the Rules.

Chapter 14

The approval of the Rule

I.

The Society had received a Decree of Praise (1864) and was recognised as a religious Society.(1869). But a Religious Society is definitely approved only when also its Rules are approved, and this is what Don Bosco now tried to obtain.

He knew from experience how much importance Rome attaches to the recommendation of the local Ordinary. Therefore, as soon as Mgr. Gastaldi took possession of his archdiocese, Don Bosco approached him with the question: "Shall I begin the routine procedure for the final approval of the Society?" The Archbishop said: yes, - and he promised his support. Through Cardinal Berardi, who had become a good friend after the miraculous cure of his nephew, Don Bosco came to know that also the Holy Father favoured an early start of the proceedings.

With the way open before him, Don Bosco began a final revision of the Rule. He based himself on the text of 1867, introduced whatever changes were required to comply with the thirteen observations he had received, and besides he added a few modifications based on recent experience.

Soon difficulties began to crop up. The Archbishop declared: "Unless you have a good regular noviciate I will not be able to support you". In a letter to his Archbishop, dated 23 November 1872, Don Bosco repeated all that he previously had already explained to Pius IX. The Pope, after hearing his explanation, had approved his ideas and helped him to obtain the approval of the Society. "First of all, Don Bosco wrote, I do not intend to found a religious Society where penitents and converts must be formed to piety. Rather, we gather boys or adults whose morality has already been tested for several years before they are admitted to our Congregation. Secondly, we limit ourselves to boys educated in our own houses, or boys proposed and tested by their parish priests - even so, two third of their number go back to the place from where they came. Those that stick are for four, five, or even seven years exercised in study and in piety, and even then only few are admitted to the practice of the vows. Third: those that are admitted in this way have to pass two years in Turin where every

day they have spiritual reading, meditation, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, examination of conscience; and every evening, in common with the aspirants, a little exhortation given by me and only rarely by somebody else. Twice in a week there is conference for the aspirants, once a week for those who belong to the Society. . .”

By Christmas his first draft came ready and Don Bosco discussed matters several times with his Archbishop. He would have liked the Archbishop's recommendation to preface his printed copy, but the Archbishop declined. He just agreed to a few lines added to Don Bosco's introduction, expressing his benevolence to the Society.

From his predecessor, Archbishop Riccardi, Mgr. Gastaldi had inherited the idea that the Salesian Society would have to be kept under the authority of the local Bishop. He said so much in a circular letter which he sent to the three Bishops who had Salesian houses in their dioceses. “Please, he wrote, when you write your recommendations, add the following points: 1) No sacred orders for members who had not made perpetual vows, 2) There should be a noviciate to root the candidates in virtue, 3) Any candidate for ordination should be examined by the Bishop or his delegate, and 4) The Bishop has the right to visit and inspect the churches of the Society”.

With this letter in hand, Don Bosco started doubting if it was the proper time to proceed at all. Moreover, the Archbishop had gone to Rome where he would certainly spread his ideas. In Don Bosco's name, Mgr. Manacorda asked Cardinal Berardi what he thought about the matter. The Cardinal was positive: Go on!

At the point of setting out for Rome, Don Bosco went to see the Archbishop who had just returned. The Archbishop gave him his letter of recommendation, or rather, a copy of it because he had already handed over the original in Rome. The recommendation repeated the praises of the letter of 1868, but then went on stressing the four points mentioned above, plus this: that the Society should be granted as much exemption from the Bishop's jurisdiction as was required for its existence, but nothing more than that. – It made Don Bosco hesitate again: would it not be better to postpone the approval of the Rules to a more propitious time? Anyhow, he was now starting for Rome, he would decide there.

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When Don Bosco arrived in Rome, February 1873, he learned that a letter of the Archbishop had preceded him. The letter was addressed to Cardinal Caterini. It contained a copy of the Archbishop's recommendation and the comment: “Those four additional points did not please the Founder” – and once again he stressed the need of a noviciate, deplored the insufficiency of studies and repeated that the judgement about fitness for ordination was the prerogative of the local Ordinary.

Other personalities however encouraged Don Bosco to go on. Meanwhile the requested letters of recommendation started coming in one by one, and they

were very positive. Only the Archbishop of Genova had to a certain extent taken into account the suggestions of his colleague of Turin; on the other hand, he was full of praise for the work of the Salesians at Sampierdarena.

Msgr. Vitelleschi, the new Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, was so friendly that he helped Don Bosco draw up the application to start the proceedings, and he himself took the application and all the letters of recommendation to the Vatican. The Pope wanted him to read out the letter of Mgr. Manacorda who had recently been appointed Bishop of Fossano. It was a poem of praise for Don Bosco and his Society, and even better: he explained very well Don Bosco's idea of a noviciate and how a regular noviciate would attract the attention of the Government and would endanger the work "So... let us please Don Bosco," said the Pope.

II.

To approve the Constitutions of a Religious Society, the Pope first of all appoints a commission of Cardinals. Secondly, before the Cardinals meet, the applicant, for us Don Bosco, must prepare what is called a 'Position', i.e. all the documents relevant to the case must be gathered together and printed into one volume and presented for examination.

From the moment Don Bosco started preparing his 'Position', all kinds of obstacles began cropping up. There was first of all a change in the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. The president, Cardinal Quaglia, had been substituted by Cardinal Bizzarri; the secretary, Mgr Svegliati, had been substituted by Msgr Vitelleschi. Msgr Vitelleschi was friendly, Don Bosco was well acquainted with his family in Rome. But Cardinal Bizzarri was new, and the first thing the new Prefect got on his desk was a long letter of Archbishop Gastaldi, describing all his reservations to the approval of the Rule. For Archbishop Gastaldi, a Religious Congregation was a model organisation with noviciate, regular studies, with a set of practises of piety, order and regularity. Don Bosco's idea was different: "In the difficult times in which we live, a commencing Congregation needs all the sympathy and leniency an Ordinary can bring up; and if difficulties arise, it needs his advise and understanding to the extent of what is possible".

Archbishop Gastaldi proposed that the Rules would first be approved by him, and then the Bishops of the dioceses where the Society had houses could come to a common approbation. Probably this suggestion was not taken seriously because the Rules had already been entrusted for examination to Fr Bianchi a Dominican. In the second half of May he came out with his observations, thirty-eight of them, with the advice that after the Rules had been suitably corrected, they would for some time practised 'ad experimentum'.

Msgr Vitelleschi charitably reduced the observations to twenty-eight and advised Don Bosco to incorporate them and send the corrected rules back to the Roman Congregation for a new examination.

On 30 December(1873) Don Bosco was called to Rome to mediate between the Church and the State on the question of the temporalities of the Bishops. It was a good occasion to work for what interested him much more: "I have

nothing more at heart in the little remainder of life that is granted to me, than to finally settle the matters of the Society”.

He had encouraging audience with the Pope and began to visit the dignitaries, especially Cardinals who might be potential members of the commission. Many were favourable, others changed their unfavourable attitude after they heard his explanation. He consulted experts and gave his final copy of the rules for printing. Most of the twenty-eight observations had been incorporated, a few of them he glossed over because they would attract the attention of the anticlerical government.

On 3 February Don Bosco was informed about the names of the Cardinals that would constitute the ‘Particular Commission’: Patrizi, De Luca, Bizzarri and Martinelli. In a circular to his Salesians he wrote: “This is the most important moment for our Congregation, help me with your prayer, help me with the exact observance of our Rules, and God will see to it that our efforts will be crowned with success.”

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The compilation of the ‘Positio’, the folder containing all relevant documentation, was the work of advocates that were authorised by and registered with the Roman Congregations. Don Bosco selected the priest–advocate Menghini to be in charge. He himself prepared a ‘Historical Note’ to serve as introduction to his ‘Positio’; his advocate found it too long and he had to shorten it. But the greatest obstacle seemed to be the gossip that made the rounds of Rome: that the studies of the members were deficient, and that many professed had left the Congregation and given troubles to their Bishops. Don Bosco added a note to rectify the situation:

“Not long ago a person in authority told me in a friendly way: “There are some people spreading the rumour that your priests and clerics don’t study.” – I told him that instead many of our priests and clerics had brought out literary and religious publications that were read and praised by many; that we have an army of 150 professed members that for the moment are engaged in study; and that 103 of them underwent public exams and obtained the degrees and diplomas for which they applied. – My friend said: “I do not mean those who are already engaged in the ministry or teaching; I mean simple clerics. It is said that, as a rule, their results are only just ordinary.” - “Please, I said, verify their results in the Curia of our Archdiocese, from the years 1850 to 1870 – because in that year the Society was already approved and the Superiors of the diocese advised me to have their studies in the houses of the Congregation.” Well, my friend went to verify, and then he answered me as follows: “Let evil tongues say what they want; from 1850 to 1870 all the

Salesian clerics registered in the Curia are marked “Very well’ or ‘Excellent”.

Then that person asked me: “What answer do you give to those who say that many of your perpetually professed members leave the Congregation and become a burden to their Bishops?” – The answer is that up to today, 23rd February 1874, not one perpetually professed members ever left the Congregation. There is a single exception, that of a professed lay-Salesian who left the Congregation in order to enter the Jesuits where at present he zealously exercises his priestly apostolate.¹

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On 7th March the four Cardinals had the folder in their hands, and the ‘Historical Note’ was printed extra and distributed to all who were interested.

The final meeting of the ‘Particular Commission’ was then fixed for the 24th. Don Bosco intensified his requests for prayers. To Don Rua: “Gather those of the Company of St Aloysius and tell them to pray, but pray with fervour, we need it!” – To Don Lazzero for the artisans: “I recommend myself to the charity of all of you. Let those of the Company of St Joseph offer a Holy Communion for my intention!” – Again to Don Rua: “Our needs are growing: redouble your prayers!” – again: “The devil is giving his final kicks: continue to pray!” On 16 March he sent a circular letter: - “1) From the 21st on, a triduum of rigorous fast for all the members of the Congregation - 2) all the boys are encouraged to frequent the sacraments of confession and communion and all the prayers of the day are for that intention. - 3) The Salesians will pass all the time possible in front of the Blessed Sacrament, and all the usual prayers are to be said in the Church - 4) In the evening Veni Creator [prayer to the Holy Spirit], prayers of reparation to the Blessed Sacrament, a hymn to Our Lady and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament”. The circular letter was sent to all the houses with a personal note to the Rector. Father Rua was advised to see that the commotion would not spread outside the house.

There was certainly need of prayers. The Consultor did not find some of his suggestions in the printed Rule and objected to the Cardinals. Don Bosco, warned at the nick of time, annulled the existing printed copies and introduced a few modifications in a newly printed text. To dissipate other doubts he wrote another page with the reasons why he insisted on having his Rules approved now.

He made a last minute visit to the Cardinals of the Commission. a visit that was not at all superfluous. Cardinal Martinello did not have a great idea of Don Bosco, he radically changed opinion after the visit. Cardinal Bizzarri, a man with a delicate conscience, confided to Don Bosco that the Pope had told him to be understanding. Cardinal Patrizi talked with him for a one and a half

¹Cav. Frederic Oreglia of St. Stephen, the brother of Cardinal Oreglia S.J.

hours, and Cardinal De Luca warned Don Bosco against a Prelate who was not in his favour.

On the decisive day, 24th March 1874, while the Cardinals were in session, two candles burned at the altar of Our Lady of Miracles. . .

III.

The Cardinals met at 10 AM.. Two points were to be discussed: the Rules, and the letters of the Archbishop. They introduced several modifications in the Rule, but the overall outcome was favourable. But about the letters of the Archbishop they discussed and discussed without being able to come to a conclusion, and since it was becoming late they decided to hold another meeting on the 31st. Don Bosco, who had not expected a second meeting, at first did not know what to think of it, but soon he regained his confidence and wrote to the Rectors of the houses: “We hope that the outcome will be favourable. Continue to pray, keep cheerful and wait with patience for what the Lord had prepared for us.”

Msgr Vitelleschi asked for another four copies of the Rules to adjust the modifications, and then – an absolute requirement! – he should be able to show his regulations for the Noviciate.

Regulations for the Noviciate did not exist. Without losing time, he asked for rules of other Congregations, studied them, asked advice, consulted his own experience. On the 24th he worked till 2 AM; then he woke up his secretary, made him write a fair copy, and the next morning the regulations were in the hands of the Monsignor.

The Cardinals had been impressed by the distorted information and unfounded doubts of Archbishop Gastaldi. Don Bosco drew up his defence in what he called a ‘Promemoria’:

“We must begin by stating that Mgr Gastaldi, the present Archbishop of Turin, up to 10th February 1873, was a constant and fervent promoter and an untiring collaborator of the Salesian Society. On that day (10 Feb. 1873) he vividly encouraged Don Bosco and sent him to Rome with a Latin letter of recommendation in which he declared to have seen the finger of God in the existence and conservation of the institute, and in which he formulated excessive praises for the great good that the Institute did and is doing, complementing the poor Founder to the skies.

1) The Rules, he said, were not approved by his predecessors.

R/ Among the documents presented to the Congregation for Bishops and Regulars there is a decree of Msgr Frasoni (dated 31st March 1852) in which he approves the Work of the Oratories, appointing the priest Bosco as its head and giving him all the faculties required for the good running of the same.

2) No approval was asked, either from Archbishop Riccardi nor from him.

R/ When an Institute is approved by the local Ordinary, there is no need of a new approval by every successive Bishop. All the same, the priest Bosco approached Msgr. Riccardi with the request to approve the Salesian Institute. The answer was, as more than once also Archbishop Gastaldi answered me, that when an Institute is approved by the Holy See, it needs no further diocesan approval. However, willing to cooperate to the stability of the Institute, on his own account he issued a decree (25 Dec. 1872) in which he confirmed all the privileges and faculties granted by his predecessors, adding several new ones, e.g. granting the Oratory parochial rights.

3) A noviciate of two years with exclusively ascetical occupations.

R/ This was fine in former times, but not in our own time and place. It would mean the immediate destruction of the Salesian Institute, because when the civil authority comes to know about the existence of a noviciate, they immediately disband it and disperse the novices. Moreover, such a noviciate could not be reconciled with the Salesian Constitutions which demand from the members a life full of activity, being satisfied with a minimum of ascetical practices, just what is required for any good ecclesiastic. Such a noviciate would never do for us because the novices would be prevented to put into practice the Constitutions according to the purpose of the Congregation.

4) Some perpetually professed members have left the Congregation and have given ground for complaints.

R/ The only one that left is Father Frederic Oreglia S.J. He belonged to our Congregation as a lay-member and left us to enter the Society of Jesus to start studies to the priesthood, and in fact he is now creditably engaged in the sacred ministry.

5) The Congregation considerably disturbs the ecclesiastical discipline in the dioceses.

R/ A gratuitous assertion. Up to date the Ordinary of Turin could not prove his assertion with a single fact.

6) It happens too often that members with triennial vows receive ordination 'titulo mensae communis' [see p. 30] and then leave the Congregation.

R/ A gratuitous assertion. Up to date nobody left the Salesian Congregation.

7) One of his diocesans, from Saluzzo, left immediately after he had been ordained in the Congregation.

R/ Not true. The priest to whom he alludes (he also mentions him in other letters) never belonged to the Salesian Congregation. He was ordained by Archbishop Gastaldi with a regular 'Ecclesiastical Title' and against the advice of Father Bosco. His Bishop had referred him to Don Bosco whose charity he enjoyed during the time of his studies.

8) Clerics dismissed from the Seminary are admitted to the Salesian Congregation and sent to other houses and dioceses, but after ordination they return to the diocese.

R/ Nothing ever happened of the kind. Should it happen in the future, the Ordinary remains free to admit or reject them, as he can do for any person who leaves a religious Congregation.

9) It is useful to point out that, if the conditions imposed would be enforced, the Salesian Congregation which has no material means, would have to close its houses and suspend its Catechisms because it would have no longer catechists or teachers; and, what is worse, it would, as a moral entity, come to the attention of the civil authorities: its members would be dispersed without delay and this would be the end of the Society.

10) Note also that the present Archbishop has never made any complaint or observation to any member or to the Superior of the Salesian Society. Rather, when recommending a cleric for science or for any special virtue, he always pointed to the students of the Salesians.

11) What is asserted in his letter of 20 April 1873 has later been repeated in three other confidential letters to the same Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, but always in vague terms or with facts that have nothing to do with members of the Society.

12) To set straight the record, and in honour of the truth, may please this Promemoria be attached to the letter in question.

Between 29 and 30 March, a copy of the Promemoria was in the hands of of Mgr. Svegliati and three out of the four Cardinals of the Commission.

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The second meeting, on the 31st, lasted four hours. The Cardinals were inclined to give a provisional approval with an experimentation period of ten years, but it was said that the Holy Father did not like that, so they voted for a definite approval. Three voted yes, one voted for a ten-years' term. The Holy Father could now be approached for an absolute approval of the Constitutions, taking into account the emendations introduced by the Commission. Don Bosco was told that he could apply for the faculty of issuing dimissorial letters for a period of ten years – not mentioned in the Constitutions but granted in a separate Rescript. When the Secretary of the Commission told the Holy Father that one vote was missing for unanimity, “Well, said the Pope, that vote will be mine!”

We can imagine the joy of Don Bosco. He wrote to Don Rua: “When you will know everything, you will say that it was really the result of so many prayers! Don Bosco now began his round of thanksgiving visits. On 8 April he was with the Holy Father. The Pope himself was happy that things had gone well and Don

Bosco received some important favours. The first regarded the noviciate. The Pope understood very well that a purely ascetical noviciate was a tall demand for a beginning active Congregation. Don Bosco asked permission to employ his novices in any occupation that would redound to the glory of God. The Pope agreed, “but don’t put them in the sacristy, he said, because they will become lazy. Make them work, and work!”²

Then Don Bosco asked dispensation from one of the modifications that imposed the age of thirty-five for members of the Superior Chapter. Only few of Don Bosco’s priests had reached that age! “There is no need of dispensation, said the Pope, time will remedy that defect, and for the time being let things continue as they are.”

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When Don Bosco returned home, the house was in mourning for the death of Father Provera – “The Society lost one of its best members”, said Don Bosco. The feast of his return and his success was celebrated the Sunday next, with all the Rectors present. The Latin text of the Rule, with a few modifications affecting style, was published in 1874, the next year the Italian translation came ready, with an introduction of Don Bosco ‘To our Salesian Confreres’.

The Constitutions were approved; to see that they were practised and appreciated Don Bosco needed Rua, ‘the Living Rule’. Don Rua visited all the houses; nothing escaped him, his memory never failed him. He took note of every infringement, informed the Rector, and after returning to Valdocco he again sent to the Rectors his written observations. Meanwhile, the care of the novices was entrusted to Fr. Barberis, nobody was better qualified for the job than he! He was amiability and goodness personified, nobody ever saw him impatient or agitated. Don Bosco testified: “Barberis has understood the mind of Don Bosco!”

When on the day of his return from Rome Don Bosco came out of the church after mass, everybody noticed a singular phenomenon. A sparkling cloudy arch enveloped the Oratory, so to say crowning the rooms of Don Bosco. This luminous display lasted for a long time. The boys were taken up by it but Don Bosco walked up to his room, talking to some confreres. Only on their insistence he came out on the balustrade to see the spectacle. The same display repeated itself during recreation after lunch with even greater brightness, the arch enveloping the Oratory and the church of Mary Help of Christians. Somebody asked Don Bosco: “What do you think is the meaning of this? He replied: “Maybe the Lord wanted to give us a sign of our victory over our opponents after the absolute approval of the Society.”

²Basing himself on the Pope’s oral permission, in the first Italian edition of the approved rules, Don Bosco simplified Chapter XIV on the Noviciate: Of the sixteen articles he kept the first three and the last four, and he dropped all the rest.

Chapter 15

The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

In Mornese, an obscure village of the hilly Monferrato region, there was a small community of Sisters that from 1872 on began to depend entirely on the guidance of Don Bosco and his sons. They tried to do for girls what the Salesians were doing for boys.

That Don Bosco would keep busy with girls was against his natural inclinations, but so many important persons kept insisting that he do something for them that he was afraid that keeping resisting the idea would go against the ways of Providence. In 1871 he mentioned the possibility to his Capitulars; he asked them to reflect and offer prayers during the month of Mary Help of Christians to obtain light from heaven. After the feast he gathered them again and asked for their frank and free opinion; all had to admit that it was opportune to do something in favour of female youth. But the idea was new, even Father Cerruti, the Rector of Alassio, was surprised. Don Bosco said: “The [French] Revolution made use of women to spread evil; we will use them to do good”. And he explained that he would call them Daughters of Mary Help of Christians: “Their Institute should be a monument of gratitude to the Mother of God for all she has done for us!”

What would the Holy Father think of such a plan? When he went to Rome and explained his ideas: the Pope listened and wanted time to reflect. In a second audience he immediately came to the point: “I have thought about your plan. It seems to redound to God’s glory and to the good of souls. In my opinion the Sisters’ main goal would be to do for girls what the Salesians are now doing for boys. As regards structure, let them be guided by you and your successors just as the Sisters of Charity are guided by the Vincentians. Keep this in mind when you write out their Constitutions and when you try them out. The rest will come later”. – As for ‘structures’, probably Don Bosco himself had not given thought to that.

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The Parish Priest of Mornese, Father Pestarino, had been formed by the Servant of God, Father Joseph Frassinetti, of Genova. He found in his parish a group of willing girls, eager to sanctify themselves, and he gave them a set of rules approved by that Servant of God. The local Bishop knew of it, and in 1857 he blessed and approved the 'Pious Union of Daughters of Mary Most Holy Immaculate'. Their leader was the school mistress, Angela Maccagna, but the best girl of all was without doubt Mary Mazzarello.

Father Pestarino himself was equally desirous of greater perfection. In 1862 he met Don Bosco in the train and received an invitation to visit Valdocco. That visit impressed him to the point that he would have liked to stay there, but Don Bosco who was informed of the good work he was doing in Mornese, sent him back to his parish – 'the Garden of the Diocese' as the Bishop called it. At any rate, in this way Valdocco came to know about Mornese and Mornese came to know Valdocco. Every time Father Pestarino came to Turin he brought news about his group of girls, and Don Bosco always sent him back with best wishes for them. When during the summer excursions of 1864 Don Bosco took his boys to Mornese, the villagers gave him a rousing reception. On that occasion Don Bosco could speak to the Daughters of the Immaculate one by one and in group, and Mary Mazzarello was ecstatic; she repeated again and again: "Don Bosco is a Saint!"

Father Pestarino himself kept asking Don Bosco to join the Salesians. Don Bosco received his Religious profession but sent him back to his village. Following his instructions, Father Pestarino invited three at first and then a few more of the best girls to live a common life in a house near the parish. They lived a poor hard life and earned their keep for themselves and for a growing group of poor children that boarded with them. Already then Don Bosco was thinking that, if ever he had to do something for female youth, he could make a start with the group of the Daughters of the Immaculate of Mornese.

Father Pestarino also desired to do something for the education of the boys of the place - why not open a Salesian school in Mornese? You build it, said Don Bosco and I will send the staff. The work was undertaken, in 1867 the Chapel was opened to the public and Don Bosco came to bless it. This was another opportunity to meet the group of the Immaculate and Don Bosco came away very satisfied. Back in Turin he traced for them a set of norms; he left it to Father Pestarino to explain the theory and the practice.

Then came the facts which we set out at the beginning of this chapter: the approval of his chapter-members and the go-ahead of the Holy Father. All he needed to make a first concrete step was a convenient place to start, a 'Motherhouse' where the novices could be formed.

An unexpected circumstance came to his help. The school of Mornese had been built and was ready, only the Church authorities had to give the permission to open it. But the Bishop had died, and the diocesan Curia feared that with a new school their minor seminary would empty out; permission was refused. Don Bosco saw an opportunity: let the Sisters occupy the place!

The Sisters...? First of all the people had built the school for their boys, they would not like the change. And the Sisters themselves? They had really never imagined themselves to be full-fledged religious Sisters. But when Father Pestarino sounded everybody privately, the outcome was surprisingly positive: twenty-seven agreed. They got the first draft of the Rule from Don Bosco; Father Pestarino explained it to them, but not a word was said about the proposed place.

When Father Pestarino visited Don Bosco in Varazze, the next step was decided – there had been sufficient time for reflection. On 29th January 1872 Father Pestarino gathered the twenty-seven, read out from the Rule the articles concerning the Superior Council, and invited them to elect a Superior, an Economer, two assistants and a Mistress of novices. Mary Mazzarello was elected superior with twenty-one votes – but... she to be Superior? There was no way to convince her, her companions realised that only obedience to Don Bosco could make her accept. “You can be first assistant, they said, we will call you Vicar and let Don Bosco decide”. Petronilla Mazzarello, Mary’s companion from the beginning, was elected 2nd assistant, Joan Ferettini became Economer, and Mary’s sister Felicina was chosen Mistress of novices: the first Superior Council of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Now it was time to tackle the delicate point of shifting to the new school, the new ‘Mother House’. Again Providence came to the rescue. The parish house was in such a dilapidated condition that simple repairs were not enough, it had to be completely rebuilt. Where then could the parish priest live? The municipalities accepted the proposal that he could occupy the house of the Sisters nearby, and that the Sisters and their girls could occupy the empty school building.

The Sisters tried to move on the quiet... but the people soon came to know and reaction was as expected. Father Pestarino had the odious duty of explaining that it were the diocesan authorities that did not want a boys’ school. Gradually the excitement calmed down, mainly because the people were convinced that the new Sisters would soon be discouraged and return home; that with the death of Father Pestarino the matter would be over.

The religious community of the school could be divided into three categories: some were ready to make vows, another group was ready to start the noviciate, and a third group could be called aspirants. They were for a month in their new place when on 5 August the local Bishop, in the presence of Don Bosco, blessed the habit of fifteen, thirteen of them pronounced triennial vows, and the novices received their medals.

They were simple country-girls, but Don Bosco took care of their formation. He sent them some lady-teachers to give elementary instruction to all and to prepare the cleverest for a teacher diploma. He obtained from the Sisters of St. Ann (of the Marchioness Barolo) two experienced Sisters to teach them religious life in theory and in practice: how to make the meditation, how to behave in the refectory, how to conduct meetings, how to run the office, how to deal with the families of the girls, the practice of silence, and things like that. They were in Mornese from February to September 1873 and then left, full of admiration

for Mary Mazzarello. “She does not need any other instruction” they said.

On 5 August 1873, nine more aspirants received the habit and three novices made temporal vows. Among those who received the habit was Emilia Mosca. She belonged to an important family; Don Bosco had sent her to Mornese to teach French but she was so much taken up by the fervour of the place that she gave up everything and remained; later she would be one of the pillars of the Institute.

The year 1874 brought other developments. The Constitutions of the Salesian Society had been approved and with great satisfaction Don Bosco could tell Father Pestarino that from now on the Institute of the Sisters was an ‘integral part of the Congregation’. – More, besides the local Director, Father Pestarino, Don Bosco appointed Father John Cagliero, the future Cardinal, as General Director of the Sisters, and, though there was yet only one house, Mary Mazzarello was voted Superior General.

But no roses without thorns. Father Pestarino died in May, and Father Joseph Cagliero, a cousin of John Cagliero, who had been sent to take his place, died in September. Don Bosco then sent Father Costamagna, who was destined to become an exceptionally energetic missionary Bishop. Costamagna was a musician, he filled the house with songs and music, and the Sisters served the Lord in holy joy.

The following year, 1875, Mary Mazzarello and twelve other Sisters made perpetual vows. By that time Don Bosco, with the help of Don Rua, of Cagliero and of Costamagna completed the Rules, and the Bishop of the diocese approved them on 23 January 1876. God’s blessing was visibly present. Vocations abounded and the first foundations started: Borgo San Martino, Vallecrosia, Biella, Alassio, Lu, Lanzo, Sestri Levante. Don Bosco could be pleased; he wrote: “The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are doing well wherever they go.”

Chapter 16

The Congregation settles in France

The Oratory, in the mind of Don Bosco, had no reason to exist if it would not provide priests for the Church. Even from among the artisan-section he would always pick out the better and brighter boys and give them a chance to study. But the times were contrary: the state was anticlerical, the school was laicising, the press ridiculed the Church and her ministers, seminarians had to perform military service; and the better families, who had once provided the bulk of the priesthood, did not come forward any more, Don Bosco was convinced that the time had come to find priests among ‘those who managed the hoe and the hammer’.

In our archives we have a first-hand account of what Don Bosco narrated to his Capitulars:

One Saturday evening, as I was in the sacristy hearing confessions, I was distracted by the thought of the scarcity of priests and vocations and considered the possible means of increasing their number. I saw the many boys around me who had come to confession, good innocent boys, but I said to myself, “Who knows how many of them will make it and how long it will be before those who persevere will succeed; meanwhile the Church is in pressing need”.

As I continued to hear confessions and was still absorbed by this thought, I seemed to be in my room sitting at my desk, and holding the register containing the names of all the residents of the house. I wondered, “How is this possible? Here I am hearing confessions in the sacristy, yet at the same time I am also in my room at my desk. Am I dreaming? No. This is really the boy’s register; this is the desk where I always work”. At that moment I heard a voice behind me saying, “Do you want to increase the number of good priests quickly? Study that register and you will know what to do.”

I looked and then said, “This is the list of the boys registered

here this year and in previous years; there is nothing else in it". I was very puzzled; I read the names, wondered, and searched through the list to see if I could find anything; but all in vain.

Then I said to myself, "Am I dreaming or am I awake? Yet I am really here at my desk, and the voice I heard was a real voice". Suddenly I decided to stand up and see who she was who had spoken to me. and I actually stood up. The boys who were waiting to go to confession thought I must be sick and I stood up looking startled; they tried to help me but I assured them it was nothing and continued hearing confessions.

When confessions were over I went to my room, and there on my desk I found the register with the names of everyone enrolled in the house, but I found nothing else. I examined the register but found no clue to help me obtain priests, and obtain them quickly. I studied other registers that were in the room to see if I could find anything in them, but these did not help me either. I asked Father Ghivarello for other registers, but it was useless. As I continued to think and to thumb through the old registers in obedience to the order given by that mysterious voice, I noticed that of the many boys in our schools who study for the priesthood hardly 15 out of every 100 --- that is, not even 2 out of 10 -- ever receive the cassock because they leave the seminary for family reasons, or to take the examinations for college, or they change their minds as so frequently happens during the last year of High School. On the other hand, among the adults, nearly all -- that is 8 out of 10 -- receive the cassock; they succeed in less time and with less effort.

So I said, "They are more reliable, and they can do it in less time. This is what I am looking for. I must give more attention to them; even open schools just for them to help them in a special way."

The results will show if what happened was a dream or reality."

Biogr. Mem., Vol.XI. pp.22-23.

Those adult vocations needed the support of a separate 'Work for Late Vocations'. They could not sit in the class room with the smaller boys, they needed a more appropriate programme of studies. Most of them, coming from poorer families, had to be financially supported.

In February 1875 he explained his project to Pius IX. The Pope was enthusiastic: "Get some Bishops to recommend your work, he said, and then I too will give you a solemn recommendation". So Don Bosco set to work, he formulated a programme for the 'Work of Mary Help of Christians for Vocations to the Priesthood' and sent it to a number of Bishops. The result was: a dozen fine recommendations, and a Papal brief, blessing the work "with very great pleasure and from all our heart."

The Archbishop of Turin was not much taken up with Don Bosco's 'novelty'. Consequently Don Bosco was prudently advised to make a start in Sampierdarena in the diocese of Genova. There special classes were conducted beginning

with the scholastic year 1875-1876. This did not prevent him from continuing, as before, special classes for adult vocations in Valdocco – especially as an exceptional person was available to take care of them: Fr Guanella, who had joined the Salesian Congregation. God had other plans for him, for three years he enjoyed the guidance of Don Bosco but later he returned to his diocese; he is now a canonised Saint, Saint Louis Guanella. In 1876 Don Bosco went to Rome and offered the Pope letters of homage from all the sections of the Oratory; there was also a letter from the ‘Sons of Mary’, his late vocations, signed by L. Guanella:

There are over a hundred Sons of Mary, and at least forty of them will receive the cassock on November. Their conduct is exemplary and their love for study admirable. Even the less talented are undaunted. Many of them can now reasonably look forward to completing five years of Latin in only twelve months; the rest may need two years. They are enthusiastic about our beloved Don Bosco. . . Holy Father bless them all so that in the future their numbers may multiply as we now hope, and that they may turn out to be worthy labourers in the vineyard of the Lord.

Biogr. Mem., Vol XI, p 49

To reward and encourage the good people who helped him in this enterprise, Don Bosco obtained some indulgences for them. As he went on with his work, the opposition never stopped, but the results were there to show how relevant the work was. After the first year, thirty-five completed the accelerated High School course; eight of them entered religious life, six went to the missions and twenty-one entered the seminaries of their own dioceses.

In Sampierdarena, requests for admissions arrived all the time of the year, so much so that the Rector, not to disturb the classes, was inclined to suspend admissions till the next year, but as he knew the importance Don Bosco attached to his project, he asked his opinion. Don Bosco said: “Accept all who come at any time. Those who enter late can do some work in the house and can follow some preparatory classes.” At that occasion also Don Rua spoke out: “If we have been able so quickly to enlarge the house with a matching growth in the number of students, it is all because the work of the Sons of Mary has attracted God’s blessing!”

One of the reasons why Don Bosco was so much interested in the work for Late Vocations, was his hope to attract a good number of mature Vocations for the missions – a hope that did not disappoint him!

Chapter 17

Cooperators and the Salesian Bulletin

I.

If, as a young priest, Don Bosco was able to run three oratories in Turin, it was because he had gathered around his person a large number of helpers, priests and laypeople, who were attached to his person and willing to obey his guidelines. Now that he had a Society, he did not want to deprive himself of this precious help. In the first edition of his Constitutions there was a chapter on 'Extern Salesians' - people who lived at home but belonged to the Society [See the text on p 24]. Rome, in 1869, considered it inconvenient, even dangerous, to mix external people with a religious community, and Don Bosco was told to remove the whole chapter. The Congregation of Bishops and Regulars did not even tolerate it as an appendix to the rules. The only possibility therefore was to gather them in a separate association.

An independent association, yet under the management of the Society: Don Bosco thought about it for three years. In 1874, during the retreat in Lanzo, he presented to his Chapter-members a plan for a 'Union of St Francis of Sales'. The plan was indeed a little generic, and the Capitulars did not understand his mind, they thought that he wanted to start one more of the many existing confraternities, and they were not enthusiastic. To make them understand what he had in mind he wrote a set of Regulations for an 'Association of Good Works'. This association would be a kind of third order like the third order of the Franciscans, with the difference that the members would sanctify themselves by action rather than by prayers. But they found it complicated, and he had to admit that they were right.

Finally he found the correct approach and he came out with his rules for 'Salesian Cooperators', 'a practical way to improve good morals and civil society!' He submitted the Rules to the Pope. The Pope answered with a brief dated 30th July 1875 wherein it was stated that the members of the association were to be considered equal to the Tertiaries of ancient orders. Not yet completely

satisfied, he also obtained from Rome a formal approval of his Regulations and a number of Indulgences. This Papal Document, dated 9th May 1876, was for the first time not addressed to himself but to the Association itself, an unambiguous sign of recognition.

With Papal approval in hand, he began to propagate the Association. He wrote a booklet and before printing it he sent the first copy to Archbishop's house, with a blank last page for the Archbishop's approval. This gave rise to an unpleasant controversy of which we can read in the Biography of the Saint; he it only remarked that this controversy never came in the way of the spread of the Association. another controversy flared up when a certain Bishop contested what was written in the brief of Pius IX, 1876, i.e. that the Association was canonically erected in some dioceses, and there was great commotion about the publication of some Indulgences in the Salesian Bulletin. Things calmed down for two reasons: first, the Archbishop of Genova considered it his duty to speak out. He publicly declared that the Association had been approved by him already 3 years ago, and that it had its headquarters in Sampierdarena, in his diocese. Secondly the new Pope, Leo XIII, openly praised, blessed and encouraged the Association of Cooperators and wanted his name published at the head of the list.

In Don Bosco's programme there was originally no mention of women - not that he deliberately left them out, his idea was to subordinate them to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Pius IX was of a different opinion: "Women, he said, are always first to start good works in the Church or in the missions. By nature they are more enterprising than men when it comes to good works. Excluding them, you deprive yourself of the greatest help of all!"

In a conference in Borgo San Martino, 1880, Don Bosco said the following: "Once upon a time it would have been enough to come together to pray. In our days, with the danger of perversion of youth of both sexes so much greater, we have to unite in action and in work". To his priests-past pupils he said (1886): "The work of the Salesian Cooperators will spread to all the countries, in the whole of Christendom.. There will be a time that to say Cooperator will mean the same as to say Christian. It will be the Cooperators that promote the Christian spirit. The more the Holy See will be harassed, the more the Cooperators will exalt it; the more wrong-doing will spread, the higher the Cooperators will raise the torch of faith". - Pius IX himself, a year before his death told someone: "The Salesian Cooperators are destined to do much good in the Church and in civil Society. Their work will be so much appreciated that I seem to see not only families, but entire cities and countries to become Salesian Cooperators." **II.**

Don Bosco always wished to have his Cooperators firmly bonded to the Salesian Congregation. The deliberations of the first General Chapter of the Congregation carry eight articles which leave no doubt about the nature of the Association. We mention a few points:

* The Cooperators are good Christians who, while living in their own families, keep alive the spirit of the Congregation of St Francis

of Sales, and help it with moral and material means for the special purpose of the Christian education of youth.

* To be a Salesian Cooperator it is required a) to be at least 16 years old, b) not to be burdened by debts, c) to observe the Rules of the Association.

* The Salesian Bulletin is the bond of union among the Cooperators. If a member becomes unworthy of belonging to the Cooperators, we just stop sending the Salesian Bulletin to him.

* Since our Association does not bind anybody in conscience, it follows that also Religious of different orders can be members, the more so Franciscan and Dominican Tertiaries.

* Our Rectors, and in general all the Salesian confreres, should strive to increase the numbers of Cooperators. They should always speak well about the Association, they can point out that the Holy Father is the first of all the Cooperators, that its scope has nothing to do with politics... But let them propose membership only to people who are known to us and who merit our trust because of their piety and probity.

From January 1879, Don Bosco began to write year by year a circular that appeared in the Bulletin. His letter looked back at the year that had passed and acquainted the Cooperators with all that was going on in the Congregation; it was a powerful means to evoke sympathy for the Salesian work. Around that time the Bulletin began another much-read column: the necrology of deceased members with some information about the best known of them. The last page of the Bulletin always carried the list of spiritual favours granted to the Salesians and their Cooperators.

To expand the numbers of his Cooperators, Don Bosco began to do something else. He did not wait for people to apply for membership; as soon as he had the names and addresses of good people, if at least he hoped not to meet with resistance, he sent them straightaway a Diploma and the Regulations. The Diploma carried the following text: "The Undersigned respectfully offers the Diploma of Salesian Cooperator to N. and requests him to accept the same. If other persons known to him would like to profit from the same spiritual favours, he can make them known to us and without delay we will send them the Diploma."

With the simplicity of a Saint, Don Bosco had asked Pope Leo XIII permission to put the Pope's name at the head of his list of Cooperators. With the same simplicity he wrote to Cardinals and Bishops and eminent people in the world of science and politics. The two yearly Conferences mentioned in the Rules were well advertised in the Press, and since they were open to all, they powerfully contributed to the expansion of the Association. From the beginning, the Conferences in Rome acquired a special importance because of the aristocratic environment and the participation of highly placed personalities.

A greater numeric expansion required a matching organisation. The Rule stipulated that the Superior of the Salesian Society was to be the Superior of

the Cooperators, and that persons called 'decurions' would be in charge of a group of ten, unless there was a Salesian house and the Rector could take their place. The decurions, or the Rectors, had to gather the names and the offerings and send them on to Turin. But as numbers mushroomed, and all the dioceses did not have a Salesian Rector to take charge, the Bishop of the place was asked to appoint a member of the clergy. He was to keep a list of the members and appoint decurions, he had to organise the Conferences and all the rest. All this was done with all possible circumspection; the Bishop or the local clergy should not feel humbled to be at the service of an Association that had a religious Superior based in another diocese. The same prudence was used not to hurt the civil authorities. Don Bosco was strict: politics had no place in his Conferences; they only propagated works of charity, the education of youth in danger, the teaching of catechism, Festive Oratories, and the Missions.

Unavoidably, people at times raised questions: Why should we recommend the works of Don Bosco when we have our own works to support? The question was answered by the Bishop of Padova in a Conference of 1884: "Don Bosco is not only helping Turin; he thinks about youth and about Society in general, and I consider the existence of the Cooperators a blessing for my diocese!" It must be said that the majority of the Bishops were of the same opinion.

When Don Bosco died, there were thousands of Cooperators. In a farewell letter addressed to them he expressed his great gratitude. Then he continued: "You, who have helped me with such generosity and perseverance, I now ask you, after my death, to help my successors. The works which I have started with your help do not need me any more, but they need you, and they need others like you who are willing to spread goodness in the world. I recommend you our works, and I entrust them to you!"

III.

Don Bosco started the Salesian Bulletin for the double reason of keeping the Cooperators united to the Salesians, and of fostering unity of thought and action among the Cooperators themselves. It was, in a way, a 'humble' Bulletin: it had no literary or other pretensions, but this only contributed to its popularity. In the course of time it became known to many other people who had nothing to do with the Salesian movement, the number of sympathisers grew year by year and nobody can calculate the immense influence for good it exerted from its very beginning.

Starting from 1875, the press of the Oratory published a monthly leaflet, the 'Bibliofilo Cattolico' - the 'Catholic Book Lover', advertising Salesian and other publications for youth and for the Clergy. Regretfully, not one copy can be traced back of its two-years' existence. In August 1877 it changed nature and became 'Bibliofilo Cattolico o Bolletino Salesiano', booklet no 5, year 3 - and it was published from the Salesian bookshop Sampierdarena, in the diocese of Genova, because the procedure of the ecclesiastical revision of Don Bosco's publication in Turin was so cumbersome and slow that the regularity of a periodical was never assured. From the year 1878 only one title was kept: 'The Salesian Bulletin', yearly subscription 3 lire... but nobody insisted on payment

and also that line disappeared after some time.

Don Bosco presented the Bulletin to the Cooperators with a first article. "The Rules of our Association, he said, speak of a monthly organ; this then is the fulfilment of this promise!". The Bulletin would consist of three parts: 1) Proposals made by the members and their directors for the good of the Association, with practical instructions according to necessity - 2) Edifying episodes, letters of missionaries, reports of important events, to serve as a stimulus and example - 3) Various communications, new books, etc.. "Here, he wrote, we are not establishing a confraternity or a religious, literary or scientific association, not even a kind of journal. We are a simple union of people who desire to do good to mankind - not with promises but with facts, with our concern, ready to accept trouble and sacrifices to help our neighbour. Totally keeping aloof from politics, we will have nothing to do with what may offend persons in authority, be it in the Church or in civil life. Our programme will be this: Leave to us the care of the poor and abandoned boys and we will do for them all that we possibly can..." In the General Chapter of 1877 he expressed how much good the Bulletin could do in the families: In one issue we can invite all to teach catechism to children, we can show how beneficial this is and how to do it in practise. Another time we can recommend our own schools; in another issue we can show them the beauty and the practical way of making the monthly exercise of a Happy Death; next; we can invite them to spiritual exercises or speak of the necessity of spreading good literature. What an impact our invitation will have if we make our proposals in a nice and friendly way!"

In the early issues, Don Bosco himself was the writer and the editor, but as soon as Fr Bonetti could be relieved of his duty as Rector of Borgo San Martino, the job was passed on to him. Fr Bonetti was the proper person, he was a good writer; in fact he was so good that Father Margotti of the 'Unità Cattolica' once tried to get him on the staff of his publication. Besides, he was a good Salesian; his veneration for Don Bosco was a guarantee of fidelity to the spirit of the founder.

But Fr Bonetti had a sharp pen, and on one occasion his animosity got the upperhand. Don Bosco's reaction was prompt: "Stop fighting battles, write words that are peaceful - as I told you many times!" And in a conversation between the two (Father Barberis taking down the words): "You believe that you have achieved who knows what when you have let out steam. Your argument is: in certain matters we must be clear and defend ourselves against vexations. But what do you gain by it? Good people do not need strong language, they are more easily convinced by a peaceful explanation of the truth. Those who do not understand the background do not come to know it better through your vehement language. The others will be happy with your invectives; they are on the look-out for an ambiguous phrase, or for an exaggerated statement, to blame us for it. We live in bad times. The authorities need no more than a pretext to plunder religious institutions. Up to now they have left us in

peace, but believe it, not because they love us but because we go out of our way not to hurt them, walking as they say between drop and drop not to get wet. We did not raise our voice about so and so who was out to molest us; we always used supreme caution and prudence in speaking and writing. I always kept the reins in hand, I always kept an eye on the net in which they wanted to snare us; but I never allowed printing a single line that even from far could compromise us. The Bulletin has a very wide scope, we have to publicise all our works we have undertaken, but let us not meddle in thorny questions. In this way our ideas will spread in a peaceful way, much good will be done, and everything works excellently well. But try to fight your battles - immediately someone will enter into polemics with you and write an article to disapprove your point; a journalist, hurt by your violent expressions will write awful stuff against us. Someone in authority will find a reason to be offended by some unconsidered expressions and refer matters to the ministry. All eyes will be upon us, the alarm will be raised, we will be persecuted and we will not be able to prevent it or help ourselves in any way."

On one occasion however Don Bosco ordered Bonetti to open all his stops. There was, in 1883, an infamous periodical that called itself 'The Saviour'. The name of the Saviour was stuck on the stones of the pavements to make people walk over it; its scandalous articles were pasted all over the walls. Catholic papers raised their voice, indignation was general but nothing could stop the ignominy. Then Bonetti came out with a pamphlet - a glorious profession of faith and reparation for the injured honour of Almighty God. It was titled: Jesus Christ, our God and our King. It was distributed free of cost throughout Turin; one hundred thousand copies were given out in one Sunday at the church doors, and requests for copies came from all over from Italy: This time the head of the serpent was crushed!"

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In 1879 the Bulletin appeared in a French edition, and in 1886 in Spanish. Soon the question was discussed about the content of these editions. Don Bosco fixed some principles in a meeting of the Superior Chapter in 1885: "1) The Bulletin is not a particular organ of any nation, it is the organ of the Salesian Society. 2) All the matter in those various languages must be the same. 3) All the editions are to be printed in the Mother House. Is this inconvenient? No doubt, but the Bulletin must not escape the personal supervision of the Rector Major."

Don Bosco was not to be moved. "I insist on having just one single Bulletin. There is the undeniable fact that the Salesian Bulletin is a very powerful tool in our hands, and the certainty that it could easily deviate from the course I fixed for it. I stick to my opinion!" The same principle was re-affirmed in the General

Chapter of 1886, and some practical guidelines were given: 1) The appointment of a Director-Editor in Chief, to co-ordinate the work. 2) The two last pages of the Bulletin to carry regional matters and therefore may vary from edition to edition. 3) Every Provincial will appoint a confrere correspondent to gather the main local news and send it on to the Director of the Bulletin.

It is easy to imagine how much expenses were involved in a Bulletin that had no fixed subscription rate. But already in the first General Chapter it was noted that the income exceeded the expenses. Regarding the troubles caused by a centralised administration, Don Bosco had this to say: "I could avoid all that work, but then the Association would not serve its purpose. It would be easy to multiply the centres and allow each centre to inscribe or erase its members, as Franciscan tertiaries do. But my efforts have always been to see that they remain united with the head, and that the head is enabled without hindrance to communicate his ideas to them. For the moment we cannot form ourselves an idea of the extension our work will take and what moral influence it will exercise. We will be in the thousands - and I am convinced that five thousand is not far away, then we will see what surprising results we can obtain". - These words were spoken in 1877. Nine years later 40,000 copies were printed - the postal expenses were alone accounted to 25,000 Lire - but in 10 years the income raised through the Bulletin was 9,00,000 Lire.

There were always people who had remarks to make: the Bulletin was blowing our trumpet to make money, etc.. Don Bosco let them say and went ahead, Once he remarked that many would come forward to imitate his example. One who learned from him was Bartholomew Longo (now a Saint) who came to find out the reasons for Don Bosco's success. "My secret is this, said Don Bosco, I send the Salesian Bulletin to those who want and those who don't want". Bartholomew Longo returned to Pompei, improved his printing press and his bi-monthly magazine 'The Rosary and the Madonna of Pompei', 4,000 copies in 1884, grew to 72,000 in ten years time.

Let us not forget one more benefit that resulted from the Bulletin: it aroused many vocations, especially missionary vocations. - Don Bosco: "If the governments do not place impediments in our way, the Bulletin will become a real power, not by itself, but on account of the number of persons that it unites and inspires."

Chapter 18

Don Bosco sends his Sons and Daughters to America

Don Bosco always felt called to the missions. When it was clear that personally he never would go, he began to prepare missionaries from among his sons. In 1872 he had a significant dream:

I seemed to be in a wild region I had never seen before, an immense untilled plain, unbroken by hills or mountains, except at the farthest end, where I could see the outline of jagged mountains. Throngs of naked, dark-skinned, fierce-looking long-haired men of exceptional height and build swarmed all over this plain. Their only garments were hides strung across their shoulders. Their weapons were long spears and slings.

These throngs, scattered about, presented varied sights to the spectator: some men were hunting, others were carrying bloodied chunks of meat at spearpoint, still others were fighting among themselves or with European soldiers. I shuddered at the sight of corpses lying all over the ground. Just then many people came into sight at the edge of the plain. Their clothing and demeanour told me they were missionaries of various orders who had come to preach the Christian faith to these barbarians. I stared intently at them but could recognise no one. They strode directly towards those savages, but the latter immediately overwhelmed them with fiendish fury and hatred. killing them, ripping them apart, hacking them into pieces, and brandishing chunks of their flesh on the barbs of their long spears. Now and then, fighting broke out again among the savages or against neighbouring tribes.

After witnessing this horrible bloodshed, I said to myself: How can one convert so brutal a people? Then I saw a small band of other missionaries, led by a number of young boys, advance cheerfully towards those savages.

I feared for them, thinking, they are walking to their death. I went to meet them; they were clerics and priests. When I looked closely at them, I recognised them as our own Salesians. I personally knew only those in front, but I could see that the others too were Salesians.

How can this be? I exclaimed. I did not want them to advance any further because I feared that soon their fate would be that of the former missionaries. I was about to force them back when I saw that the barbarians were pleased with their arrival. Lowering their spears they warmly welcomed them. In utter amazement I said to myself: Let's see how things will turn out! I saw that our missionaries mingled with them and taught them, and they docilely listened and learned quickly. They readily accepted the missionaries' admonitions and put them into practice.

As I stood watching, I noticed that the missionaries were reciting the rosary as they advanced, and that the savages, closing in from all sides, made way for them and joined in the prayers.

After a while, our Salesians moved into the centre of the throng and knelt. Encircling them, the barbarians also knelt, laying their weapons at the missionaries' feet. Then a missionary intoned: Praise Mary, Ye faithful tongues, and, as with one voice, the song swelled in such unison and power that I awoke, partly frightened".

Biogr. Mem. Vol. X, pp. 46-47

Where was the territory of this dream? Was it Ethiopia, Hongkong, Australia or India? He enquired, he studied, but nothing about the territory or the people of those places seemed to match the dream. Then came the request to send missionaries to the Argentine Republic of South America. Again he studied, he bought geographical publications about South America, and yes, the people of his dream were the Indios of Patagonia.

The invitation came through the good services of Comm. B. Gazzolo, the Consul of Argentina in Savona. He was at home in the Salesian houses of Varazze, Alassio and Sampierdarena and he was convinced that works of that nature were just what was required in Argentina. When he spoke about it to Archbishop Aneyros of Buenos Aires, Don Bosco's fame had already anticipated him and the Archbishop wrote a formal invitation to Don Bosco. First of all, Gazzolo was interested to get the Salesians to run a parish, that of the 'Mother of Mercy', for Italian immigrants in Buenos Aires. Secondly, the Archbishop knew that the people of a place not far away, in San Nicolas de los Arroyos, wanted a boys' school. The Parish Priest of that place, Father Ceccarelli, was enthusiastic about calling the sons of Don Bosco and Mr. Joseph Francesco Benitez, the Patriarch-Chairman of the local committee, could not wish better. On 22nd December 1874, in a meeting of his Council, Don Bosco formulated this reply to the Archbishop:

I am willing to send priests to Buenos Aires to establish some sort of headquarters. To this end it would be very helpful to have a church

for sacred services, and more especially for teaching Catechism to the most neglected children. The well-deserving Consul Gazzolo has suggested the church of Our Lady of mercy. If no public church is available, we could manage with some hall in which to gather and care for destitute boys.

Later I will send enough priests, clerics and lay Salesians to San Nicolas to take care of the religious services, choir, and, if necessary, teaching.

From these two locations Salesians could be sent wherever the Ordinary thinks they are needed.

Biogr. Mem., Vol.X, pp.556-557

Don Bosco liked dramatics. Without saying anything about his discussion, he prepared a sensational stroke. On 29th January, the feast of Saint Francis of Sales, he called all the boys and confreres to the study hall. A stage had been prepared, imagine the curiosity of the audience. When the time came, he invited to the podium Consul Gazzolo, in gala-uniform, the members of the Superior Council and all the Rectors, who were in Turin for the annual Conference. At the sign of Don Bosco the Consul stood up and read out the letters of invitation from Argentina. Then Don Bosco replied: "As far as it depends on me, I accept the proposals, but I have one reservation: I need the consent of the Holy Father. Therefore I am now ready to go to Rome to obtain the full agreement of His Holiness". – Surprise and enthusiasm and clapping of hands! To understand the reaction we must recreate the atmosphere of those days. At our time Valdocco is an international centre; in those days Valdocco was strictly a local family. That day was for the Oratory and for the Salesian Society the first page of a new volume of history.

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Don Bosco went to Rome, and from Rome he wrote to America for some further information: Will the Salesians enjoy full liberty of action? Can Salesian clerics be ordained without raising difficulties? The Oratory, boys and confreres, followed his steps with eager expectancy. On 12th May, Don Bosco spoke to the community in a goodnight talk:

Many people have asked me whether or not our plans for going to (South) America have been cancelled. I can now tell them that the final reply arrived today. Those who want to go must get ready. The letter I have just received informs me that, when the Alcade of San Nicolas – an office that corresponds to that of Mayor in Our Country – received my letter of acceptance, he knelt down, raised his eyes to heaven, and thanked the Lord as for one of the biggest favours ever bestowed on the town; then he went personally to inform

all the other local authorities. He answered my letter immediately, saying that he was completely satisfied with the stated terms and that as of that moment he was placing at our disposal a school and sufficient pasture land for as many as eight thousand sheep, with an orchard, playgrounds, etc.. As you see, in that country there will be work enough for all sorts of people. Priests will be needed to preach and conduct services in the public churches, teachers for schools, singers and musicians for the many fond of music; shepherds to take the sheep to pasture, shear them, milk them and make cheese, and then, people for various domestic chores. More important still, my dear sons, not far from San Nicolas is a territory inhabited by savage tribes. Now these natives are friendly and have expressed their willingness to embrace the faith, if someone will volunteer to instruct them. At present, no one had come forward, and so they live in idolatry. Now let us take courage and endeavour in every way to prepare ourselves to go to those lands and do some good there.

Soon we shall select the personnel, and then those chosen will start learning Spanish, the language spoken in Argentina. No one should be dismayed by the distance of those lands. Today even the longest distances are shrunk, thanks to steam power and telegraphy.

Biogr. Mem., Vol. XI, pp. 133-134.

Don Bosco aimed at the evangelisation of the Indios, but in this he followed his own indirect way. He planned to construct boardings and schools in civilised places nearby; this would attract their children, and next it would not be difficult to find ways and means to approach their parents. His heart also went out to the many Italian fortune-seekers. They had no schools for their children, no church where their language was understood, they risked to become a population without faith and without law.

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The immediate result of Don Bosco's words on the Missions was a sudden spurt in vocations and a visible missionary zeal in all the members of the Society. Meanwhile he did his best to prepare the way for his missionaries, they should not arrive strangers among strangers, but should be welcomed as friends. His main correspondent in this matter was Father Ceccarelli; to him he presented his missionaries one by one, with all particulars and even in minute detail. He knocked at all gates to get the necessary funds. The Municipality of San Nicolas paid five passages. He made a detailed list of all that the missionaries would need: clothing, household furnishings, requirements for worship; parcels of all dimensions and contents started arriving at the Oratory.

To everybody's surprise, to Father Cagliero himself first of all, Cagliero was chosen to lead the expedition. He certainly had all the required qualities, but

he was engaged in so many activities that it looked impossible to do without him. He had degrees in Theology from the Turin University, he was teacher of the clerics at the Oratory, he was Spiritual Director in many Institutes in the city, he was an accomplished musical composer, he had a hand in everything that was going on in the Oratory. How could this man absent himself, even for a short time? At any rate, according to Don Bosco's plan, Cagliero was not always to stay in America. Once things had settled, he could return to Turin.

Nine others were selected:

* Father Joseph Fagnano, teacher in Lanzo and Varazze. Don Bosco had but to hint at the possibility of leaving for the missions and Fagnano dropped all his activities.

* Father V. Cassinis. He was in charge of the artisans in the Oratory and they felt his absence very much.

* Three more priests: Fathers Dominic Tomatis, J.B. Baccino and James Allavena.

* Four Coadjutors: Bro. B. Scavini, master carpenter; Bro. B. Gioia, master shoemaker and cook; Bro. B. Molinari, teacher of instrumental and vocal music; Bro. Stephen Belmonte, another musician and factotum.

During the holidays Don Bosco gathered his group in Varazze; they learned Spanish under the direction of Consul Gazzolo. On 29 October, Gazzolo with them, they were received by the Holy Father in Rome.

Don Bosco had wished to give great importance to the departure ceremony of his first missionaries, but he had to do without the Archbishop and be satisfied with the Parish Priest. The missionaries made the Exercise for a Happy Death, and on 11 November the crowd filled the church of Mary Help of Christians. After Evening Prayer, during the singing of the Magnificat, the missionaries entered two by two, the priests dressed in Spanish fashion, the brothers in black with top-hat. All the Rectors and priests of the Oratory were present. Don Bosco preached a moving sermon; to the outsiders he explained what 'mission' meant and the characteristics of this missionary expedition. To the missionaries he recommended the immediate care of the Italian emigrants, meanwhile preparing to approach the Indians of Patagonia. At the end he could not withhold his tears and the commotion was general. After the 'Prayers for Travellers' all the priests present embraced the missionaries and through the main door they left the church with all the people after them. Don Bosco came last of all and on the steps of the church he stopped to see the spectacle: the square filled with a crowd that mobbed the missionaries. Then the missionaries boarded their carriages, Don Bosco with them, and they went to the station to take the train to Genoa, the harbour.

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On 14 December the ship reached Buenos Aires, and there were moving welcome scenes; it was clear that they were expected. Fathers Cagliero and

Baccino and Brother Belmonte remained in Buenos Aires to take charge of the church of the 'Mother of Mercy'; the others proceeded to San Nicolas.

The church of 'The Mother of Mercy' was called the church of the Italians, but there was nobody to care of this parish of thirty thousand souls. Father Cagliero immediately became famous for his eloquent sermons, in Spanish and in Italian, and Father Baccino, a late vocation worked wonders of zeal. The church functions attracted crowds of people. On 15 January the Vicar General of the archdiocese wrote to Don Bosco: "Your sons are doing a lot of good. They preach and catechise that it is a consolation to behold."

San Nicolas had a number of immigrants from the Italian Province of Liguria. The schools which the Salesians were supposed to run was no more than a house, not finished and not furnished. Father Fagnano immediately set to work, and with the help of the population the building was enlarged: boarding, half-boarding, a public church, a Festive Oratory, and outstations to reach far-away places. Father Ceccarelli, the parish priest of the place, wrote to Don Bosco: "Fagnano is indefatigable, Tomatis is courageous, Cassinis is constant, Allavena is robust, Molinari is tireless, and Scavini is engaged in scientific, manual and religious labours. The school works to perfection. The Salesian Fathers are doing very well, they are esteemed in town and their names resound in all of South America!"

Don Bosco made full use of the correspondence he received from America. Many letters of his missionaries were published in 'L'Unità Cattolica'. Others, of a more homely nature, were read out to boys and confreres: they did much to awake the missionary vocation. Don Bosco: "At this moment, if I give them freedom, all Salesians would opt for Buenos Aires."

As the work became known, applications for new foundations multiplied. Cagliero had three main projects in mind: 1) a professional school in Buenos Aires, like that of Valdocco, 2) a Salesian work in a suburb called La Boca, and 3) a school in Montevideo, Uruguay.

The Italians that lived in the suburb of La Boca were dominated by the Freemasonry. The Freemasonry had inspired a virulent hatred for priests, and would not allow to open a church. To the great astonishment of the Archbishop, Cagliero dared to enter the place, and through the children he gained the affection of the parents. The Salesians were welcome!

The more work there was, the more pressing became the need for personnel. Don Bosco prepared a second expedition: six priests, seven clerics and ten brothers. They left Turin on 7th November 1876 and Don Bosco accompanied them to Rome for the blessing of the Holy Father. Those destined for Argentina embarked in Genoa; the others, under the leadership of Father Lasagna, had to go and take ship in Bordeaux, France. Don Bosco wrote: "This expedition plunged us to the neck in debts, but God helps us, and we will manage!"

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The whole Republic of Uruguay had not even one school where children

could receive a Christian education. A certain rich man, encouraged by the Apostolic Delegate (the only Bishop in the whole Republic) offered a church building at Villa Colòn, not far from the Capital, and a big building nearby, on condition that the Salesians would make the church function and start a school in the building.

On the day of their arrival the missionaries were gloriously received, the next day they started cleaning the church and the building. Tropical vegetation had entered every corner, but after just one month they had already one hundred boarders. Then the newspapers started to attack them, but they were no match for Father Lasagna who answered them with the proper words at the proper time, and the good results of the boys did the rest.

With new helpers at hand, Father Cagliero realised his plan for a Professional School. Father Bodrato received a double appointment: Rector of the school, and parish priest of the new parish of La Boca. But Father Baccino, who had started so well in the church of the Italians, died in June 1877: "In a short time he made himself loved in the whole of Buenos Aires."

In 1877 the Society was to hold its first General Chapter, and Don Bosco could not imagine such an event without the presence of Father Cagliero. During his absence, Father Bodrato filled his place as Superior in America. Meanwhile Don Bosco prepared a third expedition; the difficulty was not in finding willing confreres, but in selecting from among the willing. Altogether they were eighteen: four priests, eight clerics, six Coadjutors. Some people found fault with Don Bosco because his candidate-missionaries were too young, but the future showed that Don Bosco could be trusted to make a good choice. All of them became big names in the Society, to begin with Father Costamagna, the leader of the expedition, who later became a Bishop. The financial burden was heavy, the Bulletin renewed its appeals, Don Bosco wrote letters and went begging.

For the first time six Daughters of Mary Help of Christians took part in a missionary expedition. All the missionaries were presented to the Pope by Father Cagliero and by Mother Mazzarello who accompanied the Sisters. Then they embarked, some in Lisbon, Portugal, or in Le Havre, France, and all the Sisters in Genoa, guided by Father Costamagna who just a few days earlier had been their Director in Mornese.

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In 1877 the Catholic world celebrated the Silver Jubilee of Pope Pius IX. From far and wide pilgrims flocked to Rome, among them Archbishop Aneyros of Buenos Aires, Father Ceccarelli and a few Argentinean priests. Don Bosco considered them his guests and went to Genoa to meet them, then took them to Rome, from there to Loreto and finally to Valdocco where everybody was on pins and needles to receive the Argentinean party. On 29th June, Valdocco celebrated 'The Feast of the Three Namedays': that of Don Bosco (postponed), that of Archbishop Aneyros (St. Leo, 28 June), and of Father Peter Ceccarelli (anticipated).

According to the programme, the festivities were to be concluded with a drama of Father Lemoyne: 'Hope – the Past and Future of Patagonia'. Unfortunately, because of one of the unfortunate misunderstandings with Archbishop Gastaldi, Archbishop Aneyros felt slighted and anticipated his departure. Father Ceccarelli took his place and presided over the performance, and since he had to stay in Italy for some longer time, he returned to Argentina from Lisbon together with the group of missionaries of the third expedition.

Father Costamagna and the first expedition of six Sisters had gone straight to Montevideo, Uruguay, where they opened their first house in America. Soon they were joined by another contingent of Sisters, two of them remained in Uruguay, the others went to Buenos Aires.

We mentioned that Father Cagliari had started a Professional School in Buenos Aires. The place proved to be cramped and Father Bodrato courageously decided to shift the school to Almagro, another suburb of the big city, where he also started building a church in honour of Saint Charles. In August 1878 the workshops were transferred to the new place and the new 'Escuela de Artes y Oficios Pio IX' was inaugurated with a solemn function in the presence of the Archbishop, a Minister and several dignitaries. Under the Rectorate of Father Costamagna (and later, Father Vespignani), Almagro turned into another Valdocco.

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In those first years, 'Patagonia' was a word that inflamed everybody's imagination, but to reach there was not easy. Fathers Costamagna, Fagnano, Lasagna and others made long trips on horseback, at times risking far away from the centre, but they never met a single Indio. Nevertheless, Patagonia was part of the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires. Prodded by Don Bosco, the Archbishop decided that his Vicar General, Msgr. Espinosa, and two Salesians, should make an excursion to the borders of Patagonia and try to make a first contact. Father Bodrato appointed Fathers Costamagna and Rabagliati for the purpose.

The plan of the missionaries was to embark at the Paranà-river; the ship would take them to Bahia Blanca; from there they would try to reach the little town of Patagones at the Rio Negro. Everything was simple on paper, but they had kept the 'Pampero'-winds out of their accounts. For three days and nights our travellers were pummelled by buffeting winds and billowing waves, their ramshackle ship totally ungovernable. Finally, during a lull in the weather, they managed to reach the coast, and just as the tempest seemed the work of the devil, so their salvation seemed the work of Mary. Father Costamagna informed Don Bosco of their miraculous escape. His reply: "It was a terrible experience indeed, but it is a sign that you will succeed."

Chapter 19

Foundations in Italy

I. 1875-77

Those were busy years for Don Bosco: the beginnings of his Sisters and of his Cooperators, the early years of the Foreign Missions, and the constant flow of requests for new foundations in Italy and in France. With so many things at hand, he had to go slow. Nevertheless, new houses came up one after another, though all of them did not survive. In all those houses, opened and closed by Don Bosco, it was not his prudence that was at fault, but circumstances that nobody could foresee, and so it is good to mention some of them, if only to know the reason for their premature death.

Vallecrosia had been a sleepy place in the hills of Liguria, but as land was being reclaimed in the valley, the population gradually accumulated both sides of the ancient 'Via Aurelia'. Nobody was even thinking of a church or a school in the new place when suddenly there appeared the Waldensians. In no time they constructed a Temple and a school-complex. The zealous local Bishop raised the alarm, he appealed to Rome for help and contacted Don Bosco. Don Bosco saw the need and did not hesitate: he appointed Father Cibrario as Rector of the new place, gave him a zealous cleric and a mature brother with the addition of a community of three serious and active Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. They immediately started a Sunday Oratory and daily classes, making full use of the little space they had, and in a few weeks time the Protestant school practically emptied out. Then Don Bosco prepared plans for a new church, for residences for the Salesians and for the Sisters, and for a new school, including a Teachers' Training School for the Sisters.

La Spezia came up for the same reason, to counteract the growing influence of the Waldensians. At the request of the Bishop, Don Rua came to see the locality and make provisions for a quick start. Father Cagliero accompanied the first community to their provisional place on the 10th December. On the 19th, returning from Rome, Don Bosco visited them, and how much they needed his encouragement! They were uncertain on how to start, they had found out that the people were against them, the place itself was most inconvenient. Don Bosco reminded them about the beginnings of the Oratory, when conditions were even

worse, and he placed the house under the protection of Saint Paul. Then the newspapers began to spit their venom: 'The crows have arrived, let them find no food here!' - and a drama was staged: 'Paul Scarpi murdered by the Jesuits - the harm caused by religious instruction'.

Once the new church came ready and the school had been constructed, the Bishop raised his voice against the Protestants. Catholic parents were warned not to send their children to Protestant schools. The result was as in Vallecrosia: the Protestant school was quasi-abandoned. Not only: the church functions, very well prepared, attracted crowds of people, especially during the Month of May: the church was already too small! - Don Bosco was ready to buy more ground, and in this he was generously helped by Cav. G. Bruschi, Director of Postal Services. This man was so much attached to Don Bosco that in his later life he became a Salesian Priest. His great dream, that the venerable picture of Our Lady of Snows, the Patroness of La Spezia, should be transferred to the Salesian church, was realised under the Rectorate of Don Rua.

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Don Bosco always wanted to have a house in Rome. He had received several offers, but nothing had ever realised. Now he took an opportunity to send his Salesians, if not to Rome itself, at least to very near places, Ariccia and Albano.

A Roman nobleman, Prince Chigi, invited the Salesians to open a school and run a parish in Ariccia. Ariccia was in the suburban diocese of Albano, thus Cardinal Di Pietro came to know and he also requested Don Bosco to accept the direction of the school and of the Minor Seminary of Albano nearby. To convince Don Bosco they obtained the support of the Pope. In November 1876 the Salesians were in their new places. The young students were happy with the changes, and when Don Bosco came for a first visit in January 1877, all those of Albano wanted to go to confession to him; it kept him busy from early morning till noon.

However, we must keep in mind that the Piedmontese had entered Rome in 1870, and the presence of the Salesians, they were Piedmontese, almost looked like a new Piedmontese invasion. Don Bosco, who noticed the need of improving the living conditions of the Salesian community of Ariccia and who had some hope of developing the work at Albano, had to admit that nothing much could be achieved. The clergy of the place had no good word for the Salesians. When Cardinal Di Pietro was succeeded by Cardinal D'Hohenlohe, the Salesians immediately noticed that the new Cardinal's attitude was totally prejudiced. Father Cagliari who visited both communities on his return from Sicily, advised Don Bosco to close both places.. The Cardinal of Albano accepted the Salesians' resignation without batting an eyelid. The Municipality of Ariccia made some objections but had to give in. The people though were of another opinion: twenty years later the Salesians would return to Genzano, in their neighbourhood, and they still remembered the happy days of long ago.

The foundation of Magliano Sabina - also this not far away from Rome - had a little longer life. Cardinal Bilio had asked some Salesian teachers for his Seminary. They arrived in November 1876 and did their work to the satisfaction of all. When the number of Seminarians increased, the Salesians were asked to take up the direction of the studies and the material administration of the Seminary. Don Bosco was ready to do even more: the place badly needed a student-hostel. But it became evident that nobody really wanted the Salesians to flourish. Those of Bishop's House objected that a hostel-boarding would be detrimental to the Seminary; the Municipality was anticlerical and delayed the procedure. The Rector, Father Daghero, kept pressing his point and managed to get a boarding attached to the Seminary, but the clergy kept grumbling and when Cardinal Bilio died there was no point in staying on.

During these three years Don Bosco also opened three houses in Piedmont. The first was opened in Trinità, Mondovì, in a big house that belonged to a good benefactor, Mr. Dupraz. Father Guanella, at present a Saint,¹ was sent to be Rector. The time-table of the house was somewhat unusual: there were three day-classes for 120 boys, the poorest of the place, and three evening-classes for adults from 15 to 50 years. When Mr. Dupraz died, his widow quarrelled with Don Bosco and the place was folded up.

Halfway between Turin and Lanzo, in Mathi, a paper factory was on sale. Don Bosco, who had two major presses, one in Valdocco and one in Sampierdarena, thought of taking advantage of the favourable conditions and thus become independent regarding his paper supply. The Coadjutor Andrew Pelazzo was appointed Technical Director and he was soon joined by a regular community. For thirty years things went on well. Then, in a moment of panic, fearing an outcry against religious, the property was sold.

The Mother House of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Mornese could no longer cope with the development of the Congregation. After interminable negotiations, Don Bosco managed to acquire in Nizza Monferrato an old convent and a church: the cost of purchase was little, but the cost of repairs came very much higher. The church had once been dedicated to Our Lady of Grace, but by this time it was a dark cavern; of the convent, abandoned after the laws of 1855, only the walls were standing. It took more than a year to make the place somehow inhabitable. From 1878 on, in small batches at a time and Mother Mazzarello last of all, Mornese was gradually transferred to the new place. After Father Costamagna had left for America, Father Lemoyne was appointed to take his place as Director of the Sisters. Under his direction, Nizza Monferrato produced thousands of lady-teachers for the whole of Italy, and prepared an equal number of Sisters for the Missions.

¹Saint Louis Guanella was a priest of the diocese of Como who entered the Oratory in 1874. The presence of Don Bosco filled his heart with a great joy. He made vows for three years, but then realised that the Spirit had different plans for him. After a period of uncertainty he returned to Como where he founded the Congregation of the Servants of Charity. In 1891 he wrote to Don Rua: "Don Luigi Guanella herewith professes his immense attachment to Don Bosco. Certainly, separating from him was as painful as separating from my parents who, one after another, died in my arms."

Father Barberis took note of the words of Don Bosco: "We can say that all are against us, that we have to defend ourselves against all. The legal establishment is against us; certain religious orders, themselves decadent and noticing our progress, look at us with a jaundiced eye. The wind blows against us in various dioceses, in families and in societies. If it were not really God who wants us, it would be impossible to do what we are doing. What makes us even more admire the goodness of divine Providence is not only that we go ahead, but that we clearly have before us a bright horizon; we know where we go, our way is traced out!"

II. 1878-79

Don Bosco would not consider a proposal for a new foundation unless he was given a free hand to run the house in his own way. For this reason proposals for a house in Mandrino (Switzerland) and Milan fell through, though he was interested to settle in both places. He also never declined a proposal outright: he gave himself full time to consider the pros and cons and to weigh the plans of Providence.

During the two years, 1878-79, Don Bosco started five houses in Italy. The house in Chieri is special because it was not the result of an application but of testamentary dispositions. The pious childless couple Bertinetta left to Don Bosco all their possessions - several houses - on condition that he would start a work that would be useful to their co-citizens. After considering various possibilities, Don Bosco decided to open an Oratory for girls, run by his Sisters. Father Bonetti, their Director, would come on Saturday evening and return to the Oratory on Monday morning. From Don Bosco's biography we know how much opposition his Chieri foundations received from persons that should have supported them. Don Bosco reacted by enlarging his plan: he also opened a boarding for girls, a free school for poor girls, a Sunday school for bigger girls. The Sisters had to bear with persecution but their work continued and flourished.

In 1877 Don Barberis and Don Lazzerio, on their way to Rome, stopped over in Lucca to examine the proposal of the local Bishop to open a festive Oratory. A follow-up visit of Fr. Cagliari settled the issue. The Salesians, Father Marengo, a cleric and a lay brother took possession of the place but their presence alerted the anticlericals. They raised the alarm and with the cry 'Down with the Jesuits' the whole neighbourhood was in uproar, and for a whole month the police had to make daily rounds to prevent unrest. The Salesians kept calm; the announced Conference of St. Francis of Sales was cancelled not to pour oil on the fire.

Then the paper acknowledged that those priests were not Jesuits. When a few troublemakers decided to send a petition against the Salesians to the Home Ministry they could gather just five hundred signatures; a counter-petition in no time boasted of eight thousand signatures. Fr. Marengo wrote to Don Bosco: "In the beginning they told us that we would better give up: the boys here, they said, were different. Now they see them devoutly taking part in church functions, in catechism classes and in instructions, and they say: Truly, those

Salesians have a method of their own!"

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Another Salesian Institution that from the beginning till the present day has been flourishing was the 'Manfredini' of Este, in the region of Padova, Venice. The merit goes to Father Perin, a parish priest, who realised the great harm done by the laicist system of education of his days. He started corresponding with Don Bosco, then he visited the Saint in Turin. With the permission of the Bishop of Padova, Father Perin started negotiating about a big place, old, beautiful, ample, in marvellous surroundings. The place was to be adapted and repaired, but that could be done in stages. Don Bosco sent his Economist, Father Sala, to help him; on 16 September Father Perin signed a contract with the owner "on account of, in the name of and with the money of Don Bosco". The 'money of Don Bosco' was the money of Providence who sent a generous benefactor, Cav. B. Pelà, who for all other expenses remained available till the end of his life. The school was called 'Manfredini' in honour of Bishop Manfredini of Padova.

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Many places of Sicily had invited Don Bosco - the honour of hosting the first Salesian house went to Randazzo. Sicily had suffered much from the suppression of religious orders and the anticlerical spirit was still very much prevalent. But the need of education was so great that all prejudices were set aside - the Salesians were the first religious Congregation to re-enter Sicily after the ruinous suppression.

When Fr. Guidazio, the Rector, and his staff, arrived at their place, some fifty applications for the boarding were already waiting for them. Hardly a month later he could write to Don Rua about the efficacy of Don Bosco's method of education:

You would not believe how willingly these lads listen to and reverently accept the exhortations you sent them. Were I even to talk to them about you for an hour, they would not relax their attention. They are so docile and obedient that even we are astonished. On Sundays and holidays they do not fail to receive the sacraments. . . . The parents are delighted to see their children so cheerful and happy that they would rather be in school than at home. Many families wished their boys home for Christmas, but I told them that our regulations would not allow it. Because they insisted, I called the boys themselves and asked them in front of their parents if they wished to go home for Christmas. Every one of them chose to stay with us.

This satisfied the parents, who stopped pestering us and rather sent us donkey-loads of cookies for the boys and their superiors. We have found a very simple means to keep all these youngsters contented and happy - the Altar Boys' Society. Each day of the Christmas novena eight or ten served at the altar... You should see how all of them - the older ones especially - are wild about serving in cassock and surplice... We have already staged two plays exclusively for the boys.

Biogr. Mem. Vol. XIV, pp.268

Meanwhile Father Trione and one of the clerics took pity on the many streetboys and began for them a very successful Festive Oratory. The sectarian school- and city-authorities gave as much trouble as they could, but Father Guidazio was encouraged by what Don Bosco had told him: "Go without fear! You will do many great things in Randazzo". And the Saint had added that Randazzo would be the seed of many other houses.

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Another house that would be important in the Congregation was that of San Benigno Canavese. The Salesian presence restored religious life to a Benedictine Abbey that had been founded in the year 1001. The proposal to call the Salesians came from the local Parish Priest, and Don Bosco saw in it a good place for his Noviciate.

In the beginning the Salesian Noviciate was a family affair. The novices participated in the apostolate of the community; they assisted boys, taught classes, worked in the Oratory, under the direct supervision of Don Bosco and the Superiors of the house. But the Holy see insisted on more regularity, and in a second stage the novices received their own Superior, Father Barberis; they continued to assist the boys but were gradually more and more isolated. They had their own dormitory, their own playground, their own refectory - gradually they had become a unit on their own. Now the time had come to give them a house by themselves.

Anyhow, Don Bosco did not want to give the house the appearance of a religious Institution. He arranged to have some workshops that would also provide for the need of the house. This proved to be a wise step because, before allowing the Salesians to settle, the civil authorities demanded that the place would be used for works of public utility. Don Bosco replied:

Dear Sir,

I am honoured to reply to your letter of March 1 concerning the use I intend to make of the main building of San Benigno Abbey. As already stated in the deed of cession, I intend to use it for the public good, as I have done for all other houses under my direction. Specifically, I intend to use the abbey's main building:

1. as a day school for the area's children;
2. as an evening school for adults;
3. as a youth centre for the area's young men;
4. I would turn any remaining space into a home for needy youngsters who wish to learn a craft or trade, as done in the [Valdocco] Oratory in Turin, where homeless youngsters from various places of Italy are sheltered.
5. Finally, if possible, I would also set up a centre for our young personnel, to train themselves in practical ways of maintaining discipline in dormitories, workshops and classrooms.

These are the projects I have in mind, space permitting.

I believe this is an adequate explanation of my plans. Should you request further details, I shall gladly answer your questions.

Obligingly yours. . .

The first year, 1878-79, there were fifty-one novices. Two of them, both late vocations, would become famous: Michel Unia, apostle of the lepers in S. America, and Philip Rinaldi, the third successor of the Saint.

The confreres measured the growth of the Congregation from the attendance of the retreats. When Don Bosco started with retreats for Salesians alone, in Trofarello, there were often not even twenty participants for each turn. Then Trofarello became too small and the retreats, two turns in a year, were held in Lanzo. In 1878 this was not enough and another retreat was organised in Sampierdarena, the next year also in Alassio - even though the two retreats in Lanzo attracted more than two hundred participants each.

III. Towards Rome

Don Bosco, as all other religious Founders, longed to have a house in Rome to be near the Pope. As time went on this became more than a pious wish, it became a necessity because of the volume of business to be transacted with the authority of the Church and of the State.

Pius IX, who knew of Don Bosco's desire, made him a first proposal in 1867. The Pope himself had started a correctional facility just outside Rome, its direction was in the hands of some French religious who wanted to get out of it. Don Bosco went to see the place; the surroundings were not very healthy but he was inclined to accept. For several months he discussed the terms of an agreement, but the Roman 'Commission of Pious Works' was not disposed to give him a free hand, and for Don Bosco this was an indispensable condition.

In the centre of the city there was a church of the Holy Shroud, started by a Piedmontese Confraternity, and when the last member of the Confraternity died, the possession and administration of the Church passed into the hands of the Piedmontese legation in Rome. In 1868 the church, in need of repairs, was closed. Don Bosco found the church which had a building annexed, quite convenient for his purpose and proposed to the Government, then in Florence, to pass it on to him. The minister felt inclined to give it, but then, in 1870, the Piedmontese invaded Rome and Don Bosco dropped the matter. . . imagine

what sinister interpretations would be given if a Piedmontese Congregation would accept the gift of a church from the invading Piedmontese government!

In 1869 Pius IX came out with another proposal: Don Bosco was invited to open in Rome a studentate, so that his clerics could frequent the Roman Universities, plus an Oratory like that of Valdocco. On the Quirinal there was a church, two big buildings and an open field. The whole complex belonged to the Sisters of the Incarnation but they did not need such a big place. The price was agreed and benefactors jumped in to help; then the Sisters, influenced by some highly placed persons, doubled and even tripled the price. Don Bosco did his best to keep negotiations going but when the Piedmontese entered Rome, the Sisters lost everything.

Pius IX was as interested as Don Bosco himself to have the Salesians in Rome. In February 1870 he offered him a beautiful church, San Giovanni della Pigna, with the annexed house. Don Bosco was really hopeful to get it, he wrote to the Rector of Lanzo and ordered his confreres to fast and pray for that intention. The negotiations went on well, but the political events disturbed everything. Four years latter, in 1874, he took up the matter again but then they found many reasons not to give it. [However, in 1905, St. Pius X saw to it that the house and the Church was given to the Salesians: it became the Salesian Procure in Rome.]

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In 1876 Pius IX gave Don Bosco proof of his great trust in Him. A lay-religious Institution was in crisis: the Brothers Hospitallers of the Immaculate Conception, commonly called the Conceptionists. Founded in 1857 to honour the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the Pope had been very generous with the new Institute, but by this time it was at the brink of disbanding. They had 3 residences in Rome and the members, some fifty in number, were leading a rather free life. The Pope told Don Bosco: "I want you to look after the Conceptionists... Your task is not to reform or amend them, but rather to amalgamate their Constitutions with that of the Salesians."

Invited to Rome, Don Bosco went there with the missionaries of his second expedition and he took the opportunity to study the situation of the Conceptionists. In his mind there were two causes for most of the evils: they had no noviciate and there were some troublemakers among the members. He drew up a plan of action and the Pope approved of it, but the Monsignor who was in charge of the Brothers continued to twist matters to make it appear that all Don Bosco was to do was to take up the spiritual direction of the Brothers. So when Don Bosco came to Rome in January 1877, he took with him Father Scappini, an active and kind-hearted Salesian, to be their spiritual Director. In June he organised a retreat, preached by Fathers Lazzero and Barberis. But while there was little opposition in the beginning – the Brothers very much liked the Salesians compared to the Capuchins who had been their directors before

– opposition was fomented from the outside, and whatever the Salesians did was placed in a bad light. Added to this, Father Scappini contracted seasonal fevers and had to absent himself for some time. When he announced that he was coming back they made him understand that his presence would serve no purpose. Don Bosco was taken aback with the unexpected turn of events. Pius IX was in the last days of his life, they told the Pope what they wanted him to hear. Thus came to an end an episode in the life of our Founder of which you can read many more details in Volumes 12 and 13 of the *Biographical Memoirs*.

Here we mention just one more proposal that came to Don Bosco in 1875. Prince Gabrielli offered him nothing less than the Hospice of St. Michael, in Ripa. This vast charitable Institution, founded by the Pope and confiscated by the new Government, was going from bad to worse. With the lay-administration, morality had suffered; two thirds of the income disappeared in the pockets of some employees. Don Bosco accepted in principle but made three conditions: absolute freedom of action in matters of internal discipline; all strangers being dismissed and their families cleared out of the place; and a free hand over two thirds of the revenue. The board discussed. . . and when after a month the members of the board were still discussing, it was fairly obvious that the Prince's good will would not prevail, it was all too clear that the freedom demanded by Don Bosco would never be given. Anyhow, it was for the Salesians a point of pride to know that in Rome the Government itself had recourse to the Salesian Society to solve matters of great importance.

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Finally in 1880, Don Bosco managed to acquire a place in Rome. It came about like this: Don Bosco was very much at home with Mother Galeffi, the President of the Monastery of the Noble Oblates of Tor De Specchi. This good lady sold the publications and religious articles that arrived in big trunks from the Bookshop of the Oratory. In 1874, when she wanted to settle accounts with Don Bosco, she discovered that a good amount of money was missing. Nevertheless she continued to trust the man she had put in charge of her shop, hoping to recover the money little by little.

She died in January 1876. The new Superior realised that the good Sister had been thoroughly cheated, she could not pay the money that was certainly due to the Salesian Bookshop. To save the good name of her predecessor she desired to come to a compromise with Don Bosco. Don Bosco understood here predicament and proposed that the monastery put a few rooms at his disposal. By this arrangement he could dispose for a period of thirty years, of the second floor of a house belonging to the monastery. They were low and narrow rooms, but from then on Don Bosco and his secretary had their own place to stay in Rome. The place acquired importance a little later when Don Bosco appointed a Procurator General in Rome to treat about the affairs of the Congregation. Officially, from 1877 to 1879, Don Rua was Procurator; then Father Dalmazzo

took over and he fixed his office in those five poor rooms, the first home of the Salesians in Rome.

Chapter 20

The Congregation settles in France

Don Bosco did not go to France, it was France that came to Don Bosco. Nice, at the Mediterranean Sea, had a number of institutions, but no home for abandoned boys. Their growing number worried the members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, but they did not know how to tackle the problem, except by inviting the help of Don Bosco. The Bishop in person came to talk with the Saint, then the St. Vincent de Paul Society followed up by sending two prominent members to Turin, Baron Héraud and advocate Michel. Don Bosco saw the need and promised help, but the two delegates warned him: "We have not a man or a coin to give you!" Don Bosco answered: "In the works of God we have only to make sure if they are necessary or not. If they are not necessary, we drop them; if they are necessary we take them up without fear, the material means are the 'over and above' that the Lord mentioned, and He keeps his promises."

Don Bosco, accompanied by Father Joseph Ronchail, went to Nice on 10 December 1874. After two days meetings and study of the situation, he decided to start with a Festive Oratory. The members of the local Committee would hire an old factory and provide the essential furniture.

The Salesians arrived on 9 November 1875. It was very important that nobody would recognise them as Italians. Nice had belonged to Italy, and there was a political party, the 'Separatists', who hoped for a return of Nice to Italy. For this reason Don Bosco had chosen Father Ronchail as Rector: his name sounded French and he spoke the language fluently; also the priest and cleric, assigned to help him, knew French well. In honour of the local Bishop, Peter Sola, the new place was called the 'Oratory of Saint Peter', and the inauguration was a success.

However, it was difficult to adapt the old factory into a house of education. Don Bosco had his eyes on a better place, a villa that belonged to the widow Gauthier. She asked 1,00,000 francs for it and he had nothing, but trusting in Divine Providence he ordered Father Ronchail to buy it. Providence cooperated,

in February 1877 the place was paid, and there was a new inauguration, in the presence of the sixty-five first boarders.

On that occasion Don Bosco spoke so well that his well-wishers wanted his speech to be published, and Don Bosco had no objection. When the Press of the Oratory published his speech and a report of the festivities, Don Bosco included a little treatise on 'The Preventive System of Education', a few thoughts that he had jotted down in the train on his return-journey from Nice to Turin. Later on this Treatise was added to the Regulations of the Houses.¹

Fortunately, Nice always had a number of generous benefactors. One of them, Dr. D'Espinay, published in 1881 a biography of Don Bosco that became popular and made the Founder known in every corner of the country. About the same time two other writings made Don Bosco sympathetic in the eyes of the French: G. Bastard in his book 'Fifty days in Italy' dedicated a whole chapter on his visit to the Oratory in Turin. Father Mendre wrote about 'The Priest Don Bosco'; in it he mentioned the workshops of Marseilles and expressed the hope to see the like of them in every French town. Soon Nice had a school, workshops and an Oratory, and the Salesian Sisters who were running an Oratory for girls.

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After his return from Nice, Don Bosco said in a goodnight: "In Marseilles alone we have been offered nine houses; thirty in the whole of France." His preference was for Marseilles; many Italian families had emigrated there in search of work and their children were almost all illiterate. Moreover, Advocate Michel, who had helped him so well in Nice, had prepared the way by making Salesian work known in a well-attended Conference. One of his listeners, Canon Guiol, immediately contacted Don Bosco and sent him an invitation to start work in Marseilles. Don Bosco replied in three points: "I need -1) the full agreement of the local Bishop, -2) the moral support of his correspondent, and -3) a place to gather boys for a Festive Oratory and a boarding."

In 1877 he took Father Ronchail with him and went to see Marseilles. Canon Guiol was so impatient that he followed him to Turin. Valdocco appeared to him as a revelation, the solution of all social problems. What he desired for Marseilles an Oratory like that of Valdocco, and immediately! However, France had an anti-clerical government and the matter was to be approached in a legal way.

There was in Marseilles a Society that had work for youth in danger in its statutes, and through the influence of the Bishop Father Guiol managed to obtain their co-operation. This 'Beaujour Society', as it was called, had a building from where the Brothers of the Christian Schools had retired, the 'Maison Beaujour'. Father Guiol was anxious to start without delay, but Don Bosco was careful to guard himself against future surprises.

¹In spite of its occasional character and a very sketchy treatment of the subject, Don Bosco's little Treatise on the Preventive System became the Charter of the Salesian system of education. It was still reprinted in the renewed Rules and Regulations of the Society, in 1984.

Finally, on 1 July 1878, the Salesian community arrived. Rector was Father Bologna, his name changed into 'Bologne' to sound like French, with twelve confreres. The new Institution was placed under the protection of Saint Leo, the patron-saint of the newly elected Pope Leo XIII. Father Bologna had entered the Oratory as an orphan boy; outwardly he just seemed a good ordinary man, but he had the soul of a real Salesian: good, cheerful and prayerful. Don Bosco wrote to him: "Go in the name of the Lord! Save what you can, ask what you need and papá (Don Bosco himself) will provide. Go as a father for your confreres, as a representative of your Congregation, and as a dear friend of Don Bosco!"

The beginnings were very modest; there was place for just eight boarders and they had to sleep in a hay-loft. But Father Bologna made his plans and Don Bosco was behind everything. The 'Patronage St. Léon' of Marseilles soon became another Valdocco.

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Don Bosco did his best to give a French outlook to his houses in France. Though they depended on the Inspectorate of Liguria, in practice Father Ronchail acted as local Superior. For all legal matters he advised: tell them that we have nothing to do with politics, that we care for boys who would give trouble to the authorities, that many French boys are recovered in our houses in Italy and that therefore we are interested in opening houses in France itself. Two brothers made their profession and one of them was French; he saw to it that suitable people were invited and the news spread that Don Bosco had also French religious.

In 1879 Don Bosco went back to Marseilles with the intention of enlarging the existing structures. The atmosphere was chill; nobody seemed to welcome him. Then a woman brought her son to Don Bosco, a pitiful sight, frail, almost bent double, supported by crutches. Don Bosco told Our Lady: Come now, let us get started! He blessed the boy, the transformation was instantaneous and total - the boy ran off and his mother dashed after him with the crutches. The news spread like wildfire, gifts began pouring in and the work could start.

Father Guiol was not satisfied with workshops, school and Oratory, he also wanted the Salesians to help him in his parish and this caused not a little friction with the Salesian community. A visit of Don Bosco ironed out the difficulties and henceforth the parish enjoyed the services of a Salesian choir that became famous because of a talented Salesian cleric, L. Grosso, who in time was to become one of the most famous church musicians in France.

Before leaving, Don Bosco held a Conference for his Cooperators; in spite of his deficient French he kept the audience spellbound. Moreover a few more miracles were attributed to him, so that when he left the atmosphere was warm with sympathy. Don Bosco knew how to exploit this sympathy: his Cooperators - they were six hundred! - formed a ladies' and a gents' committee: the

ladies took charge of linen, clothing and worship; the men looked after the food provisions, the workshops and contentious matters. The Cooperators of Nice heard about it, they did not want to do less and organised themselves in the same way.

These were not the only proposals for houses in France, but they did not last long. We could mention Cannes and Challonges, these houses were almost opened and closed at the same time. Of greater importance was a proposal for Auteuil, near Paris. A certain Father Roussel had started a big orphanage and he needed help to run the place. Pius IX told him about Don Bosco, and when Father Roussel came to Turin he was taken up by what he saw. Fathers Rua and Cays conducted the negotiations, and Don Bosco met Father Roussel in Marseilles in 1879. But the diocesan Curia of Paris made its conditions, they demanded that the Salesians would run the place for one year experimentally before definitely settling - which meant: they were not really trusted or welcome. The Salesians kept good relations with Father Roussel, but the work in Paris-Auteuil was given up.

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Don Bosco never planned to have an agricultural colony, he thought that in such a place it would be difficult to safeguard the morality of the boys. Then, in August 1877 he had a dream. He dreamed that he was in an old farmhouse, and while he was examining the rooms he heard singing outside. He went to see what it was: on a threshing floor there was a boy who welcomed him in song, in French, and next to the boys there was a Lady. The boy in his song indicated his friends who seemed to come from just anywhere and asked him to take charge of them. Then the Lady told him to follow her to another ground and from all sides he saw more and more boys, with spades, sickles, hoes and other farm tools. Next he saw another farm house and a little away a nice construction. The Lady told him: Look at these fields, these buildings, these boys: they are my children and I entrust them to you. They were more than thousand, and Don Bosco expressed his doubt how he could ever manage to look after them. At a sign of the Lady one group came forward; she threw a veil over them and when she withdrew it he saw them all transformed into priests and clerics. These are yours, she said, it is up to you to mould them! Then the Lady made the boys sing a hymn, and that was the end of the dream.

Don Bosco was reflecting on the meaning of the dream when he received a letter from the Bishop of Fréjus and Toulon, who asked him to accept running an agricultural colony at La Navarre, in the Department of Var. When Father Lemoyne went there, 1877, he found everything as Don Bosco had described in his dream. Then Don Bosco himself went to see the place and when he reached the house a group of boys came to meet him, piloted by a boy that carried a bunch of flowers. The similarity with the boy of the dream was so striking that blood flushed his face. In the evening during an academy in his honour, the

same boy had a solo-part in the singing, there was no longer any doubt. The boy was Michael Blain; he became a Salesian and lived to a ripe old age in our house of Nice.

The Salesians acted quickly in accepting the Bishop's proposals. . . but then they let the Bishop exercise one year of patience before arriving for the school year 1878-79. Meanwhile the Bishop mad a second proposal. to take up another orphanage that he had started, in St. Cyr. Don Bosco accepted, but only after La Navarre was good and well running.

Fr. Perrot, the newly appointed Rector, considered himself too young for such a responsibility, but Don Bosco encouraged him with a letter:

My dear Father Perrot:

I too am aware that your are only a young man and really need to study and gain experience under a capable teacher. But so what? St. Timothy was a youth when he was called to proclaim Jesus Christ and he immediately preached the kingdom of God to Hebrews and Gentiles alike.

Go then in the name of the Lord. Go, not as Salesian superior, but as a friend, a brother, a father. Let charity be your word of command, for it seeks the good of all and wills harm to no one. Read, ponder, practice our rules. This is both for you and your confreres.

God bless you and be with all who will join you at La Navarre. Pray for me. Ever in Jesus Christ.

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

The Salesians did not go as landlords, they admitted as many poor boys as the house could contain, forty of them. A visit by the Bishop procured for them a lot of sympathy; they soon saved up enough to start the construction of a bigger building that could contain even three hundred boarders.

What happened to the other orphanage in St. Cyr? Mother Mazzarello and another Sister came to see the place but they were not pleased to see a disorderly mixture of boys and girls, so the Sisters decided to make a start in La Navarre and not in St. Cyr. Two years later, when the situation in St. Cyr had improved, they also went there.

The first years were times of hard work and great poverty. God blessed their sacrifices and they had some twenty-five good years till the anticlerical law of 1902. After this blow they recovered again: La Navarre hosted a section of the Sons of Mary (Late Vocations) and the Noviciate, and thus also the last part of the dream of Don Bosco became a reality.

In Alassio, 1879, Don Bosco had the following to say about the houses of La Navarre and St. Cyr: "Let us take comfort, for this is truly a vineyard which Divine Providence has opened up for us. Much good will be done for souls, thanks to these two works. We have good hope of priestly vocations, for among those boys there are many well-brought-up lads who are priestly material.

Several have told me they want to become Salesians; one wants to join the Sons of Mary, and there are a few who will stay with us as Coadjutors. France today has very few Congregations of men who serve the working population. Such as there are have become inactive or have gone in for schools that cater for children of the upper classes. There is no one that does the type of work that we do. This is why we find so much affection wherever we go and why I hope we shall never be interfered with.”

Chapter 21

Final Conference of St Francis de Sales; First General Chapter

Several times we had occasion to mention the yearly Conference of the Rectors, held around the feast of St. Francis de Sales. In 1877 was the last of these meetings; with the Rules approved and the provision of a General Chapter every third year, those Conferences lost their meaning.

During that year Don Bosco was in Rome throughout the month of January, hence the feast of St. Francis de Sales was postponed to 4 February to make it possible for him to participate. Don Rua presided over the inaugural meeting on Saturday evening. Note the following preoccupation of the Rectors:

Salesian work was spreading and it had become impossible for Don Bosco personally to follow up all confreres. The clerics formed by him were thoughtful, studious, fervent in their practices of piety, ready for any work, cheerful and jovial; in various ways they reflected the spirituality of the Founder. Will the clerics of future generations be the same?

Don Rua communicated a desire of Don Bosco: to start the school year with a Triduum, to dispose the boys to begin the year well and to give them an occasion to put order in their ideas after the long months of holidays.

The next morning session was opened by Don Bosco. "In the beginning, he said, he was reluctant to open his schools in old monasteries confiscated by the Government. People should not say: the new religious build up on the ruins of the old! When it was a question of redeeming buildings that had passed in the hands of lay people, he had always insisted that the proprietors themselves should get the proper permission from Rome. But lately the Pope told him: Not only do you have permission, but I even recommend you to buy those buildings that belonged to old religious orders and turn them into your schools. It is a way of giving back to the Church what was taken from it, to restore those houses to the glory of God for which they were first constructed. Henceforth we know

that there will be no objection from the part of Rome.”

Don Bosco spoke of various new foundations and proposals. Then he mentioned the house of Valsalice: this house had been rented from the Brothers of the Christian Schools for a period of five years. This period was expiring: should we renew? 'I had so much hope, he said, that the school would prosper and give vocations so that also among the higher classes of persons there would be some who would consecrate themselves to the Lord. There was some good fruit, but we don't see that the Lord blesses us in that house as he blesses us in others.' Then he began to speak about the danger of admitting noble or rich persons into the Congregation. 'It looks as if St. Francis of Assisi is protecting us, he said. Listen to this story: When St. Francis started his Religious Order the devils were furiously plotting on how to destroy it. Several devils suggested different schemes. Then a small clever devil jumped up: the best way, he said, to make a religious order decadent, is to admit nobles and rich people. Surely, they will use them all regards and treat them with charity, close an eye to their weaknesses, make exceptions to the Rule, and then the whole Order will be relaxed. All devils clapped hands, the proposal was accepted with full votes. That is why I say that St. Francis has protected us. There were a few noble people who tried it with us but up to now no one decided to stay - let us thank the Lord!' - Returning to the subject of Valsalice, Don Bosco said that in his opinion the time had not yet come for a final decision; let us continue to reflect and pray, he said.

Before closing the session, Don Bosco repeated what he had said on other occasions. "Let every Rector take to heart to write out the history of his Institution". Then:

"The Holy Father told me that our Institutions will always flourish if we promote among ourselves and among our boys: 1) piety, 2) morality, and 3) economy. Keep this in mind, he said, and during these days let us look for practical ways to follow up the advice of the Pope."

In the afternoon there was a general meeting open to all the professed, to the novices and even to the aspirants of the Oratory. The meeting was in the church of Saint Francis de Sales, there were one hundred and eleven participants. It was the custom for each Rector to read out an account of his own house, but with so many new houses this procedure would become boring and too long. So the report was divided into two parts: Don Rua gave an account of the houses of Piedmont, Liguria and France, Don Bosco spoke about America and the houses of central Italy which he had just visited. From Don Bosco's talk we quote what Pius IX had told him:

When the Holy Father, bedridden, gave me an audience in his room, he told me what he thought about several matters. "Write to your sons," he said. "Start telling them and keep repeating it always: there is no doubt that it is God's hand which is guiding your Congregation. But a weighty responsibility rests on you, and you must prove yourself worthy of such favour. I tell you in God's name that if you measure up to his divine aid by your good example, if

you foster genuine piety and unblemished morals - particularly spotless chastity - and if this spirit lives on among you, you will have co-workers, Cooperators and zealous priests. Vocations for yourself, for other religious orders and for the dioceses will multiply a hundredfold. Good priests, who will accomplish much good, will never be wanting. I believe that it is a secret I am disclosing to you. I am convinced that God has raised your Congregation in these times to reveal his power. I am certain that God has deliberately kept this important secret hidden until the present, a secret unknown to ages past and to many a bygone Congregation. Your Congregation is the first of a new kind of religious order, born in this age, whose style makes it possible for it to be both religious and secular. It has the vow of poverty and keeps personal ownership at one and the same time; it belongs to the world and to the monastery, and its members are both religious and lay, cloistered yet free citizens. The Lord revealed it on our day, and I disclose it now to you. Your Congregation has been raised up in the midst of the world which, as the Gospel says, is seated in wickedness in order that the world may give glory to God. It has been raised up so that all may see that there is a way of giving to God that which is God's and to Caesar that which is Caesar's. As Jesus Christ said in His own day: 'Give to Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God that which is God's'. I predict - and you can tell your sons - that your Congregation will flourish, will spread miraculously, will last through the ages, and will always find co-workers and Cooperators, as long as it shall strive to promote genuine filial piety and especially unblemished chastity. I could tell you more, but I am tired. . . "

Biogr. Mem., Vol. XIII, p. 62

This general assembly did not, as in former years, end the annual conference; four more sessions were held.

Don Rua chaired the meeting of February 7. Its main objective was to finalise dates and preachers for the boys' spiritual retreats. . . Don Bosco presided at the day's second session. He discussed a proposal that the spiritual director of the Hospital of Our Lady of Consolation be entrusted to the Salesians. Then he narrated his dream of Pius IX's death [which, then and there, was difficult to understand. Pius IX died exactly one year later, on 8 February 1878 - read the dream in the *Biogr. Mem.* Vol. XIII, pp. 25,26,27.]

On February 6 most of the morning and evening sessions were devoted to studying and reviewing school regulations which were being readied for the press. . . The final item of the last session was in keeping with the wish expressed by Don Bosco: to find ways and means of maintaining high standards of morality in Salesian houses among both pupils and Salesians. They reached general agreement on eight points, to which Don Bosco added a ninth: great temperance in the use of meat and wine. He added a few more considerations on morality: '... Work too is a powerful safeguard. Somebody once told me, Don't make

your priests work so hard! Well, a priest will die either of overwork or of bad living'. He closed with a theme dear to him: to be deeply concerned with vocations. He offered three suggestions: speak often of vocation, talk at length about the foreign missions, and give publicity to our missionaries' letters.

Before leaving, every Rector had a private word of advice or encouragement from Don Bosco. All went away, full of confidence in the future of the Congregation. To know that Don Bosco had no secrets for his sons attached them ever more to the Founder and to the Congregation.

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The approved Constitutions stipulated that a General Chapter be celebrated every three years. The first one was held in 1879, and the three-yearly Chapters continued regularly till 1904 when a six-year term was fixed. In the beginning there was some confusion about the composition of the Chapter. The Latin text of the Constitutions said nothing; the Italian translation said: Members of the Chapter are the members of the Superior Chapter and the Rectors of the houses; but when it came to the election of the Rector Major it was said that also a perpetually professed delegate of every house was entitled to vote. Anyhow, in the Chapter of 1877 there were only the Rectors, and they agreed, for the future, to add the Provincials (called Inspectors). Provinces were a novelty in the Congregation: until that year the houses directly depended on the centre. In 1877 we read about the 'Roman Province' and the 'American Province'. In 1878 the name 'Province' is changed into 'Inspectorate', and now we have two more: a Piedmontese and a Ligurian Inspectorate. Only the next year we find the names of the 'Inspectors': Father Francesia for Piedmont, Fr. Cerutti for Liguria, Father Monateri for Rome and Father Bodrato 'Vice-Inspector' for South America.

The first General Chapter counted twenty-three Capitulars: the seven members of the Superior Council, fourteen Directors, and Fathers Belmonte and Berto. Four more 'Consultors' were invited to various sessions. Two Jesuits were invited to contribute their competent opinion: Father Franco, for the spiritual life; and Father Rostagno, canonist.

We must say something about one of the Consultors, a very exceptional person, Count Cays. Count Charles Cays de Giletta and Casellette, Doctor in both Civil and Canon Law, had been the President of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in Turin, he had been a Deputy to the Subalpine Parliament, he was an intimate friend of the royal family - in fact, during the time of the cholera the royal family found refuge in his castle of Casellette. For years he had been co-operating with Don Bosco in charitable activities, but when he applied for admission to the Salesian Society, Don Bosco asked him to take time to reflect. On 23 May 1877 he finished a retreat and was waiting to see Don Bosco while a mother entered Don Bosco's room to ask his blessing for her very sick child. Count Cays said to himself: If that child comes out healthy, then I know for

sure that Our Lady wants me to be a Salesian. And that is what happened: the child came out healthy and Count Cays applied for admission. With a special permission of Pius IX he made perpetual vows on 8 December of the same year - the first nobleman to enter the Congregation, and to realise what an exception it was, listen to the following words of Don Bosco as quoted by Father Barberis:

All other Congregations - Don Bosco remarked - were bolstered at their start by highly educated and talented individuals who joined and assisted their founder, thus becoming co-founders. Not so with us. Our first Salesians were all pupils of mine. This has put a weighty, relentless burden on me for some thirty years, but it is a blessing because, all being formed by me, they were imbued with my principles and methods. In other Congregations, the founder's assistants eventually and unavoidably brought in some differences which ultimately proved fatal to their Congregation. Being adults and set in their ways, they could not normally be expected to shed the old Adam completely. Thus far no aristocrats or men of vast wealth or scholars have entered our Congregation, so that everything we have learned and accomplished has been of our own doing. One who has not given serious thought to the nature of a Congregation or religious order cannot appreciate the importance of this viewpoint, but let one investigate the causes of the growth or decline of religious orders or the source of the splits which plagued so many of them, and he will find that it happened because there was no homogeneity from the very start.

Biogr. Mem. Vol. XIII, pp. 159-160

Don Bosco had prepared the Chapter well in advance. In July he sent to all the houses a scheme of subjects to be discussed; all the confreres were invited to study it and give their observations. It was Don Bosco's initial idea that also the Prefects of the houses should take part in the Chapter as consultants, but that proved impossible; both Rectors and their Vicars the Prefects could not be absent from the houses at the same time.

The Chapter opened in Lanzo on 5 September with a prayer to the Holy Spirit and opening words by Don Bosco. There were 26 general sessions, all of them presided over by Don Bosco, Don Rua was elected Regulator, Fathers Barberis and Berto were the secretaries. Five commissions were formed in the beginning, three were added later.

The following words of Don Bosco set the tone for the proceedings:

This is our Congregation's first general chapter. Apart from the Regulations we have just read, we do not yet have particular norms and customs to guide us. We shall proceed as best as we can as to details, but slowly and calmly, so that this chapter may become the prototype of future ones.

True, we have very little time for this chapter, but many items on the agenda have already stood the test of many years, and, besides,

we do not want to proceed scientifically by pre-determined rules. Rather, we intend to keep attuned to earthly realities which touch us directly. If we happen to overlook some matters, let's not worry, for we will have time enough to return to them on some other occasion. Let us concern ourselves exclusively with practical matters, without referring to other books in our work: let us concentrate on our outline, cutting out some articles, rephrasing or adding others when advisable. Let us study our rules, our school regulations, the circulars sent to our houses in former years, and the deliberations taken at the general conferences of directors at Lanzo and in Turin.

The value of this chapter lies in turning the theory of our rules into practice. Therefore we are to make every effort to reach our goal of having the rules uniformly practised in each of our houses.

I remind you again that the most critical feature of our sessions - I might say the most necessary - is unconditional secrecy with outsiders and even with our confreres who are not chapter members, until deliberations have been sent to Rome for approval. Be cautious too when speaking together within earshot of others. Nearly every Congregation mandates this secrecy and sanctions it by oath so that violators incur guilt. We have no such rule, but the fact that nearly all Congregations have it should impress us with the vital importance of secrecy.

During these days let us all exercise patience as we study our various topics, even though things may not always run smoothly. After all, this is our first general chapter and we have no time-tested norms to go by. Let us hope that, since we have placed it under the special protection of Mary, Help of Christians, it may, God willing, prove very beneficial to our Congregation.

Biogr. Mem. Vol. XIII, pp.187-188

The *Biographical Memoirs*, Vol. XIII, devote a whole chapter of 42 pages (pp.177 to 219) to the proceedings, session by session. Here we mention only a few points for their historical importance:

It was decided to do away with the customary terminology (very unpopular in those days) and not to speak of Provinces or Provincials but instead of Inspectorates and Inspectors. The age of the Inspectors was deliberately kept in suspense, most of the Fathers of the Congregation were not even thirty-five! Don Bosco defined a Salesian Inspector as: a father who helps his sons to do their duties, therefore advises them. helps them, and shows them the way out of certain critical circumstances.

Somebody marvelled at the absolute power of the Rector Major. Evidently, nobody objected to the authority of Don Bosco, but must we not also think of the future? Don Bosco replied: "It is exactly for this reason that I insist that the general direction of the Congregation be in the hands of the Rector Major. As for me, you already let me do what I think best and since I have the whole matter in hand, there is really no other way that things could be

done, but I must think of those who come after me!" In fact, where it was said in the deliberations to defer certain matters to the Superior Chapter, the text was changed: let them be deferred to the Rector Major; however, in important matters the Rector Major was to consult his councillors.

There was some doubt about the term 'Salesian'; is it right to call our Congregation's members and activities by that name? Here is Don Bosco answer:

Let's use this word very sparingly. Not long ago it was unknown and its meaning was hardly known. It came into use two years ago at our first missionary expedition and it caught on. Newspapers and books in Europe and South America were popularising it by their frequent accounts of Salesian missionaries, and so the name took root. Besides, it was necessary for the Congregation to have a fixed name. St. Francis de Sales is a name dear to the Church and to civil society. It is the name of a Saint outstanding for his meekness, a virtue much appreciated even by evil men; moreover, he is our chosen patron saint. The word "Salesian" has a good ring about it too, and so we felt it was wise to adopt it.

(...) Still, we have now taken a very bold step by adding "Salesian" to the bulletin which we send to our cooperators. It has been a daring step, admittedly, but a calculated one. We had to make our true identity known. Until now, thank God, whatever was published about us was truthful, except for a few false accusations by some people hostile to us, but these allegations did not in the least affect the overall welfare of our Congregation. It is extremely important that we not be misjudged. Hopefully, the [Salesian] Bulletin, which is published specifically to make our objective known, will greatly help in this respect by presenting in their true light our Congregation's main achievements.

Our objective is to let it be known that one may with a clear conscience give to Caesar what is Caesar's, without in the least derogating from giving to God what belongs to God. We are told that this is a problem in our day and age. I agree, but I would add that Our Lord himself has already solved the problem. True, in practice we run into serious difficulties. Well, then, let us overcome them not only by leaving the principle intact, but also by clarifying it with correlated reasons and proofs. I am greatly interested in finding a practical way by which we can give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

"But the government backs up the biggest scoundrels," some people object, "and at times false doctrines and principles are upheld". Well, then, we shall reply that the Lord orders us to obey and respect our superiors, "even bad ones," as long as they do not order us to do anything clearly evil. Even if they might order us to do what is wrong, we should still respect them. We shall not do what is wrong, but we shall continue to respect Caesar's authority because

it bears the sword.

(...) Despite everything, we shall endeavour to act within the law. If fines are imposed on us, we shall pay them; if community ownership is outlawed, we shall retain property individually; if examinations are mandatory, we shall take them; if certificates or diplomas are needed, we shall do our utmost to obtain them. We shall keep going forward.

"But this is burdensome, expensive and a bother," you might object. No one knows that better than I. In fact, I do not mention most of the troubles to you lest you be frightened.

I struggle throughout the day to find ways of smoothening matters or remedying the situation. We have to be patient and forbearing. Rather than fill the air with lamentations, let us work with all our might to keep things going well. (...).

Biogr. Mem. Vol. XIII, pp.213,214,215.

In the 16th conference Don Bosco suggested that before closing the Chapter, the members would delegate to the Rector Major the authority to finalise the articles of the deliberations and to introduce the necessary modifications. In the 25th conference it was clear to all that this provision was a hard necessity. After a whole month the work was not at all finished and the Rectors were keen to go back to their houses. This is what Don Bosco had to say:

What we have accomplished so far is more a preliminary than a definitive draft. Hours of study and work are still needed to refine and codify articles and clear our repetitions and possible contradictions. Furthermore, we must separate what is structural and therefore to be submitted for approval as pertinent to the constitutions from what is merely disciplinary and from matters which we should know but which should not be made public in any way. Today, then, we should work out this decree as the final act of this Chapter, and this evening at our last meeting we can read and sign it.

Biogr. Mem. Vol. XIII, pp.216.

The work of giving a definite shape to the deliberations proved more difficult than had been foreseen. After one year the work was not ready; to meet the legitimate expectations of the confreres, Don Bosco printed a booklet of a hundred pages: on the Common Life, on Morality, on Economy, and on the Inspectorates. After waiting so long Don Bosco decided not to send the deliberations to Rome but rather continue practising them by way of experimentation. In this way the time came for the second General Chapter. This Chapter revised the work that had been done and added something more. The booklet that came out in 1882 contained the combined deliberations of both Chapters.

Chapter 22

The first triennial report to the Holy See

During the time of his stay in Rome, March 1879, Don Bosco compiled his first three-yearly Report on the State of the Society. We here just mention the main parts of the Report, more can be found in Chapter 8 of the Biogr. Memoirs, Vol. XIV:

1. An Introduction in which Don Bosco declares his willingness to compile a complete Report, in accordance with the desires of the Holy See;
2. A historical survey from 1841 to 1879, and a description of the moral state of the Congregation, in six main points;
3. Detailed statistics about Salesian work in Italy, in France and in South America.

The Report was duly sent to the S. Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Its Prefect, Cardinal Ferrieri, was not a friend of Don Bosco and his Salesians. His critical eye discovered seven problem-points that needed an explanation. In spite of his good will, Don Bosco, always very busy, could send his reply only a few months later. His reply could not satisfy the Roman Congregation and on 3 October he received another list of nine observations. This time Don Bosco sent his new reply to Rome together with Father Dalmazzo who, as 'Procurator General' of the Society, was entitled to give orally all the needed explanations.

To satisfy our curiosity, without claiming to be exhaustive, we shall go through the main observations and Don Bosco's replies. It is always interesting to see how the Saint defends himself and humbly sticks to his own point of view:

Observation: The report makes no mention of the financial condition of the Society.

Reply: The Society has no legal status. The Congregation's houses are the property of the members who reside there. As a moral or as a legal body

the Congregation neither does nor can own anything. We have debts but one member [Father Cays] owns a building [his property at Caselette] that will cover everything. [The Roman Congregation was not satisfied with this explanation.]

Insistence: This Congregation thinks that all these affirmations of a non-legal status are to be understood in reference to civil laws hostile to pious Institutes. All pious Institutes ignore the civil laws of any government in drawing up their triennial report (...). Your Reverence is the only one who cites civil laws to exempt himself from this obligation.

Reply: Our pious Society is not a moral body before church or state and therefore cannot own property. Our Constitutions state that the members retain the radical ownership of their goods, and that they can freely dispose of their right either by testament or by an act 'inter vivos'. This article is of basic importance to us, and so, while seeking the approval of the Constitutions, I asked how we were to understand ch.7, art.3 ('In disposing of the Society's goods or acquiring new income, let those norms be kept which have been set by the sacred canons and the apostolic Constitution'.) Archbishop (later Cardinal) Vitelleschi, then secretary of the S. Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, replied: The response is contained in the article itself, namely: 'in disposing of the Society's goods' means, that as soon as time or place makes it possible for the Society to own in its own name, this article is to be observed. – This seems in keeping with ch.7, art.2, which says of the Rector Major: 'He has no right to buy or sell property without the consent of the Superior Chapter'.

(...) To consider buildings personally owned by our members as church property... would cause confusion to our administration since all our Salesians took their vows with the understanding of ch.4, art.1: 'The vow of poverty, of which we speak here, concerns only the administration, not the ownership, of any goods.'

Observation: The report makes no mention of the noviciates.

Reply: Our Noviciate at Turin, as that of Buenos Aires, is duly approved and regulated by the S. Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. With the approval of the same Congregation another Noviciate is being set up in Marseilles. The proposal to set up a Noviciate in Sevilla, Spain, is under consideration.

Insistence: The S. Congregation of Bishops and Regulars has no record to prove that authorisation was given for a Noviciate in Marseilles.

Reply: The misunderstanding was mine. The S. Congregation of Bishops and Regulars sought the opinion of the Ordinary of Marseilles on 5 February 1879, and on 23 February he sent a favourable reply. Hence I felt that the matter was settled whereas it is still pending. I herein enclose the relevant documents and renew my request for authorisation.

Observation: The Society may not be divided in so-called inspectorates, but in provinces, which may be established only with the Holy See's permission.

Reply: We followed ch.9, art. 17 of our Constitutions: The Rector Major may appoint visitors, or inspectors, or assessors...

It was Pius IX who recommended that terminology dissonant with the spirit of the times be deleted from the Constitutions of the Society.

We also point out that this division in inspectorates has only been proposed

‘ad experimentum’ so that as soon as we feel it is feasible, we will duly apply to the Holy See.

In these sorry times... we see no other form or organisation, and so we request that for the time being this term may be allowed to stand.

Insistence: All other Congregations, regardless of where they are located, are divided into provinces with the previous approval of the Holy See, which has never tolerated the use of any other name. You must adhere to the general norms.

Reply: In these sad times, using the term ‘province’ and ‘provincial’ would be like throwing ourselves to the wolves to be devoured or scattered. Pius IX suggested this term himself. If, however, we positively must use the traditional terminology, I request that we be restricted to do so only in our dealings with the Holy See and that in our relations with the world we be free to use the best terminology we can in these times.

Observation: It is stated that several institutions of women have been entrusted to the priestly ministry of the Salesians. Only the pertinent diocesan authority can give such responsibility.

Reply: Our priestly ministry is always arranged and controlled by the diocesan authority.

Observation: The report shows that the Salesians own boardings and day schools, but it does not say whether or not this is done with the permission of the respective ordinaries and if the norms of the sacred canons are being followed.

Reply: We have followed the Rules approved by the Holy See as described in ch. 10 of our Constitutions regarding the opening of new houses.

Observation: ... about an Institute of women named after Mary Help of Christians. Nothing is said as to whether this Institute has a Superior General to whom the nuns are subject, and whether it is totally independent, as it should be, from the Salesian Institute.

Reply: When the Salesian Constitutions were approved, whatever concerned the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was also treated and discussed.

The Institute of Mary Help of Christians is governed in temporal matters by the Superior General of the Salesian Society, but in all matters regarding religious worship and the administration of the sacraments it is entirely subject to the diocesan ordinary. The Superior of the Salesians, with the Bishop’s consent, appoints a priest to be Spiritual Director of each house of the Sisters. Several Bishops have already approved this Congregation of women and we are now in an experimental period to ascertain practically which modifications we should make before seeking the Holy See’s required approval.

Several articles of their rule state the limits of the Sisters’ obedience to the Superior of the Salesians: a copy of the Sisters’ rule is enclosed.

Insistence: Your reply to observation 5 was: When the Salesian Constitutions were approved, whatever concerned the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was also treated and discussed. However, in reviewing the voluminous matter on the Salesian position, we observe that matters concern-

ing the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, were never mentioned, much less discussed. Had this been done, this Sacred Congregation would have mandated the separation of the two Institutes.

Reply: I can state that in the summation . . . a list of houses then in existence was drawn up on p.10 and on p.16. There we read: ‘Added to the Salesian Congregation and depending from it, is the House of Mary Help of Christians, founded with the approval of the ecclesiastical authority of Mornese, the diocese of Acqui. The aim of this house is to do for poor girls what the Salesians do for boys. The Sisters already number forty and care for two hundred girls.’

The aforesaid eminent Cardinals asked several questions about the nature and scope of the Institution, and showing themselves satisfied with my oral statements, they concluded by saying that the matter would be more thoroughly studied when the Sister’s Constitutions would be submitted to the Holy See for timely approval.

Insistence: When this S. Congregation inquired about the government of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, it asked whether it had a Mother General and not a male Superior General as you erroneously stated in quoting the observation.

Reply: [Don Bosco quotes the observation as he received it and justifies his answer. Then he adds:] Your Eminence now inquires whether those Sisters have a Mother General. I reply affirmatively: they do have a Mother General and their own Superior Chapter in conformity with art.3 of their Constitutions.

Observation: It is stated that these Sisters do the cooking and take care of the linen and clothing in boys’ hospices – a practice which has always been frowned upon by the Holy See.

Reply: In each instance this arrangement was made after a previous understanding with the diocesan ordinaries; they themselves requested such services.

Observation: Your report was . . . printed.

Reply: My only purpose in printing the report was to make its reading easier. Since this was the first time I followed the advice of a Superior of another Congregation who assured me: ‘The Holy See prefers a printed report.’

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Just at the time Don Bosco handed over his report to the Holy See, March 1879, the new Pope Leo XIII appointed Cardinal Nina as ‘Protector of the Salesian Congregation’. Don Bosco could not have wished a better choice. From Turin he sent, in the name of his Chapter and of the whole Congregation a letter of thanks and homage to the new Protector. The Cardinal replied: “I am only waiting for Don Bosco to give me an occasion to help him in his worthy projects”. What stands out in all those vicissitudes is the holiness of the man of God, who forged his way resolutely and calmly, never slowing down his may activities because of all obstacles. It certainly takes heroic virtue under those circumstances, never to deviate from one’s course of action through human

weakness or bold attempts. Don Bosco wrote to Father Dalmazzo: "I cannot hide my bitter grief, that I could not make myself understood."

Chapter 23

Salesian France and the persecution of 1880

When early in March 1880 Don Bosco left France, he realised that a storm was brewing, threatening to destroy all the schools run by religious. Towards the end of the month, the French Parliament approved a bill striking at the five Catholic Universities and removing teaching rights from members of religious Congregations that were not recognised by the state. The Senate would not approve the bill as it was; an angry government decided to have its way by all means. They raked up old and buried laws and on 29 March published two decrees: 1) the closure of the Jesuit houses of education and the expulsion of the Jesuits – and 2) within three months all non-authorized Congregations were to apply for authorization or bear the consequences.

At that time France counted some 500 non-recognized Congregations with a total of around 20,000 religious. They mostly decided to make common cause with the Jesuits and not to ask for authorization, also because the conditions laid down were outrageous: the Superior General should reside in France, and the Rules and Regulations were to be submitted for scrutiny by the Government.

On 30 June, at 4 AM, the police, supported by the gendarmes and the military, broke open all Jesuit residences, expelled the inhabitants and sealed the place. Don Bosco immediately wrote to Father Beckx, the Jesuit General, and placed all his houses at the disposal of the dispersed religious.

In several letters Don Bosco advised Father Ronchail and his Rectors on how to tackle the situation: “Tell them that we are a charitable, not a religious society and that every member is perfectly free to exercise his civil rights. . . . Do what the other religious Congregations are doing but first check with the local Bishop. . . . Don’t compromise yourself by submitting an application; let things simmer for the time being.”

Once the Jesuits were expelled, more and more threats were voiced against the non-recognised religious Institutions, but also the opposition to the law grew louder; 167 magistrates resigned rather than having to execute an unjust law.

In fact, the government felt threatened and started secret negotiations to find a way out. The radical press came to know, raised an uproar, and the government fell. The new government, under Ferry, immediately set to work and expelled the Carmelites and some other male orders.

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For the Salesians it was especially a case of saving the house of Marseilles. Three years earlier Father Guiol, the Parish Priest, had officially declared to the authorities that the 'Patronage St. Léon' was a parish school depending on him. It was now agreed that his assistant, Father Mendre, would officially be the Director with some of the teachers under him. In this way Father Bologna and other Italian confreres could avoid eventual investigations, till the storm passed over.

Unfortunately, the worst enemies were within the walls of the house. A French cleric, who had been in another Congregation but was charitably allowed to do some service in the house, together with an anonymous relative, plotted against his benefactors. He got hold of a copy of the Rules and a few more documents; then he wrote a report on what he declared to have seen in the Salesian houses of France and Italy, and sent everything to the Ministry of Cult – with the result that the Salesian claim of being free citizens could no longer stand: they were just one of the Congregations threatened by the law. In the end the new Judas was discovered. He put off the cassock and left the house. Once outside, however, he began to write in the papers about the cruel treatment of the boys, and how those Italians instilled hatred against the French. He went to the point of dragging Father Bologna before the court for having violated postal secrets, and all the while his informer kept him abreast of what happened inside the house. At one point he almost succeeded to undermine the good understanding between Father Guiol and the Salesians.

Meanwhile the government started preliminary investigations. Government agents visited the Salesian houses and it was established that the Salesian Society was just one of the non-recognised religious Institutes. On All-Souls Day came the order: get out within 24 hours, or be expelled by force. To make matters worse, the Salesians were startled by the unnerving clatter that came from their immediate neighbourhood where the Dominican monastery was broken into and the priests and brothers evicted.

Father Bologna took his precautions; he sent a telegram to Alassio to say: "Please prepare forty beds for Salesians and homeless boys – this evening we are with you!" The Italian confreres then went to take shelter in the parish house of Father Guiol. The others, as they would also do in Nice and in La Navarre, composed a solemn statement to be handed over to the Police, a declaration that they gave in only to brute force; then they barricaded themselves behind the doors.

What further happened in Marseilles was this: the directors of the Beaujour Society, the ladies and gentlemen of the Committees of Cooperators, all

arrived in St. Leo's early the next morning. Once they were inside the gate was barricaded and the guests waited in a hall for the arrival of the Police. Outside a crowd was growing: curious people who came to witness the facts, and sectarians ready to do the shouting and whistling to make it appear that the expulsion was indeed the sovereign will of the people. Time passed, but no Police came. Father Guiol meanwhile told the gathering inside of a letter of Don Bosco. "They will worry you, they will harass you, but all this will be no more than disturbance. If they try to chase you out than ask for some delay to restore the children to their parents; meanwhile God will do the rest". If that is what Don Bosco wrote, said the gentlemen of the Beaujour Society, then nothing is going to happen, we are wasting our time here, – and they went home. For some time the Salesians hesitated; then the gate was opened and regular life resumed. The radical papers did not give up, they continued to rail against the 'Italians' – but the Italian consul in Marseilles, a one-time classmate of Don Bosco in Chieri, protested and the Prefecture ordered the papers to keep quiet.

Meanwhile Father Bologna's telegram had arrived in Alassio and the Rector, Father Cerutti, immediately informed Father Rua. Sure that by the time his letter arrived, the guests of Marseilles would already be there, he wrote: The Salesians, expelled from Marseille, have arrived in Alassio. Don Rua showed the letter to Don Bosco - "Impossible!" he said, and he immediately wrote a letter asking for clarifications, not to Alassio but to Marseilles.

Don Bosco's confidence came from the dream he had:

It was at the time when we were beginning to fear for religious Congregations. Indeed, since the Jesuits had already been expelled, it was certain that the others would share the same fate. I feared for our own houses in France, praying and asking others to pray, and then one night, as I slept, I saw the Blessed Virgin Mary standing aloft before me very much like the statue of Mary Help of Christians atop the dome. She wore a huge mantle spreading wide about Her, beneath which were sheltered all our houses in France. Our Lady was looking upon them with a smiling countenance, while suddenly a terrible storm arose. Or perhaps it was an earthquake, with lightning, hail, horrible monsters of every shape and form, and gunshots and artillery fire that paralyzed everyone with terror.

The monsters, lightning bolts and shelling were aimed at our Salesians who huddled beneath Mary's mantle, but of all those who were under the protection of such a powerful defender, not one was hurt. The missiles kept hitting the mantle and falling to the ground. Bathed in a sea of light, her face radiant with a heavenly smile, the Blessed Virgin Mary kept saying, *Ego diligentes me diligo* [I love those who love Me]. Little by little the storm abated, and none of our confreres fell victim to the storm or earthquake or hurricane, or whatever else you want to call it.

Why were the Salesians spared? The Commissioner of Police in charge with the expulsion had been busy the whole previous day till 10 PM, removing the

barricades and breaking open the doors of the Dominican monastery nearby. During the night an order came from the ministry to suspend further operations. The Government found that things had already gone too far.

Even in Government circles there were people who appreciated the work done in St. Leo's. Don Bosco wrote to his Salesians: 'Let's go ahead without fear!'

Chapter 24

First contacts with the people of Patagonia: 1879

We left the Salesians in Argentina and in Uruguay, giving religious assistance to Italian immigrants and to the local population, but unable to reach the native non-baptised Indios, in spite of many efforts and sacrifices.. After the disastrous journey by water, they were now probing a land-route when it was announced that the Argentinean military was arranging an expedition which, if successful, would very much facilitate the approach to Patagonia. The Government of Argentina wanted once for all to make an end to the rule of the Indio over the unlimited territories of the Pampas and Patagonia, West and South of Buenos Aires. The first step would be to reach and make safe the Rio Negro and its tributary the Neuquen, up to the Andes, so that the tribes of the South would be stopped by the river, an insurmountable barrier. The Argentinean army comprised 4,500 men, divided into 5 battalions, under the command of General Roca, the minister of war. Their opponents were 25,000 uncivilised Indios, without modern weapons, having no idea of military strategy or discipline.

There had been some earlier expeditions, but not so ambitious and without a general plan. In those raids the soldiers had massacred a good number of Indios, and had returned to Buenos Aires with a number of prisoners of war who were distributed as slaves among families. In consequence there reigned among the Indios a ferocious hatred against the white man, so that simply trying to approach them was a most dangerous enterprise. General Roca's intentions were quite humanitarian, and since he knew that the Archbishop desired to send missionaries to the Pampas, he sent word that they could join his expeditions. That is how Vicar General Espinosa and the Salesians Father Costamagna and the cleric Botta received a regular appointment as 'military chaplains'.

On Easter Tuesday 16 April the three missionaries joined some higher military personal for a train journey to Azul, the last safe civilised place. There

they received a horse and a wagon - the wagon served to transport their luggage and the things of the church, and it provided a place to rest and take refuge in the bad weather. After eight days on horseback they reached Carhuè where the military organised itself for the rest of the trip.

Carhuè was an advanced outpost. There was a kind of fortress with some forty houses, and from there it was possible to see the 'toldos' of two peaceful groups of Indios. Father Costamagna had preceded his companions by a few days; he went straight to the Indios and he was well received, in fact, the 'Cachico' (chief) offered to serve as interpreter. The children learned to make the sign of the cross and the fundamental truths of the faith, and when the others arrived the work of evangelisation was in full swing. But the General told them rather to follow the army to the Rio Negro; there, he said, you will find as many Indios as you want, it is there that Patagonia begins.

It was a very uncomfortable journey that lasted four weeks. The army dispersed two concentrations of Indios who tried to block the way. Father Costamagna, again ahead of the rest, had already reached the Rio Negro on the feast of Mary Help of Christians. Many times our missionaries witnessed the cruelty of the soldiery against the Indios.

They stopped at Cioele-Cioel on the river, because everybody needed rest. The food had been bad and scarce, they were in need of sleep, and the cold was glacial; in those places it was the full of Winter. There in Cioele-Cioel the Indios were many and the missionaries used their time to the full. On June 1, Pentecost Sunday, an altar was raised at the side of the majestic river and the Vicar General, assisted by the two Salesians, offered mass in the presence of all the officers and the whole army. After the mass sixty Indios were baptised, the General incorporated them in his army. The next day Father Costamagna baptised a number of children and some more adults and again the following day he baptised another group of nine children. Then the army moved on; our missionaries joined the group that went to Patagones where they arrived on the 21st.

In course of time Patagones, a big settlement of 4000 inhabitants would become the headquarters of the Salesian missions. In that place a few surprises awaited them : they encountered the Lazarist Father Savini who the previous year had been their companion of shipwreck, and they even met a past-pupil of Lanzo! The army considered its expedition a success, they made the return journey in easy instalments and appeared in Buenos Aires only in April 1881. Our missionaries instead left in haste and they were back in Buenos Aires just before August 1879.

The Archbishop was pleased and he immediately wrote to Don Bosco. The letter reached Don Bosco on 5th September during a retreat in Lanzo. Don Barberis who went to see Don Bosco wrote that he found Don Bosco to be 'Pure joy!'. His joy transpires in a letter to Father Costamagna: "Thanks be to God! Your mission has been successful and you are safe and sound. In your next letter tell me in the minutest detail about the reception the Cachiques gave you, their dwellings, their clothing, and what they said to you. The time has come for you to talk seriously with Father Bodrato and the Archbishop

about a mission centre for both the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Patagones. Would another centre be needed in Carhué? I'll take care of the necessary personnel, and all together we pool our financial resources". Don Bosco's joy certainly increased when he received an official report from Archbishop's house, Buenos Aires. In all, during the expedition : 223 baptisms of children of indigenous or Christian families, and 102 baptism of adults. Don Rua, in a circular letter, communicated the news to the Salesians and the Cooperators were informed in the New Year's letter: Patagonia now is waiting for more Salesian missionaries!

Chapter 25

Don Bosco agrees to build the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome

Around 1870 a new neighbourhood began to come up on the Esquiline Hill, in a place called ‘Castro Pretorio’, east of Rome’s main station Termini. Pope Pius IX realised that the new inhabitants were in need of pastoral care; he bought a plot of land for a church to be dedicated to St. Joseph, but just one year later he changed his plans: the church would be the national Basilica to the Sacred Heart. The population grew by leaps and bounds, the parishes nearby could not cope with the work, but by the time Pope Pius died, on the spot itself there was only a small chapel, utterly inadequate to the needs.

Then the new Pope Leo XIII put his hand to the work. He wrote a letter to all the Bishops of Italy and of many other places, asking them to organise collections for his project of building a worthy Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome. A commission of Roman nobles under Cardinal Monaco La Valetta and Marquis Merighi was put in charge of the works.

They started digging the foundations and immediately found out that in former times the place had been used as a pozzolano-quarry, they had to go fourteen meters deep to find solid soil. At any rate, on the birthday of the Pope, 16 August 1879, the first stone was blessed and put in place. And that was all. In spite of high patronage, there was no more money to proceed. The Pope was rather mortified, but he could do nothing about it.

One day the Pope spoke about his preoccupations to Cardinal Alimonda: the glory of God, the honour of the Holy See, the spiritual good of so many faithful – all this was at stake with the suspension of the work of the new Church. Cardinal Alimonda offered a suggestion: “Call Don Bosco, he said, he is the man capable of solving the problem.”

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In those days, March 1880, Don Bosco was in Rome. The Pope asked his Cardinal Vicar to find out Don Bosco's inclination. The Cardinal spoke to Don Bosco once, then more urgently another time, but he let it appear that it was his own suggestion. Don Bosco very well understood the difficulties involved, he did not say yes or no.

Financial difficulties. "The Romans, he wrote to the Cardinal Vicar, are accustomed to receive, not to give." Nothing much could be expected from the French: they were building their own National Church to the Sacred Heart in Paris, and they had to maintain their Catholic Schools. Italy was going through a period of privation and hardships. Building was more costly in Rome than anywhere else. Don Bosco was already building the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Turin, a Church of Mary Help of Christians in Vallecrosia, and he was building in La Spezia, Nice and Marseilles. Take also into account the frigid reception of the Pope's appeals for collections and contributions. The Pope's appeals had gathered altogether 100,000 lire – would Don Bosco do better?

Taking over the work would imply taking over all the debts and contracts made by the present administration, and those peoples would certainly to some extent interfere with the work. Don Bosco had enough experience to know that in Rome, for the Pope, one could charge any rate at all!

Then there was the Roman antipathy for all that was Piedmontese. In fact, on the very day that the news leaked out, the Cardinal Vicar had to deal with a delegation that came to protest against the humiliation inflicted on the Roman clergy.

Don Bosco's hesitations were overcome when in an audience on 5th April, Leo XIII clearly said that it was his own wish. The desire of the Pope, said Don Bosco, is for us a command, I accept the charge. Even more: with your permission I will also build besides the Church a Festive Oratory and a boarding for poor boys. The Pope blessed his good will and sent him to the Cardinal Vicar for the formalities. Immediately the Masonic section of the municipality was up in arms. They asked the minister what attitude to take towards this clerical menace. The minister was a Piedmontese and answered: "Let Don Bosco do it – I know that he wants to do good and that he has no intention of meddling in politics."

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According to the Constitutions, Don Bosco could not take a final decision until he had the consent of his Council. How the meeting the Council went on, is better quoted from the *Biographical Memoirs*, Vol. XIV, p.454:

On arriving in Turin, he summoned his councillors and presented the Holy Father's proposal to them. The ensuing discussion was a long one. All agreed that the Pope's proposal was a distinguished honour, but also a most weighty burden since they already were laden with debts amounting to three hundred thousand lire. Under

the circumstances it seemed neither wise nor conscionable to take up and enterprise that would swallow up millions more. The vote that followed was six negative and only one positive, the last most certainly Don Bosco's own. Seeing that Holy Father's proposal had been rejected, he said with a smile, "You have all given me a resounding no for an answer, and that is fine, because you acted with all the prudence needed to make serious, major decision such as this. However, were you to give me a yes answer, I can promise you that the Sacred Heart of Jesus will supply the funds to build the Church, He will pay off our debts, and He will even give us a handsome bonus as well." His words, vibrant with such trust in Divine Providence, instantly overturned their decision and, on a second ballot, they all voted affirmatively. Moreover, on studying the blueprints of the church, the chapter members thought it too small and immediately, at that same session, agreed to submit to the Holy Father a vaster project which would be more worthy of the Sacred Heart and of Rome. The "bonus" was the hospice itself, which did not figure in the Pope's intentions, but was an extra, almost a kind of reward offered by the Sacred Heart. The Congregation's debts, as Cardinal Cagliero testified at the apostolic process, were paid with no strain, as Don Bosco had promised.

It took a long time before the Salesians and the Roman authorities could agree on all points of the contract- e.g. It was difficult to convince the Cardinal Vicar that the Church had to be larger. In spite of good will of both sides new difficulties kept cropping up, but finally, in December 1880, the contract was signed.

Gradually the workers resumed their activity. The 'Tiberine Bank' of Rome gave an advance, and experiencing that Divine Providence was on Don Bosco's side, they always remained helpful with loans and advances. But surely, Don Bosco was not going to spare efforts to gather the enormous sums he required: "Faith, Prayer and on with the work!"

Chapter 26

Improvements and new ventures

The demand for admission to Salesian schools was such that they constantly were in need of amplification, which was a great encouragement for benefactors who saw that their money was well used. During 1880-82, in France, La Navarre acquired a new building, Nice received a beautiful church, the new constructions in Marseilles made it possible to triple the number of students. In Italy, Vallecrosia finished the residence for Salesians and another one for the sisters and a beginning was made with the construction of a new church. The Oratory of Lucca was enriched with a boarding for a hundred boys. We could mention La Spezia, Este, Randazzo: the work never stopped.

Even Valdocco was renewed. Don Bosco bought some ground facing the church of Mary Help of Christians and built a completely new Printing Press and Bookbinding Workshop. It shows the importance Don Bosco gave to the Press; at the same time, with everything shifted from the old to the new place, also the other trades received more elbow space and the outlook was renewed.

Four new schools were started: Penango, Florence, Faenza and Mogliano Veneto. We could add the church of St. John the Evangelist in Turin, but that is a separate chapter.

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Penango is a small village in Monferrato, in the diocese of Casale. At the instance of the parish Priest, Don Bosco bought a beautiful place in the midst of vineyards. There he installed a boarding for boys who followed primary classes, a kind of branch of the school of Borgo San Martino where every year a number of admissions had to be refused for lack of space.

The foundation of *Florence* began in 1881 but it would take four years to finalise the negotiations. Don Bosco was known in Florence, he had visited the

town often, either to visit government offices or on his way to Rome. In one of his early visits he had cured the godson of the Marchioness Ugguccioni and since then he was known and welcome in all the noble families of the place. Archbishops Limberti first, and Cecconi afterwards venerated him, and when the Protestants started their campaign among the people, everybody looked up to Don Bosco for help.

The first invitation came in 1877 from an Association of Charity among Christian workers. It took the Association three years before they managed to rent a house that could be used by the Salesians. When Don Bosco visited Florence he agreed that a start could be made from that place, but only just a start. Father Marengo who visited the place from Lucca, and Father Dalmazzo who came from Rome, both independently advised to go slow. Meanwhile the Protestants made progress, many wrote to Don Bosco to make haste, but nobody offered real support. Then finally the Archbishop wrote: "Dear Don Bosco, don't wait any longer, listen to the prayers of a Bishop who in God's name is imploring your co-operation." Don Bosco replied: "I will place myself in your hands and will do what you tell me."

On 4th March Father Confortòla, a cleric and a lay brother went to live in that little house. From the start they had problems with members of the Association who practically considered them to be at their orders, at times the Archbishop had to intervene to smoothen over the difficulties. But Don Bosco, who came to Florence, looked at things from a different angle. He was pleased to see that the Oratory had already two hundred regular members and that the confreres were kept busy from morning to night with the boys that flocked to their little house.

Towards the end of October the period of rent terminated. They had to find another place. This time a convenient place was easily found; Don Bosco constituted a little Society of five Salesians and the Archbishop, and bought the place straightaway. Father Confortòla wanted to turn it into a hostel for artisans and high school-students, but he was told that it was not prudent to start anything like that without the authorisation of the school authorities.

The Archbishop solved the question: he entrusted a number of his seminarists to Father Confortòla and issued a declaration that the new school was a Minor Seminary – for a Minor Seminary no authorisation was required. There was place only for 30 boys; but never mind, it was a beginning.

When Don Bosco visited the place on Easter Sunday 1882, he called the Cooperators together and traced out a vast project for the future: there was need of a chapel; the building was to be enlarged; there was need of a regular school because in that part of the city the only school was that of the Protestants; the Festive Oratory was to be developed. The works started; the Salesians never in vain appealed to the help of Countless Uggucione, their Mamma; the results are there for anybody to admire.

In 1877, Don Bosco met for the first time Father Tarroni, Salesian Cooperator and Spiritual Director of the Seminary of *Faenza* in the Romagna. The two holy men understood each other perfectly and Father Tarroni began preparations for a Salesian presence in Faenza. Soon everybody got interested in the idea, and the Bishop even talked about it with Leo XIII. Several Salesians stopped over in Faenza and every visit made good propaganda for the project. On the feast of Mary Help of Christians 1879, the Parish priest of the place visited Turin and hoped to come back with the contract in order and signed. This time it was Don Bosco who delayed; the house that the Salesians would occupy was an old convent, suppressed by Napoleon, and Don Bosco wanted the Pope's permission before entering. Our Parish priest was not to be discouraged, he went straight to Rome and came back to Turin with a rescript of approval – not only that: he also obtained from the Holy See a yearly donation of 250 lire for the first three years of the stay of the Salesians.

Meanwhile in Faenza the rumour spread that the Jesuits, chased away from France were arriving in their city. The Jesuits had a bad name, they were pictured as teachers of immorality and sowers of discord. Other obstacles were raised by the Government. . . 1880 passed, and month after month of 1881; the Protestants arrived and installed themselves, but the Salesians were not to be seen. Finally, in November, Father Cagliero opened an Oratory for two hundred boys and introduced Father J. B. Rinaldi as Rector. Don Bosco sent a cleric and a coadjutor to help.. The Coadjutor, Paul Bassignano immediately became popular in town; he was a small man, the people called him Paulino, a real saint; most helpful in the community and an angel of goodness for the people.

But the Salesians had to suffer: all means were good to discourage them in the hope that they would leave the place. Giving up? In 1882 Don Bosco told them to look for a better place inside the city-wall. At first the search for a new place was frustrating; the civil authority found pretexts for house-searches; the newspapers had not a good word about the 'friars-teachers', there were even attempts on the life of some confreres. But the Rector did not give up. In the end the Oratory was transferred to another location three times the size as before, it became a centre of all kinds of activities.

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Mogliano Veneto is a rural environment in the diocese of Treviso. A rich and pious widow, Elisabeth Bellavite Astory, decided to give all the land she had and a good amount of money besides, on condition that the Salesians would start an agricultural school. In 1879 she visited Don Bosco in Turin, and was so impressed by what she saw, that founding the school became her only preoccupation. Don Bosco talked with his counsellors and accepted. Father Sala went to see the place, constructed a few buildings, and in 1881 everything was ready without major difficulties. The permission from the diocese came from Canon Sarto, then Vicar Capitular of the diocese, the future Pius X.

Experience showed that the original scope of the house – agriculture – was not suited to the environment. Father M. Veronese, the first Rector, added a school, and this was just what was needed.

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With the increase of houses, the number of Salesian Rectors increased. Surely, there were the Inspectors, but also Don Bosco tried to keep in contact as his voluminous correspondence shows. The Congregation was expanding with all the fame and grandeur, and with all the dangers connected with it. It is in this context that Don Bosco had a dream: ‘The Society as it is, and as it threatens to become’, the dream of the ten diamonds. This dream must certainly find a place in our Annals:

May the grace of the Holy Spirit enlighten our hearts and minds.
Amen.

Norms for the Salesian Society.

On September 10 of this year 1881, the day the Church dedicates to the glorious name of Mary, the Salesians were assembled at San Benigno Canavese for their spiritual retreat.

On the night of September 10-11, while I was asleep, I dreamed that I was in a richly adorned house. I seemed to be strolling up and down its length with the directors of our houses when a man of majestic mien – so majestic that none of us could fix our gaze on him – appeared among us. Glancing at us in utter silence, he too started to pace the hall several steps from us. He was clad in a rich mantle or cape, closed at the front of the neck with a scarf from which a ribbon hung down on his chest. The scarf was inscribed in luminous letters : *The Pious Salesian Society in 1881*. On the ribbon were the words: *What it ought to be*. Ten diamonds of extraordinary size and brilliance adorning that august person kept our gaze from being fixed upon him. Three of the diamonds he wore on his chest; on one was written the word *Faith*, on another was written *Hope*, and the third over his heart bore the word *Charity*. The fourth diamond affixed to his right shoulder, was inscribed *Work*; the fifth, on his left shoulder, read *Temperance*. The remaining five diamonds adorning the back of his cloak were set into a quadrangle; the largest and most brilliant sparkled in the very center, and on it was written *Obedience*. The diamond to its upper right read *Vow of Poverty*, and that below it, *Reward*. On the diamond to the upper left was written *Vow of Chastity*; its sparkle had a brilliance all its own and drew our gaze as a magnet attracts iron. Beneath it was a diamond inscribed *Fasting*. These four diamonds focused their dazzling rays

upon the one in the centre; their rays, resembling tongues of fire, flickered upward, forming various maxims.

The diamond *Faith* emitted rays with the words : “Take up the shield of faith that you may fight against the devils’ whiles.” Another ray proclaimed : “Faith without work is dead. Not the hearers but the doers of the law will possess the kingdom of God.”

On the rays of *Hope* were the words : “Hope is in the Lord, not in men. Let your hearts rest where true joys are found.”

The rays of *Charity* read : “Bear one another’s burden if you want to fulfill my law. Love and you shall be loved. Love your souls and the souls of your charges. Recite the Divine Office devoutly, celebrate Mass attentively, visit the Holy of Holies with great love.”

On the word *Work*: “The remedy for concupiscence, a powerful weapon against the devil’s whiles.”

On *Temperance*: “Remove the fuel and the fire will die out. Make a pact with your eyes, with your cravings, your sleeping, lest these enemies plunder your souls. Self-gratification and chastity cannot co-exist.”

On the rays of *Obedience*: “The foundation of the whole edifice and the précis of sanctity.”

On the rays of *Poverty*: “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Riches are thorns. Poverty is not made of words but is in the hears and deeds. Poverty will open the gates of heaven and enter it.”

On the rays of *Chastity*: “All virtues come with it. The clean of heart will see God’s mysteries and God himself.”

On the rays of *Reward*: “If the lavish rewards are delightful, do not be deterred by the many hardships. He who suffers with me, with rejoice with me. For my friends, suffering is momentary, but heavenly happiness is everlasting.”

On the rays of *Fasting*: “The most powerful weapon against the devil’s snares. The safeguard of all virtues. By it devils of every sort are cast out.”

A wide, rose-coloured ribbon formed the edge of the lower hem of the cloak and on it was written : “*Topics for sermons, morning, noon and night*: Glean even bits of virtues and you will build a great edifice of sanctity for yourself. Woe to you who despise small things, you will fall little by little.”

Up to this point the directors were either standing or kneeling, totally bewildered and silent. But then father Rua, as though beside himself, exclaimed, “Let us make a note of this lest we forget it.” He sought a pen but found none. Pulling our his wallet, he rummaged through it in vain. “I will remember,” Father Durando said. “I intend to write it down” Father Fagnano retorted and began writing with the stem of a rose. All were surprised and they found they could read the writing. When Father Fagnano was trough, Father Costamagna dictated these words : “Charity understands all things,

bears all things, overcomes all things. Let us preach this in words and deeds.”

As Father Fagnano was writing, the lights went out and we were left in total darkness. “Silence,” Father Ghivarello said. “Let us kneel down and pray. The light will return.” Father Lasagna intoned the Veni Creator, and then the De Profundis, ending with the invocation Mary Help of Christians. As we all responded Pray for us, a light shone, focusing on a poster which read: *The Pious Salesian Society as it runs the risk of being in the year of salvation 1900*. A moment later the light grew stronger and we were able to see and recognize each other.

At the heart of this glowing light, the same august person appeared again, but he looked very sad and on the verge of tears. His cape was faded, moth-eaten and threadbare. Where each diamond had previously been set, there was now a gaping hole made by moths and other insects.

At the heart of this glowing light, the same august person appeared again, but he looked very sad and on the verge of tears. His cape was faded, moth-eaten and threadbare. Where each diamond had previously been set, there was now a gaping hole made by moths and other insects.

In the place of Faith I now saw “Sleep and sloth.”

In the place of Hope, “Buffoonery and scurrility.”

In the place of Charity, “Negligence in the performance of spiritual duties. They love and seek what gratifies them, not what pertains to Christ.”

In the place of Temperance, “Gluttony.” “Their god is their belly.”

In the place of Work, “Sleep, theft and idleness.”

In the place of Obedience there was only a gaping hole and no inscription.

In the place of Chastity, “Concupiscence of the eyes and pride of life.” Poverty had been replaced by “Comfort, clothes, drink and money.”

In the place of Reward, “The things of earth are what we seek.”

Where Fasting had been, there was only a hole, no writing.

We were now all filled with fear. Father Lasagna fell into a faint. Father Cagliari turned as white as a sheet and, grasping a chair for support, cried out, “Can it be that things have already come to such a state?” Father Lazzerio and father Guidazio, frightened out of their wits, reached out to hold each other up. Father Francesia, Count Cays, Father Barberis and Father Leverato fell to their knees, rosary in hand.

At that moment an ominous voice declared, “How the beauty has faded!”

Then, as we stood in semi-darkness, something strange occurred. Pitch darkness again swallowed us up and in its midst a most daz-

zling light arose in the form of a human body. We could not fix our eyes on it, but we could make it out to be a handsome young man, clad in a white garment interwoven with gold and silver threads and entirely bordered by a string of brilliant diamonds. He moved towards us majestic in mien, yet gentle and friendly, and addressed us as follows:

“Servants and instruments of almighty God, listen and understand. Take heart and be strong. What you have seen and heard is a heavenly warning sent to you and to your confreres. Take it to heart and endeavor to understand it. An attack foreseen does less harm and can be warded off. Let each of the inscriptions be a topic of your talks. Preach unceasingly in season and out of season. However, make sure that you always practice what you preach so that your deeds may be a light, which may be passed on to your confreres from generation to generation as a solid tradition. Take heed and understand. Be cautious in accepting novices, strong in training them, prudent in admitting them. Test all of them, but keep only the good; dismiss the lightminded and fickle. Take heed and understand. From morning to night ceaselessly meditate on the observance of the Constitutions. If you do this, the hand of the Almighty will never fail you. You will be a model to the world and to angels, and your glory will be the glory of God. Those who will live to see the end of this century and the dawn of the next shall say of you : ‘By the Lord was this accomplished, and it is wonderful in our eyes.’ Then all your confreres and all your sons shall sing : ‘Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory.’”

Biogr. Mem., vol. XV.

Chapter 27

The Church of St John the Evangelist, Turin

In 1869, Don Bosco began thinking of building a church in the place where for twenty-two years he had been running the Oratory of Saint Aloysius. However, it took eight years before he could start construction, only because a small piece of land was in the hands of an obstinate Protestant who could not be convinced to sell it. The only way to get it was to advance reasons of public utility and get the land expropriated, but for reasons unexplained, both the Municipality and the Ministry flatly refused help. Don Bosco did not give up: he appealed to the Council of State. Even at this level the intrigues continued, till he managed to find out who and what stood in the way, and the final outcome was in his favour.

The Avenue where the church was to come, the 'Corso Vittorio Emanuele' was one of the most beautiful thoroughfares of the city, and Don Bosco spared no effort to make his church match the environment. The church itself, sixty meters long and twenty-two meters wide, in Roman-Lombard style, could accommodate 1,200 persons, the belfry was forty-five meters high. At the side of the church, Don Bosco planned to have a work for boys.

Two factors helped Don Bosco to raise the money. Not far away on the same road the Waldensians had a very gaudy Temple, flanked by schools and social offices; Catholics were keen to see that their church would not be less. Then, Don Bosco wanted his church to be a monument to Pius IX – St. John the Evangelist was the Pope's baptismal Patron.

On 14 August 1878 Archbishop Gastaldi blessed the corner stone and in two years the main masonry-work was complete. Then Don Bosco made a list of all the work that remained to be done and asked his friends and benefactors to make themselves responsible for one item each. He constantly kept his benefactors informed about the progress: "Artists and craftsmen have finished the chancel, the central aisle, side aisles and walls; final touches will be added in a day or so. The marble floor has been laid and the bells have already been installed in the

belfry; the altars are also being set up and the confessionals, doors and pews are being made. The organ builder is at work constructing an organ that will do him honour and be worthy of our church. . .”

At the right of the entrance stands the majestic statue of Pius IX, in pontifical vestments with the tiara on his head, his right hand in the act of blessing and his left hand holding the Decree of Approval of the Society. The biographer of Don Bosco tells us what prudence Don Bosco needed to set up the statue (in the church of St. Secundus, radicals had destroyed all that reminded them of the Pope) and why the building, ready for consecration in May, could be consecrated only on 28 October 1882. Archbishop Gastaldi performed the rite of consecration and then the church filled for the first mass of Don Bosco. In the afternoon, for Vespers, Don Bosco spoke a few words and gave the history of the place:

In those days there were here no streets, no buildings, no gardens. From here till the left bank of the river Po, there were just uncultivated grounds. The place where now we have our church was occupied by some low, narrow and smoky huts, the last habitations on this side of the town. They had been taken on rent by some washerwomen and they held on to them because the place was not far from the river and all around were extensions of unoccupied ground, very convenient for them to stretch and dry their laundry. But the same open places were convenient playing grounds, and on Sun- and Feastedays, bands of young and not so young boys roamed here, spending even the whole day here without thinking of mass, or of catechism, or of any function of the church.

That was in 1847, when the times became even more disastrous for poor youth. The festive Oratory of Valdocco was frequented by eight hundred boys and could not contain more, so we thought of starting an other Oratory somewhere else. This place looked most propitious for our purpose, but it was not available at once. The washerwomen rose up in rebellion against Don Bosco and did not want to abandon heir huts. Later on they were pacified in the hope of greater profit and through the convincing goodness of Mrs. Vaglienti, the owner of the place. When Don Bosco gained possession of the sheds he adapted them, part for the Oratory, and part for a chapel that was blessed on the Feast of the Immaculate that year; another portion was set aside for classes and recreation. The place was restricted; nevertheless on every Sunday some five hundred boys gathered here for mass, and about two hundred came every day for elementary schooling – the place became known as the Oratory of St. Aloysius Gonzaga. (. . .)

Meanwhile the area began to be filled with houses and other mansions, year by year the population increased with the corresponding need for pastoral care. The Waldensians took up a place in the immediate neighborhood and with their Temple, their schools and

their conferences they became a threat to the Catholic Faith of boys and adults. . .

From the beginning it was evident that the church filled a need. Don Bosco spared no efforts to make the religious functions attractive and grand, but he could not prevent the frantic outcry of anticlerical papers who had no good word for a church erected in honour of a Pope. Don Bosco never answered, nor did he allow anybody to answer their attacks.

Two books, printed at the Oratory Press, were on sale on the day of consecration. Father Lemoyne wrote his masterpiece in two volumes 'The Apostle Saint John and the Primitive Church'. Engineer Buffa's book 'The Church of Saint John the Evangelist' described in detail the architectural and artistic marvels of the church. Indeed, when it came to matters of worship, poor Don Bosco 'would spend like a King'.

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Don Bosco never wanted that a church run by the Salesians would be an isolated sanctuary; rather, it should be a centre of Salesian activity.

When he began building the House near the church of St. John the Evangelist, he wanted it to be like a branch of Valdocco: a school, and a few workshops. By the time the building was ready in 1884, he had changed idea: he settled in it the Sons of Mary, his late vocations. True, they formed a beautiful community in Mathi, with Father Rinaldi as Rector, but in Mathi they could not expand. Settling them near the church of St. John the Evangelist had three advantages: they had ample space for themselves, they would contribute to the solemnity of the church services, and they could revive the old Oratory of St. Aloysius. In fact, immediately after their arrival, the place swarmed with youngsters. A wonderful spirit reigned among the late vocations; in 1887 and 1888, with thirty and thirty-two students in the last year, twenty-eight and thirty of them applied for admission to the Salesian Noviciate in Foglizzo.